
Book Review

Veselý, Arnošt; Nekola, Martin and Eva M. Hejzlarová (2016) (eds.) *Policy Analysis in the Czech Republic*. Bristol: Policy Press at the University of Bristol. 352 pp.

As one of the volumes in the *International Library of Policy Analysis* series, the book is a useful tool for anybody who wants to understand how and why policy analysis, both as a discipline and a practice, has evolved in Central and Eastern Europe. The volumes in the series follow the same structure, making it easy to compare policy analysis in Germany, the Netherlands, Israel, Japan or Brazil.

Policy Analysis in the Czech Republic collects nineteen studies arranged in five sections, with the aim of providing 'a more or less coherent "macro-view" of policy analysis in the Czech Republic' (p. 8). Out of the twenty three authors of chapters, only two contributors are not academics, reflecting accurately the predominance of academia in the field of public policy analysis, as is characteristic of Czech public policy.

The volume starts with Arnošt Veselý's *Introduction* which, besides providing a short overview of the book's structure, conceptualizes the term 'policy analysis'. In the Czech context this is particularly important since in the Czech language there is no clear equivalent for the term. The expression used in Czech has four meanings: policy analysis as 1) policy studies, 2) institutionalized methodological practice, 3) policy advice based upon relevant knowledge, 4) policy-related work. The term policy analysis in the book is used in a broad sense, encompassing all these different meanings.

In Part I, *Styles and Methods of Public Policy Analysis in the Czech Republic*, Martin Poříček expounds the historical development of policy analysis and highlights the historical and institutional factors that shape this field. Next, Vítězslav Novotný goes into detail regarding the development of public policy as a form of science-based policy advice. He describes the roots of Czech policy analysis, stressing the importance of the sociological stream represented by the first statesmen of independent Czechoslovakia (Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, both academics, both sociologists). He points out the fact that even though the Czech political elite (Masaryk, Beneš, Klaus and Zeman) are deeply rooted in academia and evidence-based social sciences, policy analysis as an academic sub-discipline is less appreciated than economics, law or sociology by politicians. In the last piece on the styles and methods of policy analysis, Eva M. Hejzlarová examines the classification of the various analytical academic styles used in policy analysis, concluding that Czech policy analysis is dominated by the influence of the economy, but 'still the expertise does not fit into either the positivist or postpositivist boxes' (p. 65).

Following the structure of the *International Library of Policy Analysis* series, Part II of the book is dedicated to *Policy Analysis by Government*. Starting from a supranational level and zooming in to the local level, this section is concerned with presenting policy work at the national, regional and local level. Martin Poříček,

Vladimír Hulík, Klára Hulíková Tesárková and *Libor Stejskal* show the influence of supranational (European Union, OECD and NATO) actors on national policy development over a span of 25 years through three case-studies. The role of the European Union is stressed in this part by another writer, *Ivo Šlosarčík*, who explores the process of Europeanization from the pre-accession period to the Eurozone crisis and its impacts on national policy. The policy work of the central public administration is described by *Arnošt Veselý* and *Martin Nekola* using empirical data. A detailed profile of policy bureaucrats is provided, along with a description of their tasks. The study brings to light a ‘specifically Czech factor’; namely, the instability of employment caused by ‘the ineffective Civil Service Act’ (p. 122). Next, the level of subnational policy bureaucrats and policy work is examined by *Martin Nekola* and *Arnošt Veselý*. The authors conclude that the majority of regional public administrators perform rather formal duties and take on policy advisory roles to a much lesser degree. Somewhat similar to Hungarian public administration employees, they ‘try to come with the practical problems related to policy implementation on the one hand and more conceptual tasks on the other’. We gain insight into local-level policy work from the study of *Dan Ryšavý* who provides interesting detail about the perceived influence of local decision making and their communication networks.

Czech policy bureaucrats are apparently dealing with policy analysis less than expected by Western policy literature. The next two parts, Part III, *Internal Policy Advisory Councils, Consultants and Public Opinion*, and Part IV, *Parties and Interest Groups*, try to describe the roles of the various actors typically involved in policy making. *Kateřina Merklová* and *Kateřina Ptáčková* examine three governmental and departmental advisory bodies (the National Economic Council of the Government, the Bezděk Committee, and the authors of the White Paper on Tertiary Education) as actors involved in internal advisory councils. While the authors point out several contradictions in the current institutional frameworks that limit the efficiency of the advisory boards, the study concludes that they ‘play a significant role in agenda setting and in the shaping and framing of the public discourse on the reform of particular policies’. *Paulína Tabery* describes using the findings of empirical research how public opinion and policy decisions about building an anti-missile radar base in the Czech Republic influenced each other.

