Comparative public policy studies examined: an Odyssey in four parts*

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Over the past decade, political scientists have paid increasing attention to 'what' governments do, and how and why they do it, in an attempt to integrate their findings into the cross-national study of political systems. This enterprise has mainly been carried out under the label of Comparative Policy Studies, which has thus emerged as a research field within and between disciplines. Such a development has provided an intellectual framework within which research focused on national policies, as well as on particular policy fields, such as health or urban policy, and so could more easily expand their universe of observation. In some ways this development built on earlier efforts to make the study of politics more genuinely comparative, but the more diverse effort needed to array empirical data has militated against reliance on a few theoretically-founded models. It is only in the last few years that attempts have been made to assess this literature, which has developed most strongly with relation to the policy patterns found in the more similar systems of Western Europe and North America. It is to these systems that this article is confined.

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Comparative Policy Studies have something in common with what others pursue under the labels of Political Economy or Political Sociology. What distinguishes them is not only a focus on 'policies', but particularly the endeavour to link them to phenomena associated with the concepts of 'politics' and 'polity.' Policy Studies relate to dynamics in the social and economic systems, but their primary focus is on the explicitly comparative analysis of how states differ in the manner in which their policies are politically grounded.

This paper presents a critical description in the form of four thresholds. In the threshold of *visibility* I try to explain why policy studies could develop a cross-national comparative proclivity. In relation to the threshold of *comparability* I provide an overview of the kinds of comparative analyses that have come to be published. Then, in the thresholds of *conceptual coherence* and *durability*, I present interpretations of both problems and potentials which have become evident as research has achieved greater density and self-consciousness.

The threshold of visibility

A crucial intellectual prerequisite for an understanding of how policy analysis could become cross-nationally comparative is to grasp how policy studies as academic endeavours occurred and recurred in various national settings. Such questions have until now scarcely been posed,

since most writers have implicitly followed the assumption that this variety of academic plant emerged uniquely on the American plains in the middle of the twentieth century from a process of mixing with various social sciences which were then still vital and vigorous in the hothouses of the University of Chicago.

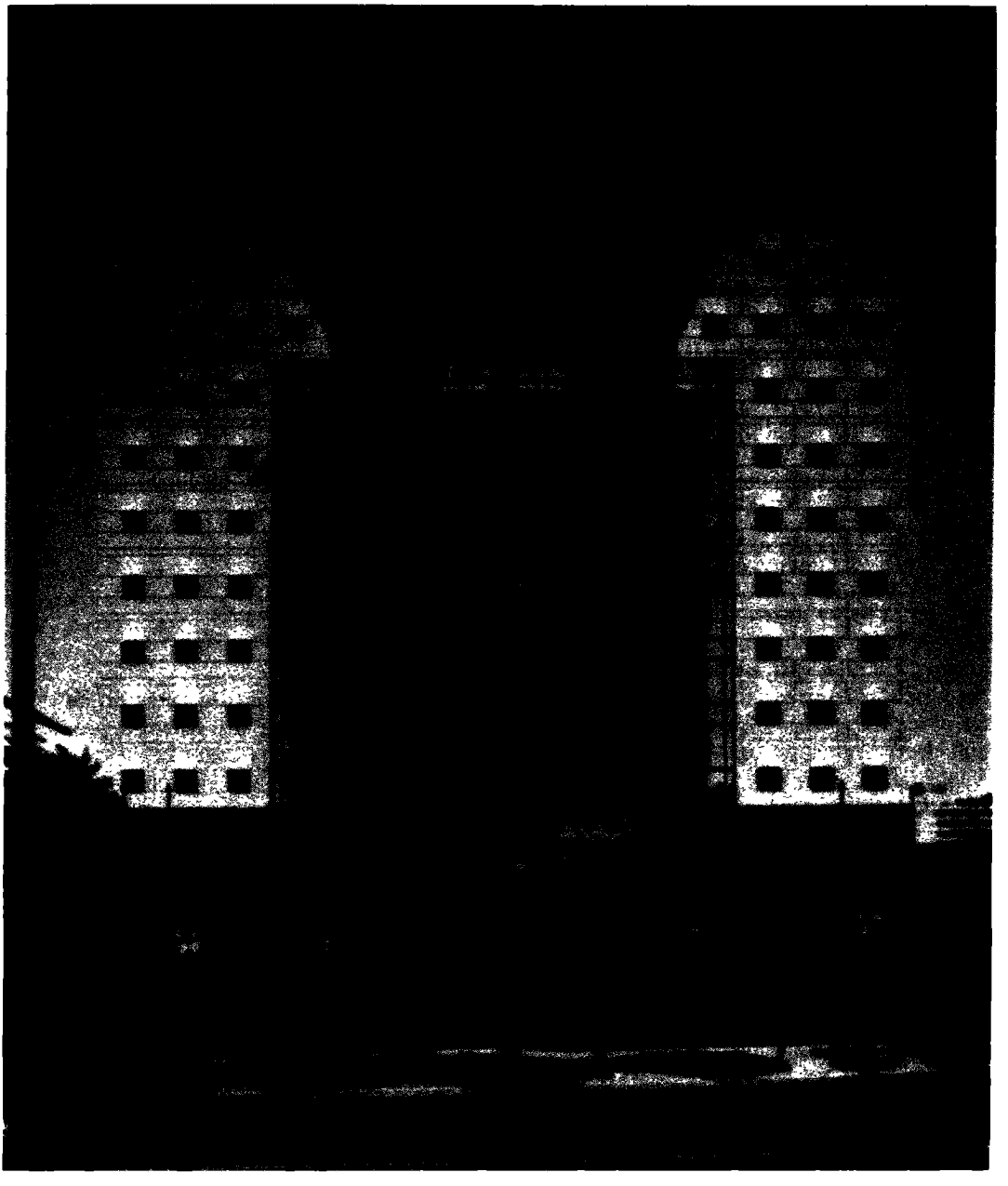
But to determine what made the sun shine favourably on this setting, one should try to compare it with preceding episodes when similar academic growths had flourished in other locales. Easier said than done, but then again not as difficult as most might imagine. When one recalls that many of the older European universities had been founded partly to train civil servants, one is drawn to look for possible predecessors of this academic innovation. Two centuries earlier, an academic discipline was established in Germany through the founding of a chair for *Polizeywissenschaft* at the University of Jena, which not only had a similar name but pursued rather similar goals. The cameral and state sciences which then developed were a forerunner of twentieth-century policy studies (Dror, 1985; Wollmann in Thurn, et al.). I will compare aspects of these cases in order to develop some working hypotheses about how suns and moons nurtured the rise and decline of policy-oriented academic endeavours.

