
19 Comparative Public Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Why do some states adopt seemingly coercive measures to achieve particular policy goals while others rely on voluntary compliance? How significant is a particular regional policy initiative? Do parties in government matter in terms of policy outputs and outcomes? These are the type of questions that are at the heart of comparative public policy research. Comparison, arguably the oldest social science activity in the world, has allowed for the generation of many accounts seeking to explain particular policy developments. Generalizations from comparatively informed research has established the following particular conventional wisdoms:

- The past two decades have been decades of neoliberalism, with the United Kingdom (UK) at the forefront. The widespread adoption of economic and social policy reforms is said to have led to a “regulatory state” (Majone 1997; Moran 2003). One example that is said to be representative of this period of sustained policy change in Britain has been the regulatory reform of the British railways.
- The UK has the “fastest law of the West” (Dunleavy 1995, 60). Largely manufactured by the plurality electoral system, single-party governments can usually rely on stable majorities in parliament and, given the absence of any other powerful and potentially countervailing political institutions, the majority party in the House of Commons is able to form an “elective dictatorship.” Two decades of bureaucratic slimming down and de-hierarchisation have caused the UK to be seen as *the* political system that is most likely to produce policy failures, if not fiascos (see Dunleavy 1995). One widely used example of such policy pattern has been the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act, which, for a time, held the dubious title (“awarded” by the UK government’s Better Regulation Task Force) of being a prime example of the knee jerk response type of policy making (see Hood, Baldwin, and Rothstein 2000). Although the 1991 Act received initial cross-party and media support, it was consequently seen as a disproportionate and ill-considered government response to a public outcry after the killing in public of innocent and vulnerable people by dogs deemed particularly aggressive.
- To achieve desired outputs, credible commitment of the regulatory framework is necessary. In situations where private investors cannot be sure of the motivations of the government, and therefore fear expropriation, governments need to develop devices to signal credible commitment in order to attract investment. For Levy and Spiller (1994), the story of designing credible regulatory mechanisms lies at the heart of the success story of Jamaican telecommunications over the past decade or so. According to their account, without a system that minimized the discretion of national administrative and political actors via a licensing regime, investment by the incumbent, Cable & Wireless, in the expansion of the telecommunications network would not have been achieved.

So far, so normal. All three stories seem to perform to type, in terms of following the usual interests of public policy analysis in explaining policy developments and in terms of concerns such as “party matters” or “institutions matter.” Similar accounts could have been developed for other

countries, for example the *Rechtsstaat* and gridlock nature that is said to dominate policy making in Germany or the supposedly statist instincts that allegedly characterise policy making in France. Is, therefore, the confirmation of stereotypes all that comparative public policy can contribute to our understanding of public policy? Let us consider three qualifications to the above stories:

- If vertical separation is regarded as the indicator of neoliberalism that was present in the British administration when the British Railways Act 1993 was adopted and which led to the adoption of a vertical separation between infrastructure and operational services as well as to large-scale organizational privatization and fragmentation (and a public subsidy regime relying on franchising), then it should not be expected that other countries would follow a similar path at the same time. However, Sweden had already separated its infrastructure and services in the late 1980s and Germany, at the same time as the UK, also separated infrastructure from its railway operational services—although both Sweden and Germany opted for different ownership and wider structural solutions as well as different pricing regimes. These similarities could also not be blamed on EU-related processes (“Europeanisation”), as the relevant Directive (91/440) only required a separation in accounting terms and was applicable to cross-border services (which was irrelevant for Britain as it did not have a trans-jurisdictional railway line in the early 1990s) (Lodge 2002; 2003).
- The UK was far from being the only country to respond to dog-related fatal incidents with a breed-based policy approach that assumed particular types and breeds of dogs to be specifically and inherently aggressive. The breed-based approach that usually placed particular restrictions on American pit bulls and American Staffordshire Terriers flourished in the early and late 1990s, as well as in the first decade of the twenty-first century across (Western) Europe and other countries (including Trinidad, various counties in the United States, and a number of provinces in Canada, with some variations across states and subnational states). The UK was part of a first wave of countries (including Scandinavian countries, Ireland, and the Netherlands) to adopt breed-based dangerous dog legislation. Some Länder in Germany also sought to adopt breed-based provisions in the early 1990s, but failed because of challenges in the administrative courts. But it was not only the content of the legislation that was similar across states. In terms of response time, the UK was far from being the frontrunner in the race for the fastest law of the West. In 2000, when a dog incident in Hamburg involving the killing of a young boy caused German Länder to respond with legislative or regulatory measures, their reaction time was faster than the UK in the 1991 episode and their responses were far from coordinated (as one would have expected from that country’s implicit policy norm to aspire toward legal harmonization) (see Lodge and Hood 2002; Hood and Lodge 2005; Hood, Rothstein, and Baldwin 2001).
- If credible commitment in terms of a nondiscretionary licensing regime was so important for the development of Jamaican telecommunications from the late 1980s, then why did the Jamaican government during the 1990s manage to challenge the initial licensing regime by facilitating rival operators (such as Voice over Internet), committing itself to liberalization and competition in international forums (i.e., the WTO) and by establishing, in a consensual agreement with the incumbent, a far more discretionary regime in 2000. More significantly, Jamaica did not appear to pay a penalty in terms of lower investment and thus decelerating network expansion. Such a claim is inherently difficult to make given the absence of counterfactuals, however, network expansion did not decrease, but increased continuously. In fact, compared to other English-speaking Caribbean island states, the Jamaican performance looks even more impressive—especially as Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago are usually thought of as having more credible political institutions than Jamaica (admittedly, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago started from more advanced positions in terms of network expansion) (Lodge and Stirton 2005, 176; 2002). Why, despite doing everything that went *against* the prescriptions of Levy and

