

# Design as an Agent for Public Policy Innovation

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Described as units developing public policies in a design-oriented manner, Policy Labs are tasked to innovate to gain in policy effectiveness and efficiency. However, as public policymaking is a context-dependent activity, the way in which these novel organisations operate significantly differs. This study discusses the emergence of design approaches for policy innovation. The purpose is to map how Policy Labs in Europe introduce design approaches at distinct stages of the policymaking cycle. For this study, 30 organisations in Europe operating at various levels of government were surveyed. Based on the public policymaking process model, it investigates which design methods are Policy Labs deploying to innovate public policies. The study exposed a gap in the awareness of the utilised methods' nature. It also showed that the use of design methods is of less importance than the introduction of design mindsets for public policy innovation, namely 'user-centredness', 'co-creation', and 'exploration'.

Keywords: public, policy, innovation, design, labs

## Introduction

In a global context of increasing complexity design has acquired a renewed momentum, for its potential to enhance economies' competitive advantage (Raulik-Murphy, 2010), but also as a strategic tool to foster innovation in the public domain (Junginger, 2014). Since 2008, policymakers worldwide are trying to develop innovative ways for sustainable growth (Bason, 2014). In this context, design has become central to some public organisations, employing designers and introducing notions of design thinking across the stages of the policymaking cycle (Junginger, 2017). Today, several Governments worldwide are gradually incorporating design approaches to develop public policies and services, recognising the value of service providers' and users' insights into the process (Bason, 2014). It is argued that design offers some potential to overcome the limitations of conventional policy methods to fostering public and social innovation by developing creative solutions (Mulgan, 2014).

Moreover, policy-making is conceived as a design activity (Johnson & Cook, 2014), and the implementation of such policies is subject to the design of services and products (Junginger, 2013). Particularly in Europe, central governments and local authorities alike are increasingly working with design managers and incorporating in their organisational structures multidisciplinary innovation units using design approaches (Whicher, 2015). Conceived in a global setting where the limits between public and private sector are becoming blurrier, these organisations look to integrate interests and ideas from various policy communities (Perl, 2013). Although considerably differing from each other, these organisations are frequently labelled as 'Policy Labs' and described as emerging organisations tasked with the devising of public policies in an innovative and 'designerly' manner (Fuller & Lochard, 2016). This study of design in public policy innovation targets these organisations that are comprised of multi-disciplinary teams who explicitly utilise design methods to involve a variety of users in the development of innovative public policies and services.



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Similarly, focusing the study to a geographic region responds to this phenomenon (the emergence of Policy Labs) having originated in Europe (Bason, 2014), thus offering the possibility to inquire into the implications of using design for policymaking beyond government pilots. Although organisations incorporating these approaches have reached a supra-national level, systematic understanding of how design is being used to innovate public policymaking remains unclear. Even though there is a growing body of literature on design in policy-making, there is still scarce knowledge of the specific design activities that ultimately produce innovative policies. Understanding how design is currently being deployed in the making of public policies will aid in understanding the potential for developing innovative policy solutions. Furthermore, it will also allow us to understand its potential to modify deeply rooted policy practices and its subsequent impact in the larger socio-political system.

## **Design for public policy innovation**

Interest in design in the public sector has grown over the last decade (Kimbell, 2015; Rosenqvist, 2017). References to design within public policy-making literature are today more frequent; however, it has been largely perceived as only relevant to the implementation stage, paying little attention to the introduction of design into broader aspects of the policy-making process (Junginger, 2013). The adoption of design in policymaking has been largely facilitated by service design's penetration into public organisations (Junginger, 2013). This creative approach to service innovation has been praised for its co-participative nature, stimulating public engagement (Sangiorgi, 2015). It is argued that design growth in the public sector relates to the way in which design-oriented companies (e.g., Airbnb, Apple) have enhanced customers experiences for new services (Kimbell, 2015). This, perhaps neo-liberal, approach to government-provided services has been explained by differences between citizens expectations and the services governments provide (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016; Rebolledo, 2016). The design promise is to help creating user-centred services, consequently improving the users (the citizens) experience.

Furthermore, Junginger (2013) argues that despite not generally being understood in design terms, policy-making is essentially a design activity. Overarchingly, design and policy-making share the goal of changing existing conditions into preferred ones (Rebolledo, 2016). Yet, it is argued that whereas traditional policy-making pursues this from a normative stance, the design approach is based on a systemic and experimental fashion which offers prospective scenarios through creativity and prototyping (Rebolledo, 2016). Moreover, Junginger (2017) stresses that the benefits of introducing a design approach in policymaking, are deeper than the mere gains in efficiency, by also enabling the creating of more meaningful and faster-implemented policies. By employing design, it is then expected to develop new policies that are based on a human-centred approach to problem-solving (Junginger, 2013).

