

Research to policy

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Keynes on power of vested interests v ideas

- “... the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the natural encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But soon or late, it is ideas not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.”

CANADIAN COGITATIONS

Canada is a well-governed, well-endowed country, yet . . .

- Telecommunications Policy Review Panel (TPRP) was a three-person committee mandated by Canadian Minister of Industry in 2005 to review Canada's telecommunications framework
- Included in the TPRP's final report was the observation that, in Canada, a "relative paucity of academic work on what has been referred to as the 'regulatory craft'" has led to "heavy reliance on foreign (mostly U.S.-based) experts on economic, technical and even social regulation".

And the recommendation . . .

- It is time, the report suggested, for “more and better policy research and analysis ... to keep Canadian telecommunications and ICT policy and regulation at the forefront of ICT developments”
- So should there be a CPRsouth in Canada too?

Demand-side or supply-side problem?

- “Only a handful of submissions to the panel relied on research undertaken by Canadians. Not many submissions to the panel were made by researchers as stand-alone participants.”
 - 2 of 109 submissions to TPRP’s first round of submissions, and 2 of 89 submissions to the TPRP’s second round, for a total of 3 of 198, were from “educational institutions”. Adding to these the individual submissions of 4 academics in the first round, and 2 in the second round, suggests that academics were responsible for 4.5 percent of submissions to the study panel.

What communication policy researchers in Canada are interested in studying

- Relative merits of Canadian content
- Universal access to communication networks and technologies
- The CBC's public broadcasting mandate
- Future, development & protection of Canadian screen, music, and other cultural (or "creative") industries.
- Social movements around communication issues
- Intellectual property, especially copyright

Demand is said to be for research on . .

- Network neutrality
- Copyright issues
- Access programs

- No research on
 - Co-regulation/self-regulation & accountability

Did supply match demand?

- Evidence that most people who study communication issues in Canada
 - Are actually in a field called cultural studies that seeks to engage in an “epic struggle for consciousness” rather than “tinkering with practical arrangements”
 - Or, on the critical side of the critical/administrative divide → by definition not likely to engage with policy
 - Include few/no economists and engineers
 - Make little or no use of quantitative methods, or marshal evidence in a systematic way

Should there be compulsions on the demanders?

- Challenging the “marketplace of ideas” assumption that those with something useful to say will muster the needed time and resources suggestion that there be a legal requirement for government agencies to conduct literature searches, in addition to the current power to order operators to pay costs of certain intervenors
 - Runs counter to the fact that supply of policy-relevant research in Canada does not seem to match demand

Another suggestion, a good one this time

- Raw data needed for policy-relevant research is difficult to get
 - Under the control of policy/regulatory agencies or of operators
- Law should make it obligatory that raw data in usable form be made public
 - Unlike in the old days of paper, all that is required is making available on the web

AMERICAN ANALYSIS

Modes by which research & ideas enter the policy process

- Research emanating from academia, think tanks, associations, industry research laboratories, public interest groups, and independent writers
- Background studies commissioned by government or other stakeholders (e.g., the 12 studies commissioned by FCC in the context of media ownership proceeding)
- Research conducted under consulting arrangements introduced during specific proceedings by specific stakeholders
- Expert testimony in regulatory and court proceedings
- Lobbying activities
- Public relations activities (e.g., op eds, TV commentary)
- Media coverage

Ideas in policy process

Stages of policy process

