SPRINGER BRIEFS IN APPLIED SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY · POLIMI SPRINGER BRIEFS

Bruno Dente

Understanding Policy Decisions

POLITECNICO DI MILANO

Springer

SpringerBriefs in Applied Sciences and Technology

PoliMI SpringerBriefs

For further volumes:
http://www.springer.com/series/11159
http://www.polimi.it

Bruno Dente

Understanding Policy Decisions

POLITECNICO
DI MILANO

Springer

Bruno Dente
Politecnico di Milano
Milan
Italy

Additional material to this book can be downloaded from http://extras.springer.com

ISSN 2282-2577 ISSN 2282-2585 (electronic)
ISBN 978-3-319-02519-3 ISBN 978-3-319-02520-9 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9
Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013952018

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Preface

The aim of this textbook is to introduce students and young researchers to the analysis of the decision-making process. More precisely it provides a conceptual framework that can be used both for understanding how public policy decisions are taken and for designing strategies able to overcome the obstacles that make policy change difficult.

As it will be explained in the following pages, it is only to be expected that in contemporary political systems policy innovation (i.e., the transformation of the ways in which collective problems are dealt with) is difficult. This is a common feature of modern democracies and no amount of tinkering with the institutional settings within which policy making takes place is bound to make it disappear.

Furthermore, the new and novel challenges that governments, at all levels, have to face if, on the one hand, make policy innovation all the more necessary, on the other hand add further obstacles to an already difficult enterprise.

This book is built on the premise that there is no simple solution to this problem. For instance, there is not a shred of evidence that a specific organizational or procedural arrangement is systematically better at making policy innovation possible. This is a field in which there are no universal truths to transmit to the students.

However, there is a vast body of literature that in the last few decades has investigated how policy is made and which factors play a role in explaining decisional success and decisional failure. The social and managerial sciences can therefore provide some guidance in the form of identifying said factors.

This book tries to go a step further. It contains a conceptual framework, i.e., the specification of the different variables explaining decisional outcomes. The advice to the policy innovator—the policy entrepreneur as it is known in the literature—is to pay attention to all these elements and to their combination in specific contexts. Only the careful analysis of the individual decision-making process can substantiate the judgment about the feasibility of the transformation at the same time giving useful inputs for building the most appropriate decisional strategies.

In other words, the possibility to introduce policy reforms with minimal strife depends strictly on the ability to correctly "read" the decisional situation. The "art and craft" of public policy analysis, as suggested by Aaron Wildavsky, one of the fathers of the discipline, is able to improve governance if it combines intellectual rigueur with an hands-on experience in treating collective problems. From this

point of view, a vast knowledge of substantive policy fields is useful if and only if it is coupled with a realistic theory of how public policies take shape. I hope that this book is able at least partly to contribute to increase the understanding of the ways in which the political systems process policy proposals, sometimes rejecting them and sometimes adopting more or less transformed versions of them.

It is my firm belief that decisional analysis, if correctly taught and learned, makes it possible to formulate reliable predictions about the feasibility of policy change and, more in general, improves policy making.

This implies a familiarity with the analytical tools as well as an ability to identify the correct methodologies. This is the reason why this book can be usefully supplemented by the additional texts that can be found on Springer Extra-Materials (http://extras.springer.com/). The first (Studying decisions) contains several examples of how it is possible to use decisional analysis in order to better understand policy making and political systems. This text includes also some guidelines for preparing decisional case studies and can be useful for the preparation of master or doctoral theses. The second text (Teaching decisional analysis) includes some suggestions on how to use the present textbook in graduate or postgraduate education and includes an example of a possible exercise in decisional analysis.

Contents

Chapter 1
Understanding Policy Decisions

Abstract The point of departure of the analysis is the recognition that major policy change is extremely difficult. However from time to time this actually happens and therefore it seems necessary to understand when and how this is possible. After a short excursus on the special characteristics of contemporary public policies, four different theoretical models of how decisions are taken are presented and discussed. The conclusion is the definition of a conceptual framework specifying which are the variables that influence policy outcomes and in particular the possibility to adopt non-marginal policy change.

Keywords Decision · Public policy · Incrementalism

1.1 The Decisional Problem

We live in difficult times. "Making the necessary reforms", as any government in the world knows all too well, is easier said than done. Taking decisions able to significantly alter the way collective problems are tackled, is particularly difficult in all democratic regimes.

The arguments used to explain this difficulty in governing and innovating usually mention the lack of agreement among the societal actors about the goals, the increasing level of institutional fragmentation, the difficult relationship between politics and administration, the fact that the coordination between the different public bodies does not work well or that the implementing procedures can put at risk what was established in the decisional phase, both as regards timing and costs. This list could of course continue.

What current explanations often have in common is the fact they resort to arguments at the level of the system. If it is so difficult to make decisions—especially important ones—there must be something wrong at a general level, making it necessary to change some institutional or political features that hinder what is needed. This is the so-called *macro-negative* approach that searches for and finds

B. Dente, *Understanding Policy Decisions*, PoliMI SpringerBriefs,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9_1,

the general causes of the malfunctions of the political-administrative system (Dunn 1981, pp. 53–54). As Robert Putnam taught us when explaining the efficiency differentials of institutions between Northern and Southern Italy (Putnam 1993), such features can be generated by a very long history.

This general, systemic nature of the reasons for failure has various effects. In the first place, because it refers to features that everyone knows, it seems plausible and persuasive: we all tend to prefer short explanations of phenomena rather than find the specific cause for every single one. Secondly, it generates a feeling of dismay: if changing what should be changed is so difficult, maybe it's worth giving up. Political apathy is also due to this feeling of impotence. Finally, if the reasons that make it so hard are at a systemic level, it follows that the innovators, or presumed as such, are free from any responsibility for failure: we do in fact tend to forgive the leaders we like for not keeping their electoral promises, blaming the general features of the system for the negative outcomes.

However, there are two objections that cannot be easily overlooked.

The first is that many of the features under suspicion are actually constituent, even fundamental, characteristics of modern democracies, of the political systems that try to lead highly differentiated societies.

Just to give an example, institutional fragmentation is the other face of decentralization and federalism. It would be totally pointless to expect that the rise in resources and legal powers of the sub-national governments has no consequences at the level of the decisional system. But this does not mean that federal states cannot make reforms, as some superficial observers are tempted to say, or even that to do so is more difficult than in unitary centralised states: who would claim that decisional efficiency is lower in Switzerland—one of the most decentralised countries of the planet—than in Italy? And in any case the trend towards greater decentralisation is widespread in all western democracies, and not only there (Marks and Hooghe 2003).

So, the decentralization of responsibilities, the separation of powers, citizens' guarantees, the opportunity to use direct democracy and the resort to the judicial system against a decision of the public authorities, represent some of the basic elements of modern democracies. Of course these features do have a price, at least at the decisional level, but they also definitely have benefits that are even more important, like the impetuous socio-economic development of western democracies in the past century proves. This is especially true if compared to the much more modest performance of authoritarian and centralized regimes, even when they resorted to planning and coordination tools that on paper should have been a lot more efficient.

As Charles Lindblom teaches us, societies and political systems based on preferences and interactions tend to work better than societies based on the reason: they recognizes the dangers of human failure, do not expect to know what people's real needs are simply going by some theory, but are based on the need to supply suitable answers to citizens' preferences even when they are contradictory or irrational (Lindblom 1977, Chap. 19, pp. 247–260).

Or, to quote Luigi Bobbio, "democracy doesn't live in Gordium" in the sense that if deciding also means "to cut", to discard some of the alternatives, "this doesn't mean that the most effective tool for this operation is a sword, or its modern equivalents, whether they be the will of the majority or the rationality of a leader-manager". Actually, says the author, to follow the example of Alexander the Great who cuts the knot rather than undo it, is not necessarily a good thing: those who behave like this "are not in a better position to conquer Asia, like the young prince of Macedonia, but simply risk to go nowhere" (Bobbio 1996, p. 8).

The second problem we have to face is that, in spite of their plausibility, "macro-negative" explanations don't always work. Important reforms do take place also in systems with similar features to the ones considered the cause of immobilism. Sometimes important decisions are made in a short amount of time and with acceptable costs. The macro explanations of decisional blockages resemble the well-known myth according to which a bumblebee should never rise from the floor. To recall Dunn, we need a *micro-positive* approach to discover the specific circumstances under which important decisions are taken, also in order to check their transferability to other contexts.

The fact is that if the systemic features considered the cause of decisional inefficiency are often the other side of democracy, and if they still do not fully explain what actually happens (since important decisions are made and implemented), it follows that even the therapies identified to cure decisional block syndromes, delays and costs of non-decisions are not suitable at all. These therapies are based on a mix between the attempt to increase coordination in the decisional process, an element that belongs to the rational decision making model that we will present in Sect. 1.4.1, and the advocacy of inclusive strategies open to the participation of all those interested that we will discuss on Chap. 6. Consistently with their structure, current explanations of failures search for general therapies, only sometimes distinguishing the different types of policy decisions. This could be a pointless struggle since it is legitimate to suspect that it is probably impossible to find a single institutional solution for a whole set of decisions.

On the contrary, it is necessary to go further in-depth in the analysis of the decisional processes to identify the basic elements that could explain why certain results are achieved.

This is the path we will follow in this book.

To do this, we will unwaveringly take one point of view that will guide us throughout the whole book. We will put ourselves in the innovator's shoes, namely the person who intends to change the content of a public policy in a non-marginal way. Chapter 6 will in fact introduce the different strategies available to the innovator to achieve his/her goals. In other words, even if it is obvious that the features of the system within which each single decisional process takes place influence the outcomes of the process itself, they do not completely determine the decisional field. In most cases, general conditions being equal, it is the combination of the different elements of the process that explain the success or failure of the attempt to reform.

This book aims to propose a conceptual framework that allows understanding decisions in the public sphere. In this sense, the book has an explanatory function, meaning it defines the variables that can influence the processes and therefore (contribute to) determine the outcomes. Such a framework can be used to explain events of the past but can also be used in a prescriptive way in order to define the courses of action an innovator must adopt to accomplish his/her project. This means to try and answer the question whether the project itself is feasible from a decisional point of view and check if there are elements that can hinder the adoption of the decision. From a prescriptive point of view, it means to understand what it is necessary to do in order to make the decision possible.

We must point out two further aspects.

First of all, the conceptual framework cannot provide any information about the quality of the proposal. It cannot tell us if it is a good idea to tackle that specific policy problem with that specific solution. The solution itself may not be suitable to achieve the goal, or it may not be worthwhile (or may even be self-defeating) trying to solve that problem at all. Understanding the dynamics of the decisional process does not mean that one is immune from making mistakes.

However, and it is the second point, a good deal of innovative projects in public policies fail, in the sense that they do not reach the implementation phase, because the process has been badly managed. In other words, the correct application of the analytical framework suggested in the following pages tries to avoid decisional failure but does not guarantee a substantial success.

This does not mean that we want to introduce a "science" of decisions, meaning that we have identified laws able to foresee what will happen. As we will mention again, quoting Aaron Wildavsky, one of the founders of public policy analysis, the discipline is more "art and craft" than science, strictly speaking (Wildavsky 1979). The ability to lead a public policy decision through the many difficulties it will come across requires a lot of *bricolage* and can be based on very few certainties. However, identifying the main elements that contribute to the outcomes, doing a bit of conceptual cleaning up and mostly, warning against the sweeping generalisations that abound in this field, can help in avoiding major mistakes and identifying possible alternative courses of action.

1.2 What is a Policy Decision

The focus of the book is the concept of "policy decision", so it is from here that we need to start. The problem would be quite simple if we were to only consider the etymology of the word decision. To decide—from Latin *de-coedere*—means to cut, to eliminate the available options till only one remains. To decide, therefore, would be synonym of to choose, and decision a synonym of choice. Every day, we all make a lot of decisions, sometimes consciously and more often unconsciously (or, better said, automatically). This implies that there are some **alternatives** for many of the actions we carry out. As soon as we wake up in the morning we can choose whether

to drink coffee, tea or a glass of whisky but this means that we have all three drinks available at home, or that there is a café nearby. However, it is absolutely clear that we cannot decide to wake up: waking up is the result of a natural process that happens independently from our will. Just like we can decide to commit suicide by jumping out of a window or, less tragically, to take a dive from a springboard, but we cannot change our mind half way through: gravity does not allow us to.

These examples highlight some essential elements: decision implies an **act of will** and the existence of alternatives. When one or the other lacks, there is no decision.

The most obvious example of the importance of the act of deciding is probably the wedding ceremony, where the questions "do you Carlo take Lucia to be your lawful wedded wife" and "do you Lucia take Carlo to be your lawful wedded husband" are explicitly asked. The idea is that in front of an action full of consequences like choosing the person you will probably spend the rest of your life with, it is necessary to clearly express the will to take such a big step, offering the chance to respond negatively.

This example demonstrates what Bobbio wrote (1996, p. 11): "The act of deciding, taken in itself … has little analytical interest and is often obscure at an empirical level". Answering to why Carlo married Lucia, thus explaining his decision, by stating that he did so because he positively answered the question the celebrant asked him, would be tautological and stupid. Actually, the decision was certainly made a long time before and its reasons sometimes are not clear to the two participants either.

This is more true for decisions made in fields other than private life. To make an example taken from 2010 Italian political news, the moment politicians decided to approve a law reforming the way Italian Universities are managed, does not coincide with the final vote of the Senate of the Republic on the text approved by the Chamber of Deputies. The decision was surely made long time before and the reform's content progressively changed also due to the intervention of a great number of actors.

So, together with the fact that a decision implies an act of will and the existence of alternatives, a further fundamental element is represented by the **process** through which the final choice came to light, the sequence of elementary actions and decisions that determined its content.

Studying a decision means to study the decisional processes, the mechanisms through which we "decide to decide" and analyse or exclude possible alternatives before reaching the final result that can also be to "decide not to decide", leaving things exactly as they are.

This last consideration highlights a fourth element. A decision must imply a potential **transformation of the world**: if we decide to drink coffee at home, this means that our coffee supplies will decrease. In other words a decision implies a **content**.

At a first level, the decision can regard the selection of the means available to reach a goal. We can choose to drive our car to work, or to use public transport or, if we have enough time, to walk. We can choose whether to spend our holidays at the seaside or in the mountains, whether to send our children to one school or

another, and so on. In these three examples, the objectives are clear: we have to go to work, we want to have a nice holiday and we wish to give our children the best possible education.

Nevertheless, things aren't always so simple: to really understand the reasons of a decision, sometimes we have to go further back, given the fact that the real decision regards what goals we want to pursue and not the means to choose in order to do so. An example can be a career decision: the problem to solve is not about the available alternatives, but about personal goals. The decision to become a doctor can be driven by the will to be useful to others, by the desire to follow family traditions, by the attractiveness of employment in an intellectually stimulating sector, or just by the idea that this is a profession where it is possible to earn good money. It is quite certain that individual choices to enter the medical school involve a mix of all these different elements but then the real choice, the essential decision, it to define what are the values to pursue that will probably lead to consider completely different alternatives, such as the missionary, shopkeeper, physicist or private banker.

The problem whether the "real" choice regards the means or the goals (that at another level can certainly also be considered means: I want to be rich or I want to help others because that is what my happiness depends on) is clearly crucial in political decisions strictly speaking (MacKenzie 1982, pp. 16–17).

Before moving on to public decisions, it is good to add at least a further aspect that refers to decisions made in private life. Up to now, in fact, we imagined that choices have consequences only for the individual who makes them. But often enough this is not true. Even though individual behaviour is always fundamental in the concept of decision, there are many cases in which the results of the process depend on the actions of different people. Going back to the example regarding marriage, Carlo's wish to marry Lucia would remain such (and probably be a reason of unhappiness) if Lucia didn't agree. This is where the complex problem of how to combine individual preferences comes into consideration.

This problem is crucial for decisions made in the public sphere, that have consequences—direct or indirect, real or potential—on a whole community, may it be the population of a village, of a region, of a country or of the whole planet. At least since the end of absolute kingdoms (but actually even before) and in any case in democratic governments, these are collective decisions, meaning that the interaction of a plurality of individuals is necessary. As we will see in the following paragraph, this has important consequences.

Among the decisions made in the public sphere, the ones that regard public policies are particularly relevant (policy decisions). It is important to underline that they are not the only ones to be made in the public sphere: for example, appointments (through elections or other kinds of designation) to positions with legal authority are equally important.

Policy decisions, however, are certainly the most visible and interesting part of the governing activity for citizens, so it is worth trying to explain what a public policy is in the most accurate way possible.

One widespread definition is the one proposed by Dye (1987, p. 1) who states that a public policy is "whatever governments choose to do or not to do". With the same spirit, (Mény and Thoenig 1989, p. 129) propose the following definition: "a public policy is the product of the activity of an authority invested with public power [*puissance*, in the original version, author's note] and governmental legitimacy".

More detailed is the definition contained in a textbook translated into various languages according to which a public policy is the "connection of intentionally consistent decisions and activities taken from different public actors, and sometimes private ones,….in order to solve in a targeted way a problem which, politically, is defined as collective" (Knoepfel et al. 2001, p. 29).

It is clear that, while Dye, Mény and Thoenig state that public policies are just the activities carried out by public institutions, Knoepfel and his co-authors, even taking their participation for granted, admit that actors can also be private, introducing two further qualifications: the first is that the actions must be consistent, at least in the intentions, and the second that they need to refer to the existence of a collective problem. At a higher level of abstraction, we can define a public policy as a set of decisions and activities that are linked to the solution of a collective problem, meaning "an unrealized need, value or opportunity which…may be attained through public action" (Dunn 1981, p. 60).

Within this definition there are no limitations regarding the consistency of the actions (those who oppose to the problem's solution must also be considered actors of the process), nor the necessary presence of public institutions (even if they probably will be present). Instead, what is crucial is the existence of a collective problem, the outlines of which are inevitably subject to an interpretative activity by the analyst, even if he/she is obviously obliged to take into consideration what the actors think and how they define the problem. Nor are there limitations as to the nature of the problems: in history and in different places, it is totally obvious that there have been important variations of what was considered a collective problem, or better said, a problem requiring public intervention.

The reason why we prefer to choose a wider definition is mainly connected to the ambition of this book, anticipated in the previous pages and that will be further detailed in Chap. 6. As we said, we will unwaveringly assume a point of view putting ourselves in the innovator's shoes. Innovators are those who want to substantially modify the content of a public policy and are not necessarily public actors, even though they almost always try to influence the behaviour of institutions. Assuming a necessary link between government activity and the existence of public policies can hide the fact that behind many policy reforms there are social actors, experts, interest groups, private individuals.

We could actually even go further, asserting that a policy, for being public, only needs the presence of a collective problem: is the fact that many cultural policies are promoted and financially supported by private foundations or companies, so decisive to think that they are not public policies? And also, the invention of microcredit as a tool for development policies in the poorest countries has generally been attributed to the Grameen Bank and to its founder Mohammed Yunus. It is an activity that is mostly carried out by private subjects, but surely the

problem that it is trying to solve is collective, and in fact it receives funding in free grants or soft loans by public institutions and non-profit organizations. This is not the right place to analyse this matter in depth, and in any case, as we will see, the fact that an activity is carried out in the political sphere has important consequences on how decisions are made.

However, the definition we gave allows us to look at the decisions we are interested in, without assuming that we only have to look at the governments' activities.

As a consequence, and remembering that a decision involves an act of will that can regard both the goals and the means and will probably involve many actors, we can define a policy decision as the process of choice between alternative ways to solve a collective problem.

1.3 Typical Features of Contemporary Public Policies

As we just mentioned, the emergence of collective problems, or better said, the recognition that a problem is collective, has been object of modifications in time and in space. What is considered as clearly public in one country, is not in another. For example, the need to save up money to "send children to college" is something natural in the USA, but not in the United Kingdom, and therefore the rise of university fees decided by Tony Blair's Labour government, and later by David Cameron's coalition government, generated harsh discussions in the political and social spheres. On the other hand, in Europe the introduction of a strict legislation aiming at preventing the creation of monopolies and oligopolies, similar to the American one, was considered an inappropriate interference of the State in the functioning of private economy for a very long time.

These differences among countries are real and consistent, but over the last 250 years it has still been possible to witness a development of public policies that allows us to highlight the typical features of the current age. This is clearly an essential step: only by understanding the nature of collective problems and how we can solve them nowadays, we can imagine how an innovator might intervene to introduce a small or big change in public policies.

The starting point is represented by the American and French revolutions and by the gradual but widespread success of the liberal state model. It is in this phase that some of the basic features of the modern public administration are born, some of which are still with us. Max Weber skilfully summarized them in the definition of *legal-rational bureaucracy*. At the basis of this model are the tasks and the tools of the state. The basic challenge the liberal State has to deal with is to ensure public order, at the same time leaving citizens as free as possible to pursue their own interests. For this reason, the tools used are essentially regulatory, aimed at determining individual and collective behaviours, defining general rules that must be respected, or making certain activities possible only after the authorization of the public administrations (permits, licenses, concessions, etc.). The administrative

activity was to be totally dominated by the law so that the liberal State becomes a synonym of ***rule of law***, definition that can basically be summarized as follows: **public authorities can only do what is prescribed, should do everything that is prescribed and they must act only in the way prescribed by the laws approved by the bodies that have legislative power**.

It is important to underline that the XIX century liberal State also carried out activities that were not regulatory in nature: it maintained permanent armies, it built roads, channels and bridges, it organized and sometimes managed public education, and so on. However, it carried out these activities *as if* they were regulatory activities. Tendering procedures for public works, for instance, are, in theory, aimed at selecting the best offer, but in fact the main preoccupation is to strictly follow the rules in order to avoid any suspicion of lack of impartiality in assessing the different offers. From this point of view it is apparent how the delay in the building of the infrastructure is considered a lesser evil than a minor infringement of the formal rules in the selection of the contractor.

Things change, sometimes very deeply, with the *welfare state*, i.e. with the enlargement of the tasks of public powers. This "great transformation" consisted of assigning the State the responsibility to solve the so-called market failures in the production of public goods but, especially, to guarantee economic and social development, full employment, the reduction of citizens' uncertainties through health and social security systems. It is in this phase that administrations grow strongly, as do the resources they absorb (to give an idea, between 1950 and 1985, the public expenditure as a ratio of GDP goes from 35.3 to 47.3 % in Great Britain and from 23.6 to 68.5 % in Sweden). Obviously this transformation entailed a parallel change in the tools of government.

Not only public interests are to be protected by the increasing use of financial transfers (just think about retirement benefits), by the use of positive and negative incentives (in policies aimed at favouring economic development, as well as environmental protection) and through the direct production of goods and services (from education to health), but what is more important, the legislative tools at the basis of the public action change their meaning. From being "conditional programmes"—formulated in the form "if…then" (for example: if specific circumstances occur, the requesting citizen has the right to have the building permit)—they become "goal programmes", in which the objectives to be reached, and not only the legal procedures, are established. This is when *planning* becomes the fundamental form of action of public powers, by basically defining the available resources, their distribution among the different policy fields and the short and medium-term objectives that must be achieved by carrying out all the activities required.

The immediate consequence is the need to enlarge the autonomy and the discretion of bureaucracies, but also to abandon uniformity, that was a distinguishing feature up to that moment. The expansion of the direct production of goods and services by public administrations gives a great impulse to the *decentralization* of responsibilities to sub-national levels, through the creation of new levels of government (for example, regions in Italy, France and Spain), through the

strengthening of the State field offices, and the increase of local administration tasks. This gradual organizational differentiation has two main objectives: the first is to adapt the organizational structure to its functions as much as possible and the second is to multiply the areas in which political control is exerted over the bureaucracy.

All these changes actually happen over a rather long period and, in many cases, without the need to face the problem of defining a new general model. This is partly due to the fact that the State's new tasks did not completely replace the previous ones and that the principles of the rule of law continue to be valid also after the creation of the *welfare state*. If it is possible to clearly identify the exact moment of the process of transition from the absolute state to the liberal state (the American and French revolutions), the same is not true for the transition from the liberal state to the welfare state. It was certainly favoured by important external events (the 1929 economic crisis, the *New Deal* under Roosevelt, and, most of all, World War II), but it happened subtly through a progressive enlargement of public expenditure and taxation.

Therefore, the administrative model of the *welfare state* has less defined features compared to the liberal state. Not only was there no Max Weber able to systematize its essential features, but also the overlapping of new and traditional principles, along with the high differentiation of the functions generated a rather complex situation.

However, some elements of this model are clearly recognizable.

The most important one is the emphasis on **effectiveness**, i.e. on the success of public policies. This represents a distinguishing feature of the welfare state and it becomes the new legitimation model of public power. Even if in most cases this *functional legitimation* does not fully replace the legal-rational legitimation of the previous phase, it is clearly recognizable and represents the basis of public powers during the XX century.

During the last phase of the XX century, however, the *welfare state* model entered a crisis leaving space for a further change that has probably not come to an end yet.

The main reason for the change regards the modification of collective problems and therefore of the tasks assigned to administrations. It is the different nature of the policies of contemporary states that explains the transformation of governmental structures.

As an example, we can consider the following three points:

1. The development of economic globalization, the increase in the markets' dimensions and of the financial market in particular, has weakened many of the tools governments could use to manage the economy; this does not mean that the population's demand for economic development and full employment has decreased nor that governments are considered less responsible for the prevention of and for the exit from economic and/or financial crises.
2. A vast improvement in the knowledge in the field of natural sciences has shown the growing interdependencies between industrial development and

environmental transformations, at a local and at a global level; the "sustainable development" imperative poses very difficult and urgent challenges for governments.
3. The unbalanced global economic development has fostered migration flows as never before, that deeply changed western societies; an open question regards how to guarantee public order, broadly speaking, in a multi-ethnic society where large minorities do not share anymore a lot of the values that were in the past considered fundamental.

These three examples identify the type of policy problems that governments face nowadays. Obviously it is impossible to forecast if and when the present phase will come to an end. However we can try to point out some fundamental features of contemporary policy processes.

The first of these features is the increase in **decisional complexity**. Today we see a growth of the decisional networks, both on the vertical axis (different geographical scales) as well as on the horizontal one (especially relations between public and private actors).

Starting from this last dimension, new types of actors enter the decisional processes. Just think about the creation of independent administrative authorities—bureaucratic bodies that do not respond to elected political representatives—with the task of regulating a series of key sectors, from monetary policy to competition protection, from consumer protection to privacy protection. Or think about the core role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), sometimes composed by professionals as well as by volunteers, in the implementation and sometimes also in the formulation of several public policies, from social services to development aid to the poorest countries. Again, let's consider the expansion of the so-called Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that act as "watchdogs" over the government's activity, often in relation with the independent authorities we mentioned before. All these new actors join in with the traditional ones and the result is a pluralisation of the points of view inside the decisional processes, increasing the gap between the actual ways in which public decisions are made and what is foreseen by constitutional law.

On the vertical axis, the sum of the two trends towards globalization and territorial decentralization led to the creation of the term *multi-level governance*, needed to indicate how in almost all policy sectors, final results depend on the actions and the decisions made by different subjects operating at different territorial levels: global fora, continental bodies (just think of the European Union), national states, regional authorities, local communities, etc. This means that it is often impossible to identify the authors of the decisions, with sometimes devastating consequences on policy accountability.

A second feature of public policies in the contemporary age regards the increase of **uncertainty**, To say it in a few words, governments often do not know if their

decisions will solve the collective problem they are facing, or if they will make it worse. What is under discussion today is whether the preferred alternative risks generating negative effects (negative externalities, in economic terms) in other fields or even if it is negative for the problem itself. Hence, a series of dilemmas apparently without a solution. Is nuclear energy an effective and efficient answer to development needs, or does it expose to unacceptable risks and/or load future generations with unbearable costs? Is building infrastructures for vehicle mobility (roads, parking spaces, etc.) a way to improve mobility or is it an incentive to the use of private vehicles increasing congestion?

Various factors determine this growing uncertainty.

First of all, it is connected to the increasing decisional complexity that we discussed previously. If the effectiveness of a local policy also depends on what will be established in an international treaty, it is clear that the actors do not control a key element of the issue they have to face and, therefore, their forecasts on the effectiveness of the choice are groundless.

Secondly, the acceleration of the changes caused by globalization processes increases the chances of exogenous shocks making it impossible to foresee if and when the trends will peak and change direction. Financial crises and technological breakthroughs represent examples of the shocks that influence policy effectiveness. But, at a different level and with certainly more serious consequences, who would have said, 50 years ago, that we would have experienced a growth of religious fundamentalisms in the transition from the second to the third millennium?

Thirdly, the development of knowledge and scientific progress widely increased our capacity to identify possible relations between different phenomena without a correspondent increase in our capacity to tackle them. Using a medical metaphor, the development of diagnostic capacities, the ability to identify the different factors at work, has not been matched by a corresponding progress in finding the appropriate therapies.

This means that we have to honestly admit that there are problems we just do not know how to solve, meaning that we are just ignorant about them. The existence of economic theories that are ferociously competitive about the factors that can determine the economic development of a territory, shows that we are just not certain which behaviours are able to reach a widely shared goal.

Finally, and this is the third of the main features of contemporary public policies, we are witnessing an increase in **conflicts** among social groups, among political actors and between citizens and public authorities. Some of these conflicts may be cyclical, meaning that a period in which choices are highly shared is followed by another in which contrasts seem to be more intense. However as regards the relationship between citizens and public authorities, it is reasonable to assume that it is a structural phenomenon. Evidence of this are the opinion polls that in all developed countries witness a significant loss of trust in government. Further evidence is the increasing role, quite novel in the sector of public policies,

played by the courts, that are more and more often called to solve conflicts where social groups criticize the decisions of public bodies. The use of direct democracy is also growing in many countries with successful referendum initiatives. In conclusion, the method to transmit political demand and the ability of the elected representatives to respond seem to have got stuck. This can be the effect of a political system that evolved in a self-referential manner, losing contact with its electors. Or, and more likely, the reasons of the transformation lie in the modification of the values shared by the citizens of developed countries: the loss of trust in an indefinite social and economic progress corresponds to the emergency of new values (the so-called post-materialist values—Inglehart 1977) and in any case, the intolerance of the need for sacrifice (which in some cases means giving up small or big privileges) for a future that we no longer believe in. Cause and effect of these changes is also the progressive de-ideologisation, at least along the lines of the political cultures that developed in the XIX and XX century, and the birth of new identities and new feelings of belonging that are often very ancient and refer to religion, ethnic groups, territorial and linguistic affiliation, and many other dimensions. However that may be, this social fragmentation seems to deeply characterize the world of public policies too and it is certainly at the basis of the conflicts that often take policy makers by surprise.

The typical features of the policy making processes (complexity, uncertainty and conflict) do not only regard large problems with long range consequences. We actually find exactly the same features if it comes to approving a European directive, a national law or the construction of a parking space in an urban area. The NIMBY syndrome (Not In My Backyard), that is the populations' refusal of the localization of a wide range of infrastructures, demonstrates how it is not the size of the intervention that generates conflicts and untreatable problems, but it is the confluence of a series of factors that we will see later.

1.4 Decisional Models

The previous considerations give us very confused image of policy decisions, meaning the processes through which the solutions to collective problems are selected. Hence the need to adopt a theoretical model, i.e. to identify the variables that can be used to investigate the whole class of phenomena that we decided to call "policy decisions" and to make explicit assumptions about the behaviours that influence their outcomes.

As Allison (1971) taught us in his study of the Cuban missiles crisis, the models are "conceptual lenses" we cannot do without and that, implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously, we use in order to describe and explain the reality.

In the first page of Allison book we find the following quotation by Alexis de Tocqueville:

> I have come across men of letters who have written history books without taking part in public affairs, and politicians who have concerned themselves with producing events without thinking about them. I have observed that the first are always inclined to find general causes, while the second … are prone to imagine that everything is attributable to particular incidents, and that the wires they pull are the same as those that move the world. It is to be presumed that both are equally deceived.

The fact that in order to find a meaning of the world that surrounds us it is necessary to use theory, and not only empirical investigation, can seem counter-intuitive, but it is not less true. In fact we need conceptual models so much, that we even use them without knowing it. As J.M. Keynes said "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist".

In the following pages, we will introduce four different decisional models. With this term, we intend "an analytical construct that identifies the essential elements" of the decisional process and therefore "the decision maker, his cognitive features, the activities of research for a solution, the modalities and the criteria of the choice and most of all… the relations among these different elements" (Bobbio 1996, p. 13).

These models are often assigned a descriptive value even before an explanatory one, either implicitly or explicitly; but often enough they are also assigned a prescriptive value, meaning that they are used to indicate how decisions should be made if we want to maximize effectiveness and efficiency in the solution of the problem.

In the final paragraph of this chapter, we will present a model that is widely based on one of those proposed in literature, but that includes some elements from the other models and seems to be able to realistically take into account how policy decisions actually work in the real world. The elements that are part of this model will be analysed and operationalized in the following chapters.

1.4.1 The Rational Model

It is traditional to start the presentation of the conceptual models able to represent the decisional process by the so-called rational model.

From Aristotle's logic to the economic planning experimented by communist regimes, passing through most of economic and management literature, the main idea seems to be that the choices made by individuals should be—and usually are—connected to a series of operations.

Basically, according to the rational model, the individual who has to make a decision should:

1. put his/her values and goals in order of priority;
2. know all the possible means to reach the goals;
3. evaluate the consequences of each alternative;
4. calculate the costs associated to the choice of all the available alternatives;
5. choose the alternative, able to maximise the benefits and to minimise the costs.

It is clear that, first and foremost, this is a prescriptive model, as it assumes that the best decision for the solution of the problem is the one that will be made at the end of a process as similar as possible to the one above. As a matter of fact, public and private management manuals contain a large number of prescriptions that refer exactly to this model. Some of them have been mostly adopted for budget and investment decisions, as for example the *Planning, Programming, Budgeting System* in the USA in the 60s or the *Rationalisation des Choix Budgetaires* in France. But the use of the cost-benefit analysis is also explicitly foreseen by national and European regulations in the case of Regulatory Impact Analysis, considered the best way to minimize the risk of placing unjustified burdens on citizens and firms.

Why this model has been and still is so successful?

First of all, this depends on the fact that, as noted by Bobbio (1996, p. 17), it promises to "create a space taken away from politics", in which important choices, not the ones on big options and general goals, but the ones representing the heart of public policies, can be made exclusively at a technical level without requiring long and hard debates. Making the right decision is just a matter of technically defining the form and the parameters of an equation and inserting data in a computer.

But a second reason for this model's success is that it seems to explain everything that happens in the real world of policy decisions and in particular their failures.

In fact, the model assumptions are that (Bobbio 1996, p. 18):

1. a clear separation between aims and means is possible, and the former are fully determined before the latter are chosen;
2. the decisional process can be carried out by a single decision maker or, in any case, by a body able to express organized and not contradictory preferences;
3. the analysis of alternatives and relevant consequences is able dispel the main uncertainty sources;
4. there are enough resources for the analysis and in particular there is enough time to investigate the consequences of all possible options, and even before, to gain the necessary knowledge on the existence of these options.

