



What Is Next for Policy Design and Social Construction Theory?

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About Writers

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Agenda

- The centrality of **policy design**
- The attention to **social constructions**
- The attention **policy consequences(or feed forward effects)**
- The **integration of normative and empirical research and theory**
- Policy design as **a complement to policy Theories**
- **Research methods** and epistemology: expanding the range in policy studies
- **Next step** for policy design research and theory building



The next generation of policy design theory should

- ▶ expand investigation into the **social constructions** that are ubiquitous in the policy field, especially the social construction of knowledge;
- ▶ Further develop, empirically and theoretically, **the relationship between policy design components and target populations**;
- ▶ empirically investigate and theorize about **the impact** that policy designs have on subsequent political voice, social movements, and other aspects of political processes;
- ▶ integrate **empirical research and normative democratic theory**; and
- ▶ **integrate policy design more fully with other policy theories.**

What Are Policy Designs?

- ▶ Policy design = *content* of policy
- ▶ 1950

Recognizing that **policies contain sets of fundamental elements, or designs**, is akin to stating that **policies contain an architecture**:




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Dimensions for evaluating policy designs

- ▶ Dahl and Lindblom(1953) did discuss a set of normative dimensions for evaluating policy designs such as
 - ▶ freedom,
 - ▶ rationality,
 - ▶ efficiency,
 - ▶ political equality,
 - ▶ and subjective equality.



The **fundamental** **empirical elements of public policy**

Schneider and Ingram (1997)

1. problem definition and goals to be pursued;
2. benefits and burdens to be distributed;
3. target populations (the “players” in the policy arena who receive, or may receive, benefits or burdens);
4. rules (policy directives stating who is to do what, when, with what resources, who is eligible, etc.);
5. tools (incentives or disincentives for agencies and target groups to act in accord with policy directives);




The fundamental **empirical elements of public policy** Schneider and Ingram (1997) (Cont.)

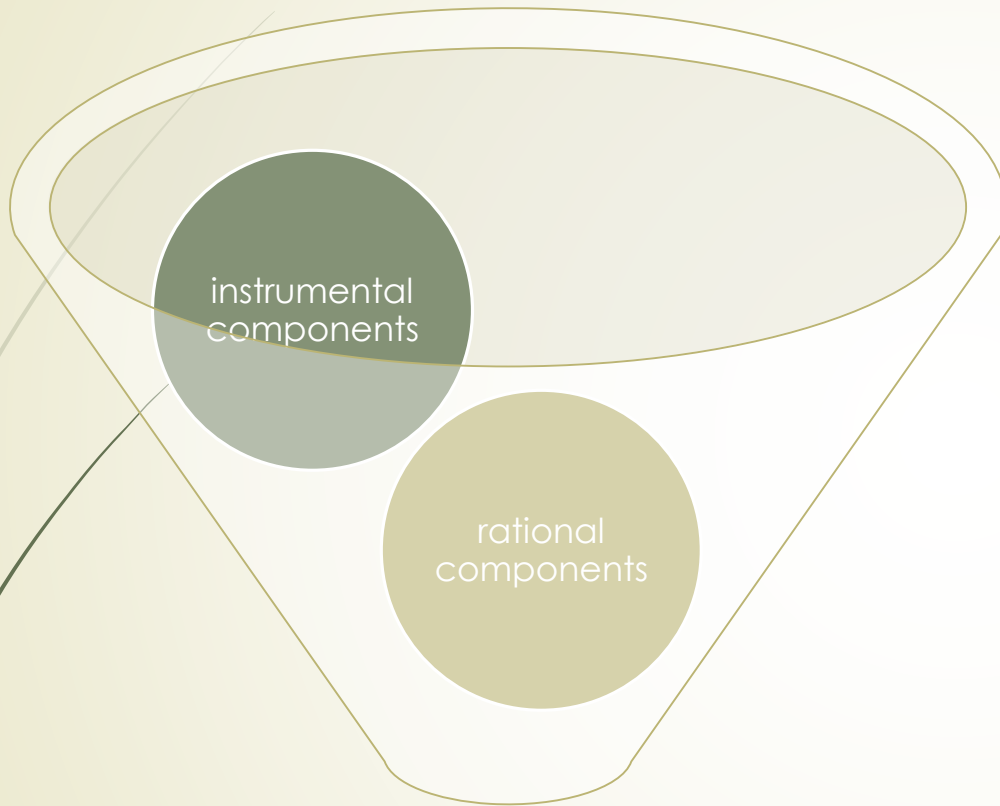
6. Implementation structure (the entire implementation plan, including the incentives for agency compliance and resources);
7. social constructions (the “world making,” the images of reality, the stereotypes people use to make sense of the reality as they see it);
8. rationales (the explicit or implicit justifications and legitimations for the policy including those used in debates about the policy); and
9. underlying assumptions (explicit or implicit assumptions about causal logics or about the capacity of people or of organizations).



