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**Bringing politics and administration together: for an agonistic policy model**

**Martin Francisco De Almeida Fortis**

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

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BRINGING POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION TOGETHER:  
FOR AN AGONISTIC POLICY MODEL

MARTIN FRANCISCO DE ALMEIDA FORTIS

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of the requirements of the University of Westminster  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis offers a new answer for an old question. Since the inception of public policy and administrative studies, the field has grappled with the problem of how to define the relationship between politics and administration. An examination of the policy literature suggests the existence of two major views: disjunctive and integrative. On one hand, those scholars who favour a disjunctive view construe politics and administration as mutually exclusive spheres. In this case, the study of policy and administration tends to emphasize the technical aspects and ignore the political factors. On the other hand, theorists who embrace an integrative view suggest that administration is fundamentally a political activity. Expanding the focus beyond managerial concerns, integrative scholars argue that public policies should not be confined to technocratic styles of policy-making that inhibit citizen engagement and depoliticize the public sphere. In spite of their commendable attention to politics, however, integrative theorists (particularly those embracing an interpretive orientation or a deliberative approach) have not yet been able to convincingly delineate a policy model that fully recognizes the political. The key argument of this thesis is that an agonistic vision has a strong potential to think politics and administration together that has not yet been considered by contemporary policy scholarship. Drawing on the work of Chantal Mouffe, the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) proposed here attempts to fill an important gap in the literature. Although agonistic theories have been widely recognized in the academic discipline of political science, they have not yet been translated into an implementable policy model. It is argued that an APM elucidates how politics and administration can be construed as interdependent spheres, thus offering a solution that helps to envisage how the political can be properly integrated into public policy and administration. In addition, besides an original interpretation of the policy process, the APM provides an innovative way of thinking how policy-making can contribute to deepen democratic values and institutions.

Key words: agonism, Mouffe, public policy, conflict, democracy

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## **Dedication**

*To Adriana Marins*

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## **Declaration**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

## Introduction

This thesis addresses one of the perennial questions of public administration: how are politics and administration related? Are they mutually exclusive or interdependent phenomena? An interesting way of answering this question is through the examination of the academic literature developed within the fields of public administration and policy analysis.

In broad terms, the relationship between politics and administration has been construed along two distinctive lines: the disjunctive and the integrative. The first approach – the *disjunctive* – depicts politics and administration as independent spheres. It has been most explicitly advocated by the ‘classical’ scholars of public administration (most emblematically by Woodrow Wilson) and later by the proponents of policy analysis (particularly Harold Lasswell). Both of these theoretical orientations share a similar disinterest for politics and propose that politics should be excluded from policy and administrative studies.

The rejection of the political dimension has been criticized by alternative views of public policy. Embracing an *integrative* vision of politics and administration, more recent developments in policy scholarship have considered that administrative practices are fundamentally political phenomena. Policy paradigms, such as the interpretive orientation and the deliberate approach, insist that administrative practices are part of the political life. Hence, it would be mistaken to confine policy and administrative studies to technical and managerial issues. In spite of their commendable attention to politics, however, the solutions proposed by these emerging paradigms is problematic.

The purpose of this thesis is to delineate an innovative policy vision – the *agonistic* – whose theoretical potential has not yet been appreciated in the literature. The key challenge is to construct a policy paradigm capable of bringing ‘the political’ into public policy and administration. Drawing on the work of Chantal Mouffe, which has received significant attention in the realm of political science, but has not yet been given a ‘policy translation’, this thesis develops an Agonistic Policy Model (APM).

In order to accurately frame the object of the thesis, it is necessary to briefly examine how different policy paradigms have construed the relation between politics and administration and failed to provide a convincing solution to the problem of their integration, thus revealing the need for an alternative approach.

### *Key arguments of the thesis*

Since its inception as a self-conscious field of academic research, public administration has grappled with the problem of how to define the relationship between politics and administration. Particularly in the United States, which privileged an anti-statist orientation, politics and administration have been usually construed as independent spheres. According to this perspective, public administration should focus exclusively on the administrative side and ignore the political dimension.

The idea that public administration is an apolitical field of knowledge has its roots in the history of the field. Woodrow Wilson, widely acknowledged as the founder of public administration as an academic discipline, famously asserted that proper administrative questions were not political questions. In his view, politics was outside the purview of public administration. Moreover, as he indicated, the answer for administrative questions was to be found in the emerging science of management<sup>1</sup>.

The aspiration for a politics-free, managerial science of government was given an important impetus with the advent of policy analysis. Although critical of orthodox public administration (Fischer, 2003) policy analysis preserved its inattention to politics. If the decisions of the government were guided by scientific knowledge and technical expertise, the founder of policy analysis Harold Lasswell noted, there would be less need for politics. In his view, enlightened experts were much better placed (than political actors) to make decisions concerning public problems (Lasswell, 1951).

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<sup>1</sup> Although his ideas were developed in the late nineteenth century, when public administration was still a fledgling academic discipline, they have endured the test of time and have not been completely discarded even today (Wilson, 1887; Hughes, 2003).

Policy analysis perpetuated a distrust for politics that was well entrenched in the field of public administration. This tendency to ignore political aspects – which for some scholars (e.g. Rosenbloom, 1993; Lee, 1995) still permeates contemporary policy scholarship – is predicated on the possibility of developing a *science* of government, based solely on technical knowledge (expertise) and hence devoid of politics. In practice, this rejection of politics in public policy and administrative studies meant that societal problems could be construed as managerial issues to be solved on a purely technical basis, without interference from politics.

The aspiration for an apolitical science of government, however, has been severely criticized on both empirical and theoretical grounds. From an empirical perspective, the observation of actual governmental practices has consistently revealed that politics and administration are difficult to disentangle. With the onset of the interventionist state, governmental agencies have been given wide discretion to initiate policies without prior congressional consent. This is a clear case in which administrative institutions wield political functions: public administrators not only execute policies but they also *decide* them. The political functions bestowed upon governmental agencies indicate, as Waldo (1948) noted, that the spheres of politics and administration are not independent at all. In practice, evidence has shown that public administration carries out administrative as well as political tasks. Public administration is a political actor (Nabatchi, 2010).

Apart from empirical evidence, there are also theoretical reasons to suspect that the separation between politics and administration is untenable. A large literature has convincingly demonstrated that the boundaries between politics and administration are much more blurred than (orthodox) public administration scholarship and (conventional) policy analysis studies would like to admit. It became increasingly clear, paraphrasing Wildavsky, that administrative questions are political questions as much as political questions are administrative questions. Two theoretical objections illustrate the inconsistency of thinking politics and administration as disjointed phenomena.

Discussing policy-making in pluralist liberal democracies, Dahl (1947) has shown that means (administration) and ends (politics) cannot be extricated because they are

mutually dependent. The choice of means, he argues, is not indifferent to the achievement of particular ends, which implies that administrative factors influence (if not determine) political goals. Therefore, because means and ends are intertwined, administration cannot be fully dissociated from politics.

Along similar lines, a vindication of the political role of public administration has also been put forward by Charles Lindblom. In his book *The Intelligence of Democracy* Lindblom (1965) asserts that the policy process is fundamentally a political – not a technical – activity. In his view, public policies result from the interaction between competing groups and not from analytical calculation carried out by experts. If the political dimension is overlooked, he clarifies, theory fails to reflect how decision-making effectively takes place in daily administrative life. Again, the relationship between politics and administration is more accurately described as mutual dependence rather than separation.

The growing acceptance that politics and administration pervade each other led to the development of policy streams that duly recognize their interdependence. The *disjunctive* views, embraced by Early Public Administration and Policy Analysis, are considered inadequate representations of policy and administration, and thus challenged by *integrative* paradigms that assert their indissociable condition.

More recent theoretical developments – particularly the interpretive orientation and the deliberative approach – criticize the apolitical view that has long pervaded the fields of public administration and policy analysis. They reject the notion that public problems are technical issues to be solved by experts. In contrast, they explicitly declare that policy and administrative issues are political phenomena.

Interpretive and deliberative views of public policy are part of an emerging policy perspective that conceptualizes politics and administration as interdependent phenomena. Departing from Wilson's politics-administration dichotomy and Lasswell's belief on science and expertise, these approaches consider that politics and administration are inextricably linked. Highlighting the role of argumentation (in the



case of the interpretive orientation) and the potential of public deliberation (in the case of the deliberative approach), these policy paradigms aim to elaborate a political understanding of the policy process.

In spite of their commendable efforts to integrate politics and administration, however, their solutions are not convincing. On one hand, interpretive ideas remain a purely analytical framework that lacks an empirical counterpart. The absence of an interpretive ‘tool-kit’, capable of guiding policy implementation, is a serious deficiency. Thus, although the interpretive orientation offers valuable theoretical insights, it does not provide practical advice for policy-makers.

On the other hand, the deliberative approach encourages the creation of participatory settings that allow dialogue between public authorities and civil society. Advocates of a deliberative public administration argue for the opening up of participatory venues so that citizens can voice their opinions and influence policy-making. The key idea of the deliberative approach is that public policies will be more legitimate and democratic if citizens are enabled to voice their preferences and demands in the decision-making process.

Although the idea of enhancing public participation in the policy process is certainly positive, the deliberative solution is nonetheless questionable. In particular, the belief that a consensus can be formed so that the plurality of views of the participants can be harmonized – and conflict overcome – is problematic<sup>2</sup>. By insisting on the construction of agreement, the deliberative approach ultimately fails to recognize that in pluralistic contemporary democracies there are political positions that cannot be ultimately reconciled.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted, however, that more recent developments in deliberative policy scholarship have recognized the impracticability of reaching a fully inclusive consensus that would be valid once and for all. Instead, it is accepted that: i) consensus tends to be provisional and open to future revision; ii) when consensus is only partially achievable, more moderate forms of agreement – such as mutual understanding – should be encouraged. See in particular Gutmann and Thompson (2004).

The absence of a theoretically sound and practically effective policy paradigm capable of integrating politics and administration elicits an important question: is there any alternative framework that can properly link politics and administration? Attempting to answer this question, an innovative policy model, whose potential has not yet been appraised in the literature, is proposed in the thesis.

**The key purpose of this thesis is the delineation of an Agonistic Policy Model (APM).** It is surprising (if not perplexing) that agonistic ideas have not yet penetrated the field of public policy. Although they have enjoyed a favourable reputation in political science, in which agonism represents an important (and to some extent popular) intellectual trend, so far very few inroads have been attempted to ‘translate’ agonism to the policy level. This thesis aims to bridge this gap by offering an agonistic interpretation of the policy process.

The political theory developed by Chantal Mouffe offers an adequate theoretical framework to think how agonistic principles can be transplanted to the domain of public policy. In particular, Mouffe’s concept of ‘the political’ sheds light of how proper political phenomena can be conceptualized. As such, it provides a solid analytical ground to understand in which circumstances policies can be properly construed as political.

In order to show which conditions are required to ‘politicize’ the policy domain, it might be convenient to briefly indicate the tenets of the Agonistic Policy Model (whose full theorization will be presented in chapters 5 and 6). From the agonistic perspective advocated here, the policy process is defined as antagonistic, hegemonic and power-laden. It is *antagonistic* because in pluralistic democratic societies policy actors hold different – and irreconcilable – perceptions of the common good. It is *hegemonic* because only one position is ultimately sanctioned by the policy process. Finally, the policy process is *power-laden*, because the capacity of policy groups to achieve their goals is predicated on their relative strength to influence decision-making.

Hence, from an agonistic perspective, the policy process is depicted as an interaction that is inherently conflictive. Due to the antagonistic condition of the social order, the goals pursued by multiple policy actors cannot be fully reconciled. Furthermore, since the goals of different policy actors cannot be simultaneously satisfied, exclusion is inevitable. This means, as Schneider and Ingram (2005) put it, that there will always be winners and losers.

The inevitability of conflict, however, does not necessarily lead to disruption of the policy system. Conflict, when properly ‘domesticated’, can have beneficial effects. For instance, when policy institutions create channels for the expression of conflict, democratic values and practices can be deepened. As illustrated by the application of agonistic principles in the Finnish planning process, acceptance of conflict can empower citizens, who are recognized as legitimate participants of the policy process, and therefore become co-authors of public policies (Bäcklund, and Mäntysalo, 2010).

The acknowledgement that conflict is not necessarily a disturbance to be eradicated, but the very nature of the policy process, is one of the important advantages of the APM over alternative approaches. It raises, however, the question of how the role of conflict should be envisaged. It also elicits the problem of the potential instability (or in more extreme cases disarray) caused by the presence of conflicting views within the policy process. As critics of agonism might object, does not the focus on conflictuality stymie (if not preclude) decision-making? How can policies be implemented when they are construed as outcomes of unyielding strife (Hillier, 2002)?

Embracing an agonistic view requires understanding the policy process as a continuous contestation that is never finally resolved. This is not to deny that temporary accommodations (partial agreements) are not possible. It is to recognize that solutions to public problems are always provisional. When public policies are portrayed through agonistic lenses, they are interpreted as forever open to revision, as a constant negotiation between adversarial positions. As Latin American policy theorist Carlos Matus contends, the policy process is ‘always ready, but at the same time it is always being made’ (Matus, 2007d, p. 31; own translation).

Thus, an APM departs from alternative policy orientations that emphasize either the centrality of expertise (particularly Policy Analysis) or the importance of consensus building (especially the Deliberative Policy Approach). Differently, it draws attention to the impossibility of achieving definitive closures that settle disputes once and for all. By conceptualizing the construction of public policies as a continuous articulation of social forces, the APM brings to the fore the hegemonic condition of the policy process. It is precisely this emphasis on the hegemonic character of policy-making that enables APM to offer a political interpretation of public policy and administration.

As such, the APM offers an answer to the main question addressed in this thesis: how can the political dimension be integrated into policy and administration? To put in a nutshell, the agonistic response could be summarized in the following way: the political can only be fully taken into account when the conflictual condition of the policy process is recognized as constitutive, and hence ineradicable.

### *Methodology*

Before delineating the APM (chapters 5 and 6), the thesis discusses how the relationship between politics and administration has been represented in policy and administrative studies (chapters 1 to 4). This task has been undertaken through a comprehensive and in-depth literature review that revealed the existence of key intellectual movements – here designated as ‘policy paradigms’ – that offered a privileged standpoint to reflect on the disjunction/integration between politics and administration. Since the ‘reconstruction’ of the relationship between politics and administration could have been carried out in multiple ways, it is convenient to indicate the specific methodology employed in this thesis<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The examination of various policy streams has enabled the construction of a ‘cartography’ that depicts how the political dimension has been construed by policy and administrative studies. Arguably, this conceptual map has heuristic value and can thus help other researchers to envisage how politics has been interpreted in different ways throughout the evolution of the disciplines of public administration and policy analysis. Other useful policy maps that might complement the one employed here can be found in Frederickson (1976), McCurdy (1986), Stacey (1996), Raadschelders (1999), Frederickson (2010), Hoppe (2010), and Raadschelders (2011).

Initially, the thesis explores the orthodox or classical period of administrative studies (here denoted as Early Public Administration), whose key analytical concept is the so-called politics-administration dichotomy (the idea that politics and administration are independent spheres). The thesis then shows how Policy Analysis has in many ways perpetuated the aspiration of public administration early theorists to develop an apolitical science of government. The analysis of both these paradigms – Early Public Administration (EPA) and Policy Analysis (PA) – has benefited from an examination of a policy literature developed particularly in the United States, whose studies offer a clear picture of the persistent endeavour to separate politics and administration.

The critique of this separation, however, has been based on an investigation not only of American but also of European-led scholarship. Indeed, integrative public policy frameworks (devoted to connect politics and administration) have strong European influences. For instance, Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) was particularly influenced by French post-structuralism, whereas the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) drew significantly on the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

The delineation of an Agonistic Policy Model (APM), for its turn, has required a more diversified literature review. It encompasses three streams of policy literature: i) American policy studies (critical of the expertise-centred, technocratic attitude of conventional policy analysis); ii) European public policy (including Dutch and Scandinavian policy scholarship); iii) Latin American postwar planning theorizing (particularly the contribution of policy scholar and practitioner Carlos Matus). In spite of the wide range of theoretical sources, the key analytical inspiration for the development of the APM has been nonetheless provided by (Belgian) political scientist Chantal Mouffe.

To facilitate the visualization of the methodology employed for the ‘reconstruction’ of the politics-administration relationship, the table below describes the main intellectual strands examined for the understanding of each policy paradigm.

Table 0.1 – Research methodology

<i>Policy Paradigm</i>	<i>Methodological Approach</i>
Early Public Administration	Review of U.S. literature on public administration (based on analysis of classical studies and first textbooks)
Policy Analysis	Review of U.S. literature on policy analysis (focused particularly on historical and empirical aspects)
Interpretive Public Policy	Review of U.S. and European literatures of an interpretive/argumentative inclination (exploration and integration of various disparate intellectual streams)
Deliberative Policy Approach	Review of U.S. and European literatures on public deliberation (with salience to the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas)
Agonistic Policy Model	Review of U.S. (especially critical policy studies), European (including Dutch and Scandinavian scholarship), and Latin American literature (notably postwar planning theorizing) literatures

Source: the author

It is important to emphasize that the methodological approach followed in the thesis is fundamentally theoretical. By discussing the relationship between politics and administration through policy paradigms, the main focus remains on how policy *scholarship* has responded to the challenge of thinking through the connection/disjunction between spheres of politics and administration. Although empirical illustrations are provided for each paradigm, in order to clarify how their analytical contentions have resonated in practice, the thesis does not offer an account of major political economy movements (e.g. Keynesian economics, neoliberal reforms, contemporary globalization trends). The absence of these more ‘practical’ aspects of policy-making does not imply that they are not relevant, but simply that they are beyond the scope of the thesis.

The discussion of policy and administrative studies undertaken here should also not convey the impression that these five paradigms represent ‘a history of public administration or policy analysis’. To be sure, the empirical evolution of public policy and administration is a highly intricate combination of ideas, models and institutions involving a multitude of actors (politicians, administrators, policy advisers, journalists, interest groups etc) that would be impossible to summarize, let alone to reproduce, in a theoretical analysis, as the one developed here in the thesis. Therefore the attempt to understand how the relationship between politics and administration has been conceived – either as integrated or as dissociated – through policy paradigms does not claim to be a representation of actual practice. It is rather a theoretical exploration that privileges particular, though arguably crucial, analytical approaches that have been influential in the development of policy and administrative scholarship.

It should also be recognized that in spite of their theoretical potential and growing penetration in academic circles and policy institutions, the last three paradigms discussed in the thesis (the interpretive, the deliberative, and the agonistic), still have not been widely disseminated in administrative settings. Public administration, as the examination of any recently published textbook reveals, has been – and continues to be – a discipline pervaded by a technocratic view that renders politics and administration as separate spheres. Thus, it would be inadequate to think that the real practice of governments has mirrored the neat, linear, and possibly progressive evolution conveyed by the paradigms analysed in the thesis.

In relation to the methodology employed in the thesis, there is a lack of a precise distinction between the normative and explanatory aspects of the proposed policy paradigms. Although more ‘traditional’ methodological approaches recommend that normative propositions should be clearly distinguished from explanatory statements, the reconstruction undertaken here has revealed that ideas of ‘how things should be’ cannot be completely separated from ‘how things actually are’. Particularly in the field of public policy and administration, in which advocacy and understanding are frequently intertwined, normative and explanatory views are difficult to ‘unpack’.

In fact, the analyses developed in the thesis have suggested that prescriptions tend to follow explanations: those policy scholars who consider that politics and administration are distinctive realms of practice also tend to make the case for a dissociative orientation that prescribes the separation between the two spheres. On the other hand, those theorists who describe politics and administration as inextricably linked usually favour an integrative attitude thus arguing for a politicization of the administrative arena. Therefore, and not completely unsurprising<sup>4</sup>, the strategy of thinking the relationship between politics and administration through paradigms has shown that prescriptive and explanatory factors are not easily disentangled.

### *Structure of the thesis*

In terms of structure, this thesis has six chapters (apart from this introduction and the conclusion). Each chapter is dedicated to the exploration of a specific policy paradigm, with the exception of the two last chapters that focus on the Agonistic Policy Model (APM). Chapter 1 explores the Early Public Administration (EPA) and discusses how the idea of politics-administration dichotomy underpinned the orthodox view of public administration in its formative years. Chapter 2 discusses Policy Analysis (PA) whose tenet was the development of a scientific approach to public policy geared to improve the rationality of the decision-making process. Chapter 3 examines the Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) orientation that elaborated a critique of technocratic views of public policy and asserted an explicit concern with the political dimension within policy and administrative studies. Chapter 4 depicts the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) whose advocates suggested that public administration could be politicized by the construction of deliberative arenas capable of channelling the voices of civil society to the bureaucratic structures of the government. Chapter 5 presents the ontological underpinnings of the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) that are derived from the agonistic framework developed by Chantal Mouffe. Chapter 6 delineates the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) and shows how different theorists help to elucidate how an agonistic

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<sup>4</sup> In his discussion of models of democracy, British political theorist David Held offers a supportive argument for the notion that prescription and explanation are frequently intertwined. He notes the existence of ‘a shifting balance between descriptive-explanatory and normative statements; that is, between statements about how things are and why they are so, and statements about how things ought to or should be’ (Held, 2006, p. 6).



policy process can be conceptualized. In the conclusion, the advantages of the APM over alternative policy approaches are outlined and an agonistic policy research agenda is proposed.

## **Chapter 1 – Early Public Administration (EPA): the rise and fall of the politics-administration dichotomy**

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the first paradigm of public administration and policy studies, which is designated here as Early Public Administration (EPA)<sup>5</sup>. It describes the main ideas embodied in EPA and gives salience to its fundamental feature, the politics-administration dichotomy. It claims that understanding this dichotomy is crucial because the field of public administration is to this day still searching for an appropriate way of ‘combining’ politics and administration. Although in modern scholarship, politics and administration are recognized to be largely interdependent, there is no consensus on how they are related. The main purpose of this chapter is to explain how and why public administration has been developed – in both theory and practice – in opposition to politics.

The studies on the field of public administration emerged as a reaction against the perceived ‘wickedness’ of politics. On one hand, politics was usually denigrated because of its association with socially harmful practices, such as corruption and patronage. Besides, politics was also interpreted as a partisan form of running the polity, which necessarily generated conflict and disagreement. On the other hand, a science of administration was conceived as a technical way of solving societal problems that avoided the pitfalls of politics. Because administration was non-partisan it could potentially reveal a scientific way of identifying the common good. In a nutshell, society would be much better off if the process of making collective decisions could be divested of political intermediation and instead be taken solely on a scientific basis.

The main advantage of the emerging field of administration was understood to reside in its scientific nature. Moreover, the scientific credentials of administration – embodied in the adoption of methodological procedures such as data gathering, hypotheses testing,

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<sup>5</sup> EPA has also been referred to as classical, traditional or orthodox public administration (Hughes, 2003; Hyde and Shafritz, 2008).

quantification of variables – would place it in a wiser position to prescribe how governments should be run. The development of a science of administration would eliminate the need for politics and encourage progress and efficiency instead of manipulation and favouritism.

The opposition between politics and administration, which is one of the distinctive features of EPA, is the main theme of this chapter. It is crucial to understand why public administration emerged in opposition to politics in order to properly grasp why later scholarship would face the challenge of bringing politics into public administration. The politics-administration dichotomy has been embedded to such an extent in the theory and practice of administration that to this day academics and practitioners are still searching for a paradigm capable of reconnecting them. The challenge of thinking politics and administration together, it is worth reminding, is the main topic of this thesis.

How EPA rose and fell is a story that deserves to be told in some detail. In particular, because it reveals that attempts to ‘sanitize’ society from politics through the development of a science of administration is an old issue. In fact, the idea that administration was the remedy to liberate society from political interference harks back to the nineteenth century, when administrative reforms in the United States were introduced with the purpose of eradicating patronage. The solution envisaged by the reformers consisted in the replacement of patronage for a civil service system, in which employees of the government would have no allegiance to political parties, being admitted solely on the basis of their merits and qualifications. By being politically neutral and organized according to technical criteria, the civil service system was deemed convenient to impart efficiency to the performance of the government. Thus, from earlier times, politics was targeted as the enemy of efficiency and construed as conducive to anarchy and disorder. The advent of a science of administration, however, would eliminate the need for politics.

For several decades, the politics-administration dichotomy would remain as the hallmark of the field of public administration. Theorists and practitioners would praise

the separation between politics and administration as the condition for efficient government. However, with the emergence of the interventionist state in the aftermath of the Great Depression, the dichotomy was given a hard blow. In order to restore economic development, public agencies were endowed with ‘political’ powers to formulate public policies. The recognition that the government wielded both administrative and political functions elicited theoretical difficulties for public administration. In particular, it challenged its cornerstone, the politics-administration dichotomy. It became clear that the boundaries that divided politics and administration were more blurred than frequently assumed. This awareness, however, implied that the discipline had to rethink its foundations, if not reconsider its own identity<sup>6</sup>. With the demise of the politics-administration dichotomy, the field of public administration began to search for broader perspectives triggering the emergence of new research agendas (Raadschelders, 2003; Keller, 2007).

This chapter aims to describe the main features of EPA, giving salience to the pivotal role played by the politics-administration dichotomy. It is structured in three main sections (besides this introduction). Section 1.2 contextualizes EPA by depicting its historical background in particular by alluding to the rise of the administrative state. Section 1.3 discusses the intellectual foundations of EPA through the examination of the contributions of three influential theorists, Woodrow Wilson, Frederick Taylor and Luther Gulick. Section 1.4 examines the demise of EPA and explains why the politics-administration dichotomy had been increasingly discredited.

## 1.2 The historical context of EPA: the rise of the administrative state

This section contextualizes the emergence of Early Public Administration (EPA) from an administrative historical perspective. Initially, drawing particularly on the experience of the United States, it describes the rise of administrative state and emphasizes how modern administration originated from a series of reforms aimed at removing political interference. Then, by alluding to the figure of the city-manager, it delineates how

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that in spite of the demise of the politics-administration dichotomy, there are scholars who still believe that EPA’s principles remain very much alive and influence the theory and practice of public administration (Adams, 1992; Rosenbloom, 1993; Holden, 1996; Hughes, 2003; Bertelli and Lynn, 2006).

administration has also acquired an anti-political connotation at the local level. The section closes with a brief comparison between the administrative models followed by the United States and Europe with the purpose of clarifying that the idea of politics-administration dichotomy cannot be considered universal.

The emergence of modern administration is inscribed within the advent of the industrial society (Weber, 1946; Waldo, 1948). Throughout the nineteenth century, the advanced capitalist nations were experiencing major societal changes. Agriculture was being progressively supplanted by industry as the dominant occupation. The size of the factories was increasing and corporations were being created to cope with the rising demand for manufactured products. The industrial development, however, posed the problem of workforce supply. Attracted by job opportunities in the industrial centres, large swaths of people were pushed away from the countryside and abandoned agricultural life, flocking massively to urbanized areas. The advent of industrial and urban societies deeply affected the role and scope of the government.

It is worth reminding that the provision of public services by the government, in the nineteenth century (except in some parts of Europe), was very limited when compared with subsequent periods. Governmental institutions usually comprised no more than the tax collection agency, the post office, police and the military, besides parliaments and courts. And yet their nature and magnitude would progressively change as a response to urbanization and industrialization stimuli. People in cities needed a wide range of goods and services that had to be provided (or at least coordinated) by a central administration. These services usually covered areas such as housing, waste and sewage systems, streetlights, medical assistance, schooling, transportation etc. Although some kind of public service provision might have existed before, they were not required in vast quantities and their funding and implementation was carried out through private donations. The scale of industrialization and urbanization, however, compelled the government to embrace the responsibility for collective service provision.

Public administration theorists writing in the first decades of the twenty-century noticed how major social and economic changes were affecting the scope and size of

administration. White (1926, p. 8) argued that the emergence of modern administration was not only a product of the progressive urbanization and industrialization, but also of technological advancement. In his view, improvements in transportation (especially railways) and communication (particularly postal services and the telegraph) created new opportunities for business expansion and ‘increased the area and intensity of administrative activity’. Along similar lines, Willoughby (1927) noted that the level of government activity had increased and penetrated into to broader areas of social life.

The province of government is now held to embrace all forms of activities which contribute in any way to the promotion of the public welfare. There is hardly a field of activity into which our governments have not entered. Their operations are now on a vast scale and require for their performance organization and technical processes exceeding in size and complexity those of any private undertaking (Willoughby, 1927, p. viii).

The growing demand for public services, however, could not be met under existing administrative practices and institutions. Rampant corruption, widespread patronage and the lack of a professional administrative staff were considered major obstacles for the development of an efficient and responsive administration. Thus, advocates of administrative reform contended that unless fundamental changes were introduced – particularly the civil service system – public services would continue to be inefficient and inadequate to meet the demand. Noteworthy, the dominant perception at the time associated the anarchy and disorder of the administration with the harmful penetration of politics in administrative affairs. Not surprisingly, calls for a ‘moralization’ of the administration were frequently understood as an attempt to insulate it from politics<sup>7</sup>.

The trenchant corruption that afflicted not only the administration but was also pervasive throughout society had one of its causes in the ‘spoils system’, which had been introduced in the United States by President Andrew Jackson in the 1820s as part of his project of ‘democratization’ (Schultz and Maranto, 1998). According to President Jackson, public service jobs should be filled by ‘ordinary’ citizens, instead of being

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<sup>7</sup> Civil service reforms were not only a matter of morality, since the professionalization of the public service was also essential to cope with the increasing complexity of administrative tasks. The clerkship type of administration was increasingly unsuitable to handle the growing demands for public services. On the professionalization of American public administration, see Karl (1976). For a discussion of the major social implications of a professional administration, see Weber’s (1946) classical study of bureaucracy.

offered as sinecures to the economically privileged elites of society, as was the common practice. In his view, public service tasks could be handled by ordinary citizens because they were simple, repetitive and did not require previous technical knowledge. In practice, however, public service jobs were treated as 'spoils' to be distributed to the political parties that won the elections. The recruitment of administrative staff was 'politicized' with nominations made to reward partisan loyalty.

The problem was that, contrary to Jackson's expectations, his spoils system produced several unintended consequences, the most dramatic being a process of rampant corruption. An additional difficulty was the significant turnover caused by the complete removal of government officials when the party in power lost the elections. The constant turn over of personnel caused organizational dysfunctions and created disarray in the administration of public services. The dissatisfaction with the spoils system reached its climax when a frustrated job seeker assassinated President Garfield in 1881, thus triggering claims for the adoption of an alternative administrative system.

The modern concept of public administration emerged then as an offshoot of the reforms introduced to overthrow the spoils system<sup>8</sup>. The professionalization of the administrative staff, which would be carried out by the introduction of the civil service system, aimed primarily at recruiting politically neutral employees who had no allegiance to political parties. By severing the ties with electoral politics, the civil service was predicated on a non-partisan, merit-based recruitment model in which employees were admitted solely based on their qualifications.

Inspired by the British administrative reforms, the civil service system in the United States was officially instituted with the passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883. Initially, it

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<sup>8</sup> Thus Raadschelders (2003, p. 192) writes that 'the emergence of the study of public administration in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century was a response both to growing local government activity and to major discontent with corruption'. The history of civil service system and its contribution to shape public administration can be found in Schultz and Maranto (1998). For the formation of the administrative state of the United States, see also Chandler (1987) and Stillman (2010). Accounts of the history of public administration as an academic discipline can be found in Mosher (1976) and Raadschelders (2011). Gladden (1972) offers an important historical analysis of public administration from a European perspective.

covered less than 12% of the overall workforce, but it was progressively expanded by subsequent administrations and by 1900 most government personnel were recruited through the civil service system, with fewer positions still dependent on the political discretion (Schultz and Maranto, 1998; Keller, 2007)<sup>9</sup>.

The advent of the civil service system led to the professionalization of the administration. From that moment onwards, the administration of the state was considered an apolitical task to be carried out by non-partisan, politically neutral civil servants. Remarkably, the constitution of the modern administrative state was predicated on depoliticization, hence enshrining one of the distinctive features of Early Public Administration (EPA): the notion that administration and politics were distinct spheres (a concept that would be later described by the literature as the politics-administration dichotomy).

In addition, this dissociation between politics and administration was not confined to the federal level. This section now addresses how the politics-administration dichotomy also reached the municipal sphere. How administration came to be secluded from politics is exemplified by the city of New York, in which professional groups and other civil society associations, concerned with the lack of responsiveness of local government, initiated a movement to prevent politics from interfering in the management of the city. The precedent set by New York would later be transplanted to several other cities scattered around the United States.

Distrustful of political meddling in the city management, these groups propagated the idea that the local government should be administered by professional experts, not by elected politicians. Thus, the figure of the city-manager came to replace that of the elected mayor. Usually an engineer, the city-manager embodied the anti-political vision of administration and expressed the notion that experts were more apt than politicians to rule. The rationale was that supplied with data and free from political interference, the

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<sup>9</sup> The model adopted in the United States was inspired by the English experience, which was deemed very successful in lessening the influence of politics. Following the publication of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report in 1854, the English civil service was also envisaged as an attempt to eliminate widespread patronage practices by carrying out a merit-basis recruitment process through open competition.



city-manager was better qualified to actualize the common good. Political problems were interpreted as technical issues and where politics failed, management would succeed (Waldo, 1948; Lee, 1995; Keller, 2007).

It would not take long before these local initiatives gained high visibility and awakened the interest of other cities. They helped to generalize a view that experts acted on behalf of the public interest, which led to the idea that an apolitical administration was consistent with democratic values. Embodying this vision, the creation of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research in 1906 set an important precedent that would later be disseminated to other cities of the United States. The proliferation of these research institutes attested to the strength of the idea of the city-manager. It also reflected the faith on scientific management to replace politics in the administration of the local government (Waldo, 1948). Their philosophy revealed distaste for politics and a preference for science and expertise: social grievances were no longer perceived as political issues, but as technical problems that required managerial solutions. Instead of politics, which was inherently partisan, conflictive and biased, expertise would promote progress, efficiency and harmony. Collective issues, which had been previously construed as political affairs, were now redefined as management questions (Lee, 1995).

Another important feature of the city-manager experience resided in the notion that corporate business should set the guiding principles of the administration. The idea that management techniques employed by private corporations could be transplanted to public administration also played a pivotal role in the formation of the modern administrative state. It also contributed to reinforce the notion that governmental affairs could be conducted on a purely technical and apolitical basis<sup>10</sup>. As a result, the politics-administration dichotomy also became entrenched in the municipal sphere.

The separation of powers was effectively eliminated at the local level and a politics-administration dichotomy was implemented by vesting a city-manager appointed by the commission with all of the administrative power. The only non-elected chief executive in American political history (the president is indirectly elected via the electoral college) was to be filled on the basis of demonstrated

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<sup>10</sup> During public administration early years, it was common sense that the government could be understood as a business corporation with the political leader compared to the chief executive officer of a private company (Haber, 1964, p. 107).

competence that would increase the scope of administration and dramatically reduce that of politics (Keller, 2007, p. 10).

Keller (2007) provides an illuminating account of the dichotomy in the public administration of the United States, pointing out decisive moments of its evolution. He depicts, decade by decade, covering the period from 1880 until 1940, the progressive managerialization of public administration and the entrenchment of an anti-political vision. Table 1.1 below helps to visualize the main episodes that contributed to the consolidation of the dichotomy politics-administration.

Table 1.1 – Entrenching the dichotomy politics-administration: key episodes in the public administration of the United States

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Main episodes</i>
1880s: intimations and foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reforms (e.g civil service system) to eradicate political corruption set the scene for the creation of public administration</li> <li>• Wilson (1887) called for a businesslike approach to government that would replace partisan politics</li> <li>• Creation of Municipal Bureaus of Research that brought a managerial orientation to local government</li> </ul>
1890s: extension of reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managerial-based reforms extended to various policy areas (health, housing, water, sewage)</li> <li>• As forerunners of the dichotomy, municipal reform initiatives spurred by businesslike mentality that strived to stymie political interference</li> </ul>
1900s: transformation in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the Commission-manager form of government: concentration of all the administrative power on the (unelected) city-manager</li> <li>• Politics is virtually suppressed and the dichotomy is established at the local level; emphasis on science and morality; cities run by experts</li> <li>• Bureaus of government research, which provided education and training for reforms (which later became graduate courses), disseminate politics-free, science-based applied research as replacement for local politics</li> </ul>
1910s: intensification of reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taylor’s scientific management principles are transferred to the public sector with his ideas grounding the recommendations of the Taft Commission (1912)</li> <li>• Establishment of the Committee on Practical Training for Public Service</li> <li>• Universities begin to create public administration schools</li> </ul>

1920s: deepening of the dichotomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication of the first textbooks in public administration</li> <li>• Important reforms at the national level: set up of the Bureau of the Budget and the General Accounting Office driven by scientific management principles</li> <li>• Strengthening of the dichotomy by the ‘application of scientific management to large-scale government organizations’ (p. 13)</li> </ul>
1930s: rise of the administrative state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The dominant vision is that administrative solutions are capable of solving societal problems</li> <li>• Specialists in public administration apply scientific management to the reorganization of executive branch</li> <li>• Creation (in 1939) of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and the Public Administration Review (PAR)</li> </ul>
1940s: reflection on the administrative state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demise of the classical orthodoxy: public administration searches for its identity; the application of scientific management philosophy is questioned</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of the role of democratic values leading to the problem of how management and democracy could be reconciled</li> <li>• Growing awareness of the limitations of dichotomy politics-administration; public and private management are perceived as distinctive</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration based on Keller (2007)

This table reveals key episodes in the evolution of public administration in the United States that contributed to enshrine the politics-administration dichotomy. Before moving to the next section, which is dedicated to the analysis of the intellectual foundations of public administration, it is convenient to make a remark. The fact that the politics-administration dichotomy is best elucidated through the experience of the United States should not lead to the conclusion that the dichotomy was a universal phenomenon. It is worth briefly considering how the administration of the state in Europe took a different path that was much more sensitive to the importance of political factors. Whereas in the United States (and in England) administration had a strong anti-political connotation, the type of administration practised in Europe was much less sceptical of politics.

Stillman (1997) offers an illuminating account of these distinctions by depicting the main differences between the models of public administration adopted in the United States and in Europe. He suggests that their differences should be considered in the light of their distinct perceptions of the role played by the state in the administration of public

affairs. Whereas the United States followed a deeply anti-state vision of administration whose foundation was associated with management, Europe developed a state-centric approach in which administration was intimately identified with law.

The main reason for these different perceptions of the importance of the state, Stillman (1997) argues, is rooted in their diverse historical development. In the case of Europe, the centrality of the state was connected to an enduring tradition that hearkened back to ancient times. Besides, administrative studies existed for a long time and preceded the advent of the modern state. They were first known as Cameralism (whose main focus was the management of the king's estate) and later, with the decline of the absolute state and the rise of parliaments, the study of administration continued within the field of law, with which it was largely identified. In short, the evolution of public administration in Europe was state-centric, and administration was understood as intertwined with politics. Hence, the European experience witnessed nothing similar to a politics-administration dichotomy.

In contrast, in the United States, public administration was construed as a field of management (Waldo, 1948). Public administration emerged as a series of bottom-up, localist, and experimental reforms and showed a deep hostility to the state<sup>11</sup>. Besides an anti-statist orientation, it paid less attention to history, and emphasized the importance of the study of management in opposition to law. It praised efficiency in opposition to the *raison d'état*. Different from Europe, in which public administration was already well entrenched, the history of the discipline in the United States has its roots in the late nineteenth century and has faced a long-term struggle to consolidate its legitimacy and to define its identity. It is convenient to depict the main differences between both traditions. As the table 1.2 below shows, there are remarkable differences between the European and United States approaches to public administration.

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<sup>11</sup> After all, it is the absence of a sense of the state that has been the great hallmark of American political culture (Skowronek, 1982, p. 3).

Table 1.2 – The different traditions of public administration in Europe and in the United States

<i>Issue</i>	<i>United States</i>	<i>Europe</i>
Name of the discipline	Public administration	Administrative sciences
Current status of the discipline	Legitimacy and identity are continuously questioned	Established
Framework of the discipline	Assumes that there are principles of universal validity	Every country has its own version of public administration
Perception of the state	Anti-statist	State-centric
‘Inception’ of the discipline	Late 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Rise of the absolute state (16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> centuries)
Historical origins of the discipline	Series of reforms (civil service system, scientific management, city-manager)	Management of the king’s estate
First university chairs dedicated to the study of the discipline	1920s	Germany ( <i>polize wissenschaft</i> ) and France ( <i>science de la police</i> ) by the end of 18 <sup>th</sup> century
Leading tradition influencing the discipline	Management	Law
Method of administrative logic	Bottom-up, inductive, empirical (e.g. case studies)	Top-down, deductive, theoretical
Politics-administration relationship	Dichotomy (administration as apolitical)	Intertwined (state-centric approach to public administration)

Source: own elaboration based on Stillman (1997)

From this comparison between the two traditions, it is possible to conclude that in Europe public administration (or rather ‘administrative sciences’, as they were called) was strongly connected with the state and thus administration and politics tend to be envisaged as intertwined. In the case of the United States, in contrast, administration emerged in opposition to politics and gave rise to the dichotomy. It is for this reason that in order to grasp the nature of this dichotomy (and then later examine its limitations), it is indispensable to investigate how public administration emerged as a field of inquiry in the United States, which is the task of the next section.

### 1.3 The theoretical foundations of EPA: the emergence of public administration as a field of inquiry

This chapter has so far described the dichotomy politics-administration from the perspective of the rise of the administrative state, in particular those reforms introduced to curb political corruption and eliminate patronage practices, whose origins are associated with Jackson's spoils system. As discussed earlier, the advent of a civil service system (at the federal level) and the dissemination of the city-manager model (at the municipal level) aimed at protecting the administration of the government from the encroachment of political interference. Different from what happened in Europe, politics and administration had been dichotomized.

It should be noted, however, that the dichotomy politics-administration was not confined to the 'practice' of modern administration. As will be now discussed, the dichotomy also became a theoretical concern in the emerging field of public administration. With theory reflecting practice, public administration scholars considered that administration and politics were two distinct analytical domains. The idea that 'administrative questions were not political questions' synthesizes the dominant thinking of EPA.

In order to grasp how politics and administration drifted apart, in the early studies of public administration, it is worth examining the contribution of three seminal authors: Woodrow Wilson (who proposed the dichotomy), Frederick Taylor (who invented the method to actualize the dichotomy) and Luther Gulick (who implemented the method in the government).

#### 1.3.1 Woodrow Wilson: the theorization of the politics-administration dichotomy

The politics-administration dichotomy that underpinned EPA was more than an empirical phenomenon. With the inception of the discipline of public administration, the dichotomized view penetrated research scholarship. The founding fathers of public administration expressed their acknowledgement that politics and administration were

not only different activities, but accordingly argued that they were also distinct analytical domains. And, as will be shown later in this section, the first textbooks in public administration also incorporated the dichotomized view in their analyses.

The publication of 'The Study of Administration' in 1887 by political scientist Woodrow Wilson is largely acknowledged as having inaugurated the field of public administration and set its intellectual cornerstones. In his pioneering article, and reflecting the dichotomy, Wilson argued that politics and administration were independent fields of inquiry. He famously stated that administrative questions were not politics questions. According to him, 'administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions' (Wilson, 1887, p. 210).

In his view, the roles of politics and administration were distinct. Politics, which was concerned with the definition of policies, should set the tasks for administration. In contrast, administration, which was subordinated to politics, had the responsibility of implementing the policies. Because politicians were elected by the people, they had legitimacy to decide which policies were most appropriate. For their turn, administrators, who were not elected, should not have discretion to formulate policies. Their duties were strictly technical.

Reflecting his appreciation for reforms that paved the way for the administrative state (discussed in the previous section), Wilson contended that in order to attain the most efficient execution of public policies, the administration of the government should be organized according to the civil service system. In similar lines with Weber's (1946) classical study on bureaucracy, he claimed that hierarchy, neutrality, and specialization were crucial for efficient performance of tasks (Fry, 1989).

Wilson emphasized the importance of hierarchy to preclude politics and administration from encroaching on each other's spheres. Hierarchy was crucial to ensure that the policies set by the political system would be accomplished without any distortion. If the government was organized hierarchically, then the subordinates would have to comply

with the commands given by their superiors. Government employees would act neutrally, that is, fulfilling their duties without personal discretion.

Although hierarchy was necessary for protecting the administration from political meddling, it was not sufficient to ensure that its tasks would be performed with the utmost efficiency. Wilson argued in favour of the development of a science of administration and contended that the pursuit of efficiency could be more properly achieved through scientific advice. In the absence of a science of administration to guide public administrators, he argued, they had to rely on sheer experience, trial-and-error attempts in order to cope with the facts.

In his call for a science of public administration, Wilson (1887, p. 218) pointed out that it already existed outside the United States<sup>12</sup>, particularly in France and Germany, where it was very advanced. Wilson rejected the argument that because these countries were autocratically ruled, their administrative models were not applicable to democratic governments. In his view, because the spheres of politics and administration were independent, techniques of administration could be transplanted without concern with the type of regime<sup>13</sup>.

Wilson justified the dissociation between administrative system and political regime by arguing that ‘the legitimate ends of administration are the same’ (Wilson, 1887, p. 218) whether the country is a ‘monarchy or a republic, a tyranny or a democracy’. Hence, politics and administration are conceived as independent phenomena. In his famous quote:

If I see a murderous fellow sharpening a knife cleverly, I can borrow his way of sharpening the knife without borrowing his probable intention to commit murder with it; and so, if I see a monarchist dyed in the wool managing a public bureau well, I can learn his business methods without changing one of my republican

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<sup>12</sup> Arguably, for Wilson, the science of administration was universal. He considered that knowledge about administration was interchangeable between countries. Universality, however, did not imply that administration was insensitive to specific contexts. In his view, provided that it could be adapted to national particularities, there was no reason why successful administrative theories and practices could not be transferred between nations.

<sup>13</sup> ‘We can borrow the science of administration with safety and profit’, Wilson (1887, p. 219) explains, ‘we have only to filter it through our constitutions, only to put it over a slow fire of criticism and distil away its foreign gases’.



spots. He may serve his king; I will continue to serve the people; but I should like to serve my sovereign as well as he serves his (Wilson, 1887, p. 220).

Wilson went further than stating that politics and administration should be dissociated. He also expressed his belief that a science of administration should be guided by managerial values. In his view, administration was not only apolitical but also business-oriented. 'The field of administration is a field of business' which entails that it is 'removed from the hurry and strife of politics' (Wilson, 1887, p. 209). Besides, a science of administration should contribute to impart a business mentality in the government and 'make its business less unbusinesslike, to strengthen and purify its organization, and to crown its duties with dutifulness' (Wilson, 1887, p. 201).

In arguing that administration should follow a business orientation, Wilson suggested that the management methods that were being developed for the industry could also be beneficial to public administrators. In addition, as the next section shows, it would be in the teachings of Frederick Taylor and in the strategies of Luther Gulick that public administration would find organisational solutions to improve its efficiency. Together, Taylor and Gulick, contributed to make the politics-administration dichotomy (that Wilson so clearly theorized) fully operational in the government.

### 1.3.2 Frederick Taylor and Luther Gulick: the operationalization of the politics-administration dichotomy

Although Wilson did mention that efficiency was the chief goal of administration, he did not provide detailed explanation of how it could be empirically achieved. The development of methods and techniques to operationalize efficiency in business organizations was carried out by Frederick Taylor who published his *Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911. The translation of the scientific principles of management from the private to the public sector would be later accomplished by Luther Gulick in the late 1930s. Initially, this section discusses Taylor's scientific management.

Taylor, a mechanical engineer by profession, realized that as a general trend the industrial business sector lacked proper management techniques, and usually relied on rules-of-thumb, if not on mere improvisation. Through his observations and experiments (such as his famous time-and-motion studies), he set the task of devising scientific principles, which through quantitative measurement and systematic testing, would indicate the one-best way to maximize the efficiency of the industrial process.

Taylor (1911) realized that the application of scientific methods to the factory production was essential to increase its productivity. He argued that the key factor to the efficient performance was the specialization of functions (within the factory). In practice, the specialization of functions meant that the responsibilities of the manager should be clearly distinguished from those of the line employees. In Taylor's view, the manager set the tasks and supervised their execution.

First, the work process had to be carefully studied and planned. Then, when the main stages of production were identified, they should be precisely and clearly communicated to the line employees. The manager was responsible for explaining in detail how each task should be performed<sup>14</sup>. What was important, Taylor ascertained, was that the worker should be spared the task of thinking<sup>15</sup>. Deprived of any discretion, the workers should be strictly devoted to the execution of the commands spelled out by the manager. The complete separation between manager and worker responsibilities was crucial to ensure that the one-best way was achieved. Thus, the specialization of functions was an indispensable step to improve organisational performance<sup>16</sup>.

It should be noted, however, that when Taylor developed his ideas he had in mind the private sector, not the government. Although it is true that he cooperated in some

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<sup>14</sup> This is why Taylor asserted that besides coordinating the production process, the manager also played an educational role in the factory because he advised his subordinates on the best way of accomplishing their job.

<sup>15</sup> Because of this suggestion, Taylor would be later criticized for the de-humanizing effects of scientific management.

<sup>16</sup> But efficiency could also be encouraged by other means. Taylor argued that apart from technical improvements in the production process, employers could introduce additional incentives to foster the productivity of the organization. In particular, he proposed a wage incentive system, in which the most productive workers would get compensation for their exceptional performance.

government studies and even held positions in the public sector, his philosophy was originally conceived for improving the performance of the industry<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, given the increasing popularity of his methodology, it would not take long before his scientific management penetrated into the government.

Taylor's principles provided a solution for the government's search for efficiency techniques capable of improving its performance. In fact, the adoption of Taylor's scientific tools reinforced the conviction that politics was not necessary for running public affairs. Public problems could be construed as technical issues to be solved by experts, thus helping to generalize the idea that a democratic government could dispense with politics (Lee, 1995). Taylor's scientific management fitted in conveniently in the politics-administration dichotomy.

Initially, scientific management was introduced at the local level, being influential in the financial sector of public administration, particularly accounting, finance, and budgeting (Stillman, 1998). It disseminated the idea that there was one-best way of performing tasks, which once discovered (through systematic experiments and quantitative analysis) would enable public organizations to achieve their missions with the utmost efficiency<sup>18</sup>.

The popularity of Taylor's methods at the local level also encouraged its adoption by the federal government. Notably, the principles of scientific management influenced the recommendations of the President's Commission on Economy and Efficiency set up by President Taft in 1912 with the purpose of modernizing the administration of the federal government. In fact, one of the major goals of the Commission was to assess the viability of adopting business strategies to improve the efficiency of the government. In

<sup>17</sup> Stillman (1998) corroborates that Taylor developed his analysis for the business sector but was highly influential in the public administration: 'He worked entirely in the business sector and had few good things to say about government, yet his scientific management doctrines so thoroughly permeated public life that few can claim to have left a greater legacy for shaping the origins and development of the modern administrative state' (Stillman, 1998, p. 98-9).

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that the introduction of scientific management in public administration was considered compatible with democratic values. The advocates of scientific management suggested that by enabling the local government to make the best feasible use of public resources the general interest was also being served. In this sense, efficiency was construed as a vehicle of democracy, an instrument capable of actualizing the will of the people.

the two subsequent decades, Taylor's ideas would spread throughout the federal government covering an extensive range of activities. Public administration theorist Leonard White, writing in the late 1920s, analysed the penetration of scientific management in the government and noted that

It can hardly be said that the scientific management has made great progress in government departments. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that its influence has been negligible. The constant refinement of methods in government work, the invention and adoption of machine operations, the development of standards, all reflect in substantial measure the influence of the exponents of scientific management (White, 1926, p. 16).

White's testimony suggests that the influence of scientific management though significant was not still well entrenched in the government<sup>19</sup>. As mentioned earlier, the adaptation of the principles of scientific management to the administrative apparatus of the government was not the work of Taylor himself. It would be up to Luther Gulick, both a scholar and a practitioner of public administration (Hughes, 2003, p. 31; Keller, 2007, p. 13) to think how efficiency methods devised for the industry could be transposed to governmental agencies. What Taylor had previously done for the business field, Gulick would accomplish for public administration. Together they were responsible for making the politics-administration dichotomy operational.

This section now turns to the examination of Gulick's contribution to EPA<sup>20</sup>. It discusses how Gulick envisaged a new organisational 'architecture' for the federal government that contributed to entrench the principles of scientific management developed by Taylor. As an active participant in various groups of administrative reforms, especially in the Brownlow Committee<sup>21</sup> set up by President Roosevelt in the late 1930s, Gulick

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<sup>19</sup> Ten years later, in the *Frontiers of Public Administration*, whilst discussing the meaning of principles in public administration, White (1936, p. 23) concluded that 'in the United States the most significant effort in the search for principles is that of the Taylor Society, representing the scientific management movement'.

<sup>20</sup> For insightful analyses on Gulick's work see Fry (1989) and Van Riper (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Gulick was one of the three members of the President's Committee on Administrative Management (also known as the Brownlow Committee), which had been set up to streamline the organization of the federal government of the United States and devise a reform to restore its administrative rationality. One of the main outcomes of this Committee was to propose a revision of the organizational structure of the executive branch.

faced the task of finding organisational solutions to streamline the federal government, which was in profound disarray and confusion<sup>22</sup>.

In one famous document (which later became an essay), titled *Notes on the theory of organization*, Gulick proposed the adoption of the principles of classical management – specialization, hierarchy, unit of command – to the executive branch of the government. He considered that if the government could discover the one-best way of carrying out its tasks, it would eliminate dysfunctions and improve its efficiency<sup>23</sup>. By adapting the principles of classical management to the federal government, Gulick was contributing to make the politics-administration dichotomy operational.

His proposal described in the *Notes* encompassed three main strategies. First, he advocated that the structure and functioning of the government should be based on organizational principles – such as specialization, unity of command, hierarchy, control and supervision – that were indispensable for increasing the rationality and efficiency of administration. Second, he emphasized the importance of developing mechanisms of coordination so that all functions of the government could be harmoniously integrated<sup>24</sup>. Third, he recommended concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch – which he designated as ‘executive leadership’ – arguing that the legislative was less apt to devise policy planning. Moreover, this leadership, Gulick insisted, should be based on the principles of scientific management as a condition for the attainment of maximum efficiency.

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<sup>22</sup> In the 1930s, in an attempt to make the economy recover from the *Great Depression*, Roosevelt launched the *New Deal*. A new set of public agencies were created to boost development with the effect of greatly enhancing the size of the public sector. In the absence of a rational plan to coordinate the roles of the newly created agencies, the federal government went into disarray. The multiplicity of organizations gave rise to duplication of functions with various agencies performing similar tasks, which generated conflict of responsibilities, disorganization and inefficiency.

<sup>23</sup> Gulick retained Taylor’s idea that there is one-best way of performing tasks that maximize administrative efficiency. In fact, he championed the value of efficiency, which for him was ‘the number one axiom’ of public administration (Hughes, 2003, p. 33).

<sup>24</sup> The absence of coordination, Gulick warned, could lead to dysfunctional results such as administrative conflict between departments that hampered the achievement of efficiency. In this sense, he suggested that ‘if subdivision of work is inescapable [specialization], co-ordination becomes mandatory’ (Gulick, 1937, p. 6).