It is quite clear that the contemporary presence of all these conditions is almost impossible, and therefore we always have a ready "explanation" for any unsatisfying result. There were not enough resources, information or coordination, communication was not appropriate, and so on. Most of the prescriptions that management consultants formulate basically suggest that we have to try and make decisional processes more rational, closer to the ideal model previously described.

And this is where the problem lies.

In fact, if the model were only used from a prescriptive point of view it would probably be useless and quite expensive, but not too dangerous.

The problem is that we all tend to use it from a descriptive and explicative point of view, as an easy way to understand someone's objectives by observing their behaviour. The syllogism is therefore the following:

MAJOR PREMISE: All people wanting A choose X
MINOR PREMISE: Mario choose X
CONCLUSION: Mario wanted A

It is quite clear that the syllogism is based on a condition the (ontological) truth of which we can never be sure about, but cast the first stone if you never thought like this. In everyday life we often think this way, and many times correctly. Adapting an example proposed by Regonini (2001, p. 94), if we see a friend of ours running down the road in a suit and tie, we imagine, and this is totally plausible, that he is late for an appointment.

However, especially in the field of policy decisions, due to decisional complexity, uncertainty of the results and latent or open conflicts, basing the interpretation of what happens on a similar model can lead to a misunderstanding of what happened and, most of all, of why it happened. The search for who is responsible for the 2008 financial crisis shows a continuous fluctuation around the rational model: bankers (or governments) are guilty as they acted irrationally on the basis of incomplete information and inconsistent conditions, or they are guilty as they actually made totally rational choices from their point of view and pursued objectives that were not in the common interest. The idea that the results arose for totally different reasons from the intentions and from the knowledge of a bunch of people is completely absent in the many conspiracy theories that we find in the newspapers or on the internet all too often.

It is obvious that the problem lies in the conditions given by the model and in particular in the assumption that there is one decision maker acting in a unitary logic, perfectly informed about the objectives, the available alternatives and the consequences in terms of costs and benefits of each alternative.

Do we therefore get rid of the good along with the bad and renounce to any explanation of decisional processes based on logic and on the assumption that individuals pursue their own interests?

1.4.2 The Bounded Rationality Model

Not necessarily, according to Herbert Simon (Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences) in *Administrative Behaviour*, published right after the end of the Second World War (Simon 1947).

The rationality of an actor, he says, lies not the fact that he is omniscient, that he/she knows all the objectives, all the alternatives, all the consequences of each alternative, but the fact that his/her behaviour is at least potentially *purposive*,

aimed at reaching a goal, even if this is not completely defined at the beginning of the process. The decision maker will try to behave consistently, but will inevitably suffer from a series of intellectual limits:

1. a limited knowledge of the alternatives available;
2. a limited intellectual capacity (there is a limit to the number of issues or aspects of the same issue that can be contemporarily considered);
3. a limited memory;
4. a limited attention span (the amount of time spent in searching for the solution of the decisional problem cannot go beyond a certain limit).

In such a situation, the rational decision maker looks for **satisfying** courses of actions, or actions that are "good enough" on the basis of the information he has, avoiding any pretence of optimization, i.e. of maximisation of the effectiveness of the solution.

The **bounded rationality model** is, in its essence, the following: the acceptance of the cognitive limits and the explicit adoption of a less strict decisional criterion compared to the one implicit in the rational model. It has a prescriptive value, meaning that it suggests to accept the first alternative that appears satisfactory without searching any further, and a descriptive and explicative value, meaning that it assumes that the decision maker's choice not only needs not to be the one best way to solve the problem, but can also be based on incomplete or even wrong analyses.

This position is even more understandable if one takes into account that Simon especially talks about decisions that are not made by one decision maker, but are created inside complex organizational and institutional contexts and therefore require coalitions. Moreover, Simon highlights how his model can essentially be applied to new and big decisions, while routine decisions are usually made according to standard operating procedures enforced by organizations in order to minimize the chances of making mistakes.

Actually, this kind of mechanism explains a great deal of our individual decisions much better than the previous one, from choosing a new car to choosing the location of our summer holidays. If we had to follow the indications of the rational model, we would risk keeping our old car or staying at home for the whole summer holidays.

This last comment shows how the limited rationality model has got a key element in common with the previous one, meaning the idea that the decision can be referred to an individual able to put his/her preferences in a transitive priority order (according to which if choice A is preferred to choice B and choice B to choice C, then choice A will be preferred to choice C). As shown in the following box, this is not always possible if the decision is made by a collective actor.

This is Condorcet's paradox, later expanded by Kenneth Arrow in the so-called impossibility theorem, according to which it is impossible to create a single social

Condorcet's Paradox

A commission is appointed in order to decide the most appropriate technology for the electric power generation, choosing among solar energy (S), nuclear energy (N) or fossil fuels like oil (O). The members of this commission are one environmentalist, who we will call Green, one technologist, who we will call White and an economist, who we will call Red. They are three rational people, who are fully aware that their opinion may not necessarily prevail and therefore they should have a second option in order to possibly avoid the most negative one of the three. In a logic of sustainable development, Green prefers renewable energies, therefore solar energy, rather than fossil fuels, but he still prefers oil to nuclear energy which he believes implies very serious risks. On the other hand and in a logic of technological and industrial development, White prefers nuclear to solar energy but is however quite in favour of the latter due to its potential compared to the use of oil that is still based on old technologies. Finally, Red, who only considers the cost of the KW/h produced, believes that in the current situation the use of oil is more efficient than nuclear energy, that implies extremely high investments, but that the latter is much better than solar energy, deeply inefficient from an economic point of view. The following matrix summarizes their positions.

	Green	White	Red
First choice	(S) better than (O)	(N) better than (S)	(O) better than (N)
Second choice	(O) better than (N)	(S) better than (O)	(N) better than (S)
Consequence	(S) better than (N)	(N) better than (O)	(O) better than (S)

What happens with a voting? Solar energy has two preferences (Green and White) against oil that only has one (Red). Oil can however count on two votes (Green and Red) against nuclear energy that only has one (White). From the transitive property, it should follow that solar energy is preferred to nuclear energy, but the situation is actually the opposite as we can see from the matrix, with White and Red prevailing on Green.

welfare function through the aggregation of individual preferences under democracy conditions (for further information, see Dunn (1981, pp. 227–230)).

In other words we have to face the challenge to find a model that appropriately represents collective choices.

1.4.3 The Incremental Model

The starting point of Charles Lindblom, the scholar who proposed the incremental model, in an article dated 1959 significantly titled "The science of muddling through", is that the close observation of policy making processes highlights the following recurring features [Lindblom (1959) cit. in Parsons (1995, p. 285)]:

- the values, objectives and empirical analysis of the action to be carried out are not distinct, but closely linked,
- since aims and means are not distinct, the analysis of the appropriateness of the means required to reach the aims is often limited,
- the test a "good" policy must pass is typically the fact that different analysts agree on its adoption, without necessarily agreeing that it is the most appropriate mean for a shared objective,
- the analysis is drastically limited in the sense that (a) important and possible consequences are neglected, (b) important alternative policies are neglected and (c) important values are neglected,
- a series of subsequent comparisons reduces or eliminates any trust in the theory.

The combined effect of these features is that the result of a policy making process actually able to reach a conclusion, is usually a decision departs but a little from the status quo, that is **incremental**. Lindblom wonders if everything only depends on the total irrationality of decision makers, or if it corresponds to some specific and not necessarily negative feature of contemporary political systems. The answer to this question will progressively come to light during the following 40 years and essentially develops at two levels.

First of all, and not differently from Herbert Simon, Lindblom states that the research for absolute rationality, that he calls synoptic, is meaningless as it is impossible to reach and potentially damaging because it can lead to serious and sometimes irreparable mistakes. Actors' cognitive limits, the constraints deriving from the political and institutional context and the impossibility to foresee the insurgence of exogenous shocks are all factors that make the prescriptive usefulness of the rational model minimal and its explanatory value non existing.

Nothing new up to here.

But Lindblom makes a further huge step forward by emphasizing the fact that the choice emerging from the decisional process is almost never an act of will of the single decision maker, but the product of social interaction. All public policy decisions are co-produced by many actors, with different values, objectives and action logics. Even when the choice can be formally referred to an individual decision maker, in selecting the alternatives he/she will have to take into account the preferences and the resources of other actors, in order to avoid the exercise veto powers or sabotages during the implementation of the decision.

More precisely, Lindblom believes that the actors of policy making processes are usually in a situation of **partisan interdependence**, meaning that they have objectives and interests that are in a structural conflict although they need each

other. A typical example could be the absolutely normal case of a decision that has to be jointly made by various public bodies: the representatives of each administration will do their best to maximise the advantages for their administration, but they also know that, in the end, they will have to find an agreement. This configuration explains the decisional criteria and the most likely results of decisional processes: we choose what we can agree upon, therefore we will choose the closest alternative to the status quo, the incremental decision.

Lindblom's model immediately appeared to be highly realistic and it influenced a large number of analyses and empirical researches.

Lindblom actually claimed that not only the analytically superiority of the model, as it was able to better explain what happens in reality, but also its appropriateness from a prescriptive point of view, as it gives useful information to improve the type of analysis necessary to prepare the decisions.

In particular, there have been different versions of the incrementalism of the analysis. The initial choice was to suggest to decision-makers the opportunity to operate by "successive limited comparisons", in order to simplify knowledge needs. This means to proceed sequentially, only assessing the options that depart minimally from the status quo at the same time not taking into consideration the larger consequences of said options. After this, Lindblom proposed a more complex version of the same approach, called "disjointed incrementalism" and "strategic analysis". The most important point, however is the fact that the incremental analysis is, in any case, better that the synoptic rational analysis, because it is aware of its own incompleteness, while the synoptic analysis is equally incomplete, but tends to hide it.

Furthermore, the incremental analysis works also because it is based on the existence of a plurality of actors and the knowledge produced derives from their interaction. This is clear in a specific type of interaction called negotiation: "when a government decides to control salaries in order to fight inflation, the challenge of defining the right level of salaries can go beyond anyone's capacity…. In this case, a form of interaction called negotiation among enterprise representatives, workers and government in a tripartite commission" can define the acceptable salary increases (Lindblom 1980, p. 27). But more in general, directly assigning to the actors the task of generating the analysis that has to inform and influence the decisional process, ensures that the knowledge produced will certainly be relevant for some of them. On the contrary, to expect that the professionalization of the decisional analysis is able to produce more appropriate information and models is often deceitful [for a discussion of this issue, see Lindblom and Cohen (1979)].

In any case, the real importance of interaction among actors is the fact that it determines better results.

First of all, it is not true that the incremental model ignores the need, and sometimes the urgency, of deep policy changes: "a fast-moving sequence of small changes can more speedily accomplish a dramatic alteration of the status quo than can an only infrequent major policy change" (Lindblom 1979, p. 520).

Secondly Lindblom approach goes further beyond the proposal of a methodology for decision making. He explicitly states that a society based on preferences and on interactions tends to work better than one based on reason (Lindblom 1977, Chap. 19, pp. 247–260). In the book *The Intelligence of Democracy*, leveraging on the double meaning contained in the title, he states that understanding democracy means to recognize its intelligence, implicit in the fact that in democratic systems it is possible to have more points of view at the same time, and therefore to surpass the cognitive limits of any unitary actor. Surely, the process resulting from this could seem confused and contradictory, but a brief comparison of performances in terms of innovation, economic development and social equity is sufficient to realize that authoritarian systems have nothing to teach to democratic ones.

Two final remarks.

The first is that, as seems clear, the unit of analysis in this model becomes the decisional process, i.e. the set of interactions through which the final decision is generated. As stated by Bobbio (1996, p. 32) it is not just a matter of observing "the solitary path made by a single decisional centre". This transformation is particularly important because, as we often said and will keep repeating, the point of view assumed in this volume is the innovator's, meaning the actor who tries to introduce a non-incremental change in how a collective problem is dealt with: understanding the context within which his action will be carried out is much more important than prescribing how he should search for the best solution to the problem.

The second remark is that the incremental model is deeply grounded in the political analysis, meaning that it explicitly considers the fact that an important part of the interactions have to deal with the "fight for power", that is to say with the competition to gain an authoritative position and with the need to influence other people's behaviour to achieve one's own goals and interests. All this, in a context where the distribution of resources among actors is always unequal and often very unbalanced.

Even if, the higher the decisional complexity gets, the more decisional processes that take place in the private sphere will tend to be similar to the ones carried out in the public sphere, there is still a strong political aspect in public policy decisions that Lindblom's model clearly highlights when stating that the essential decision making criterion is agreement among actors, meaning the consensus at the basis of authority's legitimation mechanisms in contemporary political systems.

1.4.4 The "Garbage Can" Model

With the fourth, and last, decisional model that we will focus once more on decisions in general, meaning in any organizational context. In brief, this model states that in all decisional situations where there is ambiguity at the level of objectives (badly defined by the actors), of the usable technology (that isn't very clear), and of actors'

participation (that tends to vary in time) the decision derives from the accidental meeting—mediated by the intervention of contingent factors—of problems, solutions, participants and opportunities of choice. This is the core of the model proposed by James March and Johann Olsen in 1979 that they called "garbage-can model". The authors explain the metaphor as follows: "Suppose we view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which various problems and solutions are dumped by participants. The mix of garbage in a single can depends partly on the labels attached to the alternative cans; but it also depends on the what garbage it is produced at the moment, on the mix of cans available and on the speed with which garbage is collected and removed from the scene" (March and Olsen 1979, p. 26).

It is interesting to see that the starting point of this idea is represented by the consideration that in a private company there are various objectives partly in contrast with one another: to increase sales, to improve the market share, to increase production and profits. Nowadays, we would also add: to decrease debts and to ensure liquidity, to produce dividends for shareholders and especially, to support shareholder value in the market. In other words, even in organizations that the economic theory defines monolithic, like firms, the decisional process actually sees different groups of participants who negotiate to reach an acceptable compromise as regards what decision it is better to make. Of course, this is even more true in political and administrative contexts where public policies are decided.

This plurality of possible goals is translated in a decisional model, widely based on randomness, essentially for two closely linked reasons.

The first is that the actors' preferences are not exogenous but are formed during the process. For example, they depend on the preferences expressed by the other actors: if X, who is my enemy, pushes for solution A, I will oppose it and will bring forward alternative proposals. But they can also depend on a transformation of the context, on the fact that I lost interest in participating, or that other and more serious problems gained importance.

The second is that decisional processes are often carried out over very long periods. It is believed that Keynes answered a critic by saying "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, Sir?", which means that the longer a decisional process takes, the more likely it is that the same course of action can have different consequences and meanings at different times, and that actors will modify their behaviour. But time also determines another very important effect: actors simply change, some enter and some leave the decisional arena.

Therefore it is the conceptualization of the decisional process, intended as the actions aimed at finding the solution to a problem, that becomes critical: besides problems in search of a solution, we also have solutions in search of problems and participants in search of problems to solve, satisfaction for interests or alliances to create.

Temporal alignment becomes thus the key element in order to interpret results, meaning the combination of a problem and a solution in one of the garbage cans, at one specific moment. This tends to happen accidentally and chance becomes the main cause for the "happening" (as we cannot talk about choice and awareness) of decisions and their outcomes.

The main assumptions of this model are at the basis of the conceptual framework created by John Kingdon, called *multiple stream approach,* to explain how policy issues are included in the political agenda (Kingdon 1984). Basically there are three different streams: the stream of problems, made by those issues someone believes need to be solved; the stream of public policies, a kind of primordial stew where ideas and solutions sometimes emerge, sometimes disappear; and the political stream that determines the importance and urgency of an issue on the political agenda. Sometimes, but not always predictably, the three streams merge, making it possible to deal with that particular issue using that particular idea.

It is quite clear that the *garbage can* model is essentially descriptive and interpretative, and it is able to explain and justify a wide number of situations, especially in the light of the typical features of the policy decisions we mentioned in Sect. 1.3.

However, it would be wrong to think that it does not also contain prescriptive elements.

At a first level and in the event of extremely chaotic situations, it justifies and suggests the idea that, instead of trying to simplify the problem to make it more manageable, it is better to make a random choice, hoping to stimulate a chain reaction that sooner or later will lead to a simpler decisional structure, that we are not able to foresee at present (Grandori 1984).

More in general, the representation of decisional processes as garbage cans stimulates focus on the ways to "create and support identities, preferences and resources that make a political community possible" (March and Olsen 1995, p. 28). Not by chance, the same scholars who elaborated the garbage-can model were central 20 years later in rediscovering institutions as means to provide some order in a world made chaotic by rising complexity.

1.5 A Realistic Model of the Decisional Process

The following chart deliberately simplifies what we can consider the essential features of the four models discussed in Fig. 1.1.

Each one of these models contains important clues to understand how decisions are made. So, the synoptic rational model attracts our attention to the fact that individuals usually try to choose the best solution for the satisfaction of their interests. The bounded rationality model reminds us that our knowledge is imperfect and that we are often satisfied with the first "rather good" solution that we find. The incremental model highlights how most of the decisions, especially in public policies, are the result of compromises among actors with contrasting interests. And, finally, the garbage can model shows how the passing of time is not irrelevant, since it can make the connection between problem and solution either possible or impossible.

We can imagine that, as the complexity of the decision grows, especially intended as plurality of the participants' points of view, the best way to understand

Decisional model	Decision maker	Cognitive conditions	Decisional criterion
Synoptic rational	Unitary	Certainty	Optimization
Bounded rationality	Unitary /coalition	Uncertainty	Satisfaction
Incremental	Partisan interdependence	Partiality	Mutual adjustment
Garbage can	Changeable	Ambiguity	Chance

Fig. 1.1 Decisional models

what happened is to move towards the bottom of the chart. In the light of the features of contemporary public policies this means that we suppose that in most cases neither the rational/synoptic model nor the one proposed by Herbert Simon are able to explain what really happened.

On the contrary, the prescriptive value, in the meaning of giving clear indications on how it is possible to reach the best decision from a specific actor's point of view, tends to decrease, going from the top to the bottom. The comprehensive rational model requires decision makers to make important analytical efforts that are only apparently facilitated by the discovery of techniques like linear programming or costs/benefits analysis and that require the ability to make long-term forecasts. On the other hand, the garbage can model does not contain real indications about how to behave, apart from what we will shortly mention about decisional *timing*.

However, as often repeated, both the analyst and the decision maker need a model to refer to, otherwise they risk not being aware of their own assumptions and therefore suggesting explanations or creating strategies that are inconsistent or contradictory.

For this reason we will make a clear choice towards the incremental model, meaning that we will assume that most policy decisions are made by actors with contrasting interests who need to reach an agreement to achieve their own goals. As we will see, this agreement does not mean that everybody will be happy with the outcome of the process. The basic reason that leads us to prefer the model proposed by Charles Lindblom is that it provides the best representation of the conditions that usually take place in political/administrative contexts. It is not a coincidence that politics has been defined as "the art of compromise" and that not only the creation of alliances within the power élite, but also the citizens' consensus are considered a key element for the stability and effectiveness of political systems. Decisional processes characterized by complexity and uncertainty are basically political, which means they deal with power.

This does not mean of course that Herbert Simon's ideas on one side and March and Olsen's on the other, should not be taken into consideration and cannot enrich the understanding of the phenomena we are interested in.

In particular, Simon not only taught us that each actor has cognitive limits that we have to take into account while interpreting or forecasting behaviour, but he also pointed out that a rational actor does not need to be omniscient, he just has to be *purposive*, trying to reach a goal even if it is not perfectly defined since the beginning of the process. This is why in the following pages we will consider the contributions of the rational political theory and in particular the ones coming from the application of the game theory: the actors of the incremental model also behave rationally.

March and Olsen's work shows how an actor interested in modifying the real world should consider the context the decision develops in and in particular the importance of the moment in which the choice between the available alternatives is made. The flow of events makes the specific connection between problems and solutions possible at time t, while this would not happen at time $t - 1$ nor $t + 1$. The main indication of the model is to pay attention to the *timing* of the decision a point that we will expand somewhat when considering the strategies available for policy innovators.

The incremental model, however, has a fundamental advantage. It explains why decisions made in the public sphere usually do not depart much from the status quo. Therefore, it leaves an open door on the issue of how it is possible to introduce non marginal changes, and this is the exact problem this volume tries to give an answer to. It indicates the type of analysis that those interested in introducing important changes in the ways of solving collective problems have to carry out, since the main features of the model—partisan interdependence among decision makers, mutual agreement as a decisional criterion, limitations to the analysis—are valid regardless of the nature of the problem or of the radicalism of the solutions proposed.

But if the incremental model tells us how the decisional process will develop, it does not tell us, nor it could tell us, what are the decisions that will be made, nor, in specific and general terms, what kind of decisions it is possible to make.

Therefore we have to go beyond Charles Lindblom's conceptual framework and to specify the variables that contribute to determine the possibility of an intentional and non-incremental change of a public policy, of the way to deal with a collective problem.

The model proposed in this volume and that will be explained in the following chapters, can be summarized as follows:

> The outcomes of a public policy decisional process depend on the interaction of different types of **actors** with different goals and roles who, within a **network** that can have different characteristics, exchange **resources** using different **patterns of interaction**, to obtain a **stake**, within a given **decisional context**.

In the Chap. 2 we will concentrate on the actors, on the decisional networks and on the resources, while in the subsequent chapters we will focus on the analysis of the content of the decision, on the patterns of interaction and on the decisional context.

The challenge, or the general objective of this volume, is to understand what specific combinations of these variables (let's repeat them: actors, resources, stake,

patterns of interaction) make non incremental policy decisions possible, within a specific decisional context and from the innovator's point of view, considering that in administrative and political systems actors have important cognitive limits and are bound by the need to reach an agreement.

In an explanatory key, the model is needed to cast light on the elements that explain how it was possible for a specific and important transformation of the ways used to deal with a collective problem to take place (and, after all, this is a common experience, although these events are quite rare). In a prescriptive key, the model suggests to the reformers the type of analysis they have to make to evaluate the decisional feasibility of their proposals.

A couple more warnings.

1. The conceptual framework proposed does not aim to define the features that an institutional system has to assume to secure the decisional feasibility of changes. Clearly, some of the acquisitions deriving from the application of the model implicitly contain proposals of useful institutional transformations in specific contexts or sectors. However, the validity of the model is relevant at the level of the individual decision and the individual decisional process (and therefore also to the decision to transform the institutional system), not at the level of the political system in which they occur. Any inference from the micro-level (where our analysis is placed) to the macro-level is completely undue.
2. As it should be clear, the model does not say anything about the substantial quality of the innovation proposal, meaning that it is not able to predict if it will be able to effectively solve the problem or be the correct solution to face that specific problem. The model assumes that this analysis is carried out by whoever proposes the change before and during the decisional process itself.

Certainly, the idea at the basis of Lindblom's model is that knowledge generated during social interaction is able to significantly enrich the ways in which to deal with collective problems. As we will see in Chap. 6, moreover, there is a whole family of decisional strategies, the "inclusive" ones, that claim to be able to improve the content of decisions. However, this result cannot be assured from the beginning due to the cognitive limits we recalled many times and it is not necessarily true that the solution mostly agreed on is also the most correct. What is probably valid for the system—a society based on preferences and on interactions is generally more likely to solve collective problems, compared to one based on intellect—does not apply to the single decision. In any case, the ontological uncertainty that accompanies many public policies, guarantees that very often effective solutions to several problem simply do not exist.

Our model rather realistically assumes that the innovator proposes the solution to the collective problem even if important modifications may occur between the initial proposal and the final decision. From the innovator's point of view, the decisional problem can be conceptualised as the existence of an unsatisfied

opportunity: the X alternative is available and able to solve problem Y. The analysis of the decisional process is needed to identify the elements that made a specific choice possible (i.e. decisional success).

This decisional success is possibly translated in a substantial failure, meaning that not only the collective problem was not solved, but it even got worse due to the decision made. The model is not able to say anything to this end, as it only explains and assesses the feasibility of the choice. And however, if it is true that sometimes it would have been better not to make any decision at all, it is also true that fighting for a politically (broadly speaking) impossible course of action is certainly not a better alternative.

References

Allison, G.: Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis. Harper and Collins, New York (1971)
Bobbio, L.: La democrazia non abita a Gordio. Milano, Franco Angeli (1996)
Dunn, W.N.: Public Policy Analysis: An Introduction. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs (1981)
Dye, T.R.: Understanding Public Policy, 3rd edn. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall (1987)
Grandori, A.: A prescriptive contingency view of organizational decision making. Adm. Sci. Q. **29**, 192–209 (1984)
Kingdon, J.W.: Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies. Little Brown, Boston (1984)
Knoepfel, P., Larrue, C., Varone, F.: Analyse et pilotage des politiques publiques. Helbing & Lichtenhahn, Basel (2001)
Lindblom, C.E.: The science of muddling through. Public Adm. Rev. **19**, 78–88 (1959)
Lindblom, C.E.: Politics and Markets: The World's Economic System. Basic Books, New York (1977)
Lindblom, C.E.: Still muddling, not yet through, Public Adm. Rev. **39**, 517–552 (1979)
Lindblom, C.E.: The policy making process, 2nd edn., Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall (1980)
Lindblom, C.E., Cohen, D.K.: Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving. Yale University Press, New Haven (1979)
MacKenzie, W.J.M.: Choice and Decision. In: McGrew, A.G., Wilson, M.J. (eds.) Decision Making: Approaches and Analysis, pp. 16–18. Manchester University Press, Manchester (1982)
March, J.C., Olsen, J.P.: Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo (1979)
March, J.C., Olsen, J.P.: Democratic Governance, Free Press, New York (1995)
Marks, G., Hooghe, L.: Unraveling the central state, but how? Types of multi-level governance. Am. Polit. Sci. Rev. **97**(2), 233–243 (2003)
Mény, Y., Thoenig, J.P.: Politiques Publiques. PUF, Paris (1989)
Parsons, W.: Public Policy: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham-Northampton (1995)
Putnam, R.D., Leonardi, R., Nanetti, R.: Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton University Press, Princeton (1993)
Regonini, G.: Capire le politiche pubbliche. il Mulino, Bologna (2001)
Simon, H.A.: Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-making Processes in Administrative Organizations. Macmillan, New York (1947)
Wildavsky, A.: Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis. Little Brown, Boston (1979)

Chapter 2
Who Decides? Actors and Their Resources

Abstract In public policy analysis the actors and their behaviours represent the core of any possible theoretical model. The analysis therefore starts with the definition of the actor and by a presentation of the different goals he can pursue. Then the types of resources used in the interaction are specified and this makes it possible to classify the actors into five groups. After a presentation of the different roles the actors can play in the process the attention is shifted to the decisional networks and to their different properties.

Keywords Policy actors · Resources · Networks · Complexity

2.1 Who are the Actors?

The first, essential, step of a public policy analysis approach to the study of decision-making, is to identify the actors.

In order to understand what happened or what might happen in a decisional process, the first question we have to ask is about who has contributed or could contribute to its development and outcome by adopting the relevant behaviours.

To answer the question "who are the actors?" by stating the **actors** are the ones who act is less tautological than it might appear.

This definition tells us that not everyone who has an interest in acting nor whoever should act is necessarily an actor. The actors are only those who actually act. Of course, the fact there are people interested (the *stakeholders*) is important, because they could behave, after the decision has been taken, in such a way as to cause consequences for the outcome. The actors, therefore, will have to take into account the chances of further reactions in so far as they can be anticipated. However, those who are absent cannot be considered actors, just like their "non-actions" are not part of the public policy.

B. Dente, *Understanding Policy Decisions*, PoliMI SpringerBriefs,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9_2,

It is even more important to understand that actors are not only those and all those who should take part in the process, as stated by the rules that in contemporary countries define the ways in which public policy making should take place.

As regards the first aspect, it is common experience that a wide range of subjects participate in public decisions although they are not actually legally entitled to do so; actually, in many cases these interventions are actually unlawful and represent a crime that can be sanctioned by a court. However, this type of behaviour is often very important and in some cases predictable and expected. Corruption, namely the attempt to influence public decisions promising money or other advantages to a bureaucrat or a politician, is as old as the hills and is considered totally normal in some political systems, although fortunately, this is not always the case. Anyhow, the participation of actors who are "not foreseen" by the regulations can be, and often is, perfectly lawful: the committee that protests against the construction of a parking lot or an expert who suggests a specific policy decision, are an added value for the process, often able to improve the final decision in the collective interest.

As regards the second aspect, it is important to notice that even if a public administration is legally bound to intervene in a process, this does not mean it actually will or that the intervention will be significant or able to influence the final outcome. For example, the concession for the use of a public good (a beach to establish a bathing establishment or a sidewalk for the tables of a café) usually depends on the administrative body that is in charge state property; this office, however, doesn't have any particular interest in deciding who to assign the good to, as far as all the applicants fulfil the necessary requirements and the price to be paid is already determined by regulations. Therefore, during the initial phase of the decisional process, the subject formally responsible for the decision may not actually play an important role, limiting its duties to drafting the final act, like a notary in a contract between private parties. The real decisional process in fact, could take place between other subjects and acknowledges the decision made by others, e.g. influential politicians.

This is an important clarification, since one of the most common mistakes is to restrict the analyses, especially when acting in a prescriptive logic, to the subjects that should participate, simply because the regulations say so. Too often the answer the question "how is land use decided?" is a mere paraphrase of the planning law. This type of mistake is called *methodological constitutionalism*, i.e. the idea that laws describe how public policy processes are carried out. Hence, a series of proposals to transform the legal procedures to make them coincide with an ideal decisional model. Actually, laws only prescribe (and more often prohibit behaviours and assign certain advantages to specific actors, but there is a large area in which they don't want to and cannot intervene. From this point of view, the analysis of decisional processes is a sort of *empirical constitutionalism*, namely a way to understand how real world processes are carried out (for the distinction, see Hjern and Hull 1982).

One last warning that at this point is probably unnecessary: of course, the decision not to intervene in a decisional process is sometimes an important factor

to be considered in order to explain the results, therefore whoever makes this decision is an actor. In fact, it can be the result of interactions with other subjects, an act of will that has a specific goal. However, inaction can also be explained by a series of reasons that have nothing to do with the decision not to act: the simple unawareness that a decisional process is taking place, the lack of preferences, the idea that one's participation is totally irrelevant, and so on. In all these cases, the *stakeholder*, who could theoretically be interested in the results, and the actor, do not coincide.

Having said that, and considering what we already mentioned in the previous chapter regarding the fact that rational actions address a goal (they are *purposive* to use Herbert Simon's definition), it is clear that only single individuals can be actors, only women and men acting for a certain reason. If a dog attacks a politician, stopping him from participating in a meeting in which an important decision will be made, it will surely influence the outcomes of the process, but certainly will not become an actor for this reason. If anything, the person who set the dog on the politician to hinder his participation could be an actor, even if his attempt is not successful.

It is however common experience that most individual actions in public policy decisional processes are carried out on behalf of other subjects. After all, as noted by Scharpf (1997, p. 12), in most cases it would be completely impossible to explain decisional processes if we had to investigate the reasons of every single individual taking part in the process.

It is therefore necessary to try and understand when the action can be referred to a higher entity than the acting individual, to what we can call a composite or collective actor.

The criterion we must use is quite simple: a group of subjects can be considered a collective actor if the mechanisms governing the interaction among the members of the group are sufficiently stable and binding to make sure everyone acts in the interests and for the goals of the superior unit, and not for their own.

First of all, this means that we cannot report decisions within policy processes to simple aggregates of individuals that act autonomously and only pursue their own individual goals, even when these coincide for various reasons. We can therefore affirm that the electorate is not an actor, and neither are farmers, artists nor, as we will see, the public opinion.

On the contrary, and starting from one end of an ideal continuum, public or private organizations can be considered policy actors if they respect two basic conditions: there has to be sufficient internal consistency and a collective control of the resources used. The same goes for public institutions, as stated by March and Olsen (1989, p. 17).

At the end of the day, the problem is empirical: we must observe if, in the specific situation, all those acting on behalf of the collective actor adopt a type of behaviour that can be referred to a specific and not contradictory group of goals. For instance, if all the departments of a municipality dealing with the same issue behave consistently, it is totally reasonable to assume that the actor is the municipality. But if, on the contrary, they implicitly or explicitly have

contradictory positions, we must assume that the actors are single departments and not the municipality as a whole.

The most difficult analytical problem occurs when it is not possible to assume there is a central control on the use of the action resources, meaning when the single members of the collective actor maintain the freedom to take part in the collective effort or not. This happens especially in *coalitions* (where single members do not even have the same goals) or in *social movements*, where members are free to participate or not, even if they certainly have common interests.

In the first case, even if it is true that the long-term advantages of participation in a coalition can facilitate agreements, as stated by Scharpf, and therefore indirectly introduce a collective control on resources, it is still safer to treat the single members of the coalition as actors, both in a descriptive and predictive way; by doing this, it is easier to understand under which conditions each of them will be led to defection.

On the contrary, as regards social movements, it is reasonable to assume that the movement's leadership is or may be a policy actor until it remains compact, and that the participation of single individuals can be a resource (often the main one) for leadership itself when interacting with the other participants.

To conclude, we can say that for a collective actor to be such, it must have its own preferences that will be different from the single preferences of its members. This depends on the following conditions (Scharpf 1997, pp. 60–66):

1. there must be a form of *self-interest* at the level of the major unit, meaning the conditions for its survival, autonomy and development must be clear;
2. those who act on behalf of the collective actor must be aware of and respect any formal or informal rules;
3. there must be a minimum *collective identity* shared by the members and this will make it easier to define the preferences of collective actors in a decisional process.

However, even under these conditions, we cannot exclude that the representatives of the composite actor have interests and goals that contrast with the organization, thus not identifying with it and breaking the formal or informal rules they should respect. When we say that a politician has no "sense of the State", we actually mean that he doesn't care about the collective interests he should represent, but only about his own or about those of the faction he belongs to. This actually happens quite often and the difficulty of empirical research—and even more of the attempts of guiding an innovation through the complexity of the decisional process—lies in the fact that individuals often move away from the roles assigned to them and act on the basis of different goals from the ones of the organisations they represent.

This situation is often determined by the fact that these individuals have contradictory identities: the minister of a government is at the same time a representative of the state as a whole, the collaborator of the prime minister and a member of a political party; a member of the military is certainly obliged to follow

the government's indications, but he also has his own political points of view and is part of a social group to which he is linked by the *ésprit de corps*.

To conclude, the identification of who the "real actors" are is not easy at all and this is the reason why, in studying decisional processes, interviews with the actors do not aim to "understand what has really happened", as too often is believed and practiced, but to understand what goals they were actually pursuing.

2.2 The Actors' Goals

As we already mentioned, actors of decisional processes are rational, which means that we assume that their actions always aim to a certain goal, are purposeful.

