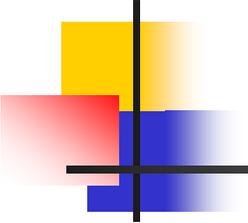


How to Understand Public Policy

The course on
“Public Policy”

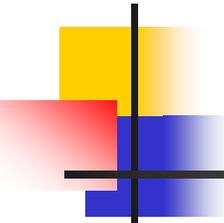
Martin Potůček



What the lecture is about

- Difficulties of scientific examination of policies
- Guidelines for the examination process
- Solving a cognitive task
 - Conceptual frameworks
 - Theory choice
 - Modelling
 - Methods of policy analysis & policy design
- Recommended structure of a scholarly study





How to understand public policy

"However, when one turns to act within the world, rather than merely study it, one must deal with the world-as-it-is, with its complexity, and must concern oneself with all the major relevant factors, conditions, and constraints. Here, encompassing paradigms are more effective than very parsimonious but highly focused ones."

Amitai Etzioni (1995, p. 105)

Difficulties of scientific examination of policies



- Unclear **determination** of phenomena.
- **Embeddedness** of a given policy in other social processes, including other policies implemented.
- **Dynamic of change** vs. cognitive stereotypes.
- The long-term effects of policies are unforeseeable and ambiguous.
- Knowledge **deficits (blank spots)** limit contextualization.
- Value-, interest- and discipline-based **biases** in the processes of inquiry, decision making and policy implementation.
- **Risk of inadequate generalizations** from particular theories.
- Risk of staking everything on a single method.
- Extensive **time and other resources** required for the inquiry process itself.
- Risk of adopting a simplistic view of the phenomenon studied.

Example of poor policy judgment: determinants of public health

- **A commonsense account/general opinion:** The health of the general population improves with the quality of health care.
- **An expert policy account:** Public health depends on:
 - genetic factors (an effect of 2–4%)
 - quality of environment (up to 10%)
 - structure & quality of healthcare (up to 30%)
 - lifestyle: physical exercise, eating habits & quality of nutrition, prevalence of substance abuse & risk behaviour (remaining %).

(Note: these expert estimates are not generally accepted by the expert community.)
- **A public policy conclusion:** Disease prevention and health promotion contribute to a better use of available financial resources if properly supported by a system of healthcare organization and management. Financial resources are spent ineffectively and wastefully if the healthcare system only intervenes after diagnosis.



Guidelines for the cognitive process

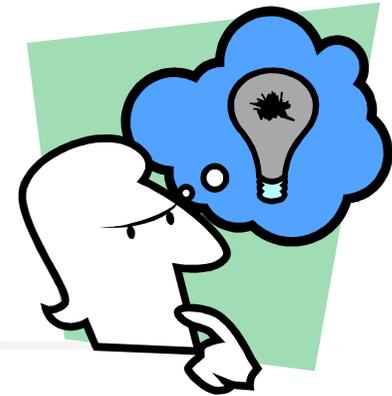
"Thinking is a struggle for order and at the same time for comprehensiveness. You must not stop thinking too soon—or you will fail to know all that you should; you cannot leave it to go on for ever, or you yourself will burst." C. W. Mills (1970, p. 245)

■ **How to become a Mills' "imaginative" researcher:**

- Do not inquire into what is already known. Start inquiry by a thorough review of existing knowledge.
- Consider the value background of your own research activity.
- Archive your knowledge, findings and ideas.
- Think within context and strive for a comprehensive and coherent interpretation of the cognitive problem.

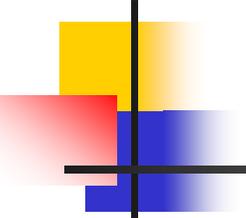


Guidelines for the cognitive process



■ **How to become a Mills' "imaginative" researcher:**

- Compare, classify and sort by different criteria and combinations thereof; look for extremes and polar opposites.
- Look for plausible theories (accounts, conceptual frameworks) for the cognitive problems, and build on them (cultivate hypotheses). Accept, reject, or adapt and develop explanations collected.
- Be inspired by all life brings: newspapers, magazines, fiction, film, theatre, conversations with friends and colleagues. Do not reject any sort of source, including correspondence, court cases or scandals.
- Never separate inquiry from life. Take advantage of your own life experience.
- Always look for the most simple and comprehensible formulation (Occam's razor).

