

## **Government and producing public policy**

**Dr. Bouriche Riadh**

**Université Mentouri de Constantine**

### **I. Institutional and historical background of public policy**

By most accounts, the academic discipline generally referred to as the study of public policy grew out of the approach called the policy sciences. The policy sciences approach has been primarily credited to the work of Harold D. Lasswell, writing in the late 1940s and early 1950s, most prominently articulated in his essay, “The policy orientation,” which was the opening chapter to Lasswell and Daniel Lerner’s *The Policy Sciences*. The policy sciences orientation was explicitly focused on the rigorous application of the sciences (hence, the plural usage of “sciences”) to issues affecting governance and government. As Fischer (2003) has recently observed: Specifically, Lasswell wanted to create an applied social science that would act as a mediator between academics, government decision-makers, and ordinary citizens by providing objective solutions to problems that would narrow or minimize. The need for unproductive political debate on the pressing policy issues of the day. In addition, Lasswell and his colleagues (e.g. Lasswell and Kaplan 1950) articulated a clear understanding of the necessity of overlaying the approach with the democratic ethos and processes, or what he defined as the “policy sciences of democracy”, which “were directed towards knowledge needed to improve the practice of democracy”. The distinctly democratic orientation

grew directly out of Lasswell's animus towards the totalitarian regimes that were present in the world community during the interwar period<sup>1</sup>.

However, the policy sciences approach and its authors have deliberately distinguished themselves from these early academic contributions by posing three defining characteristics that, in combination, transcend the contributions ascribed to the individual disciplines<sup>2</sup>:

- The policy sciences are explicitly problem oriented, quite consciously addressing public policy problems and recommendations for their relief, while openly rejecting the study of a phenomenon for its own sake; the societal or political question of “so what?” has always been at the heart of the policy sciences’ approach.
- The policy sciences are distinctively multidisciplinary in their intellectual and practical approaches. The reasoning is straightforward: almost every social or political problem has multiple components that are tied to the various academic disciplines without falling clearly into any one discipline’s exclusive domain.
- The policy sciences’ approach is consciously and explicitly value oriented; in many cases, the central theme deals with the democratic ethos and human dignity. This value orientation, first argued during the emphasis on “behavioralism”, i.e. “objectivism,” in the social sciences, recognizes that no social problem or methodological approach is value free. As such, to understand a problem, one must acknowledge its value components. Similarly, no policy scientist is without her or his own values, which also

must be recognized, if not resolved. This realization will later surface at the heart of the post-positivist orientation.

Policy making in the modern state commonly exhibits a contradictory character. Under the press of daily demands for action, often constructed as “crises”, decision makers feel the need to act without delay. Yet powerful forces are pushing systems increasingly in more decentralized and persuasion-based directions.

Public policy analysis, a recent branch of political science, deals with collective actions that produce practical measures, government action programs, and fundamental processes that describe the implementation of public policy, its functioning, its follow-up and evaluation. First of all, it is necessary to understand the concept of public policy, the analysis of the global sectorial policies and the illustration of the complexity of the fundamental processes that make up any public policy. We will further discuss the emergence of public policy and describe the process for the implementation of a good policy, and this by stressing that the success of the strategy of public action depends on several important factors. Furthermore, it's worth mentioning that the evaluation and monitoring, in particular, are a prerequisite to this success.

Public policy analysis, seeks to give an account of the development of the state intervention and other actors in sectorial society. According to Gilles Massardier, there are two ways of doing Public Policy in Western societies. On the one hand, the conventional way in which public authorities act, according to a chosen purpose based on objectives and means defined a

priori which are aimed at receptive” targets”. On the other hand, the new way in which public authorities no longer have the monopoly of making public policy but on the contrary doing it together with a multiplicity of actors who plan their experienced purposes in the process of public policy making (the model of mutual adjustments and public action). It can be said that the second method takes precedence over the first one, in reality as in theoretical approaches to public policy<sup>3</sup>.

An outstanding book written by the sociologists Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg entitled *The actor and the system* (1977) starts with the following question: Under what conditions and at the cost of what constraints, collective action, that is to say, the organized action of men is it possible? The answer given to this essential question for the study of public policy, by the same authors is: the ability of actors to collectively organize themselves, through their strategies and actions, their mutual adjustments, in a system of action resulting from the working of interactions that establishing their social world<sup>4</sup>.

