

Policy Advice and Public Policy Actors, Contents and Processes

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This article reviews the literature on policy advice and policy advisory systems by taking into consideration three sets of basic questions: who the policy advisors are; what type of policy advice they deliver; and how they intervene in the policy process and in policy dynamics. The literature review highlights some common traits of policy advice, including the differentiation, the externalization and the politicization of policy advice. It emphasizes the importance of the study of the content and the products of policy advice. It proposes some ideas to design comparative research that uses the policy subsystems and the policy sectors as units of analysis.

Keywords: Policy advisors; Policy advisory systems; Knowledge utilization; Externalization; Politicization.

1. Introduction

When policy sciences entered into the practice of US policy-making after WWII, Lasswell described it as the production and application of knowledge *in* policy (by mobilizing the best research) and knowledge *of* policy (by showing to citizens how the policy-making evolves). According to Hoppe (1999), this was a first democratic and pragmatic view of the relationship between science and policy, where knowledge and policy sciences are at the service of democracy. From that moment on, the idea that science has to be used for problem-solving has been declined in different ways (Weiss 1979; for recent empirical studies on the uses of knowledge in policy and in politics on the Italian case, see Regonini 2012 and Lippi 2012).

Policy advice, intended as the provision of advice to policymakers on government policy matters, can be considered as a specific activity in problem solving which involves expert knowledge.

The variety of forms of policy advice offers a particular perspective on the complex relationship between knowledge, policy and politics. First, the empirical analysis of policy advice describes the activ-

ities and the outputs produced by policy advisors with different origins and specializations. Second, it shows that policy advice can be used for different purposes, so that policy-makers may recur to science to justify their conduct or to design better policies. Overall, the work of policy advisors can prove to be a key ingredient of the policy process and of policy change.

Empirical research is increasingly focusing on policy advice as a distinct set of activities performed by a variety of actors that flourish inside and outside governments, with the general purpose of contributing to problem-solving, but also striving for some influence in the policy process. From a general concern of «speaking truth to power», quoting Wildavsky (1979), the research on policy advice has shown an uneven pattern of development in the different countries. Most of the literature in the last thirty years defines policy advice as an activity that aims to support policy-making by analyzing policy problems and by proposing solutions (Halligan 1995, 139). As policy advice can be performed by very different types of actors (civil servants, ministerial officers, special government units, parliamentary commissions, independent agencies, but also academics, independent researchers and institutes, professional consultants, think tanks, lobbyists, interest groups, community groups and international organizations), it can also be described as a special kind of work performed during the policy process, that is focused on suggestions to policy-makers inspired by different criteria (political or technical; substantive or procedural) (Vesely 2017). This article aims at giving an overview of the literature on the subject, by reviewing the studies in public policy on the actors, the products, and uses of policy advice. In so doing, the article uses the literature in order to describe the main trends in policy advice linked to the shift from government to governance in the political systems, and to highlight the main limitations of existing research.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 presents policy advice as an activity performed inside specific systems, called Policy Advisory Systems (PAS), also discussing the main dimensions of analysis and the possible factors affecting the features of the system in the different countries (or in the different policy sectors). Section 3 focuses on *who* the policy advisors are, considering their peculiar configurations and the relationship with other actors in the system, such as the politicians and the bureaucrats. Section 4 concentrates on *what* the policy advisors do, with particular attention to the content of policy advice, the outputs and the professionalization of this type of activity. Section 5 describes *how* policy advice intervenes in

the policy process, starting from the literature that emphasizes the different uses of knowledge in public policy and in policy dynamics. Section 6 discusses the main gaps in this literature on the *who*, the *what* and the *how* of policy advice, and proposes some ideas for future research on this subject, with a plea for comparative research.

2. Policy Advice as a System of Interactions

From Individual Advisors to the Policy Advisory Systems (PAS)

The world of policy advice is crowded with very different individual actors and organizations: individual experts, academics, central agency advisors, ministerial officers, lobbyists, but also central agency advisors, strategic policy units, appointed executive staff, ad hoc and permanent commissions in the parliaments, NGOs, trade unions, research institutes, community and international organizations. Table 1 exemplifies this variety, by taking as a reference the institutional nature of the actor involved in the policy advice.

This is the line of reasoning of the first systematic studies on policy advice, focused on the institutionalization of forms of advice (Seymour-Ure 1987) and on the description of a proper system or configuration of actors who delivered advice to the government (Halligan 1995).

Table 1. *Varieties of policy advisors in public policy.*

<i>Institutional policy advisors</i>	<i>Non-Institutional policy advisors</i>
Senior departmental advisors, central agencies, strategic policy units, temporary and permanent advisory units, ministerial officers, executive officers, parliaments, parliamentary commissions, appointed officials, judicial courts.	Academics, research institutes, private companies, interest groups, trade unions, NGOs, community organizations, international organizations, think tanks, lobbyists, pollsters, consultants.

