Theory and practice of deliberative participation in policy analysis

O Hartslief[1]
Department of Public Governance
University of Johannesburg

C J Auriacombe
Department of Public Governance
University of Johannesburg

ABSTRACT

The inclusion of a post-positivist thinking to policy making is a response to criticism raised against the limitations positivists impose on the policy making process. Policy-making and analysis are mainly seen as activities driven by empiricist ideals, quantitative facts, technocrats and experts while citizens' (deliberative) views are excluded or marginalised. Participatory (or deliberative) public policy analysis is a supporting approach presented by post-positivists to embrace democratic ideals through a better informed public policy process that includes normative and valuative knowledge through mainly qualitative processes. This approach supports the notion of multiple methods of inquiry in the contexts of argumentation, judgment and public debate.

In defining policy analysis, post-positivists have opened an opportunity for deliberative approaches. This provides an opportunity specifically to further enhance the policy process through participatory evaluation. In this article a logical qualitative inquiry accompanied by a theoretical analysis by way of a literature analysis was employed as the preferred strategy to determine the questions that are most significant to the topic, context and reliability of the research.

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses trends, issues and perspectives proposed to improve the democratic nature of policy analysis. These trends and perspectives relate to the shared responsibility for accountability. Moreover, the process includes the use of various information sources to verify and test constructions and opportunities for participants, such as citizens and other role players.

In order to be relevant to the mainstream deliberative policy analysis discourse, politicians, policy makers and the research community face pressing questions, such as: How do participatory or deliberative approaches fit into the policy cycle as part of a triangulation process? Can public reasoning and interactive decision-making be developed through participatory policy analysis in order to promote deliberative democracy? Can participatory methods be used in policy analysis – both in terms of *ex ante* and *post facto* analysis?

Of less general political interest are questions concerning the methodological advancement of deliberative policy analysis, such as: Does the post-positivist discourse offer an approach to policy analysis, as well as a better understanding or description of it than positivists offer to multi-dimensional policy issues? Also, what are the limitations of empirical approaches in relation to the requirements for research in a dynamic policy environment?

In the spirit of these questions, this article offers critical re-interpretations of some of the features of the main theoretical and philosophical frameworks of public policy analysis. Its purpose is to determine how participatory or deliberative approaches fit into the policy cycle as part of the triangulation of deliberative theory as a more recent mechanism for policy analysis. This is done against the background of traditional rationalist models.

It is crucial to reflect on the characteristics of the traditional rationalist models in order to understand the methodological advancement towards the deliberative approach to policy. This article reviews the limitations of using only empirical approaches in relation to the research requirements in a dynamic policy environment. Moreover, it goes on to contextualise the models in the field of policy studies.

The rationale for this article is based on the founding principles of democracy, as well as citizens' role in the policy cycle. The article does not aim to explain the principles of democracy, such as popular consultation, majority rule, sovereignty, political equality, universal participation or government feedback on, and responsiveness to, public opinion. Rather, it attempts to develop public reasoning and interactive decision-making. Notably, this bears relation to the main approaches impacting engagement between citizen and the generic policy cycle. While developing interactive decision-making, the democratic principles of accountability, transparency, participation and human rights are strengthened within the policy cycle.

The article also focuses on the potential of participatory methods that can be used in policy analysis – both in terms of *ex ante* and *post facto* analysis. To clarify the discourse, it is important to describe and understand what policy analysis entails, how the main theoretical and philosophical frameworks approach policy analysis and how participatory or deliberative approaches fit into the policy cycle as part of a triangulation process. The article by no means implies that post-positivists reject traditional approaches but rather supports the inclusion of deliberative discourse as an enhancing factor to existing traditional research practices. The article does not reflect on the detail of the post-positivist methodology but offers a point of departure for a sophisticated understanding and further research to expand deliberative approaches.

There are various concepts used in the article and will be dealt with sequentially in view of building an understanding of the direction to include the use of post-positivist approaches and specifically participatory discourse in mainstream research. However, it is critical that the following definitions are clarified in advance to assist the reader to understand the context of the argument. The length of the article does not allow for an extensive discussion and therefore only touches on the concepts broadly. Positivism is a presupposition that informs largely empirical science studies (Yanow 2003). Post-positivism (broadly) is a school of thought that shares the use of "language", builds constructions from existing realities and largely focuses on qualitative aspects (Gottweis 2003). Post-positivism is designed to accommodate the multidimensional complexity of social reality. Moreover, it emphasises social constructions of theory and qualitative discovery (Fischer 2003a:209 and 211) Interpretative policy analysis refers to a repositioning/focus on human interpretation and social realities at the core of the analyses. This requires a practical understanding of the local conditions (local knowledge). This key aspect highlights subjective-experimental knowledge and directly links to participatory democracy (Yanow 2003:236 and 245) and the core principles of democracy.