As stated by Pierre Muller<sup>5</sup> the notion of public policy is mainly of Anglo-Saxon origin and has undergone a very important development in the United States since the 1950s. Thus, the Anglo-Saxon tradition based on the notion of government is deeply rooted in the study and research of public policy. In this context, the fundamental question, which the author considers as pragmatic, is how the “forming” of interest can lead to the establishment of "good" effective policies, corresponding to the desired intention and to saving taxpayers' money? However, the tradition in

Europe coming from Marx, Hegel and Weber is based on the concept of the state, an institution that dominates, organizes, and transcends the society. So, the notion of public policy has struggled to get into a scientific environment nourished by the legal culture and philosophy of the state. Always according to this author, it is the establishment of a connection between these two so different traditions that permits us to ask this important question: How the transformation of the modes of action of the State over the last fifty years has changed its place and role in Western industrial societies? From this, we can confirm the distinction between what the Anglo-Saxons call "policy" that is to say the action of elected governments and administration (a public policy agenda) and what they call "politics", that is to say politics as a general activity.

The deep changes that have affected the modes of regulation of industrial societies for half a century cannot only be explained by the theories of the state. They are presented in the form of an achievement of the state regulator, shown by the prodigious growth of government intervention in all areas of daily life, but this achievement is accompanied by a major crisis of action models that seemed to have made the success of the State during the seventies as shown in the development of neo-liberal theories. The question then is what kinds of policies that can change political life<sup>6</sup>. In other words, we may ask a question on public policy making and its implementation.

Such is the theoretical perspective of this article: it aims to provide a basis for the study of public policy without claiming to provide a review of

extensive literature in this field. As this is a new discipline in political science, the issue of public policy has not been much treated in Algeria and even the Algerian literature on this subject is scarce. This perspective does certainly not answer all questions related to the analysis of policies, the field of which is far too complex, but it can serve as a first approach to clarifying the basic concepts of this domain. The general framework within which our study in public policy is developing is set out; it is now possible to move on to more precise definitions.

## **II. Public policy as an action of public authorities (government)**

Public policy can be defined as the action of public authorities. It's a matter of what the government decides to do or not do. Likewise, according to Carl J. Friedrich, public policy may seem like a set of government decisions that encompass everything that needs to be done or not according to data from context<sup>7</sup>. And more precisely in terms of activity, James Anderson defines it as an objective method of work followed by one or several actors for the treatment and resolution of an existing problem or issue of great importance<sup>8</sup>. We can say that public policy is the practice of decisions and the implementation of policies acting for maintaining the organizational structure of the different sectors of the state and perform actions with the objective of protecting society from within and from outside. For a more simplistic definition of public policy experts such as Pierre Muller<sup>9</sup> retains the definition of Yves Meny and Jean-Claude Thoenig, which, according to him, it provides a good summary of the extensive literature, including the Anglo-Saxon one in this field. Public

policy is presented in the form of a government action program in a society sector or in a geographical space. Also according to this author, this approach accords with the pragmatic procedure which is often that of the analysts of policies and who also associate more or less public policy and governmental action program. We agree with Dominique Chagnollaude who also relies on the definition and Jean-Yves Meny and Claude Thoenig in which they state that public policy is the outcome of the activity of a public authority vested with power and government legitimacy. This to maintain that the question therefore moves with regard to the "elitist" problematic (who governs?), and is interested in the outcomes of government action, its actors, its processes. In this sense, this approach does just break the myth of the single actor, rational - "the decider" – to adopt a more realistic view by studying the contents of a public activity, the program of actions and decisions it implements and its aims, "the public" aimed at by this policy and its effects<sup>10</sup>.

Besides, public policy can also be studied in terms of the typology of state actions. The most known of these typologies is that of the American author Theodore J. Lowi<sup>11</sup> who set a classification of four types of policies. Regulatory policies governing the behavior of individuals by enacting mandatory standards (rules of the road ...) distributive policies concerned with the provision of public goods by public authorities (tangible assets , legal regulation, authorizations and agreements for the implementation or continuation of a personal activity, industrial or commercial ...) redistributive policies organize the redistribution of income in society to

provide those in most financial need or other benefits based on certain criteria (public welfare system...) constituent policies are those that define the rules on the rules; they are also known as institutional policies, that is to say those for the promotion, the transformation of state or societal institutions (decentralization, reform of the Penal Code ...).