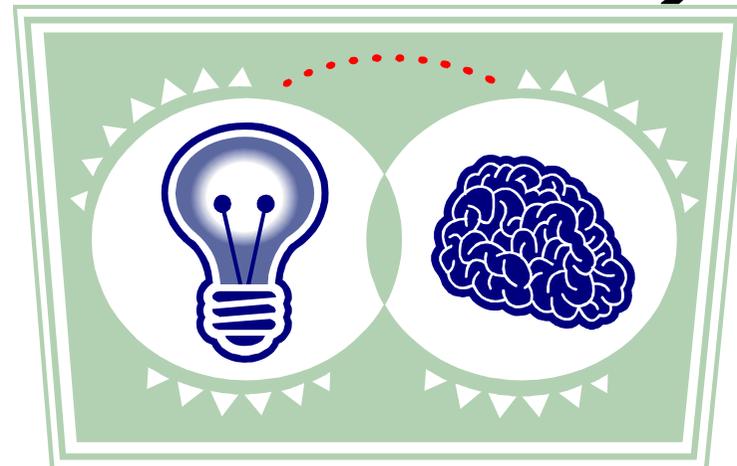


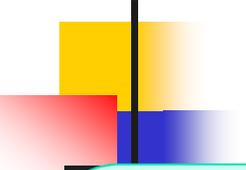
Solving a cognitive task

- **Basic steps in solving a cognitive task in public policy:**
 - Formulate the question correctly – define the policy problem.
 - Formulate the policy problem's holistic contexts (if possible, through a conceptual framework).
 - Search for and choose among theories that help you explain the policy problem defined.
 - Exclude expendable elements and relations; include missing ones.
 - Choose among models and methods; gather, analyze and interpret data and evidence about the defined problem.
 - Answer the question.
 - Define unsolved, open aspects of the cognitive task; if possible, recommend how to proceed to solve it.

Critical Thinking Question

- ***When solving a cognitive task in public policy, how do we get to **choose a theory** (or a combination of theories)?***

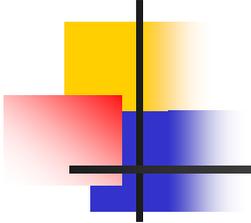




Conceptual frameworks

*"...a series of **nested conceptual maps of the explanatory space** that social scientists can use in trying to understand and explain the diversity of human patterns of behavior. (...) Our goal was to help integrate work undertaken by political scientists, economists, anthropologists, lawyers, sociologists, psychologists, and others interested in how institutions affect the incentives confronting individuals and their resultant behavior."*
(Ostrom 2005, pp. 8–9)

*"By conceptual framework (...) we mean a **system of concepts**, usually an ordered system of sufficiently reliably interpretable and interrelated conceptual means which make it possible to express identified or potential states or situations related to a thematic or issue area in a comprehensible and sufficiently precise way, to explain these states and their possible predictions, or to express the procedures, methods or possibilities of their practical formation and application."*
(Tondl 2005, p. 278)