DEMOCRACY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE POLICY CYCLE: THE CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATORY PUBLIC POLICY MAKING

The core principles of democracy include transparency, accountability, equity, access, participation and human rights – all of which come into play in government's policy-making processes.

Generally, there are two ways of viewing democracy. The issue of participation is critical to the distinction. Notably, the approaches have varied implications for understanding the abovementioned foundations of democracy. The one

view, the so-called public ballot perspective, sees democracy through the lens of representivity. Within this paradigm, citizens identify their representative through regular, free and fair elections (Sen 2004:1-2). The second perspective, known as the public reasoning perspective, attempts from within what is feasible to move to a situation of direct representation and emphasises citizens' participation. Here, participatory reasoning could be seen in public decision-making processes (Sen 2004:1).

The fundamentals of democracy should have a broader focus than electoral processes (Sen 2004:1-2). The public reasoning perspective is relevant and hones in on the discussion on deliberative policy approaches in democratic settings. In view of the argument for interactive decision-making processes (here specifically reflecting on citizen participation in policy making), the discussion turns towards the theory of public policy and accountability. These concepts have to be explained for purposes of this article.

Public policy is defined as issues governed by government through regulation and has a common (public good) purpose or goal (Parson 1995:xvii). In more theoretical terms, policy is seen as the central concept to the analysis and the practice of governance (Colebatch 2002:1).

The policy cycle is a theoretical, analytical construct that helps us understand the impact, trends, development and change of policy. It maps the policy process and might provide some idea on where public participation may be accommodated later in this article. The policy cycle identifies a policy problem in a circular format. It requires policy makers to define the problem, find alternative solutions to such a problem and monitor and evaluate options to ensure the ideal solution. In the second half of the cycle, the policy makers make a selection of the possible solutions for the policy problem, the implementation of such alternatives and an evaluation of the policy choices made (May and Wildavsky 1978 & Dunn 1994:5-35). In this regard, it is important to note that for the purposes of this article the policy cycle is a visual map and not an approach to this particular research *per se.* The policy process, as alluded to by Dunn and Parsons, is very complex and in no way a set of neat steps. It is more of a multiplicity of different internal and external forces and approaches at play at any given time (Dunn 1994:5-35 & Parsons 1995:81). Against this policy making background the article sets out to explore the value of public participation in policy-making. It argues for the importance of participatory methods and approaches in modern governance in order to improve on the democracy as citizens experience it.

To take the discussion forward it is necessary to have an understanding of the role of experts in policy (closely associated with rational or empirical approaches) and the role of citizens as participants (or 'co-signatories') of a social contract (featuring in policy analysis processes that allow for or draw on lay-

participation or post-empirical/post-positivist approaches). The social contract is a fundamental part of the democratic organisation of the state. The social contract states what is required of citizens. The concept of the social contract is not new. However, it requires more attention in the context of developing democracies.

Furthermore, the article investigates the challenges of using participatory methods and the value thereof to enhance the quality of decision-making. In order to understand *ex ante* and *post facto* analysis, the aforementioned is investigated in the context of the foundations of democracy in the democratic state. The question is how best to utilise information for the longer-term policy process over and above the first round of reports that aim to resolve short-term implementation and operational challenges. Related to this, is the challenge of utilising the softer, more subjective and valuative information within the policy making process to supplement data of a more empirical and quantitative nature.

DEFINING POLICY ANALYSIS: *EX ANTE* AND *POST FACTO* ANALYSIS

Policy analysis is defined in diverse ways. The definition most appropriate for this article implies that policy analysis is an "… applied social science discipline that employs multiple methods of inquiry in contexts of argumentation and public debate, to create, critically assess, and communicate policy-relevant knowledge" (Dunn 1994:xiii).

The definition uses the term 'multiple methods of inquiry'. This can refer to stages and the multiple disciplines (including qualitative and quantitative methodologies) on which policy analysis is based (Dunn 1994:2). The quantitative methodologies mainly refer to what is collectively known as empirical or positivist approaches. The analytical stages may include the analysis of policy determination, content, monitoring and evaluation, as well as information for policy and policy advocacy (Gordon *et al.* 1977:26-35). Policy analysis is also based on triangulation, which entails a methodology of multiplism for improving knowledge of policy. Triangulation consists of multiple perspectives, methods, data sources and communication and is also known as 'critical multiplism' (Dunn 1994:29; for the idea of multiple perspectives specifically, cf. Guba and Lincoln 1989:174; Trochim 2002:2; Fischer 2003:125-130).