Element of the policy design include:

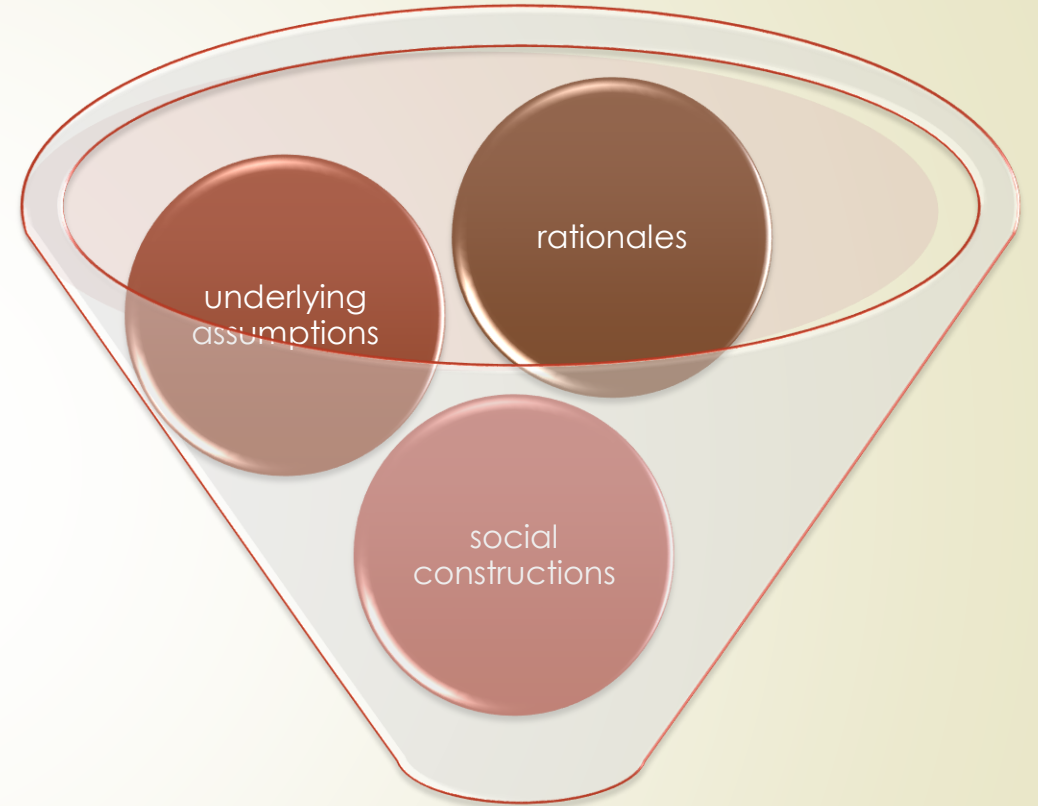
- ▶ **Target groups** or target populations are the groups designated to receive benefits or burdens
 - ▶ the **stated goals** of the policy or the problem to be solved,
 - ▶ the **means** by which the goals are to achieved (the tools),
 - ▶ the **rules** for inclusion or exclusion of individuals in target groups,
 - ▶ the **rationales** that state the cause and effect logic of the policy design (the theory of action), and
 - ▶ the **implementation structure**.
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Before