In addition, Gilles Massardier says, "another possible definition of public policy consists in a materialistic sense linked again to a state-centered vision and to the supposed ability of the state to bring about a change in the society by means of its direct intervention. Its resources cover the conventional resources of the public authority: An administration that implements and evaluates the staff, the budget, the normative framework of action and, more and more, an adequate expertise. Some authors add to the material elements, the programmatic aspect which allows to emphasize the a priori determination of the action to be taken<sup>12</sup>.

This is confirmed by Pierre Muller who notes that there is public policy when a local or national political authority, is trying, through an action coordinated program, to change the cultural, social or economic environment of social actors generally entered in a sectoral logic. All this helps to highlight the purpose of public policy by stating that we seek to understand public policy as a process of social mediation, since the purpose of each public policy is to support misalignments that can occur between one sector and other sectors, or between one sector and the global society. We say that the object of public policy is the management of a global / sector relationship, which will be denoted briefly as "GSR" (...) The GSR is



both the object of public policy (the problem we seek to solve by implementing policies) and the key variable that determines the conditions of developing a policy<sup>13</sup>.

Indeed, every sector of society is regenerated by transforming and changing its links with other sectors. For example, the developing transport sector, including the automotive industry, will affect other sectors: construction of roads and highways, the setting up of health care service for road casualties, the reform of the Criminal Code and the rules of the road ... We can say the same thing about housing, health sectors, etc. Thus, it is in the terms of the place and role of any sector in the society that a policy will be developed with the aim of changing the connections between the sector in question and other sectors. From here, what characterizes the development of all sectors of the country, the constant management of an infinite number of gaps and misalignments between the sectors. This kind of society is, always so obsessively, looking for change and modernization. The desired objective of public policy is always to speed up or slow down the transformation of sectors, which would inevitably lead to other gaps that will be managed properly in the future, and so on. In other words, each transformation leads to other transformations, which in their turn create others in infinite way.

### **III. Global sector policy analysis**

The concept of public policy cannot be discussed without considering the question of the analysis of global sectoral policies. We take the analysis presented by Bruno Jobert and Pierre Muller<sup>14</sup> to summarize these

processes. These come in three main aspects that appear to stress the complexity in understanding the functioning of the public policy. They show that public policy should emphasize three elements to understand the logic of state intervention in a particular area:

- Public policy (sectorial) is an attempt to manage a relationship between the sector and the global society, the global-sectorial relationship (GSR), and is therefore first necessary to define the place, role and function of the sector in question in relation to the global society, or in relation to other sectors.
- According to the representations made in this global-sectorial relationship (set of standards or referents of a policy), this latter may become the subject of public intervention. This representation of the GSR will be called "referential" of a public policy (sectorial). In other words, the GSR can be transformed into a subject of a rational public intervention only according to the image that the actors and policy makers in question would make.
- Finally, there is the question of who takes care of this process of construction or transformation of the referential. In other words, who is the actor who will actually develop the image of the system to regulate? This actor, known as mediator, will occupy a strategic position in the functioning of public policy.

This leads us to conclude that public policy comes to build a representation, an image of reality on which we want to intervene. The actors or the mediators will hold their perception of the system in reference to the cognitive image, compare their solutions and define their policy proposals. It is a process of "recoding" of reality through the definition of

operating procedures likely to set a political action. A referential of public policy is described as all those standards or reference images according to which the criteria for state intervention are defined as well as the objectives of the public policy in question. Whether it's a matter of health, public welfare, education, defense and security, housing, basic infrastructure and equipment, transport, economic reform, industry, agriculture, tourism, telecommunications, international relations... in every sector of social activity there is a series of representations that will sometimes change to ensure the implementation and development of good public policy. In this sense, lack of knowledge of these perceptions, and of the ability to change them, if they are an impediment to the definition of a new policy, surely cause the decision maker to encounter major difficulties. So, this referential of public policy must be built by experts who hold a strategic decision in this process. In this context, we must not neglect the problem of the hierarchy of sectors. Thus, a sector taken in terms of business logic will have a more or less higher hierarchical position depending on its place in the division of labor.

All in all, the above diagram shows that public policy may seem to the observer in two main aspects that can be identified empirically. It is first, a social image, that is to say, a representation of the system on which we want to intervene. This image can range from a vague conception of what is useful and what is not up to a catalog of very specific objectives. It is also a set of organizational, financial, administrative, legal, human means, in short, procedures, techniques, authorities' relations. Everything that makes

a policy is not only an intellectual process but a social concrete one. In fact, public policy analysts focus their attention on this second point and highlight the strategies of the different actors who are actively involved in the process of implementing a policy.