Spiller (and the World Bank) did Jamaica achieve such an extent of network expansion that outperformed both Barbados and Trinidad (see Stirton and Lodge 2003)?

These cases are hardly representative of the enormous field of studies that could be defined as falling under the comparative public policy label (instead, they are unrepresentative not only because they (1) are largely biographical and (2) originate in only one subdomain of comparative public policy, regulation). However, they seek to be representative of two central objectives of comparative public policy: comparative public policy is inherently about seeking to establish what accounts for the observed patterns in public policy. In addition, as illustrated by the three episodes briefly illustrated above, comparative public policy is also about questioning stereotypes by exploring somewhat paradoxical or counterintuitive developments (see also Castles 1989).

Although these two purposes of comparative public policy research may appear largely uncontroversial, how different literatures have sought to go about such endeavours has led to considerable diversity, in terms of research methodology, questions explored and policy domains investigated. In many ways, therefore, trying to identify the core of comparative public policy somewhat resembles the quest for a mystical essence. As with any religious and quasi-religious entity, searches for divinities encourage the emergence of diverse social movements that advocate particular roads to salvation. The search for the essence of comparative public policy is further complicated by many studies not accepting the comparative public policy label. Therefore, any search for the essence of comparative public policy as a practice rather than as a common label needs to move across different academic disciplines and departments, ranging from social policy (and education), political science, sociology, and law to economics. Given the extent of studies that could be broadly defined as comparative public policy, this chapter seeks to narrow the search for the essence of comparative public policy in three stages. First, this chapter takes a broad view as to what roughly constitutes comparative public policy. Second, it turns to the standard approaches in the study of comparative public policy and then considers diverse fields in which comparative public policy has developed. The conclusion considers whether there is more to comparative public policy than a broad label. Given the width and breadth of the literature, this chapter can only attempt to survey some trends, without any claim toward covering the literature in any comprehensive manner.

WHAT IS COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY?

In order to begin the quest for the discovery of an essence of comparative public policy, this section considers issues of the logic and methods of comparative public policy research before considering whether there are any natural limits as to what comparative public policy constitutes. It is argued that comparison is largely driven by a joint logic, but not necessarily a common method, while the subject of public policy is arguably a matter of definitional boundary-drawing as to what constitutes a state activity.

As already noted, the logic of comparative public policy is driven by the search for determinants of public policy. Increasing the number of observations provides inbuilt control against assuming particular patterns. It hardly needs stating that comparison is at the heart of any endeavour that makes this discipline a social science: in the light of the inability to conduct real experiments, comparing across time, states or sectors offers one way to explore and evaluate patterns of state intervention in order to identify and isolate variables. In short, we compare to draw inferences. The logic of comparison allows the analysis, as Francis Castles notes (1989, 4), to move beyond the overparticularistic (in the form of a single event history) and the overgeneralized (in the sense of grand narratives). In addition, there is hardly disagreement that without a shared commitment toward appropriate research design issues (see, for example, Keman 1999), comparison is meaningless, in terms of cumulating knowledge for academic knowledge and of providing policy makers with

potential lessons about policy experiences elsewhere. Thus, questions of, for example, choosing cases, observations (and number of observations), and domains (what we compare) are central to any endeavour that seeks to fall under the comparative public policy label.