Gulick averred that the introduction of these three components – principles of management, mechanisms of coordination, executive leadership – in the federal government would eliminate organizational dysfunctions and increase the performance of the administration. Particularly important in Gulick’s scheme was the role ascribed to the President, which he compared with the role of the chief executive officer (CEO) of a corporation. In his view, the Presidential Office should perform a series of functions that were designated by the acronym POSDCORB and comprised:

1. Planning, definition of the goals and methods to be achieved by the agency;
2. Organizing, ‘establishing of a formal structure of authority’;
3. Staffing, selection and training of the workers;
4. Directing, decision-making process of the organization;
5. Coordinating, harmonizing the activities of the different work units;
6. Reporting, keeping the chief executive well informed and updated;
7. Budgeting, ‘fiscal planning, accounting and control’ (Gulick, 1937, p. 13).

The adoption of POSDCORB, Gulick believed, would restore the rationality and improve the efficiency of the federal government. His ideas gained notoriety not only inside the government but also in academia and came later to be celebrated as the orthodoxy of the field (Keller, 2007, p. 13). By translating the principles of classical management to the organization of the federal government, he further contributed to the operationalization of the politics-administration dichotomy<sup>25</sup>.

The dichotomy – in theory and in practice – became embedded in public administration. Conceptualized by Wilson, instrumentalized (for the industry) by Taylor’s scientific management, and devised (for the government) as organizational reform by Gulick, the politics-administration dichotomy was both a practice and a theory. As a practice, it was

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<sup>25</sup> Gulick (1937, p. 10) argued that politics and administration should be separated, thus expressing sympathy for the dichotomy: ‘we are faced here by two heterogeneous functions, “politics” and “administration”, the combination of which cannot be undertaken within the structure of the administration without producing inefficiency’. On Gulick’s vision of the relation between politics and administration, see Justice and Miller (2007, p. 276).

pervasive in modern administrative institutions. As a theory, as the next section shows, it was widely discussed within the discipline of public administration.

### 1.3.3 The entrenchment of the dichotomy: illustrations from EPA's textbooks and classical studies

This chapter has argued that the dissociation between politics and administration has both empirical roots and theoretical underpinnings. Empirically, it has suggested that the rise of the administrative state was predicated on the exclusion of politics from administration (illustrated for instance by the adoption of a civil service system). On the theoretical side, by alluding to the influential ideas of Wilson, Taylor and Gulick, it has noted how these theorists have contributed to formulate (Wilson) and then operationalize (Taylor and Gulick) the dichotomy. It is convenient at this point to discuss how the dichotomy was accepted and disseminated by the first-generation of EPA scholars.

This 'exegetic' exercise serves two purposes. First, it offers evidence that the dichotomy was incorporated in the first textbooks produced by the discipline. Second, it makes clear the central role played by the dichotomy in the writings of EPA scholars. In fact, the dichotomy was conceived as crucial to define the identity and purpose of public administration. Next, a series of quotations extracted from EPA's first textbooks and classical studies will be presented. They will help to show how widespread and entrenched the politics-administration dichotomy was.

Frank Goodnow, in 1900, wrote his *Politics and Administration: A Study in Government* in which he divided the responsibilities of politics (to establish the will of the state) and administration (to execute the will of the state). The dichotomy is explicit in his writings:

There are then in all governmental systems two primary or ultimate functions of government, viz.: the expression of the will of the state and the execution of that will. There are also in all state separate organs, each of which is mainly busied with the discharge of one of these functions. These functions are, respectively, politics and administration (Goodnow, 1900, p. 12).

The first textbooks in the field of public administration explicitly recognized the dichotomy. Leonard White, in his pioneering study, published originally in 1926, conceived of politics and administration as independent realms. In his view, politics was concerned with the formulation of policies, whereas administration was responsible for their implementation.

Most administrative action can be summed up by saying that it is the application of the law to individual cases on the basis of specific rules and regulations intended to guide and restrict the discretion of officials. Their work is normally subject to reasonably clear differentiation from policy making, which is the primary function of legislative bodies; and from adjudication, which is the primary function of the courts. Administration is usually no more than the application of public policy to the particular case, the characteristic function of the executive branch (White, 1926, p. 9).

Law provides the immediate framework within which public administration operates ... While, therefore, law is not administration, it has a powerful influence upon administration. Law is the formulation of policy; administration is its execution (White, 1926, p. 11).

Similarly, Willoughby who published his influential manual *Principles of Public Administration* in 1927 acknowledged the dichotomy, and noted that with the advent of the administrative state the problem of public administration had precedence over electoral and legislative politics. He considered that

The whole problem of government has largely shifted from that of the organization and operation of the electoral and legislative branches of government through which the popular will is formulated and expressed to that of the organization and operation of the administrative branch through which this will as thus determined is actually put into execution ... But it can hardly be questioned that, as regards our national government at least, the great political problem now confronting us is that of securing economy and efficiency in the actual administration of governmental affairs (Willoughby, 1927, p. viii).

White's and Willoughby's textbooks, however, were not the only ones to mention the dichotomy. In his text *Public Administration*, originally published in 1935, Pfiffner clearly showed how the objective of public administration was predicated on the dichotomy. Noticeably, politics is construed as a source of disturbance that interferes negatively with the efficient administration of the government. According to him,



Every discipline has a theoretical foundation and basic ideology. The keystone for a study of public administration is the distinction between the concepts of politics and administration ... From these premises, therefore, is derived the keystone of the new public administration - the conclusion that politics should stick to its policy-determining sphere and leave administration to apply its own technical processes free from the blight of political meddling. This two-way division of governmental powers is a practical operating principle (Pfiffner, 1949, p. 21).

Furthermore, another influential scholar, Marshall Dimock, subscribed to the dichotomy. Remarkably, he sustained that the separation of the functions of politics and administration was an outcome of the emergence of representative government and the democratic regime. He argued that 'under monarchy a clear line between policy and execution was hard to draw' but in democratic societies, these functions had to be distinguished and 'definite distinction between policy formulation and execution' had to be established<sup>26</sup>:

In early governments the formation of policy and the carrying out of law were placed in the same hands ... But a clear line was not drawn between the formulation of law and its execution, nor did public administration receive particular notice or study as such. However, the development of democracy and representative government has meant a division of governmental labour and a specialization of function (Dimock, 1936a, p. 3).

Larry Walker, who wrote another important textbook in public administration, published in 1937, also stated his view on the relationship between politics and administration, which he depicted as fundamentally dichotomous. Moreover, in line with Wilson's advocacy of a business mentality in public administration, Walker emphasized the importance of expertise to conduct the administration of the government.

There are only two phases to any business, public or private. One is to make the decision as to what is to be done. That is legislation. The other is to see that the decision is carried out. That is administration. For the legislative function, representatives are needed, and the process of election is appropriate. For the administrative function, experts are needed, and the only method of securing them which has proved successful is that of appointment under a merit system (Walker, 1937, p. 15-16 cited by Waldo, 1948, p. 115-116).

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted, however, that in spite of the separation between policy formulation and execution in modern representative democracies, Dimock (1936b) concludes that public administrators are granted vast opportunities to yield their discretion. On the topic of administrative discretion within Early Public Administration (EPA) scholarship, see also Dimock and Dimock (1953) and Lynn (2001a, 2001b).

These excerpts suggest how widespread the acceptance of the politics-administration dichotomy was. They also point out to the importance of the dichotomy for the identity of public administration. Indeed, the fate of the dichotomy and the discipline were intertwined. As discussed in the next section, when the dichotomy became discredited, the very foundations of the discipline of public administration came into question.

#### 1.4 The demise of EPA: the discredit of the politics-administration dichotomy

The decade of the 1940s was a period of reflection for public administration. A decade earlier, with the advent of the interventionist state, doubts were raised about the feasibility of the dichotomy. In the aftermath of the Great Depression, the government exerted an active role in the economy with public agencies not only implementing policies, but also formulating them. The fact that public agencies made political decisions, which had previously been interpreted as a prerogative of the legislative, raised conceptual difficulties for those who advocated the dichotomy.

According to Keller (2007), the field started soul-searching in an attempt to rethink its identity. At the roots of the revision was the acknowledgement that the politics-administration dichotomy was problematic and unrealistic. Three theorists played a major contribution in denouncing the limitations of public administration as an academic discipline. Their critiques are now examined. While Simon and Dahl contended that public administration's credentials as a science were debatable, Waldo pointed out that once the politics-administration dichotomy was recognized as untenable, the discipline of public administration had to redefine its own analytical foundations.

##### 1.4.1 Questioning the scientificity of EPA: Simon's devastating blow

Herbert Simon formulated a critique that undermined the underpinnings of public administration by showing that its principles were incompatible. He claimed that the discipline did not meet scientific standards because it lacked sound theoretical foundations. In 1947, Simon (1976) published his book *Administrative Behaviour*, in

which he set out the task of defining the grounds of a science of administration. According to him, if (public) administration aspired to be a science, it should adopt a new subject of analysis. Instead of focusing on the so-called principles of administration – specialization, unity of command, span of control, organization – a science of administration should in his view concentrate on decision-making.

By proposing to change the subject from principles to decision-making, Simon was challenging the core of EPA. As discussed earlier, not only Wilson, Taylor and Gulick, but also several other public administration theorists subscribed to the notion that the principles were central to EPA. This section examines why Simon advocated a science of administration grounded on decision-making by discussing three main aspects of his critique: i) the fallacious foundations of Early Public Administration (EPA); ii) the positivistic solution and the fact-value divide; iii) the nature of administrative rationality (as opposed to the economic).

In relation to the first point, Simon suggested that the theoretical foundations of EPA were problematic, especially because the principles of public administration were not scientific. In his text 'The Proverbs of Administration', Simon (1946) claimed that the so-called principles were mere 'proverbs'. The main problem with the principles resided in their mutual incompatibility. He considered that 'for almost every principle one can find an equally plausible and acceptable contradictory principle' (Simon, 1946, p. 53). The simultaneous application of the principles – e.g. hierarchy and specialization – could produce inefficiency because they were conflicting<sup>27</sup>. In Simon's view, EPA theorists mistakenly assumed that all principles were mutually compatible and their joint implementation would inevitably lead to an efficient administration. He challenged this claim and asserted that the lack of consistency among the principles thwarted the scientificity of public administration.

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<sup>27</sup> Simon sustained that commonly accepted principles of administration could be conflicting because they presupposed different organizational attitudes. For instance, the principle of specialization requires decisions to be made by whoever possesses expertise, whereas the principle of hierarchy dictates that decisions should be taken by the highest hierarchical level.

Simon contended that the inconsistency of the principles created an impasse in the administrative theory. He suggested that instead of principles they should be interpreted as ‘criteria for describing and diagnosing administrative situations’ (Simon, 1946, p. 62). By downgrading the principles to descriptors, Simon intimated that they were not sufficient analytical foundations to establish a scientific framework that could guide administrative behaviour. How did Simon then propose to restore the scientific character of public administration?

Simon explained that if public administration aimed at being regarded as a scientific discipline, it should reform its methodology of inquiry. He proposed that a science of administration should adopt reliable methodological procedures, such as systematic testing of hypothesis, which would enable the confirmation or rejection of statements. The adoption of a sound methodology equipped administration to accept only those theories that had been satisfactorily tested. ‘These concepts, to be scientifically useful’, he wrote, ‘must be operational; that is, their meanings must correspond to empirically observable facts or situations’ (Simon, 1946, p. 62). Thus, for Simon, public administration lacked sound analytical foundations – because the principles were mutually incompatible – and only the shift to a new methodology would confer scientificity to the discipline. But which methodology did Simon advise (public) administration to embrace?

In Simon’s view, a positivistic methodological approach was appropriate for the science of administration. He argued that the model of scientificity for public administration could be found in logical positivism<sup>28</sup>. One of the advantages of a positivistic methodology resided in its ability to distinguish between facts and values. The separation between facts and values, Simon argued, was essential to allow empirical tests of concepts. By focusing only on the facts – and therefore disregarding the values – public administration would operate scientifically<sup>29</sup>. Evidently, by confining science to

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<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Simon (1976) argues that proper administrative research is empirical and follows a positivistic approach: ‘The ground of first principles of administration at the philosophical level have already been established – logical positivism’ (1976, p. 45).

<sup>29</sup> Simon (1976) clarifies that factual decisions are those that involve the implementation of goals, where value judgements are those decisions that lead toward the selection of final goals.

the domain of the empirical, value-laden theories were dismissed. This was not a problem, because for Simon normative problems and ethical judgements were outside the scientific scope. To be sure, in his view, administrative sciences were ‘concerned purely with factual statements’ since ‘there is no place for ethical assertions in the body of a science’ (Simon, 1976, p. 253).

Apart from his methodological considerations, Simon (1976) raised another important issue. He contended that if (public) administration aspired to be scientific it should embrace a new subject: decision-making. For Simon the contribution of administration should be the understanding of how individuals take decisions in organisational contexts.

In order to investigate decision-making, Simon warned about the importance of avoiding unrealistic assumptions, such as the ‘economic man’ (sic). In his view, the main problem with this concept resided in its lack of recognition of how human rationality operates. The ‘economic man’ was a fiction that distorted the analysis of decision-making processes. It mistakenly assumed that individuals had a complete set of preferences, and they possessed complete information. In the empirical world, however, these conditions were not verified leading to the conclusion that the ‘economic man’ did not provide an accurate description of human behaviour.

According to Simon, the ‘administrative man’ was a more reliable concept that reflected actual human behaviour. In contrast to the ‘economic man’, the ‘administrative man’ was defined as having only partial information over the choices available for his decision. Besides, the ‘administrative man’ did not examine all the possibilities pertinent to a particular problem, but only few of them<sup>30</sup> (Simon, 1976, p. 79). This characterization, Simon suggested, was a more realistic rendering of how individuals behaved in organizations in every day life.

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<sup>30</sup> Simon used the expression ‘satisficing’ to indicate that decisions resulted from the analysis of a small number of alternatives. Due to cognitive and organizational restraints, decision-makers concentrate their attention only on a limited range of possibilities. Limitations of time, information, financial resources prevent decision-makers from achieving the ‘optimal solution’ that would require the exhaustive investigation of every possible alternative.

In essence, Simon's critique of the scientificity of public administration involved three central arguments. First, the rejection of the principles, which were internally inconsistent, and contrary to what EPA theorists believed, did not lead to efficient results. Second, the introduction of a positivistic methodology grounded on a fact-value divide that would enable theoretical claims to be empirically tested. Third, the adoption of a new subject – the 'administrative man' – was better suited to reflect actual organizational behaviour.

As Ostrom (1973) put it, Simon's indictment of EPA was a 'devastating blow'. The discipline would have to reconstruct its foundations in order to convincingly acquire scientific status. Simon, however, was not alone in his scepticism over the scientificity of public administration. As shown next, Robert Dahl also raised doubts about many of its assumptions.

#### 1.4.2 Dahl's critique: public administration as value-laden, contextual-based research

In 'The Science of Public Administration: Three Problems', Dahl (1947) argued that public administration's scientific aspirations were unwarranted. Taking issue with the politics-administration dichotomy, Dahl criticized the attempt to build a science of administration that completely ignored political values and moral considerations. In democratic societies, Dahl noted, individuals and decision-makers could freely choose among competing different ends. Therefore, administration could hardly be dissociated from politics since the selection of the means (administration) was dependent upon the preference for particular ends (politics). Dahl (1947) considered that the politics-administration dichotomy was untenable because facts and values could not be entirely dissociated. In his view, political and ethical questions were always present in administrative decision-making.

For Dahl, and contrary to Simon's positivistic beliefs, it was impossible to completely eliminate normative evaluations from factual statements. Dahl (1947) noted that EPA aspired to be a science capable of discovering universal laws. Drawing inspiration from the natural sciences, the principles of EPA were interpreted as independent of moral and

political issues and insensitive to cultural and social contexts. These assumptions, Dahl observed, were problematic. In his appraisal of EPA's scientificity, he raised three objections against the capacity of the field to produce principles of universal validity.

The first problem was the difficulty of eliminating normative values from analytical statements. He took issue with the concept of efficiency, which was (and still is by many) regarded as the cornerstone of administration. Theorists such as Walker (1937) highlighted the benefits reaped by states when their administrative apparatus was reorganized according to efficiency principles. The problem, as Dahl pointed out, was that there were values other than efficiency that could be prioritized. After all, Dahl asked, why should efficiency be awarded primacy in the studies of administration? He noted that in pluralist regimes, there were always competing values (e.g. equality, justice), and efficiency was only one among many. For Dahl, it was unclear why efficiency should be considered, as Gulick (1937) proposed, the 'axiom number one in the scale of administration'. Cleverly, he raised the question of whether the preference for efficiency was not in itself a normative evaluation.

Normative judgements were even more important in public administration than in private administration. Dahl chastised those theorists who conflated both disciplines and averred that 'the basic problems of *public* administration as a discipline and as a potential science are much wider than the problems of *administration*' (1947, p. 2; italics in the original). In his view, the discipline of public administration was inevitably involved in the consideration of ethical values. Social ends are disputable in democratic societies because political values tend to be pluralistic. Since public administration is concerned with both means and ends, it cannot avoid making normative choices.

The second objection raised against the aspiration of public administration to formulate laws of universal validity resided in the fact that it ignored actual human behaviour. Dahl criticized public administration for neglecting what he designated as the 'human factor'. He argued that by focusing only on abstract administrative principles, public administration forgot to take into account the actual behaviour of the individuals involved. If the attitude of real people were considered, then public administration

would come to recognize that it could not possibly elaborate universal laws. For Dahl, laws of universal validity could not be formulated because human conduct was exceedingly complex, unpredictable and irrational.

There is yet a third problem mentioned by Dahl in his critique of the purported scientificity of public administration. It concerned the lack of attention to context evinced by most theories in the field of public administration. One implication of this insensitivity to context was the presumption that administrative principles that worked for one particular culture would be valid for another. For Dahl there was no basis for assuming that principles that were successful in one context, if replicated, would also be successful elsewhere. Due to the limitations imposed by specific contexts, Dahl encouraged public administration to follow a comparative approach.

These three objections led Dahl (1947, p. 11) to conclude that ‘we are a long way from a science of public administration’. In many ways, this was also the opinion of another influential scholar in the field of public administration, Dwight Waldo, whose critique of the dichotomy is discussed next.

#### 1.4.3 The discredit of the politics-administration dichotomy: Waldo’s view

Another important critique of EPA was formulated by American theorist Dwight Waldo, whose book *The Administrative State* published in 1948 rejected the notion that administration could be thoroughly dissociated from politics. The subtitle of his book sheds light on his theoretical perspective: *A Study of the Political Theory of American Public Administration*. In order to understand his critique of the dichotomy, this section summarizes some of his key ideas on this topic.

Waldo (1948) defined the dichotomy as a divide between decision and execution in policy-making, and argued that for a long time it provided a formula for EPA orthodoxy. For Waldo, however, this untenable division became clear when the following type of questions were raised: how should administrators proceed when the law was not clear? How should administrators decide when their private judgement differed from their



public responsibility? Waldo concluded that answers for these questions required transcending the politics-administration dichotomy.

For Waldo, the dichotomy that pervaded the orthodoxy of public administration was problematic and deserved critical scrutiny. Thus, he contended that

either as a description of the facts or a scheme of reform, any simple division of government into politics-and-administration is inadequate. As a description of fact it is inadequate because the governing process is a 'seamless web of discretion and action'. As a scheme of reform it is inadequate because it bears the same defect as the tripartite scheme [the separation of powers between the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches] it was designed to replace: it carries with it the idea of division, of dissimilarity, of antagonism (Waldo, 1948, p. 128).

Waldo (1948) explained that the politics-administration dichotomy was a working formula that allowed the conciliation of democratic values with the search for efficiency. By segregating administration from politics, the dichotomy entrusted only politicians with power to decide while denying any discretion to administrators. This was coherent in a democratic regime, in which the citizens voted for their leaders but not for public officials. By being excluded from the decisional process, administration could concentrate exclusively on the means, namely the efficient performance of administrative tasks. In this sense, Waldo noted, the formula was thought as a way of conciliating the search for efficiency within the broader framework of a representative government.

In reality, Waldo insisted, instead of a politics-administration dichotomy, what happened was the suppression of politics. In the case of the city-manager, for instance, all decisional powers concentrated in the hands of unelected experts. Decisions were taken and implemented by the same body. This represented an abolition of the separation of powers. Experts were empowered to decide not only the means but also the ends. Surprisingly, the centralization of political power in administrative agents was not deemed undemocratic, because it was supposed that experts aimed at the public good. In order to control the performance of the manager, institutional mechanisms were created to ensure accountability and respect for the public thus protecting the citizens 'against administrative incompetence, dishonesty, and aggrandizement' (Waldo, 1948, p. 37). In

spite of these forms of oversight, the city-manager formula undoubtedly implied a violation of the principle of separation of powers.

In his extensive review of the literature in the field of public administration, Waldo concluded that the pervasive presence of the dichotomy suggested the existence of an 'orthodoxy' in the field of public administration. Thus he explained that 'almost without exception the writers accept it as plain fact that there are but two parts or functions in the governmental process: decision and execution, politics and administration; that administration is a realm of expertise from which politics can be and should be largely excluded' (Waldo, 1948, p. 115). In Waldo's view, however, the dichotomy was increasingly perceived as problematic, which generated 'a feeling that the processes and the study of administration have matured, that they no longer need be isolated from the germs of politics. Administration can even think about invading the field of politics, the field of policy determination' (Waldo, 1948, p. 121).

Recognizing that the dichotomy was untenable, a new literature – which Waldo aptly named the 'rise of the heterodoxy' – had emerged. It emphasized that the government should be regarded as a unity and thus politics and administration belonged together within this unity. Therefore, politics and administration were envisaged as components of a larger structure. The challenge now was how to integrate them. In Waldo's view, the heterodox vision showed great awareness that political problems were administrative problems as well as that administrative problems were political problems.

Waldo's main contribution to the debate about the fall of EPA resided not only in the acknowledgement that the dichotomy was no longer sustainable but also in the recognition that the challenge was how to integrate politics and administration. He concluded his book with the warning that the demise of the dichotomy entailed the enlargement of the scope of public administration: 'In any event, if abandonment of the politics administration formula is taken seriously, if the demands of present world civilization upon public administration are met, administrative thought must establish a working relationship with every major province in the realm of human learning' (Waldo,

1948, p. 212). When politics and administration are thought together, Waldo noted, public administration has to expand its intellectual concerns beyond technical issues.

The death of the dichotomy also represented the decay of EPA as a discipline. In theory and in practice, there was a growing acceptance that politics and administration overlapped and could not be completely dissociated. The field of government studies underwent a period of self-reflection and soul-searching (Keller, 2007). Although to this day scholarship still debates the dichotomy politics-administration, the principles of EPA have long been dismissed as an inaccurate representation of how public administration effectively operates<sup>31</sup>. In the meantime, a new paradigm was being forged. The emergence of Policy Analysis is the topic of chapter 2.

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<sup>31</sup> Recent debates about the validity and explanatory potential of the politics-administration dichotomy have been carried out by Svvara (1985, 2001 and 2006) and Overeem (2005). See also Van Riper (1987).

## **Chapter 2 – Policy Analysis (PA): expertise as substitute for politics?**

### 2.1 Introduction

In the early 1940s, serious doubts were raised about the viability of Early Public Administration (EPA) as a sound and coherent approach. A theory of public administration was increasingly perceived as lacking sound principles, with its (self-ascribed) scientificity largely discredited. On the practical side, there was recognition that new tools of administration were required to equip governments to face their complex challenges. In theory and practice, a growing acknowledgement that public administration's concepts and techniques were inadequate opened the field to alternative views of public policy.

As EPA was declining as a field of academic research and as a practical orientation to government, a new set of ideas about policy-making were gaining momentum and would in future decades be disseminated initially in the United States, and later on in Europe. These innovative ideas were first developed as a series of quantitative methodologies – known as operations research and systems analysis – applied in the military sector during the Second World War. Because of their highly successful contribution to the military performance, operations research and systems analysis gained notoriety in academic circles and in the government.

Policy Analysis (PA), a groundbreaking framework that combined mathematical modelling with a broader strategic emphasis, emerged as an offshoot of operations research and systems analysis. The main appeal of PA was the possibility of harnessing the benefits of science and technology to enlighten the process of decision-making in the government. Although initially restricted to the field of national security, advocates of PA suggested that its techniques could be expanded to other policy areas. The first attempts to apply PA to non-military governmental agencies hark back to the early 1960s.

One basic assumption of PA – which is the second paradigm analysed in this thesis – was that its scientificity would make it more rigorous and reliable than previous attempts, particularly Early Public Administration (EPA). In contrast to public administration's focus on hierarchy and organizational control, PA concentrated on the application of scientific knowledge to improve the quality of the policy process. Departing from concerns with personnel, hierarchical structures, organizational charts, typical of public administration, the emerging Policy Analysis (PA) emphasized the importance of the thriving developments of science and technology to improve the rationality of the governmental action.

The comparison with public administration is fruitful in other aspects as well. As was discussed in chapter 1, Early Public Administration (EPA) attempted to set a sharp demarcation between politics and administration and proposed that public problems could be solved by the application of pure administrative means. A similar mistrust for politics is found throughout the history of PA. Politics was regarded by the advocates of PA as the realm of sub-optimal solutions in which negotiation, bargaining and conflict prevailed. This chapter will attempt to show that PA not only purported to offer a scientific orientation to governmental administration, but it also denigrated the value of politics. Some versions of PA assumed that the penetration of scientific knowledge in the process of governmental decision-making would eliminate the need for politics. In fact, this is a claim very similar to that proffered by EPA theorists. The depreciation of politics seems nonetheless surprising because of the growing recognition that politics and administration were inevitable intermingled.

The attempt to overcome the political dimension was recurrently justified in terms of the rise of science and technology. After all, in the knowledgeable society, as Lane (1966) put it, advanced scientific tools and sophisticated technological devices created conditions for the transcendence of politics and ideology. Along similar lines, Price (1965, p. 222) argued in his book *The Scientific Estate* that 'now that great issues turn on new scientific discoveries far too complicated for politicians to comprehend many people doubt that representative institutions can still do their job'. Commenting on the increasing 'esoteric nature of the scientific processes', he asked 'can the elected

representatives of the people maintain control over the major decisions of the government?'.

Other scholars were more optimistic – among them Harold Lasswell, the founder of PA – and believed that the unprecedented scientific and technical development meant that governments could entrust their decisions to experts who possessed the skills and methodologies to prescribe the best remedies to cure the illnesses of society. PA was, Parsons (2005, p. 20) observed, ‘in all essentials a belief in social science as a form of engineering or medicine’.

The attempt to exclude politics was not inconsequential. On the contrary, the aversion of PA to politics was one of the factors that propelled its decline. As DeLeon (1988) noted, the expectation that social problems could be addressed by purely technical means ended up in frustration and disappointment. After a period of experimentation, it became clear that the government could not rely entirely in PA as a decision-making tool. The ambitions of PA contrasted to its achievements, leading to an important reflection on its limitations. Sharing a similar fate to Early Public Administration (EPA), it turned out that (among other problems) the insistent denial of politics constrained the viability of its project. By the late 1960s, the difficulties of PA were evident, thus contributing to the search for alternative models and paradigms. Scholars would note that this scepticism was felt by both politicians and experts:

The use of policy analysis and policy evaluation to shape public decisions has often been similarly frustrated ... Such disappointments became more numerous as the volume of policy research grew during the 1960s. By the end of the decade, politicians and experts alike had begun to express serious doubts about the value and efficiency of extensive analyses and evaluations that had been undertaken (Greenberger, Crenson and Crissey, 1976, p. 36).

In distinct ways, and for distinct reasons, various theorists denounced PA’s inattention to politics. Lindblom claimed that different from textbook’s models, real policy-making was complex, fluid and conflictual instead of a rational and linear sequence of technical steps. Wildavsky also reacted to the attempt to reduce policy-making to a formula. He contended that a purely technical approach to policy-making was unrealistic and based on false assumptions. Only when inscribed within a broader political framework, could

policy-making be properly understood. Dryzek, for his turn, argued that PA presupposed an instrumental rationality that brought harmful consequences for pluralistic societies. PA, in his view, enforced a technocratic and anti-democratic attitude to policy-making. The theoretical contributions of these authors, which will be explored in detail in the chapter, suggest that PA's ideal of a politics-free, expertise-led approach to policy-making was problematic.

In terms of structure, this chapter is organized as follows. Section 2.2 provides a historical outline, describing how PA originated and how it became a widespread analytical tool for decision-making in the government. Section 2.3 discusses PA's key concepts particularly through the examination of Lasswell's ideas. Section 2.4 investigates PA's main limitations and addresses the difficulties it encountered when implemented in governmental agencies.

## 2.2 The historical context of PA

The growing scepticism that pervaded the Early Public Administration (EPA) approach culminated in the recognition that new concepts and methods were required to guide the theory and practice of governments. As mentioned earlier, the decline of EPA was contemporary to the ascendancy of Policy Analysis (PA), which purported to offer scientific tools to help decision-makers choose the best policies<sup>32</sup>. While EPA was left in an identity crisis, alternative frameworks were emerging in the realm of public policy-making. For three decades, PA occupied a distinct place in the daily life of government offices and, as Deleon (2006) has indicated, most public agencies (at least in the United States) created a unit of PA to enlighten their policy formulation. This section explores how PA became a widespread tool for policy-making, by investigating its historical roots. By PA, it is meant 'an applied social science discipline which uses multiple

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<sup>32</sup> Radin (2000) interprets policy analysis as a continuation of, rather than a departure from, public administration. Similarly, Dunn (1981) argues that public policy analysis originates from the studies of public administration. For a contrast between policy and administration, see Parsons (2005) who suggests that the study of the policy process should be interpreted as 'an alternative focus to the study of constitutions, legislatures, and interest groups, and public administration' (Parsons, 2005, p. 21).

methods of inquiry and arguments to produce and transform policy relevant information that may be utilized in political settings to resolve policy problems' (Dunn, 1981, p. 35).

The antecedents of PA can be traced back to early endeavours to draw out 'intelligence' for the decision-making process of the government. In the 1930s, the role of the government had been largely expanded (in an unprecedented scale) as an attempt to solve the economic crisis caused by the Great Depression. In the United States, President Franklin Roosevelt faced the challenge of designing effective policies capable of restoring economic stability. One of his initiatives was to invite social scientists to work for the government as a strategy to improve the quality of policy-making. By attracting social scientists to 'enlighten' the policy process, Roosevelt expected that the application of the latest research techniques (especially those related to data gathering, mathematical modelling, statistical projections) would offer a sounder basis for the formulation of public policies (Greenberger, Crenson and Crissey, 1976).

The integration between academic knowledge and policy-making was a novelty, which opened up the opportunity for social scientists to supply a 'more informed, theoretically driven approach to governing' (Parsons, 2005, p. 17). Since the decade of the 1930s, and later on during the war, social scientists were given the opportunity to 'demonstrate their value in resolving practical problems' in different fields such as national security and social welfare (Dunn, 1981, p. 18). Holding positions in important public offices, sociologists and economists carried out surveys and empirical tests, made evaluations, identified trends, and ultimately devised policy strategies. Their mission was to gather knowledge and apply methodologies capable of enhancing the performance of public policies. The inroad of social scientists, which was originally conceived as provisional, proved nonetheless to have lasting consequences. The engagement of professional scientists became institutionalized in the 1940s with the creation of long-term positions not only in the government but also outside it, particularly in think-thanks and research centres (Greenberger, Crenson and Crissey, 1976).

The marriage of scientific knowledge with policy-making encouraged by President Roosevelt continued in later decades, especially during the Second World War.



Technical knowledge was of particular importance in the field of national security. It was believed that issues such as ‘soldier orientation and morale, combat performance of troops, estimation of war production, regulation of prices and rationing’ should not be decided arbitrarily, but rather rely on mathematical and statistical analyses (Dunn, 1981, p. 18). The adoption of quantitative methods, replacing rules-of-thumb, improvisation or mere guessing, was seen as indispensable to maximize military performance.

In particular, two analytical models were widely employed in the military sector: operations research and systems analysis. It is worth briefly describing their chief features, since they would later become the basis for PA. Operations research evolved during the Second World War with the aim of offering quantitative methods to strengthen tactical operations, such as anti-submarine design, weapons management, and the use of the radar. As Smith (1966, p. 8) explained, the application of operations research encouraged ‘measurement, control and the mathematical analysis of complex operations’. The key principle of operations research was the belief in the existence of an optimal solution for every military problem.

The limits of operations research, however, were exposed when military decisions became more complex and required more sophisticated techniques capable of encompassing a wider range of variables. The need for a tool that combined quantitative estimates with strategic concerns paved the way for a new research technique called systems analysis. Growing out of operations research, systems analysis went beyond mathematical projections to encompass strategic calculations. Systems analysis proved useful because it was capable of constructing different scenarios of action under conditions of deep uncertainty. This points out to a key difference between the two approaches: whereas ‘traditional operations research tends toward elaborate mathematical techniques and the analysis of low-level tactical problems where objectives are precisely stated and admit of simple solution’, systems analysis assumed that policy objectives are rarely clear and unambiguous (Smith, 1966, p. 9).

Systems analysis also sought to integrate different skills into a common framework in order to identify the best solution for a problem. In this way, it worked as a mediator

across different specializations. The idea was to gather information from different knowledge sources (initially from physics and mathematics, and later shifting to economics) with the purpose of formulating alternative courses of action and then assessing their main consequences. In a context marked by unpredictability, systems analysis aimed at enlightening the judgement of the decision-maker by providing a set of policy options.

As systems analysis emerged to overcome the limits of operations research, so would Policy Analysis (PA) be developed as an attempt to improve systems analysis. The basic difference is that systems analysis was conceived for military purposes while PA was thought of as a framework applicable to any policy area. Moreover, PA was less concerned with calculations and rather focused on the design of policies that could meet the targets set by the policy-makers.

The development of PA was not the work of a single individual, but a gradual research process that encompassed public and private organizations. As Dunn (1981) has pointed out, Rand Corporation, a non-profit research institute, has played a pivotal role in the transition from systems analysis to PA. Founded in 1946, the activities of Rand Corporation focused initially on engineering and mathematical research. Among its major achievements were the construction of sophisticated analytical tools such as linear programming and game theory. In the 1950s, however, Rand Corporation's chief activities were directed toward more strategic concerns. Besides creating systems analysis, Rand also developed studies in policy areas such as budgeting and planning. Paving the way for the advent of PA, Rand scientists devised management techniques to guide the allocation of financial resources. As Smith (1966) contended, this concern with public management was essential for a shift from (military-centred) systems analysis to (government-oriented) PA<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Remarkably, Rand Corporation employed a vast number of scientists and researchers that would in later years diffuse their policy knowledge throughout government agencies. The initial attempts to disseminate Rand's expertise hark back, according to Smith (1966), to the growing popularity of systems analysis in the early 1960s. President Kennedy's decision to set up working groups to examine the potential contribution of advisory organizations also enabled organizational knowledge developed by Rand to be transmitted to government units.

The most important product of Rand's research was the program-budgeting or PPBS (which stands for planning-programming-budgeting system). PPBS, as a policy tool, aimed at offering a rational basis for definition of programs, selection of strategies and measurement of results. It was conceived as a managerial instrument that indicated the costs and benefits of each public policy, therefore helping the decision-maker to choose among different alternatives. It was through the extension of PPBS to public agencies that PA penetrated into the government. Although PPBS was conceived originally for military purposes, it was suggested that the technique had universal applicability<sup>34</sup>, and could therefore be extended to other policy areas, such as education, health, social welfare.

In 1965, enthusiastic towards PPBS, President Lyndon Johnson issued a directive mandating its implementation in all federal agencies. In spite of its success in the area of national security, the implementation of PPBS in the civilian agencies led to disappointment. Although theorists diverged on the reason of its failure (which will be explored later in this chapter), PPBS did not enable governments to improve the quality of their decisions. It was eventually recognized that most of the societal problems were exceedingly complex and not amenable to the type of analytical treatment offered by PPBS. With the growing discredit of PPBS, the popularity of PA also declined.

By the early 1970s, few government units still applied the PPBS, which was no longer conceived as a viable and reliable managerial tool. The inability of PPBS to solve public problems had several causes, particularly: i) lack of consensus on the goals of social policy, which were frequently contentious and ambiguous; ii) lack of timely, reliable information needed for evaluation purposes; iii) policy analysts' lack of familiarity with specific policy areas (education, health, welfare); iv) difficulties in translating policy choices into budget decisions (Greenberger, Crenson and Crissey, 1976, p. 34-5).

The demise of PPBS, however, does not necessarily imply that it was entirely removed from policy-making. They left a valuable legacy and even today practitioners in

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<sup>34</sup> PPBS elicited strong academic interest because it represented the best example of a practical application of PA. In fact, the success or failure of PPBS would ultimately determine the viability of Policy Analysis (PA) as a tool-kit for policy-making.

government still employ some of its ideas and instruments. Among other lasting impacts, and ‘despite mixed conclusions about its success as a tool for policy analysis’, Dunn (1981, p. 22) argues that ‘PPBS seems nevertheless to have diffused systematic procedures for rigorously testing policy alternatives’.

The dismissal of PPBS and the demise of PA bequeathed important lessons. Possibly, the most significant one was that few problems, if any, could be entirely solved by purely technical means. In particular, as DeLeon (1988) has convincingly suggested, the hypothesis that analytical tools are fully capable of resolving societal problems has not been confirmed. As the case of PPBS elucidated, even the most advanced mathematical tools failed to offer optimization solutions to tackle policy goals such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, criminality, to name just a few.

The inability of PA – as illustrated by the experience of PPBS – to solve public problems, however, cannot be understood only through an examination of its empirical development. As some scholars have argued, the eventual demise of PA was also a consequence of its intrinsic contradictions. In order to assess PA’s analytical limitations it is convenient to begin by describing its theoretical principles. This is the task of the next section.

### 2.3 The theoretical principles of PA

The empirical observation of the application of PA suggests that the ideal of an entirely analytical style of policy-making, supported by sophisticated scientific models and tools, is problematic and infeasible. Before discussing the analytical shortcomings of PA, however, it is important to describe what their proponents really advocated. It might be surprising to learn that the technocratic view that came to dominate PA throughout the 1960s (particularly in the United States) did not derive directly from the prescriptions of the authors who first formulate it. In order to clarify the theoretical assumptions of PA, the chapter now turns to the examination of the work of Harold Lasswell.

The political scientist Harold Lasswell is widely regarded by the literature as the pioneer of PA, understood as a systematic field of inquiry. In 1951, he co-edited with Daniel Lerner the book *The Policy Sciences*, which included a series of articles by scholars from different disciplines who reflected upon the meaning of PA. In the first chapter of the book, entitled 'The Policy Orientation', Lasswell articulated the main concepts of PA, depicted its fundamental features, and explained how it differed from other forms of inquiry (particularly the social sciences). In the policy literature, Lasswell's text is regarded as the inaugural study of the field. In his later publications, Lasswell (1956, 1963, and 1971) further elaborated his ideas.

Before analysing his theoretical arguments, it is worth emphasizing that Lasswell himself was not only a political theorist (Lasswell, 1936) but also more properly a policy scientist. Throughout his professional life, which was developed within not only the academic community (of political science) but also inside research centres and governmental departments, Lasswell was concerned with a type of knowledge that was simultaneously theoretical and policy-oriented. As Farr, Hacker and Kazee (2006) noted, many of his propositions derived from his personal involvement in the affairs of the government. 'He was himself the policy scientist of democracy ... and his vision of the policy sciences emerged from his own concrete life experiences in the 1940s and 1950s' (Farr, Hacker and Kazee, 2006, p. 580). Some biographical facts help to illustrate his participation in policy-centred institutions that had a formative impact in his research approach.

During the Second World War, Lasswell and several other social scientists joined the government with the purpose of developing sophisticated analyses that could guide decision-makers. Among other positions, Lasswell worked for the Experimental Division for the Study of War Time Communications, where his activities were primarily related to the impact of propaganda (Lasswell, 1927), although he occasionally offered consultancy on a broad range of issues which varied from trading to radio communication. With the experience he gathered in his work for the government, Lasswell spearheaded the foundation of various policy-oriented organizations. In 1944, he set up the Policy Sciences Council. In 1948, together with

other social scientists, he created the Policy Sciences Foundation. For his academic writings and policy formulations, he achieved growing prestige and, among other accomplishments, Lasswell was elected president of the American Political Science Association in 1956 (Farr, Hacker and Kazee, 2006).

Throughout his career, Lasswell insisted that a policy orientation should weave the threads of theory (science) and practice (decision-making). He contended that the complexity of the issues faced by contemporary societies required the most efficient use of intelligence and, unless the developments of science and technology were applied to the policy process, decisions would be based on simplistic criteria. In his view, the best way to tackle the complexity of public problems was through the application of scientific knowledge to decision-making. At the heart of his policy orientation was the assumption that the rationality of the policy process depended on the intensive use of the latest scientific discoveries. Encouraging the application of rigorous analytical methodologies to policy-making, Lasswell advocated the adoption of quantitative techniques and data-gathering tools to the decision process, which would make a scientific approach to government possible.

In Lasswell's view, much could be gained if policy-making adopted a scientific orientation<sup>35</sup>. The employment of quantitative methods would ensure that data was collected and treated in such a way as to enable decision-makers to choose the right policies. Different policy options could be measured tested, appraised in order to reveal the best alternative. By bringing intelligence to the policy process, the progress of scientific knowledge would not be confined to the academic community but would find practical application in the field of public policy. He claimed that governments (but actually any type of organization, such as private companies, trade unions, and churches) needed the knowledge produced by universities and research centres if they wished to improve the quality of their decision-making process.

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<sup>35</sup> But why should one think that what is created for scientific purposes could be harnessed for public decision-making? Lasswell (1971, p. 3-4) argues that there are no logical grounds for excluding scientific knowledge from being applied for public policy. In his view, the difference between science and policy-making is a matter of degree, not nature. Both are products of social forces that share a common desire for some kind of public enlightenment.

Instead of intuition or feeling, Lasswell suggested that decision-makers should rely on technical advice provided by experts, the policy scientists. Because collective resources were scarce, Lasswell argued, decision-makers should be guided by scientific knowledge and not by improvisation or sheer experience, as usually happened. In emphasizing the potential contribution of science and expertise to improve decision-making in the government, Lasswell was breaking with the tradition enshrined by Early Public Administration (EPA) that focused on organizational functions (hierarchy, specialization, unity of command)<sup>36</sup>. In contrast, for Lasswell, the task of a policy science was not administrative but strategic: ‘if goals are to be optimized, what strategies are most advantageous for achieving the objectives sought?’ (Lasswell, 1971, p. 55).

Lasswell (1971) suggested that his policy model was grounded on four key theoretical principles. The examination of these principles is important for two reasons. First, they illuminate the project envisaged by Lasswell, clarifying its main definitions. Second, they help to distinguish the policy project from alternative frameworks or academic disciplines, in particular Early Public Administration (EPA), the first paradigm investigated in this thesis.

Lasswell’s policy approach was contextual, problem-oriented, inter-disciplinary and normative. These four principles deserve to be analysed in more detail.

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<sup>36</sup> Among its main contributions, PA developed a jargon of its own that would be gradually incorporated in the daily life of governments. This policy vocabulary was not a mere semantic addition, but changed the perception of how governments operate. As Parsons (2005) remarked, the role of the government was re-framed as the construction of solutions for public problems through the design of programs. Policy-making was represented as a sequential succession of stages: problem identification, alternatives definition, program design. It is worth noting that this policy jargon is quite different from the language of EPA that was articulated in different terms, such as personnel, operation and maintenance, procurement, organization charts, command and control.

1. *Contextuality.* In his writings, Lasswell insisted on the fact that PA was not a speculative search for abstract knowledge. On the contrary, it focused on the practical problems of society in order to design viable solutions. The task of PA was contextual, he argued, in the sense that it attempted to supply the best scientific knowledge available to clarify particular policy options. Consequently, the function of the policy analysts was to act as mediators between theory and practice in order to enlighten the decision process by communicating to decision-makers the most convenient theories and methodologies applicable to solve a policy situation.
  
2. *Problem-orientation.* The primary task of PA was the identification of the main problems that afflicted society. Again, its chief concern was not knowledge generation *per se* but the provision of support and guidance for the decision-making process. Lasswell suggested that, from a PA perspective, the determinant object of inquiry was the public problem, that is, a relevant issue that demanded government attention and action. He warned, however, that not all problems of a given society were under the purview of PA, but only those that had a meaningful impact on the well-being of citizens. He also clarified that the role of the policy analyst was not only to help to solve a problem, but prior to that to contribute to elucidate which problems deserved the consideration of the decision-makers.
  
3. *Inter-disciplinarity.* A contextual and problem-orientated PA required an inter-disciplinary approach to knowledge. Lasswell (1951, p. 3) noted the harmful consequences of ‘an excessive atomization of knowledge’ and lamented the fact that academic knowledge became insulated and closed off communication and exchange across disciplines. Lasswell sustained that PA should employ an integrative attitude that sought to bring together the contribution of various kinds



of knowledge<sup>37</sup>. In addition, he explained that the type of knowledge proper to policy-making could be originated from natural, biological or social sciences, and would typically involve fields such as physics, biology, psychology, anthropology, political science, public administration, law, and economics.

4. *Normative character.* A contextual, problem-oriented and inter-disciplinary PA also required a fourth component, which according to Lasswell, was its normative condition. Writing in the historical context of the Cold War, he advocated the superiority of democratic societies over authoritarian regimes. In his view, PA should not be blind to this distinction. Thus, he usually spoke of the policy sciences of *democracy*, which reflected a normative commitment to democratic values and ideals. Democracy, Lasswell suggested, was the cornerstone of PA, ‘in which the ultimate goal is the realization of human dignity in theory and fact’ (1951, p. 15).

Lasswell not only defined the theoretical pillars of the policy approach, but he went further to propose how they should be articulated in more concrete terms. He suggested that these four principles could be operationalized in a sequence of policy stages, beginning with the identification of the problem to be tackled and ending in the choice of a particular course of action. It should be noted that although PA would in later years decline in popularity, the policy stages framework would remain as one of its main legacies<sup>38</sup>. It is still recommended by public policy textbooks and it is widely spread in the daily policy activity of government (Parsons, 2005). For their importance, it is worth describing the contents of the policy stages framework. The table 2.1 below depicts Lasswell’s policy stages model.

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<sup>37</sup> It is worth remarking that Lasswell conceived of his policy approach as an independent field of inquiry. In his view, policy sciences were not a specialization within the broader field of social sciences. They were, in contrast, the science that organized knowledge derived from different disciplines. Thus, he wrote that ‘we have become more aware of the policy process as a suitable object of study in its own right, primarily in the hope of improving the rationality of the flow of decision’ (Lasswell, 1951, p. 3).

<sup>38</sup> Lasswell’s ideas still have some impact on contemporary policy practices: ‘the early efforts and dicta of Lasswell remain valuable and continue to provide the foundation upon which the study of public policy is conducted’ (Howlett, Ramesh and Perl, 2009, p. 20).

Table 2.1 – Lasswell’s policy stages model

<i>Policy stages</i>	<i>Policy content</i>
Goal clarification	What situations are desired in the social process that can be modified by policy intervention?
Trend description	Which impact have (past and present) events on the achievement of those desired situations?
Analysis of conditions	Which factors were relevant to the occurrence of those trends?
Projection of development	If current policies are kept, can the desirable situations be achieved?
Invention, evaluation and selection of alternatives	What strategies or intermediate objectives should be introduced so that the desirable situations can be successfully accomplished?

Source: own elaboration based on Lasswell (1971, p. 39).

In practice, these five steps provide a guide for the work of the policy analyst. Initially, the challenge is the identification of the goal to be pursued (stage 1). In spite of its apparent simplicity, goals are not ‘out there’ to be picked, but they have to be carefully crafted. After the goal is established, the next task is to consider which factors have an impact on achieving these goals (stages 2 and 3). By examining the trajectory of previous actions, the analyst can deduce how each factor contributes (or not) to the achievement of the goal. Lasswell also noted that the analyst should consider the consequences of keeping current policies, that is, introducing no innovation (stage 4). After all these steps, the analyst is capable of knowing which realistic courses of action can be implemented to achieve the goal and solve the problem (stage 5). The selection of alternatives is a crucial moment of the policy process. And, as Lasswell warned, more often than not, the policy analyst is confronted with a myriad of policy possibilities, each yielding different implications.

Remarkably, the expertise of the policy analyst is taken to be decisive throughout all the policy stages. Quantitative methods, computer simulations, empirical tests – what Lasswell conceived as the intelligence in the policy process – could be employed with the purpose of finding the strategy that led to the best solution. The role of the policy analyst was to specify which strategies, resources, courses of action were required in order to achieve the goal. This information would have to be communicated to the decision-makers as guidance for their judgement. The policy analyst would also help to explain how those policy options differed from the current situation (and therefore which innovations were required). And, as Lasswell cautioned, the policy analyst should be flexible enough to tailor policy recommendations to the specific needs of decision-makers. Instead of presenting abstract theories, sophisticated methods, complex data tools, the analyst would attempt to interpret and translate them in a simplified language so that the advice could be rendered clear and intelligible. It was in this sense that Lasswell commented upon the role of policy analysts as mediators between theory and practice, linking researchers to decision-makers.

One of Lasswell's main arguments for a policy orientation was the idea that the rationality of the policy process depended on the level of expertise available. By employing scientific methods, political factors could be ignored. Lasswell (1951, p. 5) envisaged policy as being 'free of many of the undesirable connotations clustered about the word *political*, which is often believed to imply "partisanship" or "corruption"'. Although he did not explicitly dismiss the political nature of policy-making, Lasswell thought that the policy process could be greatly improved if it were grounded on expertise rather than politics. A suspicion of politics, which was pervasive in Early Public Administration (EPA), was also a feature of Policy Analysis (PA).

The emphasis on expertise would eventually pay off, Lasswell believed, by producing significant benefits for its citizens. A policy-oriented process enabled governments to gradually overcome economic and social problems, which meant in the long-term a more peaceful, satisfied and democratic society. The advantages of PA, Lasswell (1951, p. 8) noted, would eliminate the need for more radical political approaches: 'the basis is laid for a profound reconstruction of culture by continual study and emendation, and not

by (or certainly not alone by) the traditional methods of political agitation'. The policy orientation was therefore an alternative to revolutionary approaches, such as Marxism and Anarchism. By constant improvement of social institutions, PA created conditions for the increasing of societal welfare. Among other virtues, Lasswell contended, PA would enhance the appreciation for democratic values and if it were applied on a worldwide scale it could even reverse the trend toward authoritarianism that prevailed in several countries. In this sense, Lasswell's PA was also a remedy against authoritarian solutions.

Although his opinion varies throughout his writings<sup>39</sup>, Lasswell found no contradiction between expertise and democracy. On the contrary, expertise was conceived as crucial for the preservation of democratic practices and values. One strong defence of the democratic implications of expertise can be found in his book *Analysis of Political Behaviour* (1947) in which he was particularly insistent on the synergy between democracy and expertise. He contended that a democratic expert-driven policy process was the antidote against oligarchic forces that suppressed the freedom of society and oppressed the many for the benefit of a (privileged) few. Expertise was essential for the survival of democracy, he further noted, because democracy had to be continually protected. He claimed that if democracy was to be preserved, governments should encourage the role of expertise in the policy process: 'without knowledge, democracy will surely fall' (Lasswell, 1947, p. 1). Just to be sure: 'Without science, democracy is blind and weak. With science, democracy will not be blind and may be strong' (Lasswell, 1947, p. 12).

By channelling scientific intelligence to policy-making, an expertise-led PA would contribute to the strengthening of democracy. Nevertheless, how should the policy analyst act so as to enhance democratic attitudes? The task of the policy analyst, Lasswell noted, was to advise the decision-maker on which factors are likely to improve democratic practices and warn against policy changes that might be harmful for the polity. For instance, the policy analyst could identify which strategies were most conducive to political equality and then attempt to convince the decision-makers to

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<sup>39</sup> As Dryzek (1990, p. 113) argues, 'the most widely spread accepted characterization of Lasswellian policy sciences remains a technocratic one'.

implement them. In Lasswell's view, there was no contradiction between government's efficient performance and democratic progress in so far as expertise was guided by the values of a liberal and democratic civilization. Therefore, public policies were simultaneously technical and ideological, scientific and political (Lasswell, 1947, p. 122).

In Lasswell's view, democracy and expertise were complementary – not antagonistic – forces. They are mutually reinforcing: expertise strengthened democracy, and democracy in turn required expertise. When PA, however, began to be employed in practice as a policy method in the government, it soon became clear that the relationship between democracy and expertise was not so straightforward. The constitution of a technocratic elite illustrated unintended (anti-democratic) consequences not foreseen in Lasswell's writings. As the critics would later elaborate, PA faced important challenges, which are explored in the next section.

#### 2.4 The limitations of PA

Policy Analysis (PA), as conceived originally by Lasswell, was indeed an ambitious project. If its premises were true, then societies would progressively eradicate social problems. This would be made possible by increasing the rationality of the policy process, which would depend not on the fallible guessing of decision-makers, but rather on the intelligence and expertise brought about by policy analysts.

However, the adoption of PA by governments, initially in the United States and later in Europe, revealed that those high expectations were progressively dashed: societal problems were persistent in spite of the sophisticated models employed by analysts. As Deleon (1988, p. 25) has indicated, public problems 'refused to be corrected by textbook solutions'. Perplexed theorists would then ask questions of the sort: 'if you can land a man on the moon, why can't you solve the problems of the ghetto?' as the economist Richard Nelson (1977) wrote in his essays on policy issues. Much debate and controversy tried to make sense of this frustration by examining what went wrong. Why did PA fail?

There is an extensive literature examining the limitations of PA. The critique frequently gravitates around four main arguments. Contrary to PA's assumptions: i) the policy process was not a purely rational and technical exercise; ii) policy-making was complex, uncertain and conflictual; iii) the informational requirements PA imposed on public agencies were impossible to meet; iv) its emphasis on expertise had anti-democratic implications. Each of these arguments is now discussed.

#### 2.4.1 The limitations of PA (I): excessive reliance on expertise

One recurrent critique of PA pointed out to its excessive reliance on expertise. Critics of PA argued that the policy process could not be reduced to purely technical issues. This section examines the problems associated with an exclusive technical conception of public policy. Drawing on empirical examples, it is shown how decisions taken by governments require more than technical analysis and advice from experts, thus challenging the claim embraced by PA advocates that problems can be purely resolved by the application of analytical tools.

Deleon (1988) argues that the experience of PA needs to be assessed against an empirical background. In his view, key political events in U.S. history revealed the limitations of the approach. Each event yielded relevant lessons to be learned about the development of PA, and in each of these episodes, there were situations that challenged the capacity of PA to deliver solutions. Policy-makers, as Deleon (1988, p. 38) suggests, tended to over-emphasize the role of expertise<sup>40</sup> as if policy problems were entirely manageable by analytical modelling. He elaborates this argument by discussing three important episodes that had a formative influence in the development of PA. These episodes deserve closer examination.

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<sup>40</sup> Thus, Deleon (1988) explains that this happened because quantitative methodologies are believed to be value-free and also because values are thought as the exclusive domain of the policy-maker. In reality, however, the policy environment is not as sharply demarcated. In their government experience in the 1960s, policy analysts came to realize that: i) even the selection of methodologies implies choice of normative values; ii) values are pervasive throughout the policy process. Therefore, policy analysts themselves are not exempted from making normative choices.