It is reasonable to assume that not only is this aim consistent, but also in direct connection with their interests. Whether it be to earn money, improve their reputation, or to implement values that contribute to the definition of their identity, all actors act if they have reason to.

However, affirming that goals are defined by the interests that influence preferences only shifts the problem: where do these interests come from?

We cannot deal with an issue here that goes further beyond the economy of this volume, yet we must introduce at least two considerations.

The first, is that the preferences of a subject, that will define his/her goals in an interaction and therefore also in a decisional process, depend on how he/she perceives his/her own interests. It is one's perception of personal interests that determines preferences and not the "real" interests. It is certainly possible that not only I choose the wrong path to implement my preferences and my goals, but that I even believe it is in my interest to make a decision that will end up damaging me. This means that my perceptions can be wrong. The fact of consistently pursuing what I believe can be beneficial to me and choosing the alternatives that seem to be more appropriate to reach my goal does not make my behaviour less rational, even if my beliefs are fallacious.

The second remark is that, both at a macro and micro level, it is hard to believe that all our preferences are *exogenous* with respect to social interaction. It is certainly true that human beings have some basic needs that make survival impossible when they are not fulfilled, like eating, reproducing and so on. However, most of our preferences depend on a socialization process, on the fact that in a specific society and at a specific moment, we are offered a limited range of possibilities. As Wildavsky noted (1987, p. 4), we do not choose our preferences *à la carte*, but we can only choose one alternative among a small range of fixed-price menus. This means that preferences are endogenous with respect to social interaction and, as March and Olsen stated, (*Political preferences* are moulded through political experiences, or by political institutions).

In general terms, the further we move towards the micro level, the more it is reasonable to assume that actors' goals and preferences are exogenous. Actors approach the decisional process with a range of values, beliefs, experiences and

habits they built up long time before. Denying it would be silly and those theorists of deliberative democracy who say that the dialogue process established within an interaction can lead to a complete redefinition of actors' identity, preferences and positions, really do go over the top.

However, some preferences can be generated in the interactions of a decisional process. For instance, an actor's arrogant attitude often determines an equivalent and opposite reaction among the other participants, with a consequent radicalization of the conflict that could have been easily avoided; but it can also contribute to modifying other subjects' positions, shifting them from potential allies or observers to opposers.

This example is useful to highlight an important aspect that is underestimated too often or even ignored in decisional analyses. It is natural to assume that the subjects involved in the decisions of how to transform the treatment of a collective problem have preferences and goals as regards the problem itself and/or the solution to adopt. We call these goals **content-related goals**. However, one of the peculiar features of political systems in which policy making processes take place, is that interactions always have to do with how authority and public power are shared. This means that often enough, the goals of policy actors have nothing to do with the problem, but are essentially linked to their relations with the other actors. The alternative solution they tend to prefer is not chosen on the basis of its capacity to meet the need, the demand or the opportunity at the basis of the decisional process, but for the consequences it has on resources and on other participants' positions. These goals are called **process-related goals**.

An environmentalist group fighting for the protection of a natural area, and a real estate operator who wants to build a hotel there, will only clash on their definition of what the basic value to pursue is, of what the problem is: environmental protection or economic exploitation. But the game will most probably change if we bring this controversy within the political system: whatever the preference of the majority of public authority that has to make the formal decision, the opposition will tend to support the other side of the conflict, to weaken political competitors. The preferences of opposer groups will be endogenous to the process and referred to the relations with the majority, rather than to the collective problem.

The difference between content-related and process-related goals is an essential aspect that political scientists tend to take for granted and that, on the other hand, scholars studying public decisions from other points of view (e.g. economists) tend to ignore. In policy making processes, actors sometimes have and other times don't have both preferences and goals as regards the substantive issue (problem and/or solution) and their relations with other actors. The influence of process-related goals is often a key factor when explaining the outcomes, the success or failure of the attempts to change public policies. Ignoring this aspect is often the main cause of the reform failures.

2.3 The Actors' Resources

Before a further analysis of who actors are and of the dynamics through which they participate in decision-making, we must discuss the resources they use.

It is quite obvious that, for an actor to be able to actually shape the results of a decisional process, his actions should, at least potentially, be able to generate relevant effects for the other participants in the decision. The fact that the solution he/she proposes is the best possible one, is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to make his/her action effective. The history of public policies is full of failures depending on the fact that some alternatives, that should have solved the problem, and that were present on the intellectual market, were not even considered, or were brutally defeated, due to the fact they were proposed by subjects who were incapable of capturing other participants' attention. Just like having the nuclear bomb is useless if you have no way to deploy it near your enemy, and far away from you, the same goes if you have a great idea that will not change the world unless you are able to share it, disseminate it, to open a debate and so on.

In order to understand how and when actors are able to effectively intervene in a policy making process, we can use the concept of **political exchange**. It has been defined (Coleman 1964, Chap. 6) as the ability of actor A, who can control outcome X, which is of interest to actor B, to influence the latter, who can in turn control outcome Y, which is of interest to actor A. It is easy to understand how this concept is widely based on the idea of power, considered as the ability to influence other actors (actor B's behaviour can only be explained as a result of actor A's behaviour), adding the consideration that this is due to actor A's capacity to generate results that actor B is interested in.

These capacities are action resources (or actors' resources), that consist of the transfer of any good that has a value for the receiver.

One of the main features of action resources is their replaceability: the problem of not having a certain good in a sufficient quantity can be solved by replacing it with something else. What counts is the ability to contribute to the determination of the behavioural change of whoever is, metaphorically, on the other side of the table, and this can be achieved by altering the distribution of various goods. We will use the examples reported in the following pages to further clarify this concept.

A complete classification of action resources is probably impossible and anyway, it would end up being a long list of very different elements, like physical strength or beauty, that are not necessarily part of policy interactions. The typology we will introduce in this paragraph is deliberately brief and does not take into account some important elements. Before introducing it, we must at least underline one omission.

The possibility to resort to violence is surely an action resource, even in the field of public policies: the threat of organized crime can have consequences on a series of policies, from waste disposal (in many countries this is a "dirty business" in many respects) to land use, public procurements, gambling regulation and so on.

If the Mayor of a municipality knows that making or not making a certain policy decision threatens his own and/or his family's safety, he will certainly be pushed to act accordingly. And obviously the use or the threat of violence is an important element in relations between countries or between the State and specific social groups: war and violent repression of dissent are common practices in conflict resolution. The monopoly of legitimate violence is part of the actual idea of state (that does not necessarily mean the state will always use it legitimately or for the common good).

However, in contemporary democracies the resort to or the threat of violence, whether it be legitimate or illegitimate, is not normally used to introduce or hinder a policy transformation. Even organized crime, that can be a significant actor in many cases, usually tends to use less bloody resources when relating to the public authorities, (like the control on voting or corruption, for instance), whereas it uses violence mostly to solve its internal problems, or to threaten private citizens.

Therefore, we will only highlight four types of resources that are easy to distinguish and are the most common in public policy processes: political resources, economic resources, legal resources and cognitive resources.

2.3.1 Political Resources

Political resources are the amount of consensus an actor is able to get. It can refer to the whole population or to specific social groups involved in the different public policies. It can be confirmed through elections or referendums, it can be modified through information and communication campaigns and often suffers from external events (a particularly ferocious murder alters the consensus to policies to combat crime). It can derive from countless factors: charisma or personal status of the policy actor, ideology of who grants it and who receives it, recognition of the fact that an actor has the intellectual capacities to tackle a policy problem, perception of the convenience of the proposed options, or simply tradition.

This is a fundamental resource for all public policy decisional processes, if what we said in the previous chapter is true, namely that the chances of changing the ways a collective problem is solved, whether it be big or small, depend on whether the actors involved in the process are able to reach an agreement. In democratic governments, consensus towards the elected representative is the basis of their legal powers and explains citizens' level of trust in political and administrative institutions. It is the general loss of trust in the public authorities' capacities to solve collective problems, which in turn depends on the crisis of political ideologies of the XIX century (liberalism, socialism, Christian democracy) and on the disappearance of traditional legitimation (meaning, the natural respect for those who have important positions), that highly increases the importance of all those subjects able to modify a policy actor's consensus and political resources. The often obsessive attention that politicians have for the media, can also be explained as follows: they know that their ability to influence policy decisions not only

depends on the choices they are promoting, but also, and especially, on the idea citizens and social groups have of their personal characteristics, of their integrity, their determination and so on.

The availability of political resources is essential from the specific point of view of the policy innovator, the actor who tries to transform in a non-marginal way the treatment of a collective problem. We can somehow say that all the other resources are important only if they are able to turn into consensus during the political exchange, meaning they gather other participants' agreement as regards the opportunity to make the decision. Whether they do it because they rationally believe it is the best possible solution to implement their preferences, because they fear reprisals or simply because they trust who suggests the decision, the result does not change: what counts is that at the end of the process, the innovator's political resources exceed the minimum threshold that is necessary to take and implement the decision.

For example, show business people's commitment to humanitarian campaigns is aimed to increase popular consensus towards a cause, and therefore will be used by the promoters in order to persuade public authorities to adopt the policy decisions. From this point of view, the commitment of an actor like Richard Gere for the rights of the Tibetan people isn't very different from his colleague's, George Clooney, for the promotion of a coffee brand (and, actually, for the resolution of conflicts in Sudan): it is a matter of using the popularity and authority these people have to cause changes in politicians or consumers' behaviour.

However, we must remember that resources have to be important for those who receive them: if an individual already has a huge amount of a certain type of resource, then he/she probably won't be interested in having any more. The newly elected politician, who received the majority of the votes, probably won't be excessively worried to make unpopular decisions, exactly like the Pope will not see his authority decrease due to his very controversial position against the use of stem cells for scientific research. On the contrary, two opposing political coalitions in an electoral competition cannot be too queasy in accepting the support of heterogeneous social groups, even if this will almost surely have dysfunctional consequences on the government capacity of the winning party: even a minimum amount of consensus can in fact be decisive for the outcome of the elections.

2.3.2 Economic Resources

Economic and financial resources consist of the ability to mobilize money or any form of wealth in order to modify other actors' behaviour. What we just said is applicable here too, meaning that what counts is the importance of the wealth for whoever receives it: it is absolutely impossible to modify the position of a billionaire by promising a few hundred Euros and the same consideration applies, whatever the amount is, for all those actors whose personal enrichment is not a relevant objective.

But this also means that simply fact of having money is not a sufficient condition to predict the importance of a specific actor in a decisional process: the almost unlimited availability of economic resources of a multinational company does not make it particularly important in a policy process in which fundamental values or collective identities are at stake.

The fact that an individual became very rich through his work, is more likely to increase his credibility, his political resources, generating comments like "if he was able to do this, it means that he has exceptional abilities, qualities that make his reform proposals trustworthy and persuasive". Surely, there can also be an opposite reaction: many people tend to be suspicious of those who become too rich too soon. In these examples, anyway, it would be totally inappropriate to state that economic resources are playing a role.

This is somehow true also as regards the instrumental use of wealth. For sure, if you have money you can buy useful resources to make innovation proposals better and more attractive. The possibility to invest a lot of money in the design of a solution, mobilizing well known and expensive experts, can certainly improve its quality and consequently its external communication, thus modifying public opinion. In these cases, the effectiveness of economic resources is only indirect: it depends on the importance of the other resources that can be acquired. In fact, sometimes we can obtain the improvement of the quality and or external communication of projects without a huge amount of resources. For example, the development of electronic communication, of the Internet and of the World Wide Web, dramatically reduced the cost of knowledge and mobilization of consensus. Just think of the success obtained by Linux, an *open source* operating system, developed with the mobilization of a community of IT experts who worked practically as volunteers and effectively overcame the huge investments of ICT multinationals. Or think of the possibility offered by the Internet to organize information and communication campaigns with a minimum use of resources. Many actors already started exploiting these opportunities in tackling collective problems.

Economic resources are actually important since they can be used directly to influence the behaviour of the subjects whose agreement is useful to make the decision possible and effective. They are therefore part of the political exchange.

The easiest example refers to a public authority that promises to transfer resources to another body in order to overcome the dissatisfaction about a controversial choice: this is what happens during environmental conflicts when compensations are offered. But the same goes for the incentives, used to stimulate the behaviour of private firms that is essential in order to achieve some objectives (from the diffusion of green technologies for energy production to the establishment of new factories in the case of development policies). And finally, corruption is a typical example of how money can be used to influence the behaviour of political and governmental authorities.

It is in these situations that the availability of economic and financial resources represents an important condition to make and implement policy decisions.

This explains why reforms often take place in historical periods in which the level of public expenditure does not represent a big constraint for decision makers. In this case it is much easier to "buy" the consensus of potential counter-interested parties by using lateral payments, through long transitional periods, or other similar and expensive arrangements. The same happens if the promoters are private subjects: an industry with strong perspectives of expanding its business will be more inclined to change its investment decisions to obtain a policy change, than an industry fighting for survival in a shrinking market.

We must immediately add however, that the potential enrichment effect of the target groups, that leads them to change their behaviour in the desired direction, can be achieved with different resources besides money. For example, if important politicians support an entrepreneurial initiative, that generates business enlargement perspectives, this could lead a company to grant the public authority its consensus, or the know-how needed to implement a policy transformation: in this case, the political resources of the public authority determine the same effect as a financial transfer. But the clearest example refers to when enrichment takes place thanks to a regulatory change: the transformation of the regulation that establishes land-use, definitely generates important economic consequences for the owners of the areas that used to be agricultural and then became residential, without the need for the public authority to invest its own money. Of course, the promise of such a transformation has important consequences on relations among urban policy actors.

2.3.3 Legal Resources

With this last example we have approached the theme of legal resources. We consider legal resources as the advantages or disadvantages, attributed to particular subjects by legal regulations and in general by legislative and administrative authority's decisions.

Examples of legal resources are:

- the fact that according to the law, a certain duty is entrusted to a specific office (competence principle);
- the fact that certain behaviour is forbidden and violations are sanctioned;
- the fact that any individual has the possibility to challenge in front of a judge a public authority decision that violates his rights;
- the fact that the sequence of the activities needed to reach a legally valid decision is strictly predetermined (existence of formal procedures).

Ever since the rule of law was established after the American and French revolutions of the 18th century, all these situations, as well as many others, have been considered very important because they contribute to the definition of how policies are "made" and to determine, as a consequence, the outcomes of many decisional processes.

However, in order to understand the real importance of this matter, we must distinguish between **jus** and **lex** (*droit* and *loi* in French, *derecho* and *ley* in Spanish, *Recht* and *Gesetz* in German, *diritto* and *legge* in Italian).

It is not just a lexical distinction, although words are important, and the fact that it is difficult to explain in the lingua franca of public policy analysis (English) has led many authors to underestimate its importance (Dente 2009).

In organised societies the **lex** is a regulatory act, prescribing a certain type of behaviour, approved by a legitimate authority: the Senate in ancient Rome, the king in absolute monarchies, the Parliament in democratic/representative regimes. These acts carry out all the above mentioned activities: they give advantages or disadvantages to some subjects (for example, they define the legal competence to take care of a problem), they define the behaviours that are forbidden and specify the applicable sanctions, and they prescribe the procedures a citizen has to follow in order to obtain a judicial redress.

Jus, on the other hand, is not only the set of existing laws, but also a corpus containing the principles according to which laws should be interpreted. The distinction between **jus** and **lex** does not coincide with the distinction between constitutional laws (rules on how to make laws) and ordinary laws: even constitutional laws have to be interpreted in the light of the principles of jus, as they consolidated throughout a long evolution, with the works of legal doctrine and jurisprudence (that take part in the creation of jus). It will then be up to constitutional courts, where they exist, to use these principles to decide whether a specific ordinary law violates the constitution or how it has to be interpreted to avoid this conflict.

The principles of jus aren't written in any law, and anyway, even when this does occur, it is not terribly important. The rules *pacta sunt servanda* (respect agreements) or *nemo ad factum cogi potest* (no one can be forced to do something) are valid, regardless of the fact that the Civil Code regulates contracts, or that slavery was abolished a long time ago and is nowadays a crime. To make an example that all those dealing with public law know very well, the three "defects" that make an administrative act illegitimate (incompetence, law violation and excess of power) were elaborated by the jurisprudence of the supreme administrative courts and, only afterwards, became part of the law.

This does not mean that jus is immutable. It also changes, but very slowly and not because the change of the laws. Jus is not a resource at the actors' disposal: it defines the boundaries within which interactions take place, it is part of the decisional context and contributes to the meaning and value of laws as defined above. The attempts to change the principles of jus through an act of political will often face difficulties and resistance: just think of how slow many countries are in moving towards federalism, or how slowly typical traditions of administrative law states are being abandoned notwithstanding repeated efforts.

On the contrary, the lex is a real resource of the actors that can be used selectively and the use of which depends on the interests and goal to pursue. "Methodological constitutionalism's" mistake is to imagine that what is foreseen by law is the description of how the public policy processes actually work. Laws

need to be acted, and the "law in use", meaning the use made by the single actors of legal resources, is what actually counts in the decisional processes.

The various and different situations we find in the analysis of public policies confirm this conclusion.

- First of all, an actor can decide not to use the legal resources available due to the simple fact that it is not convenient. For example, a subject not appealing against the administration's illegal behaviour, (that the Court would almost definitely sanction), because the costs (in terms of money, time and stress) involved would exceed the benefits of receiving recognition of one's rights. This means that public and private subjects often adopt illegal behaviour simply because they know there are no counter-interested subjects that will object or might profit by using the law to modify, or to sanction, this behaviour. This is a very common situation in public policies: for example, the law stating that in Italian Universities the student fees cannot exceed 20 % of the state grant is often ignored, since the central government is interested in decreasing public expenditure and academic authorities can reach agreements with student representatives about how to use the resources generated by an increase of the fees above the legal threshold without the risk of being sued.
- Secondly, the decision as how to use legal resources also depends on the other resources participants can use. For example, if an innovator knows that he will need the cooperation of other actors in the policy implementation phase, to force the decision by using its own legal prerogatives would be a bad strategy, since in the best of cases it risks generating a partial and reluctant cooperation. In other words, the importance of political resources can greater, in a given situation, than legal resources.
- Moreover, as all lawyers know, law is not a set of inflexible rules that bind all participants' behaviour. Jus, usually recognizes the discretionary power of public administrations, that can make the application of rules more flexible, for example extending the level of tolerance of a forbidden behaviour, in exchange of the promise of a better future implementation, or allowing the people involved to take part in the decisional process. Examples could continue, for instance recalling the fact that in *multi-level-governance* situations, which characterize contemporary policy making processes, all participants have legal powers, and the possibility to decide depends on the will of all the parties to reach a compromise on what features cannot be derogated and which ones can be changed according to the needs. After all, it would be naive is to consider the "State", meaning the public power, as a totally predictable monolithic unit: it is actually composed by a set of different institutional subjects, each with a certain degree of legitimacy, but with very different missions. Whoever believes that simply changing the rules is enough to avoid conflicts among institutions will surely be disappointed, and, after all, it is not certain that the unity of command is always a good idea.
- Finally, the fact that laws are actors' resources has another main characteristic: they can be produced during the policy making process. There are policy actors,

in fact, that are in a special situation, meaning that on one side they are bound by existing rules, but on the other they can "make laws", meaning that they are able to modify rules in order to modify the interaction outcomes. The clearest example is probably the recourse to the so-called "external constraint", a situation when governments commit to establish strict rules at international level in order to overcome internal oppositions. But the possibility to intervene in decisional processes through the production of legal resources that will later be used by the actor producing them is even wider and represents a fundamental prerogative of public authorities.

To conclude: we spoke enough about this matter as it represents, one of the most important and peculiar aspects of the public policy analysis, along with a few more elements (distinction between content-related and process-related goals, that we already spoke about, and the importance of the content of the decision in determining the process outcome, that we will see later). We have to emphasize this point: after distinguishing between *lex* and *jus,* the correct way to deal with laws is to consider them actual resources available to each participant of the policy process, whose importance derives from their use and whose absence can be replaced by political consensus, money or, as we will see, knowledge.

2.3.4 Cognitive Resources

The last type of resources that can be mobilized in decisional processes are cognitive resources, meaning the availability of important information or conceptual models for the decisional process.

Knowledge is a required element to make appropriate decisions and this is implicit in various theorizations about the decisional process.

The rational model that we discussed in the previous chapter clearly links the possibility to choose the best alternative to having the best possible information about the available alternatives and the associated costs and benefits. Max Weber's theory about the role and importance of bureaucracy is based on the fact that it has a specialized knowledge in treating public affairs (Weber 1922). The need for bottom-up participation that characterizes many modern approaches to economic and social development starts from the need to exploit "local knowledge" that would otherwise be lost (Barca 2009, pp. 25–27).

However, we should not believe that this pervasiveness of knowledge as an input in decisional processes is totally obvious. The 7th president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, stated that governing a State is so "plain and easy" that any person with normal intelligence, and with no specific preparation, could do it. It is interesting to note that this theory was, and somehow still is, at the basis of the democratic paradigm and of the principle of public office appointment, and was used by Jackson to justify clientelism and the so-called *spoils system*, namely the appointment of officers on a political basis.

After all, the limits to "scientific" knowledge in policy processes were highlighted a long time ago in literature (Majone 1989; Lindblom and Cohen 1979; Nowotny 1990; Weiss 1977, 1980).

However, in the contemporary age characterized by the complexity and uncertainty of collective problems (and we need to remind what we already pointed out: this uncertainty is also an unwelcome consequence of the increase of knowledge, that highlights relations among phenomena that were previously considered independent, with the consequence that their evolution is hard to predict), the importance of scientific and technological knowledge, but also of social and political phenomena, is constantly reaffirmed.

The imperative of "know before deliberating", that Luigi Einaudi, the first president of the Italian republic, preached as a vital requirement, gives meaning and value to all important knowledge for the solution of a collective problem. It is therefore natural to think that actors who have such knowledge are in a better position in pursuing their goals compared to actors who do not have it. However, the rules of the political exchange even apply to knowledge: they are important only if and in so far as they are important for the actor receiving them, and they can be replaced, or counterbalanced by other types of resources.

Differently from the culture defining the framework in which actors move (that is part of the decisional context), knowledge, just like consensus, money or legally recognized authority, only operates in the interaction among actors. The fact that experts can agree on the idea that a specific reform project of the government will be totally unable to achieve its goals, since it is intrinsically contradictory, since it doesn't consider fundamental aspects of the problem, since it is based on unrealistic statements about the target group behaviour, or for any other reason, can be totally irrelevant for its adoption, if it formed the object of a long political negotiation and the main actors see it as the only possible mediation. The history of public policies contains various examples of these "reforms" that are not able to change anything essential, but are approved anyway because they are the only thing it is possible to agree upon.

And it isn't even necessary for the knowledge to be correct to ensure its importance in a decisional process, as long it is regarded as such. For example, in Great Britain, in the field of education policy it was for a certain period mandatory to create classes homogeneous from the point of view of the level of intellectual abilities, measured with the so-called intelligence quotient. Supported by psychological and pedagogic theories and researches, the idea was that a student could learn more if in a group of classmates who were neither more nor less intelligent than him/her. This was clearly a controversial theory, because it favoured the segregation of students from poor families, ethnic minorities or disadvantaged socio/cultural contexts. The controversy was temporarily solved thanks to cognitive resources, scientific studies that "proved" the superiority of this solution, but that later were found to be unreliable because of the statistical methodologies employed. It is possible to find dozens of similar situations and not only in the field of social sciences—just think about economic policies—but also in "hard" sciences: the anti-seismic regulation, for example, was the object of very harsh scientific debates

among experts, because some of them contested the correctness of the criteria adopted, urged by other experts, in guaranteeing the safety of buildings.

Since the importance of resources is proved by their use within the interaction, it is actually impossible to say what is, or is not, important knowledge in policy processes. Basically, any form of knowledge can be important for a specific actor and might contribute to modify his behaviour. The previous reference to "local knowledge" is a clear example of how even apparently marginal aspects can be important and how, after all, the importance of knowledge also and mostly depends on the interlocutors' ignorance: a real estate operator who makes a proposal for a new building is not necessarily familiar with specific features of that territory but the surrounding residents are. An example could be the proposal to build a water purification plant exactly in the same spot where a ferocious Nazi massacre took place during the Second World War and that, for this reason, was particularly important for all the inhabitants of the area.

In order to enrich the toolbox of the analyst of decisional processes and help understand what kind of knowledge was used, or would be needed, in a specific case, it can be useful to create a classification dividing resources in three different groups: data and information, theories and models and knowledge about the process.

- **Data and information** are certainly important resources. Having reliable statistics on a population or a territory, being able to quantify costs and expected outputs of a specific technology, or to measure the level of satisfaction of the beneficiaries of a policy or of the users of a service, are certainly all elements that can be important in decisional processes. Indirect proof of this statement is the quite obsessive attention newspapers and media pay to information that can be quantified. The scientific and objectivity aura attributed to figures shows how the importance of raw data can be absolutely essential also for communication, even when they mean very little. For example, a factor that strongly influenced the intergovernmental relations in many countries, especially in the past, was the fact that even the smallest municipality was able to claim having relevant information about its territory, that higher authorities—Region or State—did not have and were not able to question. If used properly, this information could be crucial to obtain funds, hampering infrastructural decisions and, in general, modifying the power balance between centre and periphery. This is the reason why all policy actors—public authorities, but also other groups—try to increase their influence by collecting and/or producing data they are often jealous of and that are available to the actors only through very difficult negotiations.
- However, and this is the second element that forms the set of cognitive resources, data alone often do not mean much if not interpreted and set in **theories and models** that give a sense to numbers. Therefore the availability of these theories and models is an important resource for the actors which often means giving alternative explanations of the same set of data. A rise in public expenditure, or in the inflation rate, have very different meanings in a Keynesian or monetary approach to economic policies. The fact that there are less

enrolments in university can mean that the labour market is more attractive and therefore young people have better opportunities, but also that the university system lost in credibility and/or does not offer attractive courses. Knowledge, in this second definition, often comes in the form of more or less persuasive arguments, aimed at organizing information and guiding its interpretation in a specific direction, that coincides with the interests and goals some actor. Therefore, in policy making processes cognitive resources will tend to correspond to the role of the experts that we will talk about in the following paragraph.

- The third and last knowledge component that we need to highlight is knowledge about the decisional process itself. The ability to correctly conceptualize the ways through which it is possible to achieve the modification of a public policy, by identifying the actors who participate in the interaction and their specific characteristics, and in general understanding their dynamics and forecasting the possible outcomes: all these aspects are essential resources for a policy innovator. This specific type of knowledge is called **strategic knowledge** and we will discuss it again in the following pages.

2.4 Rationality of Action and Types of Actors

After this necessary digression on resources we can go back to talking about the actors and their characteristics.

The starting point is that one of the fundamental features of policy processes in contemporary societies is **complexity**, namely the plurality of the points of view actors adopt in their interventions and of the criteria upon which they base their decisions. This is probably the main element of distinction between political processes and other types of social interactions: in fact, while in economic exchanges we tend to assume that the evaluation of the possible alternatives is basically homogeneous, and has directly or indirectly to do with the economic question "how much will I earn?", the same does not happen in the public sphere. It is in fact absolutely normal for the same problem to be analysed in utilitarian terms by some participants, ("is it worth it?"), in terms of value by some others ("is it correct?"), and in relational terms ("with who or against who should I act?") by others still. Utilities, values and relations can be very different even for single individuals, as noted by Vilfredo Pareto:

> Theologians and metaphysicians, out of a love for the absolute, which is one; moralists, in order to induce individuals to concern themselves with the good of others; statesmen, to induce the individual to confuse his own utility with the public utility; and other sorts of people for similar reasons use to reduce, sometimes explicitly, often implicitly, all the different utilities to one and one only.

All the more so, this plurality is recognizable in public policy decisional processes. This determines a complexity that is often considered the biggest difficulty

governments have to overcome. In particular, the existence of criteria to evaluate different and incommensurable alternatives sometimes makes it difficult to find an analysis procedure that is able to balance the needs of all participants. An attempt was made to create techniques able to face these decisional situations. So, instead of the cost-benefits analysis that translates all the alternatives in economic terms, looking for the one that maximises the so-called "net present value" (NPV), they proposed the multi-criteria analysis, with the aim to reach an evaluation of the convenience of an intervention considering various criteria, examined in an autonomous or interactive manner.

Without underestimating the usefulness of these techniques to structure the actors' decision, we must remember that the analysis can never replace the decision, but is only needed to help the actor to try and solve the problem. The mechanical application of any model is always somewhat arbitrary in weighting the importance of the various criteria and inaccurate in the evaluation of the consequences.

Moreover, this plurality of expected utilities and types of goals achieved is important, especially for the fact that each one of them is often associated to a specific style of intervention, a series of constraints regarding how one's relation with the other participants is structured, a specific way of analyzing the decisional situation.

We call these styles "rationalities (or logics) of action", assuming that in order to simplify reality, and to make behaviour more predictable, it is possible to identify a limited number of typical action modalities that correspond to the different categories or types of actors that we find in policy processes.

These logics of action also contain what we sometimes call the actor's "general goals", meaning the basic preferences defined by his/her vision of the world and that, in turn, define the limits within which he/she identifies his/her mission. The goals that an actor will pursue within a specific decisional process also depend on that vision and that mission: they appear to be short-term, while general goals refer to a longer period of time than the single decisional process.

This is clearly an analytical shortcut. Each single participant in a decisional process has different characteristics, deriving from his history and can still behave unpredictably by breaking the rules he should theoretically respect. However, some simplification is necessary to make the matter manageable, and it is better to do it explicitly, to avoid the basic assumptions from being left in the background, making it very difficult to test how realistic they are.

In any case, to suggest a classification of the types of actors is needed in order to be able to measure the level of complexity of the decisional network, an indicator that summarizes the plurality of points of view and is useful to figure out of how large is the decisional "space", intended as the number of possible outcomes, for the policy innovator.

It is therefore necessary to find the clearest criterion on the basis of which we will make this classification. Many authors tend to suggest formal criteria, for instance the public or private legal nature, assuming it determines different logics and actions.

The most appropriate criterion derives instead from the consideration that in contemporary states public policy processes are codified. This means that regulations or the praxis almost always specify who must and who can intervene, and how the decision should be made. The idea is that the solution to a collective problem cannot be left to the spontaneous initiative of the first person to come along, but needs to follow a predictable process. In other words all interventions must be considered legitimate, which means that there must be recognition, on the basis of socially shared values, of the validity of the motivations that lie beneath each action.

The basic criterion we have adopt therefore regards the **nature of the claim to intervene in the process**. In the name of what general principle, should a specific actor expect other participants to take into consideration his goals, his point of view, his proposals? Why does he believe his intervention is legitimate or even necessary?

As we will see, sometimes this request is essentially based upon the fact that the actor has resources the other participants cannot legitimately go without. In other cases, what seems to stand out is the nature of the interest. But some claim of the legitimacy of one's intervention is always necessary, and constrains the actor's behaviour, both reducing what can be considered acceptable and influencing the ways he refers to other participants. We assume that this "claim of intervention" defines the style, rationality and logic of action of that specific actor and therefore, presumably, of all those who belong to the same category.

As often occurs, the classification is not strict, meaning that the same subject can be included in different categories and that his behaviour during the process can change as a consequence. However, the classification is an important tool for the analysis, since it allows to make plausible hypotheses about the reasons explaining the observed behaviour and, most of all, reliable predictions on the type of actions the subject will carry out during the process.

We can divide actors into five categories: political actors, bureaucratic actors, special interests, general interests and experts.

The first group includes **political actors**, who base their claim of intervention in decision-making the fact that they represent citizens, having a significant consensus both in general terms and, specifically, referred to the matter that is being discussed. Their idea is that in a democratic political system, decisions can't be made without popular consensus. This means that the elected representatives have and need to have access to the decisional arenas and the same goes for who speaks on behalf of a committee, a professional association, a social movement and, of course, a political party. In the claim of intervention there is a clear link to the type and quantity of resources that the subject has and is able to mobilize: he will claim a bigger role the bigger the consensus he attributes to himself and that the other participants acknowledge. This link to resources is valid also the other way round: political actors will obviously pay attention to changes in the public opinion, to all those factors, like the position of the mass media, that can influence the consensus and popularity they enjoy, and they will search for allies able to further enlarge their representativeness. The utility function of a political actor is fairly obvious,

mainly if he has to undergo the electoral test on a regular basis (like for political parties), and it is legitimate to think that in each circumstance he will choose the alternative that maximizes consensus. This is the main reason why the willingness to search and reach compromise is part of the political actor's logic of action. Since consensus is often associated to the fact that the subject is able to solve problems, the ability to reach the final agreement in a debate, even sacrificing non-essential political aspects, appears to be very important. And, finally, the decisional style of this category gives huge importance to communication, to the ability to publicly prove the importance of the actor's role during the process (or, on the contrary, to keep all the aspects that could weaken his consensus hidden).

Bureaucratic actors base their claim of intervention on the consideration that legal rules give them a specific responsibility in the decisional procedure, meaning that they have the formal competence to intervene. The basic hypothesis is that in administrative political systems with a high internal differentiation, rules have to clearly define who is entitled to take the decision, which procedures must be followed and which are the constraints regarding the content of the decision. This is the essence of the so-called legal-rational legitimation that, according to Max Weber characterizes the liberal state. Even though this feature can be explicitly associated to the liberal state era, in the following phases it still maintains a central importance for different reasons.

As a consequence, bureaucratic actors will justify all their actions on the basis of their interpretation of the law, on the observance of legally predetermined procedures and on the respect of the roles they defined. Refusal to intervene in a process will be motivated by the existence of legal limits to their action, while the content of the final decision will probably be presented as non-discretional. These features of the bureaucratic action rationality, to which we could add a natural vocation to confidentiality or even to secrecy, inevitably tend to collide with the other participants' orientation and in particular with political actors'. In fact, if we state that all choices are limited both in form and in content, accepting a compromise will be very difficult, and this is what happens when entering a negotiation process. This contradiction can be a key element in policy processes, if only we think that in democratic/representative states it is totally normal for those appointed to positions with legal authority, therefore bound to laws, to have political legitimation. The mayor of a municipality is elected by citizens to exercise powers assigned by a legislation that contains various and strong limits to how he can use them.

In the interpretation of a specific decisional process it is therefore absolutely necessary to understand if and how the actions of a mayor, for example, can be interpreted in a political logic or in a bureaucratic logic: it will often be a mix of both, but one of the problems, both in predicting or explaining, is to understand which style tends to prevail and how the contradiction is solved.