Of special interest in the development of public policies tackling complex societal issues is the notion that most of the problems addressed by designers are wicked problems (Buchanan, 1992). The result of designers dealing with these types of complex problems over the years has been the advancement of sophisticated professional practices within the designing disciplines able to do this (Dorst, 2011). Moreover, concerning the intractability of wicked problems, is the acknowledgement that more creative individuals engage in problem identification and generally present higher problem construction capability (Reiter-Palmon & Robinson, 2009). Dorst (2011) poses that frame creation is a core design practice by which a problematic situation can be tackled from an original standpoint. This is of high significance because it naturally puts designers and the use of design in a privileged position to target such policy issues.

Additional to that is the idea that "design thinking puts end-users needs –rather than legacy and policy– at the centre of the policy formulation system, shifting paradigms and creating a new decisional process" (Allio, 2014, p. 6). This feature is key since relocating the policy focus could counteract the effects of path-dependency limiting policy innovation. Furthermore, Tunstall (2007) points out the importance of design in making governance tangible to every citizen by giving them a voice in co-participatory policymaking processes.

Therefore, there is a rising consensus that design can play a significant role in restructuring governmental processes and structures (Rosenqvist, 2017). However, political science scholars, are unclear on the methods policy designers employ in identifying problems, defining design criteria or in the overall process (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2016). Consequently, the introduction of design practices in public policymaking has not yet acquired mainstream diffusion.

## Public policy(making) innovation

Dissatisfaction on how governments deal with contemporary issues has arisen across the globe (Rosenqvist, 2017). Likewise, the growing number of co-dependent actors in societies makes finding, processing, and implementing solutions even more complex than it ever was (Janssen & Helbig, 2016). Furthermore, “the accelerating flow of ideas, information, goods and money across national borders has affected the nature of policy problems, [and] reshaped the attempts to engage these problems” (Perl, 2013, p. 44). This growing complexity in the issues governments face has also brought an increasing awareness of the inefficacy of the current policy instrument and processes to tackle them (Brookfield Institute, 2018). Moreover, it is currently widely accepted that governmental bodies’ structures are not particularly appropriate to address current societal issues (Sangiorgi, 2015). For instance, the British Government already in 2011, recognised that “decades of top-down prescription and centralisation have put bureaucratic imperatives above the needs of [public] service users” (HM Government, 2011, p. 7). Additionally, budget reduction has meant the need for revising public services, often re-assessing user needs to obtain gains in effectiveness and better user experience (Whicher, 2015). Rebolledo (2016), refers to this situation in which there is a disparity between what people need and government do, whilst the latter also requires gaining effectiveness in designing and delivering policies, a two-folded innovation imperative. Junginger adds “we are at a moment in time where many governments are desperately looking for new approaches to policy making and policy implementation” (2017, p. 5).

Although the need for doing things differently regarding how public issues are tackled and how public services are provided has been largely recognised, the process of policymaking remains essentially unchanged. The process model is one of the most widespread means of depicting public policy-making (Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009), and it does so by disaggregating it into a set of discrete interrelated stages with a logical flow (Hallsworth, Parker, & Rutter, 2011). This process presents an identifiable pattern of activities, although rarely as orderly and systematic as the process model (see Figure 1) portrays it (Howard, 2005; Dye, 2013).

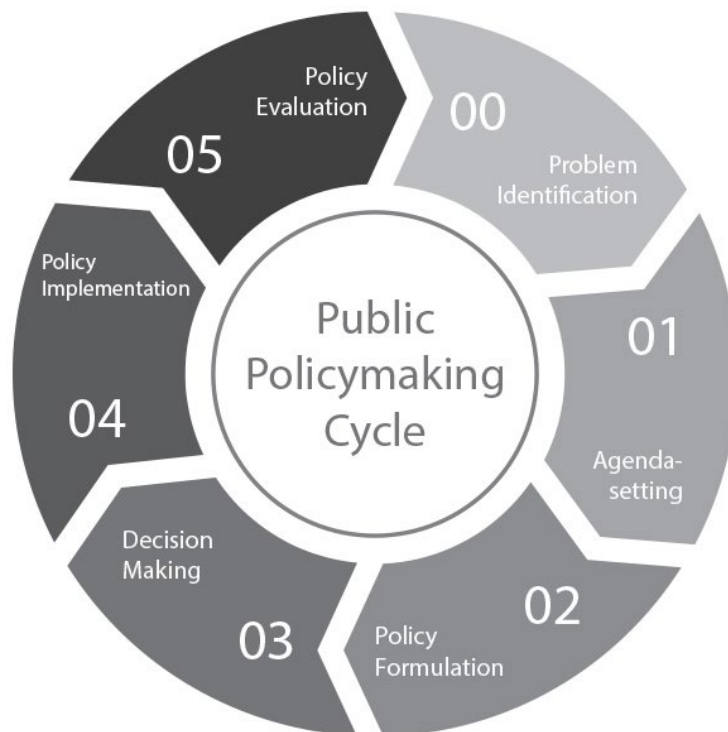


Figure 1: The public policymaking cycle, adapted from Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl (2009) and Dye (2013).

