

POLICY CHANGE – REVIEW OF CLASSIFICATION, MEASUREMENT AND FACTORS

Abstract. Judging by bibliometric indicators there is an increasing interest in the topic of policy change and its explanation among policy analysts. However, there is no theoretical consensus on how to define the concept of policy change, or which theoretical models best explain its occurrences. On one hand, there is a variety of conceptualisations of policy change, and on the other, a variety of approaches, theories and modes that seek to elucidate the process of change. Based on literature review, the paper compiles a repository of contemporary theories and classifications in the area of policy change, taking into account elements such as the degree of innovation, the dynamic and depth of change and similar. The second part offers a review of policy change models, taking Giessen's classification of nine policy change factors as its general framework. The paper concludes with a discussion on the fast developing field of policy change analysis, which requires careful consideration when selecting a specific approach to analyse the policy change aspects of the policy process.

Keywords: policy change, policy process theory, classification, measurement

Introduction

What is policy change and which factors are critical for its occurrence? How often does it occur? The review of the referential literature reveals two rather opposing standpoints. On one hand Baumgartner (2006: 193) argues that 'most policies, most of the time, do not change much', and often these kind of reforms are considered impossible to accomplish (Bannink and Resodihardjo, 2006: 1). On the other hand there is the argument that 'all policy is policy change' (Capano and Howlett, 2009b: 3). With such a vast distance between opposing opinions, in a period marked by acute social change, it is not surprising that the trend of policy change research

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is on the rise internationally. On enquiry about the entry of 'policy change' appearing in the title of publications, the Scopus bibliographical system listed 1,320 hits (0 for Slovenia) on 22 October 2015, with as much as 508 of them published only in the past five years. There were 10,800 hits (15 for Slovenia), when looking for the same entry appearing in the publications' title, abstract and key words. Also in Slovenia the interest in investigating policy change seems to be increasing with 5 hits obtained on the Co-operative Online Bibliographic System and Services Cobiss for the past three years (all of them at the level of bachelor theses), when looking for the Slovenian entry of 'javnopolitična/e sprememba/e' ('public policy change'). However, Slovenia seems to lack comprehensive scientific research studies of policy change, although the period of post-socialism offers an ideal analytical departure point to revitalise numerous theories of policy process in the conditions of radical, mainly institutional change.

For Cairney (2012: 30) examination of policy change is unavoidably biased, as scholars are necessarily confronting practical problems that demand subjective decisions. For example, they need to decide on how detailed (deep) or wide the analysis of a public change would be. Should its attention only be focused on a specific policy measure or on all those related to the area of analysis? Further, empirical and theoretical expectations are also important. They define the researchers' criteria on how a public policy should be changed with regard to the salience of the problem in question or the degree of public attention. While on the side of policy actor's standpoints to policy change are determined by their particular perspective. For example, governmental decision makers who make ('top down') policy decisions often overestimate the long term meaning of policy change in practice. Due to such biases, researchers should also be aware of the fact that their findings can be interpreted in various ways. Therefore, when investigating public policies, attention should be paid both to the way in which policy change is defined as well as the nature of the research subject and the methodological approaches that were used.

Coming from this lack of unification, the article, in the first part, examines policy change as a 'dependent variable', and gives a systematic review of the range of definitions of policy change, its classification and measurement. The 'independent variable' presented and dealt with in the second part contains the factors that influence policy change and that researchers can consider in the design of their research models. These factors were chosen on the basis of the empirical review of independent variables included in the analyses of policy change in contemporary policy processes (Giessen, 2011).

Policy dynamics and policy stability

The introduction presents the key epistemological approaches in the examination of policy dynamics, and further on looks into the concept of path dependency that mainly highlights factors preventing policy change from occurring. Policy dynamics can be an effect of very diverse factors that lead to change in specific policy components. These are, for example, the way of problem construction, definition of goals based on beliefs and ideologies, choice of measures, selection of modes of decision making, power allocation or characteristics of the institutions involved (Capano and Howlett, 2009b: 4–5). For Bardach (2006) understanding policy dynamics suggests fundamentally understanding change or how ‘to get from here to there’ in the political process.

