

The Technocratic Challenge to Democracy

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This file

Chapter 10

Technocracy and the Policy Process

Claire A. Dunlop and Claudio M. Radaelli

Preface and Acknowledgements

Manifestations of technocracy have become frequent. They include “war” declarations from Mexico’s new president on the technocrats from the “Salinas revolution” in the 1990s, but also recent technocratic cabinets in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Italy, non-partisan ministers in Portugal, and the appointment of new versions of neo-liberal “Chicago Boys” in President’s Bolsonaro cabinet in Brazil. More generally, one observes the growth of supra-national technocratic bodies such as the IMF or the EU. Examples include also populist attacks to the independence of the Federal Reserve and the ECB (as aired by US President Trump or Greek Finance Minister Yannis Varoufakis, among others), pension institutions (by Interior Minister Matteo Salvini in Italy), courts and judges (by tabloids in Britain and populists in Switzerland) as well as the Yellow Vests’ protest against Emmanuel Macron, the French president often described as technocratic. Brexit Minister David Davis and the UK Independence Party have accused the civil service of sabotaging Britain’s exit from the European Union. Similarly, it is claimed that climate scientists and experts act based on “an agenda” that they are politicized and not neutral. On the opposite side, the reliance on experts finds increasing support driven by citizens’ scepticism toward bickering parties and politicians, and by distrust toward democratic institutions’ efficiency and competence in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Issues of technocratic neutrality, its politicization, its role as counter-weight to populism, the role it plays in responsible and responsive representation in democratic systems but also the “democratic deficit” of technocratic regimes are the themes of this volume.

Although the issue of technocratic politics is propelled in the public debate when technocratic forces manifest themselves, it has become clear that the questions it poses have roots in the very foundations of our governance systems and will become ever more pressing in the decades to come. As the complexity of political systems increases, due to technological advances and an interconnected world, and citizen demands for efficient outcomes grow, the tension between responsible and responsive governance will intensify. How can democratic systems manage to use independent knowledge and expertise to deliver effective governance without losing their democratic credentials? While the “technocratization” of politics (decision making being removed to unresponsive, unelected elites) is often considered the underlying reason for the current populist backlash, technocracy can also offer a corrective for democratic systems that swing too far toward irresponsible governance. We therefore see technocracy as a challenge, but also as a potential corrective force, as a “friend” and as a “foe” of democracy. The aim of the volume is to understand and explain these dynamics, both in theory and in practice, and to provide a common framework for the study of technocratic politics for the future.

The book developed out of various research initiatives. In 2006, the University of Zurich launched a broad research programme on the challenges to democracy in the 21st century funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (NCCR programme). While dealing primarily with populism and mediatization, parts of its research were devoted to the growing demands for expertise and supra-national governance in the context of globalization. At the closing of the programme in 2017, it had become clear that beside populism, technocratic governance constituted an equally challenging alternative to representative democracy, albeit a neglected one. This prompted theoretical work and, eventually, empirical research on technocracy, most notably with a new comparative survey on technocratic

attitudes among European publics (Bertsou and Caramani 2017). In October 2017, the new research cluster on technocracy at the chair of Comparative Politics in Zurich organized a two-day workshop on “The Technocratic Challenge to Democracy” followed up by a workshop at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops in Nicosia in 2018 and a book panel at the Council for European Studies in Madrid in 2019.

For these workshops, leading academics on technocracy and related subjects were able to come together for the first time and think systematically from comparative politics and public policy perspectives about technocracy in the current “crisis” of representative democracy. This book is the result of these efforts to address technocracy and the challenge it poses to contemporary democracies theoretically and empirically at the level of state structures, policies, politicians and citizens.