Multiple methods of information inquiry are descriptive, valuative or prescriptive and may be applied before or after a policy have been implemented. Analysis is done to anticipate the outcome of a proposed policy (*ex ante*) or to evaluate the policy after it has been implemented (*ex post facto*) (Patton & Sawicki 1993:21-25).

Figure 1 Policy analysis approaches and theories
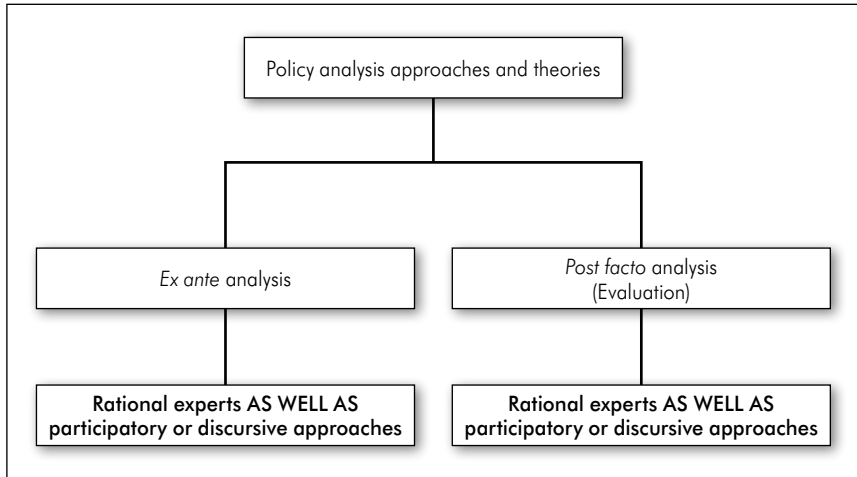
The aim of policy analysis is not only to produce facts, but also to find information about values and investigating preferred directions on policy issues. The characteristic of the information found in policy analysis is descriptive (and/ or predictive), valuative and prescriptive in nature. To obtain this information, three distinct approaches are used. This includes an empirical approach based on facts, valuative approaches based on what a policy is worth and a normative approach that asks "What must be done?".

These policy analysis approaches (empirical, valuative, normative) make a direct link to non-traditional forms of analysis through normative and valuative approaches. Policy scholars belonging to a positivist orientation have resisted normative and valuative forms and found little place for them in methodology textbooks. They are therefore, still less used in policy analysis, although this trend is changing (Dunn 1994:63). Traditionally, policy analysts tended to shy away from normative and valuative approaches. These analysts mainly used empirical analysis due to the belief that facts and values ought to be separated and that values undermine scientific integrity.

Dunn (1994:63) elaborates on this point by saying that the belief to separate facts and values (by logical empiricists / rationalists) led to misconceptions about the methodology of policy analysis. Subsequently, prescriptions (recommendations) for through policy advocacy are seen as mere emotional appeals or political activism instead of as an opportunity to produce and gain access to policy-relevant information that may inform future policy (Dunn 1994:63-65).

THEORETIC FRAMEWORKS FOR POLICY ANALYSIS

In view of the broad definition of policy analysis presented above, the following sections contain a review of the traditional analytical and theoretical frameworks in use when approaching policy analysis. Mainstream policy analysis is generally based on empirical enquiry (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003:16; Guba & Lincoln 1989, 1994, 2004). Theorists argue among themselves about the rational nature of the policymaking process. However, there is no common approach or framework to policy analysis. Furthermore, policy analysts have been unable to fit policy analysis into a neatly packaged "Eastonian black box". Therefore, it is important to broaden our understanding and ability to deal with policy issues within a wider post-positivist context, as opposed to only focusing on traditional empirical approaches (Parsons 1995:xvii & 1-3; Fischer 2003a:209-114).

It is necessary to explain the rational empirical approach to understand the limitations and proposed shift, as well as for including post-empirical approaches and their additional potential for policy evaluation and analysis.

The logical empirical approach

The definition of logical empiricism is fairly simple, as empirical approaches are based on facts gathered though carefully-selected stages. Logical empiricism is also called positivism or scientific empiricism (Fischer 2003:1-25). Theorists of the 19th and 20th centuries were cynical about metaphysics and facts, which could not be verified (www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup/). This school of thought was well established with philosophers, physicists and mathematicians, such as Friedrich Weismann, Phillip Frank and Kurt Gödel (www.britannica.com). It was believed that most scientific experiments were based on the understanding that everything is measurable and controllable. This means that the empiricist only believes that data can be obtained through physical, scientific inquiry. Facts were seen as superior tools of knowledge. As a result, valuative analysis was disregarded as possible methodological tools, as it was generally deemed to be inferior to those methodological tools associated with empiricism.

