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Routledge Handbook of Public Policy: A Review of the Book Edited by Araral et al., 2012

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Abstract

Public policy has become an increasingly complex field of research and practice, requiring interdisciplinary perspectives and robust analytical frameworks. The *Routledge Handbook of Public Policy*, edited by Araral Jr. et al., offers a comprehensive overview of this complexity by reviewing public policy research and practice across 533 pages and 36 chapters organized into nine parts. Bringing together contributions from 58 authors, ranging from graduate students to seasoned professors, the volume explores the history, methods, analysis, and cyclical processes of public policy, including agenda-setting, formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. It also examines key analytical frameworks such as the advocacy coalition framework and the policy network model, alongside discussions of the influence of mass media and the role of policy design in policy transfer and diffusion. By synthesizing these diverse perspectives, the handbook serves as a valuable resource for understanding the intricacies of public policy formulation and evaluation, and it provides a substantive reference point for scholars and practitioners seeking to navigate contemporary policy debates and practices.

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Keywords: Book Review; Public Policy; Policy Analysis; Policy Evaluation; Policy-Making

Introduction

Title of the Handbook: Routledge Handbook of Public Policy

Name of the editors: Eduardo Araral Jr., Scott Fritzen, Michael Fritzen, M Ramesh, and Xun Wu

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Purposes of the book

The Routledge Handbook of Public Policy is an edited collection that compiles contributions from various authors on the topic of public policy. This handbook intends to deliver a thorough overview of the field and provides insights into different facets of public policy research and practice.

Background of the Editors of the Handbook

The editors of the handbook are well-respected scholars in the field of public policy and bring their expertise and diverse perspectives to the book

1. **Eduardo Araral Jr**. is Assistant Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

2. **Scott Fritzen** is Associate Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

3. **Michael Howlett** is Burnaby Mountain Chair in the Department of Political Science at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

4. **M Ramesh** is Chair Professor of Governance and Public Policy at the Hong Kong Institute of Education and Visiting Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

5. Xun Wu is Associate Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

Contributors of the Handbook

There are 58 professional contributors of this handbook from different countries of university. The contributors are included from graduate students to university professors.

Summary of the Handbook

The handbook contains 533 pages and 36 chapters organized into nine parts, which is edited by (Araral *et al*., 2012) and published by Routledge. The first part of the book deals with an introduction to the study of the public policy process: history and methods (pp. 1-56). The second part of the book concerns public policy making (pp. 57-112). The third part of the book deals with modeling the policy process and frameworks for analysis (pp. 113-164). Part four of the book deals with understanding the agenda-setting process (pp. 165-214). Part five concerns understanding the formulation process (pp. 215-270). The sixth part of the book deals with understanding the decision-making process (pp. 271-328). The seventh part of the book deals with understanding the implementation process (pp. 329-384). Part eight of the book relates to understanding the evaluation process (pp. 385-448). The last parts of the book, part nine deals with policy dynamics: patterns of stability and change from (pp. 449-498).

The handbook begins with the basic study of the public policy (p. 3) process debate and the rise of policy analysis. The authors indicate that since the mid-1960s, an increasingly large number of people trained in the humanities and social sciences have come to devote their professional lives to producing policy advice. The rise of policy analysis is usefully seen as a movement. The demand for policy analysis has been driven mostly by the emergence of problems and by political conditions that have made those problems salient. Today, the policy analysis movement is large (p. 13), diverse, and global. The phenomenon of many people generating policy analysis for consumption by an array of audiences can be claimed to be a movement for several reasons. First, policy analysts all focus their energies in one way or another on identifying, understanding, and confronting public problems. As policy analysis techniques have become more commonly used to examine public issues, new challenges and innovative methods for addressing them have emerged.

The handbook reveals a policy cycle model of the policy process. In the most recent work (pp. 17-24), a five-stage model of the policy process has been most commonly used. First, agenda-setting refers to the first stage in the process when a problem is initially sensed by policy actors and a variety of solutions is put forward. Second, "policy formulation" refers to the development of specific policy options within government when the range of possible choices is narrowed by excluding infeasible ones. Third, decision-making refers to the third stage in which governments adopt a particular course of action. In the fourth stage of policy implementation, governments put their decisions into effect using some combination of the tools of public administration in order to alter the distribution of goods and services in society. Finally, the fifth stage, "policy evaluation," refers to the process in which the results of policies are monitored by both state and societal actors, often leading to the reconceptualization of policy problems and solutions in light of experiences encountered with the policy in question Howlett et al. (2009). Thus, policy model analysis implies that the idea of policy making exists as a set of interrelated stages, providing a general framework for understanding the policy development process. The handbook directs attention to the international dimensions and dynamics of policy making (p. 44) and seeks to connect these emerging global dynamics to long-recognized drivers of policy making, presenting a conceptual framework that can help in understanding the resulting interactions.