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Chapter 10

Technocracy and the Policy Process

Claire A. Dunlop and Claudio M. Radaelli

Introduction

This chapter adds to the perspective of comparative politics the lens of comparative public policy or policy analysis. Though technocracy as challenge to democracy has been explored by comparative politics as a distinctive mode of political representation (Caramani 2017, Habermas 2015), comparative public policy has a research focus on the policy process. It brings in the granularity of the policy processes. With policy processes centre stage, one sees more clearly variations across patterns of technocratic challenges. Further, clarity and granularity are delivered in this chapter via a taxonomic contribution to the topics that motivate the volume. Classifications help to disentangle complex conceptual constructs, expose the risks of conceptual stretching, and, most importantly, shed light on dimensions of a scientific discussion that deserve more attention and require greater nuance.

The organization of this chapter is simple. The next section shows differences and opportunities to develop connections between comparative politics and comparative public policy. Then we introduce the public policy “take” on technocracy by distinguishing between two modes – technocracy as comparative political scientists understand it and epistemic learning as the preeminent public policy frame. Using a taxonomic approach, we build on these foundations delineating four types of epistemic learning – the conditions for their emergence and dysfunctional or degenerative forms. Drawing on this, we conceptualise three

more learning modes where experts' contribute to policy making: reflexive arenas, bargaining environments and hierarchical structures. Our conclusions echo the themes of the concluding chapter of this volume. Paraphrasing the title of Eri Bertsou's *Conclusions*, expertise is neither an absolute friend or an absolute foe of democracy. It can degenerate into technocracy, but it can be a formidable resource of representative democracy. Its contribution depends on scope conditions that are revealed by the analysis of the policy process. This chapter is an effort to identify and justify theoretically these scope conditions.

Comparative Public Policy as Lens

Comparative politics and comparative public policy are not in contrast. In fact, one complements the findings of the other when it comes to technocracy – see also the definitions and arguments about technocracy in the chapter by Bickerton and Invernizzi-Accetti in this volume. Despina Alexiadou in Chapter 7 and Silvana Târlea and Stefanie Bailer in Chapter 8 explore the policy consequences of technocratic governments. Yet, in comparative politics, the focus on technocracy concerns the challenges to democracy in contemporary political systems, as well as the theoretical limitations and the empirical failures of present and past political projects informed by technocratic claims. As Caramani (2017 and Introduction to the volume) argues, the key research question in the field is about technocracy as mode of representation – a mode that stands in contrast to the pluralist and the populist modes. We are therefore in the field of political representation, rather than public policy. Comparative politics explores under which conditions actors, discourses and institutions are grounded in

technocracy as mode of representation, and therefore challenge or violate the conditions of democratic representation.

Some authors have connected public policy and representation.¹ Others have connected public administration and the democratic dilemmas presented by technocrats (Tucker 2018, Vibert 2007). Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 of this volume show the policy consequences of technocratic governments – in these chapters policies are examined as output of a system of representation, in classic comparative politics fashion.

However, in comparative public policy there hasn't be a solid body of policy-orientated research on the juxtaposition between the technological organisation of policy problems and needs of democratic decision – a lack of confrontation that arguably contributed to post-war disillusionment with the technocratic movement (see Akin 1977, Ellul 1964, Meynaud 1964). For comparative public policy researchers, the main focus is on the policy process. Here, instead of monoliths like “technocracy”, policy analysts identify patterns and variations, often within the same country across time or policy domains. Rather than technocracy *per se*, the analysis of the policy process reveals in granular ways different pathological and physiological types of knowledge utilization and a range of roles played by varieties of experts in public choices. The public policy literature has developed around a normative as well as empirical concern for the democratization of expertise and the possible usages of knowledge in the policy process. The key research question is under which conditions it is efficient and legitimate for a democratic political system to rely on policy processes where actors, discourses and institutions privilege professional expertise and technical-scientific knowledge.

¹ See, for example, Fischer (1990, 1993, 2009) on think tanks and the politics of expertise, and Radaelli (2003) on the representation of expertise in the European Union (EU).

Arguably, this reflects the different foci of the two disciplines: comparative politics compares political systems with a macro orientation; comparative public policy works (most of the time) at the level of policy sectors and policy processes (hence at the meso and sometimes the micro level of individual actors such as independent regulatory bodies and elite scientific experts). Technocracy as concept is definitively macro. At the meso-level, we find granular concepts like bureaucratic politics, epistemic communities, independent think tanks and, moving towards the macro level, Majone's notion of "the regulatory state" (Majone 1996). In policy analysis, the emphasis on knowledge utilization and the democratization of science/expertise is predominant.