However, what the appropriate tools of the comparative method represent is controversial. Without seeking to develop an argument about comparative research methodology (see Geddes 2003; Rueschemeyer 2003; Munck 2004; McKeown 2004; also Whitehead 2002, chapter 8; for a critical approach, see Fischer 2003), among the methods for conducting comparative public policy, large-*n* type studies, for example, comparing different “family of nations” (Castles 1998) have been particularly prominent. They have offered approximations of different national welfare state developments, pointed to interesting paradoxes and put many myths to rest (such as those of “convergence” and “races to the bottom,” see Castles 2004). Studies that utilize cross-national aggregate data across a larger number of countries, have been crucial in terms of establishing insights as to what factors (or variables) are associated with commonalities and differences across states, domains and time periods. Regardless of the attraction of statistical methods in establishing some form of robust insight that moves beyond that of anecdote, the insights produced by these methods should nevertheless be regarded with considerable caution, given the (mostly inevitable) reliance on officially produced data. In many ways, students of comparative public policy have been studying what states, international organizations or non-governmental organizations, such as Transparency International, allow (or want) them to study (by producing particular data sets) in ways determined by research methodologies that fulfil particular understandings of appropriate (statistical) methods (see also Castles 1989, 5).

Relying on broad indicators statistical association comes, of course, at the price of detailed understanding of why particular choices were taken at specific times (for example, those studies interested in the various stages of the policy cycle, see chapter 4 in this volume). Thus, different methods of comparison have dominated the study of different definitions of policy, such as whether policy is defined as an output, outcome, content, or style. Even if similarities can be established at more than just the superficial level, these similarities may hide substantial variation in motives: history is littered with examples of similar policy options being adopted for opposite reasons. What may appear at one level as similar patterns may reveal itself as immensely distinct at another level.

Thus, talking about comparative public policy should be seen as a commitment to a particular logic of doing research, namely a commitment to the systematic investigation across states, domains and time, not a particular method in terms of research strategies and instruments. As a consequence, small-*n*, qualitative studies have a role to play in advancing our understanding of public policy, and this also includes appropriately framed single-*n* studies (see Gering 2004). Considerable efforts have been made to generate substantial insights from small-*n* studies, by trying to increase the number of observations. One example of such a strategy has been the explicit use of cross-country and cross-sectoral approaches and careful case selection (see Levi-Faur 2004, building on Vogel 1996).

Despite a largely common interest in the comparative logic, there are also questions as to what the public policies are that comparative public policy is interested in; for example, studies of dangerous dogs regulation may not necessarily be regarded by some as being of equal standing when compared to the study of welfare state expenditures. The study of public policies is, however, the study of state intervention in social life, or, put differently, the study of the interaction between the state and its subjects, whether it relates to welfare state expenditure, utility regulation, or policies regarding dogs.

In addition, the past two decades have witnessed two particularly prominent trends that challenge the centrality of the state in the study of public policy; first, the study of interaction effects between international and supranational regimes, in particular the European Union and its member states, and second, a greater sensitivity toward the fact that many public policies are executed at the wider societal level leading to a greater interest in the interorganizational relationships within the economy. While some countries have traditionally relied on third-sector welfare provision,

developments such as privatisation as well as a greater interest in relationships within the economy have led to an increase in the societal localities of public policies. If, therefore, public policy has traditionally been interested in the diverse ways in which the state did things, labels such as *political economy* point to a more extensive understanding of what public policy is about—namely about how economic activity is shaped by relations among societal actors themselves; an extension to public policy that could be regarded as pointing to the continuous and indirect attempts at expanding the tactics of government into further domains of social life.

The notion of *Staatsaufgabe* (as utilized by Grimm, 1996) points to these changing trends in the delivery and organization of particular public policies. *Staatsaufgabe* translates badly into English as it defines both activity as well as obligation. If we consider the study of comparative public policy in the sense of state activities, there may some grounds to suggest that the field should be focused on those areas where the state (however defined and operationalized) does things to its subjects (in the coercive or liberating sense). However, if we take the wider definition in terms of state obligations, comparative public policy can be understood in terms of the beyond the state areas as well, namely all those domains where the state' is somehow expected to bear responsibility for outputs and outcomes. In an age where distinctions between private and public are in any case difficult to draw (and have encouraged the inflationary use of the word *governance*), where there is at least a greater prominence of private actors taking on regulatory functions (such as credit card companies in Internet gambling) and where national autonomy is said to be severely constrained by international commitments or dynamics, it makes sense to follow the second definition rather than the first—with implications on the choice of policy domain and type of research methodology.

Thus, comparative public policy is united in its search for explanations of observed patterns of state activities, using, most prominently, cross-national, but also cross-time, and cross-sectoral analysis. It is this logic of comparing that allows us to speak of comparative public policy—exploring puzzles enhances our understanding of the persuasiveness of explanations that may be widely held, but may rely on less solid foundations. In all other respects, a definition of comparative public policy is necessarily marred by controversy in terms of methodological issues as well as diversity in terms of domains investigated.

WHAT ARE THE QUESTIONS OF COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY?