Rationalism

Rationality is derived from two contexts. In the first instance, the theory developed through economic theories (which are empirical in their orientation). Secondly, bureaucratic rationality developed through sociology. In order to understand the full impact of the deliberative approaches, it is important to look at the different rationalist theorists, who were directly linked to the changing debate in public policy making (Parsons 1995:271-272).

Rationality: Herbert Simon

Rationality is also termed instrumental reasoning. It is defined as a view of recognising scientific inquiry as the only means of creating *bona fide* knowledge (Dunn 1994:59). Rationalism is characteristically linear in its logic. Defined by Herbert Simon (1957:36-69), it is the process of policy making and the action needed to reach a specific policy goal. Simon strictly focuses on a means-to-an-end approach. Rational choice is a choice between the best alternatives, which at the end will lead to attaining the pre-intended goal. Simon explains that the decision-maker would be able to make such a choice due to the comprehensive analysis (evaluation) of alternatives and systematically weighing up difficulties associated with these alternatives. Such a choice is expert-driven and assumes that researchers and policy makers have access to current information. Rationalists believe that knowledge is neutral and technocratic (Jones 2002:269-284 & Parsons 1995:277).

Simon distinguished between programmed and non-programmed decisions. Non-programmed decisions are those that require solutions for new difficulties – the discovery of new solutions on a trial-and-error basis. There are no set rules as in the case of a programmed routine decision-making process. In Simon's later work, he changed his view somewhat and argued that the improved use of technology, the strengthening of public knowledge and the improved knowledge on political institutions had the potential to strengthen rational decision-making. He calls this approach 'bounded rationality' (Parsons 1995:282 & Hill 1997:99).

Bounded rationality highlights limitations to rationality. Within the context of limitations, Simon acknowledges that human knowledge is constrained or bounded (such as by objectivity or subjectivity). Simon had doubts about the impact of a strengthened public knowledge base. He did not consider that an increased public knowledge base could make a difference in decision-making. Simon saw technology as an opportunity and he viewed the human factor as a risk – rather than an element for potential growth. Moreover, he argued that bounded rationality, used together with technology, might in actual fact provide an advantage to any organisation if used correctly (Parsons 1995:280).

Rationalist theory is subject to criticism, most of which is based on the fact that external factors, as well as human emotions influence decision makers and that, in reality, most policy processes are not as simple as Simon perceives them to be (Hill 1997:99-101). In fact, in value-laden democratic settings the processes are very complex, due to the involvement of various policy role players.

Critique of rational processes

Rationality has become the object of much critique over time. The main lines of this critique, as found in the literature, are as follows:

- Rationality is not flexible. Nor does it accommodate softer issues within a policy-making environment. The policy-making environment contains a multitude of socio-political policy problems that require an integrated policy approach. The policy-making environment is highly politicised and politicians are pushing for specific policy agendas. Furthermore, investigations of an empirical nature cannot always clarify the valuative issues at play in the policy environment (Hill 1997:99-107; Stone 2001:5; & Parsons 1995:278-281).
- There is a "historical impairment" on the part of decision-makers, which includes barriers of superstition, peer pressure, media propaganda and intimidation. Also, there is a tendency to comply with the *status quo* and different alternatives are not explored (Lindblom 1990:69).
- Other limitations to rationality identified in the literature are: individual habits (such as managerial style, attention span and human limitations); values and cultural perceptions (such as race, gender, freedom, dignity, religion and language); knowledge and information (availability and accessibility); comparing alternatives; capacity to do proper research (for example. under-qualified or wrongly placed individuals do the actual research); identifying the correct decision (late detection or snowballing projects with a lack of qualified individuals); organisational failure to pursue certain courses of action (co-ordination difficulties and dictatorship); organisational environment and the pressures arising internally and externally; clear organisational goals (no clear goals for public participation); and no clear communication about organisational constraints (Stone 2001:5; Parsons 1995:277; & Simon 1957).

Incrementalism

Charles Lindblom's incrementalist theory offers an objective insight into the dynamic reality of the policy-making environment in which options are weighted and reviewed if the need arises. It follows on the work done by Simon, with some distinctive criticism and small changes to Simon's theory. However, one particular argument Lindblom put forward was that technology cannot substitute policy analysis done by policy analysts, and that technology can only enhance policy-making. There is no correct way of making policy. It is a process that requires input from various role players and policy makers. This is especially the case in a democratic setting (Hill 1997:27; & Parsons 1995:280).

Incremetalism is similar to what Karl Popper's philosophical framework described as the piecemeal engineering model. Popper indicates that there were limitations to knowledge and human ability (humans are not objective but subjective beings). In a liberal society governance is based on understanding these limitations and finding solutions beyond the boundaries (such as human

limitations and access to information) through incrementalism (Parsons 1995:49).