Thus, to return to our metaphor of the lens, comparative political scientists put their lens on technocracy and its "threats" or "challenges" to democracy. By contrast, comparative policy analysts put their lens on concepts such as scientific communities, technical bureaucracies, economists in government, regulators, research institutes and scientists in governmental bodies, and are concerned about how to make the most efficient and democratically legitimate usage of these knowledge providers. This joins the possibility of considering technocracy as a sort of "corrective", as mentioned in the Conclusion to this volume, as well as in its Introduction. Indeed, much as there are differences, there are also possibilities to join comparative politics and comparative public policy. Comparative public policy research, pitched empirically at the micro and meso level, speaks to the dichotomy between responsiveness and responsibility often evoked in comparative politics, which is empirically situated at the macro level. Policy processes geared towards technocratic modes perform better on responsibility rather than responsiveness. And one conclusion to our chapter is that under certain conditions expertise is a corrective to the current state of representative democracy.

To explore connections, we need to address questions such as: What are the main pathways at the micro and meso-level or modes in which the policy process produces learning and benefits from expertise? Further, what blocks these learning pathways – and, yet again to connect comparative politics and comparative public policy, do these pathways stand up to our criteria of democratic legitimacy? These are questions that intersect the themes of the Introduction and the lessons drawn in the concluding chapter of the volume.

To build these connections between policy processes and the macro dimension, we are not alone. For Charles Lindblom (1965) policy processes produce learning if they connect lay and professional knowledge. Interestingly, he rejected pure expertise-driven ‘intellectual cogitation’ in favour of partisan mutual adjustment. Thus, politics and the bargaining processes typical of representative democracy are essential to the theory of the policy process. Indeed, Lindblom developed a theory of the policy process that is also a theory of representation. Another exception is the field of critical policy studies, in part connected to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2013), in part inspired by another founding father of policy analysis, Harold Lasswell (Lerner and Lasswell 1956; Torgerson 1985, 1992; Turnbull, 2008, 2018). We therefore wish to build on the efforts made in the past by Lindblom and Lasswell to connect rather than separating and contrasting policy processes and representative democracy.

The previous discussion leads us to offer a taxonomic approach to break down the monolith of technocracy – in line with what we said above about the granularity of research on policy processes. Our objective is to pin down scope conditions under which the utilization

of professional knowledge is legitimate and efficient, and the conditions that generate democratic pathologies, or simply inefficient and distorted usages of expertise²

Exploring Technocracy: From Comparative Politics to Comparative Public Policy

Recall that in comparative politics technocracy is a mode of representation that challenges democracy. Empirically, its references are actors, discourses and institutions (Caramani 2017 and Introduction to the volume). In comparative public policy, the empirical references are the same. But, in this discipline the main approach to concept formation is the following:

technocracy is conceptually framed as a mode of knowledge utilization. Further, technocracy is not exactly a macro-concept that captures the essence of a whole political system – hence, for example, we can talk of “technocratic governments” in countries A and B at time “t”.

Instead, we argue that the concept of technocracy in comparative public policy is a mode of policy-making that sits alongside other concepts like bureaucratic politics, political decision-making and epistemic communities (for this argument, see Radaelli [1999: 763, especially figure 1]). Consequently, even when looking at the same country, policy analysts talks about policy processes in one sector (say, taxation) being technocratic and another (say, media regulation) being more bureaucratic (Radaelli 1999). Or, a sector can move from bureaucratic politics to epistemic communities over time, and so on.