The stages approach offers a theoretical framework for analysing the occurrence of new policies, primarily focusing on the phase of agenda setting (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; Parsons, 1995), while paying less attention to other stages of policy process. The theoretical emphasis lays in the evaluation of policy effects, with the model including the assumption that this makes the basis for decision making about their continuation. However, in some authors’ opinions there is no convincing evidence that evaluation, with its rational approach, would be the ‘motor’ of policy change (Parsons, 1995: 569).

Numerous models, approaches and theories have so far been designed for policy research, with which analysts try to simplify the large complexity of policy processes. When deciding about the design of an appropriate theoretical research framework, Capano’s (2009: 13–18) classification, formed on the basis of the review of epistemological starting points, can be used. Capano distinguishes between four cognitive approaches of policy change analysis: the Multiple Streams Approach (Kingdon, 1995), the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework (PEF) (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991), the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) and Path Dependency Framework – PDF) (Pierson, 2000).

Past development of theories and approaches to policy research show some common aspects that Howlett and Cashore (2009: 35–36) define as an ‘orthodox’ way of the examination of policy change, which are defined by a broad consensus that:

- policy analysis should have a historic nature and focus on long time periods (of several years or even decades),
- primary mechanisms of policy reproduction are institutions and policy subsystems,
- paradigmatic change is only possible with the simultaneous change of institutions if institutions remain unchanged, policy change can only be gradual,

- paradigmatic change in a policy subsystem require exogenous shocks that cause radical disintegration of the existing policy ideas, beliefs, actors, institutions and behavioural practices.

Naturally, there is also the possibility that policy change does not occur, despite changes in some important elements in the internal or external environment. In this case, policy stability is spoken about. Policy stability is influenced for example by the process of 'feedback loop' and the related path dependency approach and close networks. Due to self-reinforcing effects the positive feedback loop brings to a lock-in or policy immutability. However, the positive feedback effect is not automatic or spontaneous, but rather requires mobilisation of policy actors that use their powers and influence to maintain the status quo (Howlett, 2009).

The *path dependency* approach highlights current policy decisions as being dependent on past policy decisions, so the well-established general orientations as such are difficult to change (Marier, 2013). This is why, as indicated by the path dependency approach, only rarely policies design entirely new activities and new policy networks (Kay, 2006; Knoepfel et al., 2007), and are rarely not linked to past policies (such as those made during socialism). Path dependency mechanisms are mainly the following (Howlett and Ramesh, 2002):

1. Past policy creates or promotes the emergence of large organisations which produce large formation expenses. These expenses in turn influence current policy-makers' decisions despite having the nature of sunk costs.¹
2. Public policy is of indirect or direct benefit to large organised groups or founding organisations.
3. Public policy contains permanent commitments that make the basis of the existential and organisational decisions of their users
4. Institutions and expectations created by policy are closely intertwined with the wider characteristics of the economy and society, which creates interconnected networks of complementary institutions.
5. The social environment finds it more difficult to accept and respond to policy outcomes that are unexpected or unwanted.

Therefore, path dependency strongly influences the outcomes of policy processes, which applies even in the circumstances of such radical change as existed in transition countries. In accordance with this theory, the beginning of the democratic political system and market economy did not

¹ *Sunk costs are those incurred in the past and that cannot be influenced by current decisions, so they are not important in the decision making.*

create a vacuum in which completely new policies could have been shaped (McFaul, 1999). As indicated by the path dependency model, current policy decisions are restrained by structures represented by past policies.