studies of policies

Now



studies of policies



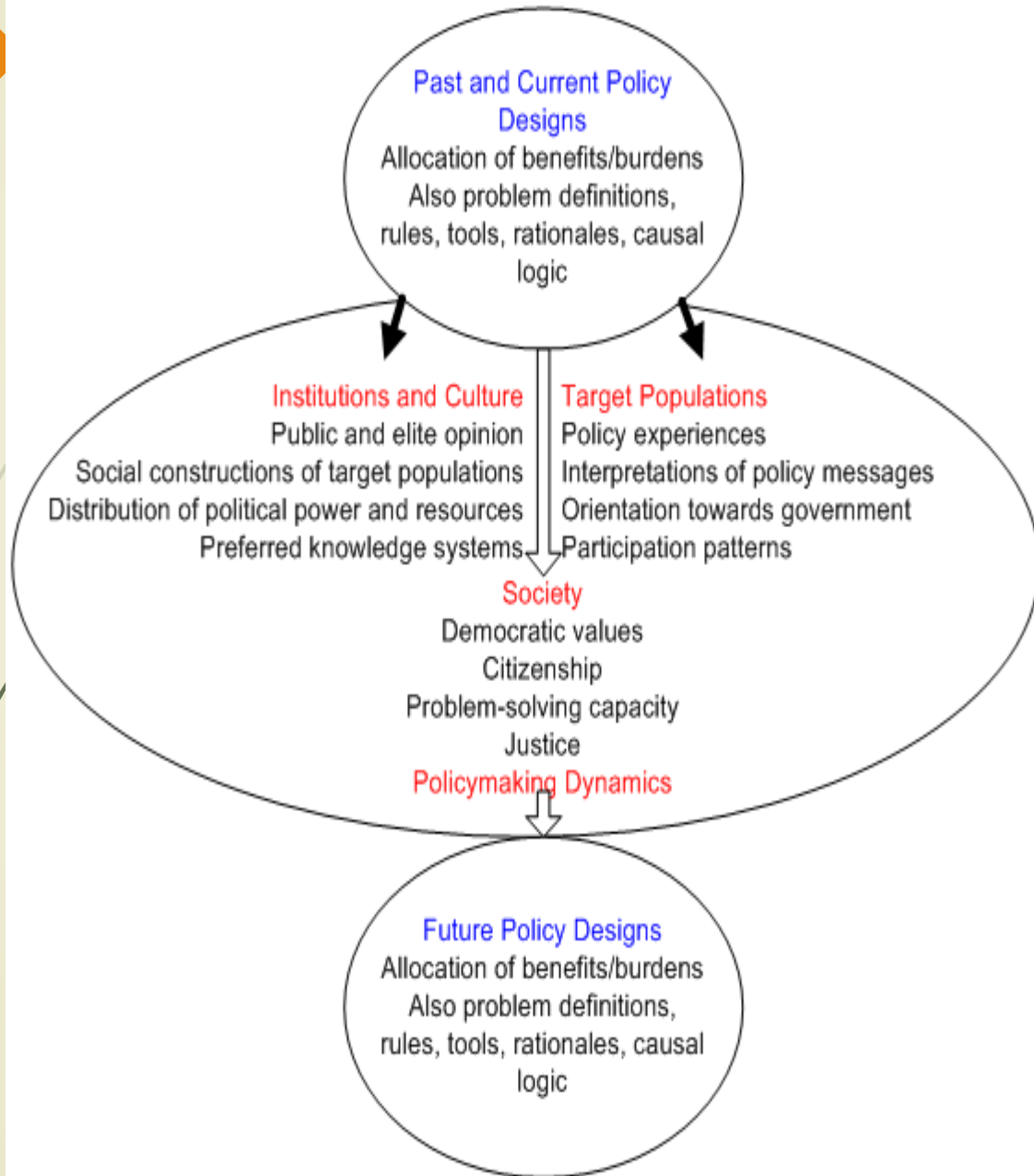
While some dimensions of policy designs are **clearly normative** (such as rationales and goals), others are **not so obviously normative** (such as tools or implementation structure).

