Day 24: Policy Science and the Profession

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Today's Objectives

1. Understand how to move forward with education towards a public policy career
2. Understand the role of theory and the scientific approach in studying policy

Working in Public Policy

- Now: Internships and other involvement
- Next: Graduate school options

Get Involved

- Internships
- APPAM Student Programs
  - Public Policy Camp
  - Regional Student Conference
  - Student Membership

- Campaigns, Parties

- Student Government

- https://www.publicservicecareers.org

Higher Education

Masters in Public Administration
- Focused on Governance
- Program at Penn State Harrisburg

Masters in Public Policy
- Focused on econometric analysis
- Program at University Park

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http://www.appam.org/careers-education/
professional-masters-degrees-for-public-service/
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How do we know what is true?

How can we evaluate different truth claims?

Great Quote

"Politicians use science the way drunks use lamp-posts - for support, not for illumination" (Birkland, 370)

Policy Science

- Goal: Use scientific method to solve public problems
- Early approach: single policy
- Over time: gain knowledge of the social world
- New approach: develop generalizable theory

Why? Why not just study specific policies?

What is theory?

> *"scientific researchers create theories to try to understand why it is that a particular collection of observations yield broadly similar results"* (Birkland, 363)

> *"a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena"* (Merriam-Webster)

Deductive Scientific Process

1. Identify a problem/question
2. Develop a theory (model)
3. Create testable hypotheses
4. Gather data
5. Test hypotheses
6. Draw conclusions
7. Repeat

A "Good" Model (Dye 1992)

- Order and simplify reality
- Identify what is significant about a system
- Congruent with reality
- Communicate meaningful information about the policy process
- Direct inquiry and research
- Suggest explanations of public policy

Empirical Evidence vs. Anecdotes

Question 1

Consider the difference between empirical scientific evidence and anecdotal evidence. What is the argument for using empirical scientific evidence over anecdotal evidence in the study of public policy?

Question 2

Think of some anecdotes you use to explain why you hold particular political beliefs. Are these anecdotes backed by social science? If not, why are anecdotes still important?
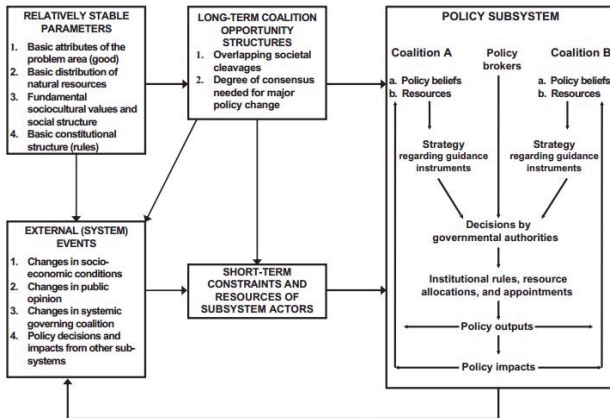
Trans-Scientific Problems

What do we do about addressing "trans-scientific problems" like pornography, abortion, teenage pregnancy, LGBTQ rights, the death penalty, and more?

Policy Theory

- There is no unified theory of the policy process
- A few major models:
  - Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework
  - Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework
  - Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium
  - Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development
- Each illuminates something important about the process
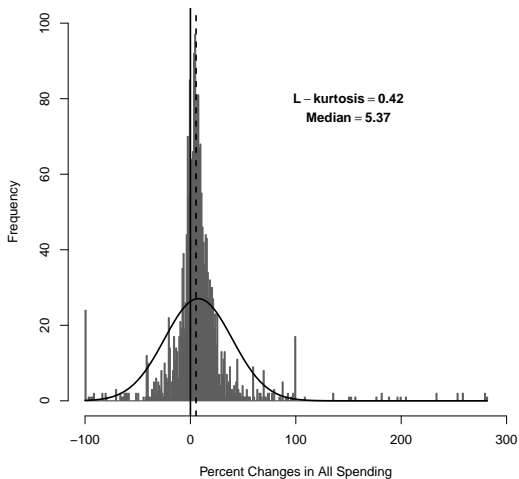
Advocacy Coalition Framework

2007 Advocacy Coalition Framework Flow Diagram

Figure: Source: Cairney 2013

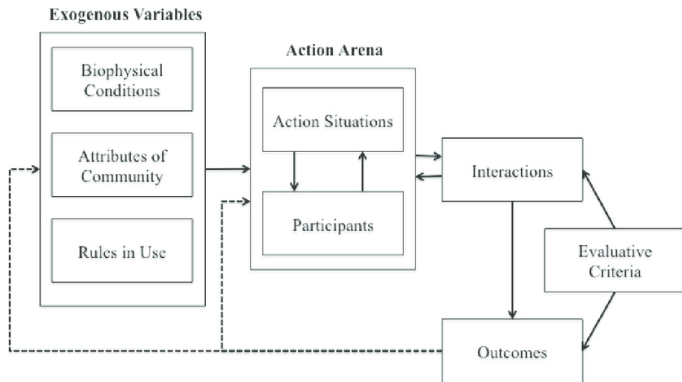Alliances form over short-term goals, not shared fundamental beliefs

Punctuated Equilibrium

Stability, punctuation, policy subsystems

Institutional Analysis and Development

Figure: Source: Schoon and Van der Leeuw 2015

Helpful for understanding management of common pool resources (without central gov't regulation)