Policy change as dependent variable

Definition of policy change

As mentioned before, in the continuation the article examines policy change as a dependent variable in terms of analysing different ways in which researchers and theorists 'grasp' or define it as the object of analysis. The very concept of 'change' refers to an empirical observation of difference in form, quality or state in time of a specific entity. Generally speaking, policy change occurs with the change of the intrinsic properties of a policy. However, due to the complexity of the concept of public policy the object of analysis needs to be clearly defined. Namely, rather than 'policy' as such, what changes is its certain specific components. Let us therefore confront the problem of how to define the dependent variable, which is among the most important problems that need to be solved when dealing with policy dynamics (Capano and Howlett, 2009b: 2-3).

In the context of policy analysis the literature often also offers expressions such as policy innovation, reform and change. The concept of innovation was mainly asserted in business management and refers to ideas, practices or objects that individuals or organisations adopt from elsewhere and perceive as new (Rogers, 2003: 12; Hoberg, 2001b: 11-12). In this sense they are separated from inventions that represent innovation, when it is first introduced in any framework. Innovations contain new behaviour, habits, expectations, patterns of rules, and have numerous social functions: maintenance of social patterns through hindering or preventing change, adaptation to changed environment and resources, achievement of social aims and an increase in the ability to establish connections in society etc. (Deutsch (2001: 19). Innovations can also influence the change of social objectives or social structure in a way that does not bring about the complete change of the system's identity. For example, for a government an innovation can be the introduction of a programme that has already been used in other countries. In general, it can be said that in the recent period innovation in the public sector became the subject of huge interest, following the model of promoting innovation in the private sector (Bekkers et al., 2011; Koch and Hauknes, 2005: 9; Mulgan and Albury, 2003).

According to Hogwood and Gunn (1984) policy innovations are less likely to occur in areas that governments and policy space perceive as 'new'. It is more likely that 'new' policies are framed in the context of pre-existing ones. The problem of 'new' issues is that they first need to gain support and

be placed on the agenda, which depends on the existing policy environment and institutions. Therefore innovation can be considered a controlled process of change on the continuum of policy maintenance.

The literature addressing policy dynamics also often involves the concept of policy reform (Bannink and Resodihardjo, 2006: 4). This is 'the fundamental, intended, and enforced change of the policy paradigm and/or organisational structure of a policy sector'. Therefore reform can be characterised as:

- fundamental: 'it implies a deviation from the existing structure or paradigm with the changed organisational structure, its paradigm or both' – a change in priorities.
- intended: it has to involve a policy decision maker that intentionally strives for change and is capable of changing a policy's direction or the organisational structure of a policy sector
- enforcement/adoption of the proposed policy reform, the criterion of which is the success of the reform proposal in all the stages of the policy-making cycle, except its implementation.

Very generally, policy change means the replacement of one or more existing policies with one or more other policies. New policies can be adopted, the existing ones can be changed, or also terminated (Lester and Stewart, 1996: 136). Succession and innovation can be interconnected, particularly as the result of the efforts of policy makers to maintain, to the maximum extent, the existing policy measures and goals. To do so they consciously influence change by introducing innovations that change goals and organisational structure only to the extent that provides a small change to the existing policy. Policy successions can come in different forms: a *linear* succession is a direct replacement of a policy or organisations and programmes with another policy, *consolidation* includes integration of policies or organisations and programmes into a unified arrangement, while splitting conversely involves the breaking down of previously unified policies into a number of components. A non-linear succession is a complex combination of other types of succession (Parsons, 1995: 572).

Lindblom (1979: 520) for instance, was an advocate of incremental change in democratic countries, which does not mean that in the end this cannot lead to a radical change. He distinguished small (incremental) change from radical change. The key finding here is that incremental changes which follow each other can rapidly lead to a radical change of the existing status quo sooner than big, but irregular changes. This is why in considering policy change the speed or tempo of their occurrence is also important, that Durant and Diehl (1989: 195) defined as the incubation period.² It can be

² In their work Durant and Diehl (1989) used the findings of palaeontology and evolutionary development.

fast (when policy initiatives are transferred from the starting concepts to their important role in policy communities rapidly and without ‘softening’) or long-lasting (‘frozen’ movement and long-lasting ‘softening’ within policy communities). Change can occur in the form of either pure mutations or evolutionary development. From the aspect of type and speed of change this can be rapid or gradual paradigmatic changes, and fast or slow incremental change (Howlett, 1999: 87).