Juma & Clark (1995:124) state that *"… the concept of policy as a social experiment is rooted in the application of evolutionary analogies to cumulative social change"*. In other words, it is a process in which a hypothesis is tested against reality in an experimental manner in the same way as a scientific enquiry.

However, this theory does not reflect the effort of systematically analysing all alternatives, as proposed by Simon, and then coming up with the single best. In stead, intended goals are reached through the element of evaluation or the reconsideration of previous decisions and the policy change that follows such evaluation.

Critique of the rational/empirical policy-making environment

It was mostly Karl Popper who in his book *Logik de Forschung* 1934 (English: *The logic of scientific discovery*) expressed criticism on logical-empiricism. As Popper did not essentially agree with the theory, he posed critical questions, such as that the metaphysical cannot be meaningless, but could become falsifiable or un-falsifiable in another more advanced century. He indirectly opened the window for scientists such as W V O Quine and Thomas Kuhn. Their works proposed that there is more than one way of providing a high-quality scientific explanation for a study outside the traditional boundaries of scientific research (cf. Fischer 2003:118-119 & www.britannica.com).

Generally, the prerequisite for qualifying any process as rational or empirical is questionable and most probably impossible – especially considering the unpredictability of the policy-making environment. Unpredictability remains a risk to governance – even in a modern dynamic policy environment with the best technological advancements that is affected by different technological advancements. Lindblom's theory was based on a stable and uncomplicated environment with a single united belief system (Hill 1997:105).

Policies of a technical nature are not likely to be transformed and adjusted incrementally without having a long-lasting impact on the country concerned (such as the privatisation of public services or financial policies). Other less complicated policies (such as a policy providing water to those living in urban areas) are changed more easily in this manner. Incrementalism paved the way for alternatives to develop due to the possibilities of various ways of creating alternatives to policy problems, by solving strategic problems with smaller adjustments. Lindblom changed his view about the theory several times. This was done to accommodate the difficulty of attaining correct information in an ever-changing political environment (cf. Hill 1997:106; Fischer 2003; & Gregory 1989).

Pessimistic findings on policy are at times ignored. This is due to the far-reaching investments and resources already made and political crisis situations or failures (scandals or tragedies) that arise before a major re-evaluation of policy change or termination takes shape (Stone 2001:6).

In conclusion, it is clear that rationalists mainly accept policy analysis as an empirical process (a linear step-by-step approach) that involves experts and technocrats. Values within the policy cycle are not fully-grasped. And, if values are taken into account, they are the values of the policy maker. Interpretation of values and situations within society is not always measurable in a purely scientific manner. Simon highlights the importance of using technology. However, he does not take human cognitive abilities into account. Individuals are not objective and uninfluenced when capturing or analysing data during the *ex ante* and *post facto* analysis. In addition external and internal factors both affect the analytical process.

Incrementalism (the piecemeal approach) did acknowledge that knowledge of society and institutions is inadequate and that small adjustments provide the best alternative for policy. Bearing in mind that small steps have an advantage for analysis (in the policy cycle), the research explores possible alternatives to a traditional analysis approach (and more specifically monitoring and evaluation). Building on the conclusions of the rational/empirical approach, the research explores what post-empiricists further contribute to analysis.

Positivism fails by simply being out of touch with citizens due to the divergence (gap) between theory and practice (reality). Policy makers and analysts are to a large extent office bound. Positivism supports a hierarchy of politicians making decisions without considering the realistic impact and the non-accessibility of accurate information. Politicians cannot be sure of policy-making due to the pace of social degradation and an unstable economic environment. Local knowledge is also largely disregarded (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003:19; Yanow 2003:228-235).

The thinking regarding policy analytical processes did not end with rationality and incrementalism. It went on to mirror developments in the epistemology that would move beyond such schools of thinking. The next part of the article review will engage with these more recent schools of thinking.

Post-empiricism

As noted before, the fact that policy analysts get entangled with issues such as rationalism, empiricism and discursive frameworks when investigating policy alternatives, points to the question of whether post-positivism provides a altered approach to policy analysis – especially in relation to the valuative and normative approaches. Secondly, by allowing citizen participation and

enhancing local knowledge as a critical enhancing methodological practice in the social sciences.