However, when it comes to policy innovation, political scientists have commonly focused on the innovation of the resulting product (the policy itself), ignoring the process by which innovative ideas make their way into government agendas (Mintrom, 1997). Policy innovation is then defined “as a policy that is new to the state adopting it” (Mintrom, 1997, p. 741). Borrowing from the economics of innovation, this definition could be understood as a case of product innovation, since it is based on the introduction of a new product or a qualitative change in an existing product (OECD, 2005). Others exclusively focus on the political aspect of policymaking, recognising policy innovations as those sought by politicians whilst looking for solutions which allow the attainment of conflicting policy objectives (Quiggin, 2006). Newer approaches define policy innovation as the “novel processes, tools, and practices used for policy design and development that result in better problem solving of complex issues” (Brookfield Institute, 2018, p. 6). Thus, emphasises the complex nature of the issues at hand and the need for new ways of policy-making to attain improved results. Similarly, an EY report on public sector innovation, claims “policy innovation is about identifying the needs of constituents and shortening the time required to develop, test, implement and diffuse a policy” (EY, 2017, p. 8). Here, the focus is set on providing the citizens with timely answers to their needs, in what could perhaps be considered a more client-provider relationship. Additionally, the process of policymaking and its distinct stages is made explicit. By stressing the need for reducing production and delivery times, the process efficiency is also highlighted. Again, stretching the definitions from the economics of innovation, we could consider these two definitions as examples of process innovation, in which innovations are oriented to the effectiveness and efficiency in which the organisation (in this case, the state) produces and delivers its products and services (Schilling, 2016). From this, a parallel between how innovation occurs in the private and public spheres can be drawn. As described by Utterback and Abernathy (1975), the outputs of an organisation embody the organisation’s innovation at a product level, whereas those innovations in the manner it conducts its ‘business’ — including how the outputs are produced— represents process innovations (see Figure 2).

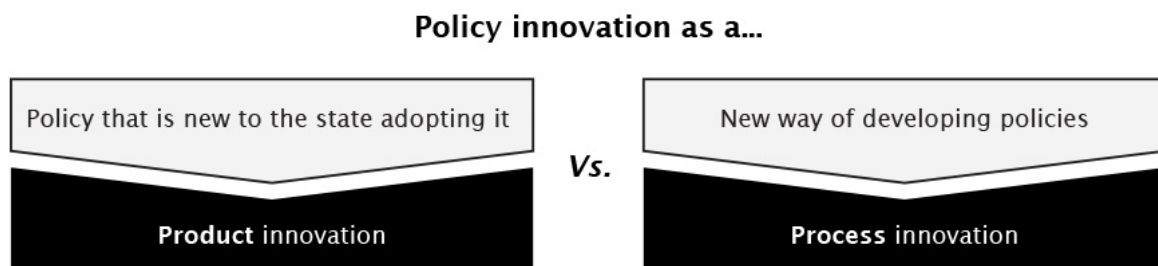


Figure 2: Policy innovation as product Vs. process innovation.

This policy innovation tension could then be described in terms of product-process dimensions. On the one hand, the innovations could be considered as the policies themselves, and the product and services they result in at the implementation stage. On the other, the focus could be set on the innovation of the process of developing new public policies. On this respect, Schilling (2016) stresses that product-process innovation’s dynamics frequently take place in ‘tandem’, this means that innovative products may allow for the development of innovative processes, whereas innovative processes may also enable the development of innovative products.

Following the above, and in the face of new and more complex societal issues, it becomes clear why looking for novel and experimental ways of arriving at innovative solutions has turned into an imperative for many Governments. The rationale seems to be: if current policy instruments are not satisfying societal needs, innovating the process of policymaking may prove crucial to arriving at more adequate solutions.

## Policy Labs as a vehicle for design for public policy innovation

In the last decade, public administrations worldwide have built organisations called Policy Labs in the pursuit of increasing the engagement of diverse and pertinent stakeholders, whilst facilitating experimentation in the public sector (van Veenstra & Kotterink, 2017). Albeit being different in form, structure, scope and origin, these organisations are broadly defined as:

*...emerging structures that construct public policies in an innovative, design-oriented fashion, in particular by engaging citizens and companies working within the public sector (Fuller & Lochard, 2016, p. 2)*

Setting-up new organisations to introduce these concepts into the public sector respond to several reasons. The scale and complexity of the challenges faced by the public sector trigger governments to look at new non-incremental ways of framing issues and developing solutions (OECD, 2017). Furthermore, it is recognised that a more systematic approach that institutionalises a culture of innovation as a core value in the public sector is currently required (Junginger, 2013). Also, that to creatively respond to complex problems, policymakers should develop the ability to envisage new scenarios (Considine, 2012). However, this clashes with the traditional notion of policymaking as a reactive activity, in which policies respond to past and present scenarios, rather than imagining future ones (Junginger, 2014). These novel approaches to creating public value are the means for public sector innovation and imply a shift in how the public sector operates (OECD, 2017).