Why do we want to refer to suns and moons to help understand when and why different kinds of states engendered academic policy research capacities? Sunlight for us can be shorthand for the dynamics generated within a certain state constellation, and the manner in which it interrelated the priority of 'foreign' and 'domestic' policies. Thus a sun favoured Central European cameral sciences[1] because rulers wanted to develop a different mix of specialists to accentuate internal socio-economic development in a period when the inter-state system was relatively stable. In the United States no such academic infrastructure developed in the pre-industrial period because the state took a less direct role in marshalling such resources (Katzenstein, 1978). States which experienced both national integration and industrialization early on had four incentives to invest in academic research capacity, or indeed in national public universities. They intervened less in how emerging academic disciplines distributed the academic turf than did Continental late developers. But the Continental systems could also change their preferences in this regard, as Prussia and Germany did in the more economically developed but internationally destabilized Europe of the nineteenth century.

Here I can best convey the essentials of my view of these processes by contrasting the conditions under which the late nineteenth century saw the decline of the academic *Polizey* sciences in German universities, with the rise of the policy sciences in American universities in the mid twentieth century.

Lowi's advocacy of a policy-to-politics approach which would lead to 'a fusion of the fields of public law, public administration and political behavior' (Lowi, 1978), would have sounded very congenial to the professors who held the chairs of *Polizey* science at German universities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their chairs had been created at a time when the sun of the absolute state stood at its zenith, built on the philosophy of Leibniz, who was something like the Lasswell of his day. They sought to systematize the knowledge of domestic policy and administration, and to convey norms of reconciling state interests with those of the welfare of the citizenry. But their mercantilist assumptions became decreasingly relevant as both the existence of the dynastic states and the social philosophy of the citizenry were changed in the post-Napoleonic period. Though they tried to adjust their teachings, these proved incompatible with the dynamics both of industrialization and of nation-building, with their dogma of the supremacy of *Aussenpolitik* over domestic *Polizey*. Their academic turf was parcelled out in a way analogous to the division of Poland. Their chairs were taken over by economists and scholars of administration, but then increasingly by teachers of state law, whose intellectual predecessors they had in part replaced some generations earlier. The last chair in *Polizey* sciences was phased out just before German unification.

In the American case, by contrast, the sun came to shine on academic policy sciences in the 1960s as a rising level of domestic disturbance motivated governments to shift analytical skills from strategic to domestic problems, and this in turn led to the emergence of policy analysts and the founding of journals like *Policy*



Spatial location of public policy: Public Services Building in Portland, Oregon, USA Recently built by the architect Michael Graves, the building echoes the Art Deco movement of the 1930s and 1940s. From *L'Empire du bureau 1900–2000*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1984

Sciences. That the earlier American hegemony in the state constellation was being challenged also contributed incentive towards mobilizing and rationalizing domestic policy processes. The rapid growth of policy science was also nurtured by 'moons', which is my shorthand for structures like foundations and sectoral structures that play supporting and more focused roles in providing research stimulus, financing and organizational support. In the 1960s the support of foundations and agencies, interacting with the *Zeitgeist*, had profound effects on disciplines like political science. They generated tidal waves which swamped the disciplinary bulwarks against reformative goals by which leaders like David Easton had, in the 1950s, effectively contained those who wanted to pursue policy research in the Lasswellian mould.

It is startling to see how sharply this trend change was reflected in the titles of articles in the *American Political Science Review*. In the three decades up to the early 1960s there were only about half a dozen articles which used the term *Policy* in relation to some kind of *domestic* policy focus; the vast majority of articles using the term were concerned with problems of foreign or military policies. Then the solar and lunar pull drew a great volume of policy research, whose initial focus was the comparative study of various policy outputs and indicators among the states of the American federal system. Thus the policy wave swelled in a setting where 'the state was writ small', in contrast to the ebbing of the earlier wave in the Bismarck era when 'the state was writ large'.

The establishment of a national policy research infrastructure is obviously *one* of several important prerequisites for the recruitment of scholars from any one country undertaking comparative policy research. Another important factor is suggested by looking at where most comparative policy research has come from in recent years. It is evident that apart from Americans, scholars from the Federal Republic of Germany have been particularly strongly represented, more so than French or even British scholars. This cannot be attributed directly to the Germans' having had more in the way of earlier academic traditions, for memory of these earlier traditions has been rather dim in Federal German policy research circles in recent decades. Much more relevant here is probably that the young researchers had special opportunities to develop skills and interest in comparative research by first trying their hand at comparing policy patterns within their own federal system. But in a sense they benefited from the creation of two German states and the Federal Republic's federal system, the activities of whose component states provided a launch pad for trials in relevant comparative studies of policy development. A number of these (Schmidt, 1982; Jann, 1983a) have in fact moved from inter-land to international comparative efforts, and the availability of such opportunities helps explain why their contributions are considerably more numerous, and perhaps also why the work of several has been recognized by the Stein Rokkan prizes awarded by the International Social Science Council (Schmidt, 1982; Alber, 1982).

The threshold of comparability

When policies had come to be sufficiently visible on both sides of the Atlantic, academics with strong binoculars could begin comparing them, and from the early 1970s begins what we can call the 'launching decade' of comparative policy studies. In the cross-national arena, political scientists took a relatively undisputed lead in moving from the visibility to the comparability threshold. Most built on a disciplinary tendency to assume that the state, or any political variable, 'matters' in the shaping of policies, an assumption which many economists and sociologists either did not express or actually denigrated.