One last consideration: it is normal to think that the image of the bureaucrat we presented here is actually connected to the liberal state phase, where regulatory policies and the respect of freedom and individual rights prevailed. In modern welfare states, on the other hand, in which the emphasis is on public services and

on the satisfaction of expressed needs, and on innovation, the bureaucrat is a manager, more similar to a professional or to an expert and works with different logics. This is certainly at least partly true, but the fact that most of the ways to solve collective problems are regulated by law has consequences and it extends the role of bureaucratic rationality even nowadays and in the predictable future. Just think about the growing role of Courts, at all levels, in defining public policies around the world: the Supreme Court of the United States introduced the right of a woman to interrupt her pregnancy, the Constitutional Court in Germany defined strict limits to the possibility to delegate important economic decisions to the European level, Italian administrative Courts are constantly called to assess policy decisions in various sectors, from the determination of electricity rates to the localization of public parking spaces. The law remains an important element in governing, so bureaucracy remains central in public policy decisional processes.

We can briefly analyse the third category of actors, namely **special interests**, who base their claim of intervention on the fact that the choice among the possible alternatives directly influences their interests, meaning they totally or partly bear the costs, and/or draw benefits from it. May they be firms, individuals, organizations representing specific categories, or people who live in a specific area, decisional processes often witness the intervention of subjects that try to influence the outcomes in a utilitarian logic. Even formally bureaucratic actors can behave like special interest groups, as pointed out by Niskanen (1971) when he stated that the main utility function of a bureaucrat is the enlargement of his available budget. The hypothesis upon which this category's claim of intervention is based, is that in contemporary societies, whoever has authority must consider the legitimate interests of citizens and social groups, and therefore the latter have the right, although not formalized by law, to represent their position in the public arena and defend themselves in any legally acceptable way. It is worth emphasizing how in this case there is no bi-univocal connection between the type of actor and type of resource: differently from politicians who need consensus, and from bureaucrats, who depend on law, special interests can indifferently use all types of resources that are important for the other participants. In any case, their logic of action is clear: they will try and maximize the benefits and minimize the costs, therefore they will choose the alternative that allows them to reach this goal. And since participation in the decisional process involves costs, they will be available to accept agreements and compromises according to their interest to conclude the process they are involved in.

General interests are those actors who, even without any political or legal legitimation, base their claim of intervention in the decisional process on the premise they represent subjects and/or interests that cannot defend themselves, that are not structurally able to act directly. Environmentalists, animal rights organisations, consumer protection organisations claim that, as the interests they represent cannot speak for themselves, they have the right, indeed the duty, to defend those interests and therefore represent them in all arenas where public policies are formulated or implemented. This is a spreading phenomenon in contemporary societies. There are foundations and NGOs that take care of the problems of poor

populations in the southern hemisphere, suggesting governments of developed countries how to shape development policies. There are civil society organizations (CSOs) that raise problems regarding privacy protection or public action transparency. The basic idea is that these issues all have in common the fact that they are matters of low interest for politicians, since they are problems that can only be solved in the long term and are difficult to translate in electoral consensus. The claim of intervention regards the fact that, on the contrary, it is necessary to protect these values to avoid them being totally neglected in contemporary political/administrative systems. This call to values, to "do the right thing", is fundamental, since it deeply influences the action of this category, usually not prone to compromise also because these actors often base their interactions on a claim of ethical superiority. This easily makes all the conflicts on the decisions that must be made when facing collective problems particularly harsh and inhibits chances of mediation. Moreover, since they state they give voice to subjects or interests that are structurally unable to participate in policy making processes, it is also terribly difficult to evaluate their representativeness: after all, it is impossible to define what the preferences of the future generations will be. This can have devastating consequences in all the cases where different organizations representing "general interests" have different positions, triggering a process that very often sees the prevalence of the most radical approaches refusing any compromise. Apart from what we just mentioned about the adopted decisional style, which is basically conflictual, the other recognizable elements regard the connection with resources. These organizations sometimes are able to mobilise relevant knowledge, but they usually base their action strategies on the use of political resources. Press campaigns, militant and visible actions (just think of Greenpeace), petitions, meetings and demonstrations, are the daily bread and butter of general interests. Also the use of legal resources (for example, class actions against polluters and/or public authorities that do not fulfil their control duties) have often the goal to publicize specific positions that influence the public opinion, essentially with the aim to generate a loss of consensus for public authorities, as they do not meet their requests. However, since these actors are mostly interested in ensuring the full legitimacy of the issues they worry about in front of the public authorities and the public opinion, they are always particularly sensitive to the possibility to formally or informally participate to public policy making, since such a step acknowledges the importance of their mission and of their vision of the world.

The last category of actors are the **experts**, who base their claim of intervention on the fact they have the necessary knowledge to structure the collective problem and/or to find the most appropriate alternatives to solve it. The underlying assumption is that only those who deal with these issues professionally have the appropriate expertise to make judgements, thus decisional processes must involve them as much as possible. It is totally natural to think that this category of actors follows a specific logic of action: respect of the scientific method to collect and elaborate the significant empirical evidence, availability to debate and peer evaluation, refusal of ideological bias and of everything that appears "non-scientific" or irrational. A point is particularly important. Disagreement between experts of

the same sector, as everyone who took part in a scientific meeting or a research group knows, can also be very harsh: the theories used can bring to very different interpretations of the same phenomena, different models of analysis of the same empirical evidence can suggest different conclusions, there can be disputes regarding the appropriateness of the available data. This is true for the so-called "hard" sciences and even more for social and human sciences: the same picture can be considered a masterpiece by an art critic and a total failure by another. This is the key of all scientific and intellectual debates and it represents one of the main factors that are able to ensure the progress of knowledge. New discoveries were possible only after the main theories were strongly criticized. However, when these scientific and doctrinal disputes emerge within a policy process, the expert has a difficult dilemma to solve: to him, it would be natural to criticize the definition of the problem or the solution proposed by a colleague, but then he would risk devaluate the importance of knowledge, and therefore of the claim to have the right and the duty to intervene and to be listened by political decision makers. The debate among experts that is perfectly acceptable in a scientific conference could be totally inappropriate and counterproductive if it were transposed in a policy making arena with the participation of many experts, as it would end up with decreasing their value. This kind of situation took place about 20 years ago at a preparatory conference of international scientific societies regarding the Rio de Janeiro Conference on sustainable development that put the problem of climate change at the centre of attention of worldwide governments. During the conference, experts who belonged to different important disciplines—like climatology, oceanography, atmospheric physics and so on—appeared to be in contrast and it seemed the conference could not reach a common proposal. However, in the last plenary session, an expert spoke to the assembly, reminding participants that there was more to agree on than to disagree on and that if scientific communities were unable to agree on their position, they would have left things in the hands of the governments who probably would have chosen to ignore them until it was too late to effectively face them. These events are obviously much more common in social sciences that are closer to public policy decisional processes. For example, the attempt to find acceptable alternatives to the dominant economic orthodoxy, monetarism, indicated as the co-responsible for the large financial crisis of 2008, did not have success till now, despite the fact that debates and meetings were organized to this end. Apparently, the truth is that good "non-orthodox" economists, who surely exist, only agree on the inadequacy of monetarism, but not on the available alternatives. The role of knowledge, and of experts in policy processes could be further analysed, recalling that there is often more than one important scientific discipline for a specific policy problem and each of them has its specific way of facing and solving the problem. So, for example, with the policy against industrial pollution, solutions also tended to depend on the fact that who guided the legislative and/or administrative activities were chemists (who privileged technological solutions that purified effluents from their most polluting elements), physicists (that proposed solutions able to increase gas dispersion in the atmosphere) or engineers (that favoured changes in the production technologies)

(see Dente et al. 1984). Or we can mention the data protection policy in Italy, where the appointment of a new head of the independent authority in charge of the matter substituting an experienced private law professor with a public law expert with a strong administrative experience, contributed to radically redirect the works of the authority, from a judicial approach essentially aimed at establishing the principles of protection through the answer to private citizens' complaints, to a totally different approach, based on regulations, inspections and sanctions (Righettini and Tassone 2009, p. 205).

Finally: the mobilisation of experts within policy processes is surely connected to their knowledge, but it is also necessary to underline how this often happens with the aim of increasing the political resources of who proposes (or opposes) a policy innovation. In other words, we shouldn't think that this category of actors could only take part in the creation of the solution to the collective problem. Actually, since they are able to strengthen, using their knowledge, a specific position, they are often involved to justify decisions that are already made instead of contributing to their elaboration. In this case, it is doubtful that they have different goals from their client's, and therefore that they are real actors and not simple political resources of some of the participants. But this is an empirical problem that only a close analysis of the specific decisional process can solve.

Summarizing what we stated in this paragraph, we can say that the **complexity of contemporary public policies** consists of the plurality and heterogeneity of the points of view represented within a policy making process. Complexity can be measured by classifying actors according to the nature of their claim to intervene in decisional processes, since it constrains the actors to specific types of behaviour and to the use of specific resources, meaning it defines their rationality or logic of action. Especially in a predictive key, but also in an explicative key, it simplifies the innovator and analyst's task in reconstructing the possible dynamic of the decisional process, reducing the range of possible options and providing a key to understand the actions observed.

2.5 The Scale of the Interests Involved

We can briefly talk about a further aspect that contributes to the definition of the total complexity of a decisional process.

We can summarize the matter as follows: actors belonging to the same category, who therefore act using the same logic of action, can act at different levels, which influences their interests and goals.

A political party that suggests a public policy at the national level supposing it will increase its appeal in the electors' eyes can be in conflict with its local section, for which this policy is disadvantageous, given the specific nature of the population of reference. For example, when the Conservative Party in Great Britain wanted to promote a strict policy to limit immigration, responding to its electors' concerns, the mayor of London, who was also a conservative, strongly opposed

this choice it since any limitation to the entry of foreign nationals entailed the danger of compromising the cosmopolitan character of the city and its attraction for talents from all over the world, an essential feature for maintaining its position as a "global city" it is, similar only to New York and may be Paris.

An industrial association that pursues a strategy for the liberalization of economic activities, by abolishing all restrictions to the creation of new enterprises, could enter into conflict with the firms that may suffer the competition of the new entries, thus loosing profit.

And of course, intergovernmental conflicts are common in contemporary states that see the intervention of a plurality of government levels on every important matter, each one of which has its own legal competences and democratic legitimation.

After all, at different scales, the same problems and the same solutions can be viewed in a radically different way: if for a regional government committed to the adoption of a plan for waste disposal, the creation a network of incineration plants on its territory is a very desirable solution to solve an environmental problem, the same proposal is negative for the quality life of the communities where these plants will be built.

The complexity of a process, defined as the plurality of possible points of view, must therefore not only consider the interests, goals and logics of action that the various categories of actors have, but also the dimension, from a local to global scale, of the interests themselves, since it has important consequences on the solution of collective problems.

Two last warnings.

First of all the global–local axis regards the territorial dimension, but it does not fully coincide with it. Actually, the conflict among territorial levels is just one aspect of a bigger genre, meaning the contradiction between general and special interests, or "particular" interests as Machiavelli wrote. Multi-level governance, as shown by Marks and Hooghe (2003) develops on two axes: one has to do with the geographical dimension, the other with the sectoral dimension. In other words, there is a hidden contradiction when breaking down any group in its components and the analyst has to take this into account, without supposing that the biggest dimension is always able to substitute the smaller one. In contemporary political systems, basic units are able to autonomously mobilize resources that the higher levels need, therefore the typical dynamic is interdependence, not hierarchy.

Finally, one of this volume's *leitmotivs* is that complexity not only is unavoidable but it can also represent an advantage from the policy innovator's point of view. The conflicts that are generated among the same types and the same level of actors are often so harsh they become unsolvable, also because they are zero-sum games. On the contrary, since a non-incremental transformation of the ways to deal with a collective problem is difficult and therefore rare, the existence of a plurality of points of view allows to imagine different possible approaches to the problem, different intervention methods, and different decisional procedures. That is, complexity increases the number of possible alternatives and is often an important asset.

This surely makes the analysis and the management of the decisional process more difficult, but this is inevitable if we don't want to run the risk of immobilism in the short term and stagnation in the long term.

2.6 The Actors Within the Process: The Roles

The heterogeneity of the actors, of their goals, of the interests they represent and of the resources they can mobilize makes the decision-making processes, and surely all the ones that tend to modify the status quo in a non-incremental way, different from each other.

This does not mean, however, that we cannot find even important regularities, as we already saw in the actors' logic of action. The same goes for the structure of the decisional process.

Similarly to what happens in the Commedia dell'Arte, where the masked types (masters, servants, lovers) are always the same regardless of the plot, in policy decisions it is possible to identify a limited number of roles that actors have.

For the purpose of this book, we can define the role as the function an actor fulfil within the process and that imply limits to its behaviour. We need to underline how the role is not linked to the categories in which we have classified the actors, but only to the ***dynamics*** of that specific process. This means that in different processes or even in the same process, the same role can be played by politicians, bureaucrats or any other kind of actor. Therefore each actor will have two different sets of constraints, one coming from the category and the other from the role. This should also simplify the analysis, especially in a predictive way, as regards the behaviour to expect during the interaction.

The recognizable roles are: promoter, director, opposer, ally, mediator, gate-keeper and filter.

The **promoter**, or initiator, is the actor who raises the problem, that states the need to intervene in order to modify the treatment of a collective problem and/or proposes a specific solution. One of the specific features of policy innovation processes, that represent the focus of our analysis, is that they can always refer to the existence of an innovator, of a subject that gives the first impulse to overcome inactivity. The two main features of this role are (a) content-related goals and (b) determination. As regards the first aspect, there is not much to say: it is almost inevitable that the preferences of who decides to start a transformation are essentially linked to the fact he believes the problem is important and the proposed solution is useful; this does not exclude the possibility of other reasons, linked to the relations with the other subjects, but in general who simply wants to appear will unlikely commit himself or herself to a difficult mission. As regards the second feature, perseverance and persistence seem to be vital conditions especially when the proposed transformation is radical and requires a prolonged effort. A successful promoter follows the advice that in *The Hotel New Hampshire,* Coach Bob gives his grandson who wants to become a professional athlete: "get obsessed

and stay obsessed" (Irving 1981, p. 121). The combination of these two elements, the almost obsessive focus on the merit of the proposal, is a common feature of many examples of public policy transformation, and it is probably one of shared characteristics of the public policy innovator and the private entrepreneur. In his history of the English civil service in the XIX century Parris created the "zealots" category to characterize the senior officers whose work identified with the reform of the policies they dealt with: Rowland Hill for the postal service, James Kay-Shuttleworth for the education policy, James Chadwick for public health (Parris 1969, Chap. 5). However, this obsessive attention to the innovation can also interfere with the initiative's success. Exactly because the promoter has content-related goals, usually regarding the problem's solution, he is probably so tied to his initial idea that he does not understand that only by changing it in a non-marginal way it will become "politically feasible". In fact, if this change is, in his eyes, a worsening of the effectiveness or of the quality of the proposal, it is possible that the promoter will resist, with the risk of wrecking his own initiative. Obviously this also depend on the type of logic of action of the actor involved: if the promoter is a politician or the representative of special interests he will be more prepared to compromise, while bureaucrats, experts and representatives of general interests will probably be rather inflexible.

With this last remark, we already entered the description of the second role we always find in policy processes: the **director** (or fixer, or pivot) of the decisional process. We can define this role as the subject who guides the process, from the first proposal to the end. This is an essential role, since meaningful changes of public policies always encounter difficulties: conflicts with those who profit from the status quo, lack of interest of essential actors, unexpected events that jeopardize the whole process. The director's role is particularly important when not only the decision, but also its implementation, depend on the contribution of various subjects with different logics of action and interests. In this case, the presence of an actor who facilitates the interaction and stimulates each actor to adopt the decisions and the behaviours needed for the success of the policy change is essential. This is true both in the event that the change generated, or can generate conflict, as well as in the more common event that this does not happen and the main obstacle is the low level of interest of the people whose contribution and participation in the process are essential. The director and the promoter often coincide: the *policy entrepreneur*, described in literature, is the result of these two roles mixed together (Kingdon 1984 Chap. 8). However, this does not always happen, also because the qualities required for this role and the connected characteristics are different from those that are typical of the promoter. If the level of determination must remain high, it is however also necessary to have the ability to adapt the definition of the problem and the technical solution according to participants' needs, to raise the interest of other actors, to effectively communicate the reasons and the importance of the proposal, to choose the most appropriate moment to act, and so on. In other words, the director must also have **strategic resources**, as previously defined, the knowledge of the decisional process and of the actors operating in it. This knowledge doesn't necessarily need to be formalized: experience, intuition and

even luck help in the implementation of innovation, but a deep knowledge of some analytical dimensions, like the ones we are explaining in this volume, is certainly an asset for the director who wants to ensure the effectiveness of his actions. It is important to underline another element: it is possible that the director's goals are only process-related; meaning that he does not have strong preferences as regards the problem or the solution, but is very interested in his relations with the other actors. The director can instrumentally understand the importance of a transformation he did not personally promote, as the opportunity to increase his status or his visibility, or to weaken his political and bureaucratic opposers. In this it is possible that decisional success, namely the fact that the decision is formally taken, does not correspond to a substantial success, meaning a contribution to the solution of the collective problem. This can happen quite often in reform processes, when the starting idea, proposed by the promoter, whatever his rationality of action was, is later managed by a politician only interested in exploiting it, in linking his name to a law, to a plan, to an intervention programme. For the decision to be approved, the director then accepts any sort of compromise, cancelling the innovative character of the proposal, and turning it into a modest adaptation to the status quo. A way to verify this kind of process is to compare the declared goals to the tools and the resources invested: the existence of internal contradictions and/or the incongruence between aims and means are a clue to the fact that the process director was actually not able, or was not interested, in a real reform, but only in gaining visibility. However, bearing in mind that the two figures can coincide, there is always need for a director and a promoter to generate a meaningful change, and it is often the contribution of a *fixer* that can unblock a decisional process that seems to have reached a dead-end or that is not able to take off. A good example is represented by the introduction, in the Netherlands, of the so-called *standard cost model*, a methodology that allows quantifying the administrative burdens that legislation puts on the shoulders of firms and citizens. The attempt to develop a better regulation policy through the introduction of the measurement of administrative burdens had been already launched in 1984, and was initially implemented between 1992 and 1994, but it met a series of obstacles and it translated in marginal savings, despite many study commissions and the creation of an independent *watchdog,* with the aim of starting a cultural change. The real transformation took place only in 2003 when Gerrit Zalm, previously Minister of Finance, but also vice-prime minister in the new coalition, was appointed with the mission to coordinate the policy to reduce administrative costs. He defined an important reduction target (25 % by 2010), elaborated a measurement model (*standard cost model*), created a technical unit at his ministry, linked the implementation of the reduction programme of administrative costs to the budget cycle, and in general, used the available political resources to force all the ministries to act effectively. The result was that when the Government fell in 2007, there was already a 23.9 % reduction (Coletti 2013).

The structural difficulty of introducing policy innovations explains why the **opposer** is another common figure, acting and committing his resources to avoid changes. There isn't much to say about this matter, apart from the fact that at the

basis of the opposition there can be both content-related goals and process-related goals and this second possibility is more likely in the case of political and bureaucratic actors and it is more unlikely among those with special and general interests, and experts. And obviously, the possibility to effectively influence the process is linked to the availability of relevant resources and their effective use.

The same considerations go for the next character in our gallery of roles, namely the **ally.** The ally has content or process-related goals consistent with the promoter and/or the director's, and brings his resources to the innovative coalition by carrying out actions, or even just by declaring his support. The only great difference lays in the fact that, given a problem and/or solution, while it is always almost impossible to choose the opposers, to a certain extent, the process director can select his allies. This is a particularly important matter: enlarging the coalition can also have dysfunctional effects, for example because it increases its heterogeneity over the threshold that guarantees its effectiveness, or because it undesirably modifies the patterns of interaction. Therefore, for example, the fact that in the conflict opposing social actors who want to change a public policy and a municipality ruled by a left-wing coalition, the right-wing minority sides with the promoters, certainly increases the resources of the innovating coalition, but can also radicalize the conflict, hindering compromise that would have been satisfactory for all the original actors.

The role of the **mediator** is more interesting. We can define him as the kind of director that only pursues process-related goals and in particular is only interested in favouring an agreement among the actors. It is important to note that the effectiveness of a mediator is connected with the existence of a conflict among interests, even a potential one, that can be mediated: if it is a zero-sum game, where the only alternative is between outright victory or total defeat, there is no chance for mediation. The same goes when a conflict regards the cognitive dimension, for example among supporters of different theories on the causality between different phenomena: just think of the debate between opposers and supporters of Darwin's theory. The first consideration as to this role is that it is relatively rare: if we always meet promoter and director and, as the problem's complexity grows, also opposers and allies, the same does not apply to the mediator. It is also worth repeating what is already implicit in the definition: the essential characteristic lies in the absolute absence of content-related goals, of preferences for a specific definition of the collective problem and/or for the any feature of the solution. In his pure form, the mediator must be completely impartial and his only goal is to complete the decisional process in a satisfactory way for the main actors. This is clear in private transactions, when even the mediator's compensation is conditional on the fact that an agreement is reached but, as we will see in Chap. 6, professional mediation is used also in collective problems, especially in conflict resolution. However, most public sector mediation activities are carried out outside a professional relation, and are often stimulated by third parties. A good example is the process to extend Malpensa airport, in Milan. Apart from the usual and predictable conflicts with the citizens of nearby towns, who were obviously worried about the noise, there was a specific problem regarding the

new road that had to connect the old airport to the new terminal. The conflict was between the (municipally owned) company that managed the airport system in Milan (SEA) and planned the whole project, and the Parco del Ticino, an association of municipalities in charge of protecting the environment on the Lombardy side of the river, on the basis of a regional law. This dispute was particularly embarrassing for the Region, great supporter of the need to build an important airport hub, but also the main funder of the Park to which it also delegated its protection powers. In order to find a solution, the president of the Region instructed the general director of the territorial planning department to act as mediator, by identifying mitigations and compensations that could lead the Park to abandon its opposition and convince SEA to include these changes in the project for the new road.

If the mediator is, theoretically, always functional to the resolution of a conflict, the role of the ***gatekeeper*** is always quite negative. With this term we describe a subject who can stop the decisional process—he has veto-power—thanks to the resources he controls, although he does not have content-related goals and the policy solution does not imply any costs or benefits for him. A typical example is the president of an assembly or of a commission: he can influence the formation of the agenda and is therefore able to accelerate or delay the discussion of a specific proposal. As we can see from this example, the gatekeeper is usually a subject who uses his resources to stop the promoter from acquiring essential resources, not because he is against the proposal, but to affirm his own importance in the interaction. In other words, he only has process-related goals. His presence is therefore always dysfunctional for the decisional outcome, and the strategies the director will have to adopt will try and cancel the veto power he has, avoiding its use. For the same reason, the involvement of potential gatekeepers, able to avoid or at least to delay the process is one of the strategies opposers use the most: the growing use of courts against many innovative proposals represents a clear example of this practice.

The last role we have to explain is the **filter**, a subject that enters the process representing the goals and the interests of others and using almost only their resources. Somehow, this is a "non-actor", as he doesn't have real goals to pursue and his actions imply a minimum use of his own resources. A local body forwarding the petition of a group of citizens to a higher authority, but also a newspaper that carries out a press campaign on a particular issue, certainly belong to this category. The presence of a subject with these features is therefore totally irrelevant in the determination of the outcomes of a decisional process, if the process director does not make the mistake giving it too much importance. This wrong perception can lead to actions whose target is the actor who acts as a filter, generating equal and contrary actions in the opposed party. A political party that reacts to a critical newspaper article and personally attacks the journalist to question his credibility, can cause the reaction of all the press, worried its prerogatives are being questioned and strengthening the position of the real opposer. Folk wisdom, in these terms, says that we shouldn't "shoot the messenger", but in contemporary politics it is a common mistake.

This last example is useful to show how the attribution of a limited number of roles to actors is not for purely academic reasons. In fact it allows to better understand the process dynamics and to adjust behaviour in order to make decisional success more likely.

Understanding if a specific actor acts by himself or if he is a filter, if the threat to use a veto comes from someone who has genuine counter-interests regarding the proposal or from a gatekeeper, only interested in improving his position in the decisional context, understanding if it is appropriate to accept the entrance of a new ally in the coalition or if an individual has the impartiality characteristics to successfully carry out the role of mediator: these are all elements that can interfere with the possibility to reach important results in the policy transformation. And, most of all, the crucial passage is often the promoter's decision to manage the innovative process on his own or to allow a director to do it. It is often the lack of awareness about the need to make this decision that explains the failure of reform processes that would be totally feasible if properly managed.

2.7 The Actors in the Interaction: Decisional Networks

The last matter we have to discuss in this chapter moves the focus of the analysis from the single actor to the group of actors involved in the policy making process.

Until now we tried to understand who the actors are, what kind of goals they pursue, which resources they use, what logic of actions they follow and their role in the decisional process. These are all questions that we must answer in order to understand the reasons of specific outcomes, but this is not yet enough. In fact, it is necessary to ask ourselves if, and to what extent, the way the interaction is structured is a further causal factor.

The attention goes on the set of actors that intervene in a process and the question is: are there features of this set that can contribute to highlight the solution dynamics of collective problems?

This is the main focus of the so-called *network analysis* (Marin and Mayntz 1991; Rhodes 1997) that became popular towards the end of the past century and that generated sophisticated methodologies for the study of a decisional network. We will consider this word equivalent to *policy network* (for a book on the formal analysis of networks, see Hanneman and Riddle 2005).

The analysis of these ideas is not possible here, nor particularly useful for our study. We will just highlight some decisional network dimensions or characteristics that appear to be important, quite easy to measure and, as we will see in Chap. 6, can be modified through specific decisional strategies.

The most obvious characteristic of a group, a network of actors, is its **size**. The fact it includes many or a just a few actors, is important since it is reasonable to expect that the dynamics of the two cases are different. However, classifying decisional networks for their quantity is not useful for the analysis, for two different reasons.

1. First of all we have to say that, empirically, the size of a decisional network is normally rather limited, at least in the processes that are object of our attention. Generally there are no networks with less than 4/6 or more that 12/15 actors, if we concentrate on the ones that have a real role, contributing to the determination of the results. The reason is basically due to the difficulty to intentionally introduce transformations in the way collective problems are tackled because the relevant resources are shared by a plurality of subjects with different logics of action and with often contrasting goals. If these subjects only 2 or 3, there are three possible alternatives: they either define decisional rules in order to institutionally decide (thus no longer being part of our observation field), or the process turns into a non-negotiable conflict and it will only be solved through the domination of the actor that has more resources or finally the conflict will simply not be solved and the process will get stuck. If, on the contrary, there are a lot of actors, the difficulty in finding an adjustment among them will overcome the cognitive capacities of any director, even if very capable, and a model similar to the *garbage can*, that we discussed in the Chap. 1, will be generated. In other and more simple words, literature on reform processes, may they be small or big, tells us that a transformation effort can be successful if the number of actors is neither too big nor too small. For example, the German policy liberalising telecommunications (surely a major process) has seen the constant presence of less than 15 subjects of few homogeneous categories (big enterprises, entrepreneurial associations, central and local institutions) (Schneider and Werle 1991). This clearly does not mean that there is no exception to this rule and that it is not possible to generate important outcomes also within very crowded networks, but these are exceptions for which we would have to carry out ad hoc analyses and find specific explanations.
2. The second reason why a simple analysis of the size of a network doesn't seem to be particularly useful, lies in the fact that the number of actors has a significant influence also on the other network's characteristics, as we will see in the following pages. Therefore, to characterize a network on the basis of its size risks considering the same phenomenon twice with dysfunctional effects on the clarity of the analysis.

This last reason also applies to a different aspect of decisional networks: their **morphology**, or form. It is possible to graphically represent the actors' networks in different ways and therefore it was natural to imagine a classification based on their form.

In Fig. 2.1 we introduce some typical forms that give an idea of the morphological variety of decisional networks. The dots are actors and the arrows are their connections that, in our analytical model, are the exchanges of resources.

Besides difficulties in the representation, that we will not discuss now, the main problem for the classification of a network based on the typical forms (starting from the upper left corner and going clockwise to Fig. 2.1, we have the star, the linear, the total interaction and the nested networks), is that it shows in a too synthetic way characteristics that should be kept analytically separated.

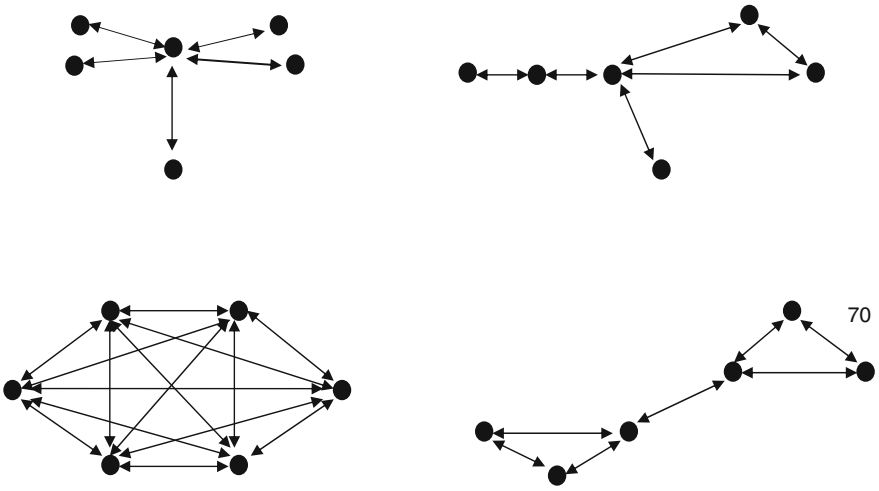

Fig. 2.1 The forms of the network

The most important characteristics are therefore different.

The first one reflects a dimension of decisional processes that we often referred to: **complexity** defined as the existence of a plurality of points of view within processes. In fact, it can be more or less high and it can only be measured by analysing the actors' network.

We have already seen how an actor's "point of view", that contributes to determine the way he defines the decisional problems, and at the same time contains limits to his behaviour, depends on his logic of action, defined by the nature of the claim of intervention in the process, and by the level (global/local or general/sectoral) of the interest represented.

In order to measure the complexity of a process and therefore of a network, we can create a matrix like the one in the following figure and put the actors in the various cells. Please note that in the matrix the dimension used to measure the level of interest is the global/local one. If the general/sectoral axis is important, it will have to be consistently modified and if both axes are important, we should add a third dimension (Fig. 2.2).

The underlying logic is that if all actors are of the same type and at the same level, therefore in one single cell, we will have a minimal level of complexity. They may even have different and opposite goals, but will inevitably tend to define the solution and evaluate the solutions homogeneously, according to the same criteria.

On the contrary, maximum complexity does not mean that all the cells are full (and even less equally full: actors do not have the same importance, since what matters is the quantity of resources they are able to mobilize), but that there is at least an actor in all the rows—for each territorial level—and for all the columns—for each type.

DIMENSION OF THE INTEREST	TYPES OF ACTORS				
	Politicians	Bureaucrats	Experts	Special interests	General interests
International					
National					
Regional					
Local					

Fig. 2.2 Measuring complexity

It is possible to calculate a complexity index by multiplying the number of rows filled in by the number of columns: in Fig. 2.1. It will vary between 1 (if all the actors are in the same cell) and 20 if there is at least one actor for each territorial level and one actor for each type.

This is clearly a conventional measurement, that can have different calculation bases if the levels of interest are classified differently (the categories of actors are fixed in our model), which can be very useful to give a synthetic indicator of the process complexity, to compare with similar cases but also to verify if its increase and its decrease in time makes it easier or more difficult to reach the decisional success.

In particular, a complexity measurement can be useful to test the hypothesis that will be presented at the end of Chap. 6, according to which decisional success depends on the fact that the process and the network complexity reflect quantity and type of interests influenced by the problem or solution. One of the main reasons for the failure of innovation processes in the field of public policies is that the decisional networks are too simple, not including some of the interested actors, or too complex, as they include subjects without any relevant goal or interest for the solution of the policy problem.

A further characteristic that is certainly important is its **density**, meaning the intensity of the relations between the actors of a decision-making process.

It is common experience that within any group of persons, the fact that direct, face to face, relations might have important consequences on the interaction outcomes. For example, it can be useful to share information, avoiding bad surprises in following phases, or increasing empathy and trust, but it can also be reason for conflict, confrontation between the participants, and so on. Even in a time of instant and global communication, all the organizations keep calling meetings to discuss and/or to take decisions: direct exchange, non verbal communication, body language, the possibility to react immediately, and so on, are irreplaceable opportunities.

However, these interactions can be very different: an *ex cathedra* lesson or a unilateral briefing, a formal meeting of the members of a coalition to decide how to deal with the opposition, a brainstorming session, and so on. The form must be appropriate for each decisional process.

In these last examples, what changes is the network density that can be measured as the proportion of actor actual links between the actors out of the total possible number of links. The formula to make this calculation is quite easy:

$$D = \sum ki / (n^2 - n)$$

where:
D density coefficient varying between 0 and 1;
n number of actors;
ki number of links of each actor.

In the four examples in Fig. 2.1 it is quite clear how the maximum density is in case of total interaction, where the coefficient is 1 since all the actors are related to each other, while it is minimum in case of the star where the exchange only takes place between the central actor and the other individual participants (the coefficient is $10/(36 - 6) = 0.33$). The other two cases have average values (0.4 in the linear network and 0,46 in case of the star network).

The consequences of a network density on the results of the decisional process can be contradictory: a rise in trust among participants or the development of a learning process, but also a rise of entropy and of the possibilities of unsolvable conflicts. In general we can say it amplifies and strengthens the other characteristics of the decisional network: the obstacles or benefits that we could expect from a process that shows a high level of complexity will be strengthened if the network has a particularly high density and weakened in the opposite event.

The same is true for the relation between density and the last characteristic of decisional networks: **centrality**, namely the fact that one or a few actors monopolize relations with participants. It can be expressed in many ways. One of the easiest is to measure the proportion of all the relations of a network that are monopolised by a specific actor, with the formula:

$$C = ki / \sum ki$$

where:
C centrality coefficient that varies between 0 and 1;
Ki number of links of each actor.

The network's centrality will be the highest coefficient identified. To go back to the examples of Fig. 2.1 it is clearly much higher in the network with the star form, than in case of the linear network.

Calculating centrality helps to understand if in a specific decisional configuration there are one or few central actors who are probably the process director(s)

or, in the event of a conflict, the leader(s) of the opposition. On the contrary, a low centrality network inevitably shows a low capacity in directing the process: centrality is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to create power relations. If I don't have an, even mediated, relation with a subject, it will be unlikely that I am able to influence his behaviour.

The relation between density and centrality is very clear as well: a high level of centrality in a low density network proves the existence of a dominating actor, able to influence the outcome of the process. This can actually be a very awkward condition: if an actor with process-related goals does not have enough resources to introduce a policy transformation and is in the middle of a low density and high centrality relation network, in which he receives highly contradictory requests from various subjects that all have important action resources, he can be embarrassed when choosing how to stand, since he will displease some of his powerful interlocutors and will lose centrality, that was actually his only goal. This explains, for example, why initially ambitious reforms end up setting for compromise leaving things basically as they were: when facing often contradictory oppositions, a promoter/director who fears losing the consensus of other important actors, will end up diluting innovation and generating only incremental changes.