Although most Policy Labs do not focus on a specific policy area, they share an interest in the participation of multiple stakeholders in the policy-making process (van Veenstra & Kotterink, 2017; Junginger, 2017). A 2016 report by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre recognises that Policy Labs play a vital role at every stage of the policy cycle, though their primary objective is on supporting innovation in the design of public policies (Fuller & Lochard, 2016). This, for instance, has led to the creation of the EU Policy Lab, "a collaborative and experimental space for innovative policy-making... [which utilises] design thinking to explore, connect and find solutions for better policies" (EU Policy Lab, 2016) at a supra-national level. Though not every EU member state features a Policy Lab, governments from those without one have expressed the aim of creating their own, based upon others' experiences in the EU (Fuller & Lochard, 2016). These "special organizational units created at the local, regional or national level have begun to explore how new design methods and new approaches can help them address concrete problems" (Junginger, 2017, p. 6). The need to create special organisations for adopting such methods, could be explained by public sector organisations being described as bureaucratic, hierarchical and risk-adverse structures (Sangiorgi, 2015), which find some design methods to be inappropriate due to their 'playfulness', or tendency for "short-circuiting the traditional decision-making structure by circumventing the political arena" (Bailey & Lloyd, 2016, p. 10). This is interesting since policy scholars claim that "the variety of instruments available to policy-makers is limited only by their imaginations" (Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009, p. 114). Although only a handful of studies on specific Policy Labs provide with accounts of bespoke design approaches for specific contexts (Bailey & Lloyd, 2016), there is currently no overview on how this "design-oriented fashion" to public policy innovation is being interpreted.

Considering Policy Labs for the study of design in public policy innovation responds to their explicit use of design for such endeavours. Similarly, limiting the study's data collection to European organisations responds to the phenomenon's geographical nature. In this regard, Bason (2014) states that experimenting with design methods in the public sphere has firstly appeared as an Anglo-Saxon and Nordic practice. Consequently, the most longstanding Policy Labs find their roots in Europe, allowing the study of design for policymaking beyond the initial experimental stages, as is the case of more novel initiatives taking inspiration from the European experience.

## **Research Design**

This study mapped the design methods/tools that Policy Labs in Europe utilise when intervening in public policymaking. Adopting a process perspective, these design methods/tools were identified at different stages of the policymaking cycle. Data was collected through online surveys conducted between January and November 2018. The sampling was based on that presented in the European Commission Joint Research Centre-commissioned report Public Policy Labs in European Union Member States (Fuller & Lochard, 2016), and expanded from the original 13 countries as to cover all 46 UN recognised states in Europe. In addition to the four-level classification (City, Metro, Regional, National) used in the above-mentioned report to identify the organisations' reach, the supra-national level category was also considered.

### *Data collection*

A survey was sent to 81 organisations in all 46 UN recognised European states. This inquired about the organisation's understanding of policy innovation in terms of the dichotomy 'product vs process innovation', at

which stage of the policymaking process they intervene (according to the six-stage model presented), and the methods/tools utilised at each stage to innovate public policies. Participants were not given definitions of ‘method’ and ‘tool’, nor that of a ‘design method/tool’. The sample consists of:

- 46 UN recognised states in Europe;
- 28 EU member states;
- 81 organisations identified as of interest;
- 17 states with at least 1 organisation of interest.

The online survey was divided into two parts. The first part was sent to the 69 organisations in the sample, and the second part was only sent to those organisations which completed the first part. This resulted in:

First survey:

- Opened in January 2018;
- First survey: 69 contacted (85%) out of 81 organisations;
- 30 valid responses (43% of all 69 organisations contacted);
- Responses from 16 countries (89% representation of all 17 countries with at least 1 organisation of interest).

Follow-up survey:

- Opened in February 2018;
- Sent to 30 organisations;
- 17 responses (57% response rate).

The first survey consisting of eight questions was sent to 69 of the 81 organisations initially identified as of potential interest. The filtering responded to a few reasons, namely, some of the organisations listed in the report Public Policy Labs in European Union Member States (Fuller & Lochard, 2016), were no longer operational by the moment the survey was sent, or further desk research showed that these initiatives were small scale projects rather than established governmental units. The follow-up survey was opened a month after and consisted of nine questions with a focus on the respondents understanding of public policy innovation and the methods/tools they utilise to achieve it.

## Results

From “a number of Policy Labs [...] in a handful of Member States of the European Union” (Fuller & Lochard, 2016, p. 2) reported in 2016, the situation seems to have evolved to a much larger number of organisations in 17 countries across Europe (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Surveys respondents’ distribution*

<i>Country</i>	<i># first survey respondents</i>	<i># second survey respondents</i>
Armenia	1	0
Austria	1	1
Belgium	1	0
Denmark	3	2
France	3	2
Georgia	1	1
Ireland	2	0
Italy	1	1
Macedonia	1	1
Moldova	1	0
The Netherlands	2	1

Poland	2	1
Portugal	1	0
Spain	2	1
Sweden	2	2
Switzerland	1	0
United Kingdom	5	3

### First Survey

Regarding the reach of these organisations, the largest proportion (56.7%) of the respondents indicated they operate at a national-level (see Figure 3). On the other end of the spectrum, 16.7% claim to be doing so at a supra-national level. However, when looking at the individual responses, only two of these organisations have decision-power at a supra-national level, whereas the other three are foundations and academic-based organisations whose work is commissioned by foreign governments and organisations.