Traditionally, comparative public policy accounts have drawn on a number of core questions and literatures. These core questions relate to an interest into the degree and nature of political units' responsiveness to external challenges. For convenience, these can be separated into three distinct analytical approaches, with further subdivisions in each approach respectively (without claiming to establish a mutually exclusive or fully exhaustive list). These three broad approaches toward accounting for public policy trends in comparative perspective are labeled here *habitat*, *responsive government*, and *institutions*.¹ The first two point to external sources shaping government policies, whereas the latter highlights the importance of internal factors. The rest of this section considers each of these three broad approaches in turn.

Habitat-based accounts stress the importance of socio-economic factors in shaping public policies, whether in terms of economic structure or in terms of exposure to particular industrial production method. Thus, policy developments are said to be particularly evident at certain levels of economic development (however measured), leading to convergence. Among the key claims of the literature stressing socio-economic determinants has been the shift in the developed world toward post-Fordism. In the light of increasing individualization of modes of production and life-styles, welfare states as well as other form of collective policy provision are said to be facing particular problems: the individualization of social experiences makes universal welfare coverage, as well as

1. The notion *habitat* is taken from Hood (1994).

easy tax collection, problematic. In addition, given the coverage of the basic societal needs, they encourage the growth of an anti-tax electoral constituency that opposes (collectivist) redistribution.

The degree of openness of national economies is often seen as crucial for explaining policy patterns, in particular in terms of available rents for politically motivated redistribution to constituencies. In other words, the more open the economy (or a particular economic sector), the more difficult it is for states to engage in corruption or other forms of predatory behavior, given likely penalties for such behavior on international markets (assuming, of course, the portability of the factors of production). Finally, the internationalization of the economy is said to expose national states to similar challenges which are, however, met by different degrees of distress and opportunity structures for incurring policy change, given institutional differences (see Scharpf 2000). These challenges of internationalization are particularly stark in areas where national states have lost their national economic border control—for example, in the European Union, the mutual recognition principle places the European Court of Justice as final arbiter as to what constitutes legitimate trade barriers (as defined in treaties). At the same time, it should be recognized that the contemporary interest in internationalization is merely a continuation in the interest in the viability of particular policy approaches given changing environmental conditions (in the case of taxation, see Hood 1994, 116–22).

Accounts that broadly fall under the responsive government label point to the different ways in which governments respond to external pressure for change. Governments take some form of opinion as a “thermostat” (see Wlezien 1995; Taylor-Gooby 1985) and respond by seeking to establish congruence between public demands and policy outputs. Although it is a basic premise of liberal democracy that governments should be responsive to the wider electorate, different sources of such responsiveness can be distinguished. First, in the pure form of responsive government, policies are seen as emerging as a response to public salience. Thus, a majority anti-tax coalition in the wider electorate is said to encourage long-term shifts toward a different policy-mix on inflation and acceptable unemployment levels. Elsewhere, public opinion responsive government is regarded as outright bad, for example in the area of risk regulation where criticism focuses on political knee jerk responses to short-lived moral panics following high visibility incidents (see Breyer 1992; Sunstein 2003).

Second, and arguably representing the most well-established research tradition in comparative public policy, is the “do parties matter” question. Research in this tradition traditionally focuses on macro-economic policy trends under left- and right-of center parties (Hibbs 1977; Castles 1982; Blais et al. 1996; Berry and Lowry 1987) or on whether party manifestos have an impact on eventual government policy (Laver et al. 2003). With regard to the former, there has been only limited evidence, for example, Richard Rose over two decades ago stressed that inheritance outweighed any form of marginal change parties in government could make (Rose 1990). Others point to changes at the margins that provide clear evidence of partisan preferences (e.g., in taxation, see Steinmo 1993, 145–54). With regard to research on the impact of party manifestos, there has been considerable evidence that points to an association between manifesto commitments and subsequent government policies (Laver et al. 2003; Budge et al. 1987; Laver and Budge 1992).

Third, according to the seminal work by George Stigler regulation is “as a rule [...] acquired by the industry and is designed and operated primarily for its benefit” (Stigler 1971, 3). Although this universal law-like statement has been modified over time (by friends and foes of this so-called economic theory of regulation, see Wilson 1980; Peltzman 1976 and 1989; Keeler 1989), it nevertheless points to the well-established tradition in political science that stresses to the importance of special interests in the development of public policies, across sectors and states. Similar interest, although based on a very different research approach, is related to the literature in policy networks and its claims about the importance of the features of the policy network (such as the distinction between issue networks and policy communities). Other types of special interests are “advocacy coalitions” (Sabatier 1988) and other forms of coalitions of various organizations and individuals

united by common policy belief systems (such as epistemic communities)—these accounts to some extent also relate to literatures that attach causality to ideas themselves.