In conclusion, network analysis supplies important information and allows quantifying different dimensions of the interaction (although with the usual inaccuracy typical of social sciences), that can represent important variables in the hypotheses more appropriate to explain or predict the outcomes of decisional processes. It therefore adds further instruments to the analyst's toolbox.

It is therefore useful for both those who would like to understand the reason of a specific result and those who want to engage in a major transformation in the solution of a collective problem, to dedicate a certain amount of time and attention to drawing—even graphically—the decisional network, because it makes it easier to understand the dynamics and calculate complexity, density and centrality, that are important elements sometimes able to explain the results. This graphic representation, which can include a lot of additional information or be totally elementary, is also useful to communicate both outside and inside the process the way in which a specific actor sees the interaction and therefore contribute to clarify a story that often appears very complicated.

2.8 Conclusions

In this chapter we set the basis of the analytical framework, focusing on who decides: the actors of the policy process.

Actually, the real starting point is to understand that the actors are those individuals or organizations that make the actions able to influence the decisional outcomes and that do it because they pursue goals regarding the problem and its possible solution, or regarding their relations with other actors.

To carry out these actions they have to spend resources, the availability of which is a condition for their action's effectiveness, and they are constrained by their role in the process and, especially, by the nature of their claim of intervention, that tends to define their logic of action. These analytical categories are needed to simplify the analysis, as they supply useful guidelines to interpret (and forecast) the behaviours.

We finally used a concept we have already expressed, the complexity of public policy processes in contemporary societies, defining it as one of the decisional network's characteristics. We define complexity as the plurality of points of view present in the process, to be considered with the other network's characteristics like density and centrality.

At this point it should be clear that the proposed conceptual framework supplies a breakdown of the phenomenon we called policy decision, in order to identify all its elements, hoping to define its typical modalities, in order to enable the policy innovator to try and implement the desired transformation. In Chap. 6 we will see the importance of these elements in supplying a guide to the interpretation of the phenomena we are interested in: non-incremental transformations in the ways collective problems are dealt with. But we first need to complete the identification of the important elements of the decisional process that are not directly referred to actors.

References

Barca, F.: An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/future/barca_en.htm (2009)

Coleman, J.S.: Introduction to Mathematical Sociology. Free Press, New York (1964)

Coletti, P.: Evidence for Public Policy Design—How to Learn from Best Practice. Macmillan Pivot, London (2013)

Dente, B.: The law as a policy resource: some scattered thoughts. In: Narath, S., Varone, F. (eds.) Rediscovering Public Law and Public Administration in Comparative Policy Analysis: a Tribute to Peter Knoepfel, pp. 33–44. PPUR/Haupt Verlag, Lausanne (2009)

Dente, B., Knoepfel, P., Lewanski, R., Mannozzi, S., Tozzi, S.: Il controllo dell'inquinamento atmosferico in Italia: analisi di una politica regolativa. Roma, Officina (1984)

Hanneman, R.A., Riddle, M.: Introduction to social network methods. http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/ (2005)

Hjern, B., Hull, C.: Implementation research as empirical constitutionalism. Eur. J. Polit. Res. **10**, 105–115 (1982)

Irving, J.: The Hotel New Hampshire. Dutton, New York (1981)

Kingdon, J.W.: Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies. Little Brown, Boston (1984)

Lindblom, C.E., Cohen, D.K.: Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving. Yale University Press, New Haven (1979)

Majone, G.: Evidence, Argument and Persuasion in the Policy Process. Yale University Press, New Haven (1989)

March, J.C., Olsen, J.P.: Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics. Free Press, New York (1989)

Marin, B., Maintz, R. (eds.): Policy Networks—Empirical Evidence and Theoretical Considerations. Westview Press-Campus Verlag, Frankfurt-Boulder (1991)

Marks, G., Hooghe, L.: Unraveling the Central State, but how? Types of multi-level governance. Am. Polit. Sci. Rev. **97**(2), 233–243 (2003)
Niskanen, W.A.: Bureaucracy and Representative Government. Aldine Atherton, Chicago (1971)
Nowotny, H.: In Search of Usable Knowledge: Utilization Contexts and the Application of Knowledge. Westview Press-Campus Verlag, Frankfurt-Boulder (1990)
Parris, H.: Constitutional Bureaucracy: The Development of British Central Administration since the Eighteen Century. George Allen and Unwin, London (1969)
Rhodes, R.A.W.: Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability. Open University Press, Buckingam (1997)
Righettini, M.S., Tassone, E.: La politica di tutela dei dati personali e la sua istituzionalizzazione—Dieci anni di vita del Garante (1997–2007). In: Dente, B., Lugaresi, N., Righettini, M.S. (eds.) La politica della privacy tra tutela dei diritti e garanzia dei sistemi, pp. 141–209. Passigli Editore, Firenze-Antella (2009)
Scharpf, F.W.: Games Real Actors Play: Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research. Westview Press, Boulder (1997)
Schneider, V., Werle, R.: Policy Networks in German Telecommunication Domain. In: Marin, B., Maintz, R. (eds.) Policy networks—empirical evidence and theoretical considerations, pp. 97–136. Westview Press-Campus Verlag, Frankfurt-Boulder (1991)
Weber, M.: Wirschaft und Geselleschaft. Mohr, Tubingen (1922)
Weiss, C.: Using Social Research in Public Policy Making. Lexington Books, Lanham (1977)
Weiss, C.: Social Science Research and Decision-Making. Columbia University Press, New York (1980)
Wildavsky, A.: Choosing preferences by constructing institutions: a cultural theory of preference formation. Am. Polit. Sci. Rev. **81**(1), 3–22 (1987)

Chapter 3
What is Decided? The Content of the Decision

Abstract The chapter introduces the concept, typical of public policy analysis, that the content of the decision plays an important role in defining the relationship between the actors. The feasibility of a non incremental policy change depends also from the fact that it provides benefits to all the participants or only to some of them and that the cost and the benefits of the decision are concentrated on few actors or are distributed among a large group.

Keywords Decisional content · Costs and benefits distribution · Zero-sum game · Policy types

3.1 Policy Determines Politics: Lowi and the Policy Analysis "Revolution"

It is fairly obvious that actors, their resources and their interactions in decisional networks play an important role in defining the outcomes of the decision. However, some of the elements of the analytical framework introduced in the previous chapter—the importance of process related goals, the equifunctionality of the resources (the fact that they can substitute each other, even in the case of the legal ones) are less intuitive.

What seem to be totally counter-intuitive is that the outcome of the decision also depend on the content of the decision itself: the same actor with the same amount of resources can reach his goals if he is dealing with a certain kind of decision and may fail if the decision is of a different nature. This seems to challenge common sense.

Yet public policy analysis affirms this exact concept, thanks to the famous formula *policy determines politics* (Lowi 1972), according to which the content of the decision is able to predict which actors will have a greater influence on the decision. To understand this statement we have to define policy as the way a

B. Dente, *Understanding Policy Decisions*, PoliMI SpringerBriefs,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9_3,

		APPLICABILITY OF COERCION	
		To the individual action	To the setting of the action
PROBABILITY OF COERCION	Remote	Distributive policies	Constituent policies
	Immediate	Regulatory policies	Redistributive policies

Fig. 3.1 Type of policy and coercion

collective problem is dealt with and *politics* as the competition for political power between political actors.

Theodore Lowi, who we owe this theoretical turning point to, started to develop this intuition when studying the political system in New York City and in particular when analyzing how the mayor could exercise his powers of appointing the heads of the different agencies. He realized in fact how political parties were decisive in the selection of the top managers of the agencies that distributed benefits to citizens, whereas the special interest groups controlled the appointments to top positions of the authorities with regulatory powers.

Lowi then expanded his intuition by creating the more complex model that we can see in Fig. 3.1.

Both dimensions of the matrix are very important.

Along the y-axis in fact, the matrix refers to the likelihood that the public administration (the State, that according to Weber (1922) has the monopoly of legitimate violence) will use coercive powers to enforce the policy.

Along the x-axis on the other hand, the matrix highlights that some public policies have a direct impact on individuals, meaning they do not become operative unless they are personalized, whereas others can disregard such a direct relation with citizens and firms, although of course they will change their behaviour. Lowi gives an example pointing out the difference between the policy that forbids false advertising and becomes operative only if it represses individual behaviour and the definition of the discount rate that operates without the administration knowing the people who apply for a mortgage and are the target of the policy.

Lowi thus identifies four types of policies:

- **distributive policies**, that supply benefits or services to families or firms (typically: aid to farmers or public services like schools, etc.);
- **regulatory policies**, that aim to modify individual behaviour mainly through prohibitions, obligations and sanctions (typically: the anti-monopoly legislation, a great deal of the environmental policies, etc.);

- **redistributive policies**, that shift wealth from one group to another (typically: income tax, pension and social security policies);
- **constituent policies**, that intervene on the ways public policies are enforced establishing "rules on rules" (typically: the creation of new administrative agencies or the modification of public administration procedures).

Using this conceptual framework, Lowi analysed the American federal legislation from F.D. Roosevelt to L. Johnson, showing how, at least as far as the three first policy types are concerned, there is an important variation in: (a) the place they are decided in, (b) the actors who have a bigger role in the decisional process being able to influence the outcome and (c) the ways in which they interact. Distributive policies are thus decided within congress committees through highly consensual processes, while on the other side, redistributive policies witness a strong executive and Presidential power. Regulatory policies seem to show more instability of the coalitions and major conflict on one side, and on the other side seem to be the ones in which Parliament can deeply influence the decisional outcomes.

Lowi basically draws two lessons from his analysis: at the analytical level and at the normative level.

Firstly, because of their growing internal differentiation, contemporary societies no longer offer the opportunity to consider the political system as an unitary object. There are many political arenas with different actors and different ways of working.

Secondly: "If we want an open and public politics, we are limited to certain kinds of policies—regardless of whether the manifest goals of these policies are fulfilled. Again we would try to avoid distributive policies, because nothing open and democratic can come out of them" (Lowi 1972). This quote shows how the analytical distinction has a strong value orientation. It stems out of a deep dissatisfaction regarding how the United States are governed and the "genetic mutation" in the way collective problems are solved that took place at a certain point. The two different subtitles of Lowi's book *The End of Liberalism,* clearly show his critical glance on the way the American political system is developing: *Ideology, Policy and the Crisis of Public Authority* was the subtitle chosen for the 1969 edition, while *The Second Republic of the United States* appeared in the 1979 edition.

We cannot underestimate the importance of Lowi's contribution. After all, his name was at the top of the rankings in the American Political Science Association's surveys that were carried out every year, as one of the most influential political scientists, even when he was basically ignored in Europe. As Gloria Regonini pointed out (2001, p. 390), he entirely reversed the way relations between politics and policies were considered and the debate that developed around these issues (Regonini 1989; Cotta 1989) goes to prove it. The following pages, in which we will try to operationalise Lowi's variable—the content of the decision, the "stake" as it is usually known—to see how it can influence the outcome and shape of the decisional process, would not have been possible without this turnaround and its influence on the development of political science towards the end of the twentieth century.

However, we must also say that Lowi's conceptual framework is not very useful in the empirical analysis of real world decisional processes. First of all because, as he expressly states himself, he tends to consider policies as a synonym of legislation, so the whole idea of policy making is rather limited and strongly linked to the state. Secondly, because it is often impossible to distinguish the various policies, since most of the major transformations are a mix of the types specified by Lowi. If, for instance, we analyse the Obama 2010 health care reform we will probably see the regulation of individual behaviour, the creation of new institutional and organizational entities, redistributive effects among the different social groups and even the attribution of privileges to specific target groups.

3.2 Concentration of the Costs and Benefits and Intensity of Preferences

Lowi's "revolution" leaves us a difficult legacy at the analytical level. On one side we cannot ignore the plausibility of the hypothesis according to which the content of the decision, what is decided, has (or can have) an influence on the outcome of the process if only in terms of decisional success (a non-incremental transformation of the status quo, regardless of the ability of the decision to contribute to the solution of the problem). On the other hand though, we must find a way to measure the content of the decision at a high enough level of abstraction to apply it to decisional problems in general and that, with the words of an author (Kellow 1988), is "elegant" enough.

A partial solution to this problem was suggested almost immediately by Wilson (1973) who proposed to classify the policies depending on whether the costs and benefits were distributed among a wide range of people, or were concentrated on one or few actors. The matrix here below is the result of the cross section between these two variables (Fig. 3.2).

Some scholars, like Padioleau (1982), tried to correlate Wilson and Lowi's typologies observing how regulatory policies—meaning the ones that try to determine individual behaviour—are actually situations in which the benefits are shared among the whole population, whereas the costs are concentrated only on a few single individuals whose behaviour is constrained: speed limits on motorways are beneficial to everyone in general since roads are safer, but affect differently the single driver depending on whether he is driving a small car or a Ferrari.

In the same way, a distributive policy that directly supplies benefits to families or firms brings more benefits to single individuals the less the beneficiaries are, whereas the costs are spread across the whole population of tax payers. Things are similar when we think about redistributive policies and constituent policies.

Anyway, besides the fact that the two typologies can overlap, what really matters are the consequences of this distribution of costs and benefits on the decisional process. At least from three different points of view.

		COSTS	
		Concentrated	Distributed
BENEFITS	Concentrated		
	Distributed		

Fig. 3.2 Types of policies and concentration of costs and benefits

1. Returning to Lowi's intuition, in fact, the first thing that stands out is that there will be different types of actors depending on each situation. Basically, what counts here is the fact that since both the costs as well as the benefits are referred to citizens (or firms), the more they are concentrated, the more it is likely that the process will include the social actors (special interest groups). All other conditions being equal, non-incremental policy decisions that involve a concentration of costs and/or benefits will see a higher participation of interest groups, with the effect of increasing the complexity of the network. The huge development of the lobbying activities, meaning pressure on public authorities by special interest groups, follows the expansion of the State's intervention in the economy and confirms what we have just said.
2. A second point worth noting is that the chances of conflict will be higher the more the costs are concentrated (regardless of the concentration of benefits). It is rather clear that whoever has to bear the costs of the solution of a collective problem will have a high incentive to fight the decision and try and block it. We can also explain the violence of the oppositions to the provisions that all developed countries had to adopt to reduce public expenditure with the fact that, in the name of equity, these measures struck very specific categories that had previously benefited from special treatment (for instance: reduction of the age of retirement, job security, free access to certain public services, etc.). We can then explain the radicalization of conflicts with the fact that these categories think they are the only ones paying for the crisis, with a disproportionate concentration of these costs on a limited amount of people. But we can say the same for many NIMBY-like environmental conflicts.
3. Finally, the concentration of costs and benefits also changes the willingness to use the resources each actor has available: in fact it increases the intensity of preference to intervene in the decisional processes, which is always an expensive thing to do, using an amount of resources in proportion with the gains or losses each actor believes he will have as a consequence of the decision itself. Even in this case, the development of the organisations representing the special interests, the fact they have to collect more resources, to mobilise a

great number of experts and to develop communication campaigns proves how the intensity of the preferences goes in the direction of increasing the resources that can be used in the decisional processes.

At the same time, the strengthening or weakening of the specialized technical bureaucracies can be considered evidence of the importance that the political/administrative powers give to a certain policy area. Furthermore: the institutionalization what we called "general interest groups" that we spoke about in the previous chapter, is actually a way to create actors who can have a high preference intensity under specific circumstances, thus overcoming the typical weakness of the diffused interests they want to represent.

For all these reasons, in relation with the concentration of costs and benefits imposed on certain actors, **attention for the content of the decision becomes a crucial element in the analysis of the decisional process**. We are therefore able to partly solve the analytical problem discussed at the beginning of this paragraph: find a way to measure a variable, the content of the decision, that after Lowi's work, we can no longer disregard but cannot operationalize as he suggested in empirical research. We did this at a high enough level of abstraction to apply the measure to a plurality of decisional situations through a rough identification of the mechanisms that, at the level of the actors, represent the connection between the variable—the concentration of costs and benefits—and the behaviour of the actors themselves within the decisional process.

3.3 Types of Games

In the previous paragraph, thanks to the debate regarding the possible effects of the concentration of costs and benefits, we actually came closer to a conceptualization of the decisional process as a game. So, we will now briefly examine what the game theory tells us about the analysis of decisional processes.

We certainly will not carry out an in-depth study of this very complex field. Scharpf's *Games Real Actor Play—Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research* (1997) represents an important guide for whoever wants to know more about this topic.

The two illustrations below define two opposite situations and at the same time help us become more familiar with the conceptual tools of this school of thought. In order to read the matrixes, one has to bear in mind that they represent the interactions of two actors: A and B, respectively along the column and the line. They both have two different strategies available (left/right for A and top/bottom for B). Each cell contains two numbers: the number in the top right corner defines what actor A earns or loses—the *payoff*—if he adopts the left strategy and actor B adopted the top one; the one in the lower left corner represents actor B's *payoff*.

Let's consider two actors who both have two alternatives (strategies). In Fig. 3.3 it is clear that in all the cells of the matrix the gain of actor A is equivalent

Fig. 3.3 Pure conflict

		Actor A Left	Actor A Right
Actor B	Top	2 -2	-2 2
	Bottom	-2 2	2 -2

to the loss of actor B. Therefore, if the actor on the line chooses the upper strategy he will have the best result if the actor along the column chooses the right-hand strategy; on the contrary he will have the worst result if the actor along the column chooses the strategy to the left. At the same time, the effects will be opposite if the actor along the line chooses the lower strategy. This type of game is called **zero-sum game** since the algebraic sum of the each cell is always zero.

On the contrary, in Fig. 3.4, if the actor along the line chooses the upper strategy and the actor along the column chooses the strategy to the left, they both benefit more than in all the other cases. We can call this game **non-zero-sum game** (or positive-sum) since the dominant (the best possible) strategy for each actor brings them both to achieve the best result.

So, it is obvious that when we are in a non-zero-sum situation, cooperation between actors is a lot easier: no actor who has a rational representation of the costs and benefits associated to his decision will refuse to cooperate. On the contrary, cooperation is definitely impossible in the event of a pure conflict: a rational actor will try everything possible to prevail.

Regardless of the scepticism of some scholars (Scharpf 1997, p. 73), these two simple and symmetrical models are more common than it appears.

We must also mention that while we can easily imagine a game of pure conflict (let's consider poker in which the amount of money the winner takes home is the

Fig. 3.4 Pure coordination

		Actor A Left	Actor A Right
Actor B	Top	3 3	1 1
	Bottom	1 1	2 2

exact amount other players lose), a non-zero-sum game would seem to imply there is a third party paying. The idea that there is not such a thing as a "free lunch" is very common in a kind of economic thought that we often read in the press or hear in conversations. Of course this is partly true: the solution to many collective problems is often achieved at the expense of someone else. Let's simply consider the compensations introduced to solve environmental conflicts we will discuss in Chap. 6: to "sweeten the pill" of the decision to build an unwanted infrastructure, often enough entails a rise in its costs that are paid the taxpayers whose opinion, of course, was not asked for.

Fortunately this is not always true for two reasons:

- First of all, in a capitalistic economic system the basic assumption is that wealth can grow, so that an agreement can bring benefits for everyone involved. This possibility is explained by Adam Smith's famous parable regarding the relationship between the client and the butcher. Benefits may be asymmetrical after negotiation, meaning the client may end up paying more or less of what he should, but in any case he will be able to eat the meat and the butcher will get some money.
- Furthermore, we must remember what we mentioned in the previous chapter: actors do not necessarily all have the same goals. For instance, one actor can have content related goals (adopt a certain solution) and another can have process related goals (proving that he "counts" in the solution of a collective problem). The occurrence they can both gain something from the agreement is therefore highly possible.

Finally, and more in general, we must remember that in the decisional processes we are interested in, characterized by complexity and uncertainty, the plurality of the points of view, the presence of many actors with different rationalities, located at different levels, with different goals and, as we have just seen, with a different intensity of preferences, is not an exception but the rule. On one hand, this makes it difficult to find an equilibrium, but we already explicitly affirmed that a non-incremental policy decision is unlikely. However, since radical transformations of the way collective problems are solved do take place we cannot exclude that what guarantees their feasibility is the ability to shape the content of the decisions in such a way to bring benefits to a plurality of people and sometimes to the whole group of actors involved. The analysis of the content of the decision is crucial both to understand why this happens as well as to foresee the chances of decisional success.

3.4 Conclusion: The Analysis of the Content

We can end this chapter giving some definitions and summarizing the most important parts of the previous paragraphs.

The **stake** is the content of the decision at every moment, therefore even before it is adopted and after it has been adopted. For those who like the game theory we

can say that the concept of stake is equivalent to the sum of the *payoffs* of the single actors.

This content can be analysed in two different ways:

- First of all by evaluating whether it is a zero-sum game or a non-zero-sum game in the perception of the main actors, thus identifying if and how the adoption of the final decision was (or will be) considered a victory, a partial victory or a defeat for the actors; it is certainly possible that these perceptions are mistaken, but what is also sure, is that actors' behaviour and their interactions are determined by their own representations of the possible consequences the decision might have on their interests and goals.
- Secondly, by evaluating each participant's level of concentration of costs and benefits, by assessing the perception of the individual actor against some "objective" benchmark. It is likely in fact that even a rather rational actor does not have, and probably is not interested in acquiring, all the necessary information regarding the concentration on other participants of the costs and benefits. What he cares about is that the outcome of the decision does not burden him too much and/or that it brings him the expected benefits.

These two analyses are absolutely crucial, since during decisional processes characterized by complexity and uncertainty the content of the decision may change in time, also due to the behaviour of the actors involved.

In Chap. 6 we will see how the transformation of the stake can take place and become part of the strategies of the actors.

References

Cotta M.: Il contributo dei "policy studies" alla scienza politica contemporanea. In: Panebianco, A. (a cura di) L'analisi della politica—Tradizioni di ricerca, modelli, teorie, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 517–541 (1989)

Kellow, A.J.: Promoting elegance in policy theory: simplifying Lowi's Arenas of power. Policy Stud. J. **16**, 713–724 (1988)

Lowi, T.J.: The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Public Policy and the Crisis of Public Authority. WW Norton & Company, New York (1969)

Lowi, T.J.: Four systems of policy politics and choice. Public Adm. Rev. **32**, 298–310 (1972)

Lowi, T.J.: The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States. Norton, New York (1979)

Padioleau, J.: L'Etat au concret. PUF, Paris (1982)

Regonini, G.: Lo studio delle politiche pubbliche. In: Panebianco, A. (a cura di) L'analisi della politica—Tradizioni di ricerca, modelli, teorie, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 491–516 (1989)

Regonini, G.: Capire le politiche pubbliche. Bologna, il Mulino (2001)

Scharpf, F.W.: Games Real Actors Play: Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research. Westview Press, Boulder (1997)

Weber, M.: Wirschaft und Geselleschaft. Mohr, Tubingen (1922)

Wilson, J.Q.: Political Organizations. Basic Books, New York (1973)

Chapter 4
How Do We Decide? The Patterns of Interaction

Abstract The ways in which the actors exchange their resources are absolutely crucial for defining the outcome of the decisional processes. In this chapter, after discussing the role of legal procedures in policy making, we will show the importance of communication between the actors (by discussing the prisoner dilemma) and of the fact that the moves of the actors are simultaneous or rather sequential (by discussing the "battle of the sexes"). We conclude by recalling the literature on policy "styles" and by proposing a classification of the patterns of interaction that distinguishes between confrontation (when the resources are weighted), bargaining (when the resources are exchanged) and collaboration (when the resources are pooled).

Keywords Decisional procedures · Confrontation · Bargaining · Collaboration

4.1 Introduction

If the outcome of a decisional process depends on the actors, on their resources and on the content of the decision, this does not mean that there are no other important variables. The ways actors relate to each other are in fact a very important part of a decisional process. Aggressive behaviour, for instance, can be counter-productive in certain situations because it generates open conflict, whereas in other cases it can be the best way to quickly reach a solution.

After all, it is reasonable to expect that, given the complexity of the decisional processes, and in particular the fact there are many actors with different interests, goals and logics of action, even the simple order in which actors enter in the process can have effects on the ways in which the problem is shaped and in determining its outcomes.

The relevance of this aspect is generally recognized. Many proposals have been put forward to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of decisional processes, by designing different ways to pre-structuring the interactions among actors. The creation on the so called "service conferences", meetings in which different public

B. Dente, *Understanding Policy Decisions*, PoliMI SpringerBriefs,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9_4,

bodies deal simultaneously with the same administrative decision, is an attempt to change the relations between public administrations themselves and, as a consequence, the relations between citizens and public administrations.

We have now entered the topic of the next section, which is about the importance of formal procedures that, in all contemporary states, are defined by law to establish how public authorities participate in policy-making.

At a higher level of abstraction it was noticed how various types of issues, in which different courses of action are available to the participants, require different levels of cooperation in order to find suitable solutions for all or most the actors involved. This matter involves the theoretical contribution of games theory we discussed in the previous chapter and we will focus on it in the third section.

Finally we will propose a very simplified and typical typology of interaction patterns that will help us understand the various resource exchange logics at the basis of the decisional strategies the policy innovator can use to achieve a non-incremental transformation of the ways to solve a collective problem.

4.2 Formal Rules and Decisional Processes

It is fairly obvious that decisional rules, namely the rules that establish how decisions should be made, have an impact on the outcome of the process. For instance, the fact that a certain decision of a collective body, whether it be legislative or administrative, requires simple majority (of those attending the deliberation), absolute majority (of those who have voting rights) or qualified majority (for instance two thirds of those who have voting rights) can have very important consequences on the content of the decision itself.

The same goes for other aspects. For instance, the fact that in the European Union the power to propose new legislation belongs to the Commission, whereas the power to approve said proposals is a prerogative of the European Council (composed by the heads of governments of the member states) and of the Parliament (directly elected by citizens) was an interesting way to balance institutional actors interested in expanding the powers of the European Union (the Commission and Parliament) and the member states worried about safeguarding their sovereignty. The fact that the European Council can approve or reject the Commission's proposals but cannot introduce new legislation without the consent of the Commission, makes it difficult to reduce the powers of the European Union itself.

All these important rules go under the name of decisional procedures. In our conceptual framework in fact, they can be treated like resources of a specific actor, namely legal resources that gain importance only if the actor decides to use them in the process. This will probably occur if having powers recognized by law is useful to pursue one's goals and if the resources that other actors can mobilise are not greater.

So, it is absolutely normal to expect that, if a certain legislative provision requires a particularly large majority, the opposition in Parliament will use this resource to obtain important changes to the government proposal. But the same

will not occur if the proposal itself is supported by the public opinion, for the fear of negative electoral consequences. The behaviour of democratic senators in the USA who voted in favour of giving the necessary funding to the Iraq war is a typical example: even though they were against the war, and had the chance to show it, they knew full well that by voting against this financial bill they would have been exposed to their electors' criticisms who believed that not giving to the armed forces the necessary means would have put American lives at risk, which is considered not only politically, but first of all morally unacceptable.

The same consideration goes for the relations between the European Commission and member states: the fact the former is aware its proposals have to be unanimously accepted by the Council is certainly a limit to the use of the power of initiative. Nevertheless, before using their veto power member states must consider the fact that an obstructionist attitude can hinder the chances of approval of the initiatives they care about (including those aiming to reduce European prerogatives) since they must be formally proposed by the Commission itself.

So, there is no doubt that the formal procedures are important but their actual meaning depends on the various decisional contexts. Too often however they are pointed at as the sole reason for the difficulty to make important decisions, forgetting the real importance they have in contemporary political-administrative systems.

It is often emphasized how the stringency of the decision-making procedures has consequences on the timing and costs of the decision, namely on decisional efficiency. The use of the adjective "cumbersome" associated to formal procedures is a way to shed light on how they are removed from what would be required to secure quickness, internal consistency and coordination, meaning how they move away from "correct" or optimal procedures. Nevertheless, we must also remember that the current critical analyses in non-specialized literature often go in the opposite direction: there are a lot of complaints about the gap between the procedures established by law and how decisional processes are actually carried out, about the fact that the outcomes of similar procedures are too different, about the high level of discretionary power of policy makers.

This rather desperate search for the "correct" decisional procedure risks concealing the real reasons for which the procedures are important in contemporary states. The problem should actually be analysed as follows: the "rule of law", meaning the ideal liberal regime that followed the American and French revolutions in the eighteenth century and consists of the general adoption of the so-called bureaucratic model, was not established to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public action (and of decisions) but to protect citizens against a possible arbitrary use of political/administrative power, and this includes the option to challenge in front of a judge any decision that is infringes their rights.

The different features of the bureaucratic model has to be interpreted as follows:

- The centralization of decisions and the ex-ante and ex-post controls are a way to guarantee uniformity in interpreting the law;
- The pre-determination of the office that has to make the decision and of the decisional sequence, the prescription of maximum and minimum deadlines and

the need to ask opinions of other bodies are all elements that should force authorities to act in a predictable way;
- The publicity of acts and the right to access information is aimed to assure complete accountability towards the public opinion.

Any deviation from the patterns predetermined by law allows citizens to challenge the decision, to get it repealed by a judge and/or receive compensation. This goes even in the event that the violation of the procedure did not have any direct consequences on the content of the decision itself that would have remained exactly the same even if all forms were respected to the letter.

After all, in many countries there are laws that establish some general principles common to all procedures so that citizens know exactly what their rights are. Even when such laws do not exist, the courts elaborate general principles to solve controversies between citizens and the state.

Considering procedures as a guarantee is not simply limited to relations between public administrations and citizens but is also applied to relations between public administrations, when one of them for instance believes it has the right to be consulted prior than a certain decision is taken.

This is of course even more true in the case of the law-making process in which all necessary steps to approve a law are strictly predefined by the Constitution and their violation can be sanctioned by the Constitutional Court through a declaration of unconstitutionality and the abrogation of a law, even if it had majority in Parliament.

So, there is no doubt that the procedures are important, they can vary from one sector to the other but they must be there. The consequences at the level of the decisional efficiency and effectiveness, however, are less important than the fact they basically represent a guarantee against public authorities.

The counter-check of this statement is the fact that if the different actors agree, the legal procedures can be totally ignored. For instance, in the event of an expropriation for public utility, e.g. when the state wants to acquire private property in order to build a road or a school against the owner's will, although there are detailed rules regarding the procedures to respect also in order to define the price of the land, public administrations always try to find an agreement with the owners in order to avoid dragging things along too much even though this means paying more that what was strictly necessary. Using the words of our conceptual framework, the public administration's economic resources are used to contrast private owners' legal resources.

The main consequence of the considerations made until now is that it is very difficult to judge how good a procedure is. In different circumstances the same sequence can play different roles (or play none at all) depending on the network, on the distribution of resources among actors as well as on the content of the decision.

Of course, the more complex the procedure is, the more widespread veto powers will be (creating unnecessary *gatekeepers* for instance). A similar consideration was made to explain the failure of the development policies in Oakland, California. In a famous book, Pressman and Wildavsky affirm that one of the main causes was "the complexity of the joint action" of politicians, bureaucrats and

special interests. They highlight how the concession procedure of the economic grants involved no less than 70 agreements among different subjects: the policy failure is thus easily explained: assuming that each agreement has a probability of 95 % of being concluded on deadline, the chances of a satisfactory final outcome are less than 0.04 %, meaning four in a thousand (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973, pp. 107/108). Even though the calculation is more suggestive than correct, the message we can gather from Pressman and Wildavsky's research is clear and in many ways convincing: if the formal procedures foresee particularly long decisional processes, the risk of failure or of stalemate is always around the corner.

This praise of simplicity however cannot be universally applied. Excluding actors potentially interested in the formal procedures from the decisional process (or not foreseeing their formal intervention) can be counter-productive since they could react both formally to this exclusion (by resorting to the judiciary on the base of the system's general principles) as well as informally (involving the media, political groups close to them, etc.) with the effect of entirely derailing the process or hindering the chances to make a decision.

In fact, as we will see when we discuss decisional strategies, some recent trends tend to generate inclusive legal procedures with the aim to involve everyone potentially interested in the decisional phase. This is justified both on the basis of democratic values and principles as well as a way to improve decisional efficiency. But we will be back to this point in Chap. 6.

To conclude this part we can state that:

- Even when justified in the name of efficiency and/or democracy, the prescription of formal procedures consists of the distribution of legal resources to specific actors, whether they be public or private;
- Therefore it has mostly to do with guarantee-related goals (for private subjects dealing with public authorities, for local governments dealing with the central government, for minorities dealing with majorities, etc.) and not with decisional efficiency;
- Anyway, the type of procedure, for instance its inflexibility or the non-optimal sequence of operations it involves, is almost never able to explain the outcomes of the decisional process by itself since there are always other elements of the process that influence the outcomes.

We must move in another direction if we want to analyse the interaction patterns more in detail.

4.3 Types of Games and Interaction Patterns

In the previous chapter we referred to the game theory to show how the interactions among actors can potentially bring benefits to everyone or can be seen as a zero-sum game with important consequences on the outcomes of the decisional process itself.

		Prisoner1	
		Doesn't confess	Betrays
Prisoner 2	Doesn't confess	-1 -1	0 -10
	Betrays	-10 0	-5 -5

Fig. 4.1 The prisoner's dilemma

However, the two opposite configurations we introduced in the previous chapter do not cover all possibilities. On the contrary, asymmetrical games or variable sum games are probably more common in the real world and are more interesting from an analytical point of view, since literature has already proved how the possibility to solve these games is strictly linked to participants' interaction patterns. We will here follow Fritz Scharpf's work, the scholar who in his book *Games Real Actors Play* (1997) was able to show, better than anyone else, the importance of the contribution of game theory to public policy analysis.

The most famous asymmetrical game is the so-called Prisoner's dilemma that clearly proves how perfectly rational individual behaviour can have negative outcomes for the person who adopts it.

It's the story of two prisoners arrested because suspected of a bank robbery. When they are kept in isolation, the police make them both an offer: "If you confess and blame your friend you will go free whereas your friend will get 10 years in jail. But if he also confesses you will both get 5 years. If you don't confess but your friend does, then you will get 10 years. Finally, if neither of you confess you will both get one year for illegal gun possession".

As we can understand from the following figure, the best strategy for both is to betray since they risk getting 5 years at the most, whereas in the best of cases they will be immediately free; on the contrary, not blaming each other presents higher risks—10 years in jail—and even the best of cases is worse than the previous one since it still involves a sentence. So both prisoners will betray and get 5 years in jail whereas had they cooperated they would have got away with a lot less (Fig. 4.1).