The authors of the handbook describe the advocacy coalition framework policy (pp. 129-132) as coalitions, learning, and policy change. Policy process research is the study of public policy over time and the surrounding actors, contexts, and events. There are three major theoretical emphases of the advocacy coalition framework. First, advocacy coalitions refer to groups of actors sharing policy core beliefs and coordinating their behavior in a non-trivial manner. Second, policy-oriented learning is defined as enduring alterations of thought. Third, policy change assumes that policies are translations of beliefs and can be conceptualized and measured hierarchically like belief systems.

The authors of the handbook discuss the policy network model (p. 153) to understand how relationships between actors involved in policy-making determine the outcomes of collective policy decisions (Compston, 2009; Knoke, 2011). To this end, policy network analysis consists of two distinct components. First, one has to identify the important actors involved in the policy-making process. Second, one has to describe the type of social interactions that occur between actors during the policy-making process.

Both components are vital to enabling the researcher to explain or predict policy outcomes. The authors identify as agenda setting and political discourse (pp. 189-194) major analytical frameworks and their application. These agenda settings include problem definition, framing, and narrative. Three questions are central to the agenda-setting perspective in public policy analysis: Which ones will succeed in gaining the active attention of political decision-makers? How do problems and solutions come to be matched together in public policy formulation? Who are the key actors in agenda-setting, and by what means do they pursue their objectives?

The authors of the book indicated the role of mass media in policy-making (pp. 204-207). Mass media can play a critical role in policy-making. Media can help to set an agenda, which is then adopted and dealt with by politicians, policy-makers, and other actors. Media matter, not just at the beginning but throughout the policy process. The authors describe policy design and develop ideas (p. 217) about how the study of policy design can contribute to an understanding of policy transfer and diffusion.

The authors of the book describe the role of policy appraisal (pp. 244-250) in knowledge collection, review, and utilization processes. Policy appraisal is a very specific type of policy analysis, a term that covers the use of analytical methods, formal or informal, in any part of policy-making, from agenda-setting to implementation. Policy appraisal is an important aspect of policy analysis that has spread rapidly and secured a high profile. The authors describe the policy analysis styles (pp. 258-263) and identify six policy analysis styles: 1) A rational style: assumptions about knowledge and reality; 2) An argumentative style: defended and criticized through the medium of language; 3) A client advice style: interests of the actors involved; 4) A participatory style: looking at society critically; 5) A process style: identifying what is good for the process; and 6) An interactive style: individuals, experts, analysts, clients, stakeholders, and target groups have or may have differing views of the 'same' policy problem. The book explains that the instrumentalism of policy making (p. 287) is a pluralistic process of policy-making involving mutual adjustment among multiple actors who typically disagree on objectives and start off from very different conceptions of the problem at hand. In this regard, Braybrooke (1963) argues that instrumentalism provides the best explanation of the policy process because it is the most effective way to make policy, allowing policy-makers to proceed when the rational comprehensive ideal has broken down.

The authors identify models for research into decision-making (pp. 299-308). Scholars agree that decision-making has become more complex. Four models for research into decision-making processes are presented (Teisman, 2000). The phase model refers to distinct stages of adoption and implementation; the stream model refers to concurrent streams of problems, solutions, and participants; the round model refers to a series of interacting decisions taken by several actors; and the track model refers to simultaneous tracks of finding, framing, and well-forming. The authors also discuss the garbage can model of the decision-making process (p. 320), which is a non-linear, chaotic, and unpredictable process that does not follow a structured or rational approach.

In the garbage can model, decision makers are seen as "organized anarchies" where problems, solutions, participants, and choices are all mixed together in a "garbage can." When a decision needs to be made, the decision makers draw from this "garbage can" and select a problem, a solution, and a choice that seem to fit the situation at hand. This means that decisions are not necessarily made in a logical or linear manner, but rather are the result of chance encounters between problems, solutions, and decision makers. However, the garbage can model has some criticisms and limitations (p. 321), such as lack of clarity, lack of empirical support, neglect of rationality, and limited applicability. These are some of the limitations of the garbage can model of the decision-making process.

