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Michael McGann



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REFERENCES

Hogan, John & Murphy, Mary P., Bristol: Policy Press, 2021, 296 p., ISBN 978-1447350897. Hardback: £72.00; ePub: £33.99

- 1 This edited collection on policy analysis in Ireland is the latest addition to Bristol Press's major series *International Library for Policy Analysis*. The overall aim of the series is to contribute to a comparative policy analysis in different national regimes. It is an ambitious project that is eloquently executed in this volume thanks to the considerable range of contributors and the skill of the editors, John Hogan and Mary P. Murphy, in coalescing the volume's 17 chapters into a rigorous assessment of the prevailing modes, practices, and key political actors shaping policy analysis in Ireland.
- 2 The book is organized into four discrete parts, beginning with four chapters surveying the history and predominant methods of policy analysis in Ireland (Part 1), followed by four chapters each on the contemporary state of policy analysis at various levels of government (Part 2) and across different kinds of political actors, from interest organizations to political parties and think tanks (Part 3). The final section concludes with a series of chapters on the wider policy analysis environment, focusing on the contribution of the media and new innovations in participatory policymaking, such as Ireland's citizens' assemblies. This structure, by and large, follows the template laid out in previous series contributions, although readers may come to doubt if policy analysis can ever live up to the positivist vision of 'systemic, evidence-based, transparent, efficient, and implementable policymaking' (p. xv) laid out by the series editors. Indeed, a great strength of *Policy Analysis in Ireland* is its attention to what Adshead and Scully (Chapter 13) characterize as the 'politicking' (p.199) of policymaking. As Hogan and Murphy outline in their introduction, a core purpose of the book is to unveil 'the

black box of policymaking' by understanding 'how policy analysis happens' (p.3). The intimation is that policy analysis, at least in the Irish style, is unavoidably political and underpinned by hidden dynamics of power.

- 3 This volume arguably represents the first synthesis of the state of the art of policy analysis in Ireland since Adshead and Millar's (2003) *Public Administration and Public Policy in Ireland* almost 20 years ago. Much has changed in the intervening period, as Ireland has gone from boom to bust and back again while being scarred by the politics of crisis and austerity.
- 4 The impact of the crisis is a recurring theme of the collection, both as a shock that highlighted the enormous deficit of policy analytical capacity within the civil service, and as a catalyst of change that had a transformative impact on the subsequent practices and approaches to policy analysis in the country. The contributors diverge on the subject of whether the ensuing transformations have enhanced the quality and practices of policy analysis or conformed them to a technocratic cage gilded by econometric thinking. There are also lively and important debates about the legacy of Ireland's social partnership approach, prevalent in the 1990s and early 2000s.
- 5 Reflecting on the contribution of civil society organisations, Murphy and O'Connor (Chapter 12) argue that social partnership is central to the understanding of Irish policymaking over the past three decades (p.175). This is certainly reflected in the level of attention that social partnership receives from contributors. In their chapter on policy analysis in the civil service (Chapter 8), Boyle and O'Riordan attribute the low quality of internal policy analysis capacity at the time of the crisis to the legacy of decades of social partnership enacted through multi-annual agreements on pay and key social policy agreements between government and its social partners (trade unions, employer groups, and, latterly, civil society organizations). Social partnership, they claim, limited the scope of policy analysis in the civil service by restricting discussion and assessment of alternative policies (p.109) that might threaten any negotiated consensus. Conversely, both Murphy and O'Connor (Chapter 12), and Dukelow (Chapter 3), observe how the social partnership era created 'political opportunity structures' (p. 175) for non-state actors and civil society organizations 'to populate the policy analysis space' (p.5), especially in the social policy domain which become an important focus of social partnership processes in the 1990s.
- 6 A key institution during the social partnership period was the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), a statutory agency established to provide policy advice on strategic issues of economic and social development. Reflecting on NESC's contribution to social partnership (Chapter 10), its former director, Rory O'Donnell, positions it as a boundary organization (p. 141) that deliberately adopted a post-positivist approach anchored in pragmatic thinking, interpretative policy analysis, and principles of network governance. This pluralist approach was underpinned by NESC's cognizance of policymaking as a form of 'interest group dialogue' rather than the rational, linear process to which it is so often reduced. A core theme of O'Donnell's chapter is the need for policy analysis to remain co-productive through 'engagement with organizations working at ground level' (p.150), and the re-framing of policy problems and solutions through a form of networked knowledge (p. 151).
- 7 The endurance of this pluralist tradition of networked policy analysis is contested by several contributions problematizing the approaches to policy analysis that have gained traction since the crisis. Reflecting on 'Gender Expertise and Policy Analysis'