Defining post-empiricism can be "nebulous". But, like the definition for public policy, there is no standard definition for post-empiricism (also called post-positivism by Fischer) (Fischer 2003:125 & Fischer 2003a:211). However, the theory does acknowledge that "reality" (recognising reality as a "social construction and the focus would be on the nature of the situation and the discursive processes that shape it") exists. Part of this understanding lends itself to objective analysis, but that there is more to it than reality only (Fischer 2003:128). The post empiricist frameworks do not focus on statistical and rigorous rules based research design but rather "involve the exercise of a multi-methodological range of intellectual criteria, both qualitative and quantitative."(Fischer 2003a:219)

The most common post-positivist philosophy is critical realism. Positivists are realists. However, the difference between critical realism (post-positivism) and realism (positivism/empiricism) is that critical realists accept that observations are imperfect and theory is revisable. Critical realists acknowledge that, in order to understand reality, scientists need to explore multiple measures and observations – including the subjective. (Trochim 2002:3 & Dunn 1994:63-65). Trochim states that post-positivists are constructivists (individuals constructing a view of what is real through experiences) and that beliefs are fallible due to diverse experiences, background and cultures (Trochim 2002:2, Guba & Lincoln 1989:43, Fischer 2003:125-130, Dunn 1994:10-11 and 29 on critical mutiplism).

Constructivism implies that knowledge is a construction or collective of various interpretations of information (Morcol 2001:383). Guba and Lincoln argue that constructivist methodology is a qualitative approach proposed as an alternative (enhancing) to the dominant quantitative evaluation approach. However, the authors argue that evaluators may use post-positivist approaches to broaden their understanding of softer issues, such as "fourth generation evaluation".

Social-construction, as well as interpretative-qualitative approaches may assist in terms of heuristic discovery and an enlightened understanding of reality. Fischer and Trochim provide arguments for post-empiricism that allows policy makers into a dimension where the policy-making cycle becomes less "fussy" or abstract as the researcher deals with day-to-day issues at a grassroots level. It would make sense to gather information from different points, to establish at a later stage whether that policy is reaching its intended outcome (cf. Fischer 2003:125-130). This holds true for both *ex ante* and *post facto* analysis (Dunn 1994:63-65; Patton & Sawicki 1993:21-25). Fischer states that the discursive policy analyst must have an understanding of socio-economic realities and the intended goal of a specific policy in order to add value to policy-making and politics.

Policy-makers face challenges that pose limitations to traditional rational policy making and that facilitates opportunities for post-empiricists to come to the fore:

- The new spaces of politics that entail a bottom-up approach. Within this paradigm citizens participate. Thus, interpretive analysis becomes more important as different dimensions destabilise politics (cf. Fischer 2003:50-140).
- Politics and policy-making under conditions of uncertainty imply that society is becoming more complex and unpredictable (cf. Hajer & Wagenaar 2003).
- The increased importance of differences in the understanding of politics, is due to the fact that societies are becoming culturally complex and also due to language differences (cf. Stone 2001).
- Acting upon an awareness of interdependence – due to differences as indicated above – society faces various complexities. Evidentially, there is a need for communities to work together to solve difficulties. Community deliberation therefore creates an environment that is important for understanding reality and for generating possible solutions to problems (cf. Fischer 2003; Hajer & Wagenaar 2003; & Frederickson 1982).
- Policy-making and the dynamics of trust and identity: The contemporary political setting challenges the idea that political parties always provide the ideal support structures for specific interests. Therefore, individual citizens need a place to voice their concerns, which may differ from those of the political party (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003:8-16).

It is clear that there are various limitations to traditional evaluation methods. These challenges may arise due to developments in information communication technology, increasing social and humanitarian policy needs, financial constraints, as well as the general changes democratic states face, including security, migration, information availability and human resources / expert knowledge. Policymakers should value, embrace and take on board norms and values, rather than seeing them as a risk to be neutralised and methodologically contained. Post-empiricists (policy analysts) must call upon agents of social and policy change to help interpret the local political environment to ensure effective policy-making.

Citizens, local knowledge and post-empiricism

A critical element to post-empiricism is the search to understand day-to-day politics. This requires a deeper understanding of social and cultural factors, rather than facts. Such socio-cultural issues play a decisive role in citizens' assessments of different views (Fischer 2003:129).

Policy-making cannot take place in isolation, since various socio-cultural issues influence the process. Within an institutional or government setting, relationships take account of ideas. These external influences are critical and are seen in the meta-theoretical influence of language, as described by Habermas (1984) in his critical theory approach and Foucault's post-structural theory of discursive power. This means that discourse is based on the awareness of how language is used, understood, perceived, listened to and analysed and more importantly, the institutions from where information emanates (Fischer 2003:31, 46-47; & Goodin 2003:61).

In more recent years, citizens' renewed awareness of their policy environment has called for some form of direct representation due to the disjuncture between government and citizens. Most individuals believe that government officials are self-serving and that citizens and their needs are not considered. Therefore, Coleman (2005:3-10) refers to an individualistic, consumerist culture that has eradicated a traditional sense of community. This, in turn, erodes confidence, trust and electoral participation. He explains that citizens in mature democracies tend to participate continuously in a range of matters (Mackinnon *et al.* 2003; & Coleman 2005:3-5).