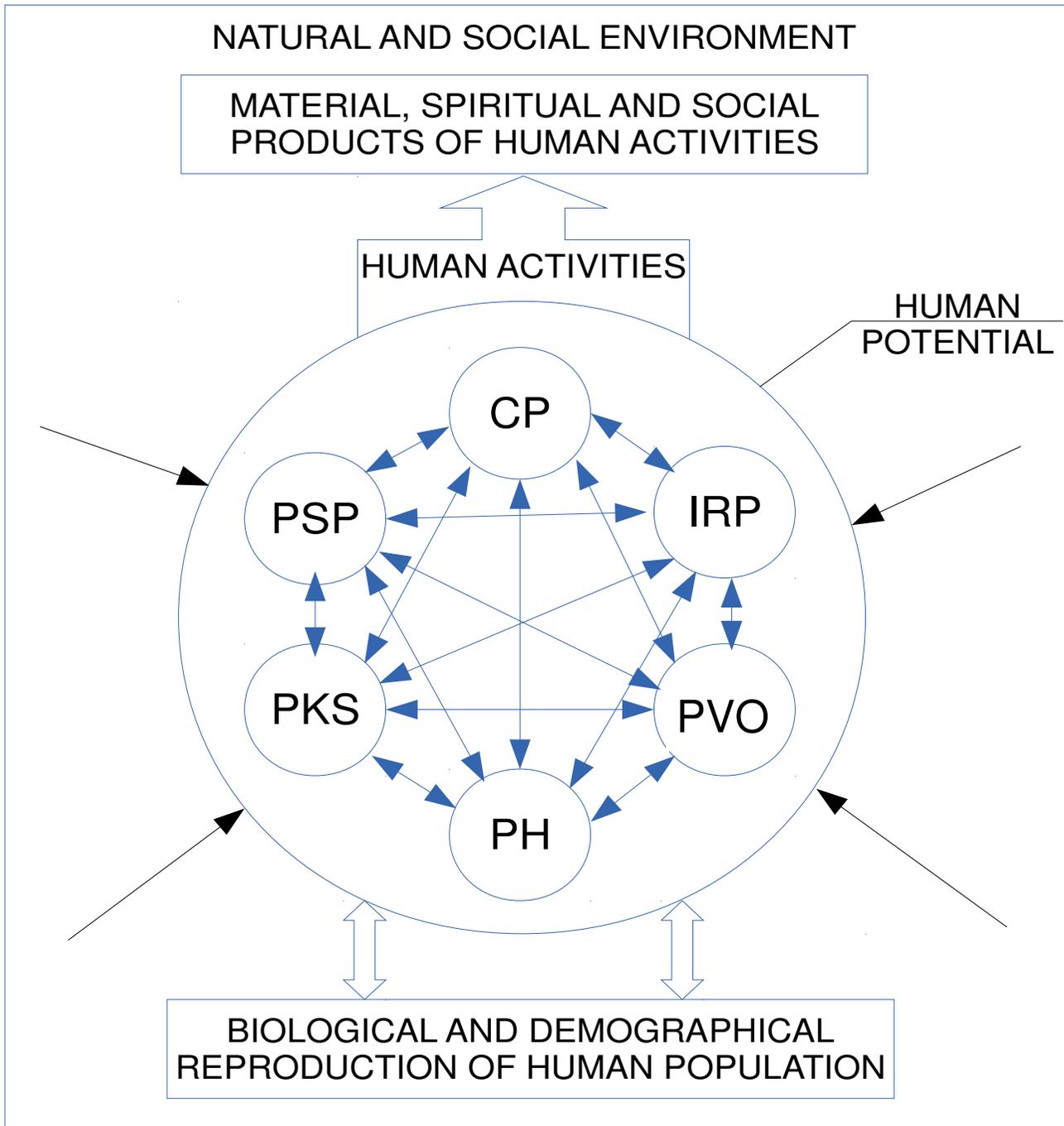


Conceptual frameworks

- Example: **Cultivation and Realization of Human Potential in the Process of Social Reproduction**

"Human potential is a system of dispositions and inclinations of man to activity (and to the existence in relationships), which develop human existential powers and society as well. The human potential is then a presupposition of life activities (and relationships) of people by which individuals and social groups realize themselves in society and change it."

(Potůček 1991, p. 117)



CP = creative potential

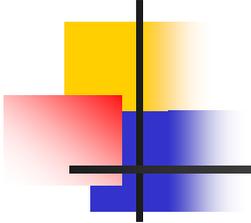
PSP = potential of social participation

IRP = individually integrative and regulative potential

PKS = potential of knowledge and skills

PVO = potential of value orientation

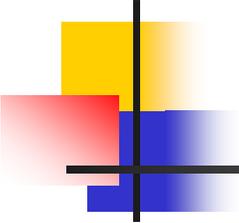
PH = potential of health



Theory choice

- Public policy (along with related disciplines) formulates a number of theories to give an account of different aspects of societal dynamics in relevant contexts.
- The different theories may complement but also contradict one another.