Given the extreme variety of forms of policy advice, the studies show a strong national characterization. Most of the research is on Westminster systems of government, in countries such as the United

Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Craft and Halligan 2017). This literature has developed by focusing on the Policy Advisory Systems (PAS), and the internal advisory systems of the government in particular.

Policy advisory systems (PAS) is the expression used by Halligan (1995) to identify the interlocking set of actors and organizations with unique configurations in each sector and jurisdiction that provides recommendations for action to policy-makers.

The basic idea is that policy advisors are actors performing specific activities in a system of interactions. In this view, the system is the result of different configurations of actors, and ultimately as the result of the match between a demand and a supply of advice. The main actors in this system are: the proximate decision-makers who consume policy analysis and advice; the knowledge producers in academia, statistical agencies and research institutes; and knowledge brokers who serve as intermediaries transforming data into usable forms (Craft and Howlett 2012, 82; Craft and Howlett 2013). Halligan describes PAS considering: a) the location and formal proximity of policy advisors to the executive; b) the degree of control the government is able to act on them. He distinguishes three different types of places where the policy advice systems can be located: in the public service; internal to the government; external to government. Both technical and political forms of advice are considered: significantly, political appointments are located separately from the public administration (public service) or as internal to government departments. Instead, the degree of government control is influenced by the stability of the advice: for example, government control is low in permanent advisory policy units and statutory authorities, whereas temporary advisory policy units in the ministers' offices or in the Prime Minister offices are subjected to higher governmental control.

The political and policy dimension of PAS. The literature on PAS has been devoted mostly to the analysis of Westminster systems of government in Australia, New Zealand, the US, UK, and Canada, with a focus on single countries. Comparative research on the characteristic and of PAS is rare, with scarce theorization about the determinants and scant attention to the mechanisms of change in the system.

Most studies have concentrated on the variance of actors and relationships between policy advisors and other actors in the system.

These studies focus on selected macro-dimensions, such as the difference in the political systems and types of democracy (majoritarian or consensual); the type of administrative tradition (Anglo-Saxon

or Continental) especially in relation to the functions of the public administration or the civil service and the type of recruitment (Craft and Halligan 2017). Very few studies consider the variance in the governance arrangements in different countries and policy sectors (Hustedt 2013), while only recently scholars have started to consider the relationship between policy change and policy dynamics and the features of the policy advisory systems (Craft and Wilder 2017).

Research on non-Westminster countries is quite recent. There are studies that map the policy analytical capacity in some European countries (see the Palgrave series of books on Policy Analysis, such as Blum and Schubert 2013). Other studies describe specific components of the PAS in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and Belgium, with some remarkable comparative research (Hustedt and Veit 2017; Kelstrup 2017; Hustedt and Samonsen 2017). Van den Berg (2017) describes the Dutch case as an increasingly fragmented case of different forms and functions of policy advice, in line with Westminster countries. Veit, Hustedt, and Bach (2017) offer an interesting overview of the changes in the internal PAS in Germany, a federal country where the knowledge about policies is dispersed along sector and territorial lines (Hustedt 2013).

The authors describe the hybridization of three different advisory logics (political salience, scientific credibility, and stakeholder representativeness) as the result of the changes due to the mediatization and the scientization of knowledge, and of the prevalence of wicked problems in public policy. The complexity of contemporary public policies also pushes private think tanks to develop forms of strategic advice, based on their research capacities and organizational autonomy (Fraussen and Halpin 2017).

These studies put forward the idea that the empirical manifestations of policy advice vary greatly according to the features of the socio-cultural context and to the national politico-administrative context (Vesely 2017). In other words, scholars are engaging in the identification of relevant variables to account for the main trends of change in PAS, with particular attention to the political dimension of the advisory system as a component of the wider national country context, and to the policy dimension, which takes into consideration the policy sectors and the governance actors also in the international context (Hustedt and Veit 2017, 45).

As for the political dimension, Hustedt and Veit argument that PAS is shaped by the overall political system they are embedded in, that involves also the characteristics of the administrative traditions in

each country. In this vein, the PAS in the Anglo-Saxon countries, based on the relationship between a neutral civil service and a majoritarian system of government, would differ greatly from advisory systems in the European parliamentary democracies, such as Denmark, Germany or the Netherlands, where strong bureaucracies coexist with a complex and institutionalized landscape of advisory bodies.