However, in order to implement public policy (sectorial) there should be three essential conditions for the sector itself: it is first necessary that a relationship of professional leadership emerges (which is a social category that takes over the management of the sector and which will tend to shape the sector's image according to its interests). Then a form of leadership in the field of administrative and technical expertise for the sector must emerge. Finally, both forms of leadership (both configurations in the so defined sector) must be superimposed (juxtaposed) satisfactorily to get the processes of positive interference under way.

In fact, the global society does not exist outside collective actions that give a meaning to its functioning. This means that the society reproduces itself only through a system of hegemony, that is to say a mechanism for legitimizing the social order and the ruling elites. But it is necessary to know that public policy refers to both the requirements of legitimacy and regulation. The state, to be stable and developed, shall, within sectors, coexist and effectively center on these two imperatives. It would probably be easier to maintain the social order if the principles governing the regulation were identical to those that direct the legitimate action.

All this leads to think that the role of public policy is far to identify with a more or less invariable role for maintaining social balance. What is true is

that the management policies of social change are developing within the scope of social structures that define the limits of this change. Not to mention that the study of public policy is also the study of gaps between state intervention on the one hand and social relations on the other. From this point of view, Bruno JOBERT and Pierre MULLER write that two examples are possible: adaptation policies correspond to the case where political power is forced to adapt its intervention to the developing environment; conversely, in the case of anticipation policies, state regulation will attempt to precede the development of the sector. But this should not lead to misunderstand the limits of public intervention in the management of sectorial gaps<sup>15</sup>.

#### **IV. Production of public policy**

The emergence of public policy presupposes the existence of an effective political agenda that can be defined as a set of perceived problems, calling for a public debate or even the intervention of legitimate political authority (...) In other words, the elites (labor, administrative, political) of citizens who may be more or less organized define a situation as problematic because they perceive the differences between what is, what could be or what should be. The finding of a problem is accompanied by labeling procedures that qualify it as falling under the jurisdiction of the public authorities. The intervention of political society is expected, including the option of doing nothing (...) For a problem to be placed on a government agenda, three conditions must be met: it must come under the jurisdiction of public authority, be the subject of a really problematic

perception of different points of view, likely to be discussed publicly. That is to say, public policy is never the result of one government actor, but is developed with a range of other actors (the "system of actors"). It consists of acts but also of non-acts equally useful to observe<sup>16</sup>.

Indeed, public action can be viewed as a collective work for the public interest. It is to improve the present and build the future for a better equity and quality of life, which is an exciting and challenging act that commits the professionals in public policy towards the citizens. Giving a meaning and movement to a policy, is also knowing how to adapt to the change and the evolution of society.

The approach of public policy in sequential terms has been popularized by American works especially those of Charles O. Jones<sup>17</sup> who suggests an analytical framework of five steps : *program identification* ( which is the identification of the step where the problem is incorporated in the governmental work). *Program development* is the step of treatment proper, *program implementation* ( the implementation of the program is the step of the application of decisions), *program evaluation* ( program evaluation is a pre-terminal step of seeing in context the program results), *program termination* ( program termination is a step of the closure of action or the setting of a new action; this last step suggests problem solving and the termination of the action)

These steps are the basis for the development and implementation of any government program. This sequence analysis has inspired the structure of numerous books on public policy and allowed to review the particularly

coherent multiple aspects of political action. It's a matter of not systematically applying this linear logic as acknowledged by Charles O. Jones himself as well as others authors such as Wayne Parsons, James E. Anderson, Yves Mény et Jean-Claude Thoenig who also have introduced such an approach. Despite all this, the description of this analytical framework remains relevant in its variations of building public policy that questions the designer on the 'disorder'

It is often preferable to see public policy as a set of parallel sequences interacting with each other and which are modified continuously, and not as a series of successive sequences. Eric Monnier<sup>18</sup> asserts that the process of carrying out a good public policy or of a program in any sector **whatsoever** comprises three components “ ‘formulation of the action’ i.e. ‘a draft solution to the problem’; the implementation of the action or the management of the action which permanently obliges the actors to reformulate the innovation according to available resources ; ‘the observation of the effets’ i.e. the evaluations that lead to reconsidering the often implicit hypotheses of the initial action formulation, and to modifying the modes of the implementation of the means.