So, simply pursuing one's own interests can have negative consequences but as we already mentioned, this outcome can depend on two conditions:

1. The first is that the two prisoners cannot communicate whereas in real life, as Ostrom (1990) pointed out we are not in prison: this explains how important communication and dialogue are to solve collective problems;
2. The second condition to which these perverse effects are linked to is that the game only happens once. In fact, in the case of repeated games it is possible to

		Her	
		Cooperates	Defects
Him	Cooperates	0 0	4 2
	Defects	2 4	1 1

Fig. 4.2 Battle of the sexes

find a way to sanction (the so-called tit-for-tat strategy according to which if one player betrays, the other one retaliates) that can, through a learning process, stabilize the game in a continuous cooperation.

And even when the two previous conditions are fulfilled, like in games with many actors in which the free-riding strategy (exclusive attention only for one's immediate interests) is without a doubt the best in an individual logic and generates what Hardin (1968) called the "tragedy of the commons" (for instance the exhaustion of natural resources due to overexploitation), the existence of entities able to impose suitable behaviour can avoid the worst outcomes.

In other words, the prisoner's dilemma, which is apparently a desperate case, can have a possible solution through communication, learning or a suitable institutional setting, thus through the variation of the ways actors interact.

A further example is the game labelled Battle of the Sexes. This is the situation: a couple want to spend the night together but while she would like to go to a boxing match he would rather go to the opera. Let's assume they both make up their minds at the same time and autonomously: the outcome will be paradoxical as we see in Fig. 4.2.

If in fact they both renounce to their first choice (cooperation) they will both end up in the worst possible situation: alone and at a show they don't like. Things work better if they both "betray" and pursue their own interest (defection): they will be alone but at least they can do what they want. The best solutions (Pareto-optimal since one wins and the other does not lose) are the ones in which only one has to give in. Nevertheless, under the initial conditions of simultaneous choice, this outcome is not at all predictable. Things completely change if the moves are sequential. If one of the players moves first, the other player's step will be easier: simply look at the two cells at the top right and lower left to realize what Lindblom (1965) called parametric adaptation, namely the simple acceptance of other people's decisions brings to the best result for both. Of course, one earns more than the other, meaning there is a distributive problem, but even the loser is better off than in other situations.

		Salience of distribution	
		Low	High
Salience of value creation	Low	Negative coordination	Bargaining
	High	Problem solving	Positive coordination

Fig. 4.3 Ideal types of negotiation

This example shows us two things: the big difference there can be in the outcomes of an interaction depending on whether the game is played simultaneously or sequentially and how we must always consider that even the best solutions can lead to an unbalanced distribution of costs and benefits.

These two models do not exhaust the analysis of the possible games: it would be useful to at least analyse the chicken-type games (in which the simultaneous defection of both players causes tragic outcomes) and the deadlock-type game (in which an open conflict is the best solution for both).

But it is more useful to ask ourselves: is it possible to identify typical interaction patterns and relate them with specific decisional configurations?

Fritz Scharpf studied this problem and suggested a classification in which four different interaction patterns are associated to different configurations of the problem. According to the author, the starting point is that a decisional situation can be more or less addressed to solve a distributive problem (how the costs are shared between participants) and/or a problem of value creation (a better or worse solution to a collective problem).

Figure 4.3 shows four possible decisional situations and associates each one to a specific interaction pattern (Scharpf 1997, p. 253).

Starting from the most simple configuration, in which neither the problems of value creation nor distributive problems are particularly important, the relational patterns that Charles Lindblom called *deferential adjustment* and Sharpf and Maintz called *negative coordination* (a situation in which each actor pursues his goals with the only limit to avoid generating negative consequences for the other participants in the process), seem to be satisfactory. This is actually a rather common situation since in the complexity of contemporary political-administrative systems; the diffusion of veto powers often forces innovators to pay a lot of attention to the possible consequences of their proposals for the real or potential participants in the decisional processes. Just as an example, policy making at a European level certainly represents a context in which the fact that the formal or substantial rule of unanimity dominates implies that the actor in charge of the initiative, namely the European Commission, formulates its proposals only after

having carefully considered the negative consequences they could have on single member states. But the same goes for many relations among the various "corps" that form the state apparatus in which attention not to "step on each other's toes" is often stronger than any other concern. Of course, this is an interaction pattern that can be unilaterally adopted (therefore it has no transaction costs), but in these cases it is highly unlikely to be able to generate non incremental innovations, meaning the type of transformations this book focuses on.

The second possible decisional situation is the one in which it is not so important to generate value, but in which distributive aspects are vital. This is the case in which bargaining is the main interaction pattern. What is more interesting for us is that this pattern enables an actor to compensate other participants for the costs that the adoption of the policy decision implies. Situations like this are also rather common: let's think about the localization of unwanted infrastructures (from incinerators to motorways) in which often enough, the agreement depend on side payments, namely compensation. It is also true that, since both parties have a strong incentive to hide their real preferences, the transaction costs, meaning the amount of resources spent in the attempt to reach an agreement, can be very high and the innovator may end up paying a lot more than what was actually necessary. Nevertheless, in this case innovation seems possible in the sense that the non-incremental decision can be made even though not in the most efficient way.

The third decisional situation is the one in which distributive preoccupations are minimal, whereas attention is all on value creation. This happens for instance when the solution to a collective problem under conditions of uncertainty is much more important than anything else. Searching for the most appropriate solution, possibly able to increase the chances of success, totally dominates interaction, regardless of the fact that at the end of the process the balance of benefits is shifted in favour of the other participants. Not only can this occur in relations between private subjects, for instance in processes related to the settling of technical standards for technologies that are still not available on the market, like the next generation mobile phones, but even in the political sphere when the distributive effects have been neutralized from previous agreements on the allocation of costs and benefits. The extreme example of this possibility is the so-called "magic formula" in Switzerland, a standing agreement for dividing the seven executive seats of the Federal Council (the Government) between the four major parties, so that electoral considerations do not hinder cooperation among the parties themselves in the formulation of public policies. But similar situations often occur when formulating specific policies, since sudden problems that can pop up force actors to put aside distributive matters and concentrate on searching for a satisfactory solution. In all these cases the most appropriate interaction pattern is **problem solving** that aims to maximize social welfare. This is the ideal solution for a policy innovator who can generate a debate regarding his proposal without having to worry about oppositions due to the personal interests of each participant.

Unfortunately, however, the most common solution in policy problems is the one in the bottom right cell in Fig. 4.3, in which although all players are interested in finding the best solution—meaning the most suitable one to generate positive

welfare effects—they also pay attention to distributive effects in the sense that they consider any solution in which they end worse off unacceptable and therefore they will oppose it. According to Scharpf, the most suitable way to solve these problems is positive coordination in which the need to maintain a balance among participants must go side by side with the honest research of the best solutions for collective interest. The use of the adjective "honest" is not by chance. When it comes to bargaining, there is an incentive to hide one's true preferences in the attempt to get from the other participants more than what it would be fair and acceptable. This is absolutely incompatible with the research of common solutions able to improve social welfare that can only be successful if the actors work in an open and clear way.

A lack of mutual trust not only will derail the process but can even stop each actor from seeing the chance of finding new solutions. We risk facing the Prisoner's dilemma or the Battle of the Sexes again, in which mistrust regarding the other participants' moves ("Of course my accomplice will betray me!" or "He/she will never give up his/her favourite choice") brings to bad results for everyone.

So, as affirmed by Scharpf who guided us through this whole analysis, trust is an absolutely crucial element to guarantee the success of positive coordination. It is hard to build up and can be easily destroyed: the "social capital" of communities has a long history as Putnam (1993) showed us and in interpersonal relations a small betrayal can change long and mutually beneficial collaborations.

In Chap. 6 we will see what strategies the innovator can enforce to solve this problem, and therefore to generate trust or at least to fight the mistrust towards his proposals.

For the moment we can only add that it is unlikely that positive coordination will be generated within big and complex networks and where many possible solutions are available. In these cases the more likely outcome is an explosion of transaction costs generating a decisional stalemate.

4.4 A Classification of the Patterns of Interaction

But now it is high time to draw the lessons from the above discussion by introducing a simple classification of the interaction patterns that can be used for the analysis of policy problems and to develop strategies for non-incremental decisions.

It seems clear until now that the relations among actors and in particular the way they relate is important to determine the outcomes of the decisional process.

The theoretical examples given in Sect. 4.3 highlighted how communication and dialogue among actors themselves, their mutual trust, the fact that their interaction his repeated over time in order to generate learning and the circumstance that their actions can or should take place simultaneously or sequentially, are all factors that can influence the chance to reach a positive outcome and in any case can affect the content of the decision.

The formal procedures, meaning the rules to define how a decisional process should take place, can certainly have a role in defining actors' relations, for instance influencing the simultaneity or sequence of their actions, but they generally work in another direction in the sense that they change the legal resources a specific actor has. This is consistent with the real meaning and purpose of formal procedures, which is to be a guarantee for citizens against possible abuse of public authority.

Finally, we must create a classification, as simple as possible and easy to apply to different types of decisional processes. To do this we can use the notion proposed by Richardson (1982) of "policy styles" or "decisional styles" suggesting the distinction among **confrontation**, **bargaining** and **problem solving.**

Each one of these styles, as suggested by Scharpf (1986, pp. 189–190), "can be characterized by a specific value orientation and can resort to different sanctionatory strategies". So, problem solving resorts to the appeal to common problems and to ostracism as a sanction, bargaining to the individual interests of all participants and to the use of incentives, confrontation resorts to the interests of the dominating groups and to coercion.

What we are mostly interested in here is the use actors make of the resources they have. In problem solving, actors put their resources together to solve the collective problem, in bargaining they exchange them and in confrontation each actor uses his own resources against others to impose his own goals and definition of the problem. In the latter case, in other words, resources are "weighted" in the context of a zero-sum game: a poker game is a perfect metaphor to explain how "the winner takes it all".

It follows that the decision to use one of the three styles or interaction patterns depends on the perception of how resources are distributed among participants. The more they are seen as concentrated, the more likely confrontation will be used; the more they are shared, the more likely problem solving will be the solution. Bargaining should prevail in intermediate cases.

Two further considerations are necessary.

The first one is that what counts is the perception of how resources are distributed, that does not necessarily reflect reality. In fact a good deal of decisional stalemates, meaning innovation processes that reach a dead end, depends on the mistaken perception of how resources are distributed. Typically, public authorities tend to overestimate the importance of the legal resources they have and underestimate the mobilization of social actors. This triggers a confrontation from which it is hard to get out, even when a more realistic vision of how resources are shared is accepted.

The second consideration is that every actor has a limited chance to unilaterally change the interaction patterns. Of course, the decision to opt for an open confrontation can be unilaterally made, but to trigger bargaining or problem solving, it takes two to see the advantages of that type of interaction.

In conclusion, we can define the **interaction patterns** as the rules that can only be partly changed by the individual actor, defining how resources are used in a decisional process. We can distinguish between:

- **Confrontation** when the resources are weighted in a zero-sum game and the actor who wins is the one with more resources;
- **Bargaining** when resources are exchanged among actors in the interest of all participants;
- **Problem solving** when resources are pooled together to achieve a common goal.

References

Hardin, R.: The tragedy of the commons. Science **162**, 1243–1248 (1968)
Lindblom, C.E.: The intelligence of democracy. Free Press, New York (1965)
Ostrom, E.: Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1990)
Pressman, J.L., Wildavsky, A.: Implementation. University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles (1973)
Putnam, R.D., Leonardi, R., Nanetti, R.: Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton University Press, Princeton (1993)
Richardson, J.J.: Policy Styles in Western Europe. George Allen and Unwin, Winchester (1982)
Scharpf, F.W.: La trappola della decisione congiunta, Stato e Mercato, **17**, 175–216 (1986)
Scharpf, F.W.: Games Real Actors Play: Actor centered Institutionalism in Policy Research, Westview Press, Boulder (1997)

Chapter 5
Where (and When) Do We Decide? The Context of the Decision

Abstract The environment within which the decision-making process takes place makes the possibility to reach the desired outcome more or less likely. It is important to distinguish between the cognitive context, the economic context and the institutional context. Then we ask if and how we can assess the importance of the context in a specific decision making context and we conclude that the most important aspect concerns the stability of the context as it can open "windows of opportunity" for the adoption of a non-incremental policy change.

Keywords Cognitive context · Economic context · Institutional context · Saliency

5.1 What is the Decisional Context

The decisional context or environment is the set of structural or contingent factors and conditions that influence decisional processes and contribute to the determination of their outcomes, but cannot be modified by actors, in particular by those interested in the policy decision.

Each decisional process, in fact, is carried out in a given space and in a given moment in time so it is reasonable to expect that what is possible or impossible here and now, will not be in another place at another moment.

Among the few attempts to analyse and classify the context, we can refer to Jänicke's work (2002, pp. 4–6) who studied the development of environmental policies in a comparative perspective and suggested an analytical framework within which what he calls the structural context of policy making is divided into three different categories: cognitive context, economic context and institutional context.

B. Dente, *Understanding Policy Decisions*, PoliMI SpringerBriefs,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9_5, © The Author(s) 2014

		strength of group connection	
		Weak	Strong
Number and diversity of rules	Various and different	Apathy (fatalism)	Hierarchy (collectivism)
	Few and similar	Competitiveness (individualism)	Equality (egalitarism)

Fig. 5.1 Cultural models

5.1.1 The Cognitive Context

The cognitive context is represented by "the conditions under which knowledge… is produced, distributed, interpreted and applied" (Jänicke 2002, p. 5). These conditions define the "structure of cognitive opportunities" that characterizes a certain society at a specific moment.

In order to clarify this point, we can put these conditions on a scale that goes from the most structural ones to the most contingent ones: culture, cognitive heritage, public opinion and salience.

Max Weber already attracted attention on the importance of **culture** through the two fundamental essays that form "The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism" (Weber 1905), when he highlighted the connection between the predestination theory developed by Calvin, and the development of entrepreneurship in countries where this theory mostly spread. It is reasonable to assume that culture—intended as a set of shared beliefs—also influences public policies in determining what the governments of those societies could or could not do.

In a more recent era, one of the fathers of public policy analysis, Aaron Wildavsky, classified the dominant cultures in contemporary society along two axes. The first is determined by the answer to the question "who am I?" and it sees individualism on one end and the total identification in a group on the other. The second question is "what do I have to do?" and the answer lies in a continuum between absolute freedom (I can do whatever I want) and the existence of a large set of stringent behavioural rules. The following scheme defines the types of culture identified through this theory (Wildavsky 1987, p. 6) (Fig. 5.1).

From our point of view—the point of view of the promoter of a change in the ways to treat a collective problem—it is clear how proposing certain solutions in certain types of societies can be particularly difficult. For example, it is reasonable to expect that, in a society where competitiveness and individualism are dominant values, it will be a lot more difficult to impose rules such as the compulsory use of a helmet for motorcyclists. In this sense, the dominating culture represents a context factor, that is not available to actors and influences the outcomes of decisional processes.

However, the cognitive factors that can bind decisions do not only refer to basic values.

For example, the fact that certain old industrialized communities are not so much against the construction of plants with a potential environmental impact, can also be explained by the fact that there is widespread awareness about technological processes in those areas, which weakens opposers' strategies often appealing to the "fear for the unknown". Of course, the contrary can also occur: absolute technical/scientific ignorance can lead to underestimate the implicit risks of a collective decision. In this sense, the **cognitive heritage** of a society and its level of education, are a further important element of the decisional context.

Moving towards the bottom of our list, towards more contingent factors, we find what is called the **public opinion**, that refers to the orientations shared by most citizens on specific issues and problems. This topic has been studied for a long time, basically to investigate the level of responsiveness of governments, meaning the correspondence of public policies to expressed preferences (Page and Shapiro 1983). These orientations can regard the individual sphere (e.g. sexual ethics) or the public sphere (e.g. the attitude towards immigrants), but they have in common the fact that they represent constraints or opportunities for policy change.

Finally, among the more contingent contextual factors we undoubtedly have to mention the **salience** of issues, meaning their importance in the public debate. Obviously, there is a relation between public opinion orientations and salience, but the two dimensions do not coincide: a very important issue can divide the public opinion but there are problems on which there is unanimity of opinions but a very low level of salience. Citizens' preferences are measured with opinion polls while salience can be measured through an analysis of the attention that mass media dedicate to the matter (Esbaugh-Soha 2006).

Now, the fact that the problem's importance is recognized by the public at large and/or by political actors, can make a great difference for the feasibility of a transformation, in the sense that it can either make it possible or prevent it.

For example, there is no doubt that the bigger is in financial terms a public investment, the more relevant is the fact that the public opinion is mainly in favour or against. Let's just think about the debates regarding the bridge on the strait of Messina, or the fact that in Switzerland, before starting the construction of the new railways tunnels that cross the Alps, the population was involved through 3 referendums.

But sometimes the fact that a certain matter goes "below water level", meaning it is not able to capture the attention of the media, public opinion or political parties, can make it easier to implement a policy innovation. An example could be the external security policy, for which a low level of political interest facilitates technocratic decisional processes. Just think about the "new security model" that the Italian armed forces adopted during the 1990s of the last century with the end of the cold war by abolishing compulsory military service, a total change in the external security doctrine, the start of the deployment of our military abroad. Actually, with a few exceptions, this new model and what it involved was only discussed in a small group of experts, with the almost total indifference of the media and of the political parties.

These four types of cognitive contexts—basic values of a society, level and dissemination of knowledge, shared orientations of the public opinion and the salience of an issue—are not unchangeable. They change over time and sometimes this happens after the intentional action of a subject. This of course doesn't apply so much to basic values, that only change over a long period of time and are unlikely to be the target of an intentional action. But good educational programmes can improve the level and dissemination of knowledge, even in particularly tough issues, and there are undoubtedly many actors who try to influence the public opinion and/or strengthen the salience of a policy problem using various tools.

We will get back to context transformations in the last part of this chapter, but what we want to highlight here is how what cannot be modified by an actor can be modified by another. In other words, the same elements can be a limit for certain subjects, while others can actively intervene to modify the "context" and make it more likely for the decisions they promote to be adopted.

For example, during a debate on the difficulties to overcome in order to promote an effective environmental protection, a former Dutch minister said that, if it is true that the adoption of a specific measure at a specific moment (for example, the approval of an environment protection plan) is always influenced by the need for a political agreement, it is still possible to try and modify the cognitive context and make more advanced decisions possible in the future. "Governing—he said—means creating the conditions for the next environment protection plan". Among the most creative initiatives implemented in the Netherlands he mentioned:

- the promotion of Gro Bruntland's (former Norwegian prime minister) book called "Our Common Future" that opened the debate about what sustainable development is all about;
- the funding of environmental research activities, not only because the results were interesting or significant for public policies, but especially because, given the tendency of Dutch scholars to write in newspapers or take part in TV shows, this made it possible to ensure a constant media coverage for environmental issues.

This example is particularly interesting since it shows how it is possible to implement policies aimed at modifying the cognitive context of decisions. After all, there are some issues—just think about measures to prevent AIDS—in which this attempt was successful and important results were achieved.

However, we mustn't make the mistake of thinking that these actions could be immediately effective in the modification of decisional opportunities regarding a specific collective problem. This is the risk run by the so-called "public relations" activities that have multiplied in the last decades. Even when they aim at modifying the most contingent aspects of the cognitive context—public opinion and salience—we have to remember that:

1. the results obtained from this strategy are often fragile: sometimes a serious crime committed by an individual immigrant can be enough to erase the effectiveness of a campaign against racial discrimination;

2. as they aim at modifying the preferences of the population for a whole class of problems, their success can only be seen in the long run, and not simply because they were able to successfully generate a transformation here and now.

5.1.2 The Economic Context and the Institutional Context

We can briefly deal with the other two environmental variables, namely the economic and the institutional contexts.

The economic and technological context can be defined as the set of economic conditions characterizing a society at a specific moment. Even in this case there are some elements that are more structural and others that are more contingent.

The first category, for example, includes the capitalist or pre-capitalist character of production processes, the main economic activity (agriculture, industry, services), the level of sectoral composition and of economic specialization (prevalence of the textile industry or of the high-tech one, for example) but also factors like the simple level of wealth of a country, measured considering the per capita gross domestic product. The contingent conditions include all those elements that pertain to the economic situation: the fact we are in a expanding or contracting phase of the economic cycle, the fact that the increase of public expenditure or its progressive decrease prevail, the fact that there is, or not, the risk of inflation, and so on. Even in this case, there are some elements that represent the context for certain types of actors and not others, who can actually modify them. Even in a decreasing phase of the public expenditure, for example, a government with full fiscal freedom can decide to increase investments in a specific policy sector.

The same goes for the institutional context, that we already anticipated in Chap. 2 when introducing the difference between *ius* and *lex*. Jänicke defines it as the "constitutional, institutional and legal structure, the institutionalized rules and internalized norms constituting the framework for interactions" (Jänicke 2002, p. 6). This category certainly includes the level of protection of property rights, the level of decentralization or fragmentation of the legal authority, the independence of the judicial order, the importance assigned to direct democracy tools, the existence of general rules about how the public action must be carried out, and so on. All these elements can constrain policy processes, restricting the decisions of some actors, but not of others, or offering action opportunities in certain sectors, but not in others. The rules that regulate actors' access to formal decisional processes are particularly important, since they influence the decisional networks' complexity, and the same goes for the procedural rules regarding decisional methods and since they influence networks density and centrality.

5.2 Analysis of the Decisional Context

Actually, as should be clear already, the contextual factors that can influence a decisional process are potentially countless. If their classification helps us understanding their nature and importance in a specific situation, no list will ever be complete nor will any typology be exhaustive. Among the contingent elements that influence the results of decisional processes, we can mention various events, like natural phenomena (earthquakes, floods, and so on), economic or financial crises, technological *breakthrough*s, terrorist attacks, and the volatility of the price of raw materials. The list could of course continue. Moreover, context-related aspects that influence a policy sector do not necessarily have the same effect in other fields: the trend in the price of oil is the context of economic policy decisions, but not of decisions in the civil rights field, that are influenced by the fear of terrorist attacks.

However, we have to remember that the logic of public policy analysis, and of the decisional analysis in particular, is different from other scientific approaches.

In the cultural theory of politics, the analysis of the cognitive context aims at understanding how individual preferences are formed and at exploring the linkages between the different public policies and the cultural features of the societies they develop in Wildavsky (1987, p. 18).

In the so-called "political economy" (Ferrera 1989), the study of the economic context aims at studying the influence it produces on the methods to solve collective problems, treating it as an independent variable in the explanation of public policies.

In institutional analysis it is assumed that political institutions give an order to politics and influence its changes (March and Olsen 1989, p. 16).

On the contrary in public policy analysis, as we have already pointed out, we are only interested in understanding how it has been possible to introduce intentional non-incremental transformations in a specific policy field and possibly predict if and how this will happen in a given situation. From this point of view, the decisional context we are interested in and that we have to analyse has a direct or indirect effect on actors' behaviour. In other words, the reconstruction of the context is part of the empirical analysis, even if the distinctions and classifications we introduced in the previous pages can help us orientate the research.

However, the analysis is drastically simplified by the fact that the contextual elements must act as constraints to the behaviour of the actors. Therefore we have to start from the reconstruction of their actions. Undoubtedly, there are structural elements that bind all policy actors in a specific situation, but in the study of decisions this element can remain in the background. We know we live in capitalistic societies, where private property is protected by law, but we do not need to repeat it all the time, just like we do not have to remind ourselves that our movements are constrained by the gravity law.

The analysis of the context is basically useful to answer two questions.

The first question is: how does the decisional context enter the policy process? And in particular, is it an absolute constraint for all participants or does it act through the action of a specific subject?

We already referred to this type of problem in Chap. 2, when we talked about the difference between *jus* and *lex*. In fact, if *jus* principles in contemporary states represent the framework within which public policies develop, *laws*, on the contrary and in most cases, are the available resources available to some actors, and their real use depends on the will to have them respected, which in turn is influenced by the contingencies of the specific decisional context.

We can now expand our considerations: various elements of the context enter the decisional process only through the mediation of specific actors. For example, economic globalization certainly influences the cognitive context of the actors at the international or national level, but is probably less important when the public policy decision is carried out at a grass roots level. Expanding the decisional network towards the top or towards the bottom can have important effects, meaning it can make the formulation of a specific problem possible or impossible.

Seen in this perspective, the decisional context appears to be less important than usually thought: the variables that explain the success or the failure of a policy transformation are more often the presence and the role of the actors for whom it is a real limitation to their action, rather than the existence of a policy environment that mechanically determines the process results. We must remember that non-incremental transformations of the way a collective problem is dealt with are quite rare. Therefore, what is valid for routine decisions does not necessarily work also for the type of phenomena we are interested in.

The second question we have to ask ourselves is even more important, and it regards the stability of the decisional context that binds the policy transformation. Are the aspects of the cognitive, economic and institutional context that influence the process, stable or do they tend to evolve? In this second instance, how likely is it that these trends are cyclical and have reached their maximum or minimum peak and therefore is it likely that the trend will reverse soon? Furthermore: what is the environment's level of fragility? Can big exogenous shocks make it collapse (or can its internal dynamics bring it to implode)? And if there is the chance this may occur, can we calculate the probability that this collapse will happen in the short or medium term?

Answering these questions is often very difficult, and however there is no doubt that the change of the decisional context is often crucial in explaining and predicting the very possibility of policy change.

If a reform proposal requires a particularly long decisional and implementation process, we must clearly assume a certain stability of the context, in order to avoid the process from stopping or deviating from the path required to achieve the desired results. During a political crisis, for instance, it is totally incongruous to approve reforms that need many further deliberations (implementation regulations, setting-up of new organizations, and so on) for becoming fully operational, since the reform proponents do not know if they will have the same authority in the months to come.

This is why many governments that won elections use their first one hundred days, the so-called "honeymoon", to have their most radical and controversial proposals approved by the Parliament: not only they can exploit the political resources gathered during their successful electoral campaign, but especially, (a) they hope they will get away with the unpopularity of their choices when it will be election time again, since by then the reform will have become more stable in the eyes of the public opinion, and (b) they know they have enough time to accomplish the implementation and make their choices irreversible. This is how we explain president Obama obstinate attempt to push his controversial health reform through Congress. The consequence of the controversy was the defeat of the democratic party at the following mid-term elections, but the bet was that this strategy would have allowed them to achieve two results: to stabilize the transformation by introducing compulsory insurance on one side, and maximise chances of being re-elected at the end of the first mandate on the other, since attention will probably focus on other, less controversial issues.

Somehow, the implementation of the election programme is an important indicator of the seriousness of a political coalition towards reforms. Real reformists will tend to anticipate the most controversial choices, the ones that can be seen as zero-sum games with a strong concentration of costs, that generate the strongest oppositions, while populist governments will hurry to implement the distributive policies they promised during the election campaign, for instance tax reduction, thus risking a very difficult time in the second part of their mandate.

If the stability (or better, the perception of stability) of the decisional context can be an important factor in making policy change possible, also its transformation, especially if unexpected and sudden, can facilitate innovation.

There are many ways through which this influence can occur, but in general we can say that crises (in the etymological sense of sudden change) are important since they force to focus attention (a scarce resource in public policy processes) on a specific problem, and they can also have the effect of weakening the political resources of the actors interested in maintaining the *status quo*.

This is why reformers often tend to dramatize the need for change: the use of emergency rhetoric goes in this direction and tends to use the elements of the context to justify the need for radical decisions. This doesn't always work of course. Popular wisdom tells us that if we keep crying wolf people will end up not believing us, and the history of public policies is full of "urgent and not to be postponed" problems, that don't really have an effective solution.

However, sometimes "opportunity windows" do open, and, if used correctly, they can favour the adoption of radical decisions. An example is the so-called "eurotax" approved by the Italian government in 1996 to bring the Italian public deficit in line with the Maastricht parameters within the deadline set by the EU. On one side, this decisions drastically reduced the public deficit (for the sum of the highest taxes and the reduction of the interest rate on the Italian public debt due to the reduction of the currency risk, implicit after joining the euro), and, on the other side, together with other important measures, they made it possible to implement a

radical reform in tax administration, that was difficult before due to the presence of multiple veto points.

But there are many more examples of "opportunity windows" and sometimes they are highly unlikely. If it is quite reasonable to assume that the 9/11 terrorist attacks generated a deep reform in the internal security policies in the USA, with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, with the aim to stop the infighting between the different police forces and the various intelligence agencies, there is nothing obvious in assuming that a devastating earthquake like the one that hit Turkey in 1999 can be seen as the opportunity for a psychiatric assistance reform, like some experts suggested (Munir et al. 2004).

The opportunity windows, or policy windows, as Kingdon noted (1984, Chap. 8) are essential to put an issue and a reform proposal on the agenda. Citing one of the individuals who were interviewed, he compared the innovator to an offshore surfer, paddling and waiting for the great wave that will bring him back to shore. We must always be prepared, because if the opportunity window can sometimes be predicted—for example, the annual budget that allows to modify the allocation of funds—sometimes it not and missing it can mean having to abandon the proposal or postpone it *sine die*.

The stability or transformation of the decisional context, especially when it is mediated by the behaviour of some actors, is an important element in the interpretation of policy processes. The context can favour or hinder the match between the problem and the solution that, we saw being a crucial component of the garbage can model proposed by March and Olsen. Hence, the fundamental importance of timing, of doing the right move at the right time, which is the most "artistic" aspect of policy making and of the successful policy innovator. But we will get back to this point in Chap. 6, when we will talk about decisional strategies.

In conclusion, indications for the analysis are very simple: the decisional context has to be measured in terms of stability or transformation, using a scale that goes from absolute immobility (**stability**), to total unpredictability of possible transformations (**turbulent transformation**), passing through an intermediate stage in which the evolutionary trends are recognized (**predictable transformation**).

References

Eshbaugh-Soha, M.: The conditioning effects od policy salience and complexity on American political institutions. J. Policy Stud. **34**(2), 223–243 (2006)

Ferrera, M.: "Political economy" e scienza politica. Un primo bilancio. In: Panebianco, A. (a cura di) L'analisi della politica—Tradizioni di ricerca, modelli, teorie, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 451–468 (1989)

Jänicke, M.: The political system's capacity for environmental policy: the framework for comparison. In: Weidner, H., Jänicke, M. (eds.) Capacity Building in National Environmental Policy: A Comparative Study of 17 Countries, pp. 1–18. Springer, Berlin (2002)

Kingdon, J.W.: Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies. Little Brown, Boston (1984)

March, J.C., Olsen, J.P.: Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics. Free Press, New York (1989)
Munir, K., Ergene, T., Tunaligil, V., Erol, N.: A window of opportunity for the transformation of national mental health policy in Turkey following two major earthquakes. Harvard Rev. Psychiatry **12**(4), 238–251 (2004)
Page, B.I., Shapiro, R.Y.: Effects of public opinion on policy. Am. Polit. Sci. Rev. **77**(1), 175–190 (1983)
Weber, M.: Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, Mohr, Tubingen (1905)
Wildavsky, A.: Choosing preferences by constructing institutions: a cultural theory of preference formation. Am. Polit. Sci. Rev. **81**(1), 3–22 (1987)

Chapter 6
Strategies for Policy Entrepreneurs

Abstract The final chapter brings the analysis to an operative conclusion by pointing out the different strategies that the policy entrepreneur can use in order to make a non-incremental policy change possible. In particular it will show how it is possible to modify the distribution of the resources, the patterns of interaction, the content of the decision and the characteristics of the decisional network. The final remarks will concern on the one hand the importance of institutionalisation and on the other of the timing of the decision. A protocol for assessing the feasibility of policy innovation will conclude the work.

Keywords Decisional strategy · Policy innovation · Institutionalisation · Timing

6.1 On the Part of the Innovator

Let's recap. In the previous pages we have assumed that, for the reason explained in Chap. 1, in political systems the vast majority of the decisions taken will be incremental, i.e. departing as little as possible from the *status quo*. Therefore, in order to introduce major policy innovations we have to look inside the black box of the policy making process, trying to understand its main elements. The model introduced at the end of Chap. 1, and specified in the following ones, posits that the outcome of a public policy decisional process depends on the interaction of different types of **actors** with different goals and roles who, within a **network** that can have different characteristics, exchange **resources** using different **patterns of interaction**, to obtain a **stake**, within a given **decisional context**.

It is time to recombine these different elements in a series of typical configurations of "successful" decisional processes. As we have already mentioned, by successful decisional process, we mean the ability to adopt and implement a non-incremental transformation of the status quo, regardless of the ability of the decision to achieve its goals (the substantial success of the policy). This idea comes from the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this book that any attempt to make a non-marginal change will clash with:

B. Dente, *Understanding Policy Decisions*, PoliMI SpringerBriefs,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9_6,

- the presence of explicit or latent opposition of actors who are against the solution or even against the definition of the problem;
- and/or with the indifference of other actors, who have the resources required to adopt the solution and would even be potentially interested, but due to cognitive limits or any other reason, are not able to picture the advantages they would have by supporting the innovation.

In other words the core problem of the decisional analysis is explaining how it is possible to make "important" decisions in fields that are known for their high level of complexity, as are usually political/administrative systems. The problem was actually already sharply perceived by Machiavelli who affirmed:

> And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. This coolness arises partly from fear of the Opposers, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not readily believe in new things until they have had a long experience of them. Thus, it happens that whenever those who are hostile have the opportunity to attack they do it like partisans, whilst the others defend lukewarmly (The Prince, Chap. 6).

From this world-famous quote we can draw a further element that we have already discussed when we analysed the role of the promoter in the decisional process: the majority of complex decisions are made on the impulse of one or a few people who raise the problem and/or formulate the initial solution. Therefore, analysing complex decisions implies putting oneself in the innovator's shoes, or, as it is better known in the literature, the **policy entrepreneur**, trying to understand what configuration of the decisional elements make possible what would otherwise be impossible.

But to put oneself in the innovator's shoes, means identifying the options that, theoretically, are available to "bring home" the transformation. It is certainly possible in fact that one can reach a structure of the decisional process that allows the non-incremental choice, simply by chance, or even by mistake. But after all, it is more likely, and certainly more desirable, that this is the result of a management of the decision-making process that explicitly aims to such a result.

Based on what we mentioned in the previous chapters in fact, it is legitimate to expect that a major, or even radical transformation of the status quo is associated to elements such as:

- the promoter's great availability of resources;
- the fact that the process is a positive sum game able to bring advantages to the majority of participants;
- the existence of common goals among the actors making collaboration possible;
- the unlikelihood that exogenous shocks will be strong enough to alter the decisional context in the short-term.

Unfortunately, it is more than likely that these conditions are not all present at the same time. Hence the chances of success are linked to the ability to recreate them artificially. As we said, this is the main task of the director of the decisional process.

