Essay

The Role of Policy Analysis for Democratic Policy-Making

by Tadao Miyakawa

Contemporary society is characterized by a high degree of division of labor that has been brought about by an increase in population, the spread of urbanization, industrial development, and technological advances in transportation and communications. Due to the resultant deepening of mutual interdependence, contemporary society has come to be organized more and more based on the production, transmission, reception, and conversion of information, rather than those of material goods. This is because the coordination of various activities in such an interdependent society must depend on the intensive use of information. In addition, the sharing and conflicts of interest that emerge from such interdependence have been expanding the domain of public issues that need public policy intervention, such as issues concerning the environment, energy, cities, and transportation.

Since these policy issues are closely related to one another, it is often difficult to separate and deal with them individually, and they also tend to be very complicated. Policy issues in one field (energy, for example) usually have an effect on policy issues in other fields (environment). Therefore, if policy-making is conducted without taking such mutual relationships into account, unexpected new issues will almost certainly arise. If we take this line of thought too far, however, by considering that "everything depends on everything else," analysis of the problem would soon become intractable. Therefore, we must limit the size of the problem, the number of factors and relationships among them, thoughtfully. Thus, the problem tends to be an ill-defined one, the definition of which very much depends on the analyst.

Regarding policy issues, there are many stakeholders who have different interests and values from one another, and since many decision-makers are involved in the policy-making process, the objectives and values pursued are plural, and are often made

ambiguous to avoid apparent conflicts. Moreover, since policy-making usually involves long-term commitments, decision-makers are faced with many uncertainties. Policy analysis, regarding such complicated issues, is supposed to provide better information to improve the policy-making process, and eventually to contribute to democracy. The concept of "democratic policy science," proposed by Harold D. Lasswell, the modern founder of policy science, is based on such an ideal. However, there have been many criticisms that this ideal has not actually been realized.

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Policy analysis aims at rationality in politics or rational governance. However, this philosophy with an old history was, in essence, not necessarily democratic. Plato, probably the first proponent of this philosophy, considered those who conducted rational governance an elite group that monopolized expert knowledge and ability. The core of this belief has persisted from the age of Enlightenment in the 18th century Europe to the present day. Although the expert knowledge required has changed with the times, it has continually served the governing elite, and has formed a kind of "technocracy." This technocracy, however, is not completely in consonance with the democratic governance of the general public, and as such there has always been tension between the governing elite and the general public throughout history.

The tense relationship between rational governance and democracy is brought about by the fact that policy-making depends more and more on technocratic policy analysis and on bureaucratic organizations that have special expertise and relevant information, consequently the democratic deliberation by the general public can only play a minor role. Some critics have argued that policy analysis has made public policy-making the privilege of authoritarian experts, due to its sophisticated analytical methods, and has resulted in the reduced influence of ordinary citizens in the policy-making process. Frank Fischer, a political scientist at Rutgers University, has written extensively on the crisis of the technocratic politics of expertise.

A deep-rooted tendency toward technocracy also exists in the Japanese bureaucratic structure. This is closely related to the history of the system of learning and education in modern Japan, especially that of higher education, during the period from the Meiji Restoration (beginning in 1868) to World War II, in which the central objective set was the development of the governing elite. Regarding the difference in the origin of learning and education between Japan and many Western nations, a great Japanese educator and the founder of Keio University, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1834-1901) had the following to say:

> The difference is that after the Middle Ages, learning arose in the Western countries among the people in general, whereas in Japan it arose within the government. In the West, learning was the business of scholars, and government officials did not have their hands in it. It belonged only to the world of scholars. Learning in Japan, on the other hand, was the learning of the ruling class, so to speak. It was merely another department within the government.
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> *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (An Outline of a Theory of Civilization), p.177

As a result, Japan's universities under the old system of education—represented by Teikoku Daigaku (Imperial University) which

taught "learning for the world of governing elites"—fostered technocrats who were loyal to national leaders (the majority of whom were also legal technocrats). These young technocrats were groomed for careers to succeed the national leaders.

Graduates from this type of educational system have a "technocratic mentality," as characterized by Robert D. Putnam, Professor at Harvard University. That is to say, they "believe that 'technics' must replace politics," and that technocrats "define their own tasks in apolitical terms" and are "fundamentally unsympathetic to the openness and equality of political democracy." In addition, they are "strongly committed to technological progress and material productivity" and "less concerned about the distribution questions of social justice." The said technocratic mentality is still deeply rooted in the current Japanese bureaucratic system; a fact that frequently causes confrontations with citizens who demand participation in the political decision-making process as well as information disclosure in administration.

Under these circumstances, it is inevitable that policy analysis tends to become oriented toward technocracy. However, to meet the demands for a democratized policy-making process, and to cope with the growing criticism against this anti-democratic trend, the following measures could be suggested.

First is the development of participatory policy analysis (PPA). Until now, research projects on PPA have been conducted with a focus on the qualification and position of the participating citizens and on how and in which stages citizens can participate. Under the concept of PPA, citizens are expected to make significant contributions concerning the values, preferences, facts, policy alternatives, and other input factors of the policy-making process. An appropriate framework for PPA should be established to enable citizens to make such contributions. Another key issue is the establishment of actual measures to realize the interaction and cooperation between citizens and specialists.

Second, to promote PPA and the participation of citizens in general, the level of knowledge and abilities among citizens needs to be improved. Citizens should be able to better understand the structure of highly complicated policy problems. They should also be aware of how these problems may be analyzed, and should be familiar with the interpretations and evaluations of the results of such analyses. It is hoped that a large number of these "informed citizens" would come forth. Adult education programs conducted in universities and other educational institutions will play a significant role in improving the level of knowledge and ability of citizens overall.

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Third, information related to policy-making should be appropriately disclosed to citizens. Information disclosure may sometimes aggravate conflicts among the people. However, information disclosure for the sake of sound democratic discussions is an essential condition for effective citizen participation. Japan's traditional concept of governing, reflected in the saying "let the people rely on the government, but not let them have much knowledge about it." is symbolized by the paternalistic Japanese term *okami* (literally, "above"—an old popular term for "government or governing elite"). This concept, as it became integrated with bureaucratic technocracy, has made Japanese citizens excessively dependent on their government. However, corruption cases in politics and administration, which were revealed one after another in recent years, became a primary cause of the people's distrust in politics and government. This distrust is one of the most

important obstacles that hinder effective citizen participation.

Finally, public spirit should be nurtured not only among those in public office, such as politicians and government officials, but also among citizens in general. Modern political theories, including pluralism, basically assume the self-interests of people, and argue that the competition among self-interested groups produces good public policies by an "invisible hand" just as in the marketplace. However, an attempt to design a system capable of producing good public policies even when self-interested behavior is dominant, such as the fragmentation of power, will only contribute to making the people more self-interested. Moreover, it is incorrect to think that the people's public spirit is not trustworthy. Nor is it appropriate to deny that public spirit can play an important role in actual policy-making decisions. Human nature can essentially acquire public spirit, and good public policy needs to appeal to the public spirit inherent in the citizens.

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