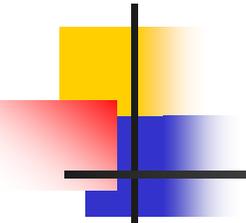
Public policy theories	Lecture
Historical institutionalism	2
Corporatism	3
Policy networks	3
Actor-centred institutionalism	4
Actors generating agendas in arenas	4
Discursive institutionalism	5
Advocacy coalition framework	5
Agenda setting	6
Veto players	7
Multiple streams	7
Bureaucracy	8
Politico-administrative relations	8
Rational choice	9



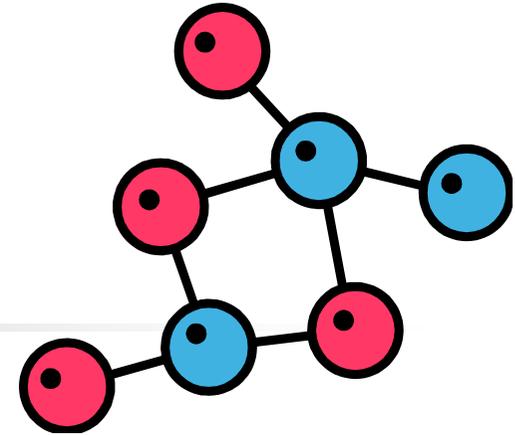
Exercise

- ***Name 2–3 theories that provide complementary accounts of the policy process.***
- ***Justify your choice.***





Modelling

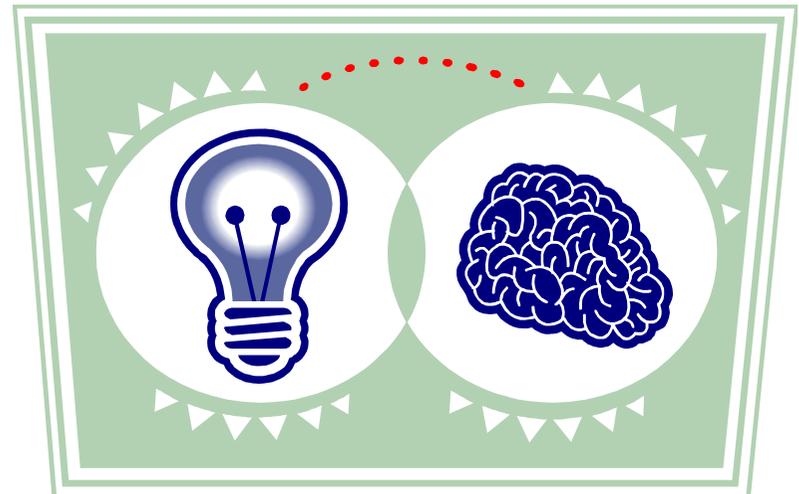


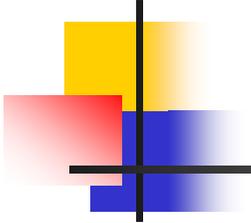
- Models are formal means of **describing** and **contextualizing relationships** (defined by theories).
- Yet already **Aristotle** advised us to:

"...look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits."

Critical Thinking Question

- ***What is the **difference** between models and theories?***
- ***Do models and/or theories anything in common with methods?***





Methods of policy analysis and policy design

Frequently used methods		Policy analysis	Policy design
1.	Brainwriting	X	
2.	Participant and non-participant observation	X	
3.	Biographic method	X	
4.	Historical analysis/Case study/Event history analysis	X	
5.	Content analysis	X	
6.	Problem tree	X	
7.	Statistical data analysis	X	
8.	Cost-benefit analysis	X	
9.	Interviewing	X	

Legend: X stands for predominant field of application.

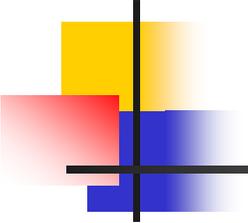
Methods of policy analysis and policy design (cont.)

Frequently used methods		Policy analysis	Policy design
10.	Brainstorming	X	X
11.	Representative surveys/Public opinion polls	X	X
12.	Expert surveys/Focus Groups	X	X
13.	Comparative analysis	X	X
14.	Process analysis	X	X
15.	Simulation modelling/Econometric modelling/Games	X	X
16.	Trend analysis/Extrapolation		X
17.	Morphological analysis		X
18.	Goal tree		X
19.	Programming		X
20.	Delphi method		X
21.	Scenario writing		X

Recommended structure of a scholarly study

1. Define the policy problem
 2. Review existing knowledge
 3. Theoretical background
 4. Characterize the methods applied
 5. Procedure and results of investigation
 6. Conclusion
 7. Sources
- Annexes (elective)





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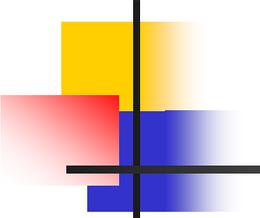
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