1. *War on Poverty*. One important experience in testing the ability of PA to solve societal problems took place within the War on Poverty initiative carried out in the United States. In the 1960s, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson launched a series of policy projects aimed at reducing poverty levels. With the guidance of policy analysts, public programs were devised and implemented in different sectors, such as health, housing, education, criminality, judicial system, and social welfare. Most of these programs were under the coordination of the Office of Economic Opportunity, which employed PA to identify problems, define strategies, and find the optimal solutions (thus mirroring Lasswell's policy stages). Despite its initial high expectations and optimism, the War on Poverty failed to meet its targets.

According to DeLeon, the main difficulty was the inability to identify the causes of social problems. It turned out that the understanding of what factors were responsible for the occurrence of a particular problem was not straightforward (usually, the causes were multiple and inter-related). The complexity of singling out the causes also complicated the design of policy alternatives, thus hampering the application of sophisticated data modelling to generate optimal solutions to public problems.

Another caveat was the lack of consensus over the goals to be pursued. Frequently, policy analysts could not agree on which problems deserved to be regarded as a priority. Consequently, they had difficulties in proposing policy solutions as advice to decision-makers. It turned out that Lasswell's policy stages could not be properly accomplished. Goals and problems were unclear and hindered the formulation of policy alternatives. What had worked in the military field proved more complicated in the social area of policy-making. As DeLeon (1988, p. 65) puts it, 'the result, not surprisingly, was a decade of trial, error, and frustration, after which it was arguable if ten years and billions of dollars had produced any discernible, let alone effective, reliefs'.

These shortcomings that emerged during the War on Poverty had profound implications for the development of PA. First, it was acknowledged that PA had some important gaps that had to be bridged. It became clear, for instance, that it was not enough to formulate

a policy, because it also had to be implemented and later evaluated. But processes of implementation and evaluation were ignored by PA's theorists. In Lasswell's conception, the role of the policy analyst finished with the proposition of a policy alternative. Therefore, there was no guidance on the subsequent stages of public policy (namely, implementation and evaluation). In order to overcome these deficiencies, new streams of policy literature, addressing those gaps, flourished in the early 1970s, which resulted in the creation of two important policy fields: implementation (e.g. Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Bardach, 1977) and evaluation studies (e.g. Nagel, 1990; Fischer, 1995).

A second lesson drawn from the *War on Poverty*, according to Deleon (1988), was that policy studies lacked proper theories, methodologies, and even adequate data. In spite of Lasswell's framework, theoretical models were not developed enough to inform the design of public programs. Lasswell's framework was too general and abstract to offer concrete solutions to specific problems. Moreover, there was a shortage of reliable and timely data. The information required for processing the data was missing. Not only were social problems very complex, but public agencies had no available information to supply. These unexpected difficulties raised doubts about the power of PA to improve the rationality the policy process: 'The *War on Poverty* provided unprecedented opportunity for the policy sciences to win their professional and disciplinary laurels (but) these opportunities were not seized' (Deleon, 1988, p. 63; my italics).

2. *Vietnam*. Another important episode in the history of PA is related to the Vietnam War. It was assumed by the U.S. military intelligence that those techniques developed during the Second World War could be replicated with great success and ensure the defeat of the opponent. In particular, it has been assumed that systems analysis, as developed by RAND Corporation, could still be employed as a useful tool to maximize the attainment of military efficiency. The limitations of the techniques, however, became evident when it was reported that tactical strategies had been wrongly designed. Although the defeat in the war could not be ascribed to the improper application of analytical tools, the experience has



taught that normative aspects played a decisive role but were neglected by intelligence analysts.

Discussing the development of PA, Deleon suggests that the Vietnam episode teaches important lessons, which are worth synthesizing here. First, the idea that decision-making can be reduced to technical issues has proven untenable. In the case of the war, a purely rational decision-making was not sufficient to provide adequate solutions. There were other considerations that could not be decided on exclusively technical grounds. In addition, as Fischer (2003, p. 9) writes,

Despite these extensive analytical capabilities, however, Washington seriously miscalculated and mismanaged the Vietnam war. For many, the reliance on rational analytical techniques was a major factor contributing to the country's defeat. Not only did a heavy emphasis on quantitative analysis neglect critical social and political variables, but the analytical results seldom moved from the field back to Washington without political distortions. Moreover, policy debates in Washington almost always missed the moral dimensions of the war, which was to become the grist of the anti-war movement.

Second, the problem of data distortion had shown that information could be manipulated. Even though policy analysts were scientifically-minded their scientific credentials did not necessarily prevent them from adapting data to fit certain purposes. Their fallibility put in question the assumption that expertise is a sufficient condition to warrant solutions to public problems. Third, in spite of analytical recommendations, policy tended to be incremental. Decision-makers are usually reluctant to introduce radical changes that might subvert the status quo (Deleon, 1988, p. 64). These were valuable lessons that illustrate some of PA's limitations.

3. *Energy Crises*. Another formative event in the development of PA took place in the 1970s, when two energy crises, although highly predictable, could not be averted with the help of technical knowledge. In order to preclude the collapse of energy supply, the government decided to invest in expertise and entrust policy analysts to devise pre-emptive solutions. Employing mathematical and computational tools, the policy community made a vast range of quantitative simulations, which should have worked as the basis of policy recommendations capable of forestalling the eminent crises. But in spite of the positive prospects

of the project, the results were disappointing. Solutions were not achieved and there were several disruptions in the provision of energy.

Discussing the failures and lessons to be learnt from the energy crises, Deleon (1988, p. 72) argues that three main aspects deserve attention: i) although data was available, the policy analysts did not agree on which goals to achieve; ii) even though advanced computational tools were at their disposal, there was no consensus on which techniques to employ; iii) it was recognized that there are factors that are not known and therefore cannot be controlled. Deleon also observed that policy analysts enjoyed privileged research conditions (financial grants, technological equipment, trust from the government, time to identify solutions) but failed to display satisfactory results. Again, the ambitions of PA seemed to be excessive and signalled the need for more nuanced approaches that acknowledged the complexity and uncertainty of social phenomena, on one hand, and the importance of extending the scope beyond the purely technical aspects, on the other (Lovins, 1977).

What is possible to learn from these episodes? As Deleon (1988) has pointed out, empirical evidence suggests that PA failed to achieve many of its promises. One important conclusion is that the policy process is not reducible to exclusive technical aspects. The capacity of expertise alone to provide effective solution to problems can therefore be questioned. These episodes offer empirical evidence that challenge PA's assumption that societal problems are solvable by purely technical and analytical tools. But these are not the only shortcomings evinced by PA. As argued next, PA has also been criticized by failing to provide an accurate depiction of policy-making.

#### 2.4.2 The limitations of PA (II): inaccurate description of the policy-making process

Another sustained critique of PA is that it misrepresented the actual process of policy-making. Contrary to PA's assumptions, policy-making stages were not clear, sequential and linear. Empirical observation suggests a much messier picture. In practice, the policy process was more complex, uncertain and conflictual. This section explains how PA's description of policy-making has not provided an accurate portrait of how public

policies actually unfold in practice. It will draw particularly on the ideas of Charles Lindblom, eminent political theorist whose contributions were deeply influential in policy theorizing.

In his various writings, Lindblom expressed scepticism over rationalistic interpretations of the policy process. His analyses offer a convenient standpoint to examine the inaccuracy of some of PA's claims, particularly Lasswell's policy stages model. Most remarkably, Lindblom emphasized the uncertainty, unpredictability and conflictuality inherent to actual policy-making. He contested the depiction of policy-making as a sequence of clear and unambiguous stages that eventually lead to an optimal solution. In his view, the policy-making process is much more complex and conflictual<sup>41</sup>.

Against the idea that policies were the result of technical advice given by policy analysts, Lindblom argued that policies originate from a variety of sources, such as political negotiation, attempts to harness economic opportunities, or even spontaneous circumstances, in which individuals are not even aware that a policy is being created. Not only that, policies do not necessarily evolve in sequential and linear stages, as predicted by Lasswell's policy stages model. In practice, policy stages can happen simultaneously, or even in reserve order.

Lindblom also contended that rationalistic frameworks failed to appropriately depict how problems are formulated. For him, the task of identifying a policy problem is more intricate than conventionally assumed. A societal problem, Lindblom sustains, can be defined from different angles and is never explicitly 'given' to policy analysts. He exemplifies with the situation of an urban riot and asks how the problem can be 'technically' defined: break of the institutional order? Evidence of racial discrimination? Lack of empowerment of the black community? Low income? Urban disorganization? A (policy) problem is neither self-evident nor immediately identifiable through technical

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<sup>41</sup> Along similar lines, critics also pointed to the conflictual reality of policy-making in which policy means and goals are inherently disputable. Knowledge in the realm of public policy is always contestable and any attempt to dictate a 'single incontrovertible, objective understanding of policy problems' risks degenerating into a technocratic form of governance. The idea that policy issues are reducible to technical analysis is problematic (Colebatch, 2007; Howlett, Ramesh and Perl, 2009, p. 27).

analysis. Thus, the task of formulating a problem can be daunting, and contrary to Lasswell's assumptions, there are multiple ways of defining it.

The issue of problem definition, Lindblom suggests, is significant because it also elucidates how politics is implicated in the policy process. There is 'no way to settle the controversy by analysis', Lindblom (1968, p. 14) criticizes rationalistic frameworks such as PA for failing to 'evoke or suggest the distinctively political aspects of policy-making' (Lindblom, 1968, p. 4). For him, in order to correctly describe the policy-making process, which is uncertain and conflictual, it has to be situated within its broader political context<sup>42</sup>. Policy-making is not only about expertise, it is also – and mostly – about politics<sup>43</sup>.

The vision of policy-making as a political process is examined by Lindblom (1965) in his book *The Intelligence of Democracy*, in which he reiterates his disagreement with sequential and linear models, such as Lasswell's policy stages model. In contrast to rationalistic assumptions, Lindblom develops an analysis that takes into account the complexity and conflictuality of the policy process. Writing within the tradition of liberal pluralism, he proposes to envisage the policy process as a mechanism that coordinates a vast number of conflicting interests<sup>44</sup>. One typical policy situation, he argues, would involve public agencies, legislative bodies, interest groups, political parties, local community, all these policy actors striving for the accomplishment of their particular interests. In his view, a rational model of policy optimization is not capable of processing the different interests of all the groups. For Lindblom, the complexity of the

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<sup>42</sup> What happens, Lindblom asks, when it is unclear which goals should guide the work of the policy analyst? When there is disagreement among experts, who should decide which alternative to follow? In his view, the political system is ultimately responsible for resolving controversies and setting the key values to be followed by experts.

<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Lindblom (1968, p. 32) claims that PA itself should be interpreted as an instrument of power insofar as the decision to apply analysis is itself a political choice. PA can help decision-makers to persuade their audiences and find justification for their choices: it is a 'method of fighting' (Lindblom, 1968, p. 34).

<sup>44</sup> In contrast to PA, Lindblom emphasizes the importance of conflict in the policy-making process. In Lindblom's (1965, p. 304-5) view, conflict is useful in the coordination of mutually incompatible interests. It is how the policy process works within the political system. After all, he asks, how are individuals coordinated when there is no one coordinating them, when they share no common purpose, and in the absence of rules that determine how they should relate one to the other? (Lindblom, 1965, p. 3).

policy situation is only resolvable through the mediation of the political system. Through a series of procedures (such as negotiation, bargaining, compromise) the policy process coordinates the participation of the various actors until a final decision is reached. Thus, contrary to what Lasswell advocated, policy solutions are political – not technical – phenomena.

Lindblom's description of the policy-making process helps to visualize some of the limitations of PA<sup>45</sup>. Particularly, it shows that policy-making is, instead of a sequence of linear stages, a much more complex, uncertain and conflictual process. It also makes clear that a view of policy-making as a purely technical undertaking fails to acknowledge the importance of politics in coordinating conflictual interests.

#### 2.4.3 The limitations of PA (III): impossible informational requirements

Lindblom was not alone in his call for a political reading of the policy process<sup>46</sup>. Arguing against an excessive emphasis on science and expertise, political scientist Aaron Wildavsky also contended that the policy process was fundamentally a political (and not a technical) activity. In line with Lindblom's arguments, Wildavsky insisted on the centrality of the political dimension in understanding the policy process. The purpose of this section is to delineate Wildavsky's (1979) critique of PA and to highlight in particular how PA's methods imposed informational demands that could hardly be met by public agencies.

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<sup>45</sup> Lindblom pointed to one more interesting limitation. Arguing that policies tend to be incremental, he contends that policy analysts would refrain from more audacious policy advice in order to avoid resistance from decision-makers, who are usually unwilling to introduce radical changes. Otherwise, if 'revolutionary' advice is offered it can 'stimulate little support, and a massive opposition, in any society attached to habitual rules and attitudes'. The practical consequence is that advice will be constrained 'to a narrow range of new policy possibilities around the status quo' (Lindblom, 1968, p. 41).

<sup>46</sup> Meltzer (1976) argued that the type of choices policy analysts take contribute to make them political actors. He claimed that policy analysts could not be purely interpreted as technical experts because they also performed the role of political actors. Thus he stated that 'if they are not political in a grand way, they are certainly so in a small way' and suggested that 'whether they know it or not, they make a number of political decisions' (Meltzer, 1976, p. 11).

In *Speaking truth to power* Wildavsky (1979) discusses the informational demands imposed by PA over public agencies. Examining the case of program-budgeting, a variation of PPBS, he concluded that the amount of information required was far beyond the capacity of the public agencies. In his view, public agencies had limited knowledge of the costs and benefits of the policies they were implementing. For him the impossibility of gathering the information required by PA was a crucial issue that explained why it ‘has not succeed anywhere in the world it was tried’ (Wildavsky, 1979, p. 32).

The problem, however, was not that public agencies were ignorant about their own policies. In reality, the amount of information requested by PA tools was impossible to meet. Examining the conditions that would have to be fulfilled to satisfy PA’s requirements, Wildavsky concluded that unless information about all policy alternatives and their respective costs and benefits were available, PA experts could not provide advice. Evidently, the quantity of information was beyond human capacity, which led Wildavsky (1979, p. 32) to argue that the technical requirements of PA were ‘like the simultaneous equation of society in the sky’.

In spite of the lack of information, PA was still employed as a method of decision-making, with disastrous consequences. PA could not help to provide technical solutions for public problems in the absence of data. But there was reluctance among policy analysts to acknowledge it. ‘The trouble with experts’, as Wildavsky (1979, p. 35) puts it, ‘is not only that they may not know what they ought to know, but that they may pretend to know things that are actually unknown’. The consequence was that PA soon became discredited because it failed to offer workable solutions to public problems<sup>47</sup>.

The frustration with PA led to reflection on what could be reasonably expected from technical analysis. In Wildavsky’s view, it was mistaken to think that public problems could be solved technically. He concluded that PA, envisaged as a purely technical tool, was not a viable mode of making decisions that affected the collectivity (Wildavsky,

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<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the expectation that problems could be eradicated was unrealistic. Problems do not disappear: ‘It is our expectation of closure ... that is misleading’ (Wildavsky, 1979, p. 83).

1979, p. 124). Any formula that attempted to provide a final answer would imply the existence of an underlying societal consensus (which is at odds with the pluralistic character of democracies). One should be cautious of being governed by scientific formula devised by experts:

At first glance, the purely intellectual mode seems ideally suited to policy analysis, which seeks to bring intelligence to bear on policy. But this identity is achieved at the cost of triviality. Instead of innumerable minds, each with somewhat different perspective, there is only one. Instead of conflict there is consensus. Instead of problem solving, in short, there is suppression of problems. Every one either gets what he wants, or has to want what he gets. Thought is made supreme at the expense of having anything worth thinking about (Wildavsky, 1979, p. 125).

Wildavsky, however, did not argue that PA should be rejected. In his view, the problem was the assumption that technical formulas could solve public problems. If PA advocates acknowledged that political factors also played a key role in the formulation of problems as well in their solution, then PA could become a workable tool. When it is accepted that PA

is infused with politics, however, social forces guide intelligence ... By being tied to power, intellect becomes the hand maiden of power ... My conclusion is that policy analysis makes more sense as an aid to (rather than substitute for) the politics of social interaction (Wildavsky, 1979, p. 125).

Wildavsky's analysis reveals clearly the impossibility of meeting the informational requirements posed by PA tools. It also points out to the problematic assumption that societal problems can be managed on a purely rational, technical basis. In fact, one of the dangers of excessive emphasis on technique and expertise (at the expense of politics) lies in the formation of technocratic elites. This is the topic of the next section.

#### 2.4.4 The limitations of PA (IV): empowering a technocratic elite

Another critical aspect of PA relates to its technocratic implications. The recognition that PA displays technocratic features reinforces doubts about its desirability and viability. After all, does not the empowerment of a small elite of experts thwart the

pluralism of liberal democracies?<sup>48</sup> The problem with the technocratic orientation encouraged by PA resides in its anti-democratic implications: experts, who are not elected and have no political mandate, are ascribed the responsibility of leading society toward the common good. Moreover, as a group of scholars (later labelled as post-positivists) have contended, the nature of liberal pluralistic societies is not compatible with rule by an elite of experts. The purpose of this section is to discuss the anti-democratic implications of PA.

First of all, it is convenient to attempt to define the meaning of technocracy<sup>49</sup>. Policy theorist Frank Fischer conceptualizes technocracy as a ‘governance process dominated by technically trained knowledge elites’ and explains that ‘the function of the technocratic elite is to replace or control democratic deliberation and decision-making processes (based on conflicting interests) with a more technocratically informed discourse (based on scientific decision-making techniques)’. Not surprisingly the rise of a technocracy has important implications for how politics is perceived: ‘The result is the transformation of political issues into technically defined ends that can be pursued through administrative means’ (Fischer, 1993, p. 22).

It is true, however, that there is no consensus in the academic community whether PA is inherently technocratic, or rather, if it is the context in which it was implemented that explains its technocratic contours. It is convenient to scrutinize different viewpoints and examine their arguments. I would like to suggest that it is possible to discern three main strands in the policy literature: i) PA is technocratic and anti-democratic, and this should

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<sup>48</sup> Such a technocratic view of government departs from a liberal pluralist conception of politics that interprets policy-making as the result of group competition (political parties and interest groups). Fischer (1993), examining President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, argues that political leaders and their experts act as an independent social force, largely protected from public pressures. Typically, in technocratic regimes, a self-referential and secluded policy elite is divorced from the general public, interest groups, and political parties.

<sup>49</sup> Investigating the emergence of a technocratic class in the United States, Fischer argues that the implementation of the Great Society by President Lyndon Johnson represented the heyday of the technocratic regime, which operated according to the following sequence: i) experts were invited by the President to help devise public sector reforms; ii) experts were asked to define the problems and advocate solutions; iii) the Presidential cabinet attempted to involve the media so that a consensus on the importance of the reform was built; iv) reports were written and then released to the public (Fischer, 1993, p. 25-6).



be celebrated; ii) PA is an ambiguous combination of technocratic and democratic components; iii) PA is inherently technocratic and anti-democratic, and this should be deplored. These positions deserve to be investigated in more detail.

The first view considers that technocracy may well be the price to pay for larger doses of expertise and specialized knowledge in the policy process. Some scholars argue that the advent of a technological society characterized by unrelenting scientific development inevitably lead to the ascension of science and the demise of politics. One illustration of a technocratic reading of PA has been put forward by Lane (1966). He argues that in contemporary knowledgeable societies, in which science and information play eminent roles, the growing importance of expertise naturally implies the dominance of expertise over politics and ideology. In his words, ‘it appears to me that the political domain is shrinking and the knowledge domain is growing’ (Lane, 1966, p. 658).

A technocratic society entrusts experts to make decisions. In Lane’s view, when expertise is applied to the policy process, decisions are based on rational calculations that seek the most efficient performance. Politics and ideology become less necessary and can be increasingly replaced by more sound scientific forms of reasoning. When the policy process is delegated to experts, political means of reaching decisions can be dispensed with. This is positive, Lane argues, because politics is not primarily concerned with efficiency but with less noble goals such as acquisition of influence, power and votes. He considers that the political class should acknowledge the benefits of expertise and voluntarily seek the advice of experts. Although politics is not bound to disappear, the rise of science implies an inevitable decline of politics that tends to be progressively substituted by technical analysis.

Oft-cited in the literature, President Kennedy’s (1962) discourse at Yale University summarizes the thrust of technocratic thinking. It is an advocacy of the end of ideology and the death of politics:

I would like to say a word about the difference between myth and reality. Most of us are conditioned for many years to have a political viewpoint, Republican or

Democrat—liberal, conservative, moderate. The fact of the matter is that most of the problems, or at least many of them, that we now face are technical problems, are administrative problems. They are very sophisticated judgments, which do not lend themselves to the great sort of ‘passionate movements’ which have stirred this country so often in the past (JFK, Commencement Address at Yale University, May 21, 1962).

The celebration of technocracy found in Lane (1966) and Kennedy (1962), however, contrasts with a second theoretical perspective that prefers to conceive the relationship between technocracy and politics as marked by ambiguity. This is the case of Lasswell’s policy sciences project, discussed previously in section 2.3. The founder of PA attempted to integrate science and expertise within a broader democratic framework, ultimately embracing a view that the role of technocrats as policy advisers was not incompatible with the democratic aspirations of liberal societies. Lasswell considered that PA was simultaneously scientific and democratic. He argued that both orientations were reconcilable because democracy was the end of liberal societies, but in turn, democracy required expertise to survive.

Lasswell was ambiguous and throughout his extensive writings has oscillated between the technocratic and democratic poles. Scholars have argued that Lasswell favoured expertise but was against the elimination of politics (Deleon, 1994a). Those domains – science and politics – were reconcilable, although they might be in tension with each other. Douglas Torgerson, for instance, noted this ambivalence in Lasswell’s project: ‘Lasswell’s early work, as we have seen, was largely congruent with the technocratic ideal of an insular elite of experts. As he endorses a policy science of democracy, however, Lasswell advances the prospect that the project of contextual orientation might expand beyond the professional realm to promote widespread, enlightened participation in a democratic policy process’ (Torgerson, 1985, p. 253).

If expertise and politics could be integrated in a coherent framework, then technocratic implications were not an intrinsic feature of PA, but only a contingent aspect. According to this vision, the technocratic tendencies displayed by PA are not derived from Lasswell’s propositions, but are a circumstance of its implementation. Therefore, the technocratic character of PA is reversible. Torgerson (1995) suggests that more democratic forms of PA could have been implemented if the lessons taught by Lasswell

were followed more carefully. But in practice what happened was the triumph of the technocratic orientation at the expense of democratic values<sup>50</sup>.

According to Torgerson (1995), Lasswell's policy approach offers tools for the strengthening of democratic practices, such as the insinuation that citizens should be educated and encouraged to participate in public life. Citizen participation would foster a democratic culture capable of checking oligarchic and bureaucratic threats. Yet, in spite of Lasswell's warnings, PA fell prey to technocratic forces (Torgerson, 1995, p. 239)<sup>51</sup>. In conclusion, this second strand of the literature redeems Lasswell's PA, conceiving it as being simultaneously technocratic and democratic.

But there is, yet, a third strand on the policy literature that assumes that Lasswell's project was not ambiguous. These scholars disagree that expertise and democracy can be reconciled and suggests that PA is irrevocably technocratic and anti-democratic. This third view is now examined in more detail.

In his writings, John Dryzek deplores the increasing technocratic features of policy-making. He suggests that PA has operated according to an instrumental logic that is detrimental to democratic practices and institutions. In his assessment, a technocratic PA eventually leads to an oligarchic concentration of power in the hands of a few experts. Technocracy and democracy can hardly coexist because they have distinct dynamics<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Had PA respected the prescriptions of his original formulator, technocratic consequences might have been avoided. This position has been espoused by Torgerson (1995, p. 230) who writes that PA as practised in the 1970s 'followed a tendency within behaviourist political science to insulate inquiry from the language and experience of politics'. He argues that the policy orientation has succumbed to the technocratic temptation. In addition, he also clarifies that Lasswell was well aware of the dangers of oligarchic concentration of power and thus reinforced the democratic potential of PA.

<sup>51</sup> Torgerson (1995, p. 245) further notes that 'with Lasswell, however, a focus on the threats of bureaucracy and oligarchy does not become an explicit critique of technocracy ... Only with the advent of post-positivist policy genre in the 1980s does the critique of technocracy enter an entirely supportive intellectual terrain'. See also DeLeon (1994b).

<sup>52</sup> Along similar lines, Stone (2001) deplores the rejection of politics imbued in the technocratic project. In her view, technocratic PA conceives politics as the realm of irrationality. In order to insulate policy from the 'indignities of politics', PA purports to adopt a superior approach based on purely rational, analytic and scientific methodology. What is forgotten, she suggests, is that policy issues are first and foremost political problems to be negotiated within the political system. To suppress politics is not possible because the very strategy of eliminating politics is itself a political attitude.

PA, Dryzek (1990, p. 3) argues, is geared by an instrumental type of rationality that interprets policy-making as a process of selecting the best means to achieve certain ends. In practice, the instrumentalization of policy-making places the focus solely on the achievement of efficiency, thus displacing other legitimate values (such as political equality or social justice). There are various reasons why this instrumental rationality is anti-democratic. On a more philosophical level, Dryzek suggests that the instrumental rationality inherent to the technocratic attitude is pernicious because it ‘destroys the more congenial, spontaneous, egalitarian, and intrinsically egalitarian meaningful aspects of human association’ (Dryzek, 1990, p. 4). On a political level, for its turn, instrumental rationality is anti-democratic because it concentrates power on a small elite of enlightened experts who control decision-making power. On an operational level, Dryzek notes, the instrumental rationality is also flawed since it provides methods and techniques that are inadequate to solve complex social problems. In all three levels, technocracy and democracy are mutually exclusive realms that cannot be reconciled.

In Dryzek’s view, only a communicative approach to policy is capable of challenging the technocratic orientation in policy-making in such a way that ‘policy analysis might cease to be an agent of domination and become a material force for emancipation’ (Dryzek, 1990, p. 113). Among the perverse implications of technocratic behaviour, Dryzek points out the discouragement of political debate by focusing analysis solely on the achievement of efficiency. Moreover, it reduces politics to a game between technical elites who monopolize expert knowledge, thus strengthening bureaucratic and hierarchical forces that impose control and restrain freedom. As he observes, a technocratic PA coercively imposes a consensus that eliminates the possibility of contestation: ‘mainstream policy analysis fails to allow that the value positions surrounding any interesting policy issue are typically complex, controversial, and fluid’ (Dryzek, 1990, p. 115).

The only solution, in his view, to make PA compatible with democratic aspirations is to embrace a deliberative approach to public policy<sup>53</sup>, which will be the fourth paradigm examined in this thesis, and will be discussed in chapter 4. For Dryzek, from a deliberative perspective, democratic participation<sup>54</sup> is celebrated and encouraged, and policy-making is made more democratic. Thus, in Dryzek's vision, a democratic policy process cannot be actualized within the type of PA championed by Lasswell.

This is also the opinion espoused by Torgerson (2007) in his re-assessment of Lasswell's project. Reviewing his earlier position, he now suggests that the PA advocated by Lasswell should be conceptualized as technocratic, oligarchic and anti-democratic:

In the end, nonetheless, his [Lasswell's] account of the policy orientation not only recapitulates the old rationalist pattern of reason ruling the passions, but also repeats the gesture of making a rational elite the hero of the story. Despite Lasswell's pragmatism and careful democratic qualifications, it can be said with little exaggeration that the basic image is one of reason on top, calming and ordering a mass of unruly impulses below (Torgerson, 2007, p. 25).

Irrespective of Lasswell's attitude towards democracy, there is little doubt that the implementation of PA in governmental agencies led to the emergence of a technocratic elite, whose oligarchic behaviour is at odds with democratic values (Fischer, 1993). This is another limitation evinced by PA, whose fundamental limitation is connected with its inability to recognize the inescapability of the political<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Dryzek favours a participatory form of democracy that is at odds with the technocratic inclinations of PA: 'My own position is that defensible policy analysis must side with open communication and unrestricted participation; in other words, with participatory and discursive democracy' (Dryzek, 1993, p. 229).

<sup>54</sup> Along similar lines, Torgerson (2003, p. 137) argues that public participation in the policy process works as an antidote to technocratic rationale: 'Technocratic discourse is now liable to be exposed not as the voice of reason, but as a device serving irrational and illegitimate power. Public participation in policy discourse is now more difficult to oppose. No longer can liberal democratic notions easily resist demands for democratic participation in policy discourse'.

<sup>55</sup> The technocratic implications of PA were also visible in the way policy analysts organize themselves as a professional cluster. As Torgerson puts it, 'Yet, contrary to Lasswell's hopes for the policy orientation, the actual tendency has been the development of a professional identity marked by institutional allegiances to a sphere of organizations – that primarily of state agencies and large private corporations – tends to reinforce tendencies toward oligarchy and bureaucratism' (Torgerson, 2007, p. 24).

The dream of banishing politics, which has seduced Early Public Administration (EPA) theorists, has also been embraced by PA's advocates. In reality, however, what appeared to be a dream turned out to be an illusion. As several scholars argued, the policy process is both technical and political. The demise of the politics-administration dichotomy undermined the analytical power of EPA. Similarly, the critique of the technocratic approach weakened PA. What was at stake in the case of both paradigms was a misrecognition of the political.

The next two chapters will examine the emergence of two paradigms that aimed to connect politics with the policy process. The Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) is discussed in chapter 3, and the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) is studied in chapter 4. Both IPP and DPA reacted against the technocratic attitude of PA and adopted a much more favourable view of politics. Their endeavour, though not uncontroversial, has the merit of attempting to formulate a political interpretation of the policy process.

## **Chapter 3 – Interpretive Public Policy (IPP)**

### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the cornerstones of the third paradigm investigated in this thesis, which will be designated as Interpretive Public Policy (IPP). It aims fundamentally at explaining the meaning of an interpretive orientation in public policy by presenting its key concepts and ideas. It will be argued that IPP emerged as a reaction to the type of rationalistic and technocratic Policy Analysis (PA) that was practised particularly in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Although of mainly a theoretical (and philosophical) nature, IPP represents a crucial episode in the evolution of public policy that deserves to be described appropriately.

It is worth noting at the outset that because IPP can be depicted rather as a framework than a technique, this chapter will focus more on theory than practice. Different from Early Public Administration (chapter 1), and Policy Analysis (chapter 2), which comprised both theory and practice, IPP remains primarily an analytical tool. In fact, this is precisely one of IPP's main challenges: the identification of appropriate methodologies and techniques capable of making it operationalizable in administrative/policy settings (Hastings, 1998).

Although IPP still lacks implementation tools, there are other reasons that justify the importance of dedicating a whole chapter to study it. First, it provides a consistent critique of (rationalistic and technocratic) PA revealing that its foundations are problematic. Second, it sets the ground for the emergence of innovative policy orientations, such as the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) that will be discussed in chapter 4. Third, it offers key insights that can be applied to the development of an Agonistic Policy Model (APM) that will be delineated in chapter 5. Fourth, it represents an attempt to integrate the study of public policies with broader social and political concerns.

Indeed, of crucial importance to the theme of this thesis – the reluctance of public administration/policy inquiry to acknowledge its political condition – is how IPP attempts to break away from a tradition that persistently ignores politics. Different from EPA (that enshrined a politics-administration dichotomy) and PA (that favoured a technocratic and anti-political approach), IPP attempts to connect policy and politics. Therefore, a study whose chief aim is to grasp how administration/policy and politics are intertwined is strongly encouraged to take seriously the advent of IPP.

Another important remark concerns the choice for the title of this chapter. The notion of ‘interpretive’ public policy should be read as encompassing a myriad of policy schools and trends that share at least two features: i) a sceptical view of positivistic (or empiricist) PA; ii) an emphasis on the centrality of discourse to understand how policy-making operates. The term ‘interpretive’ has gained traction more recently with the periodic organization of conferences under the title *Interpretive Policy Analysis* (currently in its 9<sup>th</sup> edition) in which scholars and students identified with post-empiricist approaches to public policy gather together to share their intellectual contributions.

IPP does not exactly constitute an unified body of knowledge. Instead, it is most aptly characterized as an intersection of disparate theoretical strands whose unifying theme is the rejection of (positivistic) PA. As such, IPP interweaves contributions emanating from different intellectual fields. This is illustrated, for instance, by the fact that scholars have employed a variety of different terms to refer to this type of theorizing. Here are a few examples: discursive policy inquiry (Fischer, 2003), narrative policy analysis (Roe, 1994), interpretive policy analysis (Yanow, 2000), interpretive policy inquiry (Healy, 1986), rhetorics of policy analysis (Throgmorton, 1991), argumentative policy analysis (Fischer and Forester, 1993; Gottweis, 2006), discursive policy analysis (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012), postmodern policy analysis (Schram, 1993; Danziger, 1995), postmodern public administration (Fox and Miller, 1996), post-structuralist policy analysis (Gottweis, 2003), post-positivistic policy analysis (Torgerson, 1986; Ascher, 1987, Fischer, 1998; Durning, 1999; Dryzek, 2002) and post-empiricist policy analysis (Fischer, 2009).



In order to analyse and discuss the key ideas of IPP, this chapter is structured in six sections (apart from this introduction). Section 3.2 examines the emergence of an interpretive account of public policy as a critique of PA, and draws mainly from the work of Giandomenico Majone. Section 3.3 investigates the antecedents of IPP by exploring the contribution of five important scholars who advocated an interpretive view of public policy (in the 1970s and 1980s). Section 3.4 describes the main features of IPP by examining an important interpretive framework known as Narrative Policy Analysis (NPA). It also shows how this specific interpretive strand departs from PA. Section 3.5 emphasizes one important dimension of IPP, namely its politicization of the policy process, and describes different renderings of politics implicit in some accounts of IPP. Section 3.6 takes issue with the problem of IPP operationalization and argues that despite the absence of fully-fledged workable interpretive models, there are interesting attempts that deserve attention. Section 3.7 closes the chapter by pointing out how critics of IPP envisage its main shortcomings.

### 3.2 The emergence of the interpretive account as a critique of PA

Descriptions of IPP usually start with a reference (or more accurately with a critique) of PA. Fischer, Miller and Sidney (2007) provide a convenient illustration. They note that the foundation of PA is traditionally associated with Lasswell's policy sciences, which called for an ambitious multi-disciplinary project through which scientific knowledge would be applied to improve policy decisions. When PA was implemented in the government, however, it 'largely failed to take up Lasswell's bold vision, following instead a much narrower path of development'. As they write,

Policy analysis, as it is known today, has taken an empirical orientation geared more to managerial practices than to the facilitation of democratic government per se .... In contrast to a multidisciplinary methodological perspective, the field has been shaped by a more limiting methodological framework derived from the neopositivist/empiricist theories of knowledge that dominated the social sciences of the day ... In no small part, this has been driven by the dominant influence of economics and its positivist scientific methodologies on the development of the field (Fischer, Miller and Sidney, 2007, p. xix).

Although PA has achieved some success (with its methods being adopted not only in public agencies, but also in think tanks, research centres, academic groups), its practical results were not encouraging. Introduced in the federal agencies of the United States in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, PA (whose main implementation tool was PPBS) addressed a large range of societal problems such as criminality, poverty, unemployment, social inequality, inadequate health and education.

The appraisal of the outcomes of PPBS has generated a significant literature, which outlined the gap between the expectations and the concrete results. There is a recognition that although massive financial commitments had been made and highly qualified experts had been employed, the results achieved by policy analysts fell short of the expectation. For instance, Botner (1970, p. 424) contends that ‘while some worthwhile results have been achieved with PPBS to date, the system has failed to fulfil the expectations of its more ardent proponents’. Similarly, Harlow (1973, p. 86) discussing the decline of PPBS, writes that ‘it is not surprising to anyone that some of the exaggerated claims originally made for PPBS have not been fulfilled. What is surprising to many is that even modest progress seems hard to identify’.

In spite of a general agreement that PPBS has not been successful, the literature does not offer a consensual view about the reasons why it did not deliver robust outcomes. Attempting to critically evaluate the initial four years of the implementation of PPBS, Botner (1970) suggests that the explanation for the poor achievements of PPBS can be found in the hasty manner in which it was introduced in the government. He suggests that ‘with the benefit of hindsight, it appears that PPBS was introduced in civilian agencies abruptly, on too large a scale, and without adequate advance preparation and study’ (Botner, 1970, p. 424). For his turn, Harlow (1973) contends that PPBS failed mainly because it was not suitable for dealing with the complex and uncertain political environment in which decisions are characterized by high levels of conflict and disagreement. In his view, despite the sophistication of PPBS, it was insufficient to cope with the complexity of social problems.

Although critics differ in their assessment of why PA failed in its implementation (when assessed from the experience of PPBS), they generally agree that the outcomes were disappointing when confronted with the initial expectations<sup>56</sup>. Prompted by the shortcomings of PPBS, policy theorists searched for promising alternatives that could provide more suitable frameworks for designing and implementing public policies. In particular, as Fischer (1993) suggested, attention has turned to the epistemological foundations of PA, most notably to its positivistic assumptions. If the discipline of PA was to renew itself, it had to reconsider its own ontology (Hawkesworth, 1988; Dryzek, 1993). On similar lines, Ascher (1987) contended that in order to discover new foundations, PA had to distance itself from positivism and follow a distinct (ontological) path. In addition, as Fischer, Miller and Sidney (2007) intimated, the perceived inadequacies eventually led to an interpretive ‘turn’ in policy inquiry.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the advent of IPP is commonly associated with a critique of PA. With the purpose of describing how the interpretive approach emerged in the field of public policy, this text will now turn to the work of Giandomenico Majone, which provides both an account of PA’s main limitations but also indicates the new (interpretive) directions followed by policy inquiry. Majone is an important reference in IPP and his critique of PA frequently appears in interpretive analysis of public policy.

For the purposes of this chapter, Majone’s investigation is particularly relevant for two reasons. First, he convincingly showed that the deficiencies displayed by PA were intrinsic to its theoretical assumptions. He contested the idea that PA was a sound and workable method whose failure derived from the (empirical) way in which it was implemented. In his view, the problems of PA rested on the ontological assumptions, or more properly, in its positivistic approach to knowledge. His second important contribution was going beyond a critique<sup>57</sup> and advocating a new policy agenda. Thus he proposed a vision of public policy that transcended the rationalistic tenets of PA and

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<sup>56</sup> In his essay ‘Rescuing Policy Analysis From PPBS’, Wildavsky (1969) argues that PA should be preserved in spite of PPBS’s shortcomings.

<sup>57</sup> A critique of PA’s assumptions had already been formulated by various scholars. See for instance Lindblom (1959), Wildavsky (1966), and Tribe (1972).

instead ventured into the realm of interpretation, language and discourse. In terms of structure, this section is divided into two parts. Section 3.2.1 examines Majone's critique of PA and then section 3.2.2 depicts his defence of an interpretive/discursive orientation in public policy.

### 3.2.1 Majone's critique of PA

In his book *Evidence, Argument, and Persuasion in the Policy Process* Majone (1989) sets the task of understanding the theoretical assumptions of PA. He notes that PA and its precursors (operations research and systems analysis) were developed with the primary purpose of guiding the decision process of policy-makers. In his view, because PA was essentially geared to provide a reliable decisional tool, it followed a methodology that could be appropriately called 'decisionism' (the term is borrowed from Judith Shklar). By decisionism<sup>58</sup>, he meant an analytical orientation that focuses on how rational policy-makers make choices when confronted with alternative courses of action.

Depicting the features of decisionism, Majone explains that i) it presupposes a positivistic separation of facts and values and ii) it is oriented toward the maximization of outcomes. In fact, PA based on a decisionist methodology interprets the task of the policy-maker as the selection of the most convenient means to attain certain goals. And, in order to identify the best means that will lead to the desired outcomes, the decisionist rationale is structured as a sequence of policy stages: set objectives, define possible alternatives, evaluate their consequences, and choose the alternative that maximizes the attaining of the objectives at the least cost.

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<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that the notion of 'decisionism' has been employed in political science by other authors (e.g. Carl Schmitt) albeit in a very different connotation. To avoid confusion, it is advisable to quote the whole paragraph in which Majone situates his conceptualization of the term: 'The image that lies behind this methodology has been called decisionism – the "vision of a limited number of political actors engaged in making calculated choices among clearly conceived alternatives". An actor's choices are considered rational if they can be explained as the choosing of the best means to achieve given objectives' (Majone, 1989, p. 12).

Although widely employed in public agencies<sup>59</sup>, Majone argues, decisionism is not without troubles. In his view, decisionism offers a partial description of the policy process. The problem is not that decisionism is wrong, but that it is misleading: ‘it has led to a serious imbalance in the way we think about policy-making’ (Majone, 1989, p. 20). Throughout his book, Majone enumerates a series of deficiencies of the decisionist methodology<sup>60</sup>. Here four of them will be outlined: i) suppression of values; ii) disregard for justification; iii) lack of advocacy role; iv) inaccurate description of organizational behaviour. It is worth briefly discussing each of these problematic features of decisionism, because they will help to elucidate why PA has been enmeshed with difficulties since its inception.

1. *Suppression of values.* Within the decisionist framework, PA is conceived as a fact-based, scientific-oriented approach that regards ‘values’ as exogenous to the policy process. As discussed previously in this thesis, this strict separation between facts and values leads to a politics-administration divide (the case of EPA discussed in chapter 1) and to an over-emphasizing of technique over politics (the case of PA examined in chapter 2). The problem, however, is that this fact-value dichotomization is untenable, because facts and values are intertwined when it comes to the real life of policy-making. Thus, by privileging exclusively what is factual, and thus suppressing any legitimate role for values<sup>61</sup>, PA provides an inaccurate picture of the actual policy process.

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<sup>59</sup> Echoing Wildavsky, he contends that ‘since political science seemed unable to provide a set of concepts and analytic techniques comparable to the strong normative structure of microeconomics, the majority of policy analysts remained firmly committed to a decisionist methodology’ (Majone, 1989, p. 15).

<sup>60</sup> One important limitation of the decisionism is its focus placed on outcomes rather than processes. But processes are a crucial dimension of policy-making that should not be neglected. In his influential essay, Tribe (1972) sustains that it is mistaken to believe that the maximization of outcomes is independent of the respective (policy) process. For example, one might consider that any process that leads to a desirable result is satisfactory. However, policy practice shows that the choice of a particular process is determinant to the result of the action. The selection of a process is consequential for the success or failure of the policy as whole.

<sup>61</sup> PA focuses exclusively on factual data, thus excluding values from the concern of the policy analyst. The belief that only facts are relevant for policy decision ‘relegates values, criteria, judgements, and opinions to the domain of the irrational or the purely subjective’ (Majone, 1989, p. 23).

2. *Disregard for justification.* Majone also argued that the lack of concern with 'justification' is another limitation of decisionism. In policy-making, at least in democratic regimes, decisions must always be justified. Because political agents are held accountable for their actions, decisions need to be explained to the public. When policy-makers decide for the adoption of a particular public policy, they are usually required to expose the reasons why that choice was made, for example, by showing which benefits it brings to the citizens. Failure to justify decisions might raise doubts about its legitimacy. 'To decide, even to decide correctly, is never enough in politics. Decisions must be legitimated, accepted, and carried out. After the moment of choice comes the process of justification, explanation and persuasion' (Majone, 1989, p. 31). The problem, however, as Majone outlined, is that decisionism does not take justification into account, although it is nonetheless fundamental in policy-making.
  
3. *Lack of advocacy role.* The decisionist methodology also fails to properly acknowledge the role of advocacy in policy-making. By focusing solely on factual data and efficiency maximization, the advocacy dimension (which is inherent to policy-making) is ignored. Majone (1989, p. 38) distinguishes various types of policy advocacy (instructive, advisory and prescriptive), which although pervasive in the daily life of policy-making, are systematically omitted by decisionism. For instance, the policy-maker might be advised by policy analysts about issues of problem definition or policy implementation, which are not related to efficiency maximization. In other situations, the policy-maker might be interested in getting clarification or general advice. These examples illustrate circumstances in which the activity of policy-making is devoid of an instrumental concern with outcomes. Again, the role of advocacy, recurrent in daily life of organizations, is overlooked by a decisionist methodology.
  
4. *Inaccurate description of organizational behaviour.* A fourth limitation of the decisionist methodology is the assumption that organizations always decide according to the criteria of goal maximization. What is neglected, however, is that other factors often play a decisive role in the decision-making process.

Majone noted the relevance of two constraints that often divert policy-makers from picking the 'optimal' solution: political commitments and administrative loyalties. On one hand, political commitments include listening to demands of powerful groups and deciding whether to acquiesce to their exigencies. For example, the pressure of an interest group might compel the policy-maker to discard a policy that would be more efficient on a purely technical basis. On the other hand, administrative loyalties might prompt the policy-maker to decide in such a way as not to displease a particular agency (for example, the budget office). In either situation, political commitments or administrative loyalties, decisions are not taken according to the maximization criterion, as assumed by decisionism.

These four points suggest that decisionism is problematic because it does not properly reflect how public policies effectively happen in practice. Thus, Majone proposes that PA should question its decisionist roots. The adoption of decisionism is particularly harmful because it is predicated on an instrumentalist view of policy-making that construes policies purely in terms of (efficiency) maximization. In conclusion, the decisionist view is too narrow and does not accurately capture how policy-making unfolds in practice. In order to find a framework that more appropriately mirrors the policy process, Majone recommends a departure from the decisionist tradition. As examined in the next section, he urges PA to revisit its assumptions by redirecting its attention to the crucial role played by language and interpretation in the policy process.

### 3.2.2 From decisionism to argumentation: toward an interpretive orientation of public policy

After delineating a critique of decisionism, Majone analyses how the policy process actually unravels in real life. In his view, the empirical investigation of the policy process reveals a different picture than that portrayed by decisionism. Public policies are not means to achieve specific ends, as the decisionist view assumes. Instead, they are discursive artefacts mediated by language and interpretation. Policies, Majone notes, are the product of exchange of opinions. In fact, policy-makers decide, not by

instrumentally pursuing the best means to achieve specific ends, but through a continuous process of argumentation.

In order to justify why an interpretive view is more adequate to describe the policy process, Majone calls attention to the distinction between science and policy. He argues that the trend of assimilating public policies to scientific procedures, as PA has attempted to do, is profoundly misleading. In his view, science and policy are two distinct domains, with their own rationales and procedures. He proposes to clarify their differences and explains that scientific knowledge follows a deductive method, whereas the policy process is fundamentally geared by argumentation. Moreover, scientific knowledge is based on formal proof and logical deduction with theories being formally demonstrated by drawing logical inferences from axioms.

Policy-making, however, does not follow scientific procedures, as enthusiastically suggested by PA's advocates (Lasswell, in particular). The main reason is that public policies are not primarily concerned with formulation of theories, verification of hypotheses, control of experiments, prediction of events. In contrast, policies are produced in the same way as daily informal conversations are structured, that is, as a continuous exchange of opinions (that eventually culminate in a decision). Majone explains that the policy process does not have the purpose of generating 'formal proofs but only persuasive arguments' (Majone, 1989, p. 7). In his view, public policy is concerned with debate, dialogue, conversation and not with logical and abstract reasoning or formal demonstration.

This distinction between science and policy has important implications (not acknowledged by PA though). Since policy-making is construed as being similar to an informal conversation, anyone can enter in a policy dialogue. Again, there is a radical departure from how science proceeds: the policy dialogue is open and unrestricted



instead of being confined to the interplay of experts<sup>62</sup>. Different from scientific demonstration that is a purely intellectual exercise performed by experts, policy-making is an interactive process that builds on practical reasoning<sup>63</sup> (Majone, 1989, p. 22-3). There is no reason why experts should play a special role in the policy process since the aim is not to produce scientific knowledge but rather to enable the expression of a diversity of viewpoints. The outcome of policy-making is ‘not a formal proof, but a shared understanding of the issue under discussion’ (Majone, 1989, p. 7).

Science and policy differ in other aspects as well. Majone discusses the role of empirical evidence. In science, empirical evidence is indispensable and hypotheses are confirmed or rejected depending on the existence of evidence. In policy, however, factual evidence is relevant, but only insofar as it is articulated within an argument. Policy actors are not data-collectors but rather producers of arguments, whose main concern is to ‘provide evidence which, together with other sources of information, may be used in arguments supporting a certain conclusion or recommendation’ (Majone, 1989, p. 51).

There is yet another key distinction between science and policy. Whereas science aims for the development of the best theoretical model, which will excel in explanatory or predictive powers, policy does not value theoretical sophistication per se, but only if it is

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<sup>62</sup> By asserting that policy is an open domain that requires no previous expertise, Majone offers a more democratic understanding of the policy process when compared with the technocratic view espoused by PA. In fact, he recognizes that an interpretive view is more attuned to the democratic regime. For him, both policy and democratic politics are fundamentally persuasive activities, since ‘political parties, the electorate, the legislature, the executive, the courts, the media, interest groups, and independent experts all engage in a continuous process of debate and reciprocal persuasion’ (Majone, 1989, p. 1). When conceived in interpretive terms, the democratic potential of public policies can be more acknowledged.

<sup>63</sup> Practical reasoning – frequently associated with the Greek concept of *phronesis* – offers a more adequate ground (than purely theoretical reasoning) to understand the nature of public policies. Because *phronesis* points out to a type of reasoning that connects theory and practice, ideas and action, it is better positioned to elucidate the meaning of public policies. Along these lines, Canadian policy theorist Douglas Torgerson suggests that *phronesis* offers a more convenient epistemic standpoint not only to study policy-making but also to challenge the ‘persistence of positivistic and technocratic expectations in the wider context of discourses associated with contemporary administrative institutions’ (Torgerson, 1995, p. 227). On the subject of *phronesis* in social sciences, see also Flyvbjerg (2001) and Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram (2012).

capable of being incorporated into a persuasive argument<sup>64</sup>. In this sense, Majone writes that ‘a good model is merely one type of evidence among others, not the end of the argument, much less the ultimate authority’ (Majone, 1989, p. 51). Again, Majone attempts to prove his point: unlike science, policy is an interpretive practice.

Having delineated important distinctions between science and policy, Majone (1989) suggests that public policies should be conceived in interpretive – not decisionist – terms. Contrary to Lasswell’s enthusiastic vindication of a scientific PA, as discussed in chapter 2, the terms ‘scientific’ and ‘policy’ do not dovetail. Science is about deduction and formal proof, whereas policy is about exchange of arguments. A scientific PA, therefore, attempts to connect elements whose logic are distinct.

As stated in the beginning of this section, Majone’s contribution is twofold. On one hand, he outlines a critique of decisionism, depicting some of its shortcomings. On the other hand, he proposes that Policy Analysis (PA) could be restructured by shifting away from the decisionist methodology toward a more interpretive (argumentative) view of the policy process. Having presented Majone’s advocacy for an interpretive view, it is convenient to explore how the Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) began to be gradually delineated through the contributions of several policy scholars. This is the aim of the next section.

### 3.3 A diachronic view of IPP

More heterodox interpretations of public policy were disseminated in the 1970s. That is when scholars in the field of public policy started to question some of the positivist and empiricist assumptions of the discipline and turned their attention to alternative lines of thought. Scholars of different intellectual traditions expressed their discontent against the dominant problem-solving view of public policy – whose model was PA – and proposed different ways of regarding the policy process. Five important contributions will now be examined in this section. Their writings exemplify not only a discomfort

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<sup>64</sup> In fact, policy is structured around arguments, which are ‘typically a complex blend of factual propositions, logical deductions, evaluations, and recommendations’ (Majone, 1989, p. 44).

with (positivistic) PA but also illustrate theoretical endeavours to construct innovative paths.

In an influential essay titled ‘Policy Science: Analysis or Ideology?’, published in the early 1970s, Tribe (1972, p. 67) critiqued ‘the techniques and principles of problem-solving variously referred to as policy science, cost-benefit analysis, operations research, systems analysis, and decision theory’ and argued that they ‘present difficulties shared by dominant or emerging styles of thought in a wide variety of disciplines’. Interestingly, he pointed out that the limitations of PA derived from a positivistic approach to knowledge, or as he put it, from ‘a conviction of their transparency to considerations of value and their neutrality with respect to fundamental world views and to more or less ultimate ends’ (Tribe, 1972, p. 75). As a consequence of this belief in the possibility of sharply distinguishing between facts and values, a false notion of the neutrality of technique was produced and thus, ‘the myth endures that the techniques in themselves lack substantive content, that intrinsically they provide nothing beyond value free devices for organizing thought in rational ways – methods for sorting out issues and objectively clarifying the empirical relationships among alternative actions and their likely consequences’ (Tribe, 1972, p. 75). Tribe, however, was not a lonely voice in his view of positivism as the undermining factor of PA.

In *Social Science and Public Policy*, Rein (1976) also questioned the positivistic logic of PA and went beyond by suggesting that an interpretive orientation would arguably transcend the hindrances posed by positivism. Reflecting on the relationship between social science and public policies, he set the task of identifying an alternative to positivism in PA, which he considered incapable of dealing with the complex, uncertain and controversial problems that characterize the daily life of policy-making. Opting for a ‘value critical’ perspective, Rein (1976) suggested that the focus of PA should shift away from the search for universal laws proper to positivism. In his view, attention should be placed on discursive artefacts<sup>65</sup>, such as narratives, storytelling, argumentation, analogies and metaphors that are more apt to describe the policy world

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<sup>65</sup> Thus he contends that an ‘important alternative to the search for general predictive laws, in the positivist tradition, is the narrative method of linking together isolated events, empirical studies and policy intentions which I call “storytelling”’ (Rein, 1976, p. 87).

than the positivistic means-ends instrumental approach (Rein, 1976, p. 14). Although Rein did not fully provide an interpretive account of public policy, his contribution was nonetheless significant because he not only described the limitations of PA but also anticipated the interpretive research direction that would be more systematically embraced later on.

The departure from a positivistic toward an interpretive approach to public policy has also been anticipated by Smith (1982) who argued in his work 'Phenomenology of the Policy Process' that the methodological foundations of PA remained fragile. In his quest for stronger principles, he drew on the phenomenology developed by Alfred Schutz. Smith believed that only phenomenology could offer consistent conceptual tools to ground the study of public policy. In particular, he argued that phenomenology was best suited for the task because of its capacity to deal with the indeterminacy and contingency inherent to the policy process. In Smith's (1982, p. 10) view, 'because preferences and expectations diverge, the world of policy is a changing world', and only a policy typology based on phenomenological principles could properly capture this instability and unpredictability. By focusing attention on the subjective meaning of the action, phenomenology would help PA to carve out its transition from instrumental problem-solving to a meaning-centred policy interpretation.

Also sympathetic to phenomenology, Dryzek inscribed the policy process within the broader realm of hermeneutics and claimed that the role of the policy analyst went beyond that of 'provider of technical solutions'. In 'Policy Analysis as a Hermeneutic Activity', Dryzek (1982, p. 309) noted that

We have indeed travelled far from the heady days of the 1960s, when it was widely believed that, given enough analysis and federal government money, it was possible to solve any social problem. Today, one finds widespread doubt among both policy-makers and social scientists – not least policy analysts themselves – concerning the ability of social science to contribute to social problem solving.

In his view, the challenge faced by the discipline of PA in the early 1980s could be synthesized as the need 'to carve out a constructive role for social science and policy analysis while recognizing the reality of decision processes' (Dryzek, 1982, p. 310).