As for the policy dimension, researchers should focus on the openness of PAS to non-bureaucratic knowledge, and to the coordinated interaction in the decision-making styles in the country. The idea is that PAS in the more corporative setting are more complex and institutionalized, while in more pluralist contexts are less institutionalized and external knowledge is available on the market and contracted by competition.

Still, later studies acknowledge the importance of comparative research, not only on country basis, but also on PAS role in the policy-making process and in specific policy sectors.

3. Who Are the Policy Advisors?

Differentiation, Externalization and Politicization as Main Trends

The idea of the existence of unique configurations of actors in each country and/or in each sector was intended to overcome the individual accounts of advisory activities and to emphasize their variety.

This issue becomes central in the later development of PAS in Westminster countries, with the shift usually labeled «from government to governance», which describes the process whereby actors from outside the institutions enter into policy-making. This is the case with forms of advice promoted by interest groups or lobbyists acting towards the members of the parliament or the executive (Baumgartner and Leech 1996; Marshall 2012), or of the dispersion of policy expertise along territorial lines in federations (Howlett 2009a). These changes brought to the increase in the number of actors giving advice, and to a differentiation of the forms of advice to governments: this also describes how the civil service is gradually losing its monopoly of the knowledge of policy matters.

Thus, studies on PAS were increasingly concerned with the growing tensions in the tripartite relationship between policy advisors, civil servants and political leaders. These relationships imply normative questions linked to the political responsiveness of the bureaucracy, on one side, and concerns about the public accountability of

policy advice, on the other. In fact, different systems of interactions can be present: one that is collaborative (where civil servants and policy advisors work together and jointly report to the minister); one where the policy advisor is the gatekeeper between the bureaucracy and the political leadership; and one where both the public service and the policy advice have direct and unmediated access to the policy-maker (Craft 2015, 138).

In Westminster systems, the relationship between the policy advice and the political leaders in the executive is strongly affected by personal trust (Connaughton 2010). For example, if seen as a «principal-agent» kind of relationship where informational asymmetries hold on both sides, the attitude of the principal/government and the concrete terms of the professional contract between the principal/advisee and the agent/advisor matter to the actual use of scientific knowledge.

Nonetheless, the most critical relation remains among policy advisors and the leaders of the public services. Anglophone countries are traditionally characterized by the separation of the political and bureaucratic realms, by the dominance of the latter in policy processes, and by an instrumental and pragmatic orientation (Halligan 1995). In this administrative system, then, policy advisors coming from the outside of public service (and partisan/political advisors in particular) are seen as a menace to the power of bureaucracy.

This tension is described under two different labels: *externalization*, on one side, and *politicization*, on the other side.

Craft and Howlett (2013) describe how the priority accorded to internal officials in traditional policy advisory systems has been challenged by the use of external consultants and commissions and by the increased participatory efforts. The result is the externalization of policy advice outside traditional professional public service, with the involvement of many non-governmental actors such as NGOs, think tanks, and more or less professional advice from colleagues, friends, and relatives (Eichbaum and Shaw 2007). The diversification of policy advice is seen as an attempt by elected officials to secure greater political control and responsiveness over the administration.

In a pessimistic view of this trend, the increased use of exogenous forms of advice would weaken the monopoly of advice by the public sector; moreover, public sector reforms promoting decentralization would erode the public sector capacity to provide timely policy advice (Painter and Pierre 2005). Instead, in a more optimistic view, the development of policy research communities outside government

can enrich the public understanding and the debate on policy issues (Anderson 1996).

At the same time, Peters and Pierre (2004, 2) describe the politicization of the civil service as the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards and disciplining of members of the public service. This process may favour the diffusion of policy advice of more partisan and political content: this may include the political advice of ministerial advisers (Hustedt, Kollveit and Salomonsen 2017), or appointed partisan advisers (Connaughton 2010; Eichbaum and Shaw 2007; Shaw and Eichbaum 2017; Craft 2017), and the advice given from more structured think tanks, which are linked or aligned to political parties. Clearly, the increase in political appointments is seen as a sign of politicization and it is challenged by the civil servants, who accuse political advisers of acting as a filter between the senior officers and the minister. The increasing importance of political advisers in governments and the resulting tensions can be interpreted as a change from traditional politico-administrative relations, based on the separation of roles and on the primacy of the law (as in Weber and Wilson), to contemporary governance settings, where competition between politicians and bureaucrats turns into hybrid forms of relationship, where the guiding principle is the responsiveness to the political leadership (as in the role models of Guy Peters or in the four role images of Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman).