Turning finally to institutions, it has become a platitude over the past two decades to declare that “institutions matter” and that policies are “path dependent” (see Pierson 2000a). Such an interest in the institutions was partly a result of the absence of similar responses by different political systems to similar external inputs or shocks. Thus, comparative public policy accounts have explored why certain developed states survived the years of economic stagflation in the 1970s in better shape than others (see Scharpf 1991). Similarly, as the three examples at the outset of this chapter noted, political institutions came to be associated with different degrees of responsiveness in terms of policy bandwagons (such as privatization of publicly owned utility companies). And as already noted above, internationalization and universal budgetary constraints caused different degrees of adaptation pressure on national systems—partly challenging those recipes of success of the 1970s.

Whatever stripe of institutionalism one chooses to be associated with, three distinct institutional impacts are particularly noteworthy when it comes to comparative public policy. The first is that “nations matter”—in the sense that there are particular “national styles” (emerging from an interaction between informal norms and formal institutions, Richardson et al. 1982) or that broad formal policy system factors impact on how systems respond to various policy challenges—either at the level of macro-institutional political system features, such as rules concerning electoral systems or federalism, or at more meso-level institutional mechanisms, such as the so-called politico-institutional nexus, interaction patterns between state and societal groups (see Hall 1986) or the rules and loci of decision making (Steinmo 1993). In contrast, others stress the importance of “sectors” or policy domains—pointing to distinct sectoral characteristics that pose distinct challenges to policy makers. Following this dichotomy, comparative research has increasingly utilized these two approaches for their investigation (e.g., using two policy domains in two states to explore which “logic,” the national or the sectoral, seems to dominate).

In contrast, less attention in comparative public policy research has been paid to the idea that “policies are their own cause” and that they “self-destruct” (see Hood 1994, 13–17). According to this argument, any intervention triggers responses that provoke further self-stimulating responses (Wildavsky 1980, 62–85), while environmental reactions and wider changes reduce the effectiveness (or even reverse) of the chosen policy instruments (e.g., free meals for school children instituted during times of malnutrition being carried forward in times of widespread obesity). In addition, such issues also point to different accounts regarding sources of policy change (see below). In contrast to the approaches explored earlier, this idea about how institutions matter has been far less widely explored, especially in comparative perspective.

The above section is by no means comprehensive, and, in many cases, the different approaches overlap and are used in a complementary fashion. Nevertheless, they highlight a relatively concentrated interest in broadly similar questions. In this sense of certain questions dominating academic attention, something called “comparative public policy” seems to exist.

DOMAINS OF COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY

If public policy is about what states do (directly and indirectly) to us, its subjects, then we are confronted by a large number of different types of state intervention and tools—from before the cradle to beyond the grave. Among the many ways to classify comparative public policy literatures, the following categorizes these literatures according to their dominant policy instrument, or tool. An adaptation of Christopher Hood’s typology of Nodality, Authority, Treasure and Organisation (or NATO; see Hood 1983, chapter 1) allows for one particular way of classifying different lines of enquiry that are associated with comparative public policy while also moving beyond a mere

TABLE 19.1

<p>Treasure</p> <p>Interest in how governments raise and spend money <i>Literatures:</i> Taxation and Welfare State spending, total public expenditure</p>	<p>Nodality</p> <p>Interest in how governments acquire knowledge or use information to affect behavior <i>Literatures:</i> Policy transfer & learning; government information</p>
<p>Organization</p> <p>Interest in how governments directly organize their own architecture or directly provide services <i>Literatures:</i> public management policy change, privatization</p>	<p>Authority</p> <p>Interest in how governments use authority <i>Literatures:</i> Regulation of societal actors</p>

listing of literatures in terms of subject or chronological ordering. Nevertheless, this choice of breath comes at the expense of depth and comprehensiveness. Table 19.1 provides an overview of the ways in which different comparative public policy literatures can be organized according to the NATO scheme (organized in Table 19.1 according to the degree of direct resource depleteability on the horizontal dimension (nodality and authority scoring low) and the degree of constraint on the “target” on the vertical dimension (with the use of treasure and nodality being generally more discretionary than the application of organization or authority; Hood 1983, 145). The rest of this section surveys these different literatures. While clearly not being able to do justice to the breadth and depth of these literatures, this highly selective survey points to some recurring themes across these different literatures which relate to common questions, as noted above.