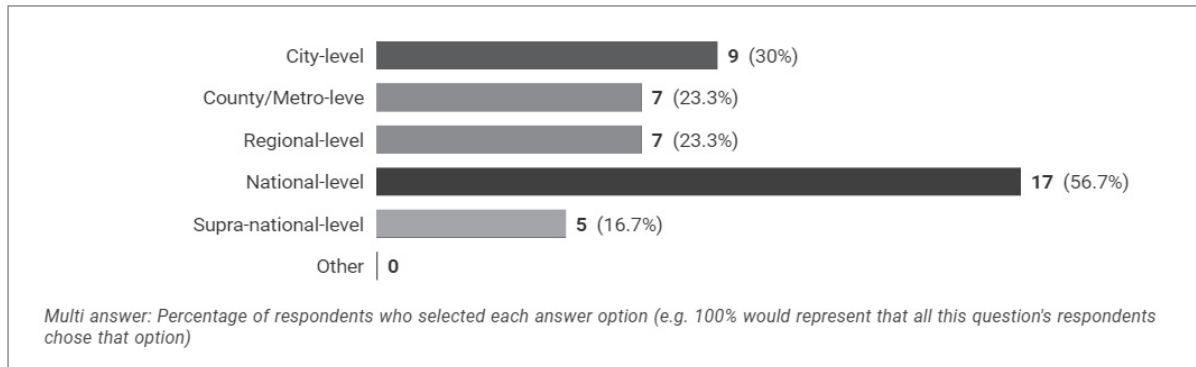


Figure 3: Distribution of the sample's reach. Based on 30 responses.

The initial survey tried to elucidate to what extent using the term 'Policy Lab' as a proxy for 'organisation developing public policies in a design-oriented and innovative fashion' serves as an all-embracing label. The results showed that although 56.6% of the surveyed organisation are either formally or informally known as a 'Policy Lab' (see Figure 4), over 40% of them are not. This negative response includes organisations which had been labelled as such in previous reports (e.g., Sweden's Experio Lab considered a 'County/Metro-level Policy Lab' by Fuller & Lochard (2016)). Moreover, less than a fourth of all respondents are formally known as 'Policy Labs', suggesting that the current label does not effectively encompass all organisations working under the definition.



Figure 4: Sample's identification as Policy Labs. Based on 30 responses.

The main objective of the survey's first part was to map the organisation's activities in terms of the policymaking cycle (see Figure 1). Respondents were asked to indicate at which stage their organisations intervene, allowing for multiple responses. As can be seen in Figure 5, there are consistent responses regarding the agenda-setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation stages, with over half of the respondents indicating their participation at those stages. Perhaps the most noteworthy stages in the cycle are the problem identification and decision-making stages, with 86.7% and 30% responses,

respectively. Whereas organisations from all the spectrum seem to be engaging in the former, the latter is almost exclusively reserved for organisations embedded in the public sector, with the only exemption being a Policy Lab with origins in a public university. Also, three organisations described their participation in policymaking outside the stages of the cycle, either indicating they “...also participate in policy piloting at smaller scale”, or they participate in “policy making process design & innovation” or simply stating that they do policy “experimentation”. Moreover, another remark of interest relates to the inability of one organisation in accomplishing its mission due to what seems as meagre political will, stating they “should be part of the agenda-setting stage, but this would require a higher buy-in from our partners in Government”.

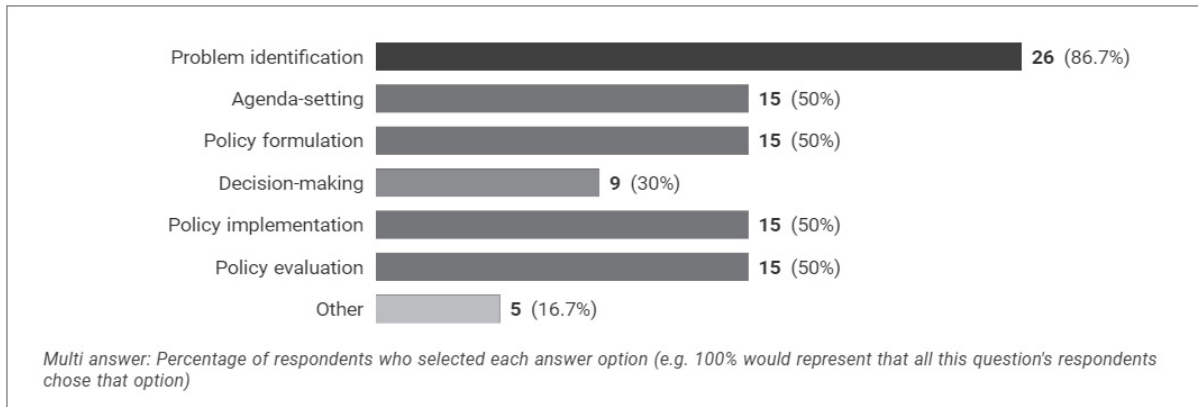


Figure 5: Organisation's intervention at each stage of the policy-making cycle. Based on 30 responses.