The fruits of these endeavours were publications which probed in different combinations of depth and breadth how two or more Western nations had shaped and implemented policies, or networks and groups of policies, in various policy sectors. One sort was descriptively analytical and contrasted, typically, the impact of major policies of similar national departments or ministries, or significant components thereof. Another focused on the degree to which different kinds of party, interest group and bureaucratic influences affected patterns of policy output. And still a third variety concentrated on

TABLE 1. A taxonomy of comparative policy analysis

General and theoretical perspectives	Policy determinants	Policy outputs and evaluation
Subject matter		
Contrasting concepts of society Contrasting definitions of policy Contrasting research methods and units of analysis	Levels of economic development Elites Bureaucracy The state Types of political regimes Political parties Interest groups	Policy areas: health, pensions, incomes policy, education, housing, taxation, employment, etc. Contrasting evaluations: (1) Short-term: policy 'impact', effectiveness (2) Longer-term: systemic consequences, e.g. 'crisis' of democracy, the welfare state, and/or capitalism; emergence of varieties of corporatism (3) Analytical: relevance of empirical findings and conceptual refinements for theory-building; explanations of 'history', inter-system differences, etc. (4) prescriptive
Illustrative scholars		
Ashford (1977, 1978) Cyr and deLeon (1975) Feldman (1978) Heclo (1972) King (1973) Peters (1977) Rose (1973)	Anton (1980) Cameron (1978, 1982) Castles (1978, 1979) Flora and Heidenheimer (1981) Heclo (1974) Heidenheimer (1973) Heidenheimer Heclo-Adams (1975)	Hibbs (1977, 1982) King (1973, 1981) Kjellberg (1977) Lindberg (1975, 1977, 1982) Peters (1972, 1975, 1977) Smith (1969, 1975) Wilensky (1975)

Source. Hancock, 1983, p 286

identifying longer-term patterns of continuity and discontinuity, extending not only over particular periods of incumbency, but also across changes of regime.

In the only comprehensive published survey of the comparative policy literature of the initial decade, M. Donald Hancock relates these and other clusters of literature in a tabular taxonomy which is reproduced here in Table 1. He constructed it to show how theoretical perspectives relate to the central empirical and analytical foci of comparative research, and to 'make explicit that comparative policy analysis is more than the sum of its parts. Instead, it is a microcosm of the conceptual, methodological and analytical diversity within political science as a whole; it is distinctive largely because of its emphasis on the causes, different forms, and social consequences of government action, or non-action, in a variety of historical and contemporary settings' (Hancock, 1983, p. 285). It is not my aim here either to criticize or to update, or to reproduce my own version of this tableau. Rather I will be presenting some perspectives on portions of the literature which complement his presentation, expanding the base somewhat to include more recent and non English-language publications. Following the way I have identified the various thresholds, my discussion moves somewhat from right to left with reference to his table.

Policy sector studies

Comparative policy research could proceed well where policy substance had already been analysed cross-nationally, but within frameworks which had not closely examined political determinants. Income maintenance was an area

where considerable prior analysis allowed innovative scholars to press more directly on the reasons for policy choices (Heclo, 1974; Wilensky, 1975). This held also for fields such as education, where a body of comparative research was already accessible. Health was another rewarding research area, although it has remained somewhat isolated, and has not been compared or contrasted much to other policy areas.

Where neither disciplinary traditions nor research-oriented international organizations had developed traditions of analysis, comparative policy research had a tougher journey. This handicap was faced by those doing innovative work in the comparisons of housing policy (Headey, 1978; Ducland-Williams, 1978); immigration policy (Freeman, 1979); and also in many areas of environmental policy (Enloe, 1975). Where international organizations had not established bases for classifying national programmes, comparative analyses faced handicaps, as with social services (Kamerman and Kahn, 1981).

Studies of environmental policy implementation have been particularly common, since fairly similar legislation was of similar vintage, and studies based on the contrast of Swedish and American experience have proved especially productive. One innovative study of clean-air policies found the United States ahead on controlling mobile sources, while Sweden was better at handling emissions from stationary sources (Lundqvist, 1980, p. 194). Another examined how agencies set tolerance levels for noise, chemical and other pollution patterns in the two countries. These were similar, but great differences were found between an adversarial American, and a more accommodationist Swedish style of regulatory enforcement (Kelman, 1981).

The policy implementation focus has been used to examine administrative relations between national and local governments in stimulating ways. This has led to comparisons of the manner in which regulatory powers in pollution control are differently exercised by the three governmental levels in various European countries (Knoepfel and Weicher, 1982) and to broader reinterpretations based on the administration of social programmes (Ashford, 1981). The intricacies of national–local financial relations have been a continuing magnet of interest (Sharpe, 1981), also leading to studies related to public activities in sectors like housing (Sbragia, 1979).

Much policy research supports the claim that 'studies in comparative public policy have demonstrated what comparative politics (studies) have always doubted, that the United States can be compared usefully with Canada and with the nations of Europe' (Feldman, 1978, p. 290).

Thus, in an example drawn from comparative economic policy, Heclo recognizes that in France the 'sharp ideological conflict in economics at the level of political rhetoric is offset by a dense system of technocratic policy management'. By contrast, 'the United States appears more inclined to define the terms of debate in a strictly adversarial manner, but does so in ways that prevent adversaries from coalescing into coherent structures of opposition', whereas in Britain such confrontational coalitions have developed 'despite higher traditions of civility' (Heidenheimer, Heclo and Adams, 1983, p. 166).

How many of the conventional policy areas have been the subject of comparative studies? An overview of the literature has so far been developed only for certain sectors (Dierkes, Weiler and Antal, 1986), and we lack up-to-date bibliographies. However, as the information in Table 2 suggests, most of the conventional policy area rubrics have come to be at the very least somewhat populated, at least in the form of an article or book chapter. Thus publications comparing the policies of European countries, either with each other, or with those of the United States or Canada, have dealt in at least a minimal degree with some twenty of the more or less conventional policy areas. They range from dissertations comparing agriculture policies (Bloomfield, 1981) to detailed studies of industrial policies (Katzenstein, 1984), from articles linking national and international monetary policies (Schwerin, 1980) to treatments of science and technology policies (Brickman et al., 1985), from studies of railroad and air transportation to others dealing with problems of urban and regional policies. Thus despite considerable concentration on some policy sectors, as discussed elsewhere in the paper, the distribution of effort across most of the domestic policy sectors has been considerable.