Contrary to Coleman's statement, participation is not sustainable, continuous or integrated into policy-making. This especially comes into play when considering the type of environment a particular democracy is functioning in and how serious the particular government is about participation. The level at which citizens want to engage is different from what governments are used to. Note, for example, the call emanating from participants at the International Conference on Engaging Citizens, held in Australia in 2005 under the aegis of the UN, for democracies to re-evaluate participatory programmes as citizens disengage at a rapid pace. The message is clear: Citizens want to be listened to and *heard*. For this, adequate participation programmes are needed (Guthrie 2005; Khan 2005; Sobhan 2005; Ratnayake 2005; Fraser-Moleketi 2005; & Bertucci 2005).

Due to the renewed call for local participatory programmes, examples of programmes are explored. The Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), Goar (2003) reports in the *Toronto Star* that ordinary Canadian citizens are capable of participating in making policy decisions through dialogue. Canadians in actual fact welcome this approach, as it allows them to develop a better understanding of the roles of government and citizens. Citizens want to be better informed. Moreover, they are willing to contribute to ideas that will benefit the collective citizenry. Thus, Canadians could set goals and review a workable social contract to which they themselves contributed. Local knowledge is found to be valuable in creating and understanding social needs (cf. Hartslief 2008:101-127).

Yanow (2003:231) supports the idea that local knowledge is important to interpretive/constructivist policy-making. She states that " *…metaphoric reasoning is common in policy practices, as well, serving both as models of prior conceptualisations of the issues and as models for subsequent action …* " Yanow emphasises that metaphoric processes facilitate access to local knowledge of policy. This local knowledge is accessed through observation, participation, conversational interviewing and reading local reports or letters. She explains that the normative cultural metaphors imply that:

- policy-relevant learning is an interactive process, it is ongoing, and it is mediated coaching;
- policy-relevant learning is seen as a process of enhancing existing policy but also to change it into *effective* policy, not just to change policy; and
- communities are resourceful and eager to share their information (Yanow 2003:233).

The experience of public participation across the board seems positive. None of the theorists indicate that the process of engagement is without challenges. However, all agree that the value of the information gathered is indisputable.

Observations on the participatory patterns of poor communities in Belgium are more or less the same as that of Yanow (Claeys *et al.* 2001:125). It is clear that poor communities find it difficult to engage government structures due to the fact that public servants do not respect or value lay-knowledge. Generally, empirical methods require complicated, costly and timely surveys to establish reasons for specific failures or actions. Researchers and other experts further alienate or intimidate locals with their knowledge or attitudes. Such professionals generally misinterpret or see little value in views portrayed by uneducated citizens. For this reason, the empirical methods of positivism fail to capture and access socio-cultural realities (Fischer 2003:129).

Fischer (2003:1-129) explains that the social sciences depend on the data and knowledge of reality. This data can only be accessed by social actors such as citizens who would interpret and communicate reality as they believe it to be. Raw data is freely available from communities. Post-empiricists support local knowledge and participation and offer "*an interpretative model of practical discourse geared to the normative context of social action*", as well as putting "*empirical research within a framework of normative concerns*" (Fischer 2003:136).

Social policy becomes a reality through participatory methods – even though it is value-driven and it creates a benchmark against which government can measure performance. This benchmarking can take place through *ex ante* and *post facto* policy analysis. In view of the realities discussed above, it would be important to review deliberative approaches in more detail.

Deliberative approaches: monitoring and evaluation through *ex ante* and *post facto* analysis

Deliberative democracy refers to the legitimate lawmaking that originates from public deliberation by citizens (Bohman & Rehg 1997:x). This refers to the act of participation and the inclusion of the citizen's "voice" to strengthen democracy. Deliberative theories, on the other hand, capture the importance of the post-modern discourse. It deals with that part of policy making where practice and theory meet on a level that adds value to policy-making normatively as well as empirically (Fischer 2003:50-149). In other words, deliberation by citizens adds value to the policy-making process by providing feedback, learning and sharing responsibility (Guba & Lincoln 1989).

Clark (1995:127) argues that deliberative theories also give rise to the concept of a learning organisation in which language and communication is seen as a way of experimenting with the citizen's views on certain policy issues. In Immanuel Kant's (1975) terminology it brings about the "the public use of reason". Most importantly, the question is to what extent deliberative democracy "enriches" democratic practice and whether or not it overcomes the important practical obstacles about reasoning and empirical requirements of science.

Bohman and Regh (1997:x) ask "*whether citizens with a variety of individual interests can also come to affirm a common good*". As in any other theory there are advantages and disadvantages associated with deliberative theories. This is due to the fact that claims and concerns citizens raise are normative and valuative in nature. Deliberative theorists argue against the economic and pluralist assumptions of competing interests and individualism, as it erodes a sense of community (Bohman & Regh 1997:38-50; & Coleman 2005). Generally, elitist and rational theories downgrade public participation to voting, and see decision-making as an elitist practice.