### Follow-up Survey

The second part of the survey focused on the organisation's understanding of public policy innovation regarding the 'process vs product innovation' dichotomy presented, as well as the methods and tools utilised by them in the pursuit of policy innovation. Unlike the first part of the survey, this second part was only sent to the 30 organisations which completed the first part. Therefore, the results are based on 16 responses.

In regard to their view on public policy innovation, participants were asked to indicate whether the organisation understands it as “a policy that is new to the government adopting it”, “a new way of developing public policies”, both approaches, or none of them, this last one under the option “other” (see Figure 6). Interestingly, although no organisation understands public policy innovation exclusively in the traditional terms, half of the respondents reported that public policy innovation refers to both approaches, with the remaining seven participants responding it is solely about a new way of developing public policies.

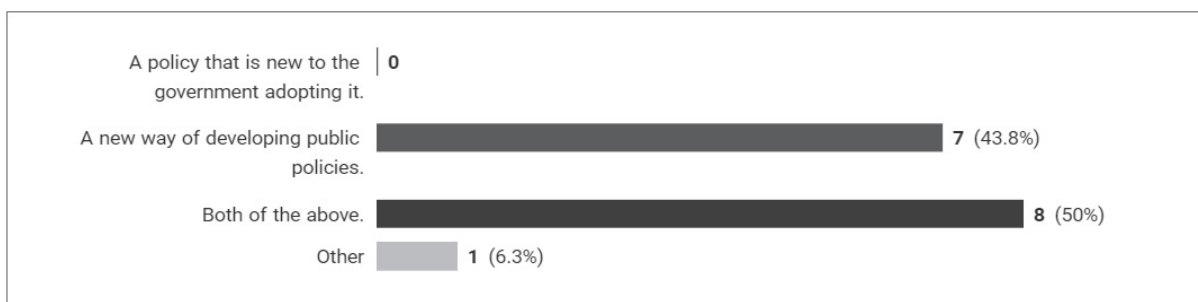


Figure 6: Organisation's understanding of public policy innovation as product vs process innovation. Based on 16 responses.

In a follow-up question (see Figure 7), participants were asked if their organisations aim at innovating how public policies are made, with 62.5% responding affirmatively.



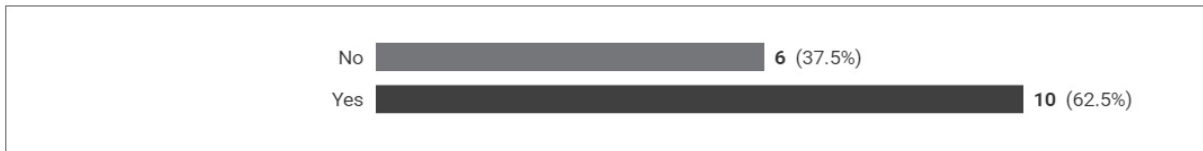


Figure 7: Organisation's aim to produce public policy innovation from a process perspective. Based on 16 responses.

The following question inquired as to why innovation is relevant to public policy-making? Although there was no restriction on who could respond, this open-ended question was responded to by those who had previously asserted that their organisations were looking at innovating how public policies are made. Specifically, some participants argued that innovation is relevant to public policy-making “to create more effect”, as well as “to ensure effectiveness of the policies”, while others explicitly recognised the complexity and nature of current issues as the most important reason for innovation in public policy-making:

*“To address complexities of our time and to solve wicked problems new approaches to policy making are needed (stakeholder involvement, evidence-based decision making, ...)”*

or

*“Because it helps policy makers find more relevant solutions for the challenges of the modern time like climate and economic challenges, improve the governance and respond effectively to the changing context of complexity and uncertainty.”*

Another participant pointed out that the current policymaking process does not necessarily consider the user’s needs in its development, hence the need for innovation:

*“Public policies are supposed to work for people, each with specific needs. One can never expect one policy to work for each individual, but one may expect the policy-making processes to start with the needs of people. To incorporate the lived realities of people in policy-making means to continuously involve people in the process – something that rarely happens on a structural basis.”*

With the aim of mapping the methods/tools utilised when intervening in the policymaking process, the survey asked participants firstly, if their organisations utilise different methods/ tools at different stages of the policymaking process to innovate public policies, and secondly, if their organisation utilise design methods/tools (i.e., persona creation, user journey mapping) to innovate public policies. The results showed that 14 of the 16 organisations utilise different methods/tools at different stages of the policymaking cycle, and 12 of those organisations utilise design methods. The remaining two organisations which do not use different methods/tools at different stages of the policymaking cycle do claim to use design methods/ tools in their activities.

Regardless of the high rate of positive responses about the use of design methods/tools to innovate public policies, the respondents were not always clear on what those methods are. Similarly, the notion of method/tool was not clear for all participants. For instance, one participant who explicitly responded that “co-design workshops” are used at the policy formulation stage clarified that “probably none of [the] mentioned... are really a tool or a method (in strict sense)”. This view was echoed by another respondent who explained that:

*“The task... [of the] Lab as part of public healthcare is to grow design capabilities and capacity to better integrate the resources of patient/relatives in delivery, development, service innovation and policy making. We are there to create a meeting between Healthcare and Design where both worlds can learn from each other. Design or service design for us is a mindset and the approach we use in all projects and work. Therefore we use and adapt a variety of design methods/tools and adjust to the project at hand. In early stages of course more anthropological tools to investigate user needs/behaviors, etc. Later on journeys/personas, etc to describe insights. Prototyping to explore and implement solutions.”*

Table 2 below shows the participants responses when asked to identify the methods/tools their organisations used to innovate public policies at each stage of the policymaking cycle.