According to Craft and Halligan (2017), the attention to politicization and externalization distracts scholarly attention from the idiosyncratic path of change toward a de-institutionalisation of the policy advice systems in Westminster countries, expressed by the growing plurality of new advisory units and the professionalization of policy competence outside institutions. A clear dynamic in these countries is the decline of the public service as the primary source of advice and, more importantly, the erosion of public service policy capacity: a trend of declining substantive experience on the policy issues in favour of more generalist (and politically-oriented) forms of policy work has been noticed (Howlett *et al.* 2014; Howlett and Migone 2013; Tiernan 2011). In their review of thirty years of studies on this subject, Halligan and Craft propose to go beyond externalization and politicization (Hustedt and Veit 2017). In their view, the de-institutionalisation of traditional Westminster PAS and the institutionalization of hybrid forms, such as ministerial partisan advice, is also affected by temporality and composition: it differs in sequence, intensity, and tempo in the different countries (Eichbaum and Shaw

2010; Maley 2011; Craft 2016). Another change has been the institutionalization of independent fiscal oversight agencies, which have added capacity and improved accountability, and which serve the Parliament (Craft and Halligan 2017).

4. What Do the Policy Advisors Do?

Content, Activities and Professionalization

The renewed attention of scholars to the role of policy advice in public policy stems from the analysis of the governance shift and the blurring of institutional boundaries in the formulation and design of public policies. PAS vary not just according to the location of their components across the institution, or to their proximity to government, but also according to the content of the policy advice.

In a view of idealized models of policy advice, Craft and Howlett (2012, 85-88) describe the shift to governance as a change from a «speaking truth to power» model of advice, where policy advice was concentrated inside governments, to a more fluid, pluralised and polycentric advice described as «sharing truths with multiple actors of influence» (Prince 2007), where the content and the forms of policy advice are diversified and actors engage in sense-making (Hoppe 1999). Apart from the increased permeability of the policy-making to a variety of public and non-public actors, the two idealized models differ in the nature of the policy advice, in the public profile of officials, and in their role in the policy process. In fact, from a neutral form of advice based on technical competence given by confident advisors inside government or neutral experts outside often hidden from view, the contemporary system of policy advice moves toward a more guarded type of advice oriented to a responsive competence, delivered by active participants in the policy debate in the public sphere, where managing of the policy networks and the building of capacities become crucial (Craft and Howlett 2012, 86).

In the latter model, the dispersed advisory capacity combines both technical, evidence-based knowledge and political viewpoints. In the «sharing truth» model of advice, as a matter of fact, internal advisors may provide at the same time a political-ideological type of advice and/or a technical and evidence oriented type of advice. They also play different roles, as «policy coordination and bodyguarding» to prevent the executives from mistakes, to orient and mobilize supporters, or build coalitions of supporters (Gouglas, Brans and Jas-

pers 2017), through the integration of different sources of advice coming from the inside departments and the outside of government (Maley 2000; Gains and Stoker 2011).

In such a fluid context, Craft and Howlett thus propose that the content of policy advice is more useful than the location of advisers in order to characterize the features of advice (Craft and Howlett 2012, 87-88). They classify policy advice according to different content dimensions: the procedural vs the substantive type of advice, on the one hand; the short term/reactive vs the long term/anticipatory orientation of policy advice, on the other. Both distinctions are very useful to capture the different facets of knowledge in public policy. For example, the substantive dimension highlights the technical content of the policy advice, focused on the functioning of policy instruments and mixes, while the procedural dimension attains to the features of the policy-making process, including the rules of the legislative process and the bargaining among actors, with a particular attention to the political and power-related aspects of the problem solving. The short-term vs long-term dimension, on the other hand, is intended to show the difference in the types of competencies, expertise and eventual products of the policy advice, according to the more or less strategic orientation. These distinctions allow us to see the differentiated activities of advising played by prominent figures on the policy scene, such as policy analysts in the public service, regulatory agencies, and even judicial bodies, but also pollsters, interest groups, political strategists and professional consultants, think tanks and academics, community and international organizations.

In this way, Craft and Howlett define four different types of policy advice: a *pure political and policy process advice*, performed in the short run about mainly procedural contents by political parties, the legislative committees and the regulatory agencies, but also interest groups and policy analysts; a *medium to long term steering advice*, focused on the procedural aspects suggested by ministers and central or statutory agencies, and also by international organizations such as the OECD; a *short-term crisis and firefighting advice*, whereby the members of the executive, the executive offices and the political staff, and also external consultants, strategists, and lobbyists give substantive advice in rapid reaction; and finally an *evidence-based policy-making* focused on the content of the policy inspired by scientific knowledge, eventually involving long-term strategic orientation, developed by statistical agencies, strategic policy units and permanent commissions, and increasingly offered on

regular basis also by think tanks and academic advisors, and sometimes by citizens involvement and big data treatment (see Table 2).

Table 2. Policy advisory systems according to policy content.