A successful policy must always come within the framework of general action to allow in principle to distinguish public policy from simple isolated measures. It is certain in any case that the existence of such a general framework is never given and that it must always be dealt with in research. As a matter of fact, the management of the affairs of the state requires continuity of action, and it is necessary for any new government to evaluate

the actions of the previous government and discuss the prospects and projections of its action in the medium and long term. A government program must define, among other objectives, those to be reached, completion dates, and the resources to mobilize. Generally, these elements allow other institutions such the parliament to analyze the feasibility of what is stated and to ensure the follow up and supervision.

As a matter of fact, the success of public policy or of the strategy of public action depends on several important factors: a rigorous diagnosis drawn up by the potential actors, and even, in some cases, by the beneficiaries of actions, that allows to identify the assets, the current weaknesses, the opportunities and threats (external and future) in order to define the risks that may arise; a prioritization of the orientations and of actions; a precise analysis of the future general conditions of the working out and follow-up of projects; an optimum contribution in the surrounding devices (national or international politics, judicial and statutory context, financial devices...), A concern for the analysis of themes, processes and management, and often of imagination, perseverance and ambition.

It is also important to take into account the element about the big mobilization seeing to it to ensure the implementation of public policy, its follow up and its evaluation leading to its success. The efficiency criterion must refer to the relationship between the invested resources in public policy and the carried out outcomes. The outcomes of public policy must correspond to the aimed objectives because they produce outputs and impacts that are really in a position to improve the situation as desired.



Thus, the efficiency criterion is linked directly to the category of outcomes. It refers to the connection between the expected effects of public policy and those that appear in reality. From the point of view of political science, the primary interest of the evaluations rests certainly on the question of knowing whether the aims and objectives of public policy can effectively be reached with the involved measures and resources.

The evaluation and the follow up of public policy are a prerequisite to its success. Their aim is to understand the sense and the performance of an already implemented, ongoing or planned public action, to draw a shared point of view, to draw lessons with regard to the initially fixed objectives and to recommend actions for adjusting a commenced or a planned policy.

As a matter of fact, the evaluation and the follow up lead to reconsider the hypotheses of the initial action and thus incite to modify the modes of implementing the means. They are part of a voluntary, constructive and democratic step; they become an essential tool encouraging the creation of real analysis, discussing the stated conclusions, the adaptation of some choices, providing decision makers with recommendations adapted to the management of their projects. They permit to harmonize the choices and orient and improve government actions. They also provide public policy makers of a wider vision on their actions, through a relay of information, of knowledge and of listening. The evaluation and the follow up become a vector of questioning and learning to better meet the challenges of the field.

## **V. Conclusion**

Producing public policy depends on relationships between the state and the society, transformations of the sectors, and public action. So it is seen as the science of the state in action.

We can see in public policy concrete measures (such as the budget, a reform or specialized institutions) that govern a sector of the society (transport, agriculture, health, higher education...) even projects (organization of the urban environment, building hospitals...). The measures can be made by groups of actors (individuals, enterprises, associations, professional organizations...), by public institutions, even by international organizations.

Such a definition can lead us to conclude that public policy serves to improve the sectors, to change the society, and to develop a country... The growing notion of change in public policy is related to the role of its sectors and to the way the processes and their endogenous making are treated in an actionist plan.

When we study the producing of public policy, we have to analyze a given policy taking into account the developments that affect the relationships between a sector and the whole society. In reality, the role of mediators is twofold as it is to decode the Global/Sectoriel relationship (GSR), i.e. that is to say to make it intelligible to the actors, through the development of a philosophy of action; to recode this GSR in terms that may influence the reality, i.e. in standards and criteria of political intervention. The job of mediators is also linked to hegemonic processes in society, since the development of a new referential is in favor of a new social stratum and through the often difficult struggles. By this production of referentials, mediators build the image that the society gives of itself, and through which it will implement the regulation processes of its sectoriality.

The performance of a public policy is always linked to the quality of its elaboration, but also to the efficiency of its implementation. The support of good public policy is all the more effective that it is based on devices and professional monitoring tools which provide a collection and evaluation of financial data and achievement of actions.

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<sup>15</sup> JOBERT B., MULLER P., Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> CHAGNOLLAUD D., op. cit. pp.272-274.

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