Critical of positivistic PA that over-emphasized the role of technique and expertise<sup>66</sup>, Dryzek argued in favour of a contextual approach to policy analysis, to which a hermeneutic approach might offer a significant contribution. After examining the literature on policy models, he noted that insufficient attention has been paid to public policy as hermeneutic activity. Delineating a hermeneutic policy model, Dryzek noted that ‘the hermeneutic image is of discourse and dialectic rather than instrumental, purposive action’. Dryzek’s (1982) hermeneutic approach also largely anticipated many of the tenets of IPP.

Although writing in the early 1990s, Forester (1990) offered a pioneering illustration of how a non-positivistic PA could be applied in the field of public planning. He presented a case study in which the processes of policy formulation and implementation were interpreted through the lenses of phenomenology. In particular, he justified his claim for a phenomenological approach on the grounds that it was more suitable to describe policy-making than the dominant positivistic PA. He argued that policies should not be primarily defined as technical means to achieve certain ends. Instead, they could be construed as a narrative in which ‘arguments are given, interpreted, and elaborated’ (Forester, 1990, p. 58). In his view, a phenomenological account that focused on the meaning of action was more apt to describe the policy process. Thus, he considered that ‘by revealing the phenomenological character of the planners’ and administrator’s practice, we can make the strongest argument for the necessity of phenomenological analysis’ (Forester, 1990, p. 58).

In their different ways, these five scholars conveyed not only a widespread dissatisfaction with a positivistic type of PA, but also (with the exception of Tribe) displayed their sympathy for a vision of public policy as an interpretive artefact. Although they disseminated important critical ideas, they did not elaborate a (more fully-fledged) interpretive view of public policy, which would have to wait until the 1990s (White, 1999). But, they had the merit of pointing to the research direction that would be later followed by interpretive theorists, whose ideas are examined next.

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<sup>66</sup> Dryzek (1982, p. 323) clarifies, however, that his hermeneutic model does not imply that positivistic approaches to policy analysis should be completely abandoned.

### 3.4 What is IPP: the example of Narrative Policy Analysis (NPA)

Different from PA, which was largely identified with Lasswell's writings, IPP cannot be associated with the work of a single scholar. Instead, it is usually understood as the culmination of a wide range of theoretical perspectives developed by theorists writing within different intellectual traditions<sup>67</sup>. In spite of not belonging to a common policy 'school', these scholars share a mutual recognition of the limitations of (positivistic) PA. This section discusses what IPP proposes, and how it operates, by examining an interpretive policy framework that is known as 'Narrative Policy Analysis' (NPA)<sup>68</sup>.

The depiction of NPA is taken in three steps. First, the emergence of NPA is (briefly) contextualized within the wider landscape of policy studies. Second, the meaning of NPA is explored and its key ideas are presented. Third, the main differences between NPA and (positivistic) PA are stressed.

Initially, it is convenient to situate NPA within the broader field of policy inquiry. Described by Fischer (2003, p. 161) as an 'emerging and promising orientation in policy analysis', NPA has mostly drawn from post-structuralism and its emphasis on discourse<sup>69</sup>. The pioneer study of Kaplan (1986) is usually cited as the inception of NPA, with Roe (1994) and Stone (2001) having offered the most well known theoretical

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<sup>67</sup> Thus, Fischer (2003, p. 12) writes that 'influenced by the contributions of critical theory, post-structuralism, social constructionism, postmodernism, and discourse analysis emerging in other fields, these scholars began to take a more distinctively epistemological approach, which can for general purposes loosely labelled "postpositivism" or "postempiricism"'.

<sup>68</sup> The choice for presenting NPA as an exemplar of IPP derives from the fact that different from other interpretive approaches that take into account only *some* elements of IPP, NPA draws on all the key aspects of IPP: i) the story-telling dimension of public policies (whose constitutive elements are plot, message, characters); ii) the collapse of the fact-value divide; iii) the notion that policies embody both a problem (what is at stake) and a course of action (what should be done); iv) a qualitative methodology that can be useful to detect not only the explicit intentions of actors but also to uncover the hidden meaning of their actions.

<sup>69</sup> Of paramount importance for the development of an interpretive view of public policy is a major epistemological shift within the social sciences. The 'discursive turn', as it is frequently labelled, questioned the very foundations of human knowledge and introduced innovative ways of thinking about epistemic issues, such as agency, power, subjectivity. It had important implications for the humanities in general and, as this section will discuss, also for the field of public policy. For an analysis of the influence of the 'discursive turn' in public policy theorizing, see Fischer and Forester (1993) and Fischer (2003).

contributions. Recent policy scholarship has been paying significant attention to the narrative approach (e.g. Bevir, 2011).

The advent of NPA, as part of the wider interpretive movement in the field of public policy, has advanced alternative ways of depicting the policy process. Moreover, as Jones and Mcbeth (2010, p. 332) clarify, NPA offers a convenient way to critique positivistic assumptions in public policies<sup>70</sup>. Instead of envisaging public policies as problem-solving devices, NPA portrays them as narrative storylines.

Given that stories are the language of human action generally, it comes as no great surprise to learn that policy-makers (and other policy participants generally) also convey their interpretations through the telling of stories, whether for purposes of argument, claims-making, or expression of individual identity (Fischer, 2003, p. 167-8).

Indeed, the similarities between the policy process and the structure of narratives have raised the attention of a large number of researchers<sup>71</sup>. In his book *Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice*, Roe (1994) notes that NPA can ‘improve our understanding and making of public policy’ and provides an illustration of how policy inquiry might benefit from the narrative method. He draws an example from the budget, which although customarily understood as a highly technical process largely dominated by experts, can nonetheless be interpreted through narrative analysis.

Roe (1994, p. 22-26) argues that the budget (or other public policy) can be conceived fundamentally as a narrative. This happens because the budget shares many of the features of a narrative: i) it is a written text (the budget document that is published every year); ii) it is fictional (because it is based on figures that simplify a more complex reality); iii) it is anonymous (insofar as there is no single author of the budget); iv) as text, it is open to multiple (and conflicting) interpretations; v) it is inter-textual (the meaning of budget can be clarified with the use of other texts).

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<sup>70</sup> Thus, they write that ‘consequently, in public policy narrative has become synonymous with post-positivist methods and post-structural philosophical orientations’ (Jones and Mcbeth, 2010, p. 332).

<sup>71</sup> Among others, important references include Gusfield (1981), Kaplan (1986), Hummel (1991), Roe (1994), White (1999), Yanow (2000), Fischer (2003), and Czarniawska (2004).

This example from the budget makes explicit the key insight of NPA: public policies can be interpreted as narratives. This approach represents a departure from conventional positivistic assumptions in which public policies are conceived, first and foremost, as problem-solving devices. Instead, NPA shows that public policies are similar to narratives in the sense that they offer explanations of what is problematic about the current situation (policy problem) and also delineate what possible alternatives can be envisaged to resolve the problem (policy solution). Or in Kaplan's (1986, p. 770) words, public policies are narratives that communicate 'how we arrived at a current dilemma, what we should do to address the dilemma, and why a particular proposal about what to do is a good one'.

NPA advocates argue that their interpretive view of public policy improves our understanding of the policy process. In her often-cited book *The Policy Paradox* Stone (2001) notes how an interpretive perspective better captures the meaning of public policies (when compared with problem-solving approaches). In particular, she argues that public policies can be conceived as narratives in the sense that they are constructed in a temporal sequence, that is, with beginning, middle and end. Both policies and narratives start with a problem to be addressed and end up with a solution that tackles the initial problem<sup>72</sup>. In addition, as Fischer elucidates, policies, when viewed as narratives, express a particular interpretation of events and recommend a specific line of action: 'A good narrative, as such, not only conveys a meaning to the listener, but offers the listener or reader a way of seeing and thinking about events that points to implications requiring further attention or consideration' (Fischer, 2003, p. 163).

Another relevant feature of public policies, when construed as narratives, is their capacity to condense a large amount of information in a coherent and non-ambivalent way. In fact, policies knit together different sources of elements (facts, ideals, beliefs, values, images) and present them in a cohesive way. As NPA proponents emphasize, public policies operate as narratives since they replace the disorderly (and conflictual) reality of policy life with a clear, convincing and unambiguous picture of what should be done: 'Good analytic stories are also rich in the sense that they integrate all factors

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<sup>72</sup> Not infrequently, the narratives involve the interplay of good and evil forces that culminate in the construction of heroes and villains.



needing consideration. The best stories, indeed, can perform that integrating function as well as any other mechanism, imposing a kind of natural order on a complex world' (Kaplan, 1986, p. 773).

From a NPA perspective, public policies are devices that organize disparate set of events by integrating them in a well-ordered narrative. Thus, they help to communicate basic information about the policy situation: who (policy actors) should do what (policy message) for which reasons (policy justification). As such, narratives perform a clarification role of explaining to an audience what is to be expected from a certain course of action. As Kaplan (1986, p. 771) writes, 'The narrative form, better than any other, can depict in specific terms how a proposed program will operate and the changes it is intended to accomplish, information that policy-makers often like to have before making resource allocation decisions '.

After presenting its main ideas, it is convenient to spell out how NPA differs from (positivistic) policy analysis (PA). Four important distinctions will be examined here: i) integration of facts and values (White, 1999); ii) contextual account of the policy process (Rein and Schön, 1993); iii) interpretive view of the policy cycle (Yanow, 1996); iv) communicative device (Kaplan, 1986). Each of these points is examined in turn.

1. *Integration of facts and values.* NPA rejects the assumption that facts and values can be clearly dissociated. Contrary to this dualistic view<sup>73</sup>, NPA sustains that when policy actors produce public policies (that is, tell stories), they mix facts and values. There is no claim, as in positivistic PA, that in order to be objective, values must be ignored. Within NPA, descriptive and normative aspects are intertwined. As White (1999, p. 22) correctly pointed out, narratives not only offer an explanation of the current situation, but they also provide normative

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<sup>73</sup> Drawing on a more positivistic conception of science, this dualism is predicated on the assumption that subjects are clearly independent from the objects they observe. From an interpretive/discursive perspective, however, this strict dissociation is questioned. In contrast to the dualism subject-object, discourse theories emphasize the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between subject and object and challenge the notion that there is an external reality lying 'out there'.

guidance. Therefore, by integrating empirical data with prescriptive ideals, NPA overcomes the fact-value divide.

2. *Contextual account of the policy process.* From a NPA perspective, the policy process is inscribed within a wider social context (Rein and Schön, 1993). This happens because public policies are interpreted as an expression of underlying political discourses. As such, narratives reveal implicit beliefs, values, and ideologies that are reflective of broader social and political structures. With appropriate methodological tools<sup>74</sup>, the researcher can read storylines with the purpose of uncovering the macro-structures of society<sup>75</sup>. By connecting policies to their context, NPA treats policy and politics as intermingled rather than independent activities. Due to its relevance, the issue of policy as a political phenomenon will be further elaborated later in the chapter (section 3.5).
3. *Interpretive view of the policy cycle.* Another important contribution provided by NPA lies in its interpretive understanding of the policy cycle. This task has been carried out by various interpretive policy scholars, most notably by Dvora Yanow who proposes to explain the policy cycle as a sequence of storylines (instead of a sequence of problem-solving stages). In her important contribution, Yanow (1996) describes how the policy cycle is viewed through interpretive lenses.

An interpretive account of the policy cycle would be somewhat like this: when policy-makers formulate policies, they tell stories of what a problem is, describe how certain solutions might address successfully that problem (formulation stage). When policies

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<sup>74</sup> Yanow's (2000) interpretive policy approach illustrates what kind of methodologies might be employed to identify the different layers of meaning embedded in a storyline. Her methodology, which departs from empiricist attitudes that emphasize data collection and quantitative measurement, shifts the focus to the expression of social meanings, and concentrates the investigation on the the symbolic level where beliefs, values and meanings are produced and 'stored'.

<sup>75</sup> Fischer makes an important distinction between the macro and micro levels of analysis: 'At the macro-level of analysis, the investigator is able to focus on how political and economic elites construct and maintain a societal-wide hegemonic discourse that makes clear what is on the agenda and what is not ... At the micro level of analysis, the focus turns to the relationships between discourse and specific institutional practices'. (Fischer, 2003, p. 89).

are implemented, the details of the policy are defined on an argumentative basis. Those individuals responsible for implementation process have to talk in order to decide the operational details of a policy (implementation stage). Next, individuals explain what they think the outcomes of the policy will be, arguing about the main benefits and shortcomings. Successful strategies or the negative factors will be highlighted by making use of stories. Even when graphics, tables and charts are produced in an explanation, they are usually inserted within a broader story of success or failure (evaluation stage). In all the policy stages, from a NPA perspective, policy actors operate by exchanging arguments, that is, by employing storylines.

4. *Communicative device.* An interpretive account of public policies, as illustrated by NPA, has another important difference when compared with positivistic PA. It helps to understand not only how policies are constituted (that is, through exchange of arguments) but also how they are communicated to external audiences (for instance to the media, or to the local community). In contrast, positivistic PA is silent about how policies are explained to society. ‘Another important use of stories’, Kaplan (1986, p. 771-2) notes, ‘is that they can form the currency of the policy-maker’s communication on a particular issue to the wider public’. In this sense, storylines facilitate the task of explaining why policy decisions were taken, which alternatives were available, what risks were associated with each policy option. As a communicative device, therefore, storylines enable the policy-maker to rationalize her actions and justify her decisions to the public opinion.

In short, by depicting policies as storylines, NPA offers a convenient framework that shows how public policies can be understood from an interpretive perspective. It shifts the focus from positivistic accounts of public policies as problem-solving strategies to an interpretive reasoning of public policies as narratives. The main thrust of this section has been to explain what IPP is, and how it operates, by looking at one of its most accomplished frameworks: NPA. By understanding the main ideas of NPA, it is possible to capture the key features of IPP.

But our description of IPP is far from complete. Another crucial aspect of an interpretive view resides in the politicization of the policy inquiry. This is the topic of the next section.

### 3.5 The politicization of policy inquiry

As intimated in the previous section, within an interpretive perspective, there is the recognition that politics is at the heart of the policy process. This is another important departure from the positivistic orientation that tends to exclude politics by envisaging the policy process as a purely technical activity. The issue of politicization of public policies deserves particular attention, it is worth reminding, because it is the main topic of this thesis.

As argued in chapters 1 and 2 respectively, Early Public Administration (EPA) and Policy Analysis (PA) only reluctantly accepted the importance of including politics within policy/administrative studies. Only after empirical facts – the advent of the interventionist state in the case of EPA, the failure of PPBS in the case of PA – indicated the distortions caused by the exclusion of political factors, did policy theorizing accept the need to take politics seriously. A significant contribution to the politicization of the policy/administration debate has been given by the Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) paradigm examined in this chapter. Different from EPA and PA, IPP correctly acknowledges the importance of thinking of public policies as part of the political system.

The integration of politics in policy/administrative scholarship does not mean, however, that all IPP theorists conceive the meaning of politics in the same way. On the contrary, different interpretive theorists define politics differently. Three visions of politics will be examined here: i) the policy process as a political manifestation (Fischer, 2003); ii) the policy process as a confrontation of systems of meaning (Healey, 1993); iii) the contestability of public policies (Rein and Schön, 1993). Each argument, which reflects a particular interpretation of what politics is about, will now be detailed in more depth.

### 3.5.1 Policy process as political manifestation

An initial portrait of how politics is frequently described in IPP can be found in the notion that public policies are part of a broader picture: they are depicted as embedded in the larger political landscape. As such, public policies reflect complex disputes about influence, authority and domination that take place at the political level. From an IPP perspective, the policy process is construed as power-laden activity in which social groups compete not only for material resources and tangible benefits, but also for symbolic rewards (Edelman, 1964).

Fischer contrasts the technocratic-apolitical approach (associated with PA) with the political approach (associated with IPP) that defines public policies primarily in terms of political struggle. He emphasizes that the technocratic-apolitical approach conceives of public problems, not as conflict-ridden issues, but as technical challenges solvable by the application of managerial techniques.

Policy analysis, in this model, strives to translate political and social issues into technically defined ends to be pursued through administrative means. Vexing social and economic problems are interpreted as issues in need of improved management and better programme design; their solutions are to be found in the objective collection of data and the application of the technical decision approaches (Fischer, 2003, p. 4-5).

By striving to ‘sidestep the partisan goal and value conflicts’, PA has frequently regarded politics as manipulation or bargaining. In addition, as Fischer (2003, p. 5) notes, ‘if politics does not fit into the methodological scheme, then politics is the problem. Some have even argued that the political system itself must be changed to better accommodate policy analysis’. Conversely, IPP takes a different stance towards politics, which is not disparaged as manipulation or bargaining, but redefined as the very terrain in which the policy process is actualized. Politics is not pejoratively envisaged as an evil to be exorcized, but as a site in which competing interests and claims are disputed. This is an important departure from the apolitical (if not anti-political) view embraced by PA. But as the next sections show, within IPP other conceptualizations of politics are also present.

### 3.5.2 The policy process as a confrontation of systems of meaning

There is a second important way in which IPP attempts to politicize policy-making. Because IPP challenges PA, policy is not construed as a purely technical process, but as a political activity in which competing positions are negotiated. Or, in the jargon employed by British planning scholar Patsey Healey, policy-making becomes a terrain for the dispute of systems of meaning. This section examines her argument.

In her study, Healey (1993) compares different planning theories and concludes that an interpretive view (although she dubs it ‘intercommunicative planning’) contributes to politicize policy-making. Her main argument is that, in contrast to technocratic planning that forecloses debate by imposing only one perspective (that of the expert), an interpretive view enables competing political positions to express their differences and negotiate their different systems of meaning.

Her point of departure is the idea that in liberal-democratic regimes, pluralistic societies will be characterized by the existence of a wide range of distinct moral and political positions. Healey (1993) argues, however, that the dominance of a narrow technocratic type of reasoning in planning has privileged a scientific and rationalistic attitude that asserts the primacy of the technical and the managerial. This technocratic attitude has stifled the expression of diversity and pluralism, typical of contemporary democratic societies. In her view, the advent of an interpretive account of public policy offers analytical tools to challenge the hegemony of instrumental reasoning.

From an IPP perspective, the focus shifts from instrumental problem-solving to debate and argumentation. In Healey’s view, this move should be celebrated, because it enables the politicization of policy-making. For her, IPP breaks with the apolitical view of the technocratic approach and redefines the policy process as a political site in which ‘meaning systems and knowledge forms and ways of reasoning and valuing’ can be confronted.

The merit of Healey's analysis is to elucidate the political implications of an interpretive account of public policies. She convincingly argues that when policy-making is no longer reduced to problem-solving but instead conceived as an arena of argumentation, then it can fulfil emancipatory roles. To put it differently, when the policy process is opened up to debate between communities (who have their particular set of values, interests, and demands), policy-making becomes a space for the confrontation of systems of meaning.

If Healey (1993) is right, then new democratic possibilities are created with the shift from PA to IPP. By conceptualizing the policy process as an arena in which different systems of meaning compete with each other, communities that were previously excluded can struggle for their inclusion in the policy debate. The interesting point raised by her analysis is that when the interests and perceptions of different communities clash, it is up to the policy process to accommodate them. This means that the policy process is signified as a political arena, in which conflictual visions of the common good are negotiated. Thus, the policy process<sup>76</sup> is envisaged as political terrain in which 'programs are formulated and conflicts are identified and mediated' (Healey, 1993, p. 242).

In conclusion, if the policy system creates appropriate conditions for the expression of multiple narratives (typical of pluralistic societies), then communities will have legitimate forums to express their own claims (or 'epistemics', in Healey's vocabulary). In this case, the policy system wields its political function of processing difference and managing diversity without imposing a particular view (as happens with the technocratic rule proper to PA). This is a second way of conceptualizing what politics means within the paradigm of IPP.

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<sup>76</sup> This political vision of the policy process has important implications. Among others, it enables the distinction between a good and a bad policy process. In Healey's view, a good policy process is capable of performing two tasks: i) to operationalize a decision-making system in which dissent is not only expressed but also properly settled; ii) to safeguard minimum conditions of tolerance and respect so that dissenting communities can communicate their worldviews without embarrassment or intimidation.

### 3.5.3 The contestability of public policies

There is yet a third form of envisaging politics from an interpretive perspective, which has been elaborated by Rein and Schön (1993), who are also important contributors to IPP. In their view, public policies are an expression of deeper social and political factors. By articulating the notion of ‘framing’, they have attempted to demonstrate how policy is inherently disputable. By transposing the notion of framing, originally developed by sociologist Erving Goffman, to policy research, they examine how policy actors formulate public policies. Their description of frame is now examined.

Instead of considering policy objectives as exogenous to the policy process, as suggested by PA’s advocates, Rein and Schön (1993) argue that policy actors construct reality through ‘frames’<sup>77</sup>. By frames, Rein and Schön mean that policy actors always operate selectively, that is, according to a point of view. Or in their own words,

In our use of the term, framing is a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading, and acting. A frame is a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined, problematic situation can be made sense of and acted on (Rein and Schön, 1993, p. 146).

When policy actors formulate policies, they reach an opinion by contrasting different possibilities and identifying desirable and undesirable courses of actions (again, this differs from PA in which there is an ‘optimal solution’ for public problems). By employing frames, policy actors devise coherent narratives that offer guidance for decision-making. Frames, therefore, refer to decisional tools (cognitive schemes) that provide orientation by giving salience to certain policy aspects while excluding others.

By showing that policy formulation always entails inclusion of certain aspects (deemed as relevant) and exclusion of others (discarded as not relevant), it follows that policy choices are necessarily selective (because they privilege a particular point of view). In consequence, different policy actors, motivated by different values will employ distinct

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<sup>77</sup> Breaking with the dualistic tradition, they ‘construct the problems of their problematic policy situations through frames in which facts, values, theories, and interests are integrated’ (Rein and Schön, 1993, p. 145).



frames, and therefore recommend distinct courses of action. For instance, customers of public services, lobbyists for governmental contracts, policy advisers, politicians will frame policies according to their own (and contrasting) perspectives.

By suggesting that there are always alternative ways of constructing policies, the framing perspective adopted by Rein and Schön suggests that public policies are necessarily disputable<sup>78</sup>. As they put it,

Framing is problematic because it leads to different views of the world and creates multiple social realities. Interest groups and policy constituencies, scholars working in different disciplines, and individuals in different contexts of everyday life have different frames that lead them to see different things, make different interpretations of the way things are, and support different courses of action concerning what is to be done, by whom, and how to do it (Rein and Schön, 1993, p. 147).

The framing approach contrasts sharply with the assumption embraced by PA's theorists that for every policy problem there is an 'optimal solution' (the one that maximizes efficiency). By conceiving the policy process as fundamentally contestable, the frame perspective advocated by Rein and Schön insinuates that the construction of public policies cannot be described as exclusively technical. Instead, it encourages a political interpretation of the policy process in which different actors struggle for the affirmation of their particular claims. The idea that policy issues are intrinsically controversial – and therefore contestable – represents a politicized view of public policies<sup>79</sup>. This is a third form of conceptualizing politics within the IPP tradition. Remarkably, as will be discussed later in chapters 5 and 6, the framing perspective shares some similarities with the Agonistic Policy Model.

The arguments elaborated by Fischer (2003), Healey (1993) and Rein and Schön (1993) converge in their insistence on the political condition of the policy process. Indeed, policy when interpreted through an interpretive orientation tends to be construed as a

<sup>78</sup> The meaning of public policies, from an interpretive perspective, is depicted as inherently contestable. As one policy scholar puts it, 'policy is likely to have different meanings for different participants; that the exact meaning of a policy, then, is by no means self-evident, but, rather, is ambiguous and manipulable; and that the policy process is – at least in part – a struggle to get one or another meaning established as the accepted one'. (Steinberger, 1995 cited in Hoppe, 2010, p. 64).

<sup>79</sup> As Rein and Schön (1993, p. 162) put it, 'frame-critical policy analysts would uncover the multiple, conflicting frames involved in a given policy dispute'.

political phenomenon (although each author offers a particular conceptualization of what the 'political' means). This is indeed an important step in the evolution of policy studies. At least theoretically, it has been possible to think of public policies as political phenomena. The question that follows immediately, however, is whether the interpretive orientation is confined to theory or if it has practical applications. Can IPP be implemented in actual policy settings? In order to answer this question, the next section examines the issue of the operationalization of IPP.

### 3.6 IPP in practice

The challenge of implementation faced by IPP has already been mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. Focusing on the issue of implementation, this section will outline different views on the prospects of the development of practical interpretive policy techniques. It will also describe Yanow's framework, which has been applied empirically to study a policy organization.

In spite of the growing interest in public policy, there is still a dearth of practical examples of IPP. Durning (1999, p. 391) considers that none of the 'post-positivistic' variants provide 'a compelling, coherent alternative model of practice to replace the traditional model'. In his assessment, policy theorists remain committed to positivism and are 'reluctant to embrace an epistemology that undermines the validity of the assumptions that underlie their work' (Durning, 1999, p. 391). He also notes that PA as a discipline is strongly rooted in the positivistic tradition and there are no signs that it will suddenly abandon its foundations. In his view, the practice of PA is likely to change, but only incrementally 'with a series of small changes in practice ultimately leading to a displacement of positivism' (Durning, 1999, p. 406).

A similar view is sponsored by Dryzek and Torgerson (1993) who detect the difficulties in finding concrete illustrations of non-positivistic accounts of public policy. They conclude their essay warning that 'the policy sciences of democracy promise a new shape dramatically at odds with prior technocratic expectations' and suggest that 'there is less an accomplishment now to be celebrated than a project to be pursued' (Dryzek and Torgerson, 1993, p. 136). They point to the critical power (and the democratic

potential) of policy approaches that challenge PA. They note, however, that these challenges are yet mostly confined to theoretical speculation and have not been properly converted into applicable policy methodologies.

The view that IPP, and more generally policy approaches that contest the positivistic tradition, has not produced a workable tool is echoed by various scholars. Howlett and Ramesh (1998, p. 468) contend that policy studies that depart from positivistic foundations ‘have been pitched at the level of meta-theoretical critique and have had little to say about exactly how very broadly defined political variables are to be incorporated into the analysis of specific policy processes and how, outside of very broad generalizations, policy ideas affect policy outcomes and policy change’.

In spite of the widespread dominance of sceptical views on the possibility of a practical implementation of IPP, illustrations can arguably be found. Although rare, the interpretive orientation in the policy field has advanced methodological frameworks (such as narrative policy analysis, NPA, discussed earlier) and occasionally provided empirical results. This section now discusses Dvora Yanow’s interpretive framework and shows how it has been applied to a public organization in Israel, whose main activity is the design and implementation of social and educational policies.

Yanow’s interpretive framework exemplifies how IPP can be operationalized as a methodological tool. Her work has the merit of attempting to identify how the theoretical concepts proper to interpretive views can be adapted to study the activities of organizations. Different from PA, it recommends that the focus of inquiry should be placed in the meaning of actions and not solely on strategies of problem-solving. First, her framework will be briefly described and later her empirical findings will be summarized.

In the book *How does a policy mean?* Yanow (1996) attempts to define the meaning of public policies from an interpretive standpoint. She argues that public policies are communicative processes (messages) that are produced by policy players (senders) and transmitted to specific communities (receivers). In her view, the policy process can be

envisaged as an argumentative context that promotes the integration of sender, receiver and message.

Interestingly, Yanow notes that the meaning of policies needs to be understood at the symbolic level<sup>80</sup>. By deciphering the symbols of an organization, she argues, it is possible to find out how the policy process is structured, how policy problems are defined, how decisions are made, how consensus is achieved. Departing from the positivistic orientation, the interpretive framework embraced by Yanow focuses on the multiplicity of meanings policy actors impart to their actions (Yanow, 1996, p. 222). By drawing attention to the symbolic dimension of policy/administrative organizations, Yanow's interpretive framework shifts the focus of policy studies from problem-solving to the interpretation of meaning<sup>81</sup>.

Yanow's symbolic rendering of the policy process will arguably become clearer when illustrated by a case study. In 'The Communication of Policy Meanings: Implementation as Interpretation and Text', Yanow (1993) offers an interesting illustration of how IPP can arguably be implemented in the practice of public organizations. Her object of analysis is an Israeli policy organization, the Israel Corporation of Community Centres (ICCC).

The ICCC was set up as a government-funded agency of the Israeli government in 1969 with the purpose of developing social and educational policies. The main target group addressed by the organization were the 'residents of urban housing projects and geographically isolated development towns' and its purpose was twofold. On one hand, the organization aimed to provide recreational centres and improve the welfare of local

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<sup>80</sup> As Yanow (1996, p. 10) notes, symbolic language has its own specific features: i) it is never private, but always public; ii) it is the product of a social convention; iii) it has to be interpreted against a historical and cultural background because its meaning is context specific; iv) its potency results from the incorporation of a multiplicity of (sometimes ambiguous or even contradictory) meanings; v) it conveys three layers of signification: emotive (feelings), cognitive (values) and moral (beliefs). On the symbolic nature of policy-making, see also Edelman (1964, 1988).

<sup>81</sup> As she argues, 'much of policy analysis focus on organizational outputs, service delivery, meeting of targets, and is couched on the language of public programs, thus ignoring substantial aspects of policy making. Public policy, as taught by interpretivist lenses, is a polyglot environment in which many different languages are spoken' (Yanow, 1996, p. 229).

communities. On the other, the ICCC would also attempt to encourage social integration between two important ethnic groups, the Sfaradim and the Ashkenazim.

Yanow notes that after 12 years of existence, the project had expanded significantly, with more than 100 centres built. Yet, paradoxically, when it came to the assessment of the performance of the agency the results were disappointing. Its organizational goals had not been achieved, the economic gap between groups had not decreased, social services for the local communities had not improved, and ethnic integration had not advanced. What raised her attention, however, was that in spite of the agency's poor performance, local residents struggled for the preservation of the ICCC. Besides, the central government (of Israel) not only approved of the project but also decided to expand it.

Trying to make sense of this apparent contradiction, Yanow (1993, p. 46) asks 'How might we explain public acclaim for the ICCC, given that the gap was no narrower after 12 years of operation?' She reckons that when appraised through performance indicators, the agency failed to accomplish its mission goals. Yet, the agency managed to develop a positive image among its stakeholders, who not only held a favourable account of the project but even joined public demonstrations to call for the expansion of community centres.

Employing her interpretive framework (which she designates as 'implementation as interpretation'), Yanow draws attention not only to the material aspects of the organization (measured by performance indicators) but also to the symbolic aspects of the implementation process. Exploring how ICCC constructed its image and identity, she emphasizes the importance of uncovering the hidden meanings 'stored' in symbols.

One interesting achievement of the ICCC was the construction of new spaces for the local residents. Yanow explains that ICCC buildings created a spatiality that was distinct from other areas of the town. 'Siting and landscaping established a physical distance: to enter most centres, one had to cross a plaza or a stepped expanse which set the building apart from the street' (Yanow, 1993, p. 48). Besides the sense of physical distance from

the town streets, various attributes – such as the scale of the buildings, their interior design, and the expensive furniture – contributed to promote psychological distance. Because the ICCC buildings were clearly different from residences or other public sites, they projected a message of ‘otherness’. The symbolic power of the building illustrates how an interpretive approach can help to uncover the meaning of policy action. This is an interesting contrast with PA whose positivistic inclinations place the focus solely on empirical facts.

Another illustration of Yanow’s interpretive framework can be found in her analysis of the activities of the organization. Contrary to conventional analyses that would focus on the declared mission of the organization or would rely on its operational chart, she looked for meanings that were not readily apparent. What she found out was that the functions of the ICCC were usually described with the use of a metaphor. Through interviews, she identified that the activities of the centres were referred to as a ‘supermarket’. This meant essentially that the centres were construed as places that provided a large variety of products for consumption. The importance of the metaphor, Yanow explains, is that it reveals the meaning underlying the action of policy actors, that is, of the workers of the ICCC (staff) and the residents of the local community (clients). As she puts it,

clients were to come into the centre, with ‘shopping lists’ (lists of desired courses), to ‘consume’ centre offerings; staff would ‘sell’ programs to clients inside the building; and centre success would be evaluated by ‘turnover of goods’ (numbers of registrants, inquiries or attendance figures) (Yanow, 1993, p. 51).

Another important conclusion of her study is the understanding of how the ICCC managed to construct its identity. In Yanow’s view, the identity of the organization was reinforced by rituals, such as the Annual Meetings, in which the leaders of the ICCC initiated discussions on goal mission and organizational values. Yanow suggests that these rituals communicated values that were important not only for the organization itself but also for the broader community. In the case of the Annual Meetings, for example, she argues that the agency attempted to engage participants in the definition of organizational goals. However, this strategy of engaging the local community did not necessarily mean empowerment. In contrast, it could also be read as a form of avoiding

complicated issues, such as the persistence of the social and ethnic gaps in the communities. It was also an opportunity to persuade the community that the agency was a 'rational' actor that acted sensibly and responsibly to accomplish its mission goals. Yanow notes that by constructing a 'myth of rationality' the ICCC was able to reconcile its mandate (particularly the objective of bridging the social and ethnic gap) with its apparent failure.

Yanow's analysis illustrates how organizational policy behaviour can be examined through interpretive lenses. Her 'implementation as interpretation' method exemplifies how IPP can be applied in practice. Although it is widely acknowledged that interpretive implementation tools have not yet been developed, it can nevertheless be argued that there are interesting possibilities (as Yanow's case study suggests), though still inchoate at the present stage.

### 3.7 The limits of IPP

The final section of the chapter will close with some reflections on the limits of IPP. As with any policy orientation, IPP has its shortcomings. One aspect has already been intimated: the difficulty in operationalization by finding applicable methodological tools. Although different suggestions have been formulated, such as Q-methodology<sup>82</sup> (Durning, 1999) or policy subsystems (Howlett and Ramesh, 1998)<sup>83</sup>, they still have not been extensively adopted to allow a conclusive verdict (as is the case of Q-methodology) or still require further research before being suitable for empirical tests (as is the case of policy subsystems).

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<sup>82</sup> Durning (1999, p. 403) notes that 'Q-methodology has been widely used in research, especially in psychology, sociology, social psychology, and political psychology' and defines it as a set of 'procedures for the empirical study of human subjectivity'. Devised by British psychologist William Stephenson in the 1930s, the Q-methodology aims primarily at uncovering the viewpoints of participants over a specific topic.

<sup>83</sup> According to Howlett and Ramesh (1998, p. 469), policy subsystems comprise two elements: i) a larger set of individuals who are knowledgeable about a particular policy issue, but who are not directly involved on a daily basis (also referred to as knowledge-based policy community); ii) a smaller set within the larger set of those who regularly 'participate in relationships with each other to further their own ends or interests' (closer to the concept of policy network).

In relation to the merits of IPP, scholars have displayed different levels of appreciation. Lawlor (1996) echoes a recurrent criticism against the interpretive orientation. He claims that besides being theoretically obscure, post-positivistic views of public policy face several problems that might discourage their adoption. Moreover, the benefits of pursuing an interpretive agenda are offset by the myriad of troubles that it entails.

To disconnect policy analysts from their disciplinary roots and charge them with the general communicative functions espoused by the new argumentative school would not only remove 'tools' as a defining feature of the field, it would further undermine the already shaky intellectual identity of the field. Post-positivism and so-called post-modernism in policy analysis is a swamp of ambiguity, relativism, and self-doubt. The new argumentation, framed as an integral part of the policy process, and with an unapologetic normative agenda, creates more problems for the policy analysis business than it solves. To paraphrase a famous Texas politician, 'This new argumentative dog can't hunt' (Lawlor, 1996, p. 120).

Lynn (1999) also rejects IPP and highlights its limitations. He notes that the idea that PA is technocratic is in fact a caricature, a straw man contrived by its critics, which is empirically inaccurate. Besides, it is incorrect to speak of PA as if it were a single, homogeneous entity. In his view, PA is better understood as multifaceted practice which has followed not one but a variety of different inclinations such as 'progressive, critical, pragmatic, optimistic, and reformist. Policy analysis has never been monolithic, never beyond the sobering influences of political and social life, and never about making policy according to strict positivist canon' (Lynn, 1999, p. 417). Although he recognizes the instrumental and empirical tendencies of PA, he argues that PA remains committed to the pursuit of the public interest. Thus, in his view, by relying on a false account of the evolution of PA, its critics assault nothing more than a caricature and thus miss the real target.

Lynn offers a second argument against the advocates of a 'post-positivistic' PA. He contends that it is naive to suppose that the adoption of an interpretive account can lead



to a rosy democratic world just because it has been freed from the tyranny of expertise<sup>84</sup>. It might otherwise elicit a ‘nightmare of discourse’. The purported politicization of public policies enabled by IPP might be strengthening even further entrenched interests and persistent hierarchies. In addition, Lynn considers that the adoption of interpretive views would mean that ‘nontransparent methods would again go unchallenged and become even more pervasive. Secrecy, obscurantism, corruption, deception, distortion, unfounded assertion, dishonesty, narrow ambition, ideological excess, and all the other temptations to which flesh is heir might well be even more widely and securely practised’ (Lynn, 1999, p. 417).

Moreover, for Lynn, the sort of PA advocated by ‘post-positivistic’ theorists is riddled with another serious limitation. Ideas as those sponsored by IPP are not empirically verifiable and therefore drastically constrain the possibility of their assessment. The extolled virtues of interpretation should not be praised but deplored because they lead policy theorization into ‘a dark, pre-enlightenment age dominated by the clash of metaphysical absolutes in which issues are settled by essentialist assertions, power and manoeuvre, and deliberate distortion or outright suppression of issues and opposition. It will be a politics of absolutist claims, bad numbers, and worse arguments; of emotion and unreason’ (Lynn, 1999, p. 421). For these reasons, in his view policy scholarship should keep the interpretive orientation at bay<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> In contrast, Fischer (2009) suggests that the interpretive policy approach can illuminate our understanding of the intricate relationship between democracy and expertise in contemporary complex societies. He notes that we now live in an age of expertise in which most policy problems display a complex nature. In his view, the problematic relationship between politics and expertise is the consequence of a paradox. The advancement of democracy in Western societies has simultaneously expanded not only legal rights and political liberties but also increased the power of corporations and modern bureaucracies (both of which are under the command of technical expertise). In order to reflect on the appropriate connection between democracy and expertise, Fischer (2009) argues that a new ‘epistemics’ is necessary. In his view, this epistemics can be found in the interpretive (post-empiricist) perspective of public policy. See also Torgerson (2003).

<sup>85</sup> Another critique that might be levelled against IPP is that other policy models – issue networks (Hecl, 1978), multiple streams (Kingdon, 1984), punctuated equilibrium model (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), advocacy coalition networks (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sabatier, 2007) – present alternatives to PA without necessarily employing a post-empiricist methodology. An enumeration of policy models that emerged after Lasswell’s (1951) stage cycles framework can be found in Appendix 1.

But these critiques take the indictment against IPP too far. Although they correctly point out some of the shortcomings faced by IPP, in particular the lack of convincing empirical methodologies, they exaggerate the problems an interpretive account generates. In particular, the critics fail to recognize the important step taken by IPP in politicizing the policy process (as discussed in section 3.5). This is a significant advancement that should not be missed. It might be worth noting as well that advocates of IPP do not usually consider that (positivistic) PA is completely wrong and should be utterly abandoned, but only that it is problematic. As Majone (1989) has emphasized, the case of an interpretive account rests on the assumption that a purely technical view of public policy is insufficient and misleading. In any case, IPP introduces a new set of questions and challenges that significantly improve our knowledge of the policy process.

More recent developments in the interpretive policy literature suggest that serious efforts are being made to move IPP beyond the realm of theoretical analysis so that besides an analytical framework IPP can also endow decision-makers with a policy ‘tool-kit’ capable of instrumentalizing their daily administrative activities. Two illustrative cases are worth mentioning.

Policy theorist Hendrik Wagenaar in his book *Meaning in Action* acknowledges that the interpretive approach, in spite of its important theoretical advancements, has not yet developed a fully-fledged implementable policy orientation. He recognizes the ‘elusive relation between interpretation and public policy’ and raises the meaningful question of how IPP can contribute to improve policy-making. As he puts it:

I confess to an omission. I have failed, so far, to address an issue that sits – uneasily, as we will see – at the centre of interpretive policy analysis (IPA), both as a theory and as an actively practised professional discipline: the relationship between an *interpretive* approach to social inquiry and the analysis of *public policy*. The productive relationship, as the italicized terms suggest, between a methodology of interpretivism and the large, institutionalized endeavour of formulating, implementing, and evaluating public policy. Or, to put the issue as a question: What has IPA to offer to elected officials, administrators, professionals, and citizens over empiricist, technical-rational approaches? (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 275; italics in the original).

In his view, an answer to the question of how to implement IPP can be envisaged in terms of its democratic potential. He argues that IPP could perhaps help to reshape the relationship between policy analysis and democratic practices<sup>86</sup>. IPP could for instance foster stronger democratic action by ‘amplifying the voice of the policy targets; the meaning that a problem has for different audiences’ (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 296). The relation between policy and democracy to which Wagenaar alludes is an interesting (and certainly promising) way of connecting interpretive theory with policy practice<sup>87</sup>.

Furthermore, in his insightful analysis, Wagenaar (2011, p. 285) suggests that IPP can provide both diagnostic and therapeutic tools in the more applied realm of public policy and administration. In relation to the former, he mentions that an interpretive orientation might improve policy analysis by offering better analytical devices geared to expand our understanding of empirical issues (e.g. global warming). In relation to the latter, he argues that IPP can contribute to the design of more accurate policy models (that seemingly would take into account the diversity of policy positions competing for attention in a particular situation). The topics of pluralism and representation will also be discussed in the next chapter, when the deliberative approach to public policy is examined.

Another important publication in the IPP literature that signals the concern with policy practice can be found in *Interpretation and Method* (originally published in 2006) edited by interpretive theorists Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. In this book, Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2014) organized a series of scholarly contributions that further our knowledge on the meaning and significance of IPP. Discussing the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the interpretive view, the aim of their study is to present ‘in a more positive vein the contributions of interpretive

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<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, Wagenaar (2011, p. 294) provides a discussion of political pluralism whose emphasis on conflict and power, which are depicted as pervasive in political and administrative institutions, resembles some of the elements of the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) that will be analysed in chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the democratic implications of public policies are a topic of fundamental importance not only for IPP but also for other policy paradigms. And, as will be discussed in the next chapter of thesis, the investigation of the democratic role wielded by public administration is one of the crucial contributions of the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) to the policy literature.

methodologies and methods to empirical social science' (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2014, p. xiv).

Sharing similarities with Wagenaar's contrast between diagnostic and therapeutic tools, Yanow and Schwartz-Shea contend that an interpretive perspective is committed both to theory and practice (or, as they put it, with 'understanding' and 'action'). They claim that different from 'traditional', evidence-based, positivist methodologies, interpretive analyses are sensitive to the meaning underlying social action, and is therefore better positioned to make sense of empirical reality. In their view, IPP can be useful both as a method (theory) and as an 'intervention' in a wide range of policy situations (e.g. such as organizational activities, administrative behaviour, management practices, governmental decision-making). Although specific interpretive policy tools applicable to public policies and capable of being empirically implemented in administrative settings are not detailed, their study has merit in showing how attention to the meaning embedded in policy/administrative organizations can help not only to improve our knowledge of how individual and institutions operate by revealing their values and beliefs (theoretical dimension) but also indicate strategies to introduce policy change (practical dimension).

In conclusion, there is reason to be optimistic about the ability of IPP to find innovative ways of linking theory and practice. Recent research developed by interpretive scholars – such as Hendrik Wagenaar, Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea – evince their awareness of the importance of bridging understanding (method) and action (instrument). This is an encouraging sign that reveals the potential of IPP to improve both policy theory and practice.

As intimated earlier, the advent of IPP has inspired the development of alternative policy frameworks and stimulated the flourishing of new (and arguably fruitful) research directions. A new paradigm in particular, here designated as the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA), which can be considered an off-spring of the IPP, is a case in point. For its importance in the policy inquiry, it deserves a detailed examination.

## **Chapter 4 – The Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA)**

### 4.1 Introduction

The Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) paradigm has revealed new ways of theorizing the policy process. As discussed in the previous chapter, IPP questioned several of the most fundamental assumptions of Policy Analysis (PA). In particular, it took issue with the ‘decisionist’ methodology followed by PA whose main emphasis is placed on problem-solving. The limitation of decisionism, according to an interpretive view, is that it fails to capture the real nature of policy-making. For interpretive scholars – such as Frank Fischer, Dvora Yanow, Deborah Stone, Douglas Torgerson – the policy process is defined, not as a technical activity to be carried out by experts, but rather as an argumentative terrain in which policy actors exchange their opinions about public problems.

Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) is also critical of PA, and therefore it is not surprising that DPA shares many of the assumptions of IPP. As this chapter will attempt to show, the deliberative and interpretive views have a mutual suspicion of problem-solving approaches. In addition, both DPA and IPP recognize that public policies are better construed as embedded in broader political and social contexts. Reacting against a purely technical view of public policy, DPA as well as IPP are committed to a ‘politicized’ view of policy-making.

Another important similarity between the deliberative and the interpretive paradigms is their common scepticism of technocratic styles of policy-making (Dryzek, 2000). As discussed in chapter 2, the belief that scientific knowledge could provide guidance for decision-makers, which is the cornerstone of PA, has contributed to the empowerment of experts and to the ‘technification’ of policy-making. In marked contrast to the more ‘elitist’ conception of technocracy, both DPA and IPP propose to shift the focus from expertise to more ‘democratic’ forms of engagement in the policy process.

For these reasons, these two paradigms – DPA and IPP – are suspicious of instrumental, expertise-centred interpretations of public policy. The existence of important similarities between these two approaches, however, should not obscure their differences. In fact, their contribution to the policy field is quite distinct, as this chapter will attempt to show. It can be argued that a crucial difference – perhaps the key one – is that whereas IPP is primarily concerned with the narrative structure of public policies, DPA focuses on deliberation and public participation. Therefore, in the case of IPP, attention is given to how policy actors ‘tell’ stories and hence impart meaning to their action. In contrast, DPA centres on how public deliberation can strengthen the legitimacy of policy decisions<sup>88</sup>.

The deliberative orientation here examined has been strongly associated with the philosophical writings of Jürgen Habermas whose ideas have inspired an important literature in the field of public administration (Denhardt and Denhardt, 1979; Denhardt, 1981; Zanetti, 1997; McSwite, 2000; Kelly, 2004; Sager, 2007) and policy analysis (Forester, 1982, 1989, 1999; Deleon, 1994b; Deleon and Deleon, 2002; Innes and Booher, 2003). As will be discussed in this chapter, Habermas’s emphasis on communicative action and public deliberation has had important (although mostly indirectly) implications in the fields of public policy and administration<sup>89</sup>. It has provided an analytical framework that offers an alternative interpretation of the policy process, and which encourages a shift of focus, away from expertise and technique

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<sup>88</sup> Apart from this more fundamental difference, these two paradigms can be distinguished in other grounds as well. First, DPA has been particularly influenced by theories of democratic deliberation, most notably by the political philosophy of Habermas. In contrast, IPP has been inspired by a disparate set of intellectual traditions (linguistics, post-structuralism, social constructivism, critical theory). Second, DPA is both a theoretical construct and a set of empirical practices (Dryzek, 2000). Conversely, IPP is still very much of a theoretical nature lacking convincing practical illustration. Third, DPA has gained ascendancy (and popularity) in the field of public policy and public administration, whereas IPP is less well known especially outside academia (White, 1999).

<sup>89</sup> The potential of Habermas’s critical theory has been acknowledged by scholars in different fields of public administration. Within organizational theory, for instance, Denhardt and Denhardt (1979) outlined a critical theory of public organizations that repudiated the prevalent orientation in public administration and policy analysis. In their view, this alternative model (which strongly draws on Habermasian ideas) would enable us to envisage public organizations less in terms of hierarchy, control and regulation, and instead place emphasis on the ‘discussion of the substantive ends of society’ and take into account ‘the reasonable conditions of human life’ (Denhardt and Denhardt, 1979, p. 117; see also Denhardt, 1981).

toward more deliberative and collaborative policy approaches. As such, it has enabled a critique of technocratic styles of policy-making whilst emphasizing the democratic potential of public deliberation.

The intention of this chapter is to examine the emergence of DPA and describe its fundamental claims. It will be argued that DPA proposes to view the policy process as an interactive activity that involves not only the administrative institutions of the state (public administration) but also civil society. Inspired by Habermas's ideas on communicative action and public deliberation, DPA emphasizes the importance of engaging civil society in decision-making. The participation of citizens in the process of policy formulation is perceived as indispensable for neutralizing the pervasive instrumental rationality that dominates administrative agencies. This deliberative view of the policy process is understood as enhancing the legitimacy of the democratic regime insofar as it enables civil society to express its values and preferences.

In order to explore the tenets of DPA, the chapter is divided into four sections (not counting this introduction). Section 4.2 analyses Habermas's philosophical contribution by probing his theory of communicative action and his deliberative view of policy-making. Section 4.3 investigates the theoretical side of DPA and examines its fundamental analytical claims. Section 4.4 addresses the empirical dimension of DPA and discusses the issue of institutional designs. Section 4.5 offers a critique of DPA and examines its limitations.

#### 4.2 Habermas: the philosophical foundations of DPA

Since the late 1960s, the literature on public policy started a soul-searching process aimed at renewing its theoretical foundations. Particularly after the dramatic failures of PPBS to solve public problems, it became clear that there were limits to the ambitions of Policy Analysis (PA). Policy theorists increasingly questioned the positivistic assumptions of the discipline, which in their view were incapable of providing a reliable intellectual basis for understanding the policy process.

The philosophical underpinnings of the deliberative orientation in the field of public policy have been associated with the work of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Although not writing directly on applied policy-making, except occasionally, his ideas have sparked a considerable literature in public policy and administration<sup>90</sup>. He provides an analytical background that offers a suitable ground for the critique of PA.

Habermas's anti-technocratic views are clearly expressed in his critique of postwar planning. For Habermas the intervention of the state (especially in the aftermath of the Second World War) has been characterized by a technocratic attitude, whose distinctive feature is the alienation of citizens from the policy process. In *Legitimation Crisis*, published originally in 1973, Habermas (1988) spoke of a 'structurally depoliticized public realm' in which citizens have become passive and apathetic (Habermas, 1988, p. 37). He pointed out the existence of a logic of decision-making that empowered bureaucrats and technocrats, but discouraged civic engagement:

The arrangement of formal democratic institutions and procedures permits administrative decisions to be made largely independently of specific motives of the citizens. This takes place through a legitimation process that elicits generalized motives – that is, diffuse mass loyalty – but avoids participation (Habermas, 1988, p. 36).

In his view, this type of policy-making that relies on bureaucratic administration and technical expertise has contributed to the 'structural depoliticization' of the public sphere, in which citizens are relegated to 'civic privatism'. In addition, the technocratization of the policy process has channelled power from civil society to a technocratic elite. The recognition that a technocratic style of policy-making, based on expertise and scientific knowledge, promotes depoliticization has led Habermas to advocate the need for a re-politicization of the public sphere.

If the public sphere is to regain its vitality, then policy-making has to shift away from bureaucracy and technocracy and embrace more democratic forms of participation. This

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<sup>90</sup> Kelly (2004) argues that public administration has been increasingly recognized by Habermas as a privileged site for public participation: 'in Habermas's most recent work on democratic theory, public administration now stands as the unique site of direct citizen participation in democratic governance' (Kelly, 2004, p. 39). He also notes that 'Habermas's discursive account of decision making has provided a sort of blueprint to guide citizen/administrator collaboration' (Kelly, 2004, p. 39).



is the key contention of the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA), which will be explored in this chapter. The main idea is that the introduction of deliberation in public policy can help to re-politicize the public sphere and make power flow from a small elite of bureaucrats and experts to the wider realm of civil society.

This exposition of Habermas's thought is organized in two parts. Section 4.2.1 examines how Habermas defines the public sphere and draws mainly from his book *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1989). Although quite removed from the main issues discussed here, this historical background helps to situate Habermas's vision of state and society, and sets the context for his analysis of deliberation. Section 4.2.2 discusses how Habermas envisages the role of institutions – such as public administration and policy settings – in the task of repoliticizing the public sphere, and builds particularly on *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1987) and *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1996).

#### 4.2.1 The structural transformation of the public sphere: civil society in opposition to the state

This section aims to (briefly) describe how Habermas depicted the advent of the modern public sphere, whose distinctive feature is the separation of the state and civil society into two separate domains. In particular, it will be shown that for Habermas civil society had to develop a public dimension in order to protect its freedom from state coercion. This discussion will set the ground for Habermas's contention (developed in the next section) that the task of democratic politics is the development of deliberative procedures capable of reconnecting state and civil society.

The emergence of the modern public sphere, according to Habermas (1989), harks back to the consolidation of early capitalism and is marked by the rise of the bourgeoisie as an economic class. In his view, the modern public sphere<sup>91</sup> is characterized by the fact

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<sup>91</sup> The public sphere originated in ancient Greece. According to Habermas, the public sphere was formed by the deliberation of citizens (who were released from the chores of productive labour) when gathered together in the polis. The idea that some issues have a public nature, he notes, remains to the present day as one of the principles of political order (Habermas, 1989, p. 4).

that public issues (e.g. administration, law) are concentrated in the state, whereas private issues (e.g. religion, morality) are relegated to civil society and the market. ‘The line between state and society, fundamental in our context’, Habermas (1989, p. 30) writes, ‘divided the public sphere from the private realm’.

But, as Habermas further notes, civil society has not been thoroughly confined to the private sphere. It has developed a public dimension when civil society groups – particularly the ascendant bourgeoisie – formulated their private (economic and political) demands in the name of the common good. Thus, although civil society was mainly devoted to private issues, it has also developed a public dimension whose main channel of expression was the parliament<sup>92</sup>. In fact, as Habermas emphasizes, the parliament has offered a vehicle for the penetration of the will of the people (namely, the interests of the bourgeoisie) and ensured that the state was sensitive to the will of civil society<sup>93</sup>.

Habermas (1989, p. 84) argues that the existence of a legislative body that responds to the claims of civil society has been interpreted as crucial to neutralize the threat of state domination. Parliaments – as deliberative arenas – perform the function of emancipating civil society from state encroachment. In fact, to be private has traditionally meant to be liberated from the rule of state authority (Habermas, 1989, p. 74). The idea that all power emanates from the people has usually been taken to express the wish of citizens to be free from coercion. In practice, a set of rights (e.g. freedoms of speech, opinion, press, assembly, association) granted by parliaments played the role of protecting individual private autonomy from state interference.

Thus, the emergence of the modern public sphere – that has pushed state and civil society into two distinct spheres – has also given rise to a concern with the preservation

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<sup>92</sup> This happened because the bourgeoisie, although in their intimacy remained tied to the private sphere, ‘in their capacity as private owners desired to influence public power in their common interest’ (Habermas, 1989, p. 56). The (economic and political) demands of the bourgeois class were couched in the language of the common good. The private interests of the bourgeoisie were presented as if they represented the collective will of society. Thus, the ‘fiction’ of a public was created.

<sup>93</sup> Or to put it differently, the constitutional state represents the institutionalization of the public sphere of civil society.

of the freedom and autonomy of civil society, which has been continuously exposed to the coercive domination of the state. In Habermas's view, the violation of civil society's private affairs by the state has created problems of legitimacy. Moreover, as the next section will attempt to show, the restoration of this legitimacy depends upon the creation of channels through which civil society can influence the decision-making of the political system.