Deliberative theorists argue for direct democracy and town hall meetings. Hence, there are some small steps by developed and developing nations to open this debate. In the US, former president George W Bush held American Town Hall meetings to inform the general public on issues of the day (White House 2001). Similarly, during the Obama presidential campaign, electronic citizen participation escalated to a level that has never been seen in the US.

It is therefore important to "as far as possible, involve those who are directly concerned with any given policy, the actors whose livelihoods are likely to be affected and at the same time whose intimate knowledge of the system under review has an important informative role to play" (Juma & Clark 1995:128). There is growing evidence that participatory efforts in policy-making ensure better understanding and ownership by the general public, as they strengthen the role of citizens in democratic settings (Butcher & Mullard 1993:134).

The strongest bond between deliberative theorists is the fact that the theory goes beyond self-interest. Moreover, it is based on bargaining in general or "construction building", as Guba and Lincoln also refer to it, which reflects clearly on democratic governance. This differs radically different from elitist theories that see decision-making as a top-down activity. Deliberative theorists require inclusive bottom-up policy making approaches.

The different approaches and practical value of the work on deliberative democracy are divided between those contributing at a highly theoretical level and those concentrating on practical application. Regarding the ideal deliberative democracy, the processes, cultural differences, political equality, learning through empowerment and related topics, as in the work of John Elster (1998:1-55) and Guba and Lincoln (1989:1-6), were all instructive and proved to be useful for the purposes of this study. Hajer (2004:15-25); Bohman and Rehg (1997:23-39); Tsjitske Akkerman (2004); Frank Fischer (2003:1-120, 1993:47); Gaventa and Goetz (2001:1-6); Goetz and Jenkins (2001:14-28); Fredrickson (1982:501-508); and John Dryzek (2000:1-65), were also useful as some of the more influential theorists in this field of study.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical landscape of policy-making is changing from a situation where the typical rationalist models, informed by economic thinking and empiricism, enjoyed a near monopoly on how policy is made (Fischer 2003). This post-empirical shift is in response to criticism against the empiricists during the past three decades. This criticism included arguments that normative and valuative realities are not adequately accommodated in the rationalist models (cf. Dryzek 2000; Juma & Clark 1995:125).

The theoretical works of Guba and Lincoln (1989), Butcher and Mullard (1993) and Goetz and Jenkins (2001) specifically enhance the inclusion of more qualitative approaches in policy-making and democracy. Deliberative approaches, such as public participation, create an opportunity to integrate the individual into the realm of a participatory democracy more effectively and to strengthen an interactive decision-making environment.

Policy analysis can be based on triangulation that consists of various data sources and multiple perspectives, ensuring corroboration of data. Normative and valuative data adds value to factual and statistical information sets. There is a growing need to enhance and strengthen the social contract between governments and its citizenry. The ever-changing social and political environments in which governments govern require participatory citizens to ensure "real-time" information and successful democratic existence.

This article focused on democracy in relation to accountability and participation. This is due to the fact that these principles were linked to the importance of the public reasoning perspective and interactive decision-making, which includes policy-making. A constructivist approach to empirical knowledge, together with normative and valuative analysis, can be included in policy-making to develop heuristic discovery. The different constructions, including lay-knowledge provides enough information, which, with the help of appropriately trained evaluators, can be used for accountability and possible policy adjustment. Thus, the importance, role and development of the "empowered" citizen now become critical factors in participatory democracy. Citizens can be empowered and helped to understand their role in society through participatory programmes. Butcher and Mullard, as well as Goetz and Jenkins, helped do this by developing a shared responsibility model with various positive spin-offs.

Community democracy, as proposed by Butcher and Mullard, may enhance accountability and policy improvement. Another challenging but achievable goal is to create an environment that instils and develops professional analysis for interpreting lay-knowledge and capacitating citizens to contribute to the process.

NOTES

1   This article is based on the MA degree dissertation of one of the co-authors, O Hartslief, which was successfully completed under the supervision of Mrs H Van Dyk-Robertson and Prof C J Auriacombe as joint promoters at the University of Johannesburg.

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AUTHORS' CONTACT DETAILS

Prof C J Auriacombe
Department of Public Governance
University of Johannesburg
P O Box 524
Auckland Park 2006
Johannesburg
Tel.: 011 559 2385
Fax: 011 559 3225
Cell: 0834633646
christellea@uj.ac.za

Odette Hartslief
223 Stead Ave
205 Albatross Flats
Queenswood
0186
Work: 012 3005522 / 012 4642192
Cell: 0824127924
Odette@po.gov.za