Peters and Hogwood (1985: 239–240) further classify policy change into policy *innovations* (for example the government faces the problem or sector that is new to it), policy *succession* (the replacement of an existing policy with another one, which, however, does not include radical change, but the continuation of the existing policy), policy *maintenance* (adaptation of the policy to maintain its orientation and functioning) and policy *termination* (abolishment of all policy related activities and public financing). New public policy and the termination of a policy are rare, with the policy most likely being transformed into a ‘new’ policy in the succession process.

Therefore, the thematisation of policy change is complex, and accordingly the formation of taxonomy of policy change is also problematic. Capano and Howlett (2009a) examine policy change from the aspect of their development and classify them in four theoretical groups of change:

- cyclical (change occurs, but returns to the status quo)
- dialectical (change occurs through a process of negation and synthesis)
- linear (change occurs in evolutionary fashion without any clear endpoint)
- teleological (change occurs in the direction of a final identifiable goal).

The analysis of policy change also needs to take account of the characteristics of change and processes in which they arise. While in their explanations of the outcomes of these processes, cyclical and teleological models mainly highlight structural factors, dialectical and linear models foreground the importance of an individual subject (agency). In regard to factors of policy change in the environment, cyclical, linear and teleological models tend to focus on exogenous factors that change the homeostatic equilibrium, while the dialectical model tends to focus on endogenous factors.

In his systematisation Sabatier identifies three types of policy change (Capano and Howlett, 2009b; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) that stem from the Advocacy Coalition Framework: change of means, specific technical instruments (secondary aspect of beliefs), change of general political strategy (policy core) and change of fundamental ideological values and goals (the core component of policy).

The most often stated approaches of policy change classification include Peter Hall’s (1993: 278–279; Howlett and Cashore, 2009: 36), that meant a

breakthrough in the study of change and its causes. Namely, his approach was the first to reach beyond the examination of public policy as a single dependent variable. Today, most analyses that investigate policy change use his approach of dividing policies into abstract/theoretical/conceptual elements, specific programme content or objectives and policy means. Policy change can be of the first order, when only the calibrations of policy instruments change (while the hierarchy of goals remain unchanged); changes of the second order involve alterations of policy instruments (while the hierarchy of goals remain the same), while third order changes involve overall change of instrument calibration, instruments and the hierarchy of goals. As of normal policy-making Hall understands the change of the first and second order, while radical change is represented by the third order or paradigmatic change.

Kustec Lipicer (2007: 94–96) addressed policy change from the aspect of policy networks, namely in terms of radical policy reforms and the establishment of new public policies. Daugbjerg (2006: 2, 68) who largely draws on Hall's definition, defines policy change as reform of the existing policies or the introduction of new ones to solve problems that the existing sectorial policies do not address. Policy reforms are a new way of addressing what the state is already involved in. The change can be radical or moderate: radical change introduces new principles as the basis of policy change. Moderate policies do not contain shifts in principles, but either measures or goals are adapted to the existing policy or new ones are introduced. In regard to cost, Daugbjerg distinguishes low and high-cost policies. Low-cost policies involve the transfer of policy principles from the existing public policy to a new one. Political and economic cost is imposed through the measures on groups that are not those targeted by regulation, additionally policy goals do not oppose the existing sectorial goals. In high-cost policies new policy principles arise. Through policy measures cost is concentrated on the group that is regulated, while policy goals oppose the existing aims. The concept of cost is linked here to the perception of consequences of the policy by those on whom policy measures will be imposed (Kustec-Lipicer, 2007).

Mainly based on Hall's division, Howlett and Cashore (2007; 2009: 39) developed a review classification of policy elements that can be the object of change and can therefore represent the dependent variable. The classification criteria that they use are policy content and focus. Policy content refers to the level of abstraction or operationalisation of content, while policy focus refers to more general policy objectives and means.