TABLE 2.

Policy areas which have been the subject of cross-nationally comparative literature in the 1975–85 period include the following:

Agriculture	Local government
Economic management	Labour market and employment
Employment	Monetary and trade
Education	Public finance and expenditure
Energy	Regional
Expenditure	Science
Environment	Social security
Health	Social services
Housing	Taxation
Immigration	Transport
Incomes and inflation	Urban planning
Incomes maintenance	

For citations of specific relevant publications, see especially Heidenheimer-Heclo-Adams, 1983, pp. 3–56; Hancock, 1983, Goehlert and Martin, 1984. Publications whose primary defining characteristic deals with international policies – such as foreign, military, strategic policy areas – are not included in this table.

Determinants

For those who seek to analyse the influence of political variables on policy outputs, alternative focal points of emphasis were seen in the structure of party systems, bureaucracies, or the nature of representative institutions. In studies involving only a few national cases these could be handled qualitatively, but as more systems were included there has been more recourse to the utilization of aggregate data. Sometimes these were subjected to correlational analysis, but at other times techniques of longitudinal analysis have been applied to see, for instance, whether changes of policy in each of the policy areas have coincided with changes in the party or parties in power in the given country or countries.

Since the late 1970s one set of political factors has attracted much more serious research activity and controversy among students particularly of European political systems. '*Do parties matter* as determinants of policy outputs, and if so how? ' became a central question. Reacting against findings which seemed to diminish the policy influence of political parties and ideologies (Wilensky, 1975), political scientists first concentrated on how the influence of Social Democratic parties mattered for policy outputs, with considerable emphasis on how Scandinavian policy outputs had differed from those elsewhere. Then attempts to explain deviant cases, like that of the Netherlands, in turn led to research comparing the policy achievements attributable to Christian Democratic periods of government control (Wilensky, 1981), with those of Social Democratic and other left parties. Then, right-wing parties came to be treated less as residuals, and more as active policy determinants in their own right (Castles, 1982). The lusty nature of the controversy is attributable in good part to the fact that it was difficult for one side to squash the other effectively. Lack of standardization left room for considerable variation in how the variables were put into operation, as well as in the range of time periods, countries and regimes to which they were applied.

Whether the party composition of governments or the corporatist ties linking governments and interest were more important determinants of cross-national policy differences has been most directly discussed in analyses of economic policies. Earlier studies had identified strong relationships between party composition and the nature of unemployment/inflation policy trade-offs (Hibbs, 1977, Korpi, 1980), while others attributed the greater success of some countries in these areas more to corporatist arrangements based on partnership ideology interacting with political culture factors (Schmidt, 1982).

Long-term studies

Some political sociologists pursuing comparative historical studies of welfare state policy development take as their *starting point* the date on which national governments became directly involved through positive legislation, i.e. when Bismarck led Germany to become the first social security innovator in the 1880s (Flora et al., 1983). Other studies of educational systems, for example, begin by examining the type of formal education which *preceded* the development of state systems, which in turn are defined very flexibly as a 'nationwide and differentiated collection of institutions devoted to formal education, whose overall control and supervision is at least partly governmental'. Nations selected for comparison include two

Government Bureau (1956), by the American painter George Tooker. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Tooker later explained that this painting was the result of a frustrating personal experience with anonymous public decision-makers, reluctant to take action. From *L empire du bureau 1900–2000*. Paris, Berger-Levrault 1984

where state intervention developed initially in a decentralized manner – England and Denmark – and two in which this occurred in a more centralized manner – France and Russia (Archer, 1979, p. 54). The experiences which both of these macro-oriented studies synthesize are similarly broad, covering in each case well over 1,000 'country years'.

In developing their conceptual framework and methodology, Flora et al. built on Stein Rokkan's problem-based theory of European political development by elaborating how enlargement of political participation during the welfare state stage led to societal values like security and equality becoming more important. The analysis tests how far political variables like scope of enfranchisement, or party composition of government, causes variations in how states differed in responding to needs engendered by similar socio-economic development processes from the 1880s to the 1970s. Parallel efforts have extended the analysis also to embrace Canada and the United States (Kudrle and Marmor in Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981, Chs 3, 8).

Therborn and Korpi share with Flora an appreciation of the state institutional factors, but place somewhat different emphasis on the role of working-class development and mobilization. Therborn grants that classes are not decision-making bodies, and that therefore 'policy-making is inherently irreducible to class conflict and class power', but holds that a class analysis can nevertheless provide the best explanatory framework for the development of welfare states, which he wants to define as those in which 'welfare activities dominate everyday

state routine' (Therborn, forthcoming). Others too would seek to reverse some Conservatives' tendency to use the welfare state label in a pejorative sense, by restricting its application only to those systems whose social policy effort exceeds a certain threshold, or where the redistributive aspects of public expenditures are especially strong.

In reviewing how, in recent years, more European social and political scientists have examined various dimensions of this analytical field, Uusitalo concludes that several substantive conclusions emerge as having sound empirical bases. First, economic levels do not differentiate well enough as to welfare state effort, with openness of the economy proving a more significant predictor. Secondly, it is evident that politics do matter, but the debate remains open as to which political variables, strength of left or right parties or corporatism, are most significant for which ways of formulating the key hypothesis (Uusitalo, 1984, 409–10).

The threshold of conceptual coherence

One political scientist who helped shape the directions of the launching decade, Rose, early on supplied a framework of analysis which laid out an approach that most followed. He suggested analysing in sequence (1) the initial state in a society prior to public recognition that a policy need exists; (2) how policy issues are placed on the 'agenda of public controversy' ; (3) how demands are advanced; (4) the importance of the form of government for policy deliberations; (5) available resources and existing constraints; (6) the move towards a policy decision; (7) the determinants of governmental choice; (8) the context of the choice; (9) implementation; (10) the production of outputs; (11) policy evaluation; and (12) feedback (Rose, 1973).