Thus, we need to spend some more time on concept formation in comparative public policy and consider some definitions. Indeed, it is instructive to compare technocracy with the

² Throughout, we will keep the language simple. We will not draw on the specialist vocabulary of theories of the policy process (e.g. multiple streams, punctuated equilibria, advocacy coalitions and so on, see Weible and Sabatier 2017) to ease the conversation with our colleagues in the field of comparative politics.

concept of epistemic communities (Haas 1990, 1992a, 1992b) – the darker and brighter sides of knowledge utilization. In the epistemic mode, the policy process revolves around highly uncertain but salient policy issues. Epistemic modes occur when there is a process of inspiration, interpretation and institutionalization in policy choice of a policy paradigm or, to simplify, a cause-and-effect policy lesson taught by experts. The final decision makers are not the experts themselves, but elected politicians and/or their bureaucracies: epistemic communities “create reality, but not as they wish” (Adler and Haas 1992: 381). Hence, the standards of legitimacy are not violated, or at least not necessarily. The communities of experts that coalesce around an epistemic cause-and-effect lesson are socially certified: it is society, not theology or divinity, which allows a central banker, a regulator, a genetic scientist, a geographer to provide decisive input to policy choice.

By contrast, and here we carry on with the same literature (Radaelli 1999), technocratic modes occur in opaque policy domains, with low salience but highly technical policy issues (Peters and Barker 1993).³ The technocratic mode in these domains is often triggered by a bureaucrat, not necessarily an expert drawn from outside public administration. There is little learning in technocratic modes – this contrasts markedly with the conditions defining epistemic modes. The technocrats do not necessarily belong to the class of actors with high social certification and high specialization – they often provide routine tasks and take decisions insulated from the scrutiny of the media, parliaments, and political parties. What makes technocracy inefficient is the absence of policy learning. But, what makes it a legitimacy challenge for democracy is the fact that the political implications of policy choice

³ We follow this literature because it allows us to develop the taxonomic approach that is the backbone of this chapter. However, we acknowledge that other ways to categorize technocracy are possible – for example one could argue that technocracy is also present in salient policy issues, for example in health policy and austerity policies.

are denied. Conflict over policy ends is silenced. Here, problems are seen as eminently computational, hence ‘the correct answer’ exists, even if it takes considerable specialist knowledge and sophisticated information to arrive at this answer (Radaelli 1999).

We come to the end of this brief excursus with a nuanced understanding of different modes. Taxonomically, the presence of issue salience, the level of uncertainty and the social certification of expertise appear to discriminate among a range of modes. Two modes in particular share elected affinities yet diverge in their impact on legitimacy: technocracy and epistemic learning. For comparative public policy researchers, the main issue is how not to throw away the baby with the bath water: can we identify scope conditions that deliver some of the benign effects of knowledge utilization without degenerating into the horrors of technocracy? This brings us to the next section, where we start from the epistemic mode, decompose it using taxonomical reasoning again, and draw implications for legitimacy.

Expertise in Public Policy: The Brighter Side and the Darker Corners

Let us carry on with our taxonomic approach taking a normative turn: what are the variables that define *acceptable and unacceptable* professional expertise in the policy process? Here, we find a considerable amount of studies on delegation to non-majoritarian institutions, learning in public policy, and epistemic communities (for example, Checkel 2001, Demortain 2011, Dezalay and Garth 2002, Dunlop 2009, Gilardi 2010). It is difficult to distil the essence of this literature in a small number of variables, but at the outset we can say that a minimal condition is the presence of professional knowledge based on advanced technical training, social science or natural science. It must be possible to attribute this knowledge to a well-defined group of professionals, or economists, or scientists. These groups must also be able to

connect their causal propositions to public policy problems without ambiguity, for example by showing how to implement a goal defined by elected politicians, such as to keep the inflation rate low or to protect the environment.

These seem common-sense minimal conditions. Yet, they hide some difficult questions. For example, how does society get to identify these groups? What are the institutions where they should legitimately operate, perhaps with some protection from the electoral cycle? Should independent regulators be somewhat accountable to elected politicians and society at some point in the policy cycle, or is this detrimental to their mission? Given that expertise and the utilization of professional knowledge should foster processes of policy learning, who is ultimately in control of the objectives of learning, the experts or those who contest elections and represent citizens?