- ▶ a variety of dimensions to evaluate of design:
 - ▶ whether the design is clear or opaque;
 - ▶ deceptive or straightforward;
 - ▶ inclusive or exclusive;
 - ▶ top-down or bottom-up;
 - ▶ participatory or closed;
 - ▶ filled with mandates or enabling discretion; and
 - ▶ whether it incorporates consistent or competing problem definitions and social constructions.

Policy design theory posits that:




Policy design helps us to understand **how, and why**, we get **certain kinds of design elements** instead of others, and to understand the full range of **consequences** that stem from differences in designs.(e.g. school failures)



past and current policy designs impact on institutions and culture (see the left-hand side of the central ellipse) both by instrumental means (e.g., by creating new rules) and by symbolic means (different interpretations).

Past and current policy also impacts on society directly by setting democratic values, what it means to be a citizen, the problem-solving capacity of society, and the understanding of justice.

The dynamics of policymaking include, for instance, interest groups, social movements, agencies, and elected officials and their staff, in addition to those who are formally determining future policy designs.




Accounting for, and Considering, the Impact of the Social Construction of Reality(Cont.)

- ▶ The idea is that **target populations have varying levels of political power**, and that **actors characterize them in positive or negative terms**.
- ▶ Schneider and Ingram (1993) suggest a set of four “ideal types” of constructions:
 - ▶ Advantaged (powerful groups with positive images),
 - ▶ contenders (powerful groups with negative images),
 - ▶ dependents (powerless groups with positive images), and deviants (powerless groups with negative images).

		Social constructions	
		More positive	More negative
Higher	Political resources of group	<u><i>Advantaged</i></u>	<u><i>Contenders</i></u>
		Employers Investors and owners Middle-class taxpayers Employed Senior social security recipients	Rich Insurance industry
		Medicare beneficiaries Black Middle class	Physically disabled Mentally disabled
Lower		Mothers	Students Feminists
		Children	Caregivers Single mothers Welfare mothers Poor Jobless
		At-risk children	Drug users Homeless Unmarried Pregnant teens Parolees Young Black dropouts "Illegal" immigrants Criminals Sex offenders
		<u><i>Dependents</i></u>	<u><i>Deviants</i></u>

Figure 1. Power and Social Constructions of Target Populations.



Accounting for, and Considering, the Impact of the Social Construction of Reality(Cont.)

- ▶ The importance of accounting for social constructions of **target groups** goes beyond a focus on the **policymaking process and the content of public policies to the impacts of policies.**
- ▶ as with the social construction of target populations, the **construction of knowledge** that drove the policymaking process may become embodied in the policy design.



Policy Design and the Feed(back)-Forward Process

- ▶ Policy design is not only a critical dependent **variable** that needs to be incorporated more explicitly into theories of the **policy process**, but is also an independent variable in that it has multiple consequences for **society**.
- ▶ feed-forward instead of policy feedback
- ▶ Some scholars have developed typologies showing how different kinds of policy shape subsequent politics, for example Lowi (1964,1979), Wilson (1973), and Steinberger (1980)




Policy Design and the Feed(back)-Forward Process(Cont.)

- ▶ Schneider and Ingram (1997, 2005; Ingram & Schneider, 2006) suggest that policy design's impacts **on four aspects** of democracy should be emphasized:
 1. justice(e.g., fairness, quality of life),
 2. citizenship (political voice, participation, orientation toward government, identity),
 3. democratic institutions (scope, depth, authenticity),and
 4. problem solving (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance).