#### 4.2.2 Communicative rationality and public deliberation

In Habermas's view, the protection of civil society against the intrusive action of the state is not the only danger that menaces civil society. Modernity, by which he means the entrenchment of capitalism and the development of the nation-state, has also produced another peril that could disrupt the freedom of civil society. Habermas (1998) refers to the intrusion of instrumental concerns into what he designates as the 'lifeworld'. In order to explain why the logics of the state and the market (that he describes as the 'systems' of power and money) conflict with the rationality of the lifeworld he takes issue with Weber's (1946) account of bureaucratic domination.

The problem with Weber's analysis of the bureaucratic trends that animate modern life, Habermas argues, is not only its ambivalence<sup>94</sup>, but also its inability to distinguish between the realms of the system and the lifeworld. In his critique of Weber, Habermas suggests that society has not only a systemic side (the state and the market) but also a spontaneous, non-institutionalized side (the lifeworld).

For Habermas, the instrumental rationality typical of capitalist modernity trespasses the realms of the economy and the state and encroaches (or 'colonizes') upon other areas of life, whose legitimation needs are different. Habermas illustrates the instrumentalization of the lifeworld by showing how the logic of the market influences individual conduct.

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<sup>94</sup> Habermas (1998) develops a critique of Weber's theory of social action, in which he points out the ambivalence of Weber's analysis of bureaucratic trends. On one hand, Weber celebrates the highly developed rationality of capitalism and modernity. On the other hand, however, he deplors the deprivation of meaning and the loss of freedom caused by the progressive bureaucratization of society. For Habermas, Weber's simultaneous celebration and denigration of bureaucracy was problematic.

Capitalist mentality intrudes in the lifeworld and shapes private behaviour by encouraging attitudes such as consumerism, competition, possessive individualism, excessive concerns with performance. As Habermas (1998, p. 325) writes, ‘the communicative practice of everyday life is one-sidedly rationalized into a utilitarian style’, which contributes to the emergence of a ‘pathology of modernity’, which results from

the penetration of forms of economic and administrative rationality into areas of action that resist being converted over to the media of money and power because they are specialized in cultural transmission, social integration, and child rearing, and remain dependent on mutual understanding as a mechanism for coordinating action (Habermas, 1998, p. 330).

The instrumentalization of the lifeworld, however, is problematic. As Habermas (1996) explains, the lifeworld plays a role in promoting social integration, in so far as it provides stability for social interaction by reducing areas of conflict. The lifeworld is important because it expands the levels of consensual agreement within society, thus facilitating the ‘domestication’ of the social. In modern societies, Habermas suggests, conflict is widespread because society is characterized by a strong pluralism. ‘Societal pluralization has fragmented shared identities’, Rehg (1996, p. xix) has indicated, ‘and eroded the substantive lifeworld resources for consensus’. The presence of multiple – and competing – political identities in a pluralistic society raises the problem of how conflict can be processed without disrupting the political order.

Indeed, in highly differentiated modern societies, social coordination is complex. Habermas (1996) distinguishes between the mechanisms of social coordination provided by the state and the lifeworld. In his view, the social coordination steered by the state is usually accomplished by hierarchy (which also dismisses the necessity of producing consensus) or modern law (which is regulated by rules and codes). For its turn, the type of coordination provided by the lifeworld is based on mutual understanding achieved through the construction of communicatively mediated consensus. As such, the lifeworld is capable of promoting social stabilization by expanding consensus and reducing conflict.

But how does the coordination capacities of the lifeworld function? How does the consensus produced by the lifeworld ‘spill over’ to the political system? According to Habermas (1996), the logic of the democratic regime presupposes that the communicative power unleashed in the lifeworld reaches the political system. In the democratic tradition, he explains, formal political institutions open up their processes of decision-making to the informal public opinion harboured in the lifeworld (for example parliaments attempt to make laws that take into account the preferences and interests of civil society). Thus, the legitimacy of democratic decisions depends on the possibility of the (informal and unstructured) opinions of the lifeworld penetrating into the (formal and organized) political system. In other words, the action of the state can be considered legitimate insofar as it enables ‘authentic’ civic influence over decision-making.

This is why, Habermas further notes, in modern democracies legitimacy is eroded when political and administrative systems remain closed and self-referential (responsive and accountable only to their internal organizational needs) or led by technocratic elites<sup>95</sup>. The preservation of freedom and autonomy therefore requires the state to be permeable to the voices, concerns and claims emerging from the lifeworld. This is a crucial point that will be later taken up seriously by the proponents of the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA). Drawing on Habermas’s advocacy for political and administrative attention to the communicative reasoning of the lifeworld, DPA scholars will defend the importance of designing participatory tools to engage civil society in the decision-making of public policies. This topic will be developed later in section 4.4.

But how does the communicative reasoning of the lifeworld flow into the state? Habermas’s analysis of the interaction between the lifeworld and the political system enables him to articulate his deliberative vision of democracy. In ‘Deliberative politics: a procedural concept of democracy’, Habermas (1996, ch. 7) discusses how communicative power can be channelled to social, political and administrative

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<sup>95</sup> Technocratic domination, whose power derives from its monopoly of knowledge, threatens to colonize (that is, normatively regulate) the lifeworld. Against technocratic trends and power concentration in large bureaucratic settings, Habermas encourages the multiplication of deliberative arenas in which civil society can counter the authority of experts and curtail the power of technocratic elites ‘who became independent oligarchies that paternalize voiceless citizens’ (Habermas, 1996, p. 303).

institutions. He proposes a deliberative model of democracy that consists fundamentally of a set of procedures designed with the purpose of enabling the force of the strongest argument to prevail<sup>96</sup>.

The democratic model advocated by Habermas (1996) presupposes the institutionalization of deliberative procedures that encourage the authentic participation of citizens. In this case, the vitality and authenticity of civil society penetrate in the formal political system (still guided by an instrumental rationality but now ‘moderated’ by the communicative reasoning of the lifeworld). The creation of deliberative arenas contributes to the formation of the collective will: ‘The flow of communication between public opinion formation, institutionalized elections, and legislative decisions is meant to guarantee that influence and communicative power are transformed through legislation into administrative power’ (Habermas, 1996, p. 299). Thus, a deliberative conception of democracy is predicated upon the establishment of procedures that enable communicative reasoning to influence decision-making, so that laws and policies<sup>97</sup> become the legitimate expression of the will of the people. To put it bluntly, civil society does not rule, but can shape the decision-making process of the state.

Habermas’s advocacy of a deliberative conception of policy-making<sup>98</sup> would later pave the way for the development of a Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA). In fact, Habermas’s ideas were welcomed in the fields of public policy and administration as a source of renewal. It should be noted, however, that his writings were not primarily

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<sup>96</sup> The cornerstone of his deliberative model is based on a conception of practical reason that relies on ‘rules of discourse and forms of argumentation that borrow their normative content from the validity basis of action oriented to reaching understanding’ (Habermas, 1996, p. 296-7). In his view, such a procedural view of democracy is exempt from substantial commitments being thus ‘neutral with respect to competing worldviews and forms of life’ (Habermas, 1996, p. 288).

<sup>97</sup> For Habermas, legitimate forms of democracy require civil society to influence not only law-making but also law-implementation. In his view, with the emergence of the interventionist state, the separation of legislative and administrative spheres is no longer clear-cut since ‘legislation sees itself compelled to become so concrete as to penetrate deeply into levels of administrative discretion. More often administrative jurisdictions are expanded in such a way that their activity can hardly any longer be considered a mere execution of the law’ (Habermas, 1989, p. 179).

<sup>98</sup> In principle, as Habermas clarifies, any matter that can be regulated in the interest of all is a candidate for deliberation. Sometimes, he goes even further: ‘every affair in need for political regulation should be publicly discussed’ (Habermas, 1996, p. 313).

concerned with policy affairs or more practical issues of public administration<sup>99</sup>. Yet, although the Habermasian vision ‘at first seems quite removed from the more practical concerns of policy inquiry’, as Fischer (2003, p. 35) mentioned, they have nonetheless ‘stimulated a sizeable literature devoted to the critique and reconstruction of policy analysis’.

Indeed, Habermas’s ideas were mostly elaborated at a philosophical and quite abstract level. Even though he discussed at length the nature of the administrative system in modern democratic regimes, and provided insights on how a deliberative orientation might guide public administration, his concepts still had to be translated into policy language. The adaptation of communicative action theory and deliberative procedures into a workable policy orientation, as the next section aims to show, was undertaken by policy scholars writing mostly within the field of public administration.

#### 4.3 DPA: from philosophy to public policy and administration

The task of this section is to explain how Habermasian thinking has influenced contemporary developments in public policy, particularly in public administration. First of all, it is important to acknowledge that critics have often contended that Habermas’s theorizing was confined to the realm of philosophical studies and therefore offered little applicable contribution to the field of public policy (e.g. Zanetti, 1997; Lynn, 1999). Here, instead, it is considered that Habermas introduced innovative ways of thinking that, although elaborated outside the policy area, can provide insights for the policy field. Moreover, a growing scholarship influenced by Habermas insinuates that his ideas deserve attention (Forester, 1989; Innes and Booher, 2003; Kelly, 2004; Sager, 2007). Fischer (2003, p. 37) is correct, therefore, in suggesting that ‘those who reject critical theory as irrelevant to the task of building participatory policy institutions generally

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<sup>99</sup> Although Habermas’s philosophical ideas have sparked interest in the field of public administration, their direct impact should not be over-emphasized. As Zanetti (1997) argues, discussing the practical applications of critical theory in public administration, Habermas’s influence still remains marginal mainly because a research program, capable of connecting theory and practice, has not yet been developed. Moreover, ‘despite many attempts to operationalize Habermas’s work as a research program’, she argues, ‘a primary difficulty is the fact that he intends his theory to be diagnostic rather than therapeutic’ (Zanetti, 1997, p. 156).

miss the point'. In addition, he clarifies that 'Habermas has provided the philosophical foundations for building the alternative model, not a blueprint for a practical model itself'.

The purpose of this section is to examine the implications of Habermas's advocacy of a deliberative conception of policy-making for public policy and administration. This discussion is taken in three steps. Section 4.3.1 examines the case for a communicative rationality in public administration. Section 4.3.2 discusses the role of deliberation in public administration. Section 4.3.3 addresses the democratic implications of a deliberation orientation in the policy field.

#### 4.3.1 Public administration and policy settings: beyond instrumental rationality?

The main idea of the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) is that public administration can be considered as a source of democratic legitimacy. This claim, however, is predicated on the possibility of public administration becoming a site of civic deliberation. How this is achievable is far from obvious, since public administration has conventionally been defined as a technical field, guided by bureaucratic values and animated by an instrumental type of rationality. This section discusses how DPA theorists, drawing on Habermasian concepts of communicative rationality, propose to envisage public administration as amenable to the influence of civil society. Particular attention will be paid to the 'turn' in Habermas thought: in his early works he was adamant that public administration was purely instrumental, but in later books he acknowledged the possibility of public administration becoming a site of communicative rationality as well.

The idea that public administration (defined as the ensemble of institutions responsible for the implementation of state policies) is guided by an instrumental type of rationality has been examined by Weber (1946) in his classical analysis of bureaucratic domination. Bluntly stated, Weber characterized public administration in terms of three key features: i) instrumental rationality (finding the most convenient means for achievement particular goals); ii) conduct regulated by rules and codes (that clearly



specify how tasks are to be carried out); iii) a hierarchical organizational structure (based on authority and obedience).

Habermas, in his early works, agreed with Weber's conceptualization of public administration. Habermas concurred with Weber that as industrial societies became more complex and their activities more specialized, bureaucratic arrangements tended to supplant previous forms of organization. They departed, however, in their appreciation of the implications of bureaucratic rationality. For Weber, the progressive bureaucratization – not only of public administration but also of all spheres of life – generated a perverse logic that would eventually lock human beings in an 'iron cage'. Nevertheless, for Habermas this analysis was not accurate because Weber failed to recognize that some spheres of life could be 'spared' the instrumental logic of modernity.

Contra Weber, Habermas suggested that in spite of progressive bureaucratization freedom and autonomy were still possible. In his view, although Weber was correct in positing that the spheres of economy (money) and state (power) remained tied to an instrumental orientation, he failed nevertheless to recognize that the sphere of civil society (lifeworld) was geared by a different rationality: communicative.

In any case, up to this point, Habermas remained in agreement with Weber on the instrumental condition of public administration (Kelly, 2004, p. 41). If public administration was animated by instrumental rationality, then it functioned as a source of coercion that interjected in the lifeworld and threatened the freedom of civil society. Hence, in his earlier texts, Habermas sees public administration as opposed to civil society: whereas public administration is marked by the application of abstract and prescriptive rules, civil society is unregulated, informal, fluid, and spontaneous. At the roots of their opposition lie different forms of rationality: public administration is instrumental, civil society is communicative. These logics are conflictive<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> 'When the law is applied administratively into the lifeworld', Kelly (2004, p. 45) notes, 'the fullness of the practical rationality used in the lifeworld comes into conflict with the one-dimensional rationality of the administrative state'.

In his illuminating study<sup>101</sup>, Kelly (2004) discusses the consequences of these conflicting logics. The main problem, he contends, is the incapacity of public administration to justify its actions to citizens in a legitimate way. Public administration acts instrumentally, according to bureaucratic procedures, and has difficulty in expressing its decisions in terms of ethical, moral and normative ideals. The type of justification offered often frustrates citizens who expect public administrators to be ‘responsive to their moral, ethical, or existential concerns’ (Kelly, 2004, p. 43).

Kelly (2004) argues that the earlier Habermas (of the theory of communicative action) clearly opposed the state and the lifeworld as repositories of two distinct and incompatible rationalities (instrumental versus communicative). In his view, however, the later Habermas (of deliberative democracy) reviewed his initial position and presented a new account of the rationality proper to public administration. It is precisely this ‘turn’ in Habermas’s thought that inaugurates the possibility of a new type of public administration – the deliberative. This point is crucial to understand the DPA and needs to be explained in more detail.

After he reviewed his position, Habermas acknowledged that public administration although still guided by an instrumental type of rationality could be open to the ‘impulses’ of civil society. In that case the communicative reasoning emanating from civil society could moderate public administration’s strategic, instrumental orientation. Thus, for the later Habermas (of *Between Facts and Norms*) if the spontaneity and authenticity of civil society could penetrate public administration, the state itself could become a source of democratic legitimacy. In other words, if the normative claims of civil society were capable of influencing decision-making the policies formulated by the state would be more legitimate and democratic. This is in fact the fundamental claim advocated by DPA theorists.

(The later) Habermas proposes the development of a deliberative public administration whose ‘construction of accountable, democratic procedures by which unstructured

<sup>101</sup> Kelly (2004) helps to illustrate how Habermas’s concepts of communicative action and deliberative theory can be translated from the philosophical level to the policy/administrative level. His purpose, in his own words, is to ‘provide an account of Habermas’s democratic theory that highlights his take on public administration’ (Kelly, 2004, p. 39).

public opinion can counter-steer administrative power' (Kelly, 2004, p. 49) could (partially) redeem it from its instrumental condition. But what is a deliberative public administration? How does it differ from conventional (bureaucratic and technocratic) public administration? To put it in a nutshell, Habermas suggests that the introduction of rational procedures to regulate the participation of civil society can create a flow of communication from the lifeworld and 'fertilize' administrative institutions. In practice, civil society can participate either in law-making (legislative arena) or in policy-making (administrative arena)<sup>102</sup>.

A deliberative public administration, as Kelly indicates, offers the possibility of the citizenry wielding some form of 'popular sovereignty'. In this case, governments are encouraged to decide together with their citizens through a more collaborative arrangement. 'Because only norms and arguments that deliberating citizens have validated in the public sphere can justify legal and administrative decisions', Kelly (2004, p. 49) argues, 'the gap between communicatively generated and administratively employed power is closed'.

In recognizing that public administrators deal with values – and not only with rules – Habermas (1996) is able to break with his earlier account of the administrative state as purely instrumental. Public administration is no longer described as insulated and removed from the public sphere, but on the contrary it is interpreted as having to offer justification for its decisions through an 'appeal to normative reasons'. For Habermas, this move from the instrumental to the communicative terrain means that public administration, instead of performing only the coercive function of a system, becomes a site of democratization.

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<sup>102</sup> Habermas (1996) proposes that links between deliberation and the political/policy system can be established in two instances: i) procedures might be created in order to allow citizens to influence legislators to pass laws that reflect their will (in this case, laws that are inspired by the public opinion are 'endowed' with normative justification and thus carry greater legitimacy); ii) procedures can be introduced to regulate the relationship between public administrators and citizens, so that a reciprocal communicative interaction can be facilitated (thus, public administration becomes an arena of deliberation and its decisions gain their normative basis from the accountability to the public).

A practical consequence of this change in Habermas's view is that 'if citizens and administrators use communicative reasoning, then direct deliberative decision making is at least possible' (Kelly, 2004, p. 55). But in spite of this 'dramatic break'<sup>103</sup>, Habermas himself would not go very far in delineating the features of a deliberative public administration. This task, as discussed in the next section, will be undertaken by scholars working in the fields of public policy and public administration.

#### 4.3.2 The political roles of public administration

In order to illustrate how DPA has been theorized, it is convenient to examine the literature produced within the fields of public policy and administration. Habermas offered the philosophical underpinnings for the development of a deliberative view of public policy and administration. The task that now confronted policy theorists consisted in the 'translation' of these philosophical insights into the more applied domain of public policy. In line with Habermas's views, scholarship in public administration has also emphasized the opposition between instrumental (bureaucratic) and communicative (deliberative) attitudes (Kirlin, 1996, 2001; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007; Stivers, 2008; Nabatchi, 2010). Advocates of DPA have also taken seriously the idea that public administration has a commitment to democratic legitimacy and civic participation (Nabatchi, Goerdel and Shelly, 2011).

This section will explore two claims that are crucial for DPA: i) public administration performs (not only technical but also) political roles; ii) because public administration performs political roles, it should be organized along deliberative (instead of bureaucratic) lines.

The first claim – public administration performs political roles – has been associated with the deficiencies of representative institutions. The key argument is that when

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<sup>103</sup> Kelly (2004, p. 54) argues that Habermas's acceptance that public administration performs according not only to instrumental but also to communicative reason is a 'dramatic break' in which the meaning and potential of public administration are reassessed. Habermas reviewed his previous position, Kelly notes, because he now perceived that public administrators enjoyed (certain levels of) discretion in their actions, which raised the problem of how their decisions were justified.

formal democratic institutions fail to carry out their tasks, these tasks are then transferred to public administration. Meier (1997) illustrates with the case of the electoral system. In his view, the political role of public administration is a consequence of imperfections in the electoral system. Since the electoral process does not provide clear policy guidelines, policy definitions are relocated to public administration. The problem, however, is that public administration has been originally designed to implement policies, not to formulate them.

Ideally, the electoral process should be able to identify the preferences of the citizens and convert them into clear policies. ‘In representative democracies’, Nabatchi, Goerdel and Shelly (2011, p. 34) contend, ‘electoral institutions are supposed to serve as forums where through the process of deliberation, social conflicts are resolved and individual interests are aggregated, resulting in the creation of public goals and policy decisions’. However, in contemporary democratic regimes, the electoral system seldom provides unambiguous policy guidance. Their aggregative purposes are not properly fulfilled and the preferences of the electorate are hardly integrated into a coherent policy agenda<sup>104</sup>.

But what happens when the electoral system does not generate the policy decisions it was conceived for? There is a ‘vicious feedback loop’, according to Nabatchi, Goerdel and Shelly (2011, p. 38), in which ‘policy conflicts are passed to administrative agencies, leaving bureaucrats to solve complex and divisive issues’. The deficient operation of the electoral system will eventually transfer the task of policy formulation to the administrative sphere. Thus, the question raised by Fischer (2003, p. 207) is pertinent: ‘what to do about the fact that public agencies have become primary policy-making arenas?’

Moreover, the tasks taken up by public administration emanate not only from imperfections of the electoral system, but also from inadequate legislative performance. In various cases, the legislature passes laws that are not specific enough in terms of policy definition, providing only general orientation. In worse circumstances, it often

<sup>104</sup> Politicians might have concerns other than the formulation of policies, being rather concentrated with other issues (e.g. re-election, party loyalty). In certain situations, some types of policies – especially those that are politically controversial, technically complex, and resource demanding – discourage political involvement.

happens that the laws passed by the legislature contain ‘ambiguous language, uninformed goals, and contradictory guidelines’. Again, the clarification of the meaning of policies is transferred to public administration, which is ‘left to make major decisions on policy matters’ (Nabatchi, Goerdel and Shelly, 2011, p. 35).

What are the implications of the inability of public administration to carry out political functions (for which it was not originally designed)? For many scholars sympathetic to DPA, the answer is the impotence of public administration to solve public problems that afflict society. Stivers (2008) speaks of public administration in ‘dark times’ due to the appalling situation of public services and the lack of democratic participation. Other DPA theorists argue that the dismal condition of public administration is rooted in a major deficiency, namely, public administration’s reluctance to acknowledge its political role as mediator between the political system and civil society (Nabatchi, 2010).

According to Nabatchi, Goerdel and Shelly (2011) new questions arise when it is recognized that public administration performs both technical and political tasks. Therefore, they ask, ‘how can public administration improve its ability to manage and arbitrate unresolved political conflicts, represent the public interest, promote sound and effective policy, and remediate the persistent failures of democracy within electoral institutions?’ (Nabatchi, Goerdel and Shelly, 2011, p. 35). What is the best way to deal with the fact that public administration is a political actor?

In their view, the failure of public administration to cope with political demands lies in its bureaucratic orientation<sup>105</sup> that forecloses the possibility of employing public deliberation and civic participation in the policy process. As anticipated by Habermas, what is at stake here is the presence of conflicting rationalities – the instrumental and the communicative. The widespread dominance of the bureaucratic ethos shields public administration from the penetration of the communicative impulses emanating from the lifeworld.

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<sup>105</sup> The dominance of the bureaucratic ethos is at odds with deliberative values: ‘agencies are not set up to serve as core deliberative institutions. Rather, they are almost exclusively bound by the established norms of bureaucratic ethos, which constrain them to focusing on achieving administrative efficiency’ (Nabatchi, Goerdel and Shelly, 2011, p. 38).

The problematic implications of instrumental rationality in public administration are an important concern in policy studies. In his discussion of the major challenges faced by public administration, Kirilin (1996, 2001) notes how the instrumental orientation manifested by public administration tends to weaken democratic governance. He calls for the overcoming of bureaucratic and technocratic behaviour and advocates an explicit recognition of public administration political roles. In line with Habermas's ideas, he claims that public administration should be open to the participation of civil society. The democratic responsibilities of public administration, Kirilin (1996, p. 418-9) contends, involve the creation of conditions for effective civic participation and protection of individual freedom.

In accordance with Habermas's vision of public deliberation as an alternative to technocratic rule, Stivers (2008) emphasizes the importance of deliberation for political freedom<sup>106</sup>. The introduction of a deliberative orientation in the policy field, she argues, can create channels for the infiltration of the voice of civil society and contribute to restore the vitality of the democratic regime. Deliberation is the antidote against 'the darkness of dark times' because it offers an alternative to the technocratic regime: 'No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few' (Stivers, 2008, p. 134).

Stiver's (2008) analysis is in tune with Habermas's (1996) view that only the communicative impulses emerging from the lifeworld can prevent the insulation of public administration. When administration is fully removed from society, it turns inwards and becomes a self-referential and closed system. Thus, Habermas (1996, p. 356) notes that 'binding decisions, to be legitimate, must be steered by communication flows that start at the periphery'. In other words, decisions taken bureaucratically, by public administrators concerned purely with the imperatives of efficiency, are problematic insofar as they lack accountability and responsiveness to the public opinion.

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<sup>106</sup> It should be noted that although sympathetic to deliberative views, Stivers (2008) draws on Hannah Arendt (not on Habermas).

This section has emphasized the political roles of public administration. However, according to DPA's advocates, there is yet another reason why the deliberative approach should be sponsored. It relates to the power of civic deliberation to restore the vitality of the democratic regime. This is the topic of the next section.

#### 4.3.3 Public administration as a guardian of democracy

This section complements the previous and examines the argument that unless public administration espouses a DPA it will endanger the viability of the democratic regime itself. In fact, theorists writing within public administration have voiced (not infrequently in stringent terms) that public administration needs to reposition itself in order to preserve the functionality of contemporary democracies. In order to explore the democratic implications of the deliberative approach, an interesting essay written by policy theorist Tina Nabatchi will be analysed. Her main argument, which will be now explored, is that public administration plays a key role in promoting an active citizenship and reducing democratic deficits.

Discussing the democratic potential of DPA, Nabatchi (2010) suggests that a deliberative orientation has the capacity to revitalize political institutions and reduce democratic deficits. The idea underlying the DPA is that only the authentic engagement of civil society in the formulation and implementation of public policies can prevent the 'toxic' effects of bureaucratic behaviour and technocratic manipulation<sup>107</sup>. Thus if citizens are invited to voice their claims, then the policy process no longer needs to be a source of domination. In addition, by encouraging citizens to freely voice their concerns and demands, deliberative public administration becomes an arena for dialogue and exchange of opinions.

The introduction of DPA in public administration, as Nabatchi has noted, can contribute to offset political dysfunctions of contemporary societies, especially political apathy

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<sup>107</sup> This vision is also shared by theorists who argue in favour of collaborative governance. See Gruber (1997), O'Toole (1997), Kettl (2000), DeLeon and DeLeon (2002), Meier and O'Toole (2006), Denhardt and Denhardt (2007).



which leads to strong democratic deficits<sup>108</sup>. In her view, which has a strong Habermasian tone, there are two main reasons why DPA is expected to promote democratization: i) it improves the level of democratic legitimacy; ii) it encourages an active citizenship. Each reason is now explored in more detail.

First, a deliberative public administration is well equipped to face the democratic challenge because participatory practices can prop up legitimacy for the regime<sup>109</sup>. When citizens realize that they play a role in the definition of policies, they tend to strengthen their support for democratic institutions<sup>110</sup>. In contrast to self-referential bureaucratic and technocratic models, a deliberative public administration is more transparent and accountable to their citizens, creating a synergy between public officers and civic society. Deliberation encourages appreciation for the regime itself, thus helping to reduce democratic and citizenship deficits that beset contemporary societies worldwide. Hence, among the political implications of a deliberative approach is the support for a democratic civic culture<sup>111</sup> that emphasizes deliberation as the chief mechanism for coordinating collective action (Nabatchi, 2010).

Second, a deliberative approach creates channels through which civil society can influence decision-making. Participants can engage in the discussion of collective issues and transcend the immediate (and self-orientated) concerns of their private world. The process of deliberation nurtures civic values (trust, empathy, tolerance) and thus discourages individualistic attitudes. A deliberative approach to public administration,

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<sup>108</sup> Burke (1997) offers an interesting discussion of democratic responsibilities in the context of public administration. In particular, he highlights the responsibility of the individual policy practitioner.

<sup>109</sup> On similar lines, Kelly (2004, p. 40) considers that 'the legitimacy of the entire democratic state is dependent on citizen collaboration at the administration level'.

<sup>110</sup> Vigoda (2002) explains that public participation can be described as either responsiveness or collaboration. Whereas responsiveness represents user's satisfaction with service delivery, collaboration is associated with civic engagement in the public sphere. This distinction has important democratic implications: responsiveness demotes citizens to customers, while collaboration entails genuine cooperation between citizens and policy analysts. Thus, the appreciation of DPA theorists for collaboration in opposition to responsiveness.

<sup>111</sup> Along Habermasian lines, Fischer (2003) explores the connection between deliberation and the construction of a democratic political culture: 'By transforming ways of organizing and knowing, such participatory deliberation has the possibility of building new political cultures that increase the possibilities of communicative action' (Fischer, 2003, p. 206).

Nabatchi suggests, politicizes the public sphere because it transfers decision powers from bureaucrats and experts to those affected by the issues being discussed. It also enables citizens to articulate and express their interests, demands and preferences<sup>112</sup>. Deliberation also prepares individuals to live better collectively since it helps to develop an other-regarding attitude, in which they learn to listen to different opinions, tolerate dissenting arguments, and develop an appreciation for the needs of others.

These two claims, which clearly denote Habermas's influence, have also been espoused by other DPA theorists. For instance, Berman (1997) contends that the shift to more participatory forms of public administration can enhance trust between citizen and government (and thus revert a long tradition of cynicism). In addition, this shift can also encourage more active and authentic civic engagement, which in turn nurtures mutual appreciation between citizens and public officials (Stivers, 1994). When citizens perceive the government not as threat, but as partner, the satisfaction with the democratic regime tends to increase<sup>113</sup>.

The claims formulated by DPA theorists – such as Nabatchi and Berman – seem to chime with Habermas's suggestion that citizens should take part in decisional processes whose outcomes affect their lives. As he puts it,

The citizens themselves become those who deliberate and, acting as a constitutional assembly, decide how they must fashion the rights that give the discourse principle legal shape as a principle of democracy. According to the discourse principle, just those norms deserve to be valid that could meet with the approval of those potentially affected, insofar as the latter participate in rational discourses. Hence the desired political rights must guarantee participation in all deliberative and decisional processes relevant to legislation and must do so in a way that provides each person with equal chances to exercise the communicative freedom to take a position on criticizable validity claims (Habermas, 1996, p. 127).

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<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Habermas (1996, p. 311) contends that processes of opinion and will-formation also contribute to transform the preferences of those that participate in the deliberation.

<sup>113</sup> Berman (1997) also notes that deliberation helps to increase the knowledge of how the government works. When citizens learn how agencies operate, they might become more respectful, tolerant and supportive. This can be done in several ways: i) explain to citizens how the policy process works so that they will be more aware of the government's activities; ii) include citizens' opinions in the decision-making process; iii) enhance efficiency levels so that citizens will be more satisfied with the performance of the government (Berman, 1997, p. 106). In doing so, he argues, a deliberative view of public policy will accomplish its mission of restoring trust, which is fundamental for democracy.

This section aimed to emphasize the democratic implications of DPA. Particular attention has been given to the potential of DPA to tackle issues of democratic legitimacy, in particular by contributing to reduce persistent democratic deficits as well as fostering more active forms of citizenship.

Before moving on, however, it is worth summarizing the three fundamental claims of DPA discussed in this section: i) public administration is a site not only of instrumental but also of communicative rationality; ii) public administration performs political roles; iii) deliberation contributes to restore the vitality of the democratic regime. The next section turns to the investigation of the issue of institutionalization of deliberative practices.

#### 4.4 How to institutionalize the DPA?

The purpose of this section is to discuss how the deliberative project can be translated into practical policy tools. Given the widespread bureaucratic and technocratic behaviour, how can administrative agencies be adapted to reflect deliberative concerns? How can public administrators engage with civil society in authentic dialogue aimed at reaching consensus? Do deliberative arenas have transformative power? An interesting way to reflect on these questions is to think about how a deliberative approach can be operationalized in administrative settings, that is, which institutional designs are more appropriate to translate the theoretical insights into workable policy tools.

This section is split into two parts. Section 4.4.1 discusses the existence of multiple institutional designs and argues that the suitability of a particular design depends primarily on the purpose to be achieved. Section 4.4.2 offers a practical illustration of a deliberative practice, namely, the participatory budgeting as implemented in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

#### 4.4.1 Multiple institutional designs

On the theme of institutional design, the contribution of political theorist Archon Fung is particularly illuminating, because it articulates different views on the problem of institutionalization in a clear and schematic manner. In several of his writings, Fung has been concerned with deliberative issues, and has addressed the question of the most suitable institutional arrangements for public deliberation. In his view, institutional designs are a crucial dimension of the policy process. Depending on institutional designs, deliberation can be more or less effective. As Fung has argued, institutional designs can be critical for the effectiveness of the policy process because they affect the quality of deliberation<sup>114</sup>.

Still according to Fung, the rationale for setting up deliberative institutions is to offer a counterweight to the domination of oligarchic practices that distort democratic governance. Deliberative arenas can create a genuinely democratic process of co-governing where the power to choose policies is not monopolized by economic elites. In claiming that deliberative public administration can protect the public from the influence of self-interested groups, Fung comes close to Habermas (1996, p. 353) who admits that ‘participatory forms of administration that bring implementing agencies into discourses with their clients (taken seriously as citizens) have a different sense than do neo-corporatist bargaining arrangements’.

Fung mentions that the advocates of DPA ‘often view structures of representative legislation and insular administration as easily captured, or at least biased, toward wealthy and socially advantaged sections of the polity’ (Fung, 2003, p. 342). He also claims that ‘injecting direct, mobilized, deliberative citizen participation into democratic governance might favour the voices of the least advantaged and so offer a procedural antidote enhances the equity in legislation and policy making’ (Fung, 2003, p. 342). Echoing Habermas, Fung points out that the introduction of deliberative practices can

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<sup>114</sup> Borrowing the concept from Dahl (1989), Fung outlines the importance of minipublics that are ‘the most promising actual constructive efforts for civic engagement and public deliberation in contemporary politics’ (Fung, 2003, p. 339).

increase the legitimacy of public policies because they enable the confrontation of different opinions and views.

From a DPA perspective, deliberative forums of public participation contribute to the quality of democratic governance. According to Fung (2003, p. 347) the democratic impact of institutional designs is a function of quantitative<sup>115</sup> and qualitative<sup>116</sup> criteria. Ideally, deliberative practices would engage as many people as possible but without sacrificing the attributes of rationality, inclusiveness, specificity and consensuality. However, the democratic effects of deliberation also depend on what Fung calls 'institutional designs'. Discussing the procedural aspects of a deliberative orientation in public administration, Fung discerns four types of designs: educational forums, participatory advisory panel, participatory problem-solving collaboration, and participatory democratic governance. Each category deserves a brief description.

The first design, educational forums, emphasizes the pedagogic capabilities of public deliberation (in line with what Dewey (1927) proposed long ago). When individuals gather in public meetings, they learn about policy, improve their knowledge of how government works, acquire information about the topics being discussed, listen to different points of view etc. In this case, deliberation might teach citizens about the policy process: 'citizens enter into detailed and sustained deliberations with officials about the content, design, and effects of particular projects, strategies, or programs' (Fung, 2003, p. 349). In educational forums, participants gain knowledge of the policy process and amass information about public issues, which facilitate the formation of their opinion. In so far as individuals are exposed to contrasting views, they also get to

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<sup>115</sup> In quantitative terms, the democratic potential of a deliberative setting is assessed according to the number of participants. In principle, the higher the number of participants, the more democratic the deliberative experience. Hypothetically, a fully democratic arena would be constituted by the totality of those affected by the decision.

<sup>116</sup> As far as qualitative factors are concerned, the point is to clarify whether institutional designs allow for a good or bad deliberation. As Fung notes, a good deliberation is understood to be rational (with individuals presenting their arguments and offering reasons to support their claims), equal and inclusive (that is, without any form of coercion or discrimination), specific (with a clear focus and purpose), and consensus-orientated (because deliberation aims at reaching agreement among participants) (Fung, 2003, p. 348).

know how other groups think and feel about particular topics. The educative function of public deliberation, Fung notes, has not been stressed enough in the literature<sup>117</sup>.

The second mode of participatory design is what Fung called ‘participatory advisory panel’. The purpose of these participatory panels is twofold. First, by disseminating relevant information to participants, the government seeks to improve the quality of public opinion<sup>118</sup>. This function is similar to that performed by the educational forum discussed above in the sense that participation operates as a ‘school of democracy’. Second, these participatory advisory panels also enable policy-makers to gather information from civil society so they can make decisions that better reflect their preferences (Fung, 2003, p. 341). Through advisory panels, the government can learn how the public reacts to different policies and adapt its strategy in order to avoid taking unpopular decisions. This type of design, participatory advisory panel, benefits both the citizenry and the government. Citizens have opportunity to get informed about policy agenda, whereas the government can improve its decision-making process, by making it more sensitive and attuned to the public opinion<sup>119</sup>.

A third modality of institutional design is what Fung designates as ‘participatory problem-solving collaboration’, whose purpose is more ambitious than the previous two variants. This participatory collaboration aims fundamentally at promoting interdependence (synergy) between government and civil society. The rationale is that when the government opens up channels of communication with civil society, wiser (and Habermas would add, more legitimate) solutions can be found to address collective problems. But why would the government voluntarily consult civil society? As Fung has explained, the government might, for instance, decide to involve civil society because it acknowledges the limitations of expert knowledge. In some cases, experts lack enough

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<sup>117</sup> Other theorists have discussed how participation may foster civic aptitudes, and enable a more democratic civic culture (see for instance Almond and Verba, 1963; Pateman, 1970).

<sup>118</sup> This is in line with what Dahl calls ‘enlightened understanding’ (Dahl, 1989, p. 111).

<sup>119</sup> As Fischer (2003, p. 206) clarifies, ‘non-specialists may contribute substantially to problem characterization by identifying various aspects of problems needing analysis, by raising important questions of fact that experts have not addressed, and by offering knowledge about specific conditions ...’. Moreover, citizens possess local contextual knowledge that experts usually lack: ‘Indeed, its ability to deliver first-hand knowledge of the circumstances of a local context addresses a major limitation of conventional methods’ (Fischer, 2003, p. 206).

information to decide or the community of experts might also fail to reach an internal agreement. Alternatively, the government might implement participatory collaboration designs with the aim of enabling social control over its own policies. In this case, citizens act like ‘auditors’ who continuously monitor government’s policies, denouncing possible discrepancies between the policy conception and its actual results.

A fourth, broader in scope and more ‘radical’ than the previous three, is a type of institutional design type that Fung designates as ‘participatory democratic governance’. Allowing the deepest level of civic engagement of the four types of design, the purpose here is the direct involvement of citizens in the construction of the government’s agenda (Fung, 2003, p. 342). While the other types raise more modest expectations, a participatory public administration is designed to facilitate democratic governance through power sharing, that is, the government enables civil society to influence (and possibly determine) which policies will be carried out. The aim is not only educative or restrained to a narrow set of policy issues, but involves more fundamental political choices. This is arguably the most democratic of all four institutional designs, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Through processes of citizen empowerment, the government transfers effective control of the agenda to the citizens, who are free to choose which policies will be prioritized. In theory, transformative change can be achieved when participatory democratic governance designs are implemented by the government.

Depending on the institutional design, a deliberative approach might have different democratic implications<sup>120</sup>. Two important corollaries can be derived from Fung’s analysis. The first is that the depth of democratic impact is a function of the scope (ambition) of the institutional design. Arguably, situations that require deep democratization might presuppose the construction of an arena in which citizens are ultimately empowered to decide. In contrast, when the purpose is knowledge transfer, an educational forum might be more appropriate. The second lesson is that participation is not a matter of ‘either or’, but of gradation. Full participation and no participation are

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<sup>120</sup> James Fishkin has conducted a series of experiments – known as deliberative opinion polls – that offers an interesting illustration of how deliberative ideas and concepts can be actualized in civic settings. See particularly Fishkin (1991, 2009).

possibilities that might be suitable for particular circumstances. Between those two extremes, there is a large range of levels of participation that correspond to different levels of democratic impact<sup>121</sup>. Thus public administration and policy settings do not have to be purely participatory and deliberative but they can accommodate doses of bureaucracy and technocracy. Because participation is a matter of degree, it can be calibrated according to the policy context and administrative viability.

#### 4.4.2 DPA in practice: participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre

One of the most celebrated deliberative experiences in the literature – which is often cited by policy theorists of different persuasions – is the Participatory Budgeting (PB), *Orçamento Participativo*, which was originally implemented in the city of Porto Alegre, south of Brazil, in the late 1980s. In fact, it was part of a wider political agenda carried out by the Workers's Party (PT) after their victory in the elections of 1988. As a left-wing party, PT envisaged PB as a tool capable of engaging local communities in the definition of local policies. Its main purpose was the creation of deliberative fora in which citizens could express their views on where the budget of the government should be spent<sup>122</sup>.

The extent to which PB has effectively empowered citizens, particularly the most disadvantaged, has elicited significant controversy. In his analysis, Fung (2003, p. 342) classifies Porto Alegre's PB within the group of 'participatory democratic governance' designs, whose goal is not only to 'incorporate direct citizen voices into the determination of policy agendas' but also to establish institutional procedures capable of strengthening 'equity in legislation and policy making'. In order to show how PB was devised in a way as to allow civic engagement in the delineation of public policies, it is convenient to briefly describe its 'organizational architecture'.

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<sup>121</sup> For instance, Fischer asks how realistic is the call for citizen participation, and sustains that 'citizen participation remains, to be sure, an imperfect practice and it is important not to exaggerate the role of citizens capabilities in meaningfully participating in complex policymaking processes' (Fischer, 2003, p. 208).

<sup>122</sup> Comprehensive and detailed information about the organization of Porto Alegre's PB can be found in *Orçamento Participativo de Porto Alegre* (2013).



For the discussion of the budget priorities, the municipality of Porto Alegre is organized into seventeen districts (Humaitá, Lomba do Pinheiro, Restinga etc) and six thematic areas (education, transportation, housing, economic development, culture and health). All citizens are permitted to join the discussions either in the region (whose focus is placed solely on the specific needs of that geographical area) or in the thematic area (in which all the big investment decisions of the whole municipality are debated).

The key deliberative events of Porto Alegre's PB<sup>123</sup> are the Preparatory Meetings, the Regional and Thematic Rounds, the Regional and Thematic Fora, and the Municipal Assembly, which constitute participatory instances in which citizens (or their delegates and councillors) have the opportunity to express their views on how the budget of the municipality should be invested. These events are now briefly described.

- *Preparatory Meetings.* They take place annually (between April and June) and are organized by community leaders. The public attending these meetings usually comprise individual citizens, grass-roots groups, community organizations. Topics of discussion encompass presentation of demands, discussion of priorities, preparation for selection of delegates.
- *Regional and Thematic Rounds.* Two rounds are convened (between July and August) and are jointly coordinated by officials of Porto Alegre Government and PB's elected delegates and councillors. The main purpose of the rounds is to evaluate the performance of the municipal government (of the previous year), to review the Investment Plan presented by the government, to elect councillors and define the number of delegates, and to present demands and offer suggestions (via Web).
- *Regional and Thematic Fora.* Also occurring on an annual basis (from August to October), these Fora play the function of electing the delegates and carrying out the task of ranking the city's priorities (in terms of investments and services) that will be consigned in the budget.

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<sup>123</sup> Information presented in this section is based on PB web page and on Santos (1998). See also Wampler (2007).

- *Municipal Assembly*. In November of each year, citizens are invited to attend the Municipal Assembly, a ceremony in which the councillors are officially nominated. It is also the formal occasion in which the citizens of Porto Alegre deliver the outcome of their deliberation to the government, which is embodied in a document ranking the investments and services that have been selected by the population.

An interesting feature of PB is the co-existence of direct citizen engagement (for example during the preparatory meetings) with representative procedures (through delegates and councillors). The two main representative committees are the *Fora of Delegates* and the *PB Council*.

- *Fora of Delegates*. They are composed of the delegates elected by the population (there is 1 delegate for every 10 citizens who participate in an assembly). The delegates are the ‘direct representatives of the population in the participatory process’ and they usually meet once a month. They act as intermediaries between PB Council and the population.
- *PB Council*. As PB’s top deliberative authority, it integrates the councillors elected in the Regional and Thematic Rounds. The Council performs the tasks of deliberating over the application of financial resources of the municipal budget. In their weekly meetings, the councillors act as mediators between the citizens and the government. They discuss criteria for resource allocation, defend the priorities established by the Regional and Thematic meetings, prepare the Investment and Services Plan (a detailed specification of investments and services selected by the population for each geographical and thematic area).

As Fung (2003, p. 361) has noted, the various fora that integrate the structure of PB generate a vast source of information that contribute to clarify: i) which policies are preferred by the population; ii) where infrastructure projects (waste, housing, water etc) should be located; iii) how the population evaluates previous government programs and

performance of public agencies. In his view, among the important accomplishments of Porto Alegre's PB are the disruption of long-standing political practices (corruption and patronage), higher levels of transparency, greater political and administrative legitimacy, more public investment in deprived areas of the city (Fung, 2003, p. 361-2).

The table 4.1 below helps to organize the information presented in this section. It elucidates how the PB schedule is structured and also summarizes the functions of each of the meetings held throughout the PB calendar.

Table 4.1 – Schedule of Porto Alegre's Participatory Budgeting

<i>Period of the year</i>	<i>Type of Meeting</i>	<i>Main activities</i>
April to June	Preparatory meetings in the Regional and Thematic Rounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of government performance</li> <li>• Investment plan presentation</li> <li>• Definition of general and technical criteria</li> <li>• Suggestion of priorities and demands (via Web)</li> </ul>
July and August	Meetings in the Regional and Thematic Rounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voting on the thematic priorities</li> <li>• Election of councillors</li> <li>• Definition of the number of delegates</li> </ul>
August to October	Meetings in the Regional and Thematic Fora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Election of delegates</li> <li>• Ranking of investments and services</li> </ul>
November	Municipal Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalization of ranking of investments and services</li> <li>• General discussions</li> </ul>
November to February	Assessment of demands and training of councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government assesses the demands formulated by Regional and Thematic Fora</li> <li>• Training of councillors, delegates and public officials</li> </ul>
February to April	Detailing of Investment and Services Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocation of resources (regional and thematic criteria)</li> <li>• Presentation and voting of Investment Plan in the Regional and Thematic Fora</li> <li>• Definition of general, regional and technical criteria</li> </ul>

Source: Orçamento Participativo (2013) with adaptations.

This succinct description of how Porto Alegre's PB works illustrates how the DPA can be implemented in order to foster civic participation in the policy process. The case of

Porto Alegre offers an interesting example of how the tasks of decision-making can be shared between government and civil society. This type of ‘collaborative governance’ reflects a transition from bureaucratic-centred or technocratic-led styles of policy-making toward a deliberative agenda, in which the participation of citizens is deemed relevant to improve the legitimacy of democratic institutions and enhance the quality of service provision.

One question not raised so far, however, concerns the actual outcomes of deliberation. Does DPA in practice deliver its promises? The next section examines the empirical limitations of DPA and elaborates a critique.

#### 4.5 Deliberative approach to public administration and policy: a critique

The advent of DPA was not the work of a single individual. Instead, it was a gradual development, of a trial-and-error nature, orchestrated by policy theorists and practitioners<sup>124</sup>. Although they are all speaking about a deliberative approach to public policy and administration, which is here designated as DPA, these theorists have employed a myriad of designations and concepts: citizen-centred collaborative public management (Cooper, Bryer, and Meek, 2006), collaborative government (Kelly, 2004), citizen governance (Box, 1998), citizen participation (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Roberts, 2008; Bingham, Nabatchi and O’Leary, 2005; Callahan, 2007), democratic public administration (Perez, 2004; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007), deliberative policy analysis (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003), public philosophy of public administration (Ventriss, 1997), practical philosophy for the public service (Stivers, 2008), responsive public administration (Burke, 1997; Bryer, 2007), participatory policy analysis (Deleon, 1994b; Deleon and Deleon, 2002), civic public administration (Frederickson, 1982, 1991, 1999, 2010), participatory-deliberative public administration (Baccaro and Papadakis, 2009), the human side of public administration (Gawthrop, 1998).

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<sup>124</sup> Harking back at least to the late 1960s with the forerunner and often-cited ‘ladder of participation’ model (Arnstein, 1969), a sprawling literature that been devoted to examine issues of deliberation in public policy.

It should be noted that civic participation is not a new topic in the field of public administration<sup>125</sup>. In fact, the importance of democratic participation in public administration has ebbed and flowed throughout the history of the discipline<sup>126</sup>. Frederickson (1982, p. 506) argues that political and civic issues were a permanent concern of the first scholars writing in the field of public administration:

In its origins, public administration was closely connected to the great over-arching issues of government. More than a century ago, when leading theorists began to construct the underpinnings of the field, it was presumed that public administration was directly associated with civism and democratic governance. The early formulations of public administration dealt with concepts of majority rule and minority rights, questions of direct citizen participation in government, questions regarding the representational or republican style of democracy, questions of justice, freedom, equality, privacy, and due process (Frederickson, 1982, p. 506).

Much has been written about the virtues and hopes raised by DPA. However, one is tempted to ask, to what extent does DPA live up to the expectations of its proponents? In this section, some sceptical visions of deliberation are examined. The purpose of this section is to elucidate the arguments against a public administration structured around deliberative practices. Three sets of arguments will be explored. First, the idea that deliberation is a remedy that works in some circumstances but that should not be considered a panacea (section 4.5.1). Second, contrary to deliberative scholars, it is argued that it might not be possible to completely jettison bureaucratic structures (section 4.5.2). Third, it is contended that in spite of its virtues, DPA makes problematic epistemic assumptions (section 4.5.3).

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<sup>125</sup> As Lynn (2001b) emphasizes, the conventional view that public administration has been completely oblivious to issues of civism and participation is nothing more than a simplification, if not a caricature. Early writers in public administration have spent considerable time discussing how to connect the performance of public administration with the promotion of civic values and democratic practices. See for example Waldo (1948), Appleby (1949), Long (1949), and Mosher (1968).

<sup>126</sup> One important episode that deserves to be mentioned is the advent of New Public Administration, which brought the issue of participation (albeit of a narrow type mostly focused on the public administrator not on the citizen) to the fore. The search for renewal within public administration stemmed from discontent with the (dominant) bureaucratic approaches and opened up the way for more participatory schemes. For an analysis of the New Public Administration movement, see in particular Marini (1971) and Frederickson (1982).

#### 4.5.1 Deliberation is not always convenient

Fung (2006) is highly appreciative of deliberative designs in public administration. He argues that within DPA ‘citizens can be the shock troops of democracy’ and goes further to say that ‘properly deployed, their local knowledge, wisdom, commitment, authority, and even rectitude can address wicked failures of legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness in representative and bureaucratic institutions’ (Fung, 2006, p. 74). In spite of the democratic potential of deliberation, he raises some considerations about the limits of deliberation that are worth paying attention to. Discussing how complex the challenges of contemporary governance are, he argues that deliberation is not always desirable or suitable. The question is how much, when and how. For Fung, empirical circumstances might mitigate the need, relevance or suitability for deliberation. In addition, specific policy issues might call for technical solutions that might be better addressed by experts who possess the appropriate knowledge or training<sup>127</sup>.

Deliberation is no panacea for public administration. Fung (2006) notes that if deliberation is overvalued then it might lead to exaggerated (or false) expectations. The policy process is complex and involves a great number of actors, interests and institutions. He argues that ‘actual decision-making processes are frequently composed of multiple points’ and suggests that policy outcomes are the product of ‘interactions among multiple arenas, such as planning agencies, stakeholder negotiations, neighbourhood councils, and public hearing’ (Fung, 2006, p. 67). Thus, deliberation is only one component of a large, intricate and complex process that comprises a multitude of policy actors and organizations. Because deliberation is likely to influence a small part of the policy process, its ability to shape decision-making should not be overstated.

Another aspect that undermines the power of deliberation to fulfil the expectations of its proponents is the passive attitude of participants. As a rule, participants tend to stay quiet and behave like silent spectators. When participants fail to engage, their preferences and concerns are not publicly expressed, and there is hardly any possible

<sup>127</sup> Apparently this seems to be the most common situation since ‘most policies and decisions are determined not through aggregation or deliberation but through the technical expertise of officials whose training and professional specialization suits them to solve particular problems’ (Fung, 2006, p. 69).

way to influence the decisions made by the government<sup>128</sup>. The deliberative process is paralysed<sup>129</sup> when participants are apathetic or disinterested.

However, these are not the only limitations of DPA. As shown next, it might indeed be the case that deliberation strengthens the very enemy it attempts to eliminate: bureaucracy.

#### 4.5.2 The return of bureaucracy?

A second set of arguments against DPA relates to the widespread dominance of bureaucratic organizations in contemporary societies. Despite claims that bureaucratic behaviour should be mitigated by more democratic types of administration (Stivers, 2008), the institution of deliberative practices may be incapable of neutralizing the power of bureaucratic forces. On the contrary, as an unintended consequence, the shift to participation and deliberation might even accrue the power of bureaucrats.

Moynihan (2003) emphasizes the role of public administrators in enabling or constraining deliberative practices. In his view, bureaucratic structures are important to create channels of communication that connect civil society to government. Ultimately, how much participation is allowed depends (among other factors) on the good will of bureaucrats who control agenda power. Bureaucratic administration 'is crucial because the degree to which managers either create barriers or promote access to participation forums and public decisions will, in turn, shape the costs and benefits that citizens consider when deciding whether or not to participate' (Moynihan, 2003, p. 165). His

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<sup>128</sup> Another problematic dimension of deliberation relates to its outcomes. What happens to the results of deliberation? Do they become policy? Are they implemented by the government? Despite theoretical assumptions, deliberation might not be strongly connected with decision-making. Deliberation does not seem to strongly influence the actual policies defined by the government (Fung, 2006). For a discussion on ability of public deliberation to promote social change, see Young (2000).

<sup>129</sup> There are also frequent problems in consensus building. Fung (2006) argues that the difficulty is not so much citizen apathy but the difficulties inherent in reaching agreement, especially when controversial issues are being discussed and negotiated. Although deliberative forums are designed for enabling the attainment of consensus, disagreements seem to be the norm. Consensus is the exception and is seldom reached by the participants.

argument is that the role of public administrators should be examined carefully because they can significantly influence the results of deliberation.

In his sceptical view of deliberation and participation, Moynihan (2003) contends that in practice policy analysts, public administrators, public managers, and civil servants are not concerned with civic engagement, being mostly focused on finding technical solutions to problems. Deliberative attitudes are not strong enough to mitigate (let alone eliminate) deep-seated bureaucratic and technocratic practices that pervade policy institutions and administrative agencies. In spite of the benevolent aims of deliberation, the prevailing instrumental rationality and bureaucratic insulation will hardly wane and policies are likely to continue to be decided by an elite of public administrators and policy analysts. Thus, he contends that ‘the idealistic nature of the goals of participation, particularly in relation to the yearning for the democratic ideal, explains much of its appeal’ and that ‘such ideals are often considered in abstract terms and tend to evoke affective rather than cognitive response from individuals’ (Moynihan, 2003, p. 168).

According to him, the romantic and far-fetched vision of deliberation results from an inaccurate reflection on the role of public administrators and policy analysts. This does not mean that deliberation cannot work, but that most deliberative scholars provide a simplified vision that neglects the various complexities involved in the institution of participatory practices. Among other problems, deliberation can end up being an ambiguous and unclear process that fails to enable preference revelation, consensus building, and decision-making<sup>130</sup>.

Moynihan challenges the assumptions of DPA and dismisses the idea that deliberation can lead to greater democratic legitimacy. In his view, deliberation produces little benefit and may in fact aggravate current problems. Mainly because, he argues, public participation is likely to reinforce already existing bureaucratic tendencies: ‘Ironically, whereas pro-participation arguments reject and seek to constrain bureaucratic power, the

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<sup>130</sup> Moynihan (2003) also notes that simplistic notions of public participation that disregard the complexity inherent to the construction of deliberative settings often neglect the operational details that are required to implement participatory forums. The advocates of deliberation have often underestimated the logistical difficulties that are required to allow the realization of public debates.



implementation of participation provides another venue where administrators are provided with discretion and power' (Moynihan, 2003, p. 170). Thus, a paradox is created: more deliberation requires more bureaucratic organization.