Nodality focuses on the way in which governments “traffic in information” (Hood 1983, 4). Governments require the provision of information for the development of policy responses and they are engaged in the dissemination of information (occupying, for example, large shares of national advertisement markets). Such activities range from at-large and bespoke forms of propaganda encouraging regime or party-in-government support to particular health advice (smoking kills), food health warnings or education (national curricula for schools). At the information receiving end, governments have traditionally taken great care in receiving reports, taking notice and registering individuals and activities. Arguably, the rise of an “audit society” (Power 1997) points to an extension of tactics of government in order to both extend its knowledge about certain activities and influence ever more activities—with all their intended and, arguably, more significantly (in their extent and their potential impact on social systems), unintended consequences. While not necessarily taking up the implications of the “audit society” thesis, the interest in new modes of governance, such as benchmarking and target setting has been of considerable degree of attention in a diversity of literatures (e.g., on the EU’s open method of co-ordination or the growth of certification schemes instead of regulation for the classification of goods).

Related, there has been a recent resurgence in interest in how governments learn and how policies get transferred from one place to another (Rose 1993, 2004; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2004; James and Lodge 2003). These accounts, seeking to explore lesson-drawing and policy transfer connect to a wider and well-established literature that has explored the transfer of institutions to post-colonial and developing countries (Jacoby 2000, chapter 1). While these earlier studies (linked to some extent to the ambitions of the comparative public administration movement of the immediate post-Second World War period) linked the learning about and transferring of public policies to stages in economic development, later studies have highlighted the importance of partisan preferences for selective learning as well as institutional processes, for example, ranging from explanations why particular policy templates are regarded as more appropriate than others (Lodge 2003), claims regarding the “fungibility” of particular policies due to their institutional complexity or close fit with a specific environment (Rose 1993) to arguments pointing to the inevitability of encouraging

‘irritant’ rather than straightforward accept/reject responses as may be assumed when using the term *policy transplants* (Teubner 1998).

Authority is defined as the use of legal or official power to “determine” (Hood 1983, 5), in the “allowing” and “forbidding” sense. Regulation combines interests of numerous social science disciplines, ranging from economics, political science, socio-legal studies and sociology to “black letter” law (i.e., generally known principles of law thought to be free of doubt or contention). And in many ways, the study of regulation has explored questions that characterise the study of public policy (such as noted above), for examples, questions concerning commonalities and differences in regulatory objectives as well as their change, the comparison of institutional architectures (especially the supposed growth of quasi-independent regulatory agencies in Europe and elsewhere) or the comparative study of enforcement practices, especially with regard to environmental regulation (Vogel 1988).

While very much encouraged by the rise of the regulatory state (Majone 1997), studies of authority go back in time, even outside the United States where, arguably, a regulatory state has been part of the institutional furniture since at least the beginning of the twentieth century (Skowronek 1992). For example, the evolution of regulation in nineteenth-century Britain (in particular relating to railways) generated a literature on “the growth of the state” (see MacDonagh 1958; Parris 1960). Turning to the studies interested in comparative regulatory change in the past two or three decades, there has been some attempt at explicit comparative work, usually relying on either cross-national and historical analysis of a single domain (Thatcher 1999; Lodge 2002) or cross-domain analysis in a single country (see Hood et al. 2001). Some studies have moved toward an explicit “across-country, across-domain” approach (see Vogel 1996; Levi-Faur 2004; Lodge and Stirton 2005). In addition, while for some the emergence of regulatory institutions is a phenomena best studied as part of an international diffusion process (at a large-n level: Levi-Faur 2003), more limited comparative analysis also points to increasing similarities across countries, even though they may have arrived at these similar points via diverse routes. If countries with very different political and economic institutions are diagnosed to arrive at similar points in terms of institutional arrangements, such as in telecommunications (Thatcher 2004) or dangerous dogs regulation (see Hood and Lodge 2005), then institutions therefore, at least to some extent, don’t seem to matter. However, taking a more fine-grained institutional analysis points to ongoing significant differences in regulatory approaches and institutions that reflect particular constellations at particular conjunctures as well as more long-standing assumptions and norms (Döhler 2002).

As already noted, in other areas of studies regarding authority (or regulation) there has been substantial interest in different ways of enforcement—see for example Vogel’s seminal study regarding enforcement in environmental regulation that pointed to the importance of national legal traditions (Vogel 1986). At the same time, regulation is hardly the only way in which states utilize authority. One key area of, arguably, growing interest has been immigration and states’ attempts at classifying immigrant populations (see King 1999, 97–134; Joppke 1999)

Treasure is defined here as the receipt and the expenditure of monetary resources. In many ways, the accounting for different expenditure patterns as part of welfare state programs—in combination with differences in organization of the welfare state—have been at the forefront of the comparative public policy literature, highlighting the existence of different types of welfare state families, as well as the well-established “do parties matter” accounts that stress the importance of public expenditures for attempts at securing re-election.