The next generation of policy research should include systematic analysis of the effects of public policy designs on the most critical issues of our time, including:

- ▶ The vastly unequal levels of political participation across socioeconomic groups,
 - ▶ The cynicism people demonstrate toward government,
 - ▶ The growing inequality in income and education,
- 



Integrating Normative and Empirical Analysis Using Policy Design Theory

- ▶ key element of policy design theory is the **integration of normative and empirical analysis**.
- ▶ Policy design theory pushes scholars to think about:
 - ▶ the technical aspects of a policy
 - ▶ Its implicit ideas, values, and broader meaning within society
 - ▶ feed-forward effects as policy outcomes

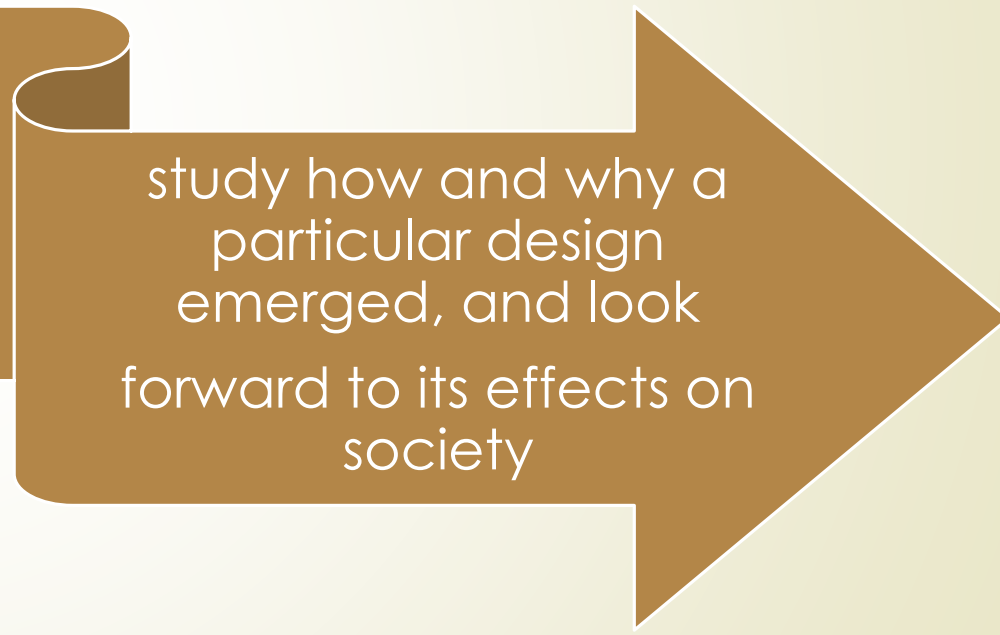


Policy Design as a Complement to Policy Theories

The analyst is encouraged



to look backward



study how and why a particular design emerged, and look forward to its effects on society



Research Methods and Epistemology: Expanding the Range in Policy Studies

- ▶ accounting for social construction processes in policymaking, policy designs, and policy impacts requires **interpretive research methods**.
- ▶ As explicated by Yanow and many others, interpretivist researchers conceptualize theory and its role, data and interpretation, and evaluative criteria, even the goal of social science research and the role of researchers themselves, quite differently from positivist researchers.
- ▶ **As articulated by Schneider and Ingram (1997), policy design theory seems to straddle these worldviews and ways of knowing rather than choosing between them.**



Next Steps for Policy Design Research and Theory Building

- ▶ Public policy scholarship needs to be relevant to the most important issues of a democratic society, and that means going beyond simply explaining political processes or explaining policy change.
- ▶ We need to ask **how processes shape designs** and **how designs affect justice, problem solving, citizenship, and subsequent democratic institutions.**



Next Steps for Policy Design Research and Theory Building(cont.)