(Chapter 14), Cullen highlights the potential for new forms of feminist political economic analysis, such as gender budgeting, to play a more strategic role in challenging the policies of austerity. However, she observes how early motivation and commitment to gender budgeting has subsided as this mode of policy analysis has become weakly institutionalized in state apparatuses, where it has been diluted and relegated to the level of de-politicized issues.

- 8 In their introduction, Hogan and Murphy lament how post-crisis institutional reforms have resulted in a relatively one-dimensional approach to policy analysis, characterized by uncritical empirical thinking (p.2). The key institutions in this regard have been the Fiscal Advisory Council and especially the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES), which MacCarthaigh (Chapter 4) positions as a response to the perceived dearth of policy analytical capacity within the civil service at the time of the crisis, and to the accusation that government had become overly reliant on hired consultants. ‘Consultocracy’, it seems, became an embedded feature of Ireland’s policy advisory system in the 1990s and 2000s, which Ruane (Chapter 5) partly attributes to the generalist skills model (p.68) of civil service recruitment during that era. Like MacCarthaigh, she positions IGEES as playing a significant role in raising the quality of policy analytical capacity within the civil service, enabling it to challenge government economic and budgetary proposals to orientate Irish policy analysis in a more evidence-informed, if not evidence-based, direction. The upshot, Ruane suggests, is ‘the development of a more systematic approach to building an integrated evidence base for policy’ (p.70), although Dukelow (Chapter 3) highlights how this focus on strengthening analytical capacity through investment in economic expertise has also pushed policymaking in a more econocentric (p.43) and quantitative direction.
- 9 One important exception has been the emergence of citizens’ assemblies, a point taken up by Clodagh Harris (Chapter 15) who served as an advisor to Ireland’s first Citizens’ Assembly (2011) and to the subsequent Constitutional Convention (2012-14). Harris positions citizens’ assemblies as vehicles for co-designing policy analysis through harnessing ‘diverse forms of expertise and evidence to develop clear, well defined policy recommendations’ (p. 229). In this, Ireland’s citizens’ assemblies have had some success in effecting constitutional change in areas such as marriage and reproductive rights. However, as Harris highlights, the politics of representation and elite control over agenda-setting remain problematic barriers to the realization of more participatory forms of policy analysis. Reflecting on policy analysis at the municipal level, Quinlivan (Chapter 6) reviews the innovations being pursued by city councils to catalyze greater local participation in policymaking. He traces the emergence of participatory policy networks as local governance structures to enable community groups to contribute to decision-making. However, these participatory innovations remain hampered by the strongly centralized nature of government, with local councils performing few political or administrative functions and being among the weakest in Europe. As a result, participatory innovations at this level will have limited reach in enhancing the overall inclusiveness of policy analysis practices.
- 10 As indicated by this brief survey, this collection offers rich reflections on where policy analysis in Ireland has come from and where it is going. While the emergence of new institutions and deepening technical experience may result in policy analysis evolving in a more rigorous and systematic direction, the political spaces for pluralist forms of networked policy analysis also risk being narrowed despite recent participatory

innovations. The edited volume will be of considerable interest to public policy researchers and practitioners alike. It will no doubt also become an invaluable teaching resource for the graduate programs in public policy and administration now established by the major Irish universities.

AUTHORS

MICHAEL MCGANN

Lecturer in Political Science, School of Social and Political Sciences, the University of Melbourne,
Australia

mmcgann@unimelb.edu.au