This linear model by-passes underlying conceptual problems.[2] Another political scientist who critically examined the American policy literature up to the mid 1970s found that 'policy was not a well defined concept', and that the literature lacked 'a standard rule of usage which would help us identify an instance of policy'. Rather, there was a wide range of usage within which policy analysis was alternatively seen as (i) a subset of the concept *political*; (ii) as coextensive with this concept; (iii) as extending to other dimensions (inter-disciplinary); or (iv) as a means of mounting an integrated attack on social problems (in *The Place of Policy Analysis* (1977), see London's contribution, p. 423).

Those who wanted to study policies comparatively thus faced a double conceptual barrier: in most of the languages that we were reading in, there was no *distinct* term for *policy*. and in Anglo-American usage the term was employed with unbounded and overlapping meanings. We might have confronted the conceptual problems directly, but nobody tried to. Or one could go ahead and initially ignore the problem by defining comparative public Heidenheimer policy simply as 'the study of how, why and to what effect different governments pursue courses of action or inaction' (Heidenheimer et al., 1983, p. 2).

But this and similar ad hoc definitions of the field have been subjected to extensive criticism, particularly of the lack of progress toward a more consistent theoretical basis (Feldman, 1978; Diamant, 1981; Scharpf, 1978). Hancock observes that 'sharply divergent conceptualizations and research foci . . . severely inhibited cumulative scholarship within the subdiscipline as a whole. At most, one can discern cumulative trends within each of the various conceptual and methodological approaches.' He agrees with those who say that 'comparative public policy lacks unity as a field', but concludes that 'it could hardly be otherwise, given the considerable epistemological and methodological diversity within political science as a whole' (Hancock, 1983, pp. 293, 298).

Rather than consider to what degree it might have been otherwise, I would like to discuss here two somewhat more circumscribed kinds of conceptual obstacles that were encountered. One section deals with the problems of inter-language equivalence, which has been part of our research infrastructure and has not been much discussed. Another deals with the much more widely discussed problem of what categories and classifications can be employed to counteract the centrifugal tendencies in policy studies so as to make them capable of being treated in a more theoretical manner.

TABLE 3. How 'deprived' are Continentals by lack of a distinct POLICY term? Some empirical data

(a) The Utility of the *Politics/Policy/Polity* Distinction for Germans

In 1984, 442, German political scientists teaching at universities were sent a questionnaire by Carl Bohret, and of these 167 responded to the question of how meaningful they found the English-language way of breaking down the Continental *Politik* concept. Their evaluations are reproduced below:

	Evaluation	
Category	Meaningful or conditionally meaningful (%)	Scarcely or not meaningful (%)
Faculty	72	28
Junior staff	77	23

Source: Hartwich, 1985, p. 462

(b) Transposing the *Policy–Politics* Contrast into Continental Languages

In 1984, the *New York Times* published a lead editorial in which it criticized proposals to develop a coherent national industrial policy for the United States. It prognosticated that such a policy would serve only to promote the interests of particular industries or regions. To emphasize this thrust it gave the following heading to the editorial:

Industrial Policy = Industrial Politics

I sent this editorial to the press attachés of several European embassies in Washington, asking them how they would translate its heading if they were asked to replicate the meaning as well as possible in their respective languages. The gist of the replies varied quite a bit, even for countries using the same language.

Thus the *French* Embassy thought it should be translated as
La politique industrielle = les politiques de l'industrie
But the *Belgian* Embassy suggested a different version:
Politique industrielle = politique politicienne de l'industrie
The *Spanish* Embassy interpreted still differently:
Una politica industrial = politica industrial global
The respondent from the Embassy of the *Federal Republic of Germany* had no trouble translating the first term of the equation as *Industriepolitik*, but could have no briefer way of putting the second than '*parteipolitische Auffassung von der Foerderungswürdigkeit bestimmter Industriezweige*'.

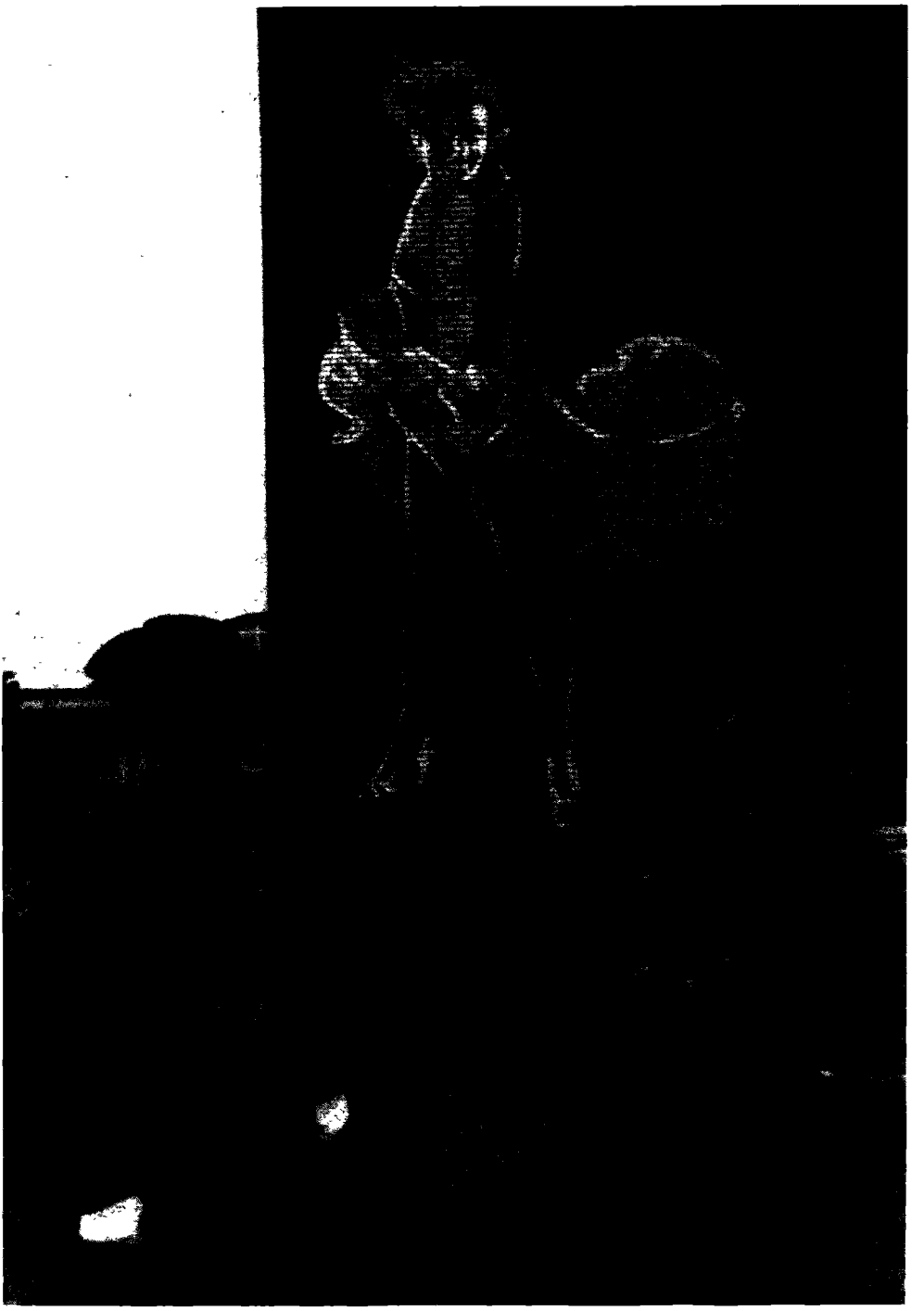
Source. Heidenheimer, 1986.