Table 2: Mapping of design and non-design methods/tools utilised at each stage of the policymaking cycle. Based on 16 responses.

	<i>Problem Identification</i>	<i>Agenda-setting</i>	<i>Policy Formulation</i>	<i>Decision Making</i>	<i>Policy Implementation</i>	<i>Policy Evaluation</i>
<i>Design Methods</i>	Ethnographic fieldwork	System Dynamics Modelling	User Centred Design	Agile method	Service design, monitoring systems	Data harvesting (monitoring phases)
	Digital ethnography	Prototyping/testing	Co-design enabling	Prototypes	Spend time with the team who has to use new tools or spaces.	Ad hoc valuation approaches
	Scenarios	Strategic conversation	Co-design workshop (preliminary phase)			
	Data analysis-interpretation	Ws (concept design)				
	User journey mapping	Scenario-based techniques				
	Design Thinking	Agile method				
	Sociology	Foresight	Design thinking			
	Psychology					
	Qualitative interviews					

In Table 2, some of the responses –such as ‘Ethnography’ or ‘Prototyping’— were used as examples for more than one activity, design and non-design methods/tools. Some other responses seem to be representative of specific practices (e.g. “Spend time with the team who has to use new tools or spaces”) rather than standardised methods. In this regard, it is important to mention that definitions of ‘method’ and ‘tool’ were not provided.

Although most respondents recognised the use of different methods across the policymaking cycle, some were unsure when asked to identify at which each stage they were used. However, respondents were still able to provide examples of these design methods/tools, namely:

- Ethnographic research;
- Co-creation;
- (Rapid) Prototyping;
- Experimentation;
- Co-Creation;
- Personas;
- User Journeys
- Design Thinking;
- Gamification;
- Human-centred design.

One respondent who claimed their organisation does not use different methods/tools at each stage did mention the use of “design thinking [and] design-driven innovation” throughout the cycle. On the other hand,

one respondent said they “use so many [methods and tools] and at different points. It very much depends on the question we are trying to address”.

## Discussion

In this section, we analyse and discuss the results of both surveys, considering the design literature presented. Firstly, although the term ‘Policy Lab’ has served as an umbrella designation to encompass all organisations working in the development of public policies innovatively, only a limited proportion (<25%) of the surveyed organisations are formally known as such. This makes explicit the need for coining a broader term to designate organisations working in this area.

### *The nature of design-specific methods and tools*

The study highlighted a lack of coherence on which methods and tools are specifically useful and where the role of the design becomes most useful and fulfilling for policy innovation. One evident aspect of the responses to the survey is the interpretation of what constitutes a design method/tool. The survey did not control for the ‘design literacy’ of the respondents, however, and without delving into what makes a design method, it is difficult to conceive a trained designer claiming ‘sociology’ or ‘psychology’ being one. Likewise, ‘design thinking’ or ‘user-centred design’ are seldom referred to as design methods/tools in the literature. Nevertheless, participants expressed that design is being used in their organisations. This discrepancy could be attributed to the fact that it is not the use of design methods/tools what constitutes these organisations design-led approaches. This could be rather based on the mindsets a design approach entail. Likewise, this could explain the broad definition used thus far, in which public policymaking is addressed by these organisations in a ‘design-oriented fashion’, without necessarily resorting to specific design methods. The notions of ‘user-centredness’, ‘co-creation’, and ‘exploration’ –typically through prototyping— appear as key aspects of this innovative approach associated with a ‘designerly’ manner. Moreover, the recurrent identification of ‘agile methods’ as a design method may support the idea that specific methods are not the most relevant aspect of these organisation’s practices. As the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001) expresses, the focus should be more on individuals and interactions instead of processes and tools. Further investigating the specific characteristics that shape these design-led approaches will be key to understanding how design can contribute to public policy innovation. Similarly, assessing how expert design knowledge is introduced in these organisations will also help in fully understanding how design is being utilised.

### *Bringing design approaches to initial stages of the policymaking cycle*

The stages of the cycle at which these organisations intervene also highlights an interesting point. A majority (>85%) of the surveyed organisations claim to be intervening at the problem identification stage of the policymaking cycle, and this resonates with the use of a design approach. This is because the ability to create frames which might help in tackling wicked problems is a key skill in addressing complex societal issues. Moreover, this skill has been associated with core professional design practices which allow for the development of original solutions. Furthermore, the need for innovating and bringing new approaches to public policymaking has been explicitly connected to the need to address the complexities of current social policy issues. This links together the notions of contemporary complex societal issues, the need for policy innovation, and the introduction of design to fostering such innovation. Additionally, one implication of these organisations operating at earlier stages of the policymaking cycle (as opposed to solely at the policy implementation stage) is a shift from the origins of the uses of design in public policymaking, where design was employed to operationalise solutions which had not necessarily arisen from a design-led process. However, it is not clear, if these organisations transit a process of problem reformulation once they have been tasked with a defined policy issue, or if the problem identification is conducted from the outset to push the identified problem into the policy agenda later. Should the former be the case, the design process could be entirely occurring at the policy implementation stage. What did become clear is that the decision-making stage of the policymaking process is still reserved to a limited set of policy actors, most of whom do not seem to belong to these organisations.