At a higher level of abstraction, we can state the point as follows. The "solution" of a complex policy problem, involving actors who are interdependent and with different goals both by nature and preference intensity, can be conceptualized as a problem of coordination, meaning the need to generate all the necessary behaviours, and to avoid negative behaviours, in order to reach the goal (in our case the actual adoption of the transformation). Such coordination can be achieved through a formal procedure, for instance the majority rule, or through debate until unanimity is reached. As observed many years ago by Charles Lindblom, however, coordination achieved through formal procedures is terribly rare in interactions between social actors. Most of coordination that takes place in human societies, therefore also in the political-administrative systems, takes place informally through adaptation and manipulation. We usually try to avoid the insurgence of open conflicts:

- either by changing our behaviour according to what we think our partners expect from us (avoiding to behave in ways they consider unacceptable);
- or by manipulating other people's behaviour (unilaterally creating the conditions and incentives able to bring other individuals to adopt the behaviour we want);
- or, but only if the previous two solutions are not possible, we by activating a formal coordination process.

We therefore define a *decisional strategy* as the innovator's intentional attempt to generate the necessary coordination by changing the different elements of the decisional process (and by adapting to the constraints resulting from the goals and interests of other actors).

These strategies represent the "typical configurations" of the decisional processes that allow to adopt non-incremental decisions within specific decisional contexts. We must in fact immediately say that we do not have any form of theory able to generally link the decisional success of major policy decisions to a specific course of action. Just to give an example, there is no doubt that in certain circumstances the radicalization of a conflict can create stalemates and decisional failure, but in other cases the same course of action might be the winning solution in order to adopt important decisions very quickly. More in general, it is possible that the solution of certain problems passes through certain types of decisional strategies, but given the complexity and uncertainty of many policy decisions, it is highly unlikely that this association will be clear except for a few rare cases.

The "art and craft of policy analysis" (Wildawsky 1979), therefore, consists of the ability to "read" the decisional processes and choose the correct strategy to achieve the transformation desired.

However, this does not mean that we have to start from scratch. If, in fact, we do not know what is required or useful in each specific circumstance, at least we

know, according to the model introduced in the previous chapters, what we can do, meaning what elements of the decisional process are liable to manipulation, the intentional attempt to transform them.

It is important to notice that this knowledge is an important resource for actors, and especially for policy entrepreneurs. Alongside the substantive knowledge and basic information, the cognitive heritage of an actor also includes what we called strategic knowledge, meaning the correct conceptualization of how decisional processes generally take place and the information required to forecast how the process they are interested in at that specific moment, will develop: who are the actors, what are their goals and logic of action, what is at stake, what interaction patterns will prevail, how stable are the elements of the decisional context that could influence the outcome of the process.

Ultimately, the practical utility of public policy analysis of consists of increasing the strategic knowledge of the policy actors and making the creation of suitable decisional strategies possible. From an explanatory point of view, the analysis is necessary to make sense of the occurrence of rare events, the non-incremental modifications of public policies, increasing our knowledge of good practices, appropriate mechanisms to solve decisional problems. This does not offer the philosopher's stone that can turn any material into fine gold, but it helps our knowledge to progress and check if and how we can make our government systems evolve.

In the following paragraphs of this chapter we will examine the various possible "families" of strategies that consist in the manipulation of the various elements of the decision-making process. In particular, we will start from the manipulation of resources, to then move on to the manipulation of the patterns of interactions, of the content of the decision and of the network. We will then focus on institutionalization, meaning on the creation of new organizations and their importance for the policy decisions, and finally we will concentrate on the *timing* of the decision, i.e. on the relation between context transformations and the acceleration or slowing down of the decisional process.

6.2 Decisional Strategies

A strategy is the intentional transformation of one or more elements of the decisional process, aimed at determining the most favourable setting in order to make a non-incremental decision.

Of course, there is no need to underline how what we say can be applied to complex decisions, whereas in simple or routine cases, standard operating procedures are generally sufficient in order to make appropriate decisions (that will probably be incremental anyway).

It is more important to notice how it is highly likely that the course of action to adopt (or retrospectively, the course of action adopted) is a mix of different strategies, meaning that we intervene on different elements at the same time.

Furthermore, it often occurs that modifying one element generates intentional or unintentional consequences at different levels. For instance, changing the patterns of interaction can either increase or devaluate the resources of some actors, while the modification of the decisional network can be associated to a modification of the content of the decision. However, and for clarity reasons, we will analyse the strategies one by one.

6.2.1 Altering the Distribution of Resources

The first family of strategies we will consider refers to the manipulation of resources, meaning the alteration of the equilibrium between the actors of the process.

Obviously, it is a totally logical and intuitive strategy.

After all, it has been ever since Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, more than 2000 years ago, that the balance of resources between opposing parties has been catching the attention of scholars of military strategy and generals. The statement in the old Chinese text, according to which:

> To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.

means that the ability to always be superior in resources brings the enemy not to take the field and therefore surrender without fighting.

The great advantage of the manipulation of resources strategy is the fact that it is perfectly compatible with zero-sum games, in which making a decision involves the attribution of burdens to one or more categories of actors. Furthermore, the alteration of the balance of resources allows to be successful when the interaction pattern is *confrontation,* it improves the bargaining power and can certainly be useful to motivate the other participants if their collaboration is required.

In other words, the strategy based on the manipulation of resources owes most of its appeal to the fact that it leaves the relation between problem and solution intact and it minimises the need to change the initial rules of interaction, as well as the network of relevant actors.

Obviously this strategy can move in two directions:

- increase the innovator's resources and/or
- reduce the opposite party's resources.

As regards the first direction, which is definitely the most common option in policy decisions, the main tool is the research of allies able to increase the resources the innovating coalition has at its disposal. Consequently, these allies must be actors who, at the very least, do not have goals that contrast with the transformation. This does not mean that the potential allies are only those who are interested in the solution of the problem (who have content-related goals), but it is enough if they are interested in defeating Opposers and/or supporting proponents.

For instance, local conflicts generated by the opposition to transformations that could be potentially harmful for the environment, tend to create coalitions with political parties or political groups excluded from the national or local government, hoping that the failure of the proposal of the majority will bring them electoral benefits. It is however possible, on the other hand, that once they form a government, they will make the same decisions they opposed before.

Furthermore, in order to be useful, **allies** must have relevant resources to be successful in the decisional process. These resources can be:

- legal;
- political (e.g. authoritativeness, ability to influence the public opinion);
- economic (e.g. covering of a part of the investment required);
- cognitive (e.g. strengthening of the scientific quality of the proposal).

Information campaigns and the mobilization of well known testimonials are the daily bread of public relations professionals and therefore of political marketing. A good example is the mobilisation of political leaders, show business stars, world-wide famous entrepreneurs in the international competitions to host the so-called mega-events (e.g. the Olympic Games, the World Fair, but also the America Cup or the World Football Cup). Experience proves how this is very often a facilitating factor but never a sufficient one. If the behind-the-scene activity of Gianni Agnelli (the former boss of FIAT) has been crucial for the Turin winning bid for the Winter Olympics of 2006, the trip to Copenhagen of neo-elected president Barak Obama was not enough to secure the victory of Chicago for the 2016 Olympic Games.

We will soon try to formulate some more general hypotheses about the type of decisional situations in which this strategy is particularly effective, but first we have to deal with the alternative method used to modify the balance of resources, that is to say the strategy to weaken Opposers' resources.

Breaking up the enemy, weakening its credibility, neutralizing its main weapons are all options that have been taken into consideration and implemented since ever, even if sometimes they were regarded as not morally acceptable.

In fact, the political history of all countries is full of episodes in which political Opposers were attacked, both due to their public and private life, causing scandals, press campaigns, generating "revelations" that were more or less true, preparing dossiers and spreading suspicion.

Such attempts are not totally unknown also in decision-making processes. For instance, it is believed that the oil lobby, worried by the competition of the Italian nuclear industry, was behind the scandal that overcame the President of the Italian National Nuclear Energy Commission in 1964, thus effectively blocking the effort to build nuclear power plants. We must say that episodes like this are quite rare due to the nature of the stake: blocking or stimulating innovation is certainly very different from the destruction of a political leader. In the first case, the solution of a policy problem is at stake, in the second case, the distribution of political power is.

Furthermore, given their rather destructive character, the use of these tactics is more common among those who want to maintain the status quo, rather than among those who promote innovation.

There are however circumstances in which the devaluation of Opposers' resources has proved to be effective in generating the conditions for the decisional success.

A first example is the rather frequent use of opposing experts. When the Opposers of a transformation were able to mobilise cognitive resources (for instance quantifications of the environmental damages that would have been caused by an infrastructural intervention), the reaction of the promoters was to call new and more authoritative experts to contrast the catastrophic diagnosis and strengthen the idea that those serious consequences would not occur. However, the most likely consequence that the opposition of experts can have is the total devaluation of the objectivity of scientific knowledge in the eyes of the "non expert" public opinion.

This normally favours the Opposers who can then play on the "fear of the unknown" or, at a higher level, invoke the precautionary principle [according to which the absence of scientific certainties regarding the harmful effects of certain behaviour is not a good enough reason to prevent the regulation (Cameron and Wade-Gery 1995)]. After all, when we discussed the **expert** in policy processes we already concentrated on how the existence of scientific disputes decreases the value and importance of knowledge as a resource, with negative consequences on problem solving.

Another rather frequent way to try and destroy the resources of actors with different interests is to resort to courts, something that has become fairly common in policy making. Even in this case, it is a classic weapon of those who defend the status quo: many decisional processes were blocked or slowed down by appeals that were often based on irregular procedures during the preparatory phase or during the final decisional phase, having nothing or very little to do with the actual problem and/or the solution. However, we do not lack examples of "judicial tactics" able to force an innovative decision. In both cases resorting to the judiciary is intended to weaken the resources of "Opposers" in a zero-sum game.

Finally, we can make two general observations about the manipulation of resources.

The first is that the advantages of this strategy, and in particular the fact that it is compatible with any initial definition of the problem, with any type of game and any type of interaction, also represent a strong limit to its effectiveness. Because it is so "easy", it is also very fragile, especially from the innovator's point of view. Because they expect the promoters to use considerable resources to overcome the possible resistances, the Opposers will hurry to do the same trying to extend the coalition that supports them to all those who want to maintain the status quo for one reason or another. As a consequence, there are two opposing fronts that are more interested in expanding their own "power" rather than coming to a conclusion, of any kind, causing the decisional process to extend in time. This always goes against transformation due to the likely insurgence of exogenous shocks.

Therefore, by putting oneself on the part on the innovator, this strategy should probably be considered especially during the preliminary phase, before the proposal becomes public and the conflict is open, accumulating an amount of resources that is out of proportion compared to the ones that can actually be mobilised by the presumable counter-interested parties, to then try to act very quickly during the decisional phase, before the opposers have the time to get organized and deploy their resources. This *blitzkrieg* tactic (the lightning war theorized by the German military doctrine) does not entirely erases the potential fragility of the strategy, but increases its chances of success.

The second general consideration refers to the fact that the manipulation of resources—especially when the innovating coalition's resources increase—is more effective when the decisional obstacle is the lack of interest of actors whose resources are necessary, but who are not able to entirely understand the advantages they could have from a transformation of the status quo. This is somewhat of a paradox: the resources manipulation strategy, compatible in theory with the zero-sum game, is actually more effective when it is used in positive-sum games, that is to say when the main difficulty to overcome is the fact that actors whose cooperation is necessary, are not strongly motivated to commit themselves in the process. It is a matter of "making them understand" the importance of the problem by mobilising the media and attributing them the advantages, in terms of visibility and consensus, that are particularly important for political actors.

6.2.2 Modifying the Patterns of Interaction

The second family of strategies concerns the manipulation of the patterns of interaction which, as mentioned in Chap. 4, i.e. the rules according to which the resources are used. They are **confrontation** when resources are weighted, **bargaining** when they are exchanged and **collaboration** or problem solving when they are pooled to achieve the transformation desired. It is rather obvious that the possibility to change these patterns might have crucial effects on the success of the decisional process both as regards its effectiveness as well as its efficiency (the time needed to decide).

However, it is just as obvious that a single actor, the innovator in our case, can unilaterally change the pattern only if he/she wants to move towards an open conflict, meaning *confrontation*. In all other cases, the decisional rules must be agreed with the other parties too: negotiation, and most of all collaboration require at least two actors.

Therefore, the easiest version of this decisional strategy is basically the following: if the innovator believes that the resources available or the ones more easy to mobilise are sufficient to achieve the objectives foreseen, then it will be his interest to make the decision go in direction of a show down in which all parties have to show their resources in a logic of *confrontation*. As an example, let's consider a poker player who decides to "call" the other players.

This is a rather common practice in policy making processes that often brings positive results for the formal decision, although oppositions could re-emerge during implementation.

For instance, let's think about the frequent use of confidence vote in Parliament that consists in the decision of the Government to condition its own survival to the approval of one of its bills. Such a decision dramatizes the conflict with the oppositions, compacts the majority suffocating any internal dissent and also makes the parliamentary procedures shorter by concentrating the time dedicated to debates. This is clearly an "**exclusive strategy**" (Bobbio 2010) since participation is limited to members of the parliament, based on the simplification of the decisional process by use of legal resources (the right to ask parliament for a vote of confidence) and political resources (the existence of an even limited majority in parliament).

Also the recourse to referendums is based on the combination of political and legal resources and in many political systems (from Switzerland to California) not only can be requested by the citizens themselves, but can also directly introduce new laws. In Switzerland, for instance, there are many cases in which referendums were used to cut the policy alternatives and force an innovation that both political parties and parliamentary assemblies were reluctant to adopt.

Having said this, this first group of strategies also involves a great deal of risks. As regards the confidence vote in fact, if on one side an abuse of this tool can damage the relationship between the majority and opposition with devastating consequences on the smooth running of the assemblies (because, for instance, the opposition systematically turns to filibustering). On the other side there have been many referendums that had opposite effects to the hopes and expectations built up by the opinion polls of the innovation promoters.

Both the off-shore re-gasification unit in Monfalcone (Gallimbeni et al. 1999) and the restoration of the Avenida Diagonal in Barcellona, are examples of how popular consultation often underestimated the fact that a favourable public opinion does not necessarily always mean a majority at the polls, simply because the chances are that Opposers risking negative effects are urged to go to the polls a lot more than potential supporters, who will tend to abstain.

Things are different when we refer to "**inclusive strategies**" that are based on participation and the transparency of the processes. They try to "overcome refusal" (Vecchi 1992) by triggering patterns of interaction based on bargaining or collaboration. The activation of inclusive strategies can be a lot more difficult since they must reach out to all actors to be effective, but at the same time this has turned them into an object of particular interest in literature. One of the reasons why they are widely studied is that, in difficult times for representative democracy, inclusive strategies represent a viable alternative from a democratic perspective. The importance of deliberative democracy and of the debate about it (a Google Scholar search of the term found about 150,000 documents in English) is strongly linked to the issue of policy decisions. Many authors do not just observe how the extension of participation has or could have positive effects on the success of the decisional process—meaning the possibility to reach a non-incremental decision—but they

tend to affirm the superiority from the democratic point of view of the decisions that are taken through popular participation. In other words, the importance of inclusive strategies is not only recognized at the level of the single decisional processes, but also for its effects on the system (Regonini 2005).

Deliberative democracy involves tools that go beyond decisional strategies, for instance, participatory budgets (Sousa Santos 1998) or the *deliberative opinion poll* (Fishkin 1993). Here we concentrate in exploring decisional success and therefore we will analyse this sub-family of strategies from this perspective. The common element is represented by the fact that all variants break down the decisional process in two phases. During the first phase, the actors agree on the rules of the game that will have to be used. In the second phase the actual decision is taken sometimes unilaterally by the authority in charge and sometimes as the result of a bargaining process (if there are opposing interests) or of collaboration (if a common objective is identified).

Clearly, as inclusive strategies for the manipulation of patterns of interaction are based on the enlargement of the process to a group of other actors, they almost inevitably have consequences both on the structure of the network and on the content of the decision. However, these are indirect effects generated by an intervention on the patterns of interaction.

Here we will focus on three types of strategies that can be included in this sub-family and are called **participatory decision-making, mediation and public debate**. Each one of these techniques has many versions, but classifying them starting from the hardest to the softest can give an idea of their importance.

In its most extreme version, **participatory decision-making** consists of the attempt to make the policy decisions shift towards a rational decisional model by manipulating the interaction patterns. Its logical preconditions are the following:

- the participants have a common problem;
- there is a limited number of alternatives;
- there is a limited number of decisional criteria;
- there are accepted ways of measuring these criteria.

If the above mentioned conditions are roughly respected, it is possible to proceed as follows:

1. during the first phase, all stakeholders and actors who can influence the decision are summoned and unanimously agree which are the alternatives to be taken into consideration, which are the decisional criteria, their relative importance and which evaluation methods and techniques have to be used;
2. during the second phase, the criteria to evaluate the alternatives are applied as neutrally as possible, a ranking of the best solutions is made and compensation for participants who are penalized by the final solution is discussed.

This strategy can actually vary a lot—for instance the criterion can simply be the agreement of all participants—and it is widely used in the processes to define land use, but it has been also employed, with mixed success, also for environmentally sensitive decisions.

One should be aware of the fragility of this type of strategy at least in its harder version. First of all, we must point out the difficulty of involving all stakeholders since there are actors who have no interest in taking part because oppose the very definition of the problem. Secondly, process-related goals can interfere. Finally, in a long process it is almost impossible to avoid exogenous shocks that modify the initial conditions.

But maybe there is a more general theoretical reason for the failure of these practices. At the end of the day they consist in the attempt to enforce, in a participatory manner, planning activities, meaning "decisions about future decisions", concerning "how" decisions must be made (Dente 2011). As Scharpf mentioned (1986a), the attempt to improve the policy making process through a better meta-policy is "strewn with skeletons of too many failed attempts to improve the procedures and institutions [that seemed] perfectly logical". According to the author the reason is that "no procedural innovation is able to exorcize the essentially political character of public policy decisions".

The second type of strategy—**mediation**—is softer than the previous one and basically consists in using the first phase, in which the rules of the game are decided, to find a mediator, namely of a person to which entrust the management of the process in order to reach a solution accepted by all interested parties. As we noticed when discussing possible roles of the actors, the mediator is a director of the process who does not have objectives of his own, regarding to the definition of the problem and/or the nature of the solution to adopt, but only process-related goals, that in this case consists of maintaining good relations among all actors involved, regardless of the outcome of the process itself. There is a vast literature regarding mediation as an alternative way to solve conflicts also because it is widely employed in the field of environmental policies mostly in the USA (Amy 1987; Weidner 1995; Susskind-Cruikshank 2001).

A fairly recent work (Turkiewitz Allen 2009) reviewed 10 studies that in turn analyzed 375 mediations of environmental conflicts showing how the success rate (defined as the ability to achieve a formal agreement) was of 74 %, said agreements were respected in 68 % of the cases, the reduction of costs compared to other methods for conflict resolution was of 85 % and that stakeholders' satisfaction was of 75 %.

The current explanation of the large use of mediation in the USA and the corresponding low propensity to its use in Europe, points to some institutional differences. In particular, the literature focuses on the dangers that an attempt to force innovation through the use of legal resources and more in general the recourse to authority, can bring in presence of a judicial system like the American one that strongly tends to retrospectively acknowledge heavy compensation to those who are able to prove—in general to a jury—that they underwent serious damage due to the behaviour of a private entity (for instance an industrial plant) or a public one (for instance the lack of surveillance of a polluting activity). What is particularly scary, and stimulates proponents of activities that have a strong impact on the environment to enter mediation processes, is the possibility for the jury to acknowledge **punitive** damages aiming to prevent, through deterrence, that similar

unlawful behaviour can happen again in the future. The sums involved therefore often go well beyond the damage actually suffered by the injured parties (the **compensatory** damages).

At a higher level of abstraction, we can say that the key element that explains the success of the tool, is the interest of all parties to reduce uncertainty, whether it regards the chance to be forced to pay an exorbitant compensation or whether it regards the duration and costs of the process, or the damage to the image of public authorities in the attempt to force a controversial decision.

This preoccupation regarding the potentially devastating and often unpredictable effects that litigation has in the USA, was certainly the original boost to spread alternative methods for the solution of disputes other than the judicial system (alternative dispute resolutions or ADR). It was strengthened even more by the progressive professionalization of the mediation activity that, on the supply side, contributed to the popularity of the tool. Besides, mediation (that we can describe as a process facilitated by a professional aiming to reach a formal agreement) is particularly effective when the interests at stake, and therefore the actors, are more than two, so when any partial agreement risks not being accepted by some of the stakeholders. As we have already mentioned, complexity and uncertainty are absolutely normal in policy innovations.

It is unnecessary now to further discuss the methods to implement mediation. We just have to mention that some specific techniques have been developed, for instance the so-called "boot camps", in which the negotiation process to reach a final agreement takes place in an isolated place and within a limited time span. We must also say that a negotiation process inevitably tends to change the content of the decision (the stake), as well as the characteristics of the network of actors.

It is difficult to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of mediation for the solution of policy problems in European countries. There are probably many reasons for this, among which we must mention the psychological difficulty for those who hold public authority to formally enter a process that subordinates its exercise to the fact of reaching an agreement.

This does not mean that there aren't examples of *de facto* mediation in Europe too. It is however mostly a non-professionalized activity often tied to the individual skills of very able people who are therefore non reproducible. Also, it is often disguised as the assignment of special powers to an individual or an organization. For instance, the appointment of special commissioners, who are exempted from a series of regulations, often hides mediation processes between opposite parties. However, the non-marginal consequence of such an arrangement is that that the formal decision is not an agreement, but a unilateral act of the commissioner who discussed the substance of the decision with the other actors of the game, but maintains full responsibility for it and therefore runs the risk of being betrayed by the same people that actually agreed during the process.

To conclude this matter, we must underline how mediation, whether it be formal or non-formal, is certainly not the panacea for the solution of all policy problems. Not only are there conflicts that cannot be mediated because they involve value-based or ideological decisions, but in many cases the process is not

able to begin and in any case, according to the information we mentioned above, the substantial success (total respect of the formal agreements signed) is only achieved half of the times.

Nevertheless, the advantage of this decisional strategy is the fact that, unlike other methods in which the interaction patterns are the object of the transformation, it acknowledges the presence of opposite interests and a plurality of conflicting goals. The legitimacy of such interests and objectives is not denied according to assumptions regarding the existence of a superior rationality, whether it refers to the existence of technically "optimal" choices, or whether it refers to concepts of public interest or common good. This of course may not suit those who give a lot of importance to value-related elements in the resolution of conflicts, but in some cases it allows to find a solution that works.

The third type of inclusive strategy that we will study is even softer than the previous ones because it does not explicitly aim to find a solution, more or less agreed on, but simply limits itself to anticipate the decisional phase with an actual preparatory phase strongly open to the participation of whoever is interested. The most famous example of this approach in the infrastructures field, is the **public debate** firstly introduced by French legislation. Basically, it consists of the practice (that is compulsory in France and in some Italian regions) for promoters of major public works to submit their projects to a preliminary public discussion in order to gather objections and adapt the projects accordingly (Floridia 2008a).

The debate can be carried out in many different ways but some common features can be detected. Usually, an external subject is appointed as facilitator of the process, then all preparatory material is collected in order to provide the basic information needed for the development of the debate. After this, if necessary, an information campaign is launched to "wake the sleeping dog" (Bobbio 2010) and increase the interest of potential stakeholders. At this point, the heart of the process is reached by summoning public meetings in which everyone can take part and talk. Some of these meetings are thematic while others have an open agenda. During this phase, participants decide whether it is necessary or not to hear the opinion of other experts or to see more evidence. Finally, the facilitator (who is often supported by a committee) prepares a final report in which he/she summarises the main issues and the proposals that resulted from the debate. At this point, the promoter must decide if and to what extent he wants to consider the results of the debate in the design of a new project. There are nowadays several cases of public debates (Bobbio 2010; Floridia 2008b) that show a great variation per duration, participation techniques adopted, mandate assigned to the facilitators/guarantors of the process, etc. What they have in common, is the fact that the public debate is not legally binding, not even indirectly, and that every limitation to the discussion (for instance excluding the question whether it is necessary to carry out the intervention by giving a mandate exclusively to discuss how it will be carried out) is basically impossible and is rapidly overcome by the dynamics of the debate.

There are various advantages in this methodology:

1. first of all, it aims at prematurely raising a series of objections, thus giving the chance to be prepared to contrast them or accept them;
2. secondly, a mutual learning process is created and is useful for all participants. In particular, there is "local knowledge" that the innovator is bound to ignore and can be gathered during the process. In many cases, the project is substantially improved in the interest of the proponent himself by the information and suggestions gathered during the debate;
3. thirdly, the actors are changed by this experience. This goes for common citizens as much as it does for experts and mainly for interest groups, whether they be special or general, who are forced to measure their position with reality. It is hard for instance, for an environmentalist group, to keep using the rhetoric of fear when facing experts able to demolish the exaggerations and loaded interpretations in a public debate;
4. finally, a public debate keeps authorities safe from the recurrent accusation of not listening to citizens, it increases the transparency of the process and weakens the suspicion that some decisions were made due to hidden or unmentionable interests.

This does not mean that this strategy is always working: the French experience shows how among 37 cases of public debate ended between 2002 and 2009, on 4 occasions the project was abandoned, on 26 occasions it was presented again with substantial modifications and on 7 occasions was left unchanged.

Actually, especially at the level of the system, but also in single cases, the main objective of the public debate is probably to increase trust. This issue is very important to assure cooperation among actors, which is a condition to guarantee the socio-economic development of territories, (Fukujama 1996; Gambetta 1988) and lies also beneath several situations that do not have a lot to do with the decisional processes, e.g. integrated territorial planning (Pasqui 2005). A classic case of inclusive strategies aiming to create cooperation among actors is for instance, the urban strategic planning in which, at least in theory, the sharing of a medium-term vision (what the city should be like in 5/10 years) creates the conditions for mutual trust among actors who have opposite goals in the short-term, but put their differences aside and cooperate to implement the action plan included in the strategic document. In other words, decisional processes can be divided in two phases: creation of the vision and building the action-plan. This indirectly causes a transformation in the initial patterns of interaction (Dente-Melloni 2005).

But it is now time to conclude this close examination of the decisional strategies based on the manipulation of the patterns of interaction by asking when it is suitable or useful to adopt these approaches in order to introduce policy innovations.

As regards the decision to force confrontation, we have already answered in the previous pages. It can have positive effects, meaning it can accelerate the formal decisional process, if:

- the innovating coalition has a lot more resources, per quantity and quality, than the Opposers;

- it is legitimate to expect that during the implementation phase there will not be any serious problems.

As regards the first condition, for instance, the success of the referendums can sometimes be considered sufficient in order to prevail in the conflict, because the principle of prevalence of popular sovereignty above any objection is part of the nature of democratic systems.

As regards the second condition, total self-sufficiency during the implementation phase, the strategy to force the decision through confrontation is suitable:

- in all cases in which the policy is merely symbolic (therefore the implementation problem does not even arises);
- in many regulatory policies in which enforcement automatically has to do with surveillance/repression (for instance, no smoking in public places);
- and in general when the administration does not need further inputs to enforce the decision (for instance concession of a financial contribution that is particularly controversial).

It is important to underline how the attempt to cause an open conflict is common enough in policy decisions. Too often, in fact, it is assumed the unconditional superiority of inclusive strategies, exorcising the practice of open conflict as a way to solve problems (and war as a way to solve international conflicts). By doing this, we give credit to a rather conciliatory or irenic version of the policy making process, while in political history we do have examples of important policy innovations that got over successful oppositions, even in old and stable democratic systems. Tony Blair's decision to force the approval of the law that raised university fees even though it caused an actual revolt in the Labour Party and Barack Obama's decision to get the health care system reform through at the US senate by just one vote, are examples of how policy making is a political process also based on power, as widely recognized by many classics of political science such as Machiavelli, Hobbes and Carl Schmitt. It is not only this, as Tocqueville teaches us, but also this.

Moving on to inclusive strategies, whether they are participatory decision-making, mediation or public debate, we must stress how they are decisional strategies, that is to say, recalling the abovementioned definition, intentional attempts of the innovator to generate the necessary coordination by changing the elements of the decisional process he/she can manipulate. Too often, in fact, they are introduced as "provisions" or "practices" able to guarantee the solution of the policy problem affirming their democratic superiority and/or capacity to generate better solutions. Actually, from the point of view we are interested in, this family of strategies is one of the ways to overcome the obstacles that hinder a decision.

It is not necessarily true that the decisions made through inclusive methods are more democratic (because since participation is function of the intensity of preferences, the costs of the final decision lay often on those who were not able to participate anyway and are almost always the majority of citizens) or technically better (for instance because their cost is increased out of proportion compared to

the added benefits). Finally, because these strategies attempt to directly or indirectly achieve a formal coordination, they are a lot less common than what we believe, since most of the coordination is carried out informally by adaptation and manipulation. However, if "possible" solutions do arise from these strategies, they are almost by definition superior to the "impossible" solutions, meaning the decisional failures that make the history of policy innovations.

This said, the circumstances in which the inclusive strategies appear useful and sometimes necessary, are logically and according to experience, the following:

1. the absence of the conditions we know are necessary for the success of exclusive strategies (superiority of resources and automatic implementation);
2. the fact that the promoter of innovation does not have all the information required: involving many actors is an effective and rather cheap way to increase cognitive resources;
3. the need to recover situations of widespread mistrust fuelled by the memory of past episodes;
4. the need to involve all important actors to avoid the insurgence of new obstacles and oppositions, after the closure of the participatory process or even after the formal decision;
5. the technical, economic and political possibility to substantially alter the initial proposal: it is obvious that otherwise this type of strategies would become a mere public relations exercise, with no effect on the chances of success in the best of cases, and sometimes with negative effects because the oppositions would radicalize their position feeling mocked by having been called to participate without any effect whatsoever.

6.2.3 Changing the Content of the Decision

Although it is less publicized than the family of the so-called inclusive strategies, and sometimes less elegant, the group of strategies we will now focus on is probably the most effective and common way to generate important policy innovations. It basically consists in the attempt of the promoter to change the content of the decision in order to develop the interest and/or overcome the oppositions of other actors. After all, we have already seen how all inclusive strategies almost inevitably bring changes to the initial proposal although they do it basically in a process of interaction with the stakeholders. This can also be done, however, unilaterally by the promoter of the innovation.

In analytical terms, the transformation of the stake means the alteration of the distribution of the costs and benefits of the decision among participants, trying to transform the process in a non-zero sum game. This can take place by working in two different directions: enlarging the content of the decision in order to take care of the goals (and interests) of the other actors, or in the opposite direction, by

breaking down the innovation in a series of more limited decisions that are less demanding and therefore more acceptable.

Starting from this second strategy—that we will call the segmentation of the stake—it is generally accepted, since a long time, there are gradualist approaches able to generate radical transformations through a sequence of incremental decisions. This answers the critiques of some scholars who accused Lindblom's incremental model of being basically conservative, since it tended to deny the possibility of real reforms. Of course, the effectiveness of such approaches is strongly influenced by the stability of the decisional context (absence of exogenous shocks), by the chance to extend the solution in time and most of all, by the ability to assure the continuity of the strategic direction. However, against the impossibility or excessive cost of immediately making the desired decision, it is a strategy that the policy makers should seriously consider. The increase of the risk and the delay in time, can be accepted for instance when the transformation is considered unavoidable and when gradualism is a way to defuse the most aggressive oppositions.

Of course this is a strategy that cannot always be used, because not all transformations can be divided in time and/or space. However, we must remember that there are circumstances in which it can really be used and not only to solve conflicts, but also to prevent them.

The alternative strategy, that we call the enlargement strategy, obviously goes in the opposite direction and more precisely towards an enlargement of the content of the decision, in order to foresee the solution to various problems within the decision itself, and the achievement of different objectives: the promoter's original objective and those shared by the other actors, whose participation is necessary to take the decision.

The so-called *package deals* practice, for instance, is part of this category and gives the chance to include a varied group of decisions into a single legal text, to facilitate the parliamentary process. This is a well-known phenomenon to scholars of the legislative process in the USA and in almost every country, where quite often different, and sometimes very small, provisions are "packed up", in the same bill.

Of course there can be very good reasons to do something like this, but it is also likely that the legislative process is also the occasion for many members of parliament to include provisions that were of special interest to their clients, through a practice the Americans call *log rolling,* which means that one's support to a specific measure sponsored by another member of parliament depends on the inclusion of his/her own proposals in exchange.

Nevertheless, we must not believe that the enlargement of the stake only applies to more or less disreputable parliamentary techniques. The combination of different problems into one solution can be a positive way to introduce important innovations, supporting win–win strategies.

By dealing with a variety of problems all at the same time and with one solution, the enlargement of the stake strategy becomes one of the ways to introduce a series of policy innovations, as the following examples in the field of environmental policies show:

- the localization of plants for toxic waste processing as an answer to the employment crisis of a specific area (Larrue and Dziedzicki 1998);
- the conversion of a former movie theatre in a concert hall in Milano as an attempt to find a solution to three different problems: avoid the loss of an important cultural building, enlarge the offer of concert rooms in Milan and try to guarantee the survival of a symphony orchestra (IRER 1989);
- the introduction of separate tanks for oil and ballast on oil tankers as a way to prevent sea pollution and avoid scrapping the ships due to low traffic caused by 1973 and 1979 oil shocks (Hartje 1995).

But maybe the clearest example of the joint treatment of problems as a decisional strategy regards the ever more aggressive competition of cities for the assignment of the so-called mega events (Olympic Games, World Fair, etc.). Even regardless of the direct (tourism) and indirect (international visibility) benefits, what cities expect from being seats of such events is a substantial input of national money that will enable them to improve their infrastructures. At least since the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 it became clear that mega events (Guala 2007) are one-off occasions because they join the problem of urban regeneration to the national interest to offer a positive image of the country. Therefore, they allow a concentration of funding in areas that are among the richest and that would normally be penalized in the distribution of public investment. The decision of the new mayor of Milan in 2005 to bid for Expo 2015 did in fact overturn, and with greater success, the strategy pursued by her predecessor who tried to prove how, according to the data, Milan was "due" more funding. The result has been that a series of important infrastructural decisions—including two lines of the underground and the several motorways—were strongly accelerated through national funding in order to be ready in time for the event.

Nevertheless, the joining of different problems is not always a successful strategy: what is essential is that the problems to be connected are those of the promoters and those of the Opposers. Trying to show that the proposed solution is also in the interest of a third party or, worse still, in the "general interest", is usually not sufficient.

Compensation is at the centre of a specific version of the enlargement of the stake strategy. Within the field of studies and practices related to the solution of the NIMBY syndrome, particular importance is given to the so-called compensations: those interventions, not directly linked to the project, aiming at avoiding a decrease in the environmental, social and economic value of the place the project will be placed in Avanzi (2010).

The basic idea is that since many projects give benefits to a vast population by concentrating costs on a small part of it, it seems fair, and in any case useful to overcome the conflict inevitably generated, to imagine "side payments", namely

compensations, that change the costs/benefits ratio for the affected population. The opening of negotiation processes with the population involved is now a common practice used by all the promoters of high impact projects.