Short-term and reactive advice		Long-term and anticipatory advice
Procedural content	«Pure» political and policy process advice	Medium to long term policy steering advice
Substantive content	Short term crisis and firefighting advice	Evidence-based policy making

Source: Craft and Howlett 2012, 91.

These studies suggest looking at the content of advice and at its shifts through time, in order to grasp the type of influence that policy advice exerts on the politico-administrative system, on one side, and to the policy-making in different sectors, on the other side. The studies reviewed so far do not offer a comparison of the forms of policy advice according to their content but emphasize some common trends. For example, the diffusion and fragmentation of evidence-based policy-making is a remarkable phenomenon both in the Westminster countries (Craft and Halligan 2017) and in some European cases, such as in the Netherlands and in Germany (Veit, Hustedt and Bach 2017; Fraussen and Halpin 2017; Kelstrup 2017).

The professionalization of policy advice. Indeed, the attention to the content enlightens the increasing professionalization of policy advice. The professionalization of policy advice as a policy work concentrates on an array of competencies and skills for policy advisors, who are increasingly challenged by the complexity of technical solutions. The professionalization of policy advice deals with the different uses of knowledge in public policy and the different forms that this relationship can take.

For example, Weiss (1979) emphasizes the diversity of purposes in knowledge utilization in public policy, by describing different models or images: the knowledge-driven (basic research is used for

practical action); the problem-solving (existing or commissioned research produces evidence used to clarify uncertainties); the interactive (policy making involves many actors providing information, including social scientists in the effort to make sense of a problem collectively); the political (using research as ammunition for a decision taken on other grounds); the tactical (when research is used for purposes that have little relation to its substance e.g. in bureaucratic politics); and the enlightenment (research makes decision-makers sensitive to new issues). In this latter image, knowledge as enlightenment affects policy less through problem-solving and social engineering based on value consensus, and more through research as social criticism, thus inspiring change in the long run (Weiss 1977, 544).

Later on, research on this subject has been developed by the scholarly in policy design. Linder and Peters (1990) promoted a quest for «conscious design», which considers the need to understand the performance in relation to the appropriateness of the means and to the diagnosis of potential pitfalls, by the correct matching of tools, problems, and goals. Policy design is seen as a specific activity that overlaps different moments of the policy process, for the development of efficient and effective policies through the study of policy instruments and implementation, policy ideas, and formulation (Howlett and Lejano 2013).

Similarly, the trend towards evidence-based policy-making represents the effort to reform or restructure the policy process, in order to prioritize evidentiary or data-based decision-making and avoid policy failures (Davies *et al.* 2007). This view of evidence-based policy making focuses on policy capacities, meaning all the issues associated with the government arrangements in order to review, formulate and implement policies within its jurisdiction (Fellegi 1996 cited by Howlett 2009b). The research on capacities has recently been gaining momentum, especially in developing countries (Painter and Pierre 2005; Wu *et al.* 2015). It focuses on the analytical capacity of governmental and non-governmental actors to collect appropriate data and utilize it effectively in the course of policy-making.

In particular, policy analytical capacity involves many aspects that go beyond research skills, such as the ability to communicate policy related messages to stakeholders or to integrate information into the decision-making stage (Howlett 2009b, 162-163). At the same time, policy advisors perceive themselves in multiple roles (as advisors, analysts, communication officers, coordinators, directors, evaluators, researchers) and involved in very different policy tasks (department

or agency planning, issue tracking, legal analysis, briefing, networking, providing options and specific advice, undertaking research) (Howlett 2009a, 9-10).

Research on policy analytical capacity in countries such as Canada has also shown that the type of analytical capacities and professional skills vary in the different policy sectors, thus showing an uneven distribution of policy analysis capacities. Evidence-informed methods are mostly used in health, welfare and education sectors, but at the same time, some departments and agencies – such as Finance – enjoy favorable circumstances, which allow them to practice sophisticated analytical techniques (such as cost benefit and cost effectiveness analysis, scenario analysis, financial impact analysis) (Howlett *et al.* 2014, 286). Moreover, most policy workers inside and outside government engage also in process related tasks and activities (*ibidem*).

All these issues are particularly relevant to the credibility and solidity of policy advice, and to the legitimacy of advisors overall, but again are scarcely theorized. A similar approach on the competencies, skill, and activities of policy advice and to the actual use of knowledge in practice is as fruitful as it is difficult to apply, due to the lack of repeated surveys on policy analytical capacities and of a mapping of policy advisors in the different countries.

5. How Does Policy Advice Intervene in the Policy Process?

Advice in the Policy Cycle, Dynamics and Subsystems

In this section, we will take on the perspective of public policy as a process, composed of different phases and dynamics. Policy advice in the policy process has been often studied by looking at the different roles of policy advisors in the phases of the policy cycle.