Taxation has been one of the key areas of contemporary public policy, whether in terms of the impact of partisan governments (Steinmo 1993, 2003; Rose and Karran 1987), the strategic incentives of rulers (see Levi 1988), the interaction between state and domestic elites (Lieberman 2003), or the differential impact of international competition on domestic tax rates (Ganghof 2000; Kemmerling 2005; Kato 2003). Similarly, there have been attempts to establish families of tax states (relying on different degrees of direct and indirect taxation, see Peters 1991). Arguably, a habitat of emerging

technologies that allow for relatively costless monitoring of monetary exchange as well as growing voter resistance to direct (or, in other words, visible forms of) taxation, has encouraged a move toward indirect taxation, such as taxes on consumption. At the same time, certain types of tax are likely to be related to different types of technologies. For example, the difficulty of controlling Internet gambling has led to credit card companies acting as gatekeepers to control such activities.

Similar to the questions to what extent states are able to tax (or, rather, what sorts of activities it is able to tax), considerable (and, in comparison to tax, considerably more) attention has been paid to the question whether states can still spend in times of perceived fiscal constraint, due to government debt, international commitments, such as the budgetary and fiscal rules shaping the European single currency, or pressures on social budgets (especially pensions), due to changing demographics. The literature has therefore partly moved beyond questions as to whether there is a universal “race to the bottom” (answer: no) or whether “parties matter” (it depends, see Garrett 1998; Iversen 1999) to the study of institutional factors in shaping the ways in which governments seek to retrench in the light of their institutional commitments and path dependencies (Pierson 2000b; Hopkin and Blyth 2004), seeking to explore why members of similar welfare state families respond in different ways (Bechberger 2005). In many ways, the interest in the “treasure” activities of national states has been at the heart of the comparative public policy literature, partly because of the existence of hard data that suited statistical treatment, partly because of the extension of the welfare state in the post-Second World War. It allowed for many crucial debates in comparative public policy, such as debates whether and why governments grow or whether political business cycles exist (Alesina, Roubini, and Cohen 1997). Given budgetary constraints and long-term demographic changes, the study of “treasure,” especially of the effecting type (i.e., expenditure), remains one core activity of those studies that fall under the comparative public policy label.

Organization is defined by the possession of capacity to mobilize people or rely on buildings, land or equipment directly without reliance on negotiations with third parties (see Hood 1983, 6). The study of direct action in comparative perspective has widely taken place within a single country, but much less in cross-national context. Nevertheless, if one accepts that administrative reform policies can be regarded as public policies that the state does to itself and, more importantly, therefore affects its subjects, then the boom industry in cross-national accounts of administrative change (often labeled “public management”) in the past two decades can be counted as a central part of contemporary comparative public policy studies. For example, Michael Barzelay employs the notion of public management policy change in order to apply a Kingdon-type approach (with some added ingredients) toward comparative case study research (see Barzelay 2001, 2003; Kingdon 1995). In contrast, Christopher Pollitt and Gert Bouckaert offer a more historical institutionalist narrative of comparative administrative reform (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

Comparison is very much at the heart of studies of the changes in the organization of the state itself in that authors identify different degrees (of comprehensiveness) of change and seek to explore different reform trajectories. Outright comparison has proven more difficult, partly given difficulties in measuring the extent of administrative reform even at the broadest level, given the need to take different institutional starting positions into account as well as different cultures. Nevertheless, broad comparison across countries throws up central puzzles, both at the level of medium-sized samples and small-n comparisons. For example, claims that extensive administrative reform policies seem to have been an “English-speaking disease” in that countries such as New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom (although to a lesser extent in its Northern Irish part) were far ahead in terms of extent and speed of administrative reform over the course of the past two decades face problems given the extensive reforms that took place in Sweden at the same time and the absence of any major administrative reform beyond the level of announcements in the United States. Similarly, issues such as party in government or economic well-being seem not to be associated with the extent of administrative reform. With diagnosed policy developments not fitting the standard public policy accounts, comparing organizations at the level of administrative reform has maintained an

inherently institutionalist flavor in the sense of describing national and subnational changes—even when trying to force a common narrative onto different case studies that highlight the role of particular policy entrepreneurs, issue framing, and other mechanisms (see Barzelay 2003 and further contributions in that special issue of *International Public Management Journal*). Administrative reform seems largely a matter of motive and opportunity for political and administrative actors set within particular institutional constellations.

While comparison of administrative reform “at large” (in the sense of broad administrative reform movements) has largely remained at the level of stressing the institutional distinctiveness of national experiences, the analysis of more specific issues in administrative policy challenges stereotypes regarding ‘path dependency’ of particular countries or policy domains. For example, the UK and Germany (at the federal level) are often regarded as being on opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to the extent and speed of the introduction of managerial reforms into government processes. However, when focusing on the issue of competency, Germany seemed to be thinking of competency in the 1980s (but then forgetting about it in the wake of unification until the late 1990s), whereas the UK senior civil service only discovered competency in the early 1990s (see Hood and Lodge 2004).

