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Wil A. H. Thissen · Warren E. Walker *Editors*

Public Policy Analysis

New Developments

Traditional policy analysis approaches are characterized by a focus on system modeling and choosing among policy alternatives. While successful in many cases, this approach has been increasingly criticized for being technocratic and ignoring the behavioral and political dimensions of most policy processes. In recent decades, increased awareness of the multi-actor, multiple perspective, and poly-centric character of many policy processes has led to the development of a variety of different perspectives on the styles and roles of policy analysis, and to new analytical tools and approaches – for example, argumentative approaches, participative policy analysis, and negotiation support. As a result, the field has become multi-faceted and somewhat fragmented.

Public Policy Analysis: New Developments acknowledges the variety of approaches and provides a synthesis of the traditional and new approaches to policy analysis. It provides an overview and typology of different types of policy analytic activities, characterizing them according to differences in character and leading values, and linking them to a variety of theoretical notions on policymaking. Thereby, it provides assistance to both end users and analysts in choosing an appropriate approach given a specific policy situation. By broadening the traditional approach and methods to include the analysis of actors and actor networks related to the policy issue at hand, it deepens the state of the art in certain areas. While the main focus of the book is on the cognitive dimensions of policy analysis, it also links the policy analysis process to the policymaking process, showing how to identify and involve all relevant stakeholders in the process, and how to create favorable conditions for use of the results of policy analytic efforts by the policy actors.

Social Sciences

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Wil A. H. Thissen and Warren E. Walker

1.1 Policy Analysis: A Multi Faceted Field

The world is undergoing rapid changes. The future is uncertain. Policymakers are faced with problem situations that are complex, and with alternative courses of action that can produce far-reaching consequences that are hard to predict. Different groups perceive and value the problem situation and the alternative actions differently. Nevertheless, policymakers have a responsibility to develop and implement policies that have the best chance of contributing to the health, safety, and well being of their constituencies. Given this context, policymaking is not easy. Uncertainties abound. Data are limited. Identifying the key issues is a difficult task. However, without proper analysis and guidance, important policy choices end up being based on hunches and guesses, and policy processes may get stuck for long periods—sometimes with regrettable results.

A number of books have been written in the past that deal with various aspects of policy analysis. However, significant additional experience has been built up over the last decades. New perspectives have emerged regarding the role of government and its inter-relationships with various groups in the process of making and implementing policy. In parallel with these changes in its environment, policy analysis has evolved to include new perspectives on its role and new analytical tools and approaches—for example, argumentative approaches, participative policy analysis, and negotiation support.

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