Hassel, Anke & Wegrich, Kai (2022). *How to Do Public Policy*.

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Zusammenfassung: In dieser Rezension wird "How to Do Public Policy" von Anke Hassel und Kai Wegrich als ein originelles und hervorragend geeignetes Lehrbuch für Studierende und (angehende) Führungskräfte der öffentlichen Verwaltung, des Public Managements und der Policy-Analyse vorgestellt. Das Buch unterscheidet sich von vergleichbaren Texten dadurch, dass es Politikgestaltung zuvorderst als strategische, politische Tätigkeit betrachtet sowie handlungsorientierte Einsichten betont anstelle der üblichen "Modelle des Politikprozesses" aus der Vogelperspektive. Das Buch beruht auf einem soliden Verständnis des aktuellen Forschungsstands der Policy-Analyse, meidet jedoch Klischees. Es vermittelt seinen Leserinnen und Lesern in gelungener Weise das nötige Rüstzeug, um die praktischen Herausforderungen der Politikgestaltung im 21. Jahrhundert in ihren institutionellen und politischen Dynamiken zu erkennen und zu gestalten.

Many students that opt to take public policy and public administration contemplate careers in practice – as policy designers, policy advocates, political office-holders, or managers of public service organisations. Yet the textbooks their teachers at university prescribe them all too often are far removed from the realities they will face when they land in such jobs. Your average public policy textbook, for example, is likely to suffer from either or both of two recurrent afflictions. The first is the tendency to depict public policymaking as a rational, linear, orderly activity by organizing the book along the stages of the so-called policy cycle or of a design process – constructs that any insider knows are at best aspirational and in many instances profoundly misleading. The second is the preoccupation with presenting and juxtaposing generic, holistic, analytically sophisticated 'models of the policy process' that tend to pay little attention to case-specific contents, contexts, institutional arrangements, and political relations. And yet it is these that policy practitioners inevitably need to take into account, navigate, and influence when trying to 'get things done' and influence policy directions.

This is why *How to Do Public Policy* is such a breath of fresh air. The authors are clearly cognisant of the historical (often North American) classical canon and the contemporary (much more globalised) frontiers of public policy analysis. But teaching as they do early- and mid-career public policy practitioners at their home institution, the Hertie School in Berlin, they are briskly determined to produce a textbook that is much more helpful to those working on the frontlines of public policy on a daily basis. The title says it all, and despite the book's organisation into three fairly conventional themes (Process, Policies, Capacities), the pragmatic, applied intent of the authors comes through loud and clear in chapter titles such as *How to Set the Agenda, How To Engage With Stakeholders, How to Coordinate Public Policy*, and tucked away in the Appendix but exceedingly useful and ever so rare in a textbook, *How to*

Write for Public Policy and *How to Design an Advocacy Campaign*. The writing is brisk, yet the treatment of topics sophisticated and subtle.

The authors' main beef with the mainstream is that much of what passes for policy analysis keeps naively focused on rationalist ideals and techniques – with 'evidence-based policy', supposedly enabled by big-data, increased computing power, and smartly designed controlled experiments. They don't beat around the bush in distancing themselves from that mindset: 'While not seeking to squash anyone's enthusiasm for working with data, knowledge, and information, the starting point and conviction of this book is that data are neither neutral inputs that only need to be used, nor are they a-political and independent from the world of politics' (p. 3). And hence, their book is based on their conviction that 'policy analysis needs to bring politics, actors, and institutions back into the centre of how to do public policy' (ibid).

They succeed admirably in delivering a book that does justice to this philosophy. They do so in a manner that is respectful of what seven or so decades of conventional policy analysis have delivered in terms of concepts, insights, and tools. And yet they ensure that this book sets itself apart from traditional approaches by offering much more elaborate and sophisticated treatment of the institutional, political, bureaucratic, interorganisational, and intergovernmental dynamics that turn public policymaking into such a complex, conflictual and seemingly chaotic affair. The book offers some original gems that are very useful pedagogically. One example is its notion of the so-called dual structure of policymaking, which distinguishes between the 'superstructure' – the high-level actors and institutions embroiled in the making of major policy decisions; and the 'engine room' – where, often in ways less immediately visible to the public middle-level and operational bureaucrats work with other stakeholders, think tanks, interest groups, and service-delivery organisations on everything that leads up to and flows on from the high-level decision making that occurs in the superstructure. Each of these structures are arenas in which policy problems get processed and policies get shaped, but they operate on different logics and at different junctures in public problem-solving efforts. When the two worlds are purposefully aligned, sensible and coherent policies may result. At the same time, in many places throughout the book we learn that such alignment is elusive.

Another great asset are the many useful tables that provide readers with helpful analytical insights and summaries, and with (more or less) practical implications or even tools. Often, the two types of tables are explicitly linked, as in chapter 3 on agenda-setting, where the analytical table 3.2 sets out four key mechanisms (timing, framing, venue selection, and use of evidence) which then re-appear in the next table 3.3 that offers a strategic tool for 'politically smart agenda-setting'. Likewise, table 4.2 on 'guiding questions and factors to consider for instrument choice and design' provides would-be designers with a checklist that does justice not just to the inherent properties of different (e.g. regulatory, financial, information-based and provision-based) instruments at their disposal, but forces them to consider questions of institutional fit, resource levels, and prevailing contextual constraints that are often conveniently forgotten in mainstream treatments of policy instruments and design choice.

The third section of the book departs furthest from the mainstream of rationalistic or models-based policy analysis, and drills down into inherently 'hands-on' themes such as working with stakeholders and how to achieve coordination both within and among different levels of government. Throughout, the authors mix classic with contemporary insights and case examples to give readers both a sense of the complex challenges involved and repertoires

for nevertheless 'doing stuff' in ways that are mindful of those complexities. The concluding chapter brings the main lines of the book together extremely well – so well in fact that the authors should consider reworking it into a stand-alone programmatic journal article expounding their pragmatic-realist philosophy of policy analysis and policy-as-work.

Perhaps the only risk of this impressive effort is that it may end up falling between two stools in the considerations of course convenors. For those that work with and for practitioner audiences, the text may still feel a bit too 'bookish' in places – being professors and perhaps wanting to demonstrate command of the literature, the authors do not entirely resist the temptation of injecting sources, argument and narratives the 'art for art's sake variety: considered important by scholars but considered at best 'nice to know' for those whose sole purpose it is to get better at playing the games in the superstructures and the engine rooms of public policy practice. For more traditionally minded course convenors, the book's consistent emphasis on how to *do* things may feel perhaps a tad too practical to feed to young undergraduate and master students that are still at the pre-professional stage of their journeys. Time – and sales figures - will tell whether my concerns are validated. In the meantime, I have immediately recommended to my colleagues at the Utrecht School of Governance that this book be adopted to replace our long-cherished choice of textbook for the public policy course (Deborah Stone's formidable but much less comprehensive and practical *Policy Paradox*). Let that be testament to my enthusiasm about this book; and let it encourage others not to pass up the opportunity of injecting their policy analysis courses with a much-needed academically sophisticated but practice-oriented core text.

References

Stone, Deborah A. (2011). *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*. Third edition. W. W. Norton & Company.

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