The use of strategies that modify the content of the decision, is very common. It is almost always possible to transform the solution, in order to minimise the opposition and/or attract new actors in the innovating coalition. Whether that happens thanks to the inclusive processes described in the previous paragraph, thanks to (a series of) bilateral agreements or unilaterally by the director of the process, it doesn't really matter. What really matters is acknowledging that the decision, if conveniently changed, can solve a series of problems

The only condition that must really be satisfied to use this strategy successfully is the conceptual flexibility of the initial project. From this point of view it appears that designing "the best possible solution" according to usual technical/economic standards is a potential obstacle to the feasibility of the innovation, since every modification can only make it worse, and will probably be rejected by the promoter. Such conceptual flexibility derives also from the from the imagination of the promoter: a successful policy entrepreneur is someone that not only advances his own proposal but must search for all the problems that can be solved by the solution he is interested in.

6.2.4 Transforming the Decisional Network

The last family of decisional strategies, the manipulation of the network strategy, regards the quantity and characteristics of the actors involved and their connections. Preliminarily we must point out that the transformation of the network of actors is also a consequence of the adoption of the other strategies. Whether it is a matter of increasing resources by researching allies, developing inclusive strategies or enlarging the stake by joining different problems, the consequence is inevitably a change in the characteristics of the network that are (as we mentioned in Chap. 2) density, complexity and centrality.

Nevertheless, this modification can also be achieved autonomously.

Starting from **density**, for instance, it is obvious that an increase of the interrelations of the actors is implicit in all inclusive strategies based on participation.

Under certain conditions, the direct interaction of the interested actors can trigger a learning process regarding which proposals are acceptable and which aren't in the eyes of participants. It is also possible to create a process of deferred exchanges, facilitated by the increase of mutual trust. Nevertheless, this is a fragile mechanism, partly because it is exposed to exogenous shocks, partly because a change in the people involved risks making the whole process start again from scratch.

This means that a "densification" strategy of the network works better when the set of actors is stable and when we are sure that their constant interaction can bring a series of incremental decisions able to cause a real policy innovation.

It is more difficult to find examples of the alternative strategy, decreasing density. However, there is no doubt that in presence of very bitter conflicts, it is reasonable to imagine that the one of the main roles of the director, especially if he is also a mediator, is to keep apart the opposing parties in order to avoid emotional and sometimes irrational elements (that are not always unknown in policy making processes) interfering with the possible solution of the conflict itself.

As regards the second property of the network, that is to say **complexity**, we already mentioned how the plurality of the points of view in the process can be an important added value, especially to generate innovative results when the interests of the actors involved do not necessarily diverge. As Hugh Heclo said "governments are not only powering but also puzzling" (Heclo 1974, p. 305). Sometimes the uncertainty about the solution of a problem is so big that the search of a viable alternative cannot disregard the contribution of everyone involved. Even in a conflict, an increase in complexity can increase the chances of finding new equilibriums, because it increases the number of possible transactions and changes the preferences of the different actors. Finally, a higher number of actors involved, with different characteristics, also has the advantage of reducing the political responsibility in case of possible failures, since the choice was made by a plurality of people (it is the well-known mechanism of blame avoidance).

The last element explains the development of bipartisan processes: beyond the rhetoric of common good and of the "superior interests of the nation", the chance to involve the opposition is born from the fear that otherwise the risk of losing consensus, generated by the impossibility to achieve the result electors hoped for and were promised, is too high. The interest of the opposition to be involved is due to its hope to get possession of the benefits linked to a successful solution of the collective problem, at least partly.

Increased complexity can take place in both of the dimensions this property of networks is made of.

As regards the types of actors:

- the involvement of experts is an obvious way to enlarge the field of available solutions, as well as the legitimacy of the decision in the eyes of the public opinion;
- the intervention of bureaucracies, besides giving stability to the process and facilitating the implementation of the decision, allows to exploit the memory of institutions to see how similar problems were dealt with in the past;
- special interests, e.g. firms, can bring a more pragmatic approach to the policy-making process, making it possible to experiment innovative solutions, especially if they promise economic benefits;
- similarly, the politicization of the issue, that inevitably generates a an increase in visibility, provides incentives for the participation of political actors, always in search of new consensus.

The benefits of an extension of the points of view in the research of solutions to policy problems are so important that sometimes it is the actor who tries to generate them within himself, almost changing his nature. Not everybody knows for

instance, that Greenpeace, an environmental organization famous for its militancy, not only funds scientific research with the aim to find new solutions to environmental problems, but in the past also struck alliances with private firms to prove the feasibility of a business model based on sustainability.

To increase the number of the territorial levels involved (the second dimension of complexity) can also have positive effects on decisional effectiveness:

- As it is clear by now, whenever the policy innovation involves localized territorial transformations, the non-involvement of the representatives of the population (whether they are municipalities or grass-roots associations) is often a major obstacle for the implementation of the proposal because it strengthens the opposition, animated not only by the fear of unacceptable costs, but also by the feeling that everything went "over the heads" of people, treated as if they were "second-class citizens".
- On the other side the attempt to globalize the problem, involving international organizations, is a strategic decision that often turned out to be winning. This is how we can explain, for instance, the race of many localities to have their historical/artistic sites or natural beauties included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites. Not only do they guarantee their protection and increase the attractiveness for tourists, but mostly a certain amount of pressure is put on national entities to gain additional funding for the preservation and increase in value of the sites. Objectives can also be internal: in Venice for instance, the search of European funds was not really motivated by financial necessities but was more interested in increasing the legitimacy in the eyes of the public opinion and in the fact that the stringency of European decisional procedures could cut short the never-ending debates about the issue, introducing fixed deadlines for the formal decision.
- More in general, it was noticed that in many policy areas the opportunity to develop the so-called multilevel governance, that is to say, the involvement of institutional entities who have different geographical constituencies, is crucial to avoid the collusive phenomena typical of processes often taking place within the same territorial community (Cersosimo and Wolleb 2001; Marks and Hooge 2003).

In short, the rise of the network complexity is often a winning strategy to generate non-incremental transformations of public policies. The most informed innovators, the real policy entrepreneurs, are well aware of this. Franco Bassanini, the minister who between 1996 and 2001 had a leading role in one of the biggest attempts of modernization of Italian public administration, always believed that it wouldn't have been possible without involving the best experts, the public servants unions, the regional and local administrations and entrepreneurial associations. The Jacobin transformation, steered from above and imposed to the other actors not only is often fragile during implementation (as we saw when discussing the manipulation of resources), but it sometimes tends to ignore crucial aspects of the problem often undermining the effectiveness of the solution.

The "terrible simplifiers" already mentioned by Burckhardt in the nineteenth century, are not only dangerous but also represent obstacles to transformations as proven for instance by the socio/economic stagnation of many authoritarian regimes. This is due to the difficulty in generating innovation in strongly centralized systems that are therefore very often bureaucratized. In this case too, it is not universal truth, but it is something that must certainly be taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, as in the previous case, we cannot exclude that the reduction of complexity, in certain decisional contexts, can represent an appropriate strategy. It consists of the reduction of the typology of actors involved, so it is implicit in all of the exclusive strategies we discussed before.

For instance: if it appears clear that a solution to a problem must be found, narrowing down the decisional process to those who are directly involved can be highly effective. This is the rationale behind the legislation forbidding the export of waste from the areas where it is produced: the costs of the non-decision should fall on the local populations pushing their representatives to search for an agreement and repress any attempt of free-*riding*. But the decision of the Special Commissioner for the Turin-Lyon high speed train, to manage the process in a direct and exclusive relation with the Val di Susa municipalities is another example of the reduction of network complexity although in a logic of inclusive process management. In this case, the reason was to appeal to the interests—or to the *ésprit de corps*—of the mayors of the municipalities involved not to delegate their relation with citizens to others, and to present an united front when dealing with the Region, the national government and European Union.

Therefore, as usual, there aren't any solutions *bonnes à tout faire,* but the choice of the most appropriate decisional strategy must consider the goals of the actors besides a series of other elements.

There are less doubts as regards the last characteristic of the network that can be manipulated, that is to say **centrality**. We can quite easily say that without an effective direction, complex decisional processes are destined to fall through. This is just another way to say that we cannot have innovation without innovators and this goes both for the content of the decision as for the decisional process.

Effective direction doesn't mean hierarchy and authoritarianism of course. Even the most open decisional practices (let's consider techniques rather popular nowadays like *brainstorming*, *future conferences* or *open space technology*) foresee the respect of specific rules and the existence of someone (the facilitator) who guarantees they are respected by "directing traffic".

The effectiveness of the direction also includes the efficiency of the process, avoiding for instance to keep reconsidering the decisions of previous phases and minimizing delays (thus reducing the risk of exogenous shocks).

However, the search of efficiency does not at all exclude the possibility of redundant processes, especially when the uncertainty about the feasibility and about the net benefits of a solution is high. This is for instance, one of the main theoretical justifications, in the relationship between institutional design and public policy making, of the bicameral parliamentary system or of the so-called

cooperative federalism, where the competencies are shared by the federation and the member states. The iteration of the decision can generate improvements, rethinks, transformations. Of course, as we already mentioned, these decisional patterns can bring to inertia or to sub-optimal results, but in many circumstances they are the most suitable for innovation. After all, as Schumpeter used to say (quote from Bendor 1985, p. 290) "economists have debated whether competitive or oligopolistic firms are more innovative. (Significantly, none has bet on monopolies)".

Much depends on the effectiveness of the director which in turn is linked to his/her authoritativeness and charisma and therefore to the trust participants have in him/her. And in any case, it is not at all necessary that the direction is always assured by a single individual: the logic of "one man in charge" belongs to the group of "truths" that is more often falsified than confirmed. This, for instance, is the reason why the direction of particularly complex processes is assigned to a team in which different interests and logic of action are represented. Or, in some cases, it is possible to entrust the direction of the process to people able to activate a network of actors at all levels. On the contrary, "holding on tight" to the process, leaving the direction to one individual entrusted with special powers, can be a negative arrangement, as the case of the "special commissioners" who failed their mission proves.

6.3 Institutionalization as a Strategy

A road that has often been chosen to facilitate the solution of policy problems and mark discontinuity is institutionalization. Basically, it consists of the creation of an ad hoc organization, whose mission coincides with the desired transformation. It actually is a specific case of a more general category, the transformation of the institutional rules, that can even mean the modification of the procedural sequences, the creation of collective bodies to support formal coordination that we already mentioned when discussing the manipulation of resources, the interaction patterns or network properties. However, the creation of a new organizational entity (a ministry, agency or body, an independent authority, etc.) is a special case because very often (and too often according to some scholars) such a transformation is equivalent, in public communication, to the policy transformation, meaning that the most publicized news is the institutional transformation itself.

The reasons of such a potential communicative distortion are quite clear. On one side, the announcement of the birth of the new organization represents a simple message, able to catch the attention of a public opinion not really interested in the technicalities of public policy. To say "the antitrust authority is born" is certainly easier than to explain through what mechanisms it can protect competition. The same goes for many other cases, from the privacy protection policy to the recurrent proposal to establish the metropolitan authorities without specifying the mission of the new institution.

On the other side, the birth of a new organization is very interesting for the political and administrative elite, especially due to the opportunities it offers in the appointment of its managers and for the consequences on the transformation of the balance of power and influence among actors.

The most interesting questions refers to a different profile, more specifically if and how it is possible to situate such a decision within the conceptual framework we introduced in the previous paragraphs, or why the birth of a new institutional subject can represent a way to generate coordination among policy actors that as we know, is the essence of a decisional strategy.

An example can explain the general meaning of the institutionalization strategy better than any conceptual analysis.

Until the 1980s, there wasn't a Ministry for the environment in many European countries (Janicke-Weidner 1997) and its duties were carried out by to other ministries with very different missions: in Spain the *Ministerio de Obras Publicas*, in Great Britain the *Department of Housing and Local Government*, in Italy the *Ministry of Health*. In a situation of progressive growth and harmonization of environmental legislation at a European level, this inevitably generated a specific definition of the public policy, and even before this, of the policy problem itself; partly due to the technical-professional skills in the organizations and partly encouraged by the organized interests that traditionally had a relation with that administration. In Italy, placing environmental duties within the ministry for health caused to focus almost exclusively on industrial pollution and on its consequences on health and neglect all those aspects (first of all the global impact of economic development) in which the harmfulness for man was not so evident. It is significant, for instance, that the first law for water protection was a parliamentary initiative, thus proving a substantial lack of governmental interest regarding this matter. The creation in 1986 of the Ministry for the environment progressively created a stable interlocutor for all European and worldwide negotiations that in those years were the main engine of the policy dynamic and were a very important part of the redefinition of the collective problem to which the public action had to contribute in the search of a solution. At the same time, the creation of the ministry, often entrusted to very important politicians, had different effects. An actor was created who, in all fields and at all levels, (from debates within the council of ministers, to budget negotiations, to the definition of the Cabinet's legislative programme) reclaimed his position, the exclusiveness of his competencies, the need to autonomously manage an important amount of financial resources and reserve for his proposals a significant amount of time in Parliament (Dente 1995).

In more analytical terms, we can say that according to the circumstances, and not necessarily in an alternative manner, the creation of a new organizational entity destined to deal with a specific problem can be situated among two different families of strategies introduced in the previous paragraphs, i.e. the *manipulation of the stake* (because it is a matter of changing the policy problem) and the *manipulation of the network*, because it refers to the creation of a new actor with automatic consequences on the complexity and centrality of the network and possible consequences on its density.

There are many policy sectors in which the institutionalization strategy represented an important element in stimulating significant transformations, i.e. making non-incremental decisions.

In particular, its use for the "definition of the problem", i.e. of the stake, is the origin of the creation of many independent regulatory authorities. They belong to the family of the *non majoritarian institutions* to use a common definition (Majone 1996), that is to say those public institutions that are not politically accountable, meaning that the principles of representative democracy are not valid for them. Their creation is in fact often connected to the need to recognize, even symbolically, the existence of a problem that is different from the ones discussed previously. Whether it be the protection of competition in the supply of public services, of the guarantee of independence from political control of the monetary policy, of privacy protection, of stimulating productivity in the public sector through the creation of an impartial evaluator, the common element that joins all these cases certainly very different one from another, is the idea that it is necessary to affirm the existence of a specific public good that must be protected separately from the others. This regardless of the ability of these subjects (very high in some cases, very modest in other circumstances) to play an real role in structuring of the network of the actors involved.

On the contrary, the need to have people able to direct the policy processes, both as regards the formulation of the programmes as well as their implementation, is at the basis of the use of the institutionalization strategy in policies for socio-economic development. The re-orientation of contents and types of interventions took place, for instance, through the creation of the Local Development Agencies (Vedres-Bruszt 2010), complex entities that often have a political as well as technical and bureaucratic component, able to promote and direct the networks and positively implement local development projects. The same is valid in a completely different sector, that is to say parks and natural reserves. In this case, in the absence of a dedicated agency, the decision to protect an area and improve its usability for recreational use, always risks being brought back into question and sometimes being completely reversed.

So, institutionalization as a decisional strategy can be entirely broken down into the two families of the manipulation of the stake and the manipulation of the network.

It is important however to underline how, under certain circumstances, it can be a totally inadequate strategy. The history of public administrations is full of episodes in which the emphatic announcement of the birth of a new entity able to "solve the problem" is followed by a total failure. Sometimes this is due to the fact that the problem is simply insoluble, sometimes the objective was purely symbolic (to show that some action was taken), in other cases the real concerns were political or institutional in nature (e.g. to find a role for some cronies). But maybe it was simply the wrong decisional strategy since neither the manipulation of the stake nor of the network were actually able to achieve the results expected.

But, more in general, this means that the creation of institutional solutions for policy problems (Knoepfel 1995, 2009) is subject to the same "rules" and precautions of the decisional strategy creation that we have already discussed.

6.4 Timing

A further element that creates complexity in the solution of (complex) decisional problems is that it is not enough to choose the most appropriate strategy, but it is necessary to use it at the right moment. This of course is a consequence of the fact that the decisional process takes time and the context and the network configuration can change.

All of the "management proverbs", both in the public and private sector, highlight how it is necessary to "do the right thing at the right time", which means it is only possible to make important decisions when the problem is "mature".

Often, these instructions are not very precise, not only because they are so general, but especially because they risk being tautological: if in retrospect we see it was possible to make the decision, then it means it was mature (on the contrary, we either chose the wrong strategy, we did it at the wrong time, or possibly both).

There are several indications in literature that are more useful.

For instance, in a report on a successful mediation [regarding the definition of a protection policy for a natural area in Maine (Reitman 2003)] the "maturity" of the decision, that made it possible for opposing groups to sit around a table and find a solution, is greatly attributed to the fact that the Opposers were "exhausted" by a long confrontation and only saw the dragging on of legal battles in front of them.

At a different level the "right moment" is influenced by the fact that there are formal deadlines that marks the opening of the decisional problem. The need to renew administrative authorizations, for instance, definitely means that there is the chance to introduce new, even radical elements of discontinuity in the policy.

But the most important and common case of the decisional context that an clever policy entrepreneur can exploit to force non incremental decisions, regards the so-called "emergencies" such as the development of international crises, for instance the 1970s oil shocks (Damgaard et al. 1989), the 1992 currency crisis, the 2008 financial crisis. The main reason why these emergencies represent an important opportunity for policy change is the fact that they sometimes transform, even radically, both the content and intensity of the preferences of actors as well as the resources they have available, especially the political resources since consensus depends on changes in the public opinion, sometimes influenced by the crisis itself.

However, even in extreme cases, the introduction of non-incremental transformations is far from being automatic, but depends on the ability of some actors to exploit the favourable combination.

In analytical terms, we can say that the "right moment" corresponds to the fact that the decisional process entered a new **phase**, in which some of the elements we considered important to determine decisional success (actors involved and their goals, the resources they have available, their mutual relations, etc.) were changed by an external event, sometimes predictable and other times not.

The ability of the innovator, the real *art and craft* of the policy entrepreneur, consists of preparing these conditions, of feeling that the "right moment" has arrived and concluding the decisional process before the window of opportunity shuts again.

6.5 Conclusion: Is There a Rule for Successful Policy Making?

From the previous pages it is clear how the choice of the most appropriate decisional strategy cannot have a simple and unambiguous theory, not even expressed in a series of "if…then" statements universally valid.

After all, since the object of the decisional analysis is the study of problematic situations characterized by complexity (plurality of points of view) and often by uncertainty (impossibility to even probabilistically establish the consequences of an action) it would be unlikely to expect the opposite. We cannot even exclude that certain unexpected results are simply the outcome of casual circumstances, unintentional mistakes, in one word of the serendipity that often characterizes human societies.

Regarding this point, we must remember Albert Einstein's precept "Make everything as simple as possible. But not simpler", which means that the analysis of decisions should consider all the elements of the process and all their possible combinations.

In the previous pages of this chapter, we tried to point out the circumstances in which, both logically and according to the literature and the available evidence, a given decisional strategy seems to be more appropriate. However, we also premised that it is more likely that the type of action to adopt (or thinking explicatively, the type of action successfully adopted) will be a mix between different strategies (meaning that we intervene on more than one element) and that the transformation of one element often causes consequences, either intentional or non intentional, at other levels. In the following box there is a sort of protocol for the design of a decisional strategy, trying to show the steps through which a policy entrepreneur should go in order to assess the political feasibility of a specific policy innovation and design an appropriate strategy. This could provide some sort of guidance but again it should be used creatively in real world situations in order to be really useful.

Protocol for the Definition of a Decisional Strategy

1. Definition of the promoter's goals

The first step is to define the starting condition. It is therefore necessary to understand the specific goals that the promoter wants to achieve with the policy decision, the relation between them and his general goals, the constraints his action must observe and the resources he can use.

2. Identification of the obstacles

The following step is the identification of the main obstacles to the implementation of the proposal, clearly referred to the decisional process. In particular, in this phase it will be necessary to answer the question whether the decisional failure will more likely be determined by the opposition of other actors and therefore by a conflict situation or by the lack of interest of the coalition necessary for the adoption of the policy change.

3. Actors analysis

The third step is the analysis of the actors. First of all, it is necessary to prepare a list of actors whose presence is either essential, unavoidable or desirable. Then, for each of them it is necessary to identify (a) the set of goals, both content-related and process-related, both specific and general, (b) the resources they will probably be able to use, and (c) the relations they have with the other actors.

4. Analysis of the environment

The fourth step is represented by an evaluation of the decisional context in order to understand which of the current conditions can change in the period of time considered necessary for the conclusion of the process, what chances there are that this will happen and what are the possible consequences on the behaviour of the identified actors.

5. Redefinition of the starting conditions and feasibility judgement

In the light of the outcomes of steps 3 and 4, it is necessary to go back to the promoter's goals, in order to check if they can be modified, if the constraints can be relaxed and if the resources available can be increased. After this second examination, is possible to express a feasibility judgement of the proposal and, if necessary, abandon the analysis.

6. Definition of strategies

If no obstacles impossible to overcome emerged, the following task consists in identifying the most appropriate decisional strategy or mix of strategies. The easiest way to do this is to review, even briefly, all the alternatives listed

in this chapter, and therefore the possibilities of manipulating the content of the decision, the resources of the actors, their interaction patterns and the properties of network and then to choose the most appropriate course of action.

7. Choosing the timing of the intervention

The last step is to decide when to launch the proposal and open the decisional process. In particular, in the light of the possible environmental changes reported in point 4, one should wonder if it is worth to wait for them to occur or, on the contrary, it is advisable to speed up the start of the actual decisional process.

With all these warnings in mind, we can however enunciate a sort of "law" or "theorem" that policy actors could consider as a guide in the analysis of each real case.

We can state it as follows:

> The ability to make a non incremental decision in the solution of a complex policy making problem, is more likely if and insofar as the decisional process has a similar level of complexity, at least in the sense that the number and diversity of actors directly or indirectly involved reflect the quantity and type of interests affected by the problem or by the solution (Dente 2009).

This does not at all mean excluding reductionist or simplifying strategies, as we have already seen (to quote Sun Tzu's metaphor, winning without fighting means carefully considering the characteristics of the enemy, thus indirectly involving it in the solution). However, this sentence certainly contains a bias, favourable to the increase of the complexity of the policy making processes. This is also based on the conviction that "the intelligence of democracy", meaning the understanding of how it works and the explanation of the effectiveness of its outcomes, consists of the ability to incorporate the diversity of preferences of members of society in the decisional process (Lindblom 1965).

References

Amy, D.J.: The Politics of Environmental Mediation. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1987)

Avanzi: Libro Bianco su Conflitti Territoriali e Infrastrutture di Trasporto. http://www.avanzi.org/news/archivio_news/download/Libro%20bianco%20infrastrutture%20di%20trasporto_Versione%20Integrale.pdf (2010)

Bendor, J.B.: Parallel Systems: Redundancy in Government. University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles (1985)

Bobbio L.: Il dibattito pubblico sulle grandi opere. Il caso dell'autostrada di Genova. Riv. Itali. Polit. Pubb. **1**, 119–146 (2010)

Cameron, J., Wade-Gery, W.: Addressing uncertainty: law, policy and the development of the precautionary principle. In: Dente, B. (ed.) Environmental Policy in Search of New Instruments, pp. 95–142. Kluwer, Dordrecht (1995)
Cersosimo, D., Wolleb, G.: Politiche pubbliche e contesti istituzionali. Una ricerca sui patti territoriali. Stato Mercato **3**, 369–412 (2001)
Damgaard, E., Gerlich, P., Richardson, J.J. (eds.): The Politics of Economic Crisis: Lessons from Western Europe. Aldershot, Gower (1989)
Dente, B.: Introduction: The Globalisation of Environmental Policy and the Search for New Instruments. In: Dente, B., (ed.) Environmental Policy in Search of New Instruments, pp. 1–20, Kluwer, Dordrecht (1995)
Dente, B.: The law as a policy resource: some scattered thoughts. In: Narath, S., Varone, F. (eds.) Rediscovering Public Law and Public Administration in Comparative Policy Analysis: A Tribute to Peter Knoepfel, pp. 33–44. PPUR/Haupt Verlag, Lausanne/Bern (2009)
Dente, B.: Planning, in International Encyclopaedia of Political Science. Sage, Los Angeles (2011)
Dente, B., Melloni, E.: Il piano strategico come strumento di "governance" locale: il caso di Torino. Amministrare **35**, 385–420 (2005)
Fishkin, J.S.: Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform. Yale University Press, New Haven (1993)
Floridia, A.: Democrazia deliberativa e processi decisionali: la legge della Regione toscana sulla partecipazione. Stato e Mercato **82**, 83–110 (2008a)
Floridia, A.: Democrazia deliberativa, strategie negoziali, strategie argomentative: un'analisi del dibattito pubblico sul "caso Castelfalfi". Paper presentato alla Società Italiana di Scienza Politica, Pavia 4–6 settembre 2008b
Fukuyama, F.: Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity. Free Press, New York (1996)
Gallimbeni, R., Piani, L., Zeppetella, A.: La concertazione dimezzata. Il terminale di rigassificazione del metano liquido di Monfalcone. In: Bobbio, L., Zeppetella, A. (eds.) Perché proprio qui? Grandi opere e opposizioni locali, pp. 53–108. Franco Angeli (1999)
Gambetta, D.: Can we trust trust? In: Gambetta, D. (ed.) Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations, pp. 213–237. Basil Blackwell, Oxford (1988)
Guala, C.: Mega Eventi. Modelli e storie di rigenerazione urbana, Roma (2007)
Hartje, V.J.: Ocean pollution by tankers: regulating operational discharges as a partial policy success. In: Janicke, M., Weidner, H. (eds.) Successful Environmental Policy: A Critical Evaluation of 24 Cases, pp. 379–393. Sigma, Berlin (1995)
Heclo, H.: Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden: From Relief to Income Maintenance. Yale University Press, New Haven (1974)
Jänicke, M., Weidner, H. (eds.): National Environmental Policies: A Comparative Study of Capacity-Building. Springer, Berlin (1997)
Knoepfel, P.: New institutional arrangements for a new generation of environmental policy instruments: intra and interpolicy cooperation. In: Dente, B. (ed.) Environmental Policy in Search of New Instruments, pp. 197–233. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht (1995)
Knoepfel, P. (ed.): Réformes de politiques institutionnelles et action publique: Reformen institutioneller Politiken und Staatshandeln. PPUR/Haupt, Lausanne/Bern (2009)
IRER: Istituzioni e nuovi modelli di governo urbano, Franco Angeli (1989)
Larrue, C., Dziedzicki, J.M.: Replacing old for new: lessons from a French case study. In: Dente, B., Fareri, P., Ligteringen, J. (eds.) The Waste and the Backyard. The Creation of Waste Facilities: Success Stories in Six European Countries, pp. 47–67. Kluwer, Dordrecht (1998)
Lindblom, C.E.: The Intelligence of Democracy. Free Press, New York (1965)
Machiavelli, N.: Il Principe, (1532) http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince06.htm
Majone, G.: Regulating Europe. Routledge, London (1996)
Marks, G., Hooghe, L.: Unraveling the Central State, but how? Types of multi-level governance. Am. Polit. Sci. Rev. **97**, 233–243 (2003)

Pasqui, G.: Territori: progettare lo sviluppo—Teorie, strumenti, esperienze. Carocci, Roma (2005)
Regonini, G.: Paradossi della democrazia deliberativa. Stato e Mercato **25**, 3–32 (2005)
Reitman, J.W.: The Allagash: a case study of a successful environmental mediation. http://www.mediate.com/articles/reitmanJ.cfm (2003)
de Sousa Santos, B.: Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre: toward a redistributive democracy. Polit. Soc. **26**, 461–510 (1998)
Scharpf, F.W.: Policy failure and institutional reform: why should form follow function? Int. Soc. Sci. J. **108**, 179–189 (1986)
Susskind, L., Cruikshank, J.: Breaking the Impasse: Consensual Approaches to Resolving Public Disputes. Basic Books, New York (2001)
Turkiewitz, K., Allen, M.: The effectiveness of environmental mediation: a meta-analytic approach. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 95th annual convention, Chicago. http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p364684_index.html (2009)
Vecchi, G.: Superare il rifiuto. Conflitti ambientali e capacità decisionale: esperienze straniere di management dei processi di localizzazione di infrastrutture 'socialmente indesiderate'. Il Nuovo Governo Locale **2**, 103–127 (1992)
Vedres, B., Bruszt, L.: La promozione dello sviluppo dall'esterno, Stato e Mercato, **30**, 189–218 (2010)
Weidner, H.: Mediation as a policy instrument for resolving environmental disputes, with special reference to Germany. In: Dente, B. (ed.) Environmental Policy in Search of New Instruments, pp. 159–195. Kluwer, Dordrecht (1995)
Wildavsky, A.: Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis. Little, Brown, Boston (1979)

Glossary

Actor Any individual or organization acting in the policy process according to non-contradictory preferences and goals

Ally Actor with content-related or process-related goals coherent with the promoter/director's goals and who brings his resources into the innovative coalition through actions or simply by declaring his support

Bargaining Interaction pattern in which resources are exchanged among actors in the interest of all participants

Bureaucrats Actors who base their claim of intervention in the process on the consideration they have been assigned a specific responsibility in the decisional procedure by law, meaning they have the formal competence to intervene

Centrality (of the network) Proportion of all the connections in the network that refers to one specific actor. Its formula is: $C = ki/\Sigma ki$ where: C = centrality coefficient that varies between 0 and 1 ki = number of connections of each actor

Cognitive resources Any data, information, model, theory or argument that an actor is able to mobilise

Collaboration Interaction pattern in which resources are pooled so actors can achieve a common goal

Complexity (of the network) Measure of the existence of a plurality of points of view within the process. It is calculated by multiplying the number of types of actors by the number of levels represented

Confrontation Interaction pattern in which resources are weighted usually within a zero-sum game

Constituent policies Policies that modify the ways in which public activities are decided and implemented. In Lowi's typology, coercion is unlikely and is applied to the context of the action. In Wilson's typology both benefits and costs are distributed

Content-related goals The preferences of an actor as regards the problem to solve and/or the solution to adopt

B. Dente, *Understanding Policy Decisions*, PoliMI SpringerBriefs,
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-02520-9, © The Author(s) 2014

Decisional context All the structural or contingent elements that influence the decisional process and cannot be modified by the actors

Decisional process The sequence of actions that leads to a choice regarding a policy problem

Decisional strategy The innovator's intentional attempt to generate the necessary coordination by changing the elements of the decisional process (and by adapting to the constraints that derive from the goals and interests of the other actors)

Decisional success Non incremental transformation of the status quo, regardless of the ability of the decision to achieve its goals, i.e. to contribute to the solution of the problem (substantial success of the policy)

Density (of the network) Amount of relations among actors of a decisional process. Its formula is: $D = \Sigma ki /(n^2-n)$ where: D = density coefficient that varies between 0 and 1 n = number of actors ki = number of connections of each actor

Dimension of the interest Level at which the actor is placed on the global-local axis and/or on the general-sectoral interest axis

Director The actor who steers the decisional process, after the initial proposal and until the final decision is made

Distributive policies Policies that supply benefits and services directly to families or enterprises. In Lowis' typology coercion is unlikely and is applied to the individual action. In Wilson's typology benefits are concentrated and costs distributed

Economic resources Ability to mobilise money or any other asset with economic value

Experts Actors who base their claim of intervention on the fact they have the necessary knowledge to define the collective problem and/or formulate the most suitable alternatives to solve it

Filter Actor who enters the process to represent someone else's goals and interests, almost exclusively using that actor's resources

Formal procedures The legal rules that establish how decisions should be made

Gatekeeper An actor having veto power (able to block the decisional process) but without content-related goals and indifferent to the fact that the policy solution is adopted or not, since it does not cause any costs or benefits for him

General interests Actors, without political or legal legitimation, who base their claim of intervention in the decisional process on the fact they represent interests that cannot act for themselves

Legal resources Specific advantages that laws and other types of public regulations assign to certain subjects

Macro-negative approach Research strategy that looks for the causes of the policy failures in the general features of the political/administrative system

Mediator The type of director who only pursues process-related goals and is solely interested in favouring an agreement among actors

Micro-positive approach Research strategy that searches for the specific reasons of a successful policy process, also in order to check its transferability to other decisional contexts

Network The set of actors who take part in a decisional process

Opposer Subject who acts and uses his resources to stop the policy transformation

Patterns of interaction The rules that regulate the use of resources within the decisional process and can only be partly changed by the individual actor

Phase of the policy process The time segment of the decisional process that is homogeneous as regards the problem dealt with and therefore as regards the content of the decision, the set of actors that intervene and their characteristics, including the resources they are able to mobilise, as well as the main patterns of interaction

Policy decision The choice between different alternative solutions to a policy problem (see)

Policy problem Dissatisfaction regarding a certain need, demand or opportunity for public intervention

Political exchange The ability of actor A, who can control the outcome X, of interest to actor B, to influence the latter, who can in turn control the outcome Y, of interest to actor A

Political resources Amount of consensus that an actor is able to mobilise. This consensus can refer to the whole population or to specific social groups involved in the various public policies

Politicians (actors) Subjects who base their claim of intervention in decisional processes on the fact that they represent citizens, meaning they enjoy popular consensus both in general terms, as well as with reference to the specific matter

Positive sum game A decisional situation in which the best strategy possible for each actor (dominant strategy) maximises the payoffs for everyone

Process-related goals The preferences of an actor regarding its relations with the other actors

Promoter The actor that raises the problem and affirms the need to intervene to change the ways a collective problem is dealt with or suggests to adopt a specific solution

Public policy The set of actions that affects the solution of a policy problem (see)

Rationality of action The set of constraints a certain category of actors has when representing their relations with other participants and in the analysis of the decisional situation

Redistributive policies Policies that transfer wealth and values from one social group to another. In Lowi's typology coercion is likely and is applied to the context of the action. In Wilson's typology benefits and costs are concentrated

Regulatory policies Policies that aim to change individual behaviour through prohibitions, obligations and sanctions. In Lowi's typology coercion is likely and is applied to the individual action. In Wilson's typology benefits are distributed and costs are concentrated

Roles of the actors The functions that the actors fulfil in the course of the decisional process

Special interests Subjects who base their claim of intervention in the decisional process on the fact that the chosen alternative affects directly their interests, meaning they bear the costs or enjoy the benefits from it

Stake The content of the decision. It can be measured as the level of concentration of the costs and benefits but also as a zero sum game or positive sum game

Strategic resources Knowledge of the elements of the decisional process that allows to correctly anticipate participants' behaviour

Types of actors Categories in which we can classify policy actors starting from the nature of their claim to intervene in the decisional process

Variable sum game Decisional situation in which actors' strategies determine an asymmetrical distribution of costs and benefits

Windows of opportunity Transformations of the decisional context that allow the matching of the policy problem with a given solution

Zero sum game Decisional situation in which each actor's costs correspond to the benefits of another actor