Inter-language equivalence

When we talk in a proverbial way about problems of comparison, we often illustrate our case through reference to apples and oranges. Terms for these fruits are distinct and separate in all the languages we normally employ, in a way that the terms for *politics* and *policy* are not. Whereas the distinction between *politics* and *policy* is easy to make in English, it is much more difficult to express in the Continental languages. For example, German and French do not possess a term for *policy* which is distinct from that for *politics*. In German *Kommunalpolitik* may mean 'local politics' or it may mean 'communal policy'. By the same token Frenchmen have to cover English terms like 'university politics' by *politique universitaire* which, however, also carries the meaning of 'university policy'. When Continental political scientists try to teach in the language of policy analysis, they have to make elaborate efforts to make the relevant distinctions, as in this case by a German political scientist:

> *Policy* and *politics* are part of every Politik and may be identified as distinguishable dimensions of political action. . . . One could say that Politik constitutes the realization of Politik in the sense of *policy*, with the help of Politik in the sense of *politics*, on the basis of Politik in the sense of *polity*. . . . [with] concepts like power, authority, conflict, and participation one would seem to be dealing with a stronger *politics*-orientation. (Rohe, 1978, pp. 65, 68, 80).

Why is it that our languages today exhibit such different capacities in this respect? Basically the problem seems to have its roots in the fact that during the early phases of Western state development, the Continental nations developed a very strong *Polizey* concept in the sense referred to above, to which English never



A huge portrait of Marilyn Monroe on the new premises of the École Polytechnique, in Palaiseau, near Paris '*Grandes écoles*' such as this one, or the Ecole nationale d'administration, provide top-level policy-makers in France.
Vimenet/Collectif

developed an equivalent concept which became widely accepted. Then in the later phases of state development, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, English generalized a broad, diffuse, but very adjustable concept of *policy*, for which the Continental languages failed to develop a distinct equivalent (Heidenheimer, 1986).

When one raises the present problem with Continental officials and academics, one sometimes gets the response that insiders can always tell from the context which meaning the speaker or writer intends to convey. I decided to test this thesis in the way described in Table 3. In may view the responses in this small pilot study show that, at the very least, political scientists are in many situations having to swim against the stream in trying to impose fairly uniform meanings of the *policy* concept in cross-national studies.

Typologies and classifications

Another kind of conceptual problem was identified by Scharpf as the 'need for a language to describe the relationship between substantive policy and the structural and environmental factors influencing policy processes. This language should permit us to reduce the infinite variety of real-world cases to a smaller set of descriptors which might lead to a systematic typology of problem situations, policy instruments, implementation strategies and of the structural and processional variables that influence the substance of the policy formation and policy implementation process' (Scharpf, 1977, 33x).

Chastising several of us for not sufficiently exploiting comparative policy studies to develop systematic theory, he asked:

> Isn't it about time that comparative policy studies should take up Lowi's challenge to classify policy areas (or issues) according to the level of conflict which they are likely to generate, and policy-making structures according to the capacity for conflict resolution which they can mobilize. If we had this typology of policy issues and of policy-making structures, we could more systematically describe the differences between policy-making patterns in different areas . . . and explain policy outcomes less impressionistically. (Sharpf, 1978, p. 124).

Several American authors did apply variants of the Lowi–Salisbury schema to various kinds of comparative analyses attempting to compare agencies, programmes and entire political systems (Smith, 1975; Lowi, 1978; Peters et al., 1977). Many Europeans also made similar efforts, with the result that 'almost all attempts to categorize state programs were based on Lowi's categories' (Jann, 1983a, p. 155). A cohort of able young scholars from the Federal Republic of Germany tried to apply the Lowi scheme in a variety of implementation studies. But in most of these efforts the great asset of the Lowi schema, its capacity to group diverse kinds of policies, was undercut by the fact that various authors often disagreed about how to classify the same national programmes under the four main categories.