The authors discuss ways of understanding the implementation process of policy (pp. 331-340) and aim to provide a description of important debates, theories, and frameworks that explain the relationship between bureaucracy and the public policy process. They provide definitions of bureaucracy, followed by explanations of bureaucratic roles in policy-making and policy implementation. On the other hand, the authors briefly review that disagreement and alternative dispute resolution in the policy process (pp. 347-354) are discussed. These include negotiation theory as a starting point, as well as consensus building and mediation theory as solutions to disagreement among parties.

The authors of the book also define methods of understanding the evaluation process of policy (pp. 387-397) and identify six models of evaluation. The most important evaluation models in the field include: 1) Goal-attainment model, also known as goal-attainment evaluation and effectiveness evaluation, which refers to effectiveness and intervention impact assessment. 2) Side-effects model; this implies a widening of the subject matter of the goal-attainment model in the sense that the search for results in the

target area is supplemented by a search outside the target area for side effects. 3) Relevance model; solving the underlying problem is the merit criterion against which the worth of the intervention is assessed. 4) Client-oriented model; this allows members of the intervention's target group to perform the evaluation based on their own merit criteria. 5) Stakeholder model; claims, concerns, and issues of the various affected actors serve as merit criteria when evaluating interventions, their contents, processes, outputs, outcomes, and organization. are assessed and evaluated Vedung (1998: 73). The major difference between the client model and the stakeholders' model is scope: while the client-driven model is basically concerned with one group of affected interests, the stakeholder model is geared to all of them. 6) Collegial models: peer review, self-evaluation; this implies that personnel of the pertinent agency are entrusted to evaluate the performance of their colleagues in some other agency or branch of the public sector using their own professional criteria of merit and standards of quality.

Policy feedback and policy learning (pp. 401-404) are also described in the book. The authors explain that policy feedback is the concept of path dependence and policy learning is a process of updating beliefs about key components of policy (Radaelli, 1995). This definition encapsulates all kinds of knowledge that can be acquired through various learning mechanisms, which reflect the eclectic environment of policymakers. In fact, policy feedback and policy learning have a lot in common when it comes to describing the process through which governmental authorities learn from the enactment of policies and programs and make incremental adjustments as a result. The authors describe policy evaluation and public participation (pp. 439-444). The explanations concern the methods and challenges of evaluating policies through the participation of affected publics. For this purpose, policy evaluation is understood as an act of judgment about the performance of a particular policy process, department, or program based on its desirability value. The authors of the book discuss policy dynamics and change (p. 451) as the never-ending puzzle. Public policy is a dynamic phenomenon. This means not only that policy is intrinsically processional, but also that as a whole, they are not the simple sum of their individual parts (stages, actors, institutions, time, instruments, etc.). Therefore, it is better to understand policy change in order to grasp policy dynamics.

At the end of the handbook, the authors describe how to learn from the success and failure (pp. 484-492) of the policy. A policy is successful if it achieves the goals that proponents set out to achieve and attracts no criticism of any significance, and/or support

is virtually universal (McConnell 2010b: 351). The three realms of policy success are process success, program success, and political success. On the other hand, a policy fails if it does not achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great, and/or support is virtually non-existent (McConnell 2010a: 357). Failure in some realms is often a precondition for success in others. Failures in some areas can be tolerated, masked, risked, exploited, and even cultivated in the pursuit of success elsewhere.

Conclusion

The handbook provides a comprehensive global survey of the policy process. The book is written by an outstanding lineup of distinguished scholars and practitioners. The Handbook covers all aspects of the policy process, including theory, from rational choice to new institutionalism. Policy network theory and the advocacy coalition framework identify key stages in the process: agenda-setting, formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation; the roles of key actors and their institutions; and policy learning and policy dynamics, from path dependency to process sequencing. As a limitation, the authors did not include introductions and summaries in some parts of the chapters. Overall, the understanding from the book is that the general concepts of public policy, different models of policy approaches, a stage model of the policy process, policy analysis styles, the policy decision-making process, and models of policy evaluation and appraisal are the major concepts one can recognize from this handbook of public policy.

Recommendations

In general, the handbook of this public policy is well organized with many relevant public policy issues. However, it would be better if the authors included an introduction and summary for each of the chapters to make it easier to understand for the readers. The content of the book is extensive, and the reader can easily use it if it is written with a focus on the main points. On the other hand, the handbook is essential for policy studies, government bodies, as well as for researchers to understand different theories and models of the public policy process that have to be taken into consideration.

Statement and declaration

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Author Contributions: Tolcha Eshete Regassa: Conceptualized, designed, and conducted the review, including the manuscript writing

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