As a result of the methodological problems encountered, when the first and second order change are tried to be distinguished in terms of their content, Hemerijck and Van Kersbergen (1999: 183–184) proposed a typology of policy change in which these are divided into paradigmatic change,

instrumental adjustments and institutional adjustments. Paradigmatic change means a deviation from the existing policy goals and the mode of addressing and understanding policy problems. Instrumental adjustments include the precision in the calibration of measures (Hall's first order change) and the change in measures as such (Hall's second order change). Institutional adjustments can either consist of adding authority and procedures to the existing institutions (patching) or the transfer of responsibility between institutions (transposition) or elimination of institutions.

And finally, in the examination of the thematisations of the policy change concept, it needs to be pointed out that while, so far, analysts have mainly been developing the aforementioned classifications of change, new approaches have recently been developed in empirical research and measurement of policy change. (e.g. Knill and Tosun, 2012a: 528). These involve the measurement that includes the definition of the measurement object, time frame, assessment of the degree of policy change (such as radical/incremental) and the directions and dimensions of policy change (expansion/reduction). In principle the dependent variable of 'policy change' can be any element of public policy, with policy measures being addressed most often. From the aspect of time, the measurement should examine at least two points in time over the period of several years or even decades to obtain data for the analysis of policy change. Policy change can have the characteristics of policy expansion or policy reduction. The empirical measurement of policy expansion or reduction takes place on two dimensions: policy density and policy intensity (Bauer and Knill, 2014: 33; Knill and Tosun, 2012a: 262–263). Policy density is defined by the density of policy targets targeted by the activity of the state and the density of policy measures (such as penetration of legislation) in a certain policy area. A policy target density indicator is the difference between the number of policy targets that were introduced or abolished in the analysed timeframe. The instrument density indicator is the difference in the number of instruments which were introduced or abolished in a specific timeframe. As the quantity aspect of the measurement of policies already in place in an area and the number of policy instruments do not describe the *effects* of a policy, the measurement of policy change needs to be complemented by the measurement of policy intensity that is defined by the intensity of the level and the intensity of the scope of measures. The intensity level of measures refers to the settings of the applied policy instruments (requirements of the policy towards the 'targets') and is described by the change of the indicator of strictness or generosity of measures in the period that is analysed. The indicator of intensity scope is the change in the number of cases inside the targets targeted by the policy measure in that period.

Independent variables of policy change and policy stability

As indicated before the second part of the article will address the 'independent variable', that is, the factors that influence policy change. A number of models, approaches and theories have been designed to explain the processes of policy making or policy process. General factors that enable the explanation of policy making and that can be understood as independent variables of policy change include the following: actors making choices, institutions, networks or subsystems, ideas or beliefs, policy context and events (Cairney and Heikkila, 2014: 364–365). The conceptual framework for our review will consist of Giessen's (2011) classification of nine empirically used factors of change.

1. Advocacy coalitions, values, beliefs and policy learning

Shared values and beliefs are among the most frequent analytical tools used in the contemporary study of policy change, mainly within the advocacy coalition framework. Beliefs are the adhesive of advocacy coalitions, making the homogeneity of coalitions the key postulate of this approach (Nowlin, 2011: 46–47). Values and beliefs determine the political behaviour of the actors players that are included in the advocacy coalition with the aim of translating their beliefs into action. This is why the relationship between advocacy coalitions influences stability or change in a certain policy sub-system. In this model policy change is the result of the change in the relationships between advocacy coalitions that occur due to new experiences or information that are the result of learning. Shared values of the advocacy coalition represent structural constraint for the process of policy learning and as such influence the possibility or impossibility of the occurrence or type of policy change. For policy learning to start, an external (such as crisis, change in public opinion) or internal (such as democratisation) shock is needed that leads to the change of belief at the secondary or policy level (Giessen, 2011: 250). In policymaking 'learning is a process in which individuals apply new information and ideas for policy decision making' (Busenberg, 2001). Therefore the concept of policy learning refers to a relatively permanent change in thinking or action goals (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 41–45), which can lead to policy change. Learning is also an important dimension in the approach of policy diffusion (Gilardi, 2010). Theoretically and empirically the inclusion of learning in the research of policy change enables development in the area of theoretical definitions of the types of learning (e.g. Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013), measurements of the existence of policy learning (e.g. Radaelli, 2009) and the development of theoretical starting points of learning mechanisms (e.g. Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013).