We need to understand how negative and divisive social constructions of social groups, of types of knowledge, and of events are used to manipulate opinion, and how these become embedded in policy designs. We need to ask whether political processes produce policy designs that serve democratic ends. We need to ask who political change serves. Who benefits and who loses? Are the changes positive influences on subsequent democracy? We need to ask about policy windows—who gains and who loses from different kinds of windows? We need policy scholars to tackle the difficult question of a policymaking culture that has become increasingly negative, divisive, and more intent on “winning” and permanently damaging one’s “enemies” than on solving problems or producing a more just society. We need studies that include policy design as causal factors that, if changed, could enable public policy to become a more democratic tool

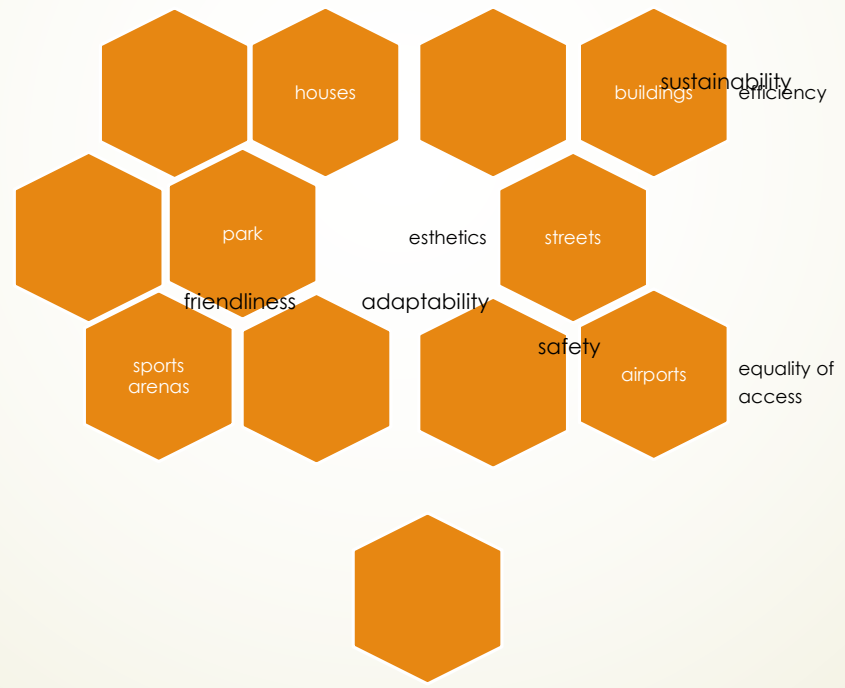



Conclusion

- ▶ Policy design Theory with its focus on
 - ▶ The content of public policies
 - ▶ The roles of social construction in policy making and implementation
 - ▶ The feed- forward effects of policies
 - ▶ The integration of empirical and normative goals

Is well positioned to move policy studies significantly forward.



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Accounting for, and Considering, the Impact of the Social Construction of Reality

- ▶ A key strength and contribution of policy design theory has been its **incorporation of social construction processes** into its model of the **policymaking process, policy design, and policy impacts**
 - ▶ Constructivist approaches to social inquiry, such as policy design theory, emphasize that **human agency means that constructions**
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- ▶ Policy designs need to
 - ▶ Be transparent rather than opaque,
 - ▶ Be straightforward rather than deceptive,
 - ▶ contain positive constructions of all social groups and points of view even of those who are “losing,”
 - ▶ Contain logical connections between means and ends, implementation processes that grant equal access to information and subsequent points of contestation, and arenas for discourse that engage multiple “ways of knowing” the issue.



Policy design theory, with its focus on the content of public policies, the roles of social construction in policymaking and implementation, the feed-forward effects of policies, and the integration of empirical and normative goals, **is well positioned to move policy studies significantly forward.**