In his view, more bureaucratic organization is necessary because the responsibility for defining the rules and procedures of deliberation, timetables and schedules, is typically entrusted to bureaucratic agencies. As a consequence, DPA tends to strengthen the power of bureaucrats and reinforce the role of public administrators who will 'have substantial power in shaping the participation forum in terms of how much influence to share – which relates to the level of participation – and what groups or individual citizens to involve – which relates to the range of participation' (Moynihan, 2003, p. 170).

Instead of dismissing DPA *in toto*, however, Moynihan is cautious in his verdict. He proposes to avoid easy solutions and encourage DPA theorists to develop more sophisticated and adequate conceptualizations of deliberation and civic participation, which might prove more effective in translating social preferences into political choices. For him, the institutionalization of deliberative practices has reasserted the power of the bureaucracy, which retains the authority to set the agenda, define the procedures, and ultimately choose whether or not to implement the agreements made by the participants.

Although for different reasons, Meier (1997) also calls for an acknowledgement of the central role played by bureaucracies. Disagreeing with DPA advocates, Meier (1997) considers that the case should be for more bureaucracy and less democracy. In his opinion, deliberation and civic participation are not the correct medicines for the illnesses that afflict large-scale contemporary societies. He argues that it is mistaken to ascribe the fragility of democracy to the dominance of a bureaucratic-technocratic attitude. The problem lies elsewhere.

According to Meier, governance problems stem from deficiencies in the electoral system and not from dysfunctions in the bureaucratic organization of public administration. He criticizes the recurrent argument that bureaucracies are the cause of

dissatisfaction with the political regime. Writing in the context of the United States, Meier suggests that ‘zero-base budgeting, management by objectives, program planning budgeting systems, civil service reform, and reinventing government are all efforts to convince us that bureaucracy is the problem’ (Meier, 1997, p. 193). The flaw of the detractors of bureaucracy, he notes, is that few empirical inquiries have demonstrated that bureaucracies perform badly.

At the heart of dysfunctional political systems are ineffective electoral institutions. Hence, the picture is quite opposite of what is usually portrayed, because bureaucracy ‘is performing fairly well while the electoral institutions seem to be deteriorating’ (Meier, 1997, p. 197). For him, the source of contemporary political dissatisfaction resides in the electoral system that has proved incapable of promoting public deliberation and civic participation. If the electoral system worked satisfactorily, he argues, it would provide politicians with sufficient information about what citizens really expect, and what kind of policies they want. Nevertheless, the configuration of the electoral system is inadequate to provide guidance on public policy issues. Thus, the responsibility of formulating policies is transferred to administrative agencies.

However, Meier notes, the solution for improving governance is not to overburden bureaucracy with those tasks left unresolved by the electoral system. In his view, administrative agencies, which are bureaucratically organized, are inadequate to cope with issues of political conflict. They operate on a hierarchical basis, through command and control, which is hardly compatible with demands for growing participation and civic engagement in public administration. For Meier (1997), the case is for more bureaucracy, even if at the expense of democracy, not for more deliberation or civic participation.

This argument should be taken seriously. As Weber (1946) has suggested, bureaucratic organization is not only a type of administration but also a form of domination. In addition, it is a feature of modernity that cannot be easily suppressed because it is anchored in deep-seated social structures (that are linked with the emergence of mass democracy, on one hand, and the consolidation of capitalism, on the other).

Therefore, it is worth raising the question of how feasible is the deliberative project in its endeavour to mitigate bureaucratic forces. In more simplistic versions, it is implied that deliberative practices can neutralize, if not replace, bureaucratic behaviour. A more sceptical view, however, suggests a more cautious approach. After all, how can deliberation undermine – and eventually disrupt – bureaucratic structures, which, as Weber has argued, cannot be dissociated from the modern state and the capitalist system?

There is reason therefore to suspect that the promises of DPA advocates cannot be fully accomplished. Not only because deliberation might not be able to eliminate bureaucratic forces, but also because of its inability to improve the quality of decision-making. The problematic epistemic assumptions of deliberation are the theme of the next section.

#### 4.5.3 The (epistemic) poverty of deliberation

In this critique of the DPA two important limitations have already been considered. First, that deliberation might not be desirable in all circumstances (hence being no panacea as sometimes is implied from the writings of DPA theorists). Second, contrary to the prediction of its proponents, DPA might propel a re-bureaucratization of public administration. There is yet a third set of difficulties faced by the deliberative approach, which is associated with its epistemic assumptions. Here, the considerations of British political scientist Mark Pennington will be followed.

Pennington (2010) casts doubts over the capacity of public deliberation to generate good decisions in a context in which: i) most policy issues involve high levels of complexity; ii) pluralistic societies tend to produce strong disagreement among its members. In his view, deliberative theorists seem to neglect the ‘massive epistemic’ demands elicited by complex and controversial policy issues (e.g. health care). If the fundamental purpose of deliberative procedures is to raise information from the public, Pennington argues, there is reason to prefer alternative forms of capturing their preferences, such as the market system.

According to Pennington (2010), the main problem of DPA resides in the cognitive demands it places on citizens. If citizens were to significantly contribute to the debate of public problems, they would have to be experts on the policy issues at stake<sup>131</sup>. This would require spending hours acquiring relevant information, collecting data, learning about different policy alternatives. Therefore, given the complexity of policy issues, the assumption that individuals have something meaningful to say is problematic. Thus, one should not be surprised to realize the poor empirical results achieved by deliberation<sup>132</sup>.

In his examination of the limitations of DPA, Pennington raises four main objections. The first problem is what he designates as the ‘fallacy of representation’ (Pennington, 2010, p. 165). Representation is understood to be fallacious when it misrepresents the real preferences of the community<sup>133</sup>. Because only fractions of the population can attend participatory meetings, decisions taken in deliberative situations can fail to reflect the general will of society. After all, how to ensure that the opinions of those engaged in deliberation fully mirror the interests of the entire civil society?

The second problem is related to the capacity of deliberation to capture information. Pennington (2010) contends that if the aim of deliberation is the revelation of people’s preferences, then deliberation might be expendable. Information about societal values and interests are well known. For example, there is little doubt that people would rather have free education and health. If preferences are already clear, why should deliberative settings be introduced? Thus, he argues that ‘eliciting information about people’s values probably does not require deliberative democracy’ (Pennington, 2010, p. 168). In this

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<sup>131</sup> He exemplifies with the case of health care provision in which participants would not be able to cope with the ‘massive epistemic problems involved in the complex questions of resource allocation’ (Pennington, 2010, p. 172).

<sup>132</sup> Pennington (2010) notes that part of the limitation of deliberative practices is behavioural. Frequently, within deliberative settings people tend to reproduce dominant ideas because they lack the self-confidence to voice their genuine preferences. Instead of authentic public deliberation envisaged by participatory theorists, empirical evidence suggests otherwise that ‘deliberative groups are particularly prone to faddish behaviour, where people copy and repeat what they believe is the prevailing wisdom’ (Pennington, 2010, p. 175-6).

<sup>133</sup> The fallacies of representation might distort deliberation in various ways. What happens if the leader of a community, who is entrusted to voice a set of concerns, changes her mind during the debates? Does she still represent the community? Thus, if leaders are persuaded by other viewpoints, they might cease to reflect the visions of the community they represent.

case, the main goals, aspirations, claims of the population could be provided by other sources (surveys, think tanks reports, governmental studies, opinion polls) which would make deliberation redundant.

There is yet a third difficulty. For Pennington, there is no reason to expect that deliberation will generate more just and legitimate policies, as often expected by DPA theorists. Empirical evidence shows, on the contrary, that deliberation often results in failed policies (Baccaro and Papadakis, 2009). Thus he asserts that ‘despite the dysfunctions of politics, many things do work well. This is because most elements of modern society *do not* depend on deliberation’ (Pennington, 2010, p. 169; italics in the original). In his view, and contrary to what Habermas proposed, the engagement of civil society in the decision-making process is unlikely to enhance democratic legitimacy.

A fourth limitation of public deliberation concerns the type of public who chooses to get involved in participatory forums. It is ironic, as Pennington observes that those individuals who are best suited for deliberative practices are those most likely to avoid it. Following Mutz (2006), Pennington (2010, p. 181) explains that ‘those who exhibit the open-mindedness and tolerance for deliberative democracy are precisely the people who tend to avoid active politics’. On the other hand, those individuals most prone to political engagement tend to be partisan and can be resistant to negotiate their beliefs and values in deliberative processes. The fact that those who possess the virtues required to participate (tolerance, mutual respect and open mind) tend to refrain from it and those who have entrenched ideological beliefs are more likely to become involved curtails the ability of deliberative arenas to achieve the hopes of their proponents: to promote a free and rational exchange of opinions capable of unleashing the communicative potential of civil society.

Summing up, for Pennington (2010), deliberation faces a series of obstacles that discourage its adoption: i) it makes unrealistic ‘epistemic’ assumptions (that citizens will have sufficient information to contribute to policy debate); ii) it incurs in distortions of representation (by presupposing that leaders will necessarily mimic the preferences of the community); iii) it mistakenly considers that preferences can be revealed through

public deliberation; iv) it tends to encourage the involvement of individuals who are less likely to significantly contribute to the debate. In his view, these reasons disavow the adoption of deliberative procedures in policy-making.

How should we interpret these critiques laid against DPA? It can be suggested that the recognition of these limitations does not entail that the aims of DPA theorists are not commendable. On the contrary, as this chapter has argued, DPA theorists remain committed to the improvement of democratic legitimacy, which is much needed in times of apathy and passive citizenship (Jamieson and Fortis, 2012). Moreover, DPA is part of an on-going policy debate geared to the construction of alternative views that challenge mainstream technocratic approaches.

In favour of deliberative democracy, it should also be mentioned that more recent developments have engaged with the critiques levelled against it. It can be argued that DPA has shown increasing sensitivity to the importance of taken into account difference and dissent, thus moderating stronger assumptions centred around the formation of consensus as a condition for an effective public deliberation. Much of the literature on deliberative democracy has moved toward a 'softer' rendering of consensus-building, thus frequently speaking in terms of 'workable agreement' or 'mutual understanding'. There is therefore a recognition that the pluralistic condition of contemporary liberal democracies (and the deep political divisions that usually accompanies it) might compete with – and possibly thwart – the ability of deliberative systems to reach consensus.

The recent work of deliberative theorist John Dryzek clearly illustrates the willingness of DPA scholarship to accept that conflictual discourses should be taken seriously. In his book *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*, Dryzek (2010) offers a discussion of the pillars of deliberative democracy – legitimacy, representation, communication, and consensus. Particularly relevant for our purposes is Dryzek's contention that deliberative systems in the process of reaching collective decisions should not only include a multiplicity of discourses, but more importantly enable their mutual contestation.

Noteworthy, he clarifies that deliberative democracy no longer operates under the assumption that consensus is a primary requirement. ‘The ideal of consensus’, Dryzek (2010, p. 35) notes, ‘has long been rejected by most deliberative democrats’. Furthermore, he explains that ‘consensus was once thought of as the gold standard of political legitimacy in deliberative democracy, especially by Habermas (1996) and thinkers influenced by him. The idea of consensus has also been a soft target for critics of deliberative democracy in a plural society, because it seems so unrealistic when faced with political conflicts of any depth’ (Dryzek, 2010, p. 15). In his view, deliberative democracy is not necessarily committed to the formation of consensus, although he argues that a meta-consensus<sup>134</sup> is necessary so that distinct discourses can legitimately express their singular preferences, demands, values, and reasons.

The legitimacy of decisions within deliberative systems, Dryzek argues, hinges on the possibility of the ‘democratic contestation of discourses in the public sphere’ (Dryzek, 2010, p. 39). In this case, collective decision-making is deemed legitimate insofar as it takes into account the multiplicity of discourses relevant to a particular public policy issue. The idea that a plurality of discourses can contest each other implies that deliberative spaces are deemed capable of recognizing – and ultimately of processing – difference. This point is crucial, and will be discussed in more depth later, because it raises the question of whether deliberative democracy is moving toward a more agonistic interpretation of the political system. As will be argued in the next chapter, an agonistic approach is a promising theoretical framework that offers an alternative view to deliberative democracy, and whose main thrust is the assertion that antagonism, hegemony and power are at the roots of our understanding of the political.

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<sup>134</sup> He conceptualizes meta-consensus as ‘agreement on the legitimacy of contested values, on the validity of disputed judgements, on the acceptability and structure of competing preferences, and on the applicability of contested discourses’ (Dryzek, 2010, p. 15).

## **Chapter 5 – Agonistic Policy Model (APM): the ontological underpinnings**

### 5.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have explored four important paradigms in the policy field. Particular attention has been paid to the relationship between politics and administration. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, both EPA (Earlier Public Administration) and Policy Analysis (PA) assumed the possibility of drawing sharp boundaries between the two spheres, though in different ways. On one hand, EPA was grounded on the notion that politics and administration constituted two independent fields of theory and practice (the so-called politics-administration dichotomy). On the other hand, PA proposed to harness the latest scientific developments to improve the policy decision-making process and enshrined expertise as the supreme value of public policy. Although developed in different contexts, both EPA and PA shared two important commonalities: i) they privileged the technical side of the policy process; ii) they either ignored the political dimension or construed it in depreciative ways.

The problematic one-sidedness of both EPA and PA was subsequently critiqued by theorists who warned about the consequences of emphasizing expertise at the expense of politics. In the case of EPA, a growing awareness of the inextricability between politics and administration seriously contributed to undermine the dichotomy, which was no longer perceived as a workable concept. As Dahl (1947) had shown, in pluralistic societies both the means (administration) and the ends (politics) were open to discussion and debate. Not only that, he also asserted that the definition of the means to be employed and the ends to be achieved could not be entirely dissociated. A similar view was also espoused by Dwight Waldo, who depicted the dichotomy as nothing more than a 'myth'. The empirical observation of how public administration works in practice, according to Waldo (1948), revealed that the purported separation between the spheres of administration and politics was simply not true. On the contrary, politics and administration could hardly be divorced since administrators both decided and executed



public policies. The Wilsonian dream of a completely de-politicized – which in fact meant ‘sanitized’ – public administration has proven to be no more than an illusion.

In the case of PA, on the other hand, a similar critique emerged. It cautioned against reducing policy-making to mathematical modelling or to purely logical or technical procedures. Critics pointed to the problematic exclusion of politics from the policy process. Lindblom (1959) argued that PA failed to depict how the policy process actually evolved in the practice of administrative life. He noted that contrary to PA’s assumptions, policy-makers did not employ scientific criteria and highly advanced methodological tools to decide which policies to implement. Along similar lines, Majone (1989) also contended that the policy process could not be portrayed as a scientific endeavour centred on expertise. This view, Majone claimed, was only partially accurate. In order to offer a complete and consistent depiction of the policy process, it was imperative to introduce the political dimension. This task has been carried out by Wildavsky (1979) in his influential book *Speaking Truth to Power* in which he argued that the policy process was about not only technique and expertise but primarily about politics. Unless the political dimension was taken into account, the policy process would inevitably fail to mirror the actual practice of administrative settings.

Public administration and policy studies have since their inception as theoretical fields grappled with the question of what to do with politics. Their initial assumption that administration and public policy could be theorized exclusively in technical, apolitical ways has proven to be problematic. The recognition that the political dimension was part and parcel of the administrative life led to a long period of soul-searching in administrative and policy scholarship and propelled the emergence of new theoretical movements. This thesis has given salience to two of these paradigms – the Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) and the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) – which attempted to incorporate the political dimension in the policy process. Instead of emphasizing the technical dimension, IPP and DPA shifted the focus to the wider social and political aspects of the policy process.

In the case of IPP, political and administrative aspects were considered as interwoven phenomena. By emphasising the importance of language to understand the policy process, IPP strived to offer an integrative view of politics and administration. Politics, as Frank Fischer noted, was ‘at the very roots’ of the policy process. Along similar lines, other IPP theorists – such as Donald Schön and Martin Rein – defined policy-making as a contested process in which facts and values, means and ends, were hard to dissociate. In spite of this commendable attention to politics, however, IPP has important limitations. In particular, it has not been able to demonstrate how its analytical framework can be made ‘practical’. Although innovative, IPP remains confined to the theoretical level. Policy practitioners can employ it as a heuristic device, but not as a set of operational procedures capable of guiding empirical implementation.

On the other hand, DPA has developed a policy orientation that is not only theoretical but also applicable. In fact as several deliberative experiments have illustrated – the Citizens Summit in Washington D.C., the Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, the Decentralized Planning in Kerala, among many others – DPA has proved amenable to institutionalization. Drawing upon the philosophical insights of Jürgen Habermas, DPA offers an analytical framework that also purports to encompass political factors. As DPA theorists, such as Camilla Stivers and Tina Nabatchi, have indicated, public administration is a site in which both political and administrative tasks are performed.

In line with Habermas’s ideas, DPA scholars advocate a shift from technical to deliberative forms of governance. Their remedy, however, is problematic. As critics have pointed out, the adoption of DPA encourages the reinforcement of bureaucratic practices (which was the very ‘enemy’ to be defeated) and is plagued by epistemic difficulties that severely compromise its applicability. Therefore, in spite of a commendable recognition of the centrality of politics in public policy and administration, DPA also does not provide a convenient solution.

The cases of IPP and DPA evince that policy scholarship has seriously attempted to depart from the apolitical visions of public policy and administration, typical of disjunctive paradigms such EPA and PA. In spite of their concern with politics, their

frameworks face important shortcomings. This thesis proposes to delineate an alternative approach – the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) – whose analytical potential remains largely unexplored in policy studies.

In order to actualize this task, the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) is discussed in two stages. Initially, in this chapter 5, the thesis concentrates on the discussion of the ontological underpinnings of APM. Particular attention is paid to the meaning of agonistic theory and how it differs from other approaches. In addition, a detailed examination of Mouffe’s agonistic vision – which provides the theoretical foundations of APM – is also undertaken. This inroad in agonistic political theory is crucial to clarify the ontological assumptions that ground APM. Arguably, it will make explicit how the ‘philosophical’ principles that buttress APM are radically distinct from those that inform alternative policy paradigms, particularly the interpretive and the deliberative. The investigation of the (more empirical) policy features of APM will be dealt in chapter 6.

In terms of structure, this chapter is organized in three parts. Section 5.2 defines agonism and indicates how it contrasts with other theoretical frameworks. Section 5.3 summarizes Mouffe’s agonistic theory and differentiates it from competing forms of agonism. Section 5.4 draws from an empirical illustration taken from the Brazilian health sector to illustrate how the conflictual dynamic of the social process, described by Mouffe’s agonistic theory, unfolds in practice.

## 5.2 The agonistic theory

Agonism, like many other strands of political thought, is a broad ‘church’. There is a long list of names of political theorists who are frequently associated with the agonistic approach<sup>135</sup>. In order to clearly understand the version proposed by Mouffe it is convenient to start by discussing what agonism is (section 5.2.1) and to indicate which

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<sup>135</sup> An agonistic view of politics has been delineated by various scholars and has been frequently associated with theorists such as Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Bonnie Honig, David Owen, James Tully. This list is not exhaustive and occasionally there is controversy about who it should include (Hannah Arendt is one case in point).

variants exist (section 5.2.2). This initial inroad in the agonistic theory will help to clarify not only the chief claims of the agonistic theory but also to distinguish it from alternative approaches (e.g. the aggregative and the deliberative).

### 5.2.1 What is agonism?

Agonistic theories are inscribed within a post-foundationalist tradition of political thought (Torfing, 1999). They are part of an intellectual orientation that rejects the idea that the social realm is anchored in solid and permanent foundations. Instead, post-foundationalism posits the contingency and instability of every foundation. The main idea embraced by post-foundationalist theorists is the ‘assumption of the impossibility of a final ground’ (Marchart, 2007, p. 2).

Post-foundationalist theorizing usually presupposes what Lefort (1988) has called the ‘dissolution of the markers of certainty’, that is, the absence of stable foundations to ground social action. It departs from foundationalism, which claims that society and politics are firmly established upon immutable principles. An illustration of a foundational approach can be found in the concept of ‘*homo economicus*’ formulated by English liberal thinker John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century. He defined the ‘*homo economicus*’ as an abstract individual whose primary aim is the maximization of self-satisfaction. This concept of agency, which has been influential not only in political liberalism but also in the field of public policy<sup>136</sup>, is predicated on the assumption that individual behaviour is well-known and can be defined a priori (hence independent of empirical considerations). In this sense, the notion of ‘*homo economicus*’ operates as a foundational concept, which is universal and invariable.

In contrast, from a post-foundationalist perspective, the political subject is usually interpreted as lacking a substantive and unified essence, being instead conceived as the bearer of multiple, fragmented, and contingent identities. The political subject is no longer depicted as having a fixed identity (or acting according to fixed criterion).

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<sup>136</sup> The concept of agency proposed by Mill (1844) underpins for instance rational choice theories that construe individuals as maximizers of their self-benefit. See for instance the classical work by Buchanan and Tullock (1962).

Instead, it is construed as a ‘lack’ that constantly defers the moment of stabilization and closure (Marchart, 2007, p. 6; Torfing, 1999, p. 57).

Post-foundational theories emphasize the construction of the social as ‘negativity’. This means that the process of the actualization of the social is always partial and incomplete. The lack of a metaphysical essence that would provide a firm, stable ground entails that the social can only constitute itself in contingent, precarious forms that are inevitably open to transformation. Thus, agonistic theories interpret political action as situated within an indeterminate, open terrain characterized by the impossibility of a final ground. As such, political agency takes place in a context in which competing grounds vie for anchorage. This ‘ontological undecidability’ means that the foundations have to be continuously constructed and re-constructed without ever achieving a full, definitive stabilization.

For agonistic thinkers, this impossibility of a final grounding of the social leads to a distinction between the ‘political’ and politics. Whereas the ‘political’ refers to an ontological dimension, politics relates to the more empirical (or ontical) everyday side of political activity. The ‘political’ represents the ‘moment whose full actualization is always postponed and yet always achieved partially’ (Marchart, 2007, p. 6) and contrasts with politics, which is associated with the concrete set of institutions and practices of the political system. This distinction, which will also be found in the work of Chantal Mouffe, is crucial for agonistic theorists and will be later developed in more detail.

Although this section seems removed from the primary concerns of this chapter – to delineate the ontological underpinnings of an APM – it is nevertheless important because it helps to situate agonism within the broader landscape of political theory. Mapping agonism, however, requires also discerning its main versions, which is the topic of the next section.

### 5.2.2 Competing variants of agonism

Evidently, there is no settled, definitive ‘cartography’ of agonism. An interesting way of understanding its different versions can be found in Wingenbach (2011). Although peculiar<sup>137</sup>, his analysis is useful because his main concern is whether agonistic ideas can lead to institutional politics. He divides agonism in two large groups, depending on whether institutionalization is admitted or not. The first group – agonistic pluralism – accepts the possibility of actualizing agonism through institutions, whereas the second – agonism of resistance – argues that institutions need to be dismantled if agonistic ideas are to be carried out<sup>138</sup>. It is convenient to explain the difference between the two groups in more detail.

The first group, of agonistic pluralists, acknowledges that contemporary societies have given rise to a multiplicity of political identities whose coexistence requires the development of institutions capable of accommodating their difference. In the view of agonistic pluralists, even if these differences are very pronounced they can be processed within democratic boundaries. Thus, they are not hostile to political institutions. On the contrary, they understand politics as the terrain where these fundamental, deep-seated differences can be legitimately expressed and negotiated. For agonistic pluralists, like Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly, the pluralistic character of contemporary societies, marked by the emergence of groups with irreconcilable political demands, does not necessarily degenerate into violence or destruction of the democratic regime. Thus, agonistic pluralists advocate the feasibility of dealing with difference within democratic settings and accept the possibility of actualizing agonism through institutional practices (Mouffe, 2000; Connolly, 2002).

Differently, theorists classified under the cluster ‘agonism of resistance’ are not sympathetic to the idea of institutionalizing agonism. Suspicious of any form of power,

<sup>137</sup> Wingenbach (2011) presents a classification of agonism that is ‘elastic’ since he includes authors like Badiou and Rancière who are not typically depicted as agonistic theorists. In spite of his heterodox choice of authors, his analysis remains nonetheless useful for the purposes of this chapter.

<sup>138</sup> According to Wingenbach (2011) advocates of pluralistic agonism include Mouffe, Connolly and Tully, while proponents of agonism of resistance are illustrated by theorists such as Rancière, Badiou, Owen and Honig.

they conceive of democracy not in terms of a permanent set of institutions, but as occasional breaks of the constituted order. They construe institutions ‘as the repositories of power, expressing and maintaining sedimented relations of domination’ (Wingenbach, 2011, p. xv-xvi). Therefore, those scholars that advance an agonism of resistance (e.g. Rancière, 1999; Badiou, 2005) tend to show disaffection not only to institutions but also to the democratic regime, which they interpret as irreversibly tainted by forms of oppression and subordination. In their view, if difference is to be genuinely processed, the social and institutional orders need to be disrupted so that political identities can be re-articulated in new terms.

The distinction between agonistic pluralism and agonism of resistance is helpful because it classifies agonistic theorists according to their acceptance of institutions. It is then clear that for the purposes of this thesis – the development of an APM – the ideas advanced by those who advocate agonism of resistance cannot offer guidance. Hence, insights have to be taken from within the variant of agonistic pluralism<sup>139</sup>. Moreover, as the next section will discuss, the work of Chantal Mouffe can provide a suitable framework for guiding the delineation of an APM. In particular, her ideas will help to demonstrate that ‘attempts to solve administrative problems in isolation from the structure of power and purpose in the polity are bound to prove illusory’ (Long, 1949, p. 264). The next section discusses the specifics of Mouffe’s agonism.

### 5.3 Mouffe’s agonism

The work of Chantal Mouffe has received significant attention in political science<sup>140</sup>. Her agonistic framework has been applied in a variety of intellectual domains, ranging from law to cultural studies, and from environmental analysis to international relations. The popularity of Mouffe’s ideas stems perhaps from her ability to articulate emancipatory concerns without having to forsake the gains of liberal democracy (such

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<sup>139</sup> Although it should be mentioned that even for agonistic pluralists, there is no consensus on how to institutionalize agonism. As Wingenbach (2011, p. ii) noted, ‘It is difficult to find a careful articulation of the institutions and practices that might constitute agonistic democracy in action’.

<sup>140</sup> Mouffe’s agonism has inspired a significant scholarship in political science. See for instance the interesting studies of Smith (1998), Torfing (1999) and Tormey (2010).

as human rights and rule of law)<sup>141</sup>. In times when the Left is struggling to reconstruct its political agenda, after the demise of the socialist experience, Mouffe's agonism provides an original theoretical standpoint that contributes not only to challenge conventional ways of understanding politics but also opens up new and promising alternative venues through which more fair, equitable and democratic aspirations can be actualized.

Mouffe's ideas offer a valuable analytical source that deserves to be studied seriously because it not only elucidates the very meaning of the political (to which it was primarily intended), but also yields enlightening insights into the *policy* process. Her vision of conflict as the *leitmotiv* of political life when adapted to the level of public policy reveals the limitations of other policy paradigms – particularly Policy Analysis (PA) and the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) – and instigates new visions of the policy process. An Agonistic Policy Model (APM), whose policy features will be discussed in chapter 6, represents an original interpretation of the policy process that indicates new theoretical and practical possibilities not acknowledged by conventional models of public policy.

To be sure, the adaptation of Mouffe's agonism to the context of policy-making can also contribute to bridge an important gap in the public policy literature since agonistic ideas remain confined to the realms of political theory and political philosophy. The lack of an agonistic model in the fields of public policy and administration seems puzzling taking into account the fact that the emergence of analytical frameworks in political theory has often influenced the direction of policy theorizing<sup>142</sup>. This is the case with aggregative and deliberative theories that represent the two most important analytical frameworks in political theory.

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<sup>141</sup> Democratic politics should be concerned with the radicalization, not elimination, of liberal democratic values and institutions. In her preface to *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, Mouffe discusses the tasks of the Left in contemporary politics and argues that it should not aim at a 'rejection of liberal democracy and its replacement by a completely new political form of society, as the traditional idea of revolution entailed, but a radicalization of the modern democratic tradition' (Mouffe, 1992, p. 1).

<sup>142</sup> Bäcklund and Mäntysalo (2010) in their study of public planning in Finland suggest the importance of political theory and public policy scholarship moving *in tandem* so that developments in the latter do not neglect advancements in the former.



In the field of public policy, the aggregative model has motivated different intellectual trends such as the public choice school (e.g. Downs, 1957; Buchanan and Tullock, 1962; Olson, 1965; Niskanen, 1971) or political economy approaches (e.g. Dahl and Lindblom, 1953; Lindblom, 1965; Lindblom, 1968). For its turn, the deliberative view in political theory has inspired a large literature (e.g. Stivers, 2008; Nabatchi, 2010) that has gained increasing recognition in recent years. However, the agonistic orientation, which has already been entrenched in political philosophy and political theory, has not yet been adapted to the field of public policy and administration. The absence of an agonistic strand in public policy is surprising given that agonism is a powerful analytical tool to think about politics, policy and administration.

There is yet another reason for opting to ground the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) on Mouffe's agonism. In the fields of public policy and administration, there is a strong tradition of disaffection with politics, which has conventionally been construed pejoratively (quite often taken as a by-word for undesirable practices such as corruption, fraud or manipulation). In contrast to expertise that has quite often been hailed as an exemplar of rationality and efficiency, politics has been demoted as a sphere of arbitrariness and uncertainty. Mouffe's agonism provides a sound standpoint to challenge the contemporary disenchantment with politics. Her celebration of the political, which in her view is constitutive and therefore cannot be overcome or transcended, sheds new light in public policy scholarship and helps to bring politics back to the limelight. In addition, as she wrote in her first book *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, politics should not be conceptualized as one of the various compartments of the social but as a 'dimension which is present in all fields of human activity' (Mouffe, 1979, p. 201). As the analysis of her work will hopefully make clear, the fields of public policy and administration, which have endeavoured to develop politics-free frameworks, can certainly learn meaningful lessons from agonistic ideas.

In terms of structure, the explication of Mouffe's agonism is divided in five parts. The first comments on her post-foundational assumptions and helps to clarify how she conceptualizes political identity. The second part discusses her definition of the political

and draws attention to the centrality of antagonism and conflict. The third part focuses on her interpretation of democratic politics. The fourth presents Mouffe's critique of post-political theories of democracy while the fifth part examines how Mouffe's framework differs from the variant developed by other agonistic theorists.

### 5.3.1 Mouffe's conceptualization of the political subject: the process of identity formation

In order to grasp how Mouffe articulates her vision of agonism, it is convenient to start by pointing out her (epistemological) allegiance to post-foundationalism. As mentioned earlier, a commitment to the post-foundationalist view is a common trace of agonistic theories. Just to recap: the key claim advanced by post-foundationalism lies in the impossibility of establishing a final, permanent ground to anchor the social. It does not argue that grounds do not exist (which is the position of another intellectual orientation, anti-foundationalism), but that grounds are always contingent, temporary, partial and precarious.

The post-foundationalist view asserts the 'open and incomplete character of any social totality' and rejects essentialist and fixed renderings of the subject. Subscribing to this post-foundationalist approach, Mouffe contends that 'to be capable of thinking politics today' metaphysical foundations should be replaced by a new theorization of political subjectivity. In her view, the very notion of political agency has to be re-examined in order to reflect the absence of a final ground. Thus, a post-foundationalist depiction of the political agent needs to consider that the lack of an essence requires some 'mechanism' of stabilization and closure, which for Mouffe will be found in the process of hegemonic articulation. She notes that

it is indispensable to develop a theory of the subject as a decentred, detotalized agent, a subject constructed at the point of intersection of a multiplicity of subject positions between which there exists no a priori or necessary relation and whose articulation is the result of hegemonic practices. Consequently, no identity is ever definitively established, there always being a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in the way the different subject positions are articulated (Mouffe, 1993, p. 12).

Her post-foundationalist vision of the subject has been initially formulated in the book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, co-authored with Ernesto Laclau, and published in 1985. Drawing on Gramscian political concepts, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argued that the post-foundational character of the social formation ascribed an especial role to hegemony and antagonism. Their contention that ‘the openness and indeterminacy of the social, which gives a primary and founding character to negativity and antagonism, and assures the existence of articulatory and hegemonic practices’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 145) shows clearly their refusal of a foundational conceptualization of society, which would depict political agents in terms of unitary, pre-given identities (such as the ‘*homo economicus*’ discussed earlier). Since these identities are no longer conceived as fixed substances, they have to be created and maintained, though always in contingent and provisional ways.

The process of identity formation is the result of articulatory practices that stabilize the social, hence momentarily suspending its contingency. Among the important contributions offered by Laclau and Mouffe – both in their joint and separate work – is the idea that the construction of collective identities is itself a political phenomenon. ‘Since any political order is the expression of a hegemony’, Mouffe (2000, p. 99) writes, ‘political practice cannot be envisaged as simply representing the interests of preconstituted identities, but as constituting those identities themselves in a precarious and always vulnerable terrain’.

According to Mouffe, an agonistic approach presupposes a reconceptualization of the subject, which is not construed as a recipient of rights ‘but as the articulation of an ensemble of subject positions, constructed within specific discourses and always precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject positions’ (Mouffe, 1992, p. 10). Different from the unitary view of the subject, forwarded by liberal theories, in Mouffe’s agonistic approach, the subject is defined as fragmented.

For Mouffe, identities are not substantialized essences (e.g. the worker, the woman, the citizen) that can be defined a priori. Instead, they are constituted in a relational process, in which the ‘self’ is affirmed against an ‘other’. Borrowing the concept from Henry

Staten (in his analysis of the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida), Mouffe suggests that in order to be articulated, identities require a 'constitutive outside', that is, an external point of reference. As Mouffe (1993, p. 2) emphasizes, 'every identity is the affirmation of a difference'.

An agonistic approach operates according to a relational interpretation of the subject: to be 'A' signifies not to be 'non-A'. In this view, that radically departs from the liberal perspective, political identities are construed not as fixed and stable essences but as contingent and provisional articulations (which can always be dis-articulated and then re-articulated in different terms). Identities, Mouffe (2000, p. 56) contends, are formed 'through multiple and competing forms of identifications'. And, as discussed next, this post-foundational interpretation of identity formation has significant consequences for her definition of the political.

### 5.3.2 Mouffe's definition of the political

In her work, Mouffe has formulated an original concept of the political, which deserves to be analysed in detail. In her view, the political should not be envisaged as 'mere technical issues to be solved by experts', which is the implicit notion that informs much of contemporary political theory. In contrast, 'properly political questions always involve decisions which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 10). In her analysis, the political is about power and antagonism. This section now attempts to clarify how Mouffe defines the political and draws special attention to her emphasis on conflictuality as its defining feature.

As intimated earlier, in Mouffe's view, a proper conceptualization of the political depends upon an understanding of how political identities are formed. First of all, it is necessary to examine what are the implications of interpreting identities in a relational way. Remarkably, she points to the relevance of retrieving the contribution of German theorist Carl Schmitt (whose role in Mouffe's agonism will be analysed later).

Once we have understood that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity, i.e. the perception

of something 'other' which constitutes its 'exterior', we are, I think, in a better position to understand Schmitt's point about the ever present possibility of antagonism and to see how a social relation can become the breeding ground for antagonism (Mouffe, 2005, p. 15).

Mouffe's understanding of subjectivity is made particularly explicit when she argues that in the political terrain collective identities always assume the configuration of a 'we' that is opposed to a 'they'. Because identities are conceptualized relationally, it is only the existence of a 'they' that enables the constitution of a 'we'. The affirmation of difference (or 'otherness') is the condition of possibility for the emergence of collective identities.

Mouffe notes that in contemporary pluralistic societies, political identities can assume a variety of forms: some more conflictive than others. In her view, what is important is that the possibility of this interaction becoming antagonistic cannot be ruled out. 'The we/they distinction, which is the condition of possibility of formation of political identities', she writes, 'can always become the locus of antagonism' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 16). Moreover, it is precisely this antagonistic potential (that underpins collective identities) which is at the roots of the political.

The notion of antagonism is central to Mouffe's agonism. According to her, collective identities 'can always become transformed into antagonistic relations. Antagonism, then, can never be eliminated and it constitutes an ever-present possibility in politics.' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 13). The role played by antagonism in politics is indispensable to grasp the meaning of the political in Mouffe's theorizing. Drawing on Carl Schmitt (1976), Mouffe defines the political as that dimension in which the 'we'/'they' interaction takes the shape of a friend-enemy relation type. She notes that collective identities can be interpreted in terms of friend-enemy 'when the other, who was until then considered only under the mode of difference, begins to be perceived as negating our identity, as putting in question our very existence' (Mouffe, 1993, p. 3).

This conceptualization of the political as a friend-enemy relation has an important implication that differentiates Mouffe's political theory from other intellectual traditions. Instead of envisaging the political as a set of institutions or in terms of

particular regime types, which are recurrent views in liberal political theory, Mouffe envisages the political in ‘constitutive’ terms interpreting it ‘as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition’ (Mouffe, 1993, p. 3).

In order to differentiate between the ‘constitutive’ (or ontological) dimension from its empirical forms (or the ontic) dimension Mouffe proposes to distinguish between ‘the political’ and ‘politics’. In her own words:

‘The political’ refers to this dimension of antagonism which can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations. It is a dimension that can never be eradicated. ‘Politics’, on the other hand, refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seeks to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting, since they are affected by the dimension of the ‘political’ (Mouffe, 2013, p. 3).

This distinction is useful for many reasons. It shows that the political has a constitutive nature that needs to be distinguished from its empirical actualizations. In addition, as examined next, it also reveals the task of democratic politics.

### 5.3.3 The task of democratic politics: from antagonism to agonism

Earlier, it has been indicated that from a Mouffian perspective the potential of antagonism inherent in social relations can never be suppressed. Because of its constitutive condition, antagonism cannot be eradicated. It can nonetheless be ‘handled’ in different ways by political institutions. As Mouffe explains, the ‘aim of democratic politics is to transform *antagonism* into *agonism*’ (Mouffe, 2000, p. 103; italics in the original). In order to formulate the task of politics, Mouffe undertakes an original reinterpretation of Schmitt’s friend-enemy understanding of the political.

Although concurring with Schmitt that ‘antagonisms can take many forms, and it is illusory to believe that they could be ever eliminated’, she nevertheless takes a step further and argues that democratic institutions ‘if properly understood, can shape the element of hostility in a way that defuses its potential’ (Mouffe, 1993, p. 5). In fact, the

main task of democratic politics should be located in the attempt to moderate antagonism. As she puts it,

One of the main tasks for democratic politics consists in defusing the potential antagonism that exists in social relations. If we accept that this cannot be done by transcending the we/they relation, but only by constructing it in a different way, then the following question arises: what could constitute a 'tamed' relation of antagonism, what form of we/they would it imply? (Mouffe, 2005, p. 19).

The solution, Mouffe notes, lies in the possibility of converting antagonism into agonism. What does this mean? Reinterpreting Schmitt's friend-enemy understanding of the political, Mouffe argues that although antagonism is an ever present possibility that can never be fully eliminated, the political community can organize itself in ways that domesticate it. The idea that the friend-enemy distinction can lead to different modalities of conflict has not been foreseen by Schmitt. In his view, the conflictuality proper to the political could manifest itself only as antagonistic confrontation. Mouffe, however, envisages the possibility that the conflictual condition of the political shifts into an agonistic struggle. In her analysis with and against Schmitt, she revisits his friend-enemy distinction and re-describes it as a contestation between adversaries (Mouffe, 1999b).

When the 'we/they' relation takes an agonistic form, then different political opponents do not regard each other as enemies but as adversaries. 'Antagonism is struggle between enemies, while agonism is struggle between adversaries', Mouffe (2000, p. 102-3) clarifies. While enemies want to destroy each other, adversaries recognize the legitimacy of their interlocutors and they never question their right to express their ideas and desires.

Conflict, in order to be accepted as legitimate, needs to take a form that does not destroy the political association. This means that some kind of common bond must exist between the parties in conflict, so that they will not treat their opponents as enemies to be eradicated, seeing their demands as illegitimate, which is precisely what happens with the antagonistic friend/enemy relation (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20).

An agonistic type of relation consists of an interaction between 'we/they' in which the legitimacy of the opponent is not put in question. It is accepted that their differences cannot be finally resolved through rational means. The conflict persists – since

antagonism is not suppressed – but it does not degenerate into violence. In fact, the propensity to violence is defused precisely because dissent is acknowledged as legitimate.

It is convenient to distinguish Mouffe's conceptualization of adversaries from the definition offered by other political traditions. Mouffe's adversary is certainly distinct from the rational, self-interested subject assumed by liberal views of political theory. In contrast, Mouffe disavows the idea that a rational solution that overcomes conflict can be instantiated. The liberal adversary is in fact a competitor in pursuit of personal interests that do not confront the prevailing forms of hegemony.

I would like to stress that the notion of the 'adversary' that I am introducing needs to be distinguished sharply from the understanding of that term that we find in liberal discourse because in my understanding the presence of antagonism is not eliminated but 'sublimated' so to speak. The field of politics is for them a neutral terrain in which different groups compete to occupy the positions of power; their objective is merely to dislodge others in order to occupy their place. They do not put into question the dominant hegemony and there is no attempt at profoundly transforming the relations of power. It is merely a competition among elites (Mouffe, 2005, p. 21).

In this sense, the type of agonistic struggle delineated by Mouffe goes much deeper (in terms of social structures and power relations) than the sort of political contestation advocated by liberal pluralists (such as Arthur Bentley or Charles Lindblom). Instead of envisaging politics as competition among self-interested groups, Mouffe's agonism involves questioning the power structures of society. Whereas liberal theorists are primarily concerned with how conflicts can be negotiated and superseded by rational means, Mouffe's framework emphasizes the impotency of rationality to eliminate antagonism.

What is at stake in the agonistic struggle, on the contrary, is the very configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured: it is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally. The antagonistic dimension is always present, it is a real confrontation but one which is played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures by the adversaries (Mouffe, 2005, p. 21).

For Mouffe, the agonistic struggle is the 'condition of existence' of modern democracy. From her perspective, the task of democratic politics in its contemporary form resides in



the construction of institutional channels that enable the manifestation of dissenting views. When democracy is structured in a way that acknowledges the ineradicability of antagonism and hence provides mechanisms for the legitimate expression of adversarial political positions, then dissenting voices do not need to resort to authoritarian or violent strategies to exteriorize their ideas and desires (Mouffe, 1999a). Democracy, she argues, should allow disagreement, which is not only ‘legitimate but also necessary’.

Conceptualized in these agonistic terms, democracy is much more than a set of procedures or an ensemble of institutions geared to the protection of individual rights. It is otherwise the legitimate space in which adversaries play out their struggle. Different from the liberal view that frequently associates democracy with rule of law and constitutional principles, a Mouffian agonistic interpretation depicts democratic politics as the terrain where different hegemonic articulations are disputed. ‘Adversaries fight against each other because they want their interpretation of the principles to become hegemonic’ (Mouffe, 2013, p. 7).

The indication of democratic success therefore should be measured not by the degree of consensus attained among political competitors, as liberal theories of democracy would suggest, but by the existence of legitimate channels through which opponents can manifest their dissent. In addition, as Mouffe has frequently warned, a vision of democracy that is consistent with agonism requires relinquishing the expectation of reaching a final consensus that would reconcile the plurality of political perspectives existing in a given society. On the contrary, as she explains in her book *The Democratic Paradox*, ‘we have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion’ (Mouffe, 2000, p. 104).

The notion that rational consensus could be achieved through democratic institutions is not only problematic, Mouffe suggests, but it is dangerous to the vitality of democracy itself. When dissenting groups are denied democratic channels to express their claims, they are encouraged to employ non-democratic means to vent out their disagreement. ‘When the agonistic dynamic of the pluralist system is hindered because of a lack of

democratic identities that one could identify’, Mouffe (1999a, p. 756) writes, ‘there is a risk that this will multiply confrontations over essentialist identities and non-negotiable moral values’. Such an antagonistic confrontation would take the shape of a friend-enemy relation, in which ‘we’/‘they’ regard each other as enemies to be destroyed. This is precisely what democratic politics should avoid. Although the potential hostility inherent to social relations cannot be finally suppressed, it can nevertheless be organized in less confrontational ways. When their conflict is envisaged as agonistic struggles opponents no longer perceive each other as enemies, but as legitimate adversaries.

Mouffe’s agonistic framework points out to the centrality of antagonism and conflict, on one hand, and to the pervasive condition of the political, on the other. Recent – and influential – trends in political theory, however, have asserted the advent of a post-political age in which both conflict and politics have become obsolete. As discussed next, by refusing to accept the hegemonic condition of the political order and denying the constitutive character of the political, the emergence of post-political theories might endanger the future of democracy.

#### 5.3.4 Contemporary political theory and the evasion of the political

An agonistic approach of a Mouffian persuasion also plays an important role in clarifying the limitations of political theories that assert a post-political vision. Mouffe (2005) takes issue with the idea that the political is now in decline and has been superseded by post-traditional forms of collective engagement. She criticizes in particular the post-political theories developed by Beck (1997) and Giddens (1998) in their contention that the partisan, divisive lines that have characterized modern societies – left and right being the most distinguished form of political division – have become outdated with the advent of a logic of individualization, in which collective solidarities have lost their centrality.

According to post-political theorists, the traditional sites of politics – parliaments, political parties, trade unions – have been replaced by a type of ‘identity politics’ in

which individuals enjoy stronger forms of autonomy and are charged with the task of continuously redefining their selves in contexts marked by uncertainty and instability. The rise of the individual and the demise of the collective, from the post-political perspective, entails that democratic practices no longer depend on politics to be expanded and deepened. Democratization has ceased to depend on politics as a result of the growing relevance of the role played by the individual. ‘To put it in a nutshell – individualization is becoming *the social structure of the second modernity itself*’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. xxii; italics in the original). The focus is placed – not on traditional political institutions that have become obsolete – but on issues of self-actualization and personal choice.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) contrasts the ‘old value system, [in which] the self always had to be subordinated to patterns collectivity’ and points to the emergence of a new set of values that foster cooperation and altruism. ‘Thinking of oneself and living for others’, they argue, ‘once considered a contradiction in terms, is revealed as an internal connection’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 28). They also note that the rise of individualism in the second modernity, which superseded the collective values that predominated in the first modernity, is consequential for political life.

In their view, processes of individualization pose a challenge to the way in which representative democracy has been traditionally structured. Because now only the individual matters – what they refer to as the ‘living your own life society’ – the capacity of representative institutions to aggregate the preferences of a multitude of individuals is put into question, particularly because the integrative function performed by ‘traditional’ political organizations such as parties and trade unions has waned.

The main problem that currently confronts representative politics stems from the fact that ‘it is not possible to admit more and more actors in the game of political power, because that would multiply the arenas of conflict without increasing the potential for consensus’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 28). This situation creates a process in which society is increasingly politicized without a correspondent ‘activation of politics’. The multiplication of conflict, which no longer can be channelled and processed

through political institutions, implies that the construction of agreement has become harder. Hence, they conclude that individualization is ‘eroding the social-structural conditions for political consensus, which until now has made possible collective action’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 29).

The main problem with the type of analysis developed by post-political advocates, as the vision sponsored by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim clearly illustrates, is their inability to recognize the adversarial condition of politics (Mouffe, 2005). In essence, they fail to acknowledge that the political order necessarily entails a hegemonic condition that cannot be overcome even in the advent of a post-industrial modernity. Moreover, by being oblivious to the ‘hegemonic dimension of politics’, their analyses tend to be dismissive of the role played by power in social relations. Thus, emphasis is given, not to how dominant hegemonic projects can be challenged, but on how the individual can best actualize his/her existential concerns.

Conversely, from an agonistic perspective, power and hegemony are at the heart of democratic politics, whose main concern is the ‘profound transformation of the existing power relations and the establishment of a new hegemony’ (Mouffe, 2005, p. 52). From an agonistic view, it becomes clear that this shift from the collective to the individual promotes a strong (and perverse) depoliticization. By refusing to engage with the crucial dimensions of power and hegemony, post-political theorizing ends up evading the political itself. Such a post-political view that dislocates the emphasis away from power and hegemony is inscribed within a broader tendency – dominant in contemporary political theory – that refuses to accept the constitutive character of antagonism and conflict. Such neglect is consequential for both the theory and practice of democracy:

Whatever theorists might dream, conflicts and antagonisms will always be with us and instead of producing theories about the world as it should be, democratic theorists would be more helpful if they would dedicate their attention to the different ways in which this dimension of conflictuality could be played out in ways compatible with a democratic order (Mouffe, 2002, p. 616).

When envisaged from an agonistic perspective, which recognizes that every political order is hegemonic, the task of democratic politics is conceptualized in very different terms. As Mouffe (2000, p. 100) argues ‘if we accept that relations of power are

constitutive of the social, then the main question for democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values'. Power is at the centre of democratic concerns and in spite of the fact that contemporary political-economic phenomena (particularly globalization) have given rise to important societal changes the aim of deepening democracy cannot ignore it.

Therefore, for Mouffe, the task of democratic politics lies obviously not in the attempt to eradicate power but instead in the creation of mechanisms that enable a legitimate confrontation among hegemonic articulations. This adversarial view of politics is completely at odds with the post-political vision that asserts the primacy of an individualistic logic that is supposed to have undermined the importance of collective identities. From a post-political perspective, and as a consequence of their inability to envisage politics in collective and adversarial terms, power relations cannot be challenged, which raises serious doubts about the democratic vision it advances.

The critique of post-political ideas is helpful to elucidate the tenets of Mouffe's agonistic approach. It also makes clear the crucial role played by hegemony, power and antagonism in her view of politics. Just to be sure: 'Politics, especially democratic politics, can never overcome conflict and division' (Mouffe, 1996, p. 8). It should be mentioned that other versions of agonism have also grappled with the concepts of power and antagonism that are central to Mouffe's approach. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, it is convenient to single out Mouffe's vision by clarifying how it differs from the versions advocated by other agonistic theorists.

### 5.3.5 Mouffe's agonism: a comparative perspective

As mentioned earlier, however, other political theorists have emphasized similar views that conflict-driven agonism can invigorate democratic practices. Obviously, Mouffe's agonism is not the only one that emphasizes the potential of antagonism in human associations and proposes to alleviate its propensity to hostility through legitimate democratic struggle. In her book *Agonistics* Mouffe (2013) clarifies the specificity of her version of agonism by explaining how it differs from those espoused by Hannah

Arendt, Bonnie Honig and William Connolly<sup>143</sup>. Mouffe's critique, which is helpful to elucidate her framework, deserves a very succinct examination. These different conceptions of agonism are now briefly examined.

According to Mouffe, the problem of the agonism developed by Hannah Arendt is that it constitutes 'agonism without antagonism'. For Mouffe, although Arendt correctly ascribes priority to the pluralistic character of political life, she nevertheless fails to recognize that this plurality is also the source of irreconcilable division that will lead to the emergence of antagonistic political identities. The problem, therefore, with Arendt's version of agonism<sup>144</sup> is that it cannot take into account 'the hegemonic nature of every form of consensus and the ineradicability of antagonism' (Mouffe, 2013, p. 11).

A Mouffian conceptualization of agonism is also different from that proposed by Bonnie Honig, who conceptualizes the process of identity formation as perpetually open to the challenge posed by dissenting views. According to Mouffe (2013, p. 11), such a description of agonism is correct but gives insufficient attention to 'the crucial role of hegemonic articulations'. In this case, the problem with Honig's (1993) agonism is the lack of explanation of how new political identities and institutions can overcome those that are being supplanted.

Mouffe also questions the type of agonism proposed by William Connolly. Although she accepts Connolly's idea that democracy has to be radicalised so that new forms of engagement (that are reflexive of a deep respect for the difference) can emerge, she nonetheless raises doubts about the extent to which his version of agonism recognizes the ineradicability of antagonism. Thus, she asks if within Connolly's agonistic framework 'can all antagonisms be transformed into agonisms and all positions be accepted as legitimate and accommodated within the agonistic struggle?' Her answer is that Connolly's insistence on the deep respect for the other, while enabling a strong

<sup>143</sup> A cautious note is important here. By suggesting that Mouffe's agonistic theory is more suitable for grounding an Agonistic Policy Model (APM), it is not presumed that the versions of agonism developed by Arendt, Honig and Connolly cannot be helpful to offer important insights into policy-making.

<sup>144</sup> Moreover, as Mouffe (2013) mentions, Arendt favours an interpretation of the political – based on the notion of 'inter-subjective agreement' – that ultimately accepts that the task of the political is the formation of rational consensus.

form of pluralism, blinds him to the need of establishing boundaries between different forms of conflict and disagreement (for instance, respect for the other might be impossible when stronger forms of conflict that threaten the very foundations of social coexistence are at stake). Similar to the case of Arendt, Mouffe (2013, p. 14) notes, Connolly fails to properly acknowledge the role of antagonism in pluralistic societies.

The versions of agonism developed by Arendt, Honig and Connolly have the merit of emphasizing the centrality of pluralism in contemporary democratic societies. However, they do not sufficiently stress the crucial dimensions of the ‘political’, that is, the ineradicability of antagonism, neither the process of hegemonic articulations. Although there is nothing wrong with the celebration of pluralism – with its implications of tolerance for difference – politics cannot avoid the ‘moment of decision’ or ‘closure’, in which a hegemonic configuration is formed. Hence, the specificity of Mouffe’s approach lies in its recognition of the ‘constitutive character of social division and the impossibility of a final reconciliation’ that is not properly acknowledged by other agonistic theorists such as Arendt, Honig and Connolly.

This section has examined the tenets of the agonistic version proposed by Chantal Mouffe. It has drawn attention to her interpretation of the political as a constitutive dimension of human coexistence that cannot be transcended or overcome. It has also examined how she envisages the task of democratic politics as the construction of institutional structures that contribute to domesticate the antagonistic character inherent to social relations. When this antagonism is converted from a fight between enemies into a struggle between adversaries then hostility is defused and conflict can be ‘handled’ in ways that do not menace the existence of democratic values, institutions and practices.

Mouffe’s agonistic framework, which has been developed at the political level, has an explanatory (and emancipatory) potential at the policy level that has not yet been fully appreciated. It is high time policy studies and public administration theory engage with Mouffe’s agonism and tap into her insightful analyses. In what follows next, the chapter will discuss how her central concepts – hegemony, antagonism and power – are not only

abstract categories of political philosophy but useful and applicable analytical tools capable of dissecting how the social process evolves.

#### 5.4 Hegemony, antagonism and power: an examination of the Brazilian health sector through agonistic lenses

Arguably, Mouffe's ideas are enriching not only in the field of political theory, to which they were originally addressed, but also to the domain of public policy. Her framework can offer innovative ways of envisaging policy-making, and hence contribute to the development of policy scholarship. As the previous chapters of this thesis have emphasized, the problem of how to properly integrate politics and administration has represented a challenge to the field of public policy since its inception. In addition, although important paradigms – such as IPP and DPA – have had an explicit concern with the integration of politics and administration their solutions remain problematic. In contrast, an APM can arguably offer an adequate way of welding politics and administration together without incurring the limitations of IPP and DPA. Before attempting to delineate the policy features of the agonistic model, which is the task undertaken in chapter 6, it is worth showing how the dynamic of conflict and antagonism central to the agonistic project unfolds in practice. In this section, an empirical illustration drawn from the Brazilian health sector helps to envisage how Mouffe's key concepts – hegemony, antagonism and power – are heuristic devices that enlighten the logic of the social process. This is an initial step in showing how Mouffe's ideas are a valuable framework to understand how public policy effectively operates in practice. As a preliminary discussion, it will also pave the way for the full articulation of agonistic concepts within the policy process, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

##### 5.4.1 Conflict and antagonism: an empirical illustration of Mouffe's agonism

From a Mouffian perspective, as argued earlier, the centre of analysis gravitates around the notion of conflict. Her vision of agonism is essentially a framework for coping with the conflictual character of contemporary pluralistic societies. 'What is important',



Mouffe (2013, p. 7) contends, ‘is that conflict does not take the form of an “antagonism” (struggle between enemies) but the form of an “agonism” (struggle between adversaries)’. So how do agonistic concepts help to illuminate the understanding of the social process?

