

SAAPS Conference (South African Association of Political Science)

"A policy analysis of the South African 1998 Water Reform Act: A French school's perspective",
panel on "Unpacking the dynamics of policy processes",
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Public policy analysis in France :
sociologizing the approach of
public policy analysis

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Presentation Outline



- 1) Historical detour
- 2) « Political sociology of public action »
- 3) Limitations
- 4) the way forward

1. PPA draws on:

1. « Public sciences » in the US (Laswell)

State expansion but relative failure of interventionist policies of the Welfare State

Decisionist approach: optimisation of decisions (positivist epistemology, assumption of rationality)

2. Sociology of organisations

critiques of managerial 's conception of decision-making

1. PPA draws on:

- Central contribution of Sociology of organisations

Challenges the idea of an absolute rationality in the decision or rationality *a priori*

Challenges the idea of a hierarchical functioning of administrations

Complex, interactive process without a start and an end, improvisations,

Critiques « policy cycles » (Jones), no linear process

No « problem-solving » orientation in every case

- Insists on the implementation phase

2. *Political sociology of public action*



- **No more questions on the State with a capital « S »** (its nature, its legitimacy etc)

Enigma: public policy analysis works could prove that « weak » state like the US could perform better than « strong » state like France

- **No more a « Why » question but rather a « How » question:**

**Distance ourselves from rhetoric or policy substance;
focus on what public actors do in practice**

2. What it consists of:

PPA introduces 3 shifts:

- With the political will
- With the idea of a State unicity
- With decision's fetichism

Analysis of the state *from below*, in action, in concrete, in its practices

« *on ne peut déduire le contenu et les formes des politiques gouvernementales des caractéristiques de la politique électorale* » (Muller)

= considering the state through its outputs , not its inputs

- « Public action » rather than « Public Policy »:

Bring together 2 schools: socio. of collective action and socio. of public policy

Co-prod° in interaction with non-state and non-public actors

Contextualized analysis of interactions between different actors' groups

« *les interprètes et l'auditoire sont mis au centre de l'analyse, ce n'est plus la partition et le compositeur* » (Lascoumes)

2. *Fruitful approach*

- Agenda's conflicts, **problem definition evolution**
- Technical instruments of public action (administrative categories also) **not determined by the objective but by ideological frames** (past experience; cultural beliefs; path dependency)

Unpredictability: instruments's emancipation, live a life on their own

2. Methodology

- Sociological approach:

Qualitative methods with comparative small-N case studies

Semi-conducted interviews

Grey literature analysis

Press review

Participatory observation

Cutting back information

3. Limitations



Too much success for PPA: estrangement from
« politics » dynamics that yet still matter

How to reconcile « policy » and « politics »
analysis?

4. *The way forward:*

New challenges in the Western PPA:

Transformation Process of Public policy in the
North:

Multiple spatial levels and scales

Origins of decision-making influences are
proliferating

New modes of public action

= New polycentricity of the State

4. *The way forward:*

Bottom-up Politics (« *politique par le bas* », JF Bayart)

Can learn from the African experience, not so exotic (difference in degree not in nature)

- Different body of literature of political scientists working on African countries **but New openness to PPA methods**, anthropological works

(especially fecond in Africa because of the gap between organigramme and real functioning of the state)

Need for taking into account for real, Administrations in Africa (Darbon)

5. Conclusion

- Bringing down the boundaries between specialists of African countries and other political science practitioners
- Bringing down the separation between terrains (North/South) can help bringing back together politics and policy analysis
- Reflection on the possible transfer of concepts used in Western countries to Southern Africa context
(State; policy networks, epistemic communities, policy instruments, civil society etc)