The threshold of durability

Even a cursory glance at the titles of comparative policy studies makes it evident that these seem not only to have been influenced by the ebb and flow of reform moods, but also to reflect patterned variations as to which different policy sectors are selected for examination. The early 1970s saw something of a 'gold rush' toward the fields of social policy – income maintenance, education, social services – which were perceived as having strong potential for redistributing incomes and life chances. But in the mid 1980s we are witnessing an equally or perhaps even more one-sided concentration on research relating to policy areas dealing mainly with enhancing competitiveness – such as industrial, labour, technology and international trade policies. Clearly such trends reflect the ways in which policy students are responsive to where and how the most relevant moons smile or frown.

A glance at the kind of evidence represented by journal names reminds us just how the focus of policy publications has fluctuated. As indicated earlier, up to the mid 1960s most of the work published by political scientists which emphasized the 'policy' term dealt with problems of foreign and strategic policies. But a recent bibliographical tool listing current English-language journals which include the term policy in their names shows a strikingly different distribution. So 'domesticated' has the policy term become that the journal *Foreign Policy* is the only one out of thirty which bears a title

suggesting a primary concern with international or military affairs. By contrast no fewer than four out of the thirty titles (which of course are not limited to political science) include the term *Social Policy* in their titles (Goehlert and Martin, 1984, xi). With present trends running in still other directions, the picture will no doubt look different again a decade from now.

Comparative breadth could be perceived as one antidote to the tendency of policy analysis to be 'the sometimes opportunistic, often belated handmaiden of emerging social trends and dominant configurations of power' (Anderson, 1984, p. 5). As Ashford remarks in trying to pursue comparison across policy problems and through time in several countries: 'There is of course the risk that those committed to comparative policy analysis will try to run before they can walk, but, on the whole, such efforts are preferable to self-paralysis, and worse, leaving such important work to the self-interested' (Ashford, 1984, pp. 84, 116).

One of the facts of much policy research conducted in local and national situations is that it is difficult for disciplinary or other instruments of professional ethos to monitor threshold levels of both the quality and disinterestedness of what passes for policy research. Assuming that it is futile to labour this point, one can identify several techniques which could in theory serve to keep such tendencies somewhat in check. One strategy would be to raise up research sponsorship or co-ordination higher in the levels of political system, on the assumption that this would impede the influence of parochial interests. The other would be to seek to build up institutional but also intellectual patterns of continuity, which would serve to maintain continuity of research ethos across 'trend-changes' and alternations of political control – the moons which affect the tides of policy research attractiveness.

The role of international organizations as co-ordinating facilitators, if not outright sponsors of academic comparative policy research, has not been widely discussed, considering how much their data and interpretations are relied upon by researchers. One aspect which has probably had a negative effect is the paradox that the country whose scholars have been most active in comparative research, the United States, is the one whose government has had the poorest relations with several of the important international organizations. Though we don't much study aborted policies, even when they concern ourselves, we can nevertheless speculate that this factor may have contributed to some non-developments, for example that the United States has not generated any key academic centres of comparative policy research. Quite possibly the growth of more visible European centres for the sponsorship and diffusion of research, such as the Centre for the Study of Public Policy at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, and the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, might be marginally attributed to the fact that it was more feasible there to combine national and international resources and contacts.

What was probably up to now the most ambitious conference to assess the fruits of cross-national policy research was held in Berlin in December 1983. The scope of its organization was decentralized, with four groups discussing reports on research into economic, education, environmental and social policies. It provided a unique opportunity to gain insight into the nature of struggle over paradigms and priorities in these four important fields.

Each of the four policy groups there tended to take off from rather different concepts of what was at the core of the policy analysis, depending largely on disciplinary and national origins of the organizers. In the social policy group the welfare state paradigm was positioned to dominate at the expense of its constituent policy areas. Those reviewing the economic policy sector tried to distinguish between a 'politics' perspective on the one hand and, on the other, a 'technical "policy" approach' which could be put at the disposal of policy-makers. The environmental group came closest to distinguishing policies in the mainline political science sense. The education area report was again different in that it perceived national education policies as largely determined by tides of opinion generated by international agencies, and discussed 'preferred policies' of the World Bank, Unesco and OECD. It examined cross-national research findings in a global and holistic framework, but asserted typically that 'the separate policy impact of these findings is difficult to assess because they are part of a wider current of arguments and findings' (Dierkes et al., forthcoming).

Consequently it was not feasible to compare the characteristics of the four policy areas with each other, since they had been discussed in such very different ways in each of the four groups.

Others, also based in Berlin, have concentrated more on the interaction between policy changes over time, and the assumptions and goals of researchers who are themselves subject to changing conditions of support. They acknowledge that much recent policy research has incorporated an '*étatiste* bias', which has reflected too uncritically the foregone conclusions of political actors as to policy goals during the ascendant portions of political reform cycles (Thurn et al., forthcoming). Examining how conservative governments in the 1980s have reacted by sharply reducing support for social science research, the authors seem to identify a rank order in which the passing of the 'reform mood' has had more impact as one proceeds from Sweden to the Federal Republic of Germany to the United States to the United Kingdom.

Also contributing to discontinuity of policy research efforts is the way in which trends in policy cycles have come to be related to the levels at which governmental intervention is targeted. Because it came to be so closely linked to the arenas of 'domestic' policies which waxed so expansive in the 1960s and 1970s, policy research has been focused very strongly on decisions and implementation at the national level. But the issues that both politicians and analysts regard as most crucial in the mid 1980s, are once again strongly embedded in supranational networks, especially economic and strategic ones. Researchers who are conceptually well grounded at the international level have something of an advantage, since they can often explore the interdependence of policies more effectively than those rooted more at the national or sub-national levels. This seems due less to any insurmountable disciplinary or paradigmatic barriers than to the dialectical way in which visibility conditions related to 'domestic' and 'foreign' policies have succeeded each other.

Having grown the way they have, comparative policy studies can respond to the changing weights of these political and disciplinary pulls, for their potential for adaptability is the other side of their relative lack of conceptual cohesion. If, after a decade, comparative policy studies are at a crossroads, it is not one at which the practitioners have collectively to decide whether to take one route or another. Some no doubt will continue to press the search for theoretical cohesion which can produce conceptual frameworks that can achieve consensus within political science.