Consider for a moment the policy configuration – which is typical of many policy domains – of the health system in Brazil.

The modern health system in Brazil dates back to the formation of the Single Health System (SHS) in the early 1990s. It was the result of a wide recognition that the existing health structures were inadequate to deal with the complex demands of a country with a large population. Thus, the creation of the SHS aimed primarily at the provision of health care to which every Brazilian citizen had become entitled with the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988. Notably, the Constitution asserted the principle of universality, which meant that health care become enshrined as a constitutional right of every individual regardless of ability to pay. The Constitution also determined that the design of the health system should be decentralized with the localities wielding significant political power to decide which policies to implement (although the broad guidelines of the health policy remained under the purview of the federal government). Another important novelty of the new Brazilian health system was the institution of participatory decision-making arenas (health councils) in which societal groups – health care consumers and providers, professional associations, trade unions, social movements, interest groups, politicians, experts, policy researchers, civil servants – could potentially influence the definition of health policies.

The health policy system in Brazil helps to visualize how the policy process carries out an ineradicable antagonistic potential that nevertheless can be processed ‘agonistically’. In addition, the health sector exemplifies how the policy process is not a purely technical exercise of policy-making in which experts can ‘reveal’ optimal and impartial solutions that are capable of satisfying the collective interests of the whole polity. ‘Political questions are not mere technical issues to be solved by experts’, Mouffe

(2013, p. 3) argues, since ‘proper political questions always involve decisions that require making a choice between conflicting alternatives’.

In contrast to the technical view, the health system shows that the policy process is a contentious, conflict-ridden, power-laden arena in which different policy actors vie for the privilege of having their policy project internalized by the government. Far from a neutral, expertise-led activity, the policy process is fundamentally a political terrain in which differences are asserted and negotiated. This conflictual condition of the health policy process has been a pervasive feature (Marques and Mendes, 2007) with multiple groups advocating different – and irreconcilable – solutions.

An illustration – which is also typical of many other policy sectors – can be found in the examination of the conflictual projects advanced by policy protagonists. In the case of the Brazilian health system, for instance, three main groups have articulated their policy projects in antagonistic ways: social actors, state actors, market actors. Social actors have engaged in participatory deliberative forums (particularly the health councils) in order to voice their demands and influence policy formulation at the grass-roots level; state actors have strived to preserve their privileged position in the policy process from the encroachment of other groups; market actors have systematically developed strategies so secure, and whenever possible to expand, their profits as health providers (Cortes, 2009).

The conflictual character of the relation between the groups – the ‘we’ and ‘they’ distinction – is one of the key features of the health policy domain. The preferences advanced by the policy actors (and in fact their identities) are not reconcilable since the satisfaction of their demands cannot be attained simultaneously. Empowering social actors, for instance, would imply dis-empowering state actors. Alternatively, meeting the demands of the social actors would require challenging the design of health provision thus thwarting the position of market actors. These situations point to the fact that their differences are constitutive, and though they can be negotiated in different ways, they cannot be eradicated. ‘In a modern democratic society there can be no longer a substantive unity and division must be recognized as constitutive’ (Mouffe, 1993, p.

147). The existence of incompatible demands suggests that the health policy process should be characterized as a political arena.

Although the purpose here is evidently not to tell the history of Brazilian public health sector, it is worth nonetheless emphasizing that the politicized character of Brazilian health policy is not a new phenomenon<sup>145</sup>. In the 1970s, the health policy agenda was roughly hegemonized by a collusion between federal agencies (Ministry of Health) and pharmaceutical companies, which led to the formation of an urban-based, profit-driven policy design. This hegemony was challenged in the 1980s and 1990s by the emergence of counter-hegemonic policy movements that advocated a structural reform of the health policy system.

The current design of the health system, which largely represents the assertion of a particular policy-political project, harks back to the promulgation of the Federal Constitution (1988), which redefined the overall design of the health system and established the new regulatory framework<sup>146</sup>. In spite of the more ‘democratic’ features, the health model is still state-centric<sup>147</sup>, not society-led<sup>148</sup>. Some scholars (e.g. Campos, 2007; Cortes, 2009; Paim, 2013) have characterized it as a much-politicized arena, in

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<sup>145</sup> The developments of the health system in Brazil are based on Cortes (2009). See also Gerschman and Santos (2006).

<sup>146</sup> The Constitution of 1988 emphasized the principles of universalization, decentralization and civic participation. The role of policy formulation was transferred to two key bodies, the National Health Council in articulation with the Tripartite Commission (composed of representatives from the federal, state and municipal levels). The task of policy implementation was ascribed to the nascent Single Health System (SHS), the operational body of the health system (similar to the NHS in England, from which it drew partial inspiration).

<sup>147</sup> The adoption of the state-centric model, however, came at the price of (partially) meeting corporate demands from the (powerful) medical lobbies and market interests of private companies. For instance, private hospitals were not nationalized and health users can still opt for the private health market. Not only that, the Single Health System operates in ‘partnership’ with private hospitals thus operating as a consumer of health services provided by the private market. The combination of public and private arrangements generated a problematic fragmentation of the health system (Campos, 2007). The hybrid character of the system elicits dysfunctional consequences that negatively affect the efficiency of health service delivery.

<sup>148</sup> Gerschman and Santos (2006) argue that in spite of the principles of decentralization (that transfers responsibilities to states and municipalities) and participation (that empowers civil society) the health policy decision-making still preserves a state-centric condition with a privileged role played by the federal level (Ministry of Health).

which (powerful) interest groups – insurance companies, pharmaceutical lobbies, medical professional associations, trade unions – vie for the affirmation of their projects.

To simplify a complex picture, the health system has been interpreted as a blend of strong bureaucratic power (wielded by federal agencies under the Ministry of Health) and highly influential market forces (evinced by a significant participation of the private health insurance companies and providers) with the exclusion of an aspiring civil society that is eager to influence the decision-making process (Cortes, 2009). What does the current hegemonic configuration tell us about the health policy domain in particular, and the broader policy-making system in general?

From this brief description, it becomes clear that policy dynamics is fundamentally a political issue in which multiple actors compete for primacy. In order to understand the policy process, according to the agonistic approach advocated here, the researcher is encouraged to examine – not books on policy optimization as the mainstream literature would suggest – but the configuration of hegemonic forces and how they are articulated. When depicted through agonistic lenses, the policy process has a fundamental political character. Politics, policy, and administration are inextricably linked. Although technical aspects (e.g. finance, budgeting, organizational charts, legal frames) are certainly relevant, the political dimension is crucial to explain how a particular policy design comes to be established. As Geva-May and Maslove (2000, p. 717) contended, ‘the debates and processes of change to health care systems must be seen as arenas in which political power contests occur’. In their study of the health reforms in Canada and Israel, they have concluded that ‘developments in health care systems are the by-product of power struggles between political forces’ (2000, p. 718). Their point is precisely what an APM suggests, that ‘political struggles determine policy making’ (2000, p. 719).

Before closing this section, and taking the example of the Brazilian health system in consideration, it is worth considering how APM departs from other policy paradigms. An APM, by emphasizing the impossibility of effacing the conflictive character of the

policy process, rejects the claims advanced by both Policy Analysis (PA) and the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA). In relation to PA, an agonistic perspective makes clear that there is no formula capable of finding a neutral solution to policy problems. Returning to the example of the health case, it becomes clear that even if the design of health policies were entrusted to experts, what they could provide is only a point of view that can always be challenged. Expertise cannot abolish the conflictive nature of the policy process. In fact, important ‘scientific’ journals such as *Cadernos de Saúde Pública* [Reports of Public Health] have dedicated significant attention to the Brazilian health model. The dialogue between experts reveals expressive disagreement among different scientific communities and the existence of die-hard controversies. In a recent issue that assessed the quarter-century since the creation of the Single Health System (SHS), experts were still unsure about which path to follow. Although the medical academic community concurred on the prevalence of a perverse yet significant health care deficit there was no consensus on the ideal solution to prescribe (Scheffer, 2013).

An APM, predicated on the notion of the ineradicability of antagonism between policy actors, also departs widely from the DPA, explored in chapter 4. Contrary to the idea that rational debate can lead to the identification of a consensual point of view capable of reflecting the diversity of the interests of the participants, APM contends that their differences cannot be overcome since they are constitutive. Although the aim of DPA is laudable, it does not place the focus on the essence of the policy process: power. Again, ‘political struggles determine policy making’. Coming back to the Brazilian health case, it is possible to clearly discern how policy actors embraced different – and irreconcilable – projects. Social actors pushed for the strengthening of participatory forums so that they could express their demands to the health authorities and exert control over the government; state actors were primarily concerned with the preservation of their central role in policy formulation, hence attempting to foreclose power-sharing agendas; finally, market actors ‘infiltrated’ federal agencies and other key decision-making bodies in order to expand their market opportunities and increase their profitability. Thus, how can deliberative procedures hammer out the construction of a consensual view when the policy projects at stake mutually negate each other? APM calls attention to the dimension of power in the policy process. As Long (1949, p. 257)

presciently wrote, ‘the lifeblood of administration is power’. The power dimension is not properly captured by DPA, and its attempt to ‘dissolve’ it through rational deliberation eventually contributes to undermine its explanatory credentials.

APM contends that the policy process is fundamentally a power dispute among competing policy projects. It brings to the fore the idea that although power and antagonism cannot be eradicated, they can be negotiated in different ways. In fact, as discussed next, this is the task of democratic politics.

#### 5.4.2 From antagonism to agonism: the task of democratic politics and public policy

How to prevent the antagonistic vision of the policy process held by different policy actors from degenerating into non-democratic forms of negotiation? How to ensure that policy differences are processed democratically, that is, through existing institutional structures and procedures? As previously discussed, from a Mouffian agonistic perspective, there is reason to suggest that even deep-seated conflict – for instance the intractable controversies alluded by Schön and Rein (1995) – can be negotiated within democratic boundaries, that is, through policy institutions.

There is a growing recognition among scholars that the task of dealing with political conflict has been transferred from the electoral system to public administration (Meier, 1997; Nabatchi, 2010). This issue has been explored in chapter 4, but it is worth briefly recalling the key argument. The idea was that although electoral and parliamentary institutions were originally designed to convert the preferences of the electorate into well-defined, clear and unambiguous public policies, they have not been able to execute their assignments. ‘Since the parties have failed to discuss issues, mobilize majorities in their terms, and create a working political consensus on measures to be carried out, the task is left for others – most prominently the agencies concerned’ (Long, 1949, p. 258). Consequently, public administration ended up both formulating and implementing public policies.

In practical terms, the assumption of the task of dealing with conflict has meant not only that public administration enacted political and administrative roles, but also that it became a guardian of democratic practices and values (Stivers, 2008; Nabatchi, 2010). Through public policies, democracy is ‘engineered’. The question, however, is how well prepared is public administration to cope with (deep-seated) conflict? Although deliberative scholars have correctly recognized that public administration is a political actor (entrusted with the responsibility of handling conflict), the solution they provide is inadequate.

As chapter 4 has shown, they propose to transform public administration in deliberative policy settings so that conflict can be negotiated and eventually overcome (Nabatchi, 2010). From our agonistic standpoint, this solution is highly problematic since it fails to acknowledge that the conflictual condition of the policy process is constitutive and hence ineradicable. Moreover, contra deliberative policy scholars, an APM posits that conflicts should be celebrated, not deplored. Conflict – not consensus – is what energizes democracy<sup>149</sup>.

Returning to the domain of health policies, scholars also diverge on the significance of conflict. While Campos (2007) insinuates that there is room for building a wide consensual view that integrates a vast range of disparate interests, Paim (2013) considers that the hegemonic configuration of the health system precludes the achievement of consensus since multiple policy actors hold irreconcilable policy-political projects<sup>150</sup>.

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<sup>149</sup> It is nonetheless important to acknowledge that contemporary deliberative scholarship has refrained from advocating consensus as the chief purpose of deliberation. For Gutmann and Thompson (2004), for instance, the crucial aspect is the justification of decisions, that is, reasons underlying decisions must be publicly expressed. Thus, the ultimate aim of deliberate democracy is not to reach consensus, but to produce justifiable decisions. For more recent developments on deliberative democracy, see also Warren and Pearse (2008) and Fishkin (2009).

<sup>150</sup> According to Campos (2007), there are two projects operating within the Brazilian health system: the state-centric and the liberal-privatist. On one hand, the state-centric tradition emphasizes free public health care for all regardless of capacity to pay (this is the model dominant for example in the UK). On the other hand, there is a liberal-privatist vision that construes health care as a private affair that should be dealt individually with the state setting only the regulatory framework that defines the rights and responsibilities of health care providers (as happens in the United States).

Campos (2007) raises the pertinent question of whether the definition of a national health model could be the result of a wide agreement among different segments of the Brazilian population. Could the disparate interests of multiple segments – poor citizens, urban middle class, health workers association, health managers, health care providers, social movements, political parties – be welded together in a comprehensive consensus? From an agonistic perspective, the answer is negative because any form of consensus would deny the ‘political’, that is, it would be blind to the fact that antagonism is constitutive and hence ineradicable. Along similar lines, Paim (2013) emphasizes conflict and antagonism as the key to develop the health system.

Progressive forces of civil society should rely on the bearers of antithesis who tend to emerge from social movements that identify distinct antagonism in contemporary society. Special attention [should be paid] to the plurality of voices in a democratic society would enable the constitution of individual and collective political subjects, who would question the subversion of social rights, inequities in health and relations of subordination, hence triggering new political actions (Paim, 2013, p. 1934; own translation).

The evolution of the Brazilian health system, as noted earlier, has witnessed a series of struggles that opposed groups with contentious policy-political agendas (Marques and Mendes, 2007). Since the 1970s, for instance, the Public Health Reform community (known as *sanitaristas*) have laboured in favour of universal health care system based on state-led provision. They were highly influential in the design of the health model enshrined by the Brazilian Federal Constitution (enacted in 1988) and in the implementation of the Single Health System. In spite of their support for a comprehensive health care system – construed as part of an ideology of inclusion, freedom and democracy<sup>151</sup> – the configuration of the policy model has remained fragmented (and for many dysfunctional).

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<sup>151</sup> The construction of an efficient, responsive, accountable health system, sensitive to the preferences of the polity, is frequently portrayed as a token of democratic progress (Shimizu et al, 2013). ‘SHS [Single Health System] project is a policy for the construction of democracy that aims to enhance the public sphere, social inclusion and inequality reduction’ (Paim and Teixeira, 2007, p. 1820; own translation). In the contemporary Brazilian context, health and democracy are twin processes and permeate each other (Fleury, 1997).



The literature on Brazilian health policy tends to indicate the existence of (an uneasy and constantly challenged) consensus that brings together state actors (who control significant organizational, decisional and financial resources) and market actors (notably private hospitals and health insurance companies) but which excludes societal groups (particularly health care consumers and health workers) (Cortes, 2009). Currently, there is a strong debate whether deliberative practices can challenge the power of state and market actors. Evidence<sup>152</sup> indicates that in spite of health councils being a constitutional obligation, power has not yet flowed to civil society (Shimizu et al, 2013).

From an agonistic point of view, there are two important lessons to be retained. The first concerns the ineradicability of conflict. The conflictive condition of the health system is not contingent, but constitutive. Although the configuration may change (for instance by constructing an alliance between state and societal actors through deliberative forums), the existence of conflict cannot be superseded. This is why the expectation of a consensual view (Campos, 2007) is deceptive. Any consensus will be a partial representation of the social and therefore unable to mirror the totality of societal preferences. ‘Every consensus exists’, Mouffe (2000, p. 104) argues, ‘as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion’.

There is yet a second reason to suspect consensus. Because it precludes opposition, it has perverse democratic implications. A vibrant democracy, as Mouffe has persistently warned, depends on the creation of institutional channels for the expression of dissent and disagreement. This is why the task of democratic politics is to allow for agonistic confrontation, that is, contestation between adversaries. A contest between adversaries who mutually respect the legitimacy of their opponent to make explicit their differences. The emphasis is certainly not on consensus, which is pernicious for democratic vitality.

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<sup>152</sup> In their discussion of participatory forums (health councils), Shimizu et al (2013) contend that power is still concentrated in the government. In most cases, health councillors (that represent civil society) get acquainted with the decisions being made, but they do not get involved in the process of decision-making. In their view, the organizational logic of health councils – bureaucratic and centralized – does not contribute to empower civil society. In their view, health consumers lack voice and influence, hence remaining passive spectators.

‘The illusion of consensus’, Mouffe (1993, p. 5) argues, is ‘fatal for democracy and should therefore be abandoned’.

This discussion has broader implications for the fields of public policy and administration, which frequently accept that the aim of policy-making is the production of consensus. An APM cautions against the emphasis on consensus and encourages the field to acknowledge the benefits of dissent. This claim might seem counter-intuitive at first. However, when read against the background of its democratic implications it can make sense. Through agonistic lenses, ‘conflicts are not seen as disturbances that unfortunately cannot be eliminated, as empirical impediments that render impossible the full realization of harmony’ (Mouffe, 1993, p. 8).

Therefore, politics and policy-making should be committed not to the establishment of consensus, but to the instigation of agonistic struggle. Only when contending policy actors construe their opponents as adversaries – and not as enemies – can the antagonistic potential of their difference be defused. This is the test of democratic strength: to what extent can the policy process enable conflict, dissent and disagreement to emerge.

Evidently, the agonistic emphasis on dissent does not mean that policy-making should be discouraged from taking decisions. In her writings, Mouffe has clarified that her vindication of conflict does not imply a thorough rejection of consensus. In policy-making, decisions need to be taken and there is nothing wrong with it. But they are construed as ‘temporary respites in an ongoing confrontation’ (Mouffe, 2000, p. 102). Therefore, it is possible to speak of a ‘conflictual consensus’.

Therefore, an APM assumes that ‘consensus is no doubt necessary, but it must be accompanied by dissent’ (Mouffe, 2005, p. 31). This means that policy organizations are encouraged to operate according to the logic of ‘conflictual-consensus’, that is,

decisions are taken and consensuses are (provisionally) accepted, but the constitutive character of conflict is not dismissed<sup>153</sup>.

A critic of agonism might interject and argue that an emphasis on conflict in the pragmatic field of public policy and administration is easier said than done. This argument should be taken seriously because it reveals the danger of making abstract prescriptions that lack empirical feasibility. Therefore to avoid the risk of proposing a policy model that is not implementable, it is advisable to examine how a conflict-centred, power-driven, dissent-led APM can be delineated. In order to understand how conflict can be handled within the policy process, the next chapter will focus on the policy features of the APM. In particular, attention will be given to the work of contemporary policy scholars whose ideas are attuned with the theoretical work developed by Chantal Mouffe.

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<sup>153</sup> When policy-making follows the ‘conflictual-consensus’ logic, it accepts that conflict cannot be transcended and also recognizes that the unavoidable consensus can be ‘institutionalized in different ways, some more egalitarian than others’. Depending on how the consensus is built, new hegemonic configurations can be devised (Mouffe, 2013).

## **Chapter 6 – Agonistic Policy Model (APM): the policy features**

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the policy features of the Agonistic Policy Model (APM). The theoretical cornerstones presented in chapter 5, which concentrated on the examination of Mouffe's agonism and set the ontological underpinnings of APM, are now analysed from a policy orientation. The purpose here is to explore the policy dimension of the APM with a particular focus on its democratic implications.

The examination of the policy aspects of APM is relevant for various reasons. First, it helps to understand how the policy process unfolds when considered from an agonistic perspective. Second, it spells out the reasons why the agonistic approach to public policy proposed here challenges the theoretical claims of the four other paradigms addressed in this thesis. Third, it delineates the democratic implications of APM. Fourth, it enables the visualization of how APM integrates politics and administration.

The key argument put forward here is that an APM deserves to be taken seriously because it offers both a theoretical framework and a policy tool that has not yet been fully appreciated in public policy and administrative studies. An examination of contemporary policy scholarship suggests that research has occasionally dabbled with agonistic ideas but never in a systematic and explicit way. Although fundamental agonistic concepts have been discussed by policy scholars, they still have not been completely integrated into a body of thought. By developing an Agonistic Policy Model (APM), this thesis aims to contribute to fill this gap.

In terms of structure, this chapter is organized as follows. Section 6.2 examines how policy studies have interpreted the role of conflict in the policy process and suggests that it has usually been cast in rather negative terms. Section 6.3 discusses the ideas of policy scholars whose vision of the policy process can be characterized as 'embryonically' agonistic. Section 6.4 discusses the work of Robert Hoppe and critiques

his typology of public policy. Section 6.5 engages with the situational approach of Carlos Matus, whose vision of the policy process chimes with Mouffe's agonism. Section 6.6 shows how the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) can be implemented in practice by drawing illustrations from the field of urban planning. Finally, section 6.7 closes the chapter and attempts to formalize the Agonistic Policy Model (APM).

## 6.2 Conflict in public policy

Before analysing how policy literature has grappled with agonism, it is convenient to briefly discuss how public policy and administration have dealt with the issue of conflict, which is at the very roots of the agonistic orientation. In this section, it is argued that in spite of a recognition that conflict is an important component of the policy process, public policy scholarship has tended to construe it in depreciative terms. The negative perception of conflict, however, is at odds with the APM, which understands conflict not only as constitutive of the policy dynamic, but also as a source of vitality for democracy. In this section, the overall (derogatory) perception of conflict is initially investigated, then an exemplification drawn from contemporary policy scholarship of how conflict can be conceived differently (in a way that is more attuned to the agonistic view) is presented.

Conflict does not enjoy a favourable reputation in policy studies. In general, as a rule, although conflict is recognized as inevitable, it is depicted as a detrimental aspect of the policy process that needs to be eliminated as quickly as possible. Thus, it is primarily portrayed as nuisance or disturbance: public policy scholarship 'accepts the existence of conflict, but it concentrates on minimizing the effects of conflict' (Chappell, 2007, p. 37). The lack of appreciation for conflict is perhaps the reason why it is not among the most popular subjects in public policy studies.

Policy theorizing has refrained from engaging with conflict, which is often denigrated as a source of paralysis and anarchy. 'Policy makers and planners have always had difficulty with conflict management and have not yet developed a respect for strife and its forms as a recurrent feature of power and decision-making structures' (Pløger, 2004,

p. 79). To be sure, the celebration of conflict is not one of the hallmarks of public policy scholarship. Instead, modern policy studies tend to displace conflict and emphasize other aspects of public organizations, such as coordination (Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest, 2010), creation of public value (Moore, 1995), tools of government (Hood, 1983), policy learning (May, 1992; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993), just to cite a few examples. No doubt, these aspects are central to public policy, but they push the focus away from conflict.

There is reason, however, to suggest that conflict is not always problematic. As a lone voice in the field of public policy contends, ‘conflict is inevitable and yet desirable part of organizational life’ (Montgomery and Cook, 2005, p. 6 cited in Chappell, 2007, p. 34). The pejorative interpretation of conflict is problematic, because it neglects the constructive role that it might play not only in public organizations but more broadly in the political regime. As Chappell (2007, p. 33) notes, ‘There is a general belief that all conflict must be resolved or terminated. This perspective would have us believe that all conflict is bad. Actually, this is contrary to the democratic process and demonstrates a lack of understanding regarding the importance of conflict’. In fact, appreciation for democratic values is intimately connected with an endorsement of conflict in politics and public policy.

A vindication for the positive role of conflict<sup>154</sup> within pluralist democracies has been put forward by Mouffe (1996, p. 10) when she argues that ‘when we accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion, we can begin to envisage democratic politics in a different way’. She argues not only for recognition of the legitimacy of conflict but also for the construction of institutional venues for its expression.

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<sup>154</sup> From an agonistic perspective, however, even a positive interpretation of conflict is not enough to qualify a scholar or a framework as ‘agonistic’. This is an important distinction that needs to be made. In fact, renowned liberal policy theorists, such as Arthur Bentley and Charles Lindblom, have ascribed conflict crucial importance in explaining the policy process. In spite of their conflict-driven analyses, their conceptualization cannot be properly defined as agonistic. For an interesting discussion of the agonistic elements in Bentley (1908) see Spicer (2011).

Attention to broader democratic values can encourage a more appreciative vision of conflict. Perhaps, a shift in the perception of conflict is not far-fetched. An interesting illustration, taken from contemporary policy scholarship that duly acknowledges the importance of conflict – and does not propose to suppress it – can be found in the work of policy scholar Steven Ney. His account of conflict respects the (agonistic) notion that conflict is not a hindrance to be overcome, but the very condition in which the policy process takes place, as will be clarified in subsequent sections.

In his book *Resolving Messy Public Problems*, Ney (2009) asserts the conflictual nature of the policy processes and argues that this conflictuality should be interpreted as giving rise to an ‘irreducible plurality of views’. Thus, departing from the standard treatment in the field, that envisages conflict as a temporary stage to be superseded by some form of consensus or agreement, Ney acknowledges its constitutive character.

In his study, Ney focuses on ‘messy’ (also referred to as ‘wicked’ or intractable in the literature) problems, which can be defined as those situations that ‘seem to be uncannily adept at developing immunities to any cure policy-makers have so far administered’ (Ney, 2009, p. 1). Problems are messy, he notes, not only because of their inherent complexity but also as a result of the intricacy of the policy process. In his view, democratic societies operate according to a multi-layered policy process populated by a multitude of institutions. ‘Pluralist democracies’, Ney (2009, p. 3) writes, ‘more than any other political system, encourage value-driven conflict’. Public policy decisions need to be worked out through a myriad of policy participants (politicians, public officials, courts, interest groups, experts, the media, civil society) who hold different ideas of what should be done and how. The presence of a high number of actors, some of them acting as ‘veto-players’, contribute to congest the policy channels. Thus ‘instead of enabling swift and decisive policy action, political systems – particularly pluralist democracies – ensnare decision-makers in slow, circular and mindbogglingly complicated policy processes’ (Ney, 2009, p. 2).

Different from mainstream approaches to public management, which construes conflict negatively as a source of trouble and disruption, Ney argues that the policy process is

more properly interpreted as the coexistence of an ‘irreducible plurality of views’. Instead of forcing conflictual situations to succumb to rational decision-making or other forms of consensus building (although sometimes he seems somewhat ambivalent), the different perspectives expressed by different policy actors should be admitted as equally valid and acceptable. Ney offers a vision of conflict that is compatible with the tenets of the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) proposed here.

Analysing the policy domains of transport, health and pensions, and drawing on cultural theory (inspired especially by Mary Douglas) and advocacy coalitions theory (from the work of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith), Ney (2009, p. 183) concludes that

The case studies show how policy debate about complex and uncertain problems generates an irreducible plurality of voices and narratives. None of the stories within any of the policy domains can be readily reduced onto another. Neither are the contending stories close substitutes for each other. Each argument is suffused with the kind of interpretation, judgement and values that makes them incompatible, each argument containing facts and evidence that make them hard to dismiss.

The idea that conflict is at the core of the policy process, especially in pluralistic democracies, is certainly not new. Nonetheless, what is appealing in Ney’s examination of messy problems is his willingness to accept the legitimacy of the coexistence of an ‘irreducible plurality of views’. This important recognition is attuned to Mouffe’s (2013, p. 7) agonistic vision of conflict:

Conflict in liberal democratic societies cannot and should not be eradicated, since the specificity of pluralist democracy is precisely the recognition and the legitimation of conflict. What liberal democratic politics requires is that the others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned.

An Agonistic Policy Model (APM), which is being built in this chapter, attempts to fill a gap in the literature. It should be recognized, however, that in spite of the absence of an APM, important contributions – such as that provided by Steven Ney – offer conceptualizations that can be construed as consistent with an agonistic approach. Although it was never his purpose to engage with agonistic ideas (his background is in cultural theory and the advocacy coalitions approach), his rendering of conflict nonetheless displays significant commonalities with the agonistic orientation advocated



here, hence helping to elucidate what configuration an agonistic view might assume in the field of public policy.

As this chapter will attempt to show, not only Ney but also other theorists can facilitate the task of envisaging how an APM can be delineated. As the following sections indicate, various policy theorists (explicitly engaging with agonistic ideas or not) have developed frameworks that can be ‘appropriated’ by an APM. Along these lines, the (agonistic) contributions of contemporary policy researchers Richard Box, Douglas Torgerson, Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram are examined next.

### 6.3 Intimations of agonism: the contributions of Box, Torgerson, Ingram and Schneider

The absence of fully-fledged agonistic models does not mean that interesting inroads in agonistic theory have not been made by policy theorists. In order to exemplify how the agonistic perspective has sporadically influenced policy research, three illustrations are worth describing: Box’s hegemonic interpretation of the policy process, Torgerson’s conceptualization of the policy professional as ‘voices of dissent’, Ingram and Schneider’s understanding of the policy process as exclusionary. They are briefly examined now with the purpose of showing that agonistic themes are not a complete novelty in policy scholarship.

Embracing a hegemonic view of the policy process, American policy theorist Richard Box in several of his writings has acknowledged the need of rethinking public policy theory and practice. He has argued that policy studies hardly evoke their critical power to challenge hegemonic power arrangements. Through silence over societal issues such as (capitalistic) regime exploitation, (undemocratic) relations of subordination, growing inequality among social classes, policy studies end up being complicit with the status quo (Box, 2004). Box encourages policy theory and practice to adopt a more ‘progressive’ attitude that recognizes its civic responsibilities to promote a more democratic, equitable and fair society.

His emphasis on the hegemonic character of the policy process leads him to envisage the task of public administration as the construction of alternatives capable of challenging dominant forms of subordination. In his view, public policy and administration should not be confined to interpret the world. They should actively pursue to change it. He notes that the idea that public policy and administration should enact a passive role stems from the dichotomous vision that has construed politics as the source of decision and administration as the realm of execution. ‘Since public administration is thought to be an instrumental field tasked with implementing policy, not making it, one might assume that the appropriate role of practitioners and academicians is to deal with the consequences of societal conditions, not to change them’ (Box, 2008, p. 4). There are, however, many reasons why this dichotomous vision is problematic, since in practice public administrators and policy practitioners either decide or strongly influence those who decide. When it becomes clear that the politics-administration dichotomy is an unreliable descriptor of the policy process, it can be more easily accepted that public administration is itself a site of power capable to promoting transformative change<sup>155</sup>. The political power of public administration therefore can be channelled to question deep-seated forms of subordination and oppression. Clearly, agonistic tones can be detected in Box’s analyses particularly in his emphasis on the hegemonic logic of the policy process.

Another variant of the idea of public administration as transformative site can be found in the work of Canadian policy theorist Douglas Torgerson. In his essay ‘Policy professionalism and the voices of dissent’, Torgerson (1997) challenges the (conventional) assumption that policy professionals are disengaged, ‘neutral’ experts whose tasks are purely technical. He indicates that this technocratic, apolitical view of the policy professional has usually been portrayed as entirely opposed to the strongly

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<sup>155</sup> Public administration’s commitment to progressive values and social change prompted Box (2007) to conceive of the ‘public service practitioner as an agent of social change’. In his view, those individuals working within public policy institutions should actively strive for reversing unequal social conditions. His key argument is that ‘public professionals might use the administrative discretion and legal and organizational resources available to them to shift “downward” the distribution of goods such as education, infrastructure, public safety, access to public decision-making, and so on, with the intent of narrowing the widening gap between the wealthy and everyone else, especially the poor’ (Box, 2007, p. 194-5). Therefore, the public administrator is invited by Box to act politically on behalf of those groups that are under-represented and usually lack voice and power to make their claims heard.

politicized approach adopted by social movements. Drawing on the case of environmentalism, he notes that social movements have traditionally been committed to a transformative, disruptive agenda that question power structures and challenge social patterns perceived as unfair or oppressive.

But is it really the case, Torgerson asks, that policy professionals are purely technical whereas social movement (activists) are purely political? In his view, this opposition should be seen as problematic. Instead of the conventional dualistic view that construes policy professionals as technocrats concerned with the preservation of organizational procedures and institutional routines in opposition to social movements that are conceived as spaces of dissent, disruption and disturbances to the political order, Torgerson suggests that this binary might be misleading.

Torgerson's key argument appears to be that the 'voices of dissent' typical of social movements are not irreconcilable with policy professionalism. 'The sphere of environmental politics', he says, 'thus forms a particularly prominent site of contact between the distinct, largely antagonistic worlds of policy professionalism and dissenting social movements' (Torgerson, 1997, p. 346). When the conduct of policy professionals is analysed through the lenses of dissent and transformative politics typical of social movements, there is reason to suppose that public administration itself can become a site of contestation of power structures capable of disrupting the prevailing order. He does not explain whether this is practically feasible, although he does argue that this is theoretically conceivable. His article has nevertheless the merit of giving salience to the possibility of public administration and policy settings emerging as sites of resistance and counter-hegemony. In addition, his discussion of the policy professional as an agent of change has some clear affinities with the agonistic ideas embraced by Chantal Mouffe.

The concept of target population developed by Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram has interesting agonistic elements that are worth pointing out and represents a third illustration of agonism in policy scholarship. In *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions in Public Policy*, Ingram and Schneider (2005) indicate the exclusionary

logic of the policy process, which in their view always operates by excluding certain groups and including others. In order to become the recipient – or in their jargon the ‘target’ – of a public policy, and hence eligible to the material and symbolic benefits provided by the government, a particular group needs to be perceived as ‘deserving’. This positive discrimination that privileges a specific group, however, should not obscure the fact that competing groups are depreciated and treated as undeserving and unentitled.

In their work, Schneider and Ingram explore the dynamics of the policy process, which in their view follows an exclusionary, oligarchic logic that tend to reward a few – those that are socially constructed as honoured and dignified – as well as marginalize others who are deemed responsible for their own situation and therefore judged ineligible for obtaining support (especially funding) from the government to remedy or improve their (unfavourable) situation. The allocation of resources among social groups is not therefore a neutral mechanism based on technical criteria, as more conventional approaches to public policy would suggest. This allocation, in contrast, is a policy/political process that divides society into opposing camps: the deserving and the undeserving<sup>156</sup>. It is not difficult to realize that this exclusionary logic to public policy has a strong agonistic connotation, since, as Mouffe has often argued, every social order has a hegemonic structure, which means that politics is necessarily based on relations of exclusion.

What can be learned from Box’s hegemonic reading of the policy process, Torgerson’s conceptualization of the policy professional as an agent of transformative politics and Ingram and Schneider’s exclusionary public policy vision? Their contributions evince the existence of agonistic ideas in contemporary policy scholarship (although none of these authors claims to be working within an agonistic framework). The agonistic traces that surface in their writings are a positive indication of the potential of agonism to challenge dominant forms of thinking and to propose alternative views of the policy

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<sup>156</sup> The policy process is depicted not only as an instrument for rewarding specific groups (with material and symbolic benefits) but also as a mechanism of confirmation (or disavowal) of particular social constructions. ‘Public policy’, Schneider and Ingram (2005, p. 5) note, ‘is the primary tool through which government acts to exploit, inscribe, entrench, institutionalize, perpetuate, or change social constructions’.

process. The absence of a systematic account of agonism in public policy persists as a (lamentable) gap in the literature and provides the main justification for the elaboration of this thesis.

There is yet one more crucial element missing in the (partially and fragmentary) agonistic analyses advanced by Box, Torgerson and Ingram and Schneider. None of them – and it has never been their purpose in the first place – indicate how an agonistic policy configuration can be conceptualized. In order to show how an agonistic view of public policy might be articulated, the thesis will explore the contributions of policy theorists Robert Hoppe (section 6.4) and Carlos Matus (section 6.5).

#### 6.4 Agonism in policy theory: Hoppe's policy typology

Policy and administrative scholarship has accepted that policy-making is fundamentally political. Either in earlier research (Levitan, 1943; Waldo, 1948; Appleby, 1949; Long, 1949; Stein, 1952; Dimock and Dimock, 1953; Sayre, 1958; Kaufman, 1969; Wildavsky, 1979) or in modern policy and administrative studies (Healey, 1993; Rein and Schön, 1993; Fischer, 2003; Nabatchi 2010; Spicer, 2010; Lodge and Wegrich, 2012) it has been recognised that policy and administration can hardly be dissociated from politics.

Despite the recognition of the political character of policy and administration, scholarship has not yet fully acknowledged the potential contribution of agonistic ideas for the understanding of the policy process. However, recent essays have shown awareness of the agonistic strand (Fox and Miller, 1996; King, 2000; Patterson, 2001). An exception in the field, which devoted more systematic attention to the agonistic dimension of public policies, can be found in the work of Dutch policy scholar Robert Hoppe. In his book *The Governance of Problems*, Hoppe (2010) explores the features of an agonistic style of policy-making, along side other three types: deliberative, advocacy coalitions, and the technical. His investigation has the merit of showing that in certain circumstances the policy process should be construed as agonistic. This section will probe Hoppe's depiction of the policy process with emphasis placed on the agonistic

component. Initially, his conceptualization of the policy process is described. Later, his argument that the agonistic style should be collapsed into the deliberative, so that conflict can be overcome, is examined.

Hoppe (2010) employs an approach that he designates as ‘governance of problems’<sup>157</sup>. It is based on the idea that public policies are an instrument to convert political demands into administrative solutions. Critical of analytic policy models that focus only on the technical aspects of policy-making – such as Lasswell’s (1971) sequential policy cycle framework – Hoppe argues that the policy process should be envisaged as a combination of political, policy and administrative elements. Thus, he posits that the policy process should be interpreted not only in terms of problem-solving (expertise), as analytical models propose, but should also be sensitive to broader political issues (power and participation).

In his governance of problems approach, Hoppe suggests that the policy process should be conceptualized in terms of what he designates as ‘policy-politics styles’, that is, specific modes of policy-making that help to transform political problems into policy and administrative solutions. Each policy-politics style corresponds to a particular type of problem. The table 6.1 below helps to visualize how Hoppe’s model connects the four types of policy problems with the four styles of policy-politics.

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<sup>157</sup> Hoppe (2010, p. 43) qualifies his understanding of the term, ‘I coin the concept of governance of problems. By this concept I mean the ensemble of all those institutions, beliefs, rules and practices that are used by citizens and other policy players in public problem processing in a political system’.

Table 6.1 – Hoppe’s policy-politics typology

<i>Type of problem</i>	<i>Policy-politics styles</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Features</i>
Unstructured problems	Agonistic	Dissent on policy objectives and policy tools	Policy issues are highly politicized, conflictive and passionate
Moderately structured (agreement on means)	Deliberative	Dissent on policy objectives and consensus on policy tools	Policy issues are depoliticized by the adoption of deliberative institutions and procedures
Moderately structured (agreement on goals)	Advocacy coalitions	Consensus on policy objectives and dissent on policy tools	Policy issues are decided by coalitions of individuals who share similar beliefs
Structured problems	Technical	Consensus on policy objectives and policy tools	Policy issues are handled by experts through the application of rational problem-solving

Source: adapted from Hoppe (2010, ch. 5)

In his view, each of these four policy-politics styles – agonistic, deliberative, advocacy coalitions and technical – are adequate for coping with a specific type of policy problem. The agonistic approach is construed as appropriate to deal with ‘unstructured’ problems, that is, problems that lack consensus on either the policy objectives (ends) or policy tools (means). A typical example would be media regulation, in which there is strong dissent on both the policy objectives (should it be regulated?) and on the policy tools (how to regulate it?).

One may speak of unstructured problems when policy makers observe widespread discomfort with the status quo, yet perceive persistent high uncertainty about relevant knowledge claims, and high preference volatility in mass and elite opinion or strong, divisive, even community-threatening conflict over the values at stake ... any solution effort immediately spawns new dissent and more intense conflict (Hoppe, 2010, p. 73).

For Hoppe, agonistic policy-politics styles are appropriate to deal with unstructured (contentious) problems that involve highly politicized issues that generate intractable or ‘wicked’ controversies. Rarely a set of core assumptions is shared and ‘the number of belief systems in the policy issue area is large, with multiple belief systems vying for dominance in rather chaotic processes. Issue networks breathe an atmosphere of political strife, adversarial debate and agonistic participation’ (Hoppe, 2010, p. 134). The disorganized and unstable process of policy formation is not easily managed<sup>158</sup> and tends to be experimental with motivated individuals fighting passionately for their beliefs.

In contrast to the agonistic style (that is concerned with unstructured or contentious problems), the technical style is appropriate to deal with structured problems, that is, policy issues marked by high levels of certainty on both the objectives (ends) and tools (means). Therefore the technical style – centred on expertise and scientific problem-solving – is appropriate to handle situations in which there is agreement on what to (ends) do and how to do it (means). Hoppe (2010, p. 72) explains that structured problems are similar to ‘puzzles’, in the sense that for every puzzle there is only one possible solution. Thus, when dealing with structured problems policy-makers know that solutions are certain and undisputed. Policy problems become a matter of either expertise or bureaucratic routine. In between the agonistic and the technical styles of policy-politics, there are two intermediate types, the deliberative and the advocacy coalitions, which though important will not be further examined here.

The description of the agonistic framework provided by Hoppe is precise and useful. His attention to power and participation in the construction of an analytic of the policy process is commendable (Hoppe, 2010, p. 44). In addition, his policy model has the virtue of avoiding linear and sequential analyses of the policy process (e.g. Lasswell (1971)). Moreover, Hoppe’s model – that he designates as ‘governance of problems’ – has the merit of integrating political, policy and administrative aspects.

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<sup>158</sup> In more extreme agonistic circumstances, Hoppe (2010, p. 135) argues, the policy process might come to a paralysis. ‘In the case of truly agonistic and agitating populist politics, process management boils down to crisis management and political “fire fighting”’.



Unfortunately, Hoppe remains faithful to the structuration methodology<sup>159</sup>, which recommends the conversion of unstructured into structured problems, so that they can be resolved by problem-solving techniques. This allegiance to the structuration process leads Hoppe to propose that the agonistic style should succumb to more ‘structured’ stages of the policy process. An agonistic policy process ‘cannot succeed in processing unstructured policy problems into successful, feasible forms of collective, organised action. They remain locked into a populist type of politics, with agonistic, highly adversarial modes of ad-hoc participation’ (Hoppe, 2010, p. 137). Cautioning against optimistic celebration of conflict, Hoppe (2010, p. 136) notes that agonistic issues can lead to ‘random decision’ or in even worse cases to ‘non-decision’. The propensity of agonistic policy process to chaos and anarchy might require ‘crisis management’ measures to contain violence. Thus he says that ‘in situations of prolonged deadlock and controversy, politicians and other policy makers sometimes resort to a politics of transformative discourse coalition construction, conflict management, and accommodation and pacification of conflicting values’ (Hoppe, 2010, p. 142).

The solution, in Hoppe’s view, lies in the transformation of the policy process toward less agonistic, more stable and rational forms of policy-making, in which negotiation can proceed in less anarchic ways. Only when the agonistic stage is transcended, can decisions be taken. Unstructured problems are pushed into the direction of structured problems. In order to convert ‘divergent views and mutual criticism into opportunities for policy change’, strongly contentious issues need to be de-politicized (Hoppe, 2010, p. 139). Only a ‘politics of accommodation’ can collapse conflict into consensus. In this case, agonistic forms of policy-making have to be replaced by deliberative styles.

Evidently, Hoppe’s analysis is at odds with the APM proposed here. Although his depiction of the policy process has room for agonism, which is an important step in policy scholarship and deserves to be praised, it does not sufficiently acknowledge the constitutive character of antagonism. He mistakenly proposes to overcome agonism with the deceptive expectation that the antagonistic component will be wiped out when

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<sup>159</sup> See Thompson and Tuden (1959) and also Mason and Mitroff (1981).

the policy problem becomes increasingly more structured. Hoppe suggests for instance that agonistic issues can be more structured if they are processed through deliberation. Because policy adversaries ‘come to realise that their predicament may end in serious, potentially harmful conflict’ (Hoppe, 2010, p. 139) they opt for the formation of deliberative networks capable of ‘accommodation of conflicting values, principles and goals’ (Hoppe, 2010, p. 140). Deliberative venues would then be more adequate to deal with rife and divisive conflict.

The solution offered by Hoppe is problematic. Although his idea of a progressive ‘structuration’ of policy problems makes sense, his intimation that antagonism can be dissipated does not. His analysis fails to realize that antagonism is constitutive of the policy process and cannot be overcome. It can be negotiated in different ways, as Mouffe often argued, but it cannot be removed. Hence, Hoppe’s attempt to transcend antagonism represents an (equivocated) attempt to supersede the political condition of the policy process.

The limitation of Hoppe’s model does not mean that his typology of policy problems is not useful. It should be acknowledged that he elaborated an elegant and sophisticated synthesis of the policy process. When it comes to the problem of dealing with deep-seated – or ‘wicked’ – conflict, however, there is reason to suspect that alternative approaches might offer interpretations that are more attuned to Mouffe’s understanding of the ‘political’. One interesting policy model, closer to Mouffe’s agonistic views, can be located in the policy model developed by Latin American policy theorist Carlos Matus, whose ideas are now examined.

#### 6.5 Agonism in public policy: Matus’s situational approach

The ideas of Carlos Matus, which will be explored in this section, offer important insights on how an agonistic policy process can be conceptualized. Although he never makes use of the term ‘agonism’, his vision of public policy has striking similarities with the theoretical framework developed by Chantal Mouffe. To be sure, it is convenient to start by showing some shared views between Mouffe’s agonistic theory and Matus’s situational approach.

Remarkably, both theorists construe the political activity (in the case of Mouffe) and the policy process (in the case of Matus) as pluralistic, hegemonic, adversarial, non-rational and indeterminate. Since Mouffe's ideas (that set the ontological underpinnings of the agonistic model) have already been discussed in chapter 5, it is convenient to focus on Matus's views of the policy process. His model of public policy (Matus, 2007d, p. 30-1) is grounded in five main assumptions:

1. *Pluralistic condition of social life*: 'in the social system there is an indeterminate number of subjects who govern and plan from distinct perspectives so that no actor is granted the ability to control all the variables involved in the conduction of the social process'<sup>160</sup>.
2. *Hegemonic conception of society*: 'each of these actors are inserted in a different way in reality, opt for different ideologies, have distinct interests and intentions ... In consequence, reality can be explained in different ways by each one of these actors and this particular explanation will be the foundation of their action'.
3. *Adversarial interpretation of policy behaviour*: policy actors engage in a conflictual dispute over goals and resources since the policy/planning process 'should necessarily encompass the problem of coping with – and winning over – the resistance displayed by others against the plan'.
4. *Creativity – not rationality – as the foundation of human agency*: 'these social actors are creative and therefore nothing can predict their behaviour except only foresee and prepare to react rapidly against the contingencies that result from the creativity of the social actors who interact in a system pervaded by uncertainty'.
5. *Open, dynamic and indeterminate view of social interaction*: 'planning is an unceasing and continuous process in which calculation, action, evaluation of

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<sup>160</sup> All citations of Matus's works are my own translation.

actions, and correction of plans are constantly repeated. The plan is always ready, but at the same time it is always being made’.

Mouffe and Matus, besides displaying a common allegiance to these philosophical principles, also exhibit another important similarity. Both theorists assert the primacy of conflict as the driving force of the political/policy process. This is the main reason why Matus’s policy framework can offer significant lessons on agonistic policy. In fact, the examination of the contemporary policy repertoire has indicated that the ideas proposed by Matus are those that are more attuned to Mouffe’s agonistic framework. In this section, it will be argued that the ontological underpinnings of the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) are clearly visible in Matus’s work.

The argument is presented in three parts. Initially, because Matus is not well known in the European (and American) literature, the context in which he developed his ideas is briefly discussed (section 6.5.1). Then, his situational approach, which represents his key contribution to policy studies, is analysed (section 6.5.2). After that, the chapter indicates how Matus’s policy views provide a important way of integrating politics, policy and administration (section 6.5.3).

#### 6.5.1 Carlos Matus: a post-war Latin American planning theorist

The policy models elaborated by Carlos Matus, a Chilean-born policy scholar and practitioner, whose books have never been translated into English and are available only in Spanish and Portuguese, have sparked considerable interest in Latin American countries, where they are widely adopted and taught in schools of government. Noteworthy, his planning method – known as Situational Planning (SP) – has enjoyed expressive recognition in Brazil, and has been ‘officially’ embraced by several public institutions (Gonçalves, 2005; Paula, Tanaka and Araújo, 2010). Outside Latin America, however, Matus’s ideas are virtually unknown. Due to the lack of studies on Matus’s work in the European and American policy literatures, it is convenient to briefly mention the context in which they were produced.

Much of Matus's writings are a response to the type of planning orientation that dominated Latin American scholarship since the Post World War. As he reiterated in several of his books, the 'traditional' approach to planning asserted a technocratic view centred on expertise and efficiency (Matus, 1997). Based on a top-down, hierarchical and deterministic interpretation of the policy process, the traditional variant was embodied in the elaboration of national plans aimed to foster economic development, thus being largely silent about more democratic issues, such as public participation, civic engagement, power sharing that would inform much of the later planning theory (Forester, 1989; Healey, 1993; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010).

Matus pointed out the limitations of the traditional planning approach, which in his view had achieved modest results in practice and was problematic in theory<sup>161</sup>. For Matus, planning was not an abstract exercise controlled by a narrow technocratic elite, but a dynamic activity embedded in the broader social landscape (Fortis, 2010). The planning process, he argued, should be envisaged as a deeply politicized arena in which policy actors struggled for the attainment of their (irreconcilable) objectives. Traditional planning, however, was unable to acknowledge the pluralistic condition of modern societies.

By conceptualizing planning as a purely instrumental activity to be carried out by experts, the traditional methods were ultimately 'precluding other social forces from planning and from creating a conflict of objectives and means' (Matus, 2007b, p 159). This emphasis on technique and scientific reasoning had depoliticizing effects, especially because it ended up 'eliminating the existence of opponents'.

In contrast to the one-dimensional and apolitical tendencies evinced by the traditional planning, Matus proposed the adoption of a new orientation that he designated as 'situational'. The Situational Planning (SP) developed by Matus operated according to an interactive and conflictual logic – which in later works he would associate with the notion of a game – that emphasized the pluralistic character of governing. Echoing his

<sup>161</sup> In a famous interview he proffered to journalist Franco Huertas, Matus defined the notion of planning. In his view, 'to plan means thinking before doing, to think with method in a systematic way; it is to explain possibilities and examine its advantages and disadvantages, to set goals, project toward the future' (Huertas, 1993, p. 6).

view of public planning as a contentious struggle between adversaries, Matus indicated that ‘organizations should be conceived as permanent arenas of negotiation and conflict’ (Azevedo, 1992, p. 130).

His Situational Planning (SP) approach conceptualizes the policy process as a game in which opponents struggle for the actualization of their aspirations and goals. Matus (1997, p. 171-172 cited in Gonçalves, 2005, p. 106) notes that his situational theory

is a theory of a game, but not in the mathematical sense of game theory, but in the sense of *kriegspiel* (war game) ... the problem of the plan consists in that each force should win over an active and creative resistance of the opponent in order to attain her situation-objective ... Therefore, whatever the construction of feasibility for one force is, it is the destruction of feasibility of its opponent.

Matus contended that his Situational Planning (SP) methods could be interpreted as a ‘method of governing’ capable of offering advice for Latin American policy-makers. ‘Modern planning’, Matus claimed, ‘is or should be the working tool of the politician’ (Huertas, 1993, p. 3; Matus, 2007a; Matus, 2010). In his view, Latin American politics, policy and administration were rife with improvisation, which led to ineffectual public policies that failed to meet their targets, and also contributed to foster strong disaffection with democratic values. Matus contended that what was needed was a ‘science of governing’ capable of organizing political and administrative activity so that the policy objectives could be properly accomplished (Matus, 2008). In order to more accurately describe Matus’s planning methods, it is important to investigate his policy framework.

#### 6.5.2 Situational Planning: conflict in the policy process

Although never labelled as an agonistic thinker, the analysis of Matus’s policy model convincingly demonstrates that his views of the policy process can be qualified as agonistic (in a Mouffian sense). To put concisely, Matus in his prolific work proposed to envisage the policy process as an open arena in which actors struggled with their

opponents for the actualization of their objectives<sup>162</sup>. As this section will attempt to demonstrate, Matus's ideas evince a surprisingly agonistic tenor, which derives from the way he conceptualizes the policy process. An examination of Matus's major works shows that his situational approach operates according to the key agonistic concepts:

1. *Hegemony*: Matus's situational approach conceptualizes the social process as an arena in which different policy actors contend for the attainment of their particular objectives and goals. Since not all policy actors can accomplish their purposes simultaneously, the policy process will always privilege a specific group (Matus, 2007a).
2. *Antagonism*: policy actors sustain antagonistic views of the common good that can be negotiated only partially; their deep-seated differences, however, rule out the possibility of building a consensus capable of amalgamating their distinctive positions. Thus, every policy decision can be construed as a partial agreement that is always open for renegotiation (Matus, 1985).
3. *Power*: the policy process is conceptualized as a power dispute. Policy actors engage in a contestation for scarce resources (e.g. budgetary funds, technical information, administrative loyalty, symbolic benefits) that frequently mirrors their asymmetric power. In order to enhance their chances of accomplishing their objectives, policy opponents establish a 'system of alliances' (Matus, 2000).

Thus, the policy process as envisaged by Matus is based on theoretical principles that are central to Mouffe's agonistic project. By embracing a hegemonic, antagonistic and power-laden conception of the policy process, it is not surprising that Matus construes the interaction between policy actors as fundamentally conflictive. Instead of attempting to suppress antagonism, which is the standard view in the policy literature, he depicts the policy process as constitutively antagonistic.

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<sup>162</sup> According to Matus, the planning activity is structured in four main steps: explanatory (identification and selection of problems), prescriptive (choice of particular courses of action), strategic (analysis of political viability), tactical-operational (implementation of actions).

Similar to Hoppe's policy model, the framework developed by Matus is sensitive to conflictual situations that cannot be decided rationally. The advantage though is that Matus does not attempt to collapse the agonistic into the deliberative style so that institutional designs and procedures can be introduced with the purpose of overcoming conflict. For Matus, conflict is the essence of the policy process and cannot be eliminated. His policy orientation assumes that conflict and power are inherent to governing (Azevedo, 1992). This is the main reason why Matus's views can be qualified as 'agonistic'. By embracing a dissent-driven, power-centred understanding of the policy process, he suggests that conflict among contending groups cannot be dealt in purely rational terms. Thus, discussing the conflictuality inherent to the social and policy processes, Matus (1987, p. 20) writes in his book *Política, Planificación y Gobierno* (Politics, Planning and Government) that the nature of public problem is 'conflictive, because each social force represents distinct social views and intersections, and as a consequence they struggle for distinct designs for the future'. This way of conceptualizing public problem evinces the inadequacy of the traditional forms of planning. Thus, Matus continues, 'if the goals of men [sic] concerning the future are conflictive, planning is not undertaken in a bed of roses guided by technical-scientific calculation'.