Policy advice beyond the formulation phase. The use of scientific knowledge made by policy advisors emerges clearly during the policy formulation phase when policy solutions are derived from the definition of the policy problem prevailing in the agenda. In particular, many scholars who study partisan/political advisors in the Westminster countries have noticed that their role extends beyond policy formulation and beyond the sheer use of scientific knowledge for evidence-based policy-making. For example, Maley (2000) emphasizes the different policy roles of partisan advisors in Australia: by crafting

and managing of the agenda, they act on idea generation; by linking ideas to government interests and policy opportunities, they move the process forward; by mobilizing ministers and officials, they build political support in the cabinet; by bargaining with central agencies they smooth the procedural aspects of policy making; finally, they combine different aspects of policy roles. For Eichbaum and Shaw (2007, 101-103), the most desired skills for ministerial advisors in coalition and minority governments are the ability to network with agencies and other departments, the understanding of the processes of executive government, but also the expertise in communication and media. Nonetheless, the most important skills are in political negotiations and in policy evaluation and research.

Similarly, Connaughton (2010, 351-352) defines different policy roles for partisan advisers in the Irish government according to their main activity in the policy formulation and implementation (pure advice or steering) and to the prevalent content of their communication (technical/managerial or political). The pure expert is the advisor who brings substantive expertise in a specific sector; the partisan is appointed on a political basis and represents the ministers in political negotiations; the coordinator is involved in monitoring programs and liaising with government officials and stakeholder groups; while the minder is the political advisor who is in a close professional relationship with the minister, and guards him/her against political and reputation harms.

Thus, policy advisors seem to do more than simply sharing knowledge. In particular, the literature highlights the functions of political and partisan advisors, focusing again on Westminster systems. Craft (2015) highlights the existence of the important «non-advisory» roles of partisan advisors. He typifies four different activities of partisan advisers in the policy process (buffering, bridging, shaping and moving): these activities cover different phases of the policy process and involve the policy advice about the procedural aspect of policy-making, together with the actual content of policy initiatives (Craft 2015, 145).

Though these classifications about partisan advisors may add some conceptual confusion, yet they suggest that different types of policy advisors are diffused in a number of phases of the policy-making and that the role of policy advice goes well beyond the formulation phase, touching the agenda setting, the implementation, and the evaluation phases. In fact, policy sciences and policy advice have a crucial role, for example, in the evaluation phase. Here the policy advisor should provide a neutral evaluation of the effective-

ness of implemented policies, offering policy advice according to three ethical and professional criteria: independence (from the object of the study itself and from the commissioner of the study); methodological transparency; replicability of the evaluation methods (Lippi and Morisi 2005, 236-243).

Knowledge and advice in policy dynamics. The studies on the dynamics of policy stability and change in policy subsystems and in different policy sectors have shown that the uses of knowledge vary also according to the work of governing (Colebatch 2015). In the analysis of policy change, Weible (2008, 619) has synthesized different uses of expert-based information in public policy. Learning, for example, focuses on the cognitive side of participation in public policy. This is in line with Weiss (1977) about the slow and indirect effects of the accumulation of science on decision makers' beliefs on the causes of the problems and the preferred solutions. Instead, the political use of knowledge is when policy-makers use expert-based information to legitimize previously made decisions, even through the distortion or the selective use of information. Another political use of policy advice would be to support or legitimate existing policy preferences (Sabatier 1987). Finally, the instrumental use of knowledge occurs when the policy making is directly affected by expert-based information, in a rational approach to problem-solving where decision follows the research findings.

The learning, political and instrumental uses of evidence all clearly emerge in the different frameworks that try to explain policy change. For example, frameworks such as the Multiple Stream Approach (MSA), the punctuated equilibrium approach, the social construction theory and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) may be considered in more detail, given the crucial role of information and expertise therein (Weible 2008).

First, knowledge can be used by a skilled policy entrepreneur to couple the three streams of problem, policy, and politics in the MSA (Craft 2015, 141). According to this approach to policy change initially developed by Kingdon (1995), the process that brings novelty into the agenda-setting and may lead to policy change starts with the opening of a policy window, an opportunity for the policy entrepreneur to couple at the same time a specific problem with an available solution that is supported by political forces in position of power (Zahariadis 2007). In sum, policy participants use science both to identify problems and to evaluate ideas and solutions: in particular, the policy entrepreneur is interested in its solution to prevail and

may often use ideas or evidence to shape agendas and policies for political gains (Weible 2008, 617). Therefore, it can happen that an actor who advises the government over some specific issues also plays the role of policy entrepreneur, using its knowledge resources to affect the coupling process, or suggesting potential for ideational compatibility within the policy stream itself (Craft and Wilder 2017).