Others perceive comparative policy as playing more of an intellectual linking role between political science and other disciplines. Some of us indeed believe that 'comparative public policy can never become a self-contained specialized discipline, for the subject draws elements from many different disciplines. . . . Comparative public policy is located at a busy crossroads in the social sciences. It provides a setting where political scientists, sociologists, historians and economists are learning from one another. The premises each brings can be treated against the perceptions of others' (Heidenheimer, Heclo and Adams, 1983, p. 8). Rose recently articulated a complementary view: 'Cross-national lesson-drawing assumes that professional tribalism is as strong as national ethnocentrism. . . . In academic terms, material currently segregated in journals such as the *National Tax Journal* or the *Journal of Social Policy* logically needs to be considered together. Spending on social policy and taxing to finance it are two complementary sides of the policy process, albeit currently two unrelated academic disciplines' (Rose, forthcoming).

To use a religious metaphor, the comparative policy field may in some senses be said to be ecumenical and Broad Church. Its largest components are political scientists, who mingle easily with those from other disciplines sharing common concerns. But it is also agnostic, and particularly so in regard to how it relates research behaviour to academic demarcation. Characteristically there is no journal that emphasizes the Comparative Policy terms in its name. Rather the ample article literature is found in various publications, thus reaching the broadest possible academic audiences in various disciplinary congregations.

The improved capacity to utilize cross-national comparisons has surely enhanced our ability to handle better the variables that change over time, including the ideological ones. But

such advance could be eroded if we exchanged all the major tools – lenses, concepts, and terminologies – every decade or two. Already there are some among those who helped popularize policy studies in the 1970s who are now distancing themselves from 'the familiar term policy, because of the multiple and vague meanings that the term policy has come to have' (Rose, 1984).

The term which is presently being suggested as a partial substitute for 'policy' is that of 'programme'. It seems to have more concrete referents, but in the major languages it has accrued meanings which, I would argue, are less than helpful as a means of clarifying what the researcher is or is not trying to accomplish. But the major point regarding conceptual labels is related to our ability to maintain identity, and to improve sophistication under conditions of changing tides and issue cycles. One adaptive strategy would be to exchange conceptual apparatus every decade or two, as reflected in shifts from *administrative* studies in one era, to *policy* studies in the next, to *programme* studies in the next, and then perhaps back to public law and administrative studies again. The knowledge gain under such conditions of flux would more than challenge the capacity of generations of Lasswells! One effect could damn thresholds as postulated here to become fanciful, since a constant refocusing of endeavours would cause them to be redefined and regained by each cohort of researchers.

It would be even more futile to call on policy scientists to throw off their chains so as to become the intellectual masters of their environments. One can have few illusions as to the capacity of social science disciplines to withstand the ebb and flow of tides generated by suns and moons, probably in any part of our planet. A capacity and even affinity at times for swimming in such turbulent cross-tides is part of the qualification of the mature student of policies. We therefore harbour fewer illusions as to the ability of quasi-experimental techniques or abstract paradigms to allow us to cut keys that will make our talents indispensable. If there is an alternative adaptive strategy leading to greater durability than in the scenario above, it lies in improved consciousness and awareness of our environment, and how it has come to be that way. This is where an increased emphasis on making our endeavours more comparative – across time, countries and language areas, across policy fields and disciplines – can also become a means to the end of producing better intellectual products.

In conclusion, then, there are indications that the efforts to develop a genuinely comparative tradition of cross-national policy studies are making some headway after a decade of attempts to cross barriers between disciplines, national traditions and ideological camps. Those who have developed some skills in manipulating quantitative and qualitative techniques in this endeavour have demonstrated a reasonable capacity to develop terms of discourse which have led scholars of very diverse backgrounds to join in common dialogue, rather than writing above each other. That groups of Western European scholars have made considerable effort to cope with conceptual problems to revive and embed policy research within their native intellectual traditions, as in the case of significant recent French (Grawitz and Leca, 1985) and Federal German volumes (Hartwich, ed. 1985) shows that there is a readiness to invest in making this research thrust more internationally relevant and accessible. These and numerous other indicators support the assertion made to the 1985 World Congress of the International Political Science Association in Paris by its President, that comparative policy research had indeed become a cross-national study in which American and European scholars had come to develop an increasingly balanced and reciprocal tradition of social science scholarship.

Notes

* The substance of this article was presented to the general session on comparative public policy at the XIIIth World Congress of the International Political Science Association in Paris in July, 1985. I am grateful for comments from other members of the panel, Bernard Cazes, Gary Freeman, Jean Leca, Alberta Sbragia, Fritz Scharpf and Göran Therborn, as well as those received from Douglas E. Ashford, John Ambler, Jürgen Feick, Hugh Heclo, Otto Keck, Edward C. Page and Richard Rose. An extended version of this article was published in *The Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 5, no. 4, 1985.

1. Cameralism refers to the system of political sciences in eighteenth-century Germany and Austria 'which placed itself at the service of the absolute monarchy and attempted to work out a systematic account of the functioning of the various administrative services as a basis for the training of public officials'. What distinguished this cameralistic practice from mercantilism elsewhere in Europe was 'the circumstance that only in Germany and Austria did internal political consolidation coincide with the introduction of mercantilistic policy. Other major emphases were on centralization of administration and administrative law, the surmounting of guild organization of industry, and the creation of more uniform municipal laws' (Sommer, 1930, p.159).

2. In the same article Rose did mention the 'risk that policy scientists will be able to communicate informally in a common language – colloquial American – yet exchange professional papers that employ so many differing and vague conceptual languages that the result is an intellectual Tower of Babel'. He suggested that the term policy be considered a 'generic symbol', with reference to public policy distinguishing the choices that concern a political scientist from those that may concern an economist, a social psychologist or a sociologist. Topics can of course be 'public', i.e. noticeable within the political system, without being officially adopted or acknowledged by government. This touches on the question of the extent to which the adjective 'public' reduces ambiguity. Francophones employ the term *politiques publiques* to denote the policy meaning. But does the inclusion of 'public' make the policy term more meaningful in Anglo-American usage, or does it tend to set up a tautology? This problem could fruitfully be further discussed.

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