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## Boekbespreking van: Analysing Public Policy

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Peter John, *Analysing Public Policy*. Pinter, London 1998, ISBN 1855675870, £ 14.99

This book aims to create an encompassing theory of public policy. Peter John argues that the main research in contemporary public policy studies focuses (should focus) on policy variation and policy change. Policy variation research aims to explain differences in policy-making between sectors and across countries. Research on policy change is directed towards explaining policy stability and policy change. The argument this book advocates, is that current political science theories or approaches are not able to explain policy variation and policy change satisfactorily, and that an integrated, evolutionary theory is therefore necessary. After a short introduction to the policy-oriented approach of political science and a critical review of the stages model, the author presents in five successive chapters an overview, some applications and a critical acclaim of the five prevailing theoretical approaches to the study of public policy: institutional approaches, group and network approaches, socio-economic approaches, rational choice theory, and ideas-based approaches. After concluding that none of the former theories fully explains variation and change in public policy, he uses the two remaining chapters to introduce a synthesis in the form of an evolutionary model of public policy variation and change.

By illustrating the deficiencies of simple stagist models like the sequential model of the policy process, Peter John discusses some of the problems with the conventional study of public policy. This leads to the conclusion that stagist models confuse more than they illuminate because in reality policy-making cannot be neatly chopped into pieces of agenda-setting, policy design and policy evaluation. Therefore, stagist models can at best serve as heuristic or learning devices but are not suitable for extracting testable hypotheses.

Each of the five central political science theories and approaches has its strengths and weaknesses. I will give two short examples of Peter John's treatment of the five basic theoretical approaches. First the institutional approach. One of the institutional approaches this book discusses is new institutionalism. According to John, new institutionalists accept that there are a variety of influences on policy and they consider "that institutions affect power of groups, shape the way ideas circulate to influence policy, and influence the coordination of public decisions." (p.57) According to new institutionalists institutions comprise norms and conventions. The broad view of new institutionalism enables a comparison of policy-making across countries. But "by incorporating values and norms as part of institutions, they include too many aspects of political life under one category." (p.64) Second the ideas-based approach. These perspectives have in common that ideas are key factors explaining policy change and variation. This chapter discusses the work of Haas, Sabatier, Fischer and Stone. Not surprisingly the criticism is that one element (ideas) dominates the explanation of policy change and policy variation.

As a result it is impossible to know whether what is being claimed is correct or not. In post-positivist and/or interpretivist public policy everything is transformed into discourse. If the empirical world is to be investigated, it cannot be seen as a seamless connection of ideas. (p.166)

In short, John argues that each approach offers at best a partial explanation for policy change and/or policy variation, while comprehensive explanations are needed. Therefore, a synthesis has to be developed. In doing so John first discusses the work of Sabatier (Policy Advocacy Coalition Framework), Kingdon (Policy Streams Approach), and Baumgartner and Jones (Punctuated Equilibrium Model). These three models have in common that they place ideas at the centre of the analysis and combine them with elements of rational choice, network, institutional, and socio-economic approaches. The drawback is that they do not fully manage to encompass all the activity associated with public decision-making. John suggests that an evolutionary approach is able to fill that gap.

An evolutionary theory of public policy views public policy-making primarily as continuous processes of competition between and cooperation concerning ideas and interests. It is argued that by incorporating elements of Kingdon's Policy Streams Approach and Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium Model it is possible to explain the 'success' of a policy in evolutionary terms. In an evolutionary approach, institutions, groups, economies and ideas constitute the ground on which policies are born, grow old and become extinct.

John's book offers a critical and very well written, though somewhat roughly sketched, overview of contemporary public policy theory. Public policy analysts and political scientists should, therefore, have it in their bookcases. Less convincing is the way John tries to find a solution to the central problem that existing approaches only provide a partial explanation. In the first place his evolutionary theory is not (yet) very specific. Second, in its present form the proposed evolutionary theory seems to suffer from the same drawbacks as some of the other approaches this study covers. As a result John does not convince me to use his approach in preference to ad hoc combinations of partial approaches.

Rob van de Peppel

Donatella Della Porta and Yves Mény (eds.), *Democracy and Corruption in Europe*. Pinter, London/Washington 1997, ISBN 1-85567-367-3

During the 1990s political and administrative corruption has become an important issue for many states in different parts of the world. Many developing countries as well as established democracies were confronted with series of scandals that showed that no regime is immune to the corruption virus. The volume *Democracy and Corruption in*