A conflict-orientated interpretation of the policy process, as Matus clarifies, does not imply the impossibility of reaching decisions. Contrary to Hoppe's theory, discussed earlier, the acknowledgement of the ineradicability of antagonism is not incompatible with decision-making. On the contrary, according to Matus, decisions even in circumstances of rife disagreement can be processed by the policy arena (Belchior, 1999). Evidently, the acceptance of conflict as intrinsic to the policy process raises the question: how can conflict be processed when actors hold deep-seated differences that are not amenable to rational agreement? In order to understand the solution Matus advocates to this issue, it is necessary to examine his concept of 'situationality'.

The policy model developed by Matus is construed as 'situational' because policy actors are depicted as holding particular views of what should be achieved. The concept of 'situationality', which was borrowed from the philosophical work of Ortega y Gasset, is



linked to the idea that policy actors necessarily reason and act from a specific point of view<sup>163</sup>. Thus, multiple policy actors are bound to differ and sustain distinct views of which policy objectives should be given priority. Different from the traditional planning, predicated on the existence of one single logic, Situational Planning (SP) operates according to a multiplicity of logics derived from the ‘situationality’ of the actors contesting in the policy arena.

The concept of situation has important implications. In particular, it encourages an agonistic interpretation of policy process, which is construed as an arena of dispute in which contending groups struggle against each other for the affirmation of their particular objectives. As Matus argues, the situated character of policy actors implies the inevitability of conflict since, ‘our’ criteria needs to be distinguished from ‘their’ criteria. Policy actors operate according to their situated perspectives that stand in opposition to the perspective of their opponents. The ‘situational explanation’, Matus (2007b, p. 151) notes, ‘is always made by “us” or by “them”’. In a language that is reminiscent of Mouffe’s agonistic analysis, Matus envisages the planning activity as a contested terrain in which multiple actors are confronted with the different views of their opponents.

In a contradictory and conflictive social process reality consists not only in what I believe, but also in what others believe. This is of paramount importance for the strategic planning, because the interactive calculation requires attempting to uncover the possible motivations and actions of the opponent and they do not depend upon *my* situational explanation, but of *their* explanation (Matus, 2007b, p. 152; my italics).

It is true nonetheless that the adversarial nature of the planning activity requires mechanisms for the settlement of disputes<sup>164</sup>. For Matus, the government was the arch-arbiter of the policy process and as such fulfilled the role of mediating the confrontation between different policy positions. The role of the government was to ‘coordinate’ the

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<sup>163</sup> Matus noted that ‘situational analysis requires the differentiation of explanations. Each actor values the social game in a particular way and acts in it according to his specific interpretation of reality’ (Huertas, 1993, p. 19).

<sup>164</sup> Matus (2007c) distinguished between three different sources of conflict: cognitive (frames employed by policy actors that lead to different interpretation of events), emotional (sympathy for certain people or adherence for particular values), interests (the notion that the victory of my opponent represents my defeat).

struggle so that the diversity of perspectives could be respected. According to Matus (cited in Huertas, 1993, p. 63-5; see also Matus, 1991, p. 38), conflict could be ‘managed’ in various different ways, which he dubbed ‘tactical and strategic means’ that ranged from more conciliatory (negotiation) to openly confrontational forms (war):

1. imposition: based on authority or hierarchy;
2. persuasion: based on the charismatic power of the leader;
3. negotiation: based on mutual concessions among contestants;
4. mediation: based on the intervention of an external actor;
5. court action: based on legal decision;
6. coercion: based on threats;
7. confrontation: based on the relative power of the opponents;
8. dissuasion: based on threat of physical action and intimidation;
9. war: based on violent action (only when the stakes are very high).

The solution for coping with conflict cannot be predicted a priori because it is dependent on the contextual circumstances of the interaction. Matus offered several tools for mapping the conflict so that the best way to handle it could be identified. He recommended the drawing of different types of matrix – such as the ‘weight vectors’ or ‘critical resources’ – that would measure the configuration of forces and therefore display the relative power of each actor.

In fact, the examination of the power relations – a crucial element of the agonistic framework – in every policy process had a pivotal importance in Matus’s model. He argued that unless the (asymmetric) power of actors was taken into account the viability of the plan could be compromised<sup>165</sup>. In order to visualize how power was dispersed, he suggested that policy actors could be clustered around categories of ‘friendship’, ‘enmity’ or ‘indifference’ so that the existence of alliances could be identified. The importance Matus ascribes to the distribution of power within the policy process, it is

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<sup>165</sup> In his view, power has four dimensions: political (control over decision-making); ii) economic (control over budgetary and financial resources); iii) communicative (control over production and dissemination of information); iv) organizational (control of technical knowledge) (Matus, 1991, p. 37).

worth remarking, is another significant similarity he shares with Mouffe's agonistic framework. The role of power in Matus's planning model will be further examined in the next section when the issue of politics-administration is addressed.

Before closing this section, however, it is helpful to point out how an agonistic vision of public policy, construed through Matus's lenses, challenges competing policy approaches. As mentioned earlier, the cornerstone of Matus's agonistic policy framework is the notion that the policy process is fundamentally a conflictive arena in which different groups strive for the attainment of their objectives, which are always resisted by their opponents. Different from other policy models, conflicts are not expected to be solved rationally (as the Policy Analysis paradigm suggests) or through the formation of consensus that harmonizes distinct moral views (as the Deliberative Policy Approach paradigm recommends)<sup>166</sup>.

In the case of Policy Analysis, although Matus employs problem-solving devices in his method, his conceptualization of the policy process is techno-political, that is, it blends elements of expertise (technical side) and power (the political side). In contrast, Policy Analysis tends to emphasize the neutral, exclusively technical dimension of the policy process. In most policy analysis textbooks politics is sidestepped as if it were not a legitimate concern. For Matus, politics and expertise are constitutive of the governing process and neither can be relinquished.

Moreover, advocates of Policy Analysis often suggest that with scientific progress and the sophistication of policy methods politics might eventually become redundant. From Matus's point of view, however, although politics and expertise are constitutive dimensions of the policy process, expertise ultimately remains subordinate to politics,

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<sup>166</sup> The contrast between Matus's planning methods and the Early Public Administration (EPA) and the Interpretive Public Policy (IPP) paradigms is difficult, albeit for different reasons. EPA has been largely discarded after the 1940s when its politics-administration dichotomy proved no longer tenable (either as explanatory device or as organizational practice) and IPP remains confined to the theoretical domain thus lacking an implementation framework that would enable comparison with Matus's model. See Appendix 2 for a more systematic comparison of the policy paradigms examined in this thesis.

since the primary purpose of his planning methodology is to serve the needs of politics<sup>167</sup>.

In relation to the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA), the crucial difference is that while the deliberative orientation conceives of the policy process as an exchange of arguments by rational policy actors within deliberative arenas, Matus depicts the policy process as an arena of struggle in which creative – not rational – actors strive to attain their goals. Whereas DPA operates according to the assumption that the exchange of opinions can eventually lead to the formation of a consensus that mirrors the common good, Matus considers that although cooperation is possible, society has a hegemonic configuration that precludes a single view from representing the general interest. In his view, the policy process has a situational logic, which means that policy actors are construed as adversaries who are engaged in a conflictive dispute. Every consensus is therefore only a partial representation of the common good that can always be challenged by dissenting views.

Because the struggle is adversarial (or in Matus's jargon, 'situational'), conflicts cannot be processed in exclusive rational grounds. Instead, the management of conflict is subordinated to a power dynamics. In tune with Mouffe's agonism, Matus contends that the policy process cannot be interpreted as a purely scientific problem-solving exercise. Instead, it should be viewed as a situation in which power and technique, politics and administration, are inextricably linked. The integration between the political and the technical is another seminal contribution of Matus's policy model that deserves to be analysed. This is the topic of the next section.

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<sup>167</sup> Matus indicates the primacy of politics particularly when he argues that political leadership should perform three main roles: 'a) the design of the rules of the social system under which we desire to live or the acceptance of the current [rules], which defines the *type of game* in which we participate, b) the design of the government project for a determinate period ... c) the conduct and guidance of the game of each day, evaluating and amending its results' (Matus, 2008, p. 26; italics in the original).

### 6.5.3 The integration between politics and administration: Matus's concept of technical-reasoning

Before concluding the study on Matus's work, it is important to outline how his policy model operates according to an integrative vision that welds politics, policy and administration together. Matus's advocacy of the techno-political reasoning offers an interesting and innovative way of answering the question of how politics and administration, power and expertise, are connected.

The inability, either in theory (policy and administrative studies) or in practice (governmental action), to properly balance politics and administration generates what he designates as 'dysfunctions'. The political dysfunction emerges when attention is placed solely on politics with an utter neglect of policy and administrative matters. For its turn, technocratic or administrative dysfunctions results from exclusive concern with technical or organizational affairs thus overlooking the importance played by politics (Matus, 2007a). Because both dimensions – the political (power) and the administrative (expertise) – are constitutive of the policy process, they need to be carefully balanced. In order to explain in more detail how Matus conceived of the relationship between politics and administration, his techno-political perspective is now probed.

In his book *La Teoría del Juego Social* (The Theory of the Social Game), Matus (2000) elaborates on why he decided to adopt a situational approach to the planning process. His explanation is interesting because it sheds light on his view of politics and administration as integrated phenomena. The 'concept of situation', he says, developed initially in his book *La Planificación de Situaciones* (The Planning of Situations) emerged

in our experience in the government of Chile, of realizing the significant deficiencies of traditional planning and the lack of methods of governing; of the abrupt gap between the political calculation and the technical calculation. At that time I had an inkling of the need of what today I call the *techno-political reasoning* ... (Matus, 2000, p. 176; italics in the original).

Rejecting either purely technical or purely political interpretations, Matus defines planning as the privileged locus of the techno-political reasoning. Critical of

technocratic views that construe planning solely in technical terms, he argues that 'planning is not something identifiable with a mere legal-bureaucratic instrument or with a technocratic model that you can either accept or reject' (Matus, 1985, p. 5). In addition, he also disavows an exclusive political rendering of the plan, which he suspected could degenerate into decisions being motivated by sheer improvisation, feeling or personal experience. Instead, he conceptualizes the planning process as an activity that operates according to a techno-political logic. In order to understand why Matus claimed that planning implied both technical and political dimensions, it is indispensable to distinguish between two types of problem: the 'well-structured' and the 'quasi-structured'<sup>168</sup>.

'Well-structured' problems are like puzzles, in which there is one possible solution that is uncontroversial and acceptable by all those involved in the policy process. Puzzles admit one and only solution, which is knowable and achievable. However, most of the problems that afflict society are not of this kind. Because they are much messier, contentious, and hard to define, these problems are defined as 'quasi-structured'. This is precisely the type of problem planning copes with. Quasi-structured are complex because they take into account 'the creativity and subjectivity of social actors, the multiplicity of scarce resources and rationalities, the coexistence of actors with distinct visions and objectives' (Matus, 2000, p. 325).

The contrast between well-structured and quasi-structured problems is crucial to understand why Matus suggested that the logic of the planning process was techno-political. In the case of well-structured problems, solutions are likely to be clear, rational, precise and determinate. Well-structured problems are similar to scientific challenges, solvable by purely logical or technical means. The case of quasi-structured problems is different. The definition of the problem depends on who defines it. Moreover, instead of one solution, quasi-structured problems may admit a potentially infinite number of solutions. These features led Matus (2000, p. 330) to suggest that apart from their technical status, quasi-structured problems inevitably involve a 'socio-political dimension'.

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<sup>168</sup> Matus borrowed the concepts of well-structured and quasi-structured problems from Mitroff (1974).

If planning dealt only with well-structured problems, the technocratic solution would be adequate. By employing scientific methods and collecting data, indisputable solutions could be drawn to resolve problems. Like a puzzle, all the pieces could nicely fit together after a technical solution had been identified. However, very few problems have a well-structured nature. In that case, the technocratic approach is clearly insufficient. When it is accepted that most of the issues that beset contemporary societies have a quasi-structured condition, then it is necessary to recognize the limits of expertise.

Matus's Situational Planning (SP) deals with quasi-structured problems and acknowledges that: i) the planning process takes place in circumstances that are unstable, indeterminate and changeable; ii) problems are a social construction not an external, given fact; iii) 'the solution of a problem generates other connected problems because the system has continuity and does not end like a game or a solution of a puzzle'; iv) solutions to problems are not pre-given, they need to be invented (Matus, 2000, p. 330). When the quasi-structure nature of public problems is accepted, then solutions cannot be exclusively based on expertise. According to Matus, only a technopolitical reasoning that takes into account the dimension of power is capable of providing an adequate framework to explain how the policy process operates.

Unless the power (political) factor is introduced in the analysis, it is not possible to properly explain how problems are defined, how solutions are constructed, which strategies are designed, and ultimately which results are achieved. Far from purely technical matters, these questions are always decided in a contentious arena in which different social groups strive to impose their (particular) definitions. The plan is a terrain of conflict: 'Therefore, the actor who plans is not facing feeble forces but fierce resistances. This is what we need first of all to take into account, because planning, sometimes more than others, always refers to a context of conflict among opponents' (Matus, 1985, p. 5).

This is why Matus sometimes refers to planning as ‘una lucha’ (a struggle) because decisions are never the outcome of a neutral decision-maker that attempts to maximize the benefits of a particular policy (as in Policy Analysis) or the product of a moral agreement between rational individuals (as in the Deliberative Policy Approach). Instead, the policy process is depicted as a power arena in which contenders fight for the attainment of their objectives and goals. In almost belligerent terms, Matus describes planning as a situation in which ‘standing from opposite, distinct or similar positions, actors align themselves before the game plan of the *others*’. The confrontational nature of the policy process evinces not only its agonistic nature but also the insufficiency of technical reasoning to interpret it.

The fact that the policy process is mostly constituted by quasi-structured problems means that solutions cannot be purely rational or technical. They are the result of a hegemonic struggle, in which policy actors contest – and not merely compete – for the imposition of their desires and aspirations, by making use of their power resources. Therefore, the plan is not only about technical issues (although Matus never dismissed their importance), but also about the relative strength of those involved to enforce their projects over their opponents. This means that the logic of the plan articulates both the technical and the political, expertise and power. Thus, Matus spoke of a *techno-political* reasoning as the appropriate form of construing the policy activity.

Matus’s policy framework offers a convenient way of theorizing the relationship between politics and administration. It also provides insights on how the ontological underpinnings of the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) can be thought at the policy level. In addition, as the next section will attempt to show, the agonistic model is not only a theoretical abstraction but also an orientation that can already be observed in some fields of public policy.

#### 6.6 Agonistic Policy Model (APM) in practice: the case of urban planning

This section illustrates how the APM can be actualized in practice. Exemplifications, drawn from the field of urban planning, are described in order to show how the APM can be implemented in policy settings. The key argument proposed here is that the case



of urban planning evinces the applicability of the APM, which is not only a theoretical framework but also a policy tool. In addition, it is also argued that the introduction of the APM, by legitimizing the expression of conflict, can deepen democracy.

The argument is developed in two steps. First, it examines how agonistic approaches have inspired a policy literature that is critical of dominant instrumental approaches in the field of urban planning. Second, it indicates how the adoption of agonistic practices in policy settings can be conducive to citizen empowerment and thus encourage deeper forms of democracy.

#### 6.6.1 The limitations of instrumental and rationalistic views in public planning

An interesting illustration of the potential of the APM as an applicable policy tool can be found in recent (particularly Scandinavian) studies on urban planning (Hillier, 2002; Pløger, 2004; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010). Moreover, as will be now discussed, this literature engages with current analytical developments in democratic theory – particularly Mouffe’s theoretical framework – and offers insights on how a conflictual vision of the policy process can be empirically actualized.

As a background, it is worth noting that these authors – Hillier, Pløger, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo – are inscribed within a theoretical trend in the field of urban planning (which is part of the broader field of public policy) studies whose primary concern is to challenge the mainstream instrumentalist approach that construes planning as a rationalistic activity based on objective knowledge (thus emphasizing data-collection, quantification, measurement, empirical designs etc). Drawing from a wide range of theoretical perspectives – including the agonistic – these studies argue that the instrumental view is narrow since it takes into account a single perspective: that of the expert.

The salience ascribed to expertise, as discussed in chapter 2, tends to encourage technocratic forms of decision-making. ‘Such notions assume that policy- and decision-making proceed in a relatively *technocratic* and value-neutral, unidirectional, step-wise

process towards a finite end point' (Hillier, 2002, p. 4; my italics). Besides its technocratic – 'one-dimensional' – attitude, the instrumentalist and rationalistic approaches tend to depoliticize, since they do not encourage active civic engagement and restrict the decision-making process to a few enlightened experts.

Among its major limitations, the technocratic inclinations of the instrumental-rationalistic orientation fail to recognize the political nature of public planning. 'Planning practice', as Healey (1997, p. 84) suggests, 'is thus not an innocent, value-neutral activity. It is deeply political. It carries value and expresses power'. In the light of contemporary urban planning scholarship, the instrumental-rationalistic vision can be challenged by recent developments in democratic theory. Drawing on the agonistic perspective developed by Chantal Mouffe, urban scholars sympathetic to agonistic ideas criticize the insensibility evinced by public planning (theory and practice) to the political dimension.

An agonistic perspective, these scholars – Hillier, Pløger, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo – contend, can help to theorize planning practices as conflictual practices pervaded by power, a conceptualization that is at odds with the technocratic, apolitical view expressed in instrumental-rationalistic approaches. Not only that, in their view, an agonistic analysis brings to the fore another crucial dimension that is neglected by the instrumental-rationalistic approach: its potential to politicize the policy process.

#### 6.6.2 The Agonistic Policy Model (APM) in practice: power and conflict in the policy process

In their own ways, these urban theorists (Hillier, Pløger, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo) tend to conceptualize the planning and policy processes as predicated on power and antagonism. Remarkably, they highlight how policy interaction is permeated by conflict and dissent. Moreover, as Pløger indicates, agonism and democracy are linked: 'agonism could be said to be the ethos of a democracy respecting the legitimacy of difference and interests through public participation' (Pløger, 2004, p. 72).

Pløger argues that strife should be recognized as the very core of public policy since it is constitutive – or as he puts it: immanent – to the planning activity. He notes, however, that agonistic conflict only takes a productive shape when it is capable of empowering citizens, who are deemed legitimate actors to influence political process and policy decision-making. ‘Politics, planning and democracy projects’, he suggests, ‘need to find ways of working with agonism without automatically recurring to procedures, voting, representativity, forced consensus or compromises’ (Pløger, 2004, p. 87). In other words, from an agonistic perspective, deeper forms of democracy require going beyond mechanisms of representation or communicative consensus-building strategies.

A similar position is also expressed by Jean Hillier in her book *Shadows of Power* in which she discusses different theoretical approaches to land-use planning. She is suspicious not only of instrumental-rationalistic views, but also of the communicative, consensus-building orientation (strongly influenced by Habermas) that tends to regard conflict as a temporary disagreement that can be superseded by moral reasoning. As Hillier testifies, emphasis on rational deliberation and consensus is ineffective in capturing the essence of the policy process – power and antagonism – and ultimately fails to encapsulate its political dimension. This is why an agonistic approach provides a more suitable framework to understand how policy operates.

In developing new explanatory theory I suggest an alternative to the core Habermasian concept of rational consensus. This alternative introduces the notion of agonism, i.e. the possibility of permanence of conflict, inequality, difference, nonreciprocity and domination which I believe may engage more productively in explanation of power games enacted in planning decision-making (Hillier, 2002, p. 14).

The limitations of both the instrumental-rationalistic and communicative views are also echoed by Finnish planning scholars Pia Bäcklund and Raine Mäntysalo who analyse how agonistic conflict can be processed by policy institutions. Enthusiasts of the Mouffian agonistic approach, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo (2010) investigate the planning practices adopted in Finland with a particular interest on the role of citizen participation. In their study, they examined how participation is stimulated or discouraged in five different cities (Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, Tampere and Turku).

The study carried out by Bäcklund and Mäntysalo is illuminating because it empirically illustrates APM's potential to be implemented in policy settings. This evidence is important since it enables a visualization of the applicability of the APM proposed here. In addition, by alluding to the democratic implications of the APM, it reveals its capacity to strengthen democratic values and institutions. In fact, they conclude their essay arguing that the agonistic approach (more than any other competing policy orientation) enables the 'strongest' form of participation.

Initially, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo pose the question of whether planning practices mirror the evolution of planning (and democratic) theories. In their study, they test the hypothesis that theoretical progress in planning theory has spurred corresponding developments in actual planning activities. In order to find out, they develop a theoretical framework that construes the evolution of planning theory in four main stages: comprehensive-rationalist, incrementalist, communicative and agonistic. Each of these models reveal a particular interpretation of how citizen participation should be envisaged. These four models are now briefly described:

1. *Comprehensive-rationalist*: based on instrumental rationality, this vision of planning operates according to the assumption that knowledge is neutral and objective (and can be captured by quantification tools). This approach depicts planning as scientific, apolitical activity led by experts. The emphasis on a technocratic approach to governing drastically reduces the scope for citizen participation since citizens are not construed as carriers of meaningful knowledge that could improve the quality of decision-making (they are otherwise identified as passive spectators whose participatory role is confined to voting).
2. *Incrementalist*: critical of the comprehensive-rationalist approach, the incrementalist view suggests that policy-makers ground their decisions on partial, value-laden knowledge. In the absence of complete information, interest groups are welcomed to supply technical knowledge (expertise) to decision-makers. Because the interests of different groups conflict, processes of

negotiation and bargaining are introduced. Participation, in this model, is restricted to the competition between self-interested groups (thus, conceptualizing participation in rather elitist terms).

3. *Communicative*: largely inspired by Habermas (especially his notion of communicative rationality), the emphasis on planning theory shifted from aggregation of interests to rational deliberation and consensus-building. ‘A decision would be found to be legitimate only if each person with a stake in the issue had been equally involved in all the phases of planning and decision-making’ (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010, p. 340). The communicative approach broadens the realm of civic participation, since citizens are now perceived as repositories of knowledge, whose expression is deemed essential to restore legitimacy to the democratic process.
4. *Agonistic*: an agonistic approach asserts that the notion of subjectivity embraced by the communicative model suppresses the differences that are constitutive to the social. ‘Habermasian communicative planning theory is unable to acknowledge conflicting conceptions of reality as being equally valid’ (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010, p. 341). Participants have conflictive interpretations of reality that cannot be thoroughly accommodated in a single view (a fully inclusive consensus). For instance, citizens engaged in planning practices might contest not only the arguments but the very knowledge frameworks employed by the authorities to discuss public issues. An agonistic model stresses the inability of communicative processes to solve difference by rational debate and consensus-building.

According to Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, each of the approaches offers a particular understanding of what the role of participation should be. They argue that participation can thus be visualized in a spectrum that ranges from more restrictive (in the comprehensive-rationalist and incrementalist) to more participatory orientations (in the communicative and agonistic approaches). Indeed, this is a convenient way of portraying not only the role played by participation in different theoretical frameworks,

but also of depicting the ‘evolution’ of planning and democratic theories. Their heuristic model is transcribed in the figure below.

Figure 6.1 – Shifts in planning and democratic theory and their correspondent perception of citizen’s role



Source: Bäcklund and Mäntysalo (2010, p. 344)

To what extent, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo ask, does the planning activity reflect the transition from comprehensive-rationalist and incrementalist models to the more recent (and participatory) deliberative and agonistic models? Is the evolution depicted in the figure only a portrait of theoretical developments or also an accurate description of how the planning process has evolved? To put it differently, to what degree does (planning) practice mirror (democratic) theory?

From the outset, they note that the planning system in Finland has historically been deeply influenced by the first approach – the comprehensive-rationalist – which means that public planners have construed their plans as if they were an objective and comprehensive representation of reality. The dominant planning culture is strongly pervaded by an instrumental view that interprets knowledge as neutral, value-free and apolitical. This more ‘traditional’ approach, which is very much alive, tends to restrict

public participation to low levels<sup>169</sup>. Hence, the capacity of citizens to influence government decisions is limited<sup>170</sup>. In spite of the dominance of the comprehensive-rationalist approach, the empirical examination carried out by Bäcklund and Mäntysalo has revealed two different patterns.

There is a first group (corresponding to the cities of Espoo and Vantaa) in which traditional forms of planning are more entrenched, and not surprisingly, participation seems to be rather narrow and restricted. In the second group (as illustrated by Tampere and Turku), however, public authorities are less suspicious of citizen involvement in public planning and stimulate civic engagement. There are wider opportunities for participation. Meetings are open and anyone can join. Reflecting the planners's encouragement for broader participation, citizens are able to influence the construction of the policy agenda. Moving beyond the sphere of representation, citizens are empowered to decide together with public officials. And, as Bäcklund and Mäntysalo (2010, p. 346) suggest, this participatory approach has aimed 'to offer a social space for the active politicization of issues'.

By enabling direct participation, these two cities (Tampere and Turku) are depicted as potential exemplars of agonistic democracy. Inputs provided by citizens are taken into account and 'with the politicization of issues, decision-making becomes openly political, too – instead of being disguised as aiming for an abstract common good with reference to expert knowledge' (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010, p. 346). In their view, these more radical forms of public participation, in which citizens are empowered to co-decide along side with the planning authorities, can be associated with the agonistic democratic theory.

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<sup>169</sup> Interestingly, the comprehensive-rationalist model also tends to enshrine a type of politics-administration dichotomy: 'the political actors make value decisions and the civil servants operationalize them' (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010, p. 345).

<sup>170</sup> Thus, the participatory role of citizens is confined to representational mechanisms, particularly electoral voting. 'Embedded in the institutionalized structures and normative prescriptions of good governance, the deep-seated comprehensive-rationalist model of planning and the associated aggregative model of democracy is still lurking, framing what is possible or even conceivable in local participatory planning in Finland' (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010, p. 348).

This is indeed an important contribution to the agonistic policy literature. First, it suggests that an APM is not only a theoretical abstraction but that it is an implementable policy tool. Second, it shows that by politicizing decision-making an agonistic policy process is more conducive to forms of participation that empower citizens, who are considered legitimate co-authors of public policies. In this case, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo's study reveals that agonistic theories of democracy are much better placed (than either aggregative or deliberative theories) to deepen democratic values<sup>171</sup>.

In this sense, the type of citizen empowerment enabled by agonistic public policy can be associated with the idea of participation proffered by Sherry Arnstein in her classic text *A Ladder of Public Participation*, in which (although writing in a completely different context) she clarifies what she means by participation.

My answer to the critical *what* question is simply that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parcelled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216; italics in the original).

An agonistic policy process, therefore, by emphasizing citizen empowerment can be construed as an instrument for the deepening of democracy. Only when the policy process encourages the expression of conflict and does not attempt to collapse it into rational forms of decision-making (either through technocratic or deliberative means), then can the 'irreducible plurality of views' be fully taken into account. This happens when actors holding irreconcilable perspectives recognize each other as legitimate

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<sup>171</sup> It is true, however, that Bäcklund and Mäntysalo point out to the danger of pushing theory too far ahead of practice. They note that 'while each paradigm shift in theory purports to replace the former theory with a new one, in practice the new theory emerges as a new addition to the palette of coexisting theoretical sources, to be drawn upon as a source of guidance and inspiration in organizing participatory planning' (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010, p. 346). The asymmetry between theory and practice could lead to a situation of 'institutional ambiguity', in which successive theoretical developments (in planning and democratic theory) are not accompanied by corresponding shifts in actual governmental practice.



adversaries whose right to disagree is fully respected. When agonistic conflict is accepted as part and parcel of the policy process, democratic values are reinvigorated.

Having delineated the democratic implications of an agonistic policy orientation, the next section attempts to bring together the insights collected through the chapter and formalize the Agonistic Policy Model (APM).

### 6.7 An Agonistic Policy Model (APM)

An exploration of the policy literature indicates the existence of agonistic ideas (even when not explicitly interpreted or labelled as such). These ideas can provide important insights and help to elucidate how an Agonistic Policy Model (APM) can be delineated, which is the main purpose of this thesis: to fill this gap in the literature by offering a description of how an agonistic view of the policy process can be articulated. In this final section, the key aspects of the Agonistic Policy Model (APM) are recapitulated and organized so that it can be presented in more formal terms.

Thus, in order to describe the tenets of the APM, this section will weave the contributions of the different policy and planning theorists analysed throughout this chapter (with particular salience given to Matus's situational approach, which arguably best represents agonism in public policy). Together, the ideas put forward by these scholars enables the visualization of the APM.

The APM proposed here is predicated on a set of ontological assumptions that have been inspired by Chantal Mouffe's agonistic framework. It is worth summarizing its three key concepts: the notion of the hegemonic formation of the social process, the antagonistic condition of political identities, and the idea of power as constitutive to the political arena.

First, Mouffe's agonistic theory assumes that the social has a hegemonic constitution, which means that its foundations are always the accomplishment of a specific group (who nonetheless asserts its vision of the common good as if it represented the general

interest of society). Second, her framework is also grounded on the notion that political identities have a relational character so that the construction of a ‘we’ presupposes the existence of a ‘they’. Since, at the political level, the affirmation of ‘we’ depends on the exclusion of ‘they’, the interaction between groups displays an antagonistic character. Third, and reflecting Mouffe’s post-foundationalist epistemic affiliations, the social is not conceived a priori in essentialist terms. On the contrary, it is depicted as a contingent formation that is impregnated with power. Thus, the articulation of political forces is fundamentally a power dispute for the mastery of the social. These three elements – hegemony, antagonism and power – can be thus conceptualized as the ontological terrain in which the agonistic policy process evolves.

Underpinned by these ontological features, the policy process can be construed as: i) open-ended; ii) conflictive; iii) deeply democratic; iv) integrative. These components are now theorized.

1. *Open-ended*. In line with the post-foundationalist epistemological perspective, the agonistic vision conceives the policy process as having an uncertain, contingent and indeterminate configuration. As indicated by Matus’s situational approach, the policy process cannot be demarcated in terms of beginnings and endings since it is a continuous activity. In contrast with alternative views of public policy (e.g. Lasswell’s stages) that depict the policy process as having a clear beginning and end, from an agonistic perspective, it is not interpreted in terms of sequential phases, but as open-ended since it is always amenable to revision. The APM construes policy decisions as temporary stabilizations of power, thus provisional and precarious.
2. *Conflictive*. Conflict is the core of an agonistic policy process, which is defined (by Matus as well as by several other policy scholars) as a conflictual arena in which contending actors struggle for the attainment of their purposes and goals. The reason why the policy process is constitutively conflictual lies in the hegemonic or situational condition of the policy contestation: actors hold different – and irreconcilable – views of the common good that will inevitably

elicit tension and friction. The nature of their disagreement cannot be solved rationally, as suggested by alternative approaches, but it can be handled in ways that are more or less democratic (antagonism becomes agonism when those who disagree are treated as adversaries rather than enemies).

3. *Deeply democratic.* In tune with Mouffe's theoretical framework, the introduction of an agonistic policy orientation contributes to deepen democratic values and practices. From an agonistic perspective, public policies are conceived as contentious arenas of struggle in which adversaries express and negotiate their differences. Such a conflict-driven conceptualization of the policy process, as indicated by Bäcklund and Mäntysalo (2010), can greatly contribute to the expansion of democratic opportunities for citizen participation. When the policy process respects agonistic contestation, democratic boundaries can be enlarged with citizens playing a significant role in choosing which policies will be implemented. Different from alternative policy models that emphasize either technocratic or deliberative solutions, an agonistic policy process has a potential to deepen democracy.
  
4. *Integrative.* Another key feature of APM is its integrative role in bringing politics and administration together. As Matus has persuasively argued, the policy process operates according to a techno-political form of reasoning, which combines expertise and power (by-words for administration and politics). Because the vast majority of public problems are quasi-structured, they cannot be decided on purely rational or technical grounds. Instead, a policy decision (which is always a partial and temporary form of closure) incorporates non-rational elements, particularly power. Thus, solutions to public problems are better described as precarious and temporary agreements pervaded by a mixture of technical and coercive elements. The coexistence of power and expertise indicates that politics and administration are inextricably linked in the policy process.

The table 6.2 below attempts to summarize the discussion above and present the key features of the APM. It emphasizes the distinction between the level of ontological underpinnings (inspired in Mouffe’s framework) and the level of policy configuration (drawing mostly on Matus’s situational approach).

Table 6.2 – The Agonistic Policy Model: key features

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Ontological Underpinning</i>	<i>Policy Configuration</i>	<i>Policy Proponents</i>
Intellectual mentor	Chantal Mouffe	Several (with salience for Matus)	
Dominant framework	Agonistic pluralism	Agonistic public policy	Fortis
Epistemic foundations	Post-foundationalist, Anti-essentialist	Uncertain, contingent, indeterminate	Matus, Fox and Miller
Key concepts	Hegemony, antagonism and power	Contestation, dispute, dissent	Matus, Hillier, Pløger, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo
Nature of the policy process	Conflictual or Adversarial	Situational	Matus
Policy process	Agonistic contestation	Arena of struggle	Box, Ingram and Schneider, Matus
Decision-making	Conflictual-consensus	Power-laden, dissent-driven	Box, Matus
Human agency	Emphasis on passions and emotions	Creativity	Hillier, Matus
Role of institutions	Venues for transformative change	Sites of counter-hegemony and resistance	Box, Wingenbach
Democratic orientation	Deep democracy	Citizen empowerment	Box, Torgerson, Pløger, Bäcklund and Mäntysalo
Relationship between politics and administration	Primacy of the ‘political’	Integration between politics and administration	Matus

Source: the author

The distinctive features of the APM indicate its potential to think public policy in innovative ways. Next, in the conclusion, the main advantages of the APM over alternative policy approaches are highlighted. In addition, suggestions for the development of an agonistic policy research agenda are also put forward.

## Conclusion

This thesis advocates an Agonistic Policy Model (APM), an innovative policy framework that has not yet been systematically considered by contemporary scholarship. The APM delineated here helps to elucidate how agonistic ideas, so far confined primarily to the realm of political theory, can be put in practice. In line with Mouffe's vision, agonism is depicted as a framework suitable for institutionalization. Moreover, as empirical illustrations drawn from the field of urban planning have revealed agonistic practices have already been implemented in actual policy settings.

In order to clarify the advantages of the APM over alternative policy models, it is convenient to spell out five basic reasons that recommend its adoption: i) it provides an innovative (non-rationalistic) view of the policy process; ii) it integrates politics and administration; iii) it is sensitive to the complex nature of public policies; iv) it has the potential to deepen democracy; v) it can offer a new vision of policy advocacy.

*Innovative (non-rationalistic) view of the policy process.* First of all, one of the important features of the APM resides in its originality. Predicated on the ineradicability of hegemony, antagonism and power (aspects that play a constitutive role in the agonistic framework), the APM developed in this thesis conveys an innovative view of the policy process. It draws attention to the limitations of other approaches – particularly Policy Analysis and the Deliberative Policy Approach – that emphasize rationalistic forms of decision-making. The APM, for its turn, rejects the notion that policy actors should be characterized as essentialized subjects whose behaviour is dictated by a rationalistic form of reasoning.

In the case of Policy Analysis, for example, it is assumed that an instrumental type of reasoning (that tries to find the best means to achieve certain ends) is conducive to the identification of the most efficient policy choices. Although departing substantially from Policy Analysis (PA), the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA) preserves an allegiance to the rationalistic conception of the policy actor. For deliberative policy proponents, some sort of agreement – or mutual understanding – can usually be achieved through

rational debate in which reasons and arguments are exchanged<sup>172</sup>. In both cases, though in different ways, PA and the DPA are committed to a rationalistic form of reasoning.

Differently, the APM does not assert that policy actors are guided by a rationalistic conduct. As Mouffe (at the political level) and Matus (at the policy level) have convincingly shown, agency has a non-rational dimension that needs to be taken into account. In the policy process, individuals and groups are also motivated by passion. The role of emotions and creativity is overlooked by PA and DPA, thus severely compromising their ability to explain how the policy process unfolds in actual practice. The APM, however, is attentive to the inadequacy of positing the policy subject as a rationalistic individual whose attitude is based on instrumental calculation (in the case of PA) or civic deliberation (in the case of DPA).

*Integration between politics and administration.* Second, the APM envisages how politics and administration can be construed as integrated phenomena, thus helping to answer one of the perennial questions of public administration: how should politics be conceived from an administrative perspective? Are they mutually exclusive or interdependent spheres? To be sure, the APM conceptualizes politics and administration as spheres that are inextricably linked. It concurs with Wildavsky's assertion that political questions are administrative questions, as much as administrative questions are political questions. The inextricability between these two mutually dependent spheres is clearly revealed in Matus's contention that the logic of the governing process is *techno-political*, that is, a combination of power (politics) and expertise (administration).

The reason why the APM can offer an integrative view that combines politics and administration results from its recognition of 'the political'. Because it is grounded on genuine political elements – hegemony, antagonism and power – the APM is better positioned (than alternative policy orientations) to provide a political interpretation of

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<sup>172</sup> It should be recognized, however, that deliberative scholarship has evolved since the original – and seminal – contributions of Habermas. Recent developments have acknowledged the importance of dealing with difference, and to some degree, accepted that under circumstances of strong division deep-seated differences might not be negotiable (Young, 2000). For an analysis of how the deliberative perspective has responded to the agonistic critique, see Dryzek (2005).

the policy process. To envisage policy and administrative phenomena as embedded in the political dimension is an important contribution of the APM to contemporary scholarship that deserves to be highlighted.

*Sensitivity to the complex nature of public policies.* Third, by placing emphasis on conflict and antagonism, the APM more aptly mirrors the condition of contemporary public policies, which can be portrayed as dealing with ‘intractable’ (Schön, and Rein, 1995) or ‘messy’ (Ney, 2009) public problems. Because it defines the policy process as a continuous dispute that is never permanently settled, the APM is attuned to the increasingly complex condition of policy-making.

Due to its post-foundationalist epistemic affiliations, which assert the lack of final and permanent ground for the formation of the social, the APM captures the instability, uncertainty and complexity typical of most policy issues. The conflict-driven, open-ended conceptualization of the policy process embraced by the APM is in line with Sørensen and Torfing’s (2007) characterization of contemporary governance as a ‘complex and potentially chaotic process in which numerous interests, identities and rationalities fuse and collide’ (p. 25), and which is ‘never formed, established or institutionalized once and for all’ (p. 52). In their view, instability is at the roots of contemporary forms of governance, which they depict as:

complex and dynamic systems in which centripetal and centrifugal forces constantly undermine each other so that order and stability only exist as a partial limitation of disorder and instability ... Conflicts sustained by the cultural, social and political differences between the relatively autonomous actors prevent governance networks from being transformed into stable political institutions (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, p. 26-7).

The emphasis on instability, conflict and difference suggests possible similarities between network governance theory and the APM. Further research might indicate to what extent these frameworks are compatible. In principle Sørensen and Torfing’s (2009) metagovernance approach appears to share some similar concerns with the agonistic vision developed here. For example, when they argue that policy-making should be interpreted, not in fixed and essentialist terms, but as a continuous activity that ‘will eventually lead to the formulation of a framework of rules, norms, values and



ideas that is both *precarious* and *incomplete*' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 236; emphasis added). The possible affinity between these two approaches – the APM and the metagovernance developed by Sørensen and Torfing – elicits interesting research questions that might motivate a prospective 'agonistic' public policy research agenda.

*Potential to deepen democracy.* A fourth argument in favour of the APM lies in its potential to strengthen democratic values and institutions. A truly democratic society requires institutions that recognize the legitimacy of different – and irreconcilable – positions. This is precisely the task of the APM: to encourage policy actors to contest their goals without attempting to impose consensus. This is an important departure from alternative visions of the policy process that insist on consensus-building and hence disavow contestation. Again, the contrast with Policy Analysis (PA) and the Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA), two influential policy paradigms, is fruitful.

On one hand, proponents of PA aim for the identification of the 'one right answer', a type of consensus based on technical knowledge (expertise). On the other hand, advocates of DPA defend the construction of mutual agreements through rational deliberation, thus suggesting that difference can be ultimately harmonized (and, in stronger versions, reconciled). In both cases, the policy process is geared to the formation of a consensual view that inhibits the expression of diverse and heterogeneous perceptions.

Because the APM celebrates the co-existence of multiple views, it allows policy actors to express their disagreement through policy venues. When the policy process is conceptualized as an arena of struggle, policy actors (motivated by irreconcilable views of the common good) are recognized as contenders who can freely assert their particular preferences and demands. By legitimizing conflict in the policy process, the APM contributes to foster democratic practices and institutions. Dissent – not consensus – is indispensable to vitalize democracy and reverse the 'democratic deficits' that pervade contemporary societies.

As the agonistic planning experience in Finland makes clear, when public authorities accept the existence of dissenting views and refrain from imposing (either technocratic or deliberative forms of consensus) then the policy process can lead to deeper forms of democracy. As noted by Bäcklund and Mäntysalo (2010), more democratic ‘agonistic’ policy processes have the potential to make power relations more transparent and hence create conditions for counter-hegemonic groups to challenge structures of oppression and domination.

*A new vision of policy advocacy.* There is a fifth reason that justifies the adoption of the APM. In times when scientific advice is no longer accepted as incontrovertible (Jasanoff, 1990), science is described as just one, among many other, forms of knowing in the policy process (Healey, 1993). In this case, the APM is particularly well positioned to provide guidance to help governments improve their decision-making.

What kind of policy advocacy could ‘agonistic advisers’ offer to governments? First of all, the penetration of agonistic ideas within administrative agencies would question the emphasis on purely technical means to solve public problems. Modern administrative reforms, for instance, have attempted to enhance the quality of decision-making by insisting on rationalistic, managerial tools (e.g. zero-base budgeting, management by objectives, strategic planning). Differently, from an agonistic orientation, the focus should be placed on the legitimation of conflict in policy arenas. As such, it should encourage the construction of venues for the legitimate expression of difference, so that dissenting views can confront each other.

Second, ‘agonistic advisers’, because they are sensitive to the hegemonic condition of the social order (and thus aware that every policy position is only a partial representation the common good), can act as intermediators between a multiplicity of policy perspectives. The agonistic ‘arbiter’ could for instance make explicit how power is allocated within a specific policy situation (and perhaps suggest the existence of alternative arrangements that could foster more equal and fair configurations)<sup>173</sup>. As an

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<sup>173</sup> Empirically, this can be accomplished by the construction of a ‘power weight vectors’ table (Matus, 2000) in which the relative strength of policy actors is revealed.

arbiter, the agonistic practitioner operates as an ‘interpreter’ between different policy epistemics.

These five reasons suggest the convenience of adopting the APM proposed here. As the example of urban planning (discussed in chapter 6) confirms, the significant potential of the APM is only beginning to be realized. There is reason to suggest that other fields can benefit from an agonistic orientation as well. In particular, two fields of public policy stand out in their potential to embrace the agonistic vision. One is accounting; the other, budgeting.

*Agonistic potential in the field of accounting.* New Zealand policy theorist Judy Brown has published a series of studies highlighting the potential of agonistic ideas to renew accounting. Brown (2009) comments that accounting is a discipline searching for alternative paradigms. She draws attention to the emergence of recent trends that conceive accounting as a ‘politicized’ terrain pervaded by power, thus challenging more entrenched instrumentalist views that emphasize data-gathering and production of technical reports. Scholars, critical of the positivistic affiliations of the discipline, have called for new theoretical paths capable of moving accounting beyond expertise-centred, technocratic theorizing.

Attempting to contribute to this debate, Brown proposes the adoption of agonistic ideas as way to link accounting with democratic theory. She notes that ‘there is a dearth of explicit acknowledgement or engagement with, for example, agonistic critiques’ (Brown, 2009, p. 315). In her view, mainstream accounting is unable to acknowledge the pluralistic condition of modern societies because it insists in finding the ‘right answer’. However, this belief on the possibility of the ‘right answer’ is very problematic, because it precludes the recognition of the existence of conflicting views. Not only that, these empiricist approaches disregard that accounting is a social practice permeated by power disputes, thus ultimately ignoring the political dimension. Brown argues for an ‘accounting that is more receptive to the needs of a plural society; one that is “multi-voiced” and attuned to a diversity of stakeholders’ values and interests’ (Brown, 2009, p. 317).

In line with the APM developed here, Brown suggests that accounting should not aim for definitive closure, final truth or ‘incontrovertible accounts’. In her view, new accountings should be oriented to make power relations more visible, facilitate citizen engagement in the decision-making process, and promote accountability and responsiveness. In particular, the agonistic approach developed by Chantal Mouffe has a strong potential to challenge mainstream accounting that embraces a technocratic and apolitical orientation. For Brown, the main advantages of the agonistic approach are derived from its ability to:

- enable the expression of multiple perspectives
- promote the engagement of non-experts
- recognize power dynamics (and expose relations of domination and inequality)
- discourage instrumental reasoning and technocratic decision-making
- foster transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement
- admit the subjectivity and contestability of information (Brown, 2009).

The ‘agonistic’ accounting advocated by Brown is an illustration of the potential of agonistic ideas to challenge expertise-led, technocratically-driven views that are pervasive in a wide range of policy and administrative fields. The dissemination of agonistic interpretation can contribute, as Brown correctly suggests, to neutralize the depoliticizing tendencies of public policy and open up new ways of conceiving democratic participation in the policy process. Moreover, by making power relations more transparent, agonistic views can potentially facilitate transformative change so that marginalized groups are given legitimate spaces to express their (counter-hegemonic) perspectives.

*Agonistic potential in the field of budgeting.* The field of accounting, however, is only one exemplification of the vast potential of agonism to renew public policy, theory and practice. Another domain that remains captive to restrictive forms of instrumental reasoning and technocratic forms of decision-making is public budgeting, whose dominant orientation resembles what Brown designates as ‘monologic’ (that is, based on

the assumption of objectivity and neutrality of knowledge). It is therefore reasonable to recommend the application of agonistic ideas to the important field of public budgeting.

It should be acknowledged that other policy approaches, particularly the interpretive, have already attempted to discuss how budgeting could be understood in less technical ways. For instance, Roe (1994) suggests that budgeting can be conceived as a narrative in which authors (budget authorities) communicate their message (the budget text) to an audience (politicians, experts, journalists, civil society). It is true that this approach, which Roe designates as narrative policy analysis, has some advantages. For example, by employing semantic analysis, researchers can uncover meanings hidden in policy documents and thus detect underlying power structures. However, as argued in chapter 3, although the interpretive vision has the merit of pointing out the limitations of more technocratic, expertise-led approaches to public policy, it remains confined to the theoretical level. Thus, it does not offer convincing indication of how dominant rationalistic and instrumental forms of reasoning can be challenged in practice.

The Agonistic Policy Model (APM), on the other hand, is not only an analytical framework but also a 'form of intervention'. It can thus be suggested that the application of agonistic ideas in the field of budgeting can inspire the construction of tools that operate according to a techno-political logic. The penetration of agonistic practices can arguably elucidate the shortcomings of 'monologic' views that search for the 'right answer', and thus disregard the diversity and heterogeneity typical of pluralistic democratic societies.

An 'agonistic vision of public budgeting' can bring to the fore the notion that every budget represents a choice over how society is managed. By making power relations more visible, an agonistic perspective may evince the hegemonic nature of the budgeting process, which always privileges certain groups and exclude others (Schneider and Ingram, 2005). Apart from this 'diagnostic' contribution (how things are), the agonistic perspective can also indicate a 'therapeutic' solution (how things should be).

It can be suggested, for example, that an ‘agonistic budgeting’ would place emphasis on the idea that the budget is a contested terrain, whose configuration cannot be decided in purely technical terms. In this case, the budget would be depicted as a hegemonic and contingent articulation (liable therefore to be re-articulated in different ways). From this agonistic perspective, the budget is construed not as a technical activity to be carried out solely by experts, but as a correlation of forces that struggle for the recognition of public authorities (every budget allocation can be seen as a reward for a ‘deserving’ group). To put it differently, from an agonistic perspective, the budget can be construed as a provisional consensus that can always be disrupted.

This conceptualization represents a departure from the conventional idea (that informs much of contemporary budget theorizing) that budget is a neutral and objective activity. An illustration helps to visualize to what extent budgeting is rooted on positivistic and empiricist approaches to knowledge. The analytical, ‘technicist’ orientation that pervades budgeting can be clearly detected in contemporary discussions over budget innovation. As Allen Schick, one of the most renowned experts in the field, in his conceptualization of public budgeting, puts it

Budgeting is a process that transforms information into decision. Requests submitted by spending units or generated by central budget staffs are inputted into the process, and allocations to entities, projects and other recipients are outputted. The quality of these decisions depends on the data available to decision makers, as well as on the analytic tools they use to process the information. One of the perennial aims of budget innovation has been to influence the decisions that flow from the process by modifying the classification or content of budget data and by introducing new analytic methods (Schick, 2007, p. 110).

This citation reveals how entrenched analytical, expertise-led views are in the field of budget. Furthermore, as Ebdon and Franklin (2006) argue, mainstream budgeting, by emphasizing an instrumental orientation, ends up being insensitive to the pluralism of contemporary societies and thus blind to democratic values. According to these scholars, current budgeting practices evince the following features:

- rationalistic and positivistic types of reasoning (that encourage data collection, statistical analysis, surveys, technical reports)

- technocratic styles of policy-making that favour expertise and depreciate non-expert forms of knowledge
- top-down structures that concentrate power on government officials and ‘insulates’ budget technocrats from societal forces
- emphasis on efficiency as the main criterion for the allocation of financial resources (e.g. cost-benefit analysis)
- inattention to citizen empowerment and democratic participation

How can the agonistic policy perspective proposed here contribute to the democratization of the budget? Which recommendations can it offer for the politicization of budget practices and techniques? These are interesting questions that can be addressed by a prospective ‘agonistic budgeting debate’.

It might be worth indicating that recent publications, both by policy scholars and practitioners, have alluded to the potential of non-technocratic, political views of public budgeting. An illuminating illustration can be found in the idea of a ‘gender-responsive government budgeting’ (Sarraf, 2003). This is an innovative budget tool that is already being implemented in civil society and non-governmental organizations (besides under consideration by some national governments). It draws attention to the importance of connecting budget allocations (funds) to gender-sensitive policies. Although still a fledgling initiative that is gradually getting traction, the ‘gender-perspective budgeting’ has a vast democratic potential (especially to promote equality of gender) that is beginning to be recognized (within and outside academia).

The ‘gender-responsive government budgeting’ is a promising way of promoting (much needed) innovation in the field of public budgeting. It has the ability to politicize a field that is overwhelmingly centred on expertise and thus insensitive to the democratic implications of its attitudes. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the political dimension of public policy, the ‘gender-responsive government budgeting’ exemplifies how agonism can be practically implemented in policy and administrative settings.

Accounting and budgeting, however, are only two fields in which agonism can arguably contribute to improve policy-making. There are many more. For the five reasons mentioned earlier in this conclusion, the case can be made for the dissemination of agonism, a new policy approach whose potential is only beginning to be actualized. The introduction of the APM in a multiplicity of policy and administrative sites might well be the cure of an old illness: the persistent denial of the political in public policy and administration.



## Appendix 1

### Important policy streams developed after Lasswell (1951)

<i>Policy model</i>	<i>Proponents</i>	<i>Key ideas</i>
Stages	Lasswell (1971)	Policy process as a sequence of phases: intelligence, recommendation, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal, and termination. It revises and improves Lasswell's (1951) original formulation.
Public Choice	Buchanan and Tullock (1962), Olson (1965), Niskanen (1971), Ostrom (1973)	Drawing on neoclassical economics, it portrays individuals as weighing costs and benefits with the purpose of maximizing satisfaction. Government should produce public goods and services only when the market is incapable to operate. When 'market failures' occur, the government should try to mimic the competitive logic of the market that seeks efficient solutions.
Policy communities and issue networks	Hecllo (1978)	Policy-making is interpreted in terms of policy communities, which are groups unified by a set of beliefs, values and interests that provide a common ground for the operation of a network. One important off-shoot is policy advocacy coalition model (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993).
Policy politics	Lowi (1964 1972)	Lowi stressed that policy determines politics, and constructed a typology that reduced policy-making to four distinct (mutually exclusive and exhaustive) categories: regulatory, distributive, redistributive and constituent. Each category, Lowi (2009) clarifies, is a separate arena of power that contains with its specific structure of power.
Implementation studies	Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), Bardach (1977)	When it was realized that policies are often carried out in a way that differs from their original design, theorists argued that the process of policy implementation should also be studied in order to understand when policies succeed or fail.

Multiple streams	Kingdon (1984)	The multiple streams model is an adaptation of the garbage can model (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972). It suggests that the setting of the political agenda is the result of a flow of three sets of processes or streams: problems (public matters that require attention), policies (proposals to solve the problems) and politics (the interplay of political institutions and groups).
Punctuated equilibrium model of public policy	Baumgartner and Jones (1993)	Aimed at explaining policy change, stability and variation, it depicts decision-making as the result of interaction between institutions, ideas, socioeconomic factors, and policy actors. Agendas in the political system can change rapidly disrupting existing consensus. Equilibrium is an exception in policy-making, which is predominantly marked by change and disequilibrium
The new-institutionalism	Hall and Taylor (1996), March and Olsen (1989, 1995) and North (1990)	New-institutionalism has been particularly important in rescuing the pivotal role of ideas and beliefs in policy research. It asserts that institutions are influential or determinant in how actors define their policy preferences. Institutions provide ideas, symbols, rituals, rules, communication patterns, and roles that contribute to shape the preference of individuals.

Source: the author

## Appendix 2

### Comparison of policy paradigms I – theoretical perspective

<i>Paradigm</i>	<i>Dominant ethos</i>	<i>Intellectual background</i>	<i>Theoretical underpinnings</i>
Early Public Administration (EPA)	Bureaucratic	Politics-administration dichotomy (Wilson), Scientific management (Taylor)	Efficiency, hierarchy, specialization of tasks
Policy Analysis (PA)	Technocratic	Operations analysis, systems analysis, policy sciences of democracy (Lasswell)	Problem-solving, instrumental rationality; reliance on scientific knowledge
Interpretive Public Policy (IPP)	Argumentative or narrative	Symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, post-structuralism (e.g. Fischer)	Framing, storytelling, practical reason (phronesis)
Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA)	Democratic legitimacy	Deliberative theories of democracy (e.g. Nabatchi, Stivers)	Communicative rationality, civic participation, deliberative arenas
Agonistic Policy Model (APM)	Ineradicability of conflict and antagonism	Post-foundationalism, Mouffe's agonistic theory	Open-ended, conflictive, deeply democratic, integrative

Source: the author

## Appendix 2 (cont.)

### Comparison of policy paradigms II – view of politics

<i>Framework</i>	<i>Contribution to policy theorization</i>	<i>Limitations</i>	<i>Perception of politics</i>
Early Public Administration (EPA)	Dichotomy politics-administration	Formalism, insulation, lack of accountability; aversion to politics	Dichotomy politics-administration
Policy Analysis (PA)	Policy as problem-solving and technical expertise	Policy is broader than problem-solving; disregard for politics; instrumental rationality	In theory, policy should seek democratic ends; in practice, apolitical
Interpretive Public Policy (IPP)	Public policy as interpretive artefacts	Lack of practical guidance; relativism	Politicization of public policy
Deliberative Policy Approach (DPA)	Policy arenas as spaces of public deliberation and civic engagement	Convenient only in specific cases; depend on bureaucratic acquiescence; strong cognitive requirements	Democratization of the policy process
Agonistic Policy Model (APM)	Policy process as arena of struggle	To be developed by policy scholarship	Integrative view of the policy process

Source: the author

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