Second, when policy change is conceived as punctuated (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), knowledge utilization and policy advice can be used in different ways either to maintain the status quo or to promote radical change. The disproportionate use of knowledge is thus aimed at either creating or destroying a policy image and can affect the expansion of conflicts and the mobilization of actors (Weible 2008, 618).

Third, the social construction theory describes the perception of the content and quality of knowledge as socially constructed phenomena, so that the use of expert-based information is used to reinforce or challenge social constructions of target populations and is contingent on the composition of the political context, and features such as the scientific community with the prevailing social construction (Schneider and Ingram 1997, 150–188).

Fourth, both Weible (2008) and Craft and Wilder (2017) discuss the uses of knowledge and the role of policy advisors in the Advocacy Coalitions Framework, where different coalitions in policy subsystems are configured as groups of people sharing the same beliefs and core values (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). In the ACF, policy change may happen when the beliefs of the components of the coalitions change so that ideas acquire a central place in the framework.

Policy advice may enter into the picture as it is involved in the on-going process of sense-making and consensus formation through which interpretations of problems and potential solutions are discursively constructed (Craft and Wilder 2017). Knowledge utilization can affect the belief systems from both the inside and the outside of a policy subsystem, as policy advice can be seen as a dialectical or even argumentative exchange (Majone 1989). According to Weible (2008, 619), experts affect policies by slowly changing the beliefs of policy actors through policy-oriented learning (Sabatier 1987) and use knowledge to mobilize allies or to argue with opponents, both inside and outside the advocacy coalition. From another perspective, the partisan advisers should be conceived also as brokers or as «middlemen» between the social science, bureaucracy and political decision-making (Gains and Stoker 2011, 495), thus helping to transmit policy ideas.

PAS, policy subsystems and policy ideational compatibility. These accounts of the policy change show that the use of knowledge may vary greatly depending on the policy-making context where public policies are put in place (Weible 2008, 619). Moreover, they suggest that the policy subsystem, rather than the country or the wider political system, should be the unit of observation in order to understand the dynamics of change also in the PAS.

Craft and Wilder (2017, 221 e ss.) propose to concentrate on policy advisory system as a dynamic, looking not at the location and at the government control – as in traditional studies on PAS and the public service – but rather at the matching between the PAS and the policy subsystem in a given sector. This shift in the unit of analysis allows us to better contextualize the advisory system operation and dynamics and to understand why advisory system components combine in particular policy instances and with what effect. In other words, what matters most to understand the changes in policy advice and their impact on the policy process are the interactions between the actors and the cohesiveness of the subsystem, not the proximity of advisory supply to decision makers.

The authors propose to do so by developing a typology of advisory networks in order to catch the advisory configuration and the domain-specific dynamics (Craft and Wilder 2017, 225), looking at two important dimensions of variation in the policy making: the accessibility, on the one hand, and the policy ideational compatibility, on the other.

The accessibility refers to the possibility for policy advisors of different origins to actually access the policy subsystem and the relevant coalitions inside it. The policy ideational compatibility considers the coherence of the content of the policy advice with the ideas, the values and the mission of actors inside a subsystem. Crossing the two dimensions, Craft and Wilder define a typology of advisory networks that can be used for the empirical research: *collaborative policy advisory network* (with high accessibility and high compatibility); *contexted policy advisory network* (with high accessibility and low compatibility); *hegemonic policy advisory network* (with low accessibility and high compatibility); *closed/insulated policy advisory network* (with low accessibility and low compatibility).

Here the policy ideational compatibility becomes crucial, and the relevant question becomes what it is about the policy advice that is compatible with the policy subsystem. The authors postulate different possibilities or different drivers of advisory system–policy subsystems compatibility: compatibility in the content of policy, looking at

the ideas; compatibility in the purpose, looking at the actors in the subsystem; compatibility in the issue, looking at the salience, complexity, and temporality of the advice; and compatibility in the relations, looking at the trust, the capacity, the influence and the conflict among actors (Craft and Wilder 2017, 229).

6. Main Gaps in This Literature and Some Ideas for Future Research

Mapping the Configurations, the Quality and the Effectiveness of Policy Advice

The literature on policy advice is spreading in its empirical scope in political science. Still, comparative research and theoretical developments represent a weakness in the existing studies (Hustedt and Veit 2017). In our view, these weaknesses can be addressed by looking at three main topics: the features of the PAS, the quality of the content of policy advice, and its influence and the effectiveness in the policy dynamics.