2. Ideas, narrations, frames

Ideas or causal and normative beliefs about the content and process of public policy are the means of achieving the actors' goals and are therefore understood as an important policy resource (Hoberg, 2001a: 11). While normative beliefs can refer to policy goals (desired states), causal beliefs refer to the choice of adequate measures to achieve the goals (what functions).

A particularly important aspect in the examination of the influence that ideas have on public policy is the change of policy paradigm, as it solely can enable the change of the basic policy goals (Hall, 1993). New ideas can influence a number of policy changes in the way that they change the relations between interests or actors. The phenomenon of new actors (interests) and new ideas can lead to quick paradigmatic change, while the unchanged ideas and beliefs mainly cause incremental policy change (Howlett and Ramesh, 1998; Howlett and Ramesh, 2002: 35). Additionally, new actors that do not contribute new ideas to the policy network can influence the change of policy measures, as furthermore the existing actors/interests can bring the change of programmes or measures, based on either new or old ideas.

From the aspect of the advocates of the historic institutionalism approach, ideas as normative structure restrict the range of possible solutions that can be adopted by political decision-makers, thus contributing to the stability of public policies. The power of ideas depends on how much support they receive from political parties, the business community, the influential academic community and other actors, as well as from the access of these actors to important policy-making arenas. On the other hand advocates of organisational institutionalism highlight the role of cognitive structure in shaping policy questions and the proposed solutions – new ideas (Campbell, 1998: 377). Based on the integration of both approaches the ideas at cognitive level can be translated to programmes and paradigms, and at normative level to public sentiments that represent the framework of possible solutions for policy problems. The probability that a (new) programmatic idea will affect policymaking depends on its clarity and simplicity, when solving the problem to which it refers. It also depends on how much it is congruent with existing paradigms, in keeping with public sentiment and framed to fit a given social space. However, these conditions are not enough for the idea to succeed: they also need to be related to interests or their holders that are ready to dedicate the resources for the adequate framing of the idea (Campbell, 1998: 394–398).

In this context we should also mention narrative analysis, the evolving theory of policy process that examines the influence of policy narratives on the results of policy process. The theory thematises policy narrative as a strategic story that has a plot, bad and good characters and a moral lesson (Jones and McBeth, 2010; Petridou, 2014: 24; Shanahan et al., 2013). For example,

policy stories can strengthen the existing viewpoints of members of a policy coalition or convert actors who previously had an opposing opinion.

3. Individuals: policy entrepreneurs and issue experts

Policy change can also be explained by work of individuals or small groups (policy entrepreneurs) who are willing to invest enough time, knowledge and personal skills to change a policy through a policy process in accordance with their ideas, values and interests. They differ from the rest of policy actors mainly by their big desire to influence the change of action in their area of interest. Also important for the occurrence of change are experts who possess knowledge and expertise on technical and social aspects of the issue in question. These are two elements that are crucial for the change to occur, when policy design involves experts (Giessen, 2011).

Policy entrepreneurs possess some characteristics that can make them successful in achieving their goals, namely: the ability to understand standpoints of other policy actors, recognise social problems, form teams, and manage through role modelling. These characteristics enable them to establish connections between groups that are usually separated and link them with the policy makers. As has been pointed out by the advocates of the punctuated equilibrium approach, policy entrepreneurs reduce the significance of the existing policy images simultaneously creating new ones with which they foreground their concrete problems and need for change. And the institutional approach points out that policy entrepreneurs can influence change mainly through possessing detailed knowledge of key procedures and norms, with which they can recognise the limits of acceptable behaviour (Mintrom and Norman, 2009).