Related, the past two decades have witnessed the shift in many developed and developing countries from the direct public service provision by the state to the delivery of these services through (often regulated) private providers. One particular prominent area has been the literature on the privatization of state-owned enterprises, in particular in the area of utilities, such as telecommunications. Such changes in organization are notable, if alone for the fact that Max Weber defined the railways and the telegraph as defining features of the occidental state over a century ago.

The above classification and overview of the literature is hardly exhaustive and is likely to generate substantial criticism for its incompleteness. This section’s main purpose was to highlight the key domains in which comparative public policy literatures have evolved. Regardless of the differentiation in terms of activities, there is a distinct commitment toward raising similar questions, suggesting that there remains something at the heart of comparative public policy that makes it identifiable, namely the type of questions it asks. Certain literatures do not easily fit into any of the four categories—and in many cases, even the above-mentioned literatures often stretch across different areas. For example, the study of regulation often involves the study of organization (such as regulatory institutions and questions of ownership). More generally, key areas in the comparative public policy literature stretch across numerous, if not all, four types of activities. For example, “varieties of capitalism” accounts (see Hall and Soskice 2001) cut across a number of different types of activities and policy instruments, ranging from cross-national expenditure patterns, the organization of particular forms of relationships (in the economy) to the impact of legal instruments on the wider system of law. The “varieties of capitalism” literature also highlights the importance for the analysis to move beyond the state into the institutions that govern the relationships within the market.

Classifying writings on comparative public policy according to NATO points to the difficulty of assessing any claims concerning big government. The usual measures of big government—expenditures—have hardly witnessed a universal cut despite the contemporary emphasis on containment. However, how to measure the size of government activity becomes even more difficult when trying to assess the combined effect of other types of policy instruments, such as those of information or authority. For example, one of the attractions of using regulation is the shift of compliance costs to (largely) private parties, whereas a simple reliance on rule-making is relatively costless (apart from the production costs of writing the rule).

Finally, taking a NATO perspective allows the analysis to move toward an assessment whether there have been some larger trends in the evolution of state activities. Indeed, as Hood (1983, 154–63) noted over two decades ago, we may be witnessing a return to an age that is less characterized by checkbook government than by regulatory government that largely relies on authority.

In contrast, some may point to the growth of media-management within central government as one indicator of government via information (in fact, some argue that certification schemes rather than a reliance on regulation point to a move away from authority to nodality). However, just as there are potential difficulties in putting the ruler over the size of the regulatory state in terms of extent of rules and their cost (and benefits), any attempt at trying to “metrify” government by information is also limited, especially in comparative perspective, for example because of differences in political-media relations.

CONCLUSION

At the outset, it was noted that comparative public policy appeared in many different guises. The purpose of this chapter was to discover whether there was anything that unified studies that (explicitly or implicitly) carried the comparative public policy label. One key risk of the ever-differentiating analysis of public policies, across existing disciplines and newly forming fields, is that unifying themes are lost in the variety of different languages that emerge with each academic subfield. Similarly, the risk is the different subfields have differentiated to such an extent that they no longer communicate to each other even if they ask similar questions and share research interests.

This chapter has sought to identify an essence in comparative public policy in three respects. It has been argued that there are certain elements that unite comparative public policy, namely a shared commitment toward the logic of comparison and a broad interest in asking related questions. At the heart of the academic study of comparative public policy in all its fields and methods is the interest in exploring the determinants for state action—and such exploration requires a willingness to move beyond description to explore puzzles and challenge received wisdom, as the three brief examples noted at the outset.

In terms of active engagement with the world of practicing public policy, comparative public policy plays a distinctive role. In a world, where Herbert Simon’s complaint regarding the prominence of “proverbs in administration” (1946) still holds true, the role of comparative public policy is to inform and challenge national developments and arguments. While appropriate comparison is likely to add information to the policy-making process and allows for a critical estimation as to the extent and nature of contemporary policy developments, contemporary comparative public policy analysis should nevertheless seek to avoid falling into the “what works” trap. Drawing lessons for application, especially in partisan contexts where short-term interests dominate, is most likely to lead to unintended and unforeseen irritation effects. Instead, comparative public policy is most likely to contribute to the intelligence of decision making by critically assessing any proclamation of national innovation in public policy and by pointing to and exploring comparative experiences that move beyond the casual anecdote. Comparative public policy, therefore, is hardly the divinity that through its questions and empirical investigations is going to lead to the nirvana of well-functioning state interventions (potentially it is more likely to represent the role of the chorus in ancient Greek tragedies), but its essence is that of critical and continuous questioning, not more, but, more importantly, not less.

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