### *The need for substantial change to the public policymaking process*

With none of the respondents subscribing to the traditional view of policy innovation as exclusively the introduction of a new policy by a government, the idea that the process by which policies are developed is of

utmost importance became evident. However, with half of the respondents indicating that public policy innovation should involve both, a new process and a novel outcome, the parallels between public policy innovation and that described in the economics of innovation is clear. This seems to indicate that innovative public policies can hardly emerge from the way they have been traditionally developed, signalling its exhaustion for providing appropriate solutions. Two main arguments appear crucial in supporting this. Firstly, the need for innovation to address the complexity of current social policy issues, suggesting the traditional processes fail in doing so. The staged-model represented in the policy cycle could be key to understanding how policymaking has been mainly conceived in a reductionist manner, limiting the Government's capacity to integrate a systemic approach to their development. Secondly, including the inputs from a larger set of stakeholders throughout the policymaking process is imperative in developing meaningful and appropriate public policies. The literature is explicit in recognising that during most stages of the cycle, only subsets of the policy universe are involved (Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009). However, there seems to be an exceptional urge for including the inputs from a very specific group of stakeholders: the users. With the advent of service design at the policy implementation stage, the introduction of the user's perspective in public service development has gained traction, due to its extensive use of co-productive approaches. However, in a more holistic view of the policymaking process, devising a public service may not be possible to disaggregate from the framing of the problem being addressed. Amongst other reasons, this becomes clear when considering the prototyping of solutions, an aspect highlighted by the surveyed organisations. Prototyping will necessarily mean a non-linear process where several iterations of the solution, including the further reframing of the problem, are likely to occur. This consideration, resorts back to the first point, urging for a more systemic approach to the policymaking process.

## Conclusion

Incorporating design approaches in the making of public policy seems to hold the potential for fostering innovation, according to this study's participants. However, the introduction of design in the public policymaking process does not appear to be attached to the use of specific design methods, but rather to certain 'designerly' mindsets, namely, 'user-centredness', 'co-creation', and 'exploration'. User-centredness relates to the shifting of the policymaking process' focus towards the 'main' users affected by the policy to be conceived. This implies maintaining a constant feedback loop with these users throughout the process. Concordantly, 'co-creation' refers to the joint development of policies and their actionable outcomes by several stakeholders which might not typically be involved in such activities. This includes, but it is not limited to, those directly affected by the new policy (the 'users') and frontline public servants. The exploratory mindset is embodied by a willingness to experiment with solutions that do not necessarily resemble the existing policies, thus breaking from path-dependency. It also suggests a positive attitude towards failure, in which several iterations of a proposal are tested against assumptions and with several stakeholders, consequently reinforcing the user-centred and co-creative spirit.

New ways of developing public policies as well as new public policies better suited to deal with current societal problems appear to be a requirement for most governments. However, the latter seems to be largely dependent on the former, often demanding significant changes in the public policymaking process. Whereas previously an analogy with the product versus process model for technological innovation was presented, it became apparent that certain features, such as the 'tandem' dynamic where innovative processes may allow for the development of innovative products and vice versa, is not met. Furthermore, as key stages of the process, such as the decision-making stage, remain in control of limited policy subsets a comprehensive co-creative approach to public policymaking will only be partially implemented. Furthermore, retaining the decision-making power in a reduced portion of the stakeholders will continue to hinder exploratory approaches by, for example, interfering in the feedback loops and policy development's timescale. It appears the public policymaking process will require extensive revision to fully incorporate a design approach with the potential of affecting substantial change, as well as to enable a systematic production of innovative solutions.

Lastly, Policy Labs, or more generically, organisations working in innovative public policymaking are promoters of the introduction of design mindsets in this realm. Arguably, the design capacities in these organisations may not be distinctly robust, since, for instance, their understanding of specific design tools and methods is notoriously fuzzy. This does not necessarily imply a detrimental effect on the outcomes they can produce, as the design mindsets employed by these organisations can be learnt and appropriated beyond the use of design methods and tools. However, some of these principles, such as problem re-framing considered crucial in the ability to develop innovative solutions, are sophisticated professional practices which might require in-depth

understanding and long-standing experience to be effectively deployed. Low performance due to limited design expertise may undermine these organisation's legitimacy, thus having a detrimental effect on the expansion of innovative public policymaking processes. Regardless, the shifting of these organisations towards the early stages of the policymaking process may, if the current power structure permits it, precipitate further changes in the way public policies are conceived. Perhaps even making design literacy a key skill of future policymakers.

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