4. Policy networks, subsystems and their bureaucracy

Policy networks are the next factor that analysts see as an explanation for policy change, which can only be possible, when the policy network no longer supports the interests of those who strive to maintain the current public policy (Kustec-Lipicer, 2007). This is why policy networks can also explain policy stability, insofar as they are 'closed' networks, where key actors prevent new actors from entering policy debates and discourses. Namely, all actors strive to create 'policy monopolies' dominated by the stability of interpretations and predictability in terms of who can participate in policymaking. Closed policy networks typically also involve veto players that can prevent changes from occurring (Howlett and Ramesh, 2002).

From the aspect of policy sub-systems, spill-overs between sub-systems and the change of settings are also important for policy change (Howlett and Ramesh, 2002). With regard to borders a spill-over represents an external factor of change, as the activities of the sub-system which previously was

separated reach beyond its borders and affect structures and the functioning of other sub-systems. The transgression of sub-systems' borders can be influenced by technological change (such as information technology) or change in other sub-systems.

Sub-systems involve a specific role of bureaucracy and individual bureaucrats, which is exposed by the emerging theories of the policymaking process (Nowlin, 2011: 54–55). In the circumstance of the excess of information in the political system, not only authority over policymaking, but also over processing of information is transferred to the bureaucracy by the lawmakers, which enables the bureaucracy to encourage or block policy change.

5. External shocks and crises

Within the conceptualisations of the factors of policy change an important place is occupied by external events (shocks). These can significantly influence a policy sub-system and in turn policy change, as they establish new circumstances, due to which former policy goals and instruments become inadequate and the actors form new perceptions on how to position themselves in the new situation (Giessen, 2011: 252). External shocks can also be an opportunity for mobilisation and learning (Birkland, 2006). The influence of external factors can also be thematised by the theory of punctuated equilibrium (e.g. True et al., 1999), while the shocks as perturbations are addressed by the theory of subsystem adjustment analysis (Howlett and Ramesh, 2002: 36). Subsystem perturbation includes external and non-cognitive factors of change that influence the policy sector by establishing new circumstances and events outside the sub-system. These factors can include macro-economic circumstances (e.g. democratic transitions, economic and financial crisis), new systemic government coalitions and natural disasters amongst other things. New circumstances force actors to acquire views that reach beyond the existing frameworks, while a sub-system can also be influenced by external factors through the entrance of new actors in the policy process and the redirection of public attention.

6. Policy internationalisation and diffusion

While at the national level international actors and processes notably influence policy change, the related decision-making critically involves national institutions (Beland, 2009). The limited impact of the international environment is also highlighted by the low rate of policy convergence between the EU member countries that is not self-evident even at the level of common policies. Researchers cannot offer convincing proof of the existence of a convergence of policies, despite the fact that all countries experience a common pressure for change, due to new technologies, global competition and common European policies. The way in which social systems

respond to common external pressure mainly depends on social norms and traditional practices, characteristic of individual social systems. For example, research of the social policies in EU member countries (Roberts and Springer, 2001: 4–22), and environmental and biotechnological policies has not corroborated the existence of such convergence (Wallace and Wallace, 2000: 55). Among the rare exceptions of convergence in the EU there is the single monetary policy.

Policy diffusion is also defined as a socially transmitted policy innovation between political systems and within them, including the communication and processes of influence (Knill and Tosun, 2008; Rogers, 2003: 13). Mechanisms of policy diffusion are learning, emulation and economic competition (e.g. Maggetti and Gilardi, 2015: 4) and coercion (Dobbin et al., 2007: 455–456). Learning is a process in which the policy in one legal system is influenced by the information about the outcomes of public policy in another legal system. Emulation stems from the countries' need when they are adopting policy decisions to adjust to their normative environment and provide social acceptability of the new public policy (Maggetti and Gilardi, 2015). Economic competition encourages countries to strategically adjust their policies to ensure economic competition in international economic connections that are based on the free flow of labour, goods and capital. Coercion is carried out by the governments of strong countries, international organisations or non-governmental organisations that impose the acceptance of a new public policy on another country through conditioning, policy leadership or hegemonic ideas.