First, most of the empirical research on PAS is in Westminster countries and concentrates on the dynamics at the level of the executives. There is a quest to extend this research to non-Anglo-Saxon countries, to cover political and administrative systems also beyond national governments (including, for example, sub-national governments and more encompassing governance settings), and possibly design comparative research in order to find relevant trends across countries. Some new research has been done on the cases of the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. Still, a lot of work needs to be done in the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, who share distinctive administrative traditions (Peters 2008). In this sense, a possible solution would be to map the actors in the PAS at the country level, but focusing on a limited number of policy sectors.

In order to describe the prevalent type of actor in the PAS, the mapping of policy advisors could consider two main dimensions: the nature of the advisor (public vs private); and the type of policy content delivered (political/procedural vs technical/substantive). A classification of different PAS according to these dimensions shows not only where the knowledge about policy is located, but also the type of content that is mainly associated with policy advice. As shown in figure 1, this classification allows us to describe the PAS in the different countries according to the prevalent type of policy advice.

FIG. 1 Policy advisory systems according to advice location and content.

Political/procedural advice

Public sector		Private sector	
Executive advice (executive officers, government policy units, senior civil servants, other ministers, cabinets)	Partisan advice (political parties, interest groups, lobbyists, private corporations, pollsters)	Administrative advice (independent agencies, judiciary, regulators, ministerial policy analyst, parliamentary commission)	Expert advice (research institutes, think tanks, international organizations, NGOs, community)

Technical/substantive advice

Moreover, more comparative research is needed to develop and possibly test hypotheses on what variables affect the configuration of PAS in each country. Comparison of PAS configurations in different countries should consider: different types of democracy (majoritarian vs consensual); different administrative systems (Anglo-Saxon, Napoleonic, Continental); different constitutional settings (unitary vs federal-regional); and prevalent decision-making style (pluralist vs corporatist).

Second, future research should describe the quality of policy advice in the different policy sectors. The existing research is quite vague about the characteristics of the products of policy advice, and tends not to consider how these products are perceived by policy-makers and by the overall public opinion. The issue of the quality of policy advice is particularly relevant in present times, where both politics and science are increasingly contested in the media. A possible solution, again, would be mapping the products of policy advice in a specific sector and then surveying the perception of different

groups of stakeholders about the scientific credibility and political acceptability of that policy advice. This type of research should also take into consideration the reputation of the policy advisors and the stability or the institutionalization of the delivery of the advice.

Third and finally, the existing literature acknowledges the importance of configurations in the policy sectors and focuses its attention on the characteristics of the policy subsystems, looking for a matching with the features of policy advisory systems. Still, it is not clear what activities of policy advice affect the dynamics of policy change or stability, and, most of all, how policy advice can be effective in solving policy problems. Part of this weakness is due to the fact that the literature focuses on structures (policy subsystem configurations, networks etc.) which are quite difficult to describe.

Again, a possible solution here could be to undertake a case study approach, using process tracing or other qualitative techniques to reconstruct the functions of policy advice in the policy process. This first exploration should allow designing with parsimony a comparative research on the role policy advice in the policy dynamics, again focusing on a specific policy sector in different countries.

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Il fallimento della riforma delle province in Sicilia fra vincoli, opportunità e crisi dell'autonomia

Giancarlo Minaldi

The Provinces' Reform Failure in Sicily between Constraints, Opportunities and the Autonomy Crisis

In the overall reform of the Italian provinces Sicily was the only autonomous Region that tried to pursue an independent reform process inspired by the never implemented regional provision of 'free consortia of municipalities'. Nevertheless, the outcome of this process was a clear and emblematic policy failure, as the regional government decided to sign a commitment for the full implementation of the National Reform. The article analyses the sequence and the outcome of the regional institutional policy through the lens of the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) and taking into account the effects of path-dependence. The results highlight how the paradoxical outcome of the policy process cannot be totally attributed to the «objective context factors» that would make impossible an autonomous path to the provinces' reform.

Keywords: Institutional Policy; Multiple Streams Framework (MSF); Historical Institutionalism (HI); Sicilian Autonomy.

1. Introduzione

Nell'ambito del processo di riforma istituzionale che ha riguardato gli enti intermedi italiani, la Regione Siciliana ha seguito un percorso singolare, ben più travagliato e complesso, sia rispetto alle altre regioni a statuto speciale, sia rispetto al processo di riforma nazionale che ha portato all'approvazione della legge 56 del 2014. Avviata precocemente (già nel 2012), la riforma siciliana è passata attraverso numerose leggi regionali, decine di proposte, dibattiti, tavoli tecnici e audizioni parlamentari.

Nell'autunno 2015, quello che era apparso come l'approdo finale, con l'approvazione della legge regionale 15/2015, è stato rimesso in discussione con la decisione dell'esecutivo nazionale di impugnare dinanzi alla Corte costituzionale numerose disposizioni della legge.