The twelfth chapter, written by *Vojtěch Sedláček* and *Arnošt Veselý*, discusses Czech experiences with outsourcing policy advice. Debating whether outsourcing is always the best or worst solution, the study sheds light on several deficiencies of the Czech institutional setting that limit the potentially beneficial effects of outsourcing. Among others obstacles, corruption, the difficulty of assessing what is ‘good advice’, and the institutional preference for lower price over quality are important to overcome. In addition, bidding and base-line budgeting are also identified as influencing negatively the outsourcing of policy analysis. The fourth part of the book, *Parties and Interest Groups*, starts with a study by *Vilém Novotný*, *Martin Polášek* and *Michel Perottino* who examine Czech political parties using their perspective of a policy advisory system. The authors seek to explore how the two main Czech political parties (the Social Democrats and the Civic Democrats) influence the process of policy making. After examining the two main parties’ formal mechanisms and

organizational structures, the study finds that policy work in political parties is 'institutionally anchored'. Yet, since political parties focus on winning elections, policy analysis and the elaboration of policy recommendations are not the main concerns of these parties.

Another important actor in policy analysis is organized civil society. The chapter by *Karel Čada* and *Katerina Ptáčková* starts with a presentation of the contrasting perceptions of *Václav Klaus* and *Václav Havel* about NGOs and analyses both institutional and grassroots organizations that participate in the policy process. While civil society organizations are a very important element of policy implementation, their role in elaborating policies is rather limited.

The last part of the book, *Academic and Advocacy-based Policy Analysis*, (Part V.), focuses on the media, think tanks, academia and various policy institutions. First, *Vlastimil Nečas* and *Tomáš Trampota* stress the importance of seeing political communication as an interdisciplinary field of study of the relationship between the media and politics, rather than as it is currently approached by either media studies, sociology or political science. While the topic is extremely important, I find it a little disappointing that the article does not include strong empirical analysis in this regard. In the next chapter, *Ondřej Císař* and *Milan Hruběš* introduce readers to Czech think tanks. Empirical research shows a less-than-rosy picture of the field: 'Similarly to other civil society organizations in the Czech Republic "see for example Císař and Vráblíková, 2013", think tanks seem to follow money' (p. 288) and 'orient themselves toward decision-making institutions and funding sources, in other words, they follow influence and money' (p. 290). Next, *Tereza Stöckelová* analyses the opportunities and limitations for academics who participate in drawing up policy. The author points to structural challenges that lead to the clear division between purely academic, and professional, policy-related work. Moreover, the study concludes that the current setting effectively discourages academic expert involvement in policy making and professional practice. The last chapter, written by *Arnošt Veselý*, *Eva M. Hejzlarová* and *Anna Zeliková*, examines academic public policy programs, with a detailed presentation of various programs and an analysis of masters' theses. The study concludes that the 'Prague school' has a strong influence on Czech academic programs, which can be seen in the emphasis on methodology, and the strong sociological perspective. The programs stress the need for the professional orientation of policy work and the provision of the necessary academic knowledge.

While at certain times it seems that the book's individual chapters are only very loosely interconnected, themes recur and bond individual pieces to each other. The intertwined nature of academia, central public administration and policy advisory roles, or the key figure of the National Economic Council (NERV) as a policy advisory institution, are such themes. The book also highlights another characteristic of Czech public policy analysis when compared to Anglo-Saxon practices: the limited role of political parties, NGOs and external partners in providing policy input. Given the historical and political context of Central and Eastern European countries, this fits the pattern of a narrow form of participatory activism (Petrova and Tarrow, 2007).

The editors have achieved their goal of providing to readers an accurate overview of the field of Czech policy analysis. The majority of studies tend to focus

less on policy analysis as institutionalized methodological practice or as policy work, which indicates that policy analysis is regarded more as a form of expert advice and an academic discipline. The broader, theoretical relevance of policy analysis practices (as covered, for example, in the work of Hajnal, 2010) is less pronounced in this volume.

Because of the combination of different styles and analytical levels employed in the individual studies, the book is refreshing reading and a perfect tool for understanding the challenges and opportunities of Czech public policy analysis, and a must-read for those involved in creating and analyzing policy.

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