7. Political parties

The next factor regarding policy change are political parties: considerable policy change in particular would be less likely without the inclusion of elected politicians (Hoberg, 2001a: 16). However, in literature the importance of political parties in policy design is often relativised. Although in democracy political parties are normatively a predominant factor of policy change, numerous researchers of policy change do not attribute them a central role (Giessen, 2011: 253), although the participation of parties in policy design is said to be one of their more important functions (Krašovec, 2002: 27). While political parties can establish policy change, the differences between two governments can be the result of circumstances beyond their control rather than their explicit intention (Howlett et al., 2009: 67). On the other hand, political parties can be the most important factor in policy change, when, for example, after elections, they are involved in replacing a former governing coalition. However, in this case political parties mainly influence public policy by providing staff for executive functions, and to a lesser extent through the legislative process.

8. Institutions

In the context of policy change, institutions are defined as rules and procedures through which jurisdiction is distributed in public policy and the structure of the relations between the actors in policy process is defined (Hoberg, 2001a: 11). While new institutionalism including informal rules and cultural practices among institutions has become the increasingly prevailing approach in policy research, state order or institutional arrangement still features among the most important factors (country's polity and its politics) of public policies (Knill and Tosun, 2012b: 41).

Institutions importantly co-determine the extent to which actors believe in the possibility of policy change (Cashore et al., 2001: 11), with the strategically oriented actors striving to also change institutions as such and transform ideas in policy space to achieve their self-interests. For example, social transition is a great opportunity for institutional change, but, as Bannink and Resodihardjo (2006: 8) point out it is difficult for the reform actors to reform institutions in a wider sense. Namely, institutions consist of norms, rules and regular practices the result of which is both stability in preferences of actors and stability of interpersonal interactions. The actors know what to expect from each other, how to explain the acts of others, and how to act in interpersonal relations. Therefore, people in a certain policy space adjust to a certain way of work with which they achieve the stated goals and they do not want to renounce this predictability.

9. Veto points

Veto players are the last important factor of policy change to be mentioned that occurs in referential literature. Through their authority or power veto players can influence policy change and stability by either blocking the change and preserving the stability or accelerating the change and eliminating the stability by renouncing their veto (Tsebelis, 1995: 293). The larger the number of veto players and the smaller their mutual political correspondence, the smaller the opportunity of policy change.

Conclusion

According to the bibliometric data, mentioned at the beginning of this article there is an increasing interest among the scholars in the field of policy analysis for the subject of policy change and the analysis of its occurrence. As the analysis in the first part of the article allows us to conclude there is no theoretical consensus either on how to define the concept of policy change or about which theoretical approaches best explain its occurrence. With regard to the conceptualisation of the concept of policy change, on one hand the comparative analysis shows that the definition of this

concept changes or develops from one- into multi- dimensional classifications. On the other hand, the analysis of the occurrence of policy change reveals a number of approaches, theories and models trying to explain the process of the occurrence of policy change, while new approaches are constantly evolving, which highlights the rapid development of policy change research. The framework used in our review of explanatory factors of policy change was Giessen's classification of nine empirically perceived factors of policy change. The introduction of the empirical measurement of policy change seems to be important characteristic of the former period. It goes beyond consideration only at the level of policy measures and takes target groups into account in analysis. This reduces the reasons for criticism (Knill et al., 2010 and Giessen, 2011) according to which policy change research is not based on clear definitions and measurements of the research object. Nonetheless, theoretical diversity of the existing and newly emerging models of explaining policy change reveals the large complexity of policy process, in turn pointing to the need for a more substantial judgement, when using individual approaches or their combinations in the examination of concrete policy process for policy change.

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