

Public Policy – Practice and Critic

Stanislav Konečný

After publishing his monograph *Teória verejnej politiky* (The Theory of Public Policy, Košice: ŠafárikPress 2021), the author returned to the subject of his long-term interest from the opposite perspective. Looking at public policy from a practical perspective brings a more realistic understanding of what theory sometimes formulates only in abstract, general terms. This is why the title of this new monograph also carries a critical accent.

Just as public policy theory is a broader interpretative framework within modern public administration theory, this monograph presents not only the pure framework of public policy but also its overlaps with public administration practice. However, the author adheres to a structure that closely mirrors his previous theoretical monograph.

This is why the monograph begins with an excursion into history, emphasizing how politics became public policy. Without unnecessary references to theorists who, from antiquity through the medieval state and modern times to the present, have attempted to grasp the development of political thought, the author observes real practice, in which historically conditioned forms of what we now call the public sphere did not always successfully and linearly assert themselves in political decision-making. Without idealizing, he notes the extent to which the politics of ancient Athens was public, or how Roman *collegia* may have been the seeds of today's civil society. Still, especially how the administration of public affairs began to move further and further away from elements of co-decision-making, so that after more than a millennium, it was not allowed to return to them in the form of guild and city self-government, and finally, with the French Revolution, the return to the voice of the citizen began. The author perceives this process as irreversible and therefore critically evaluates attempts to re-enclose decision-making mechanisms within party structures.

In the second chapter, he shows how the public interest has become a political mantra and, again using practical examples, shows how the public interest actually arises from individual interests, how it is first legitimized at the level of group interests, and how it ultimately gains its final legitimacy through confirmation by the public – such as that which legitimized the end of politics administered by political (party) elites in November 1989.

The author devotes the third chapter to the wide range of actors who today co-create public policy practice. He emphasizes the importance of civic associations, trade unions, professional and academic self-government, and other legitimate representatives, initiators, and bearers of public interests, even though some political actors are reluctant to accept this reality in practice.

The fourth chapter then highlights several problems these actors encounter when implementing public policy – and how the tools intended to serve the public interest are sometimes distorted and abused.

Quite naturally, the monograph thus leads to one of its most critical parts, when the fifth and final chapter addresses the issue of corruption as an area in which public policy, or what passes for it, fails. Unlike a theoretical monograph, we do not find scientific classifications and theoretical considerations on the fight against corruption here. Instead, we encounter a harsh confrontation with proven facts, as well as a clear statement that corruption cannot be eliminated by addressing its consequences; instead, its causes must be tackled head-on. The author sees these causes primarily in the lack of respect for the public nature of politics, but also in the ossification and lack of reform in our public administration system.

The monograph was recommended not only by renowned experts as reviewers, but also by its highly qualified scientific editor. Finally, the comprehensive bibliography, which also provides an overview of the author's numerous publications on the subject, testifies to the high quality of this small monograph.

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