To shed light on these questions, we draw on recent advances in the literature on learning in public policy (Dunlop and Radaelli 2013). This is where we start to pin down the variables we are looking for. The first two variables that justify delegation of tasks to non-majoritarian institutions and epistemic groups are the impossibility to calculate the pay-offs of alternative courses of action and the social certification of a group, organization or actor. If the pay-offs are computable, then the classic democratic theory of representation (and in public policy Charles Lindblom) suggests that the best option is pluralist bargaining and representational rules that allow different preferences to be aggregated and composed to get to a final public choice. Radical uncertainty, by contrast, puts societal and political actors in a situation of gambling rather than a situation of calculability of pay-offs. Different groups still have their preferences, but they cannot relate them unambiguously to different policy choices and therefore cannot rank alternative courses of action. Hence, our first variable is the presence of uncertainty.

The second variable is social certification: who and what makes central bankers, heads of regulatory agencies, standard setting organizations more or less legitimate to carry out the tasks they have? Who decides who can do what? Obviously, it is not a divine right. It is a social choice, in turn anchored to culture, tradition, market-pressure, political necessity, even conditionality. For example, in the context of accession to the European Union (EU), prospective member states are asked to set up competition and regulatory authorities that do not respond to political masters. In the recent episodes of successive bail-outs of Greece, one important condition set by the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund was the independence of the statistics authority in that country.

Thus, our second variable is the presence, in a given place and historical context, of social certification of a group of actors sharing some beliefs about their 'science' and how this science can be applied to public policy. Without social certification of these professional groups we cannot even think of calibrating professional knowledge utilization in public policy around legitimate democratic politics.

We can then carry on and explore what happens when social certification and uncertainty co-exist. We assume that professional expertise and knowledge are used to improve on public policy; in short, they are used to foster learning. Drawing on Dunlop (2009), let us make another taxonomic step and ask two questions: who is in control of the objectives of learning? And turning to the content and means of learning, who controls them? There are two options: either the experts are in control, or other actors (for example, actors that represent people or interest groups) are. The result is this two-by-two matrix (Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1 Expanding the epistemic mode

Decision makers' control of learning objectives

		High	Low
<i>Decision makers' control of learning content</i>	High	Epistemic Communities as CONTRIBUTORS	Epistemic Communities as PRODUCERS OF STANDARDS
	Low	Epistemic Communities as FACILITATORS	Epistemic Communities as TEACHERS

Source: Dunlop (2009: figure 2; 2017: Figure 2); Dunlop and Radaelli (2013: Figure 2).

We see that only in one case we can possibly identify the pure situation of the experts behaving like teachers. Basically, this is the most optimistic narrative provided by the literature on epistemic communities where expert enclaves guide policy makers on both the form and objectives of policy (Haas 1992a, 1992b). In the other three cells of Figure 10.1 the expert *assists* other actors in the policy process by: providing standards when the content of learning is set by other actors; contributing to objectives and content (of policy learning) set by others; facilitating the achievement of the objective of learning with specific content. Typical cases are standard-setting by international organizations when the objective is set by governments (for example, net neutrality standards); technical knowledge deployed to assist pension reforms when the government sets the final objective and the parameters about timing and cohorts affected by the reform; economists working on a plan to reduce the deficit when the government leaves them free to choose the means of deficit reduction.

The most important message in Figure 10.1 is that in all four cases there is a learning relationship: the expert has a dialogic relationship with other actors. Even in the bottom-left

quadrant the teachers are not authoritarian despots. They teach lessons to an audience. A is still talking to B, persuading, communicating, and so on. Experts may define the solution (imagine, a plan to reduce health expenditure in a country) but they rarely control implementation – this is left to bureaucracies. In the other three quadrants, the relationship is even more obviously dialectic (see Dunlop 2017 for an empirical application).

Another interesting implication of this analysis is that to really violate the basic conditions of democratic life and enter the world of technocracy, we need to jump-out of the figure so to speak. Put differently, we must violate the pre-conditions that identify situations where these four variations of expert-driven policy learning are possible (Table 10.1).⁴ The obvious case is when societies trust the wrong experts or assign to experts tasks that are better carried out using partisan mutual adjustment. Further, the experts may be wrongly identified, they may silence important minority positions (the Galileo syndrome) and favour scientific group-thinking, misjudge social risks, and stifle social innovation.

Next we have the case of policy instruments that bias the policy process towards expertise. Consider for example regulatory impact assessment processes that are now mandatory in many countries (Dunlop and Radaelli 2016 for an overview). With regulatory impact assessment, a government makes the commitment to gather and publish evidence of the likely impacts of proposed regulation on a wide range of stakeholders, the economy and the environment. Thus, the authorization for governmental intervention via regulation does no longer lie in representation and the democratic mandate, but in following some criteria of economic analysis or more generally evidence-based policy.

⁴ These are not imaginary cases. See Dror (1971a, 1971b) for a fuller discussion of the possible defects of scientists involved in policy making.

Table 10.1 Degenerations of epistemic learning

<i>Epistemic communities approached as ...</i>	<i>Government focusses on ...</i>	<i>Learning degeneration as ...</i>
Teacher	Understanding expert advice	Groupthink
Producer of standards	Supporting robust evidence creation	Failure to produce robust knowledge
Facilitator	Defining policy relevance	Politicisation of research process
Contributor	Achieving stable paradigms	Debasing evidence-based policy paradigm

Source: Dunlop (2017, adapted from Table 1).

It can therefore be argued that policy instruments like impact assessment bias the stage of policy formulation towards economic analysis. Is this bias acceptable, under which conditions? Should policy formulation and evaluation be left in the hands of economists trained in benefit-cost analysis or draw on participatory techniques? Should policy formulation be left in the hands of Weberian bureaucracies accountable to their ministers, instead? This question has no general answer. It depends on the preferences of society and on how expertise, technical information, data are handled by economists, bureaucrats and politicians – indeed we are aware of forms of benefit-cost analysis open to societal and political argumentation (Sunstein 2011).

Time also makes a difference. Regulators do not always keep their reputation intact over time: they often bump into problems that are too political not to raise contestation. They may be attacked by some parties in opposition. And, these parties may one day form a new government hostile to these regulators, or simply with different views about the degree of independence. Governments may, over time, reduce the autonomy of environmental and

health and safety agencies – in turn responding to slow but deep movements of public opinion and markets. Central bankers, economic advisers, ethics committees, climate change scientists, chief medical advisers make mistake: they may be in the position of the teacher but teach the wrong lesson – after all, science proceeds by conjectures and confutations. When epistemic reputation suffers, the degree of social certification declines.

To conclude, we identified conditions for an appropriate and legitimate usage of expertise. Invariably, these conditions are contingent on the existence of dialogic channels between the experts and other actors. When there is no dialogue and the conditions are violated, we can talk of technocratic challenges to democracy. When there are no learning dynamics, the efficiency of public policy cannot improve.

Different Modes of Learning

In turn, learning is generated by different causal factors. Grounding policy choice in expertise, technical knowledge, policy instruments based on rational calculation and scientific modes of thinking is not the only way in which societies produce learning for public policy.

Yet again, the literature we referred to above (Dunlop and Radaelli 2013) has contrasted epistemic learning with other ways in which learning is generated. First, we find again Charles Lindblom's partisan mutual adjustment (Lindblom 1959, 1980). This is a pluralist mode wherein different groups exchange resources in the process of bargaining and problems are solved by interaction rather than scientific analysis. Bargaining however is not limited to the identification of a compromise leading to policy choice. It is also a formidable process to exchange information and to inform different actors about the constellation of preferences around a policy problems. Although learning is not the main motivation of the bargaining

actors, it is a very important spin-off of their interaction. One interesting property of partisan mutual adjustment is that intellectual cogitation is not assigned a premium: experts do not have higher social certification, they bring their own preferences and information into the policy process. Social interaction, not intellectual cogitation, is the engine of learning in partisan mutual adjustment.

Second, we have participatory processes based on reflexivity. Specifically, reflexivity refers to the possibility to change core policy beliefs as a result of social interaction. Here again all actors are equal in terms of social certification. The main engine is dense social interaction grounded in communicative rationality. There are many variations of participatory modes – for us the point to bear in mind is that experts have to accept the basic democratic rule that all knowledge, lay and professional, may potentially be relevant to solving policy problems. Here we are close to Eulau's (1973) well-known vision of a 'consultative commonwealth'. Participation is supposed to deliver on social learning and stable conflict resolution via reflexivity, hence this is yet another way to generate learning in policy.⁵

If elected assemblies, bureaucrats, and courts have higher social certification, we can imagine learning occurring in the shadow of rules, hierarchies, legal structures and so on. Learning how to comply with these systems of rules is another valuable social property of our democracies, hence we include hierarchy in our list. Policy processes in the stage of rules enforcement can be considered manifestations of learning in hierarchies. Learning in these cases includes objects like the legitimate degrees of flexibility in implementation and compliance, what is sanctioned and what it not, and the attitudes of inspectors and street-level officers.

⁵ Schön and Rein (1994) illustrate the scope conditions for preference change.

Figure 10.2 Conceptualising knowledge modes as policy learning

		<i>Problem of tractability</i>	
		Low	High
<i>Certification of actors</i>	Low	2. Reflexive learning	3. learning through bargaining
	High	1. Epistemic learning	4. Learning in the shadow of hierarchy

Source: Dunlop and Radaelli (2013: adapted from Figure 1).

To conclude, learning can be produced by expertise, but also by partisan mutual adjustment, reflexivity, and hierarchies. What matters is the social certification of actors and the tractability of policy problems. In fact, when uncertainty is very high, bargaining is not possible and systems of rules are either meaningless or cannot produce compliance. This leads Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) to a four-fold taxonomy of learning in public policy (Figure 10.2). This taxonomy tells us that the epistemic mode works well when there is low issue problem tractability and high social certification of experts. However, we argue that it does not perform well in the following circumstances – circumstances for which one of the other three modes is, at least in terms of our conceptual analysis, more appropriate:

- Composition of preferences (bargaining and reflexivity are superior)
- Necessity to generate social consensus on the scope of rules, their flexibility and the nature of compliance (reflexivity and hierarchy are preferable to the epistemic mode)
- Conflict resolution (bargaining and reflexivity are better)

- Composition or modification of values, norms, deep core beliefs (reflexivity is the strongest performer)
- Distributive choices (either distribution is set by rules or by persuasion, so hierarchy and reflexivity are preferable; alternatively we can imagine bargaining on compliance as a process distinct from bargaining on the initial policy choice. In any case, the epistemic mode comes last on our list).

It follows that we run into technocratic challenges when we draw on actors, discourses, and institutions anchored to epistemic modes to address all the issues we listed above:

composition of preferences, consensus creation, conflict resolution, values and distributional choices. Since societies have plenty of these issues and the nature of public policy is often contested, distributive and value-sensitive, it follows that expert-based modes have a limited legitimate place in public policy. However, this does not mean that experts should be excluded or play no role in policy processes. Rather, it means that they can and should still participate, but under conditions that are not the ones of privileged epistemic actors. To see this, we move to our final conceptual section.

The Possible Roles of the Experts

What are the possible roles for experts in these different learning arenas? Specifically, we are concerned with the communicative and political skills required to make effective, functional contributions in each. To do so, we draw one more time on the knowledge utilisation literature (Dunlop 2014: 215–21; for the seminal works see Dror 1967, 1984 and Meltsner 1976 and, more recently, Pielke 2007). Table 10.2 illustrates the points we are making.

Table 10.2 Possible roles of experts

<i>Learning mode ...</i>	<i>Communication skills ...</i>	<i>Political skills ...</i>
Epistemic	Dialogic capacity to talk to politicians	Epistemic humility
Reflexive	Ability to speak early in the policy process	Commitment to open up science to lay knowledge at the early stage of problem definition
Bargaining	Ability to advocate policy choices on the basis of evidence whilst recognizing the domains where evidence is not conclusive	Propensity to be involved in coalitions pro or against policy with clear roles
Hierarchical	Peripheral policy vision	Institutional awareness

Source: Dunlop (2014: 216 adapted from Table 2).

We can dispense with the epistemic learning realm relatively quickly. Here, experts are privileged actors whose production of authoritative knowledge gives them special framing power (Dunlop, 2016). To ensure this power does not result in a-critical groupthink, experts must communicate with politicians in a dialogic manner – reflecting a willingness to persuade sometimes over long periods of time. Soft skills of communication are not enough however. Experts who operate in epistemic settings require humility about the knowledge they carry. Knowledge is dynamic after all, and this must be reflected in the advice they give. Being open where evidence is partial or a best guess helps protect experts from later charges of getting it “wrong”.

Moving on to learning in issues steeped in reflexive impulses, the challenge for experts is to make meaningful contributions to social learning without de-basing their authority. This is tricky. True engagement in participatory processes means opening-up to the value-talk that characterises contested issues. Where expertise is being re-distributed, experts need to find

ways to talk to citizens' hearts as well as their minds. Politically, this scientific opening-up must be done before problems are fully defined.

The idea of experts operating in interest-driven worlds of bargaining will sound like heresy to some. Yet, epistemic communities can and do facilitate heavily political policy debates or risk living in the fantasy that all policy can be driven by rational-technical inquiry alone (Benveniste 1977, Weiss 1992). Political participation without politicizing the research process itself is the goal here. Flourishing in such competitive worlds requires not only a willingness to come down from the side-lines and advocate policy positions (based on evidence), but also to act politically by joining advocacy coalitions.

Finally, we meet the experts who set standards in hierarchical structures. How might these experts avoid the inertia and blocked innovation associated with such restrictive settings? Politically, experts in the shadow of hierarchy need a nuanced understanding of their room for manoeuvre; who are the veto players, where are the gaps in formal rules, what are the tacit codes that underpin how we do things round here etc. Once they have maximised their positions, experts can use their knowledge to widen the field of vision in ways that reshapes institutions and so policies.

These are just four possible skill sets for experts; there are more, of course. Adopting our taxonomic approach perhaps obscures as well as illuminates. However, it does help us make clear connections between types of knowledge use in public policy and learning forms – epistemic and beyond.

Conclusion: Expertise and Modes of Learning

Experts and policy processes grounded in technical, professional and scientific knowledge have a role to play in the policy process. Arguably, the most important difference between comparative politics and comparative public policy is that the former has analysed technocracy whilst the latter has been more interested in the granularity of the policy process. It is exactly because of this focus that public policy research is able to classify and explain efficient-inefficient and legitimate-illegitimate types of (professional and scientific) knowledge utilization. The first conclusion is therefore that in comparative public policy, we find scope conditions defining the appropriateness of epistemic anchors to policy choice.

The second conclusion is that any violation of these conditions brings us to the domain of technocratic illegitimacy and/or inefficient public policy choices. This contribution has shown that the conditions for appropriate usages of professional, technical, scientific knowledge are narrow and that societies often benefits from other usages.

The third conclusion is that there is a legitimate role of experts in the policy process but this is not always the same role. It depends on the structure of the policy process. The democratically acceptable role and the overall efficiency of mobilising experts as policy actors vary according to the prevalent structural quality of a process – it can be epistemic, but it may well be a policy process informed by bargaining, reflexive communicative rationality or hierarchy. The role of the experts is determined by the games policy actors play. If experts operate in a hierarchical process by wrongly thinking they are inside a bargaining process, they are bound to be irrelevant or detrimental to democracy.

Taken together, these conclusions and the underlying taxonomic analysis show that the discipline of comparative public policy should not shy away from addressing big, important,

politically relevant questions like technocracy. With our exercise, we have shown that the public policy lens works well and can add clarity to topics that are often left to other, more “macro” disciplines like comparative politics.

These conclusions are qualified by acknowledging that our contribution is taxonomic, ideal-typical and conceptual. If we were to introduce empirics we would certainly find many more variations that cannot be captured by ideal-types. At the same time, empirical analysis is the best way to corroborate or falsify our main propositions about the scope conditions – this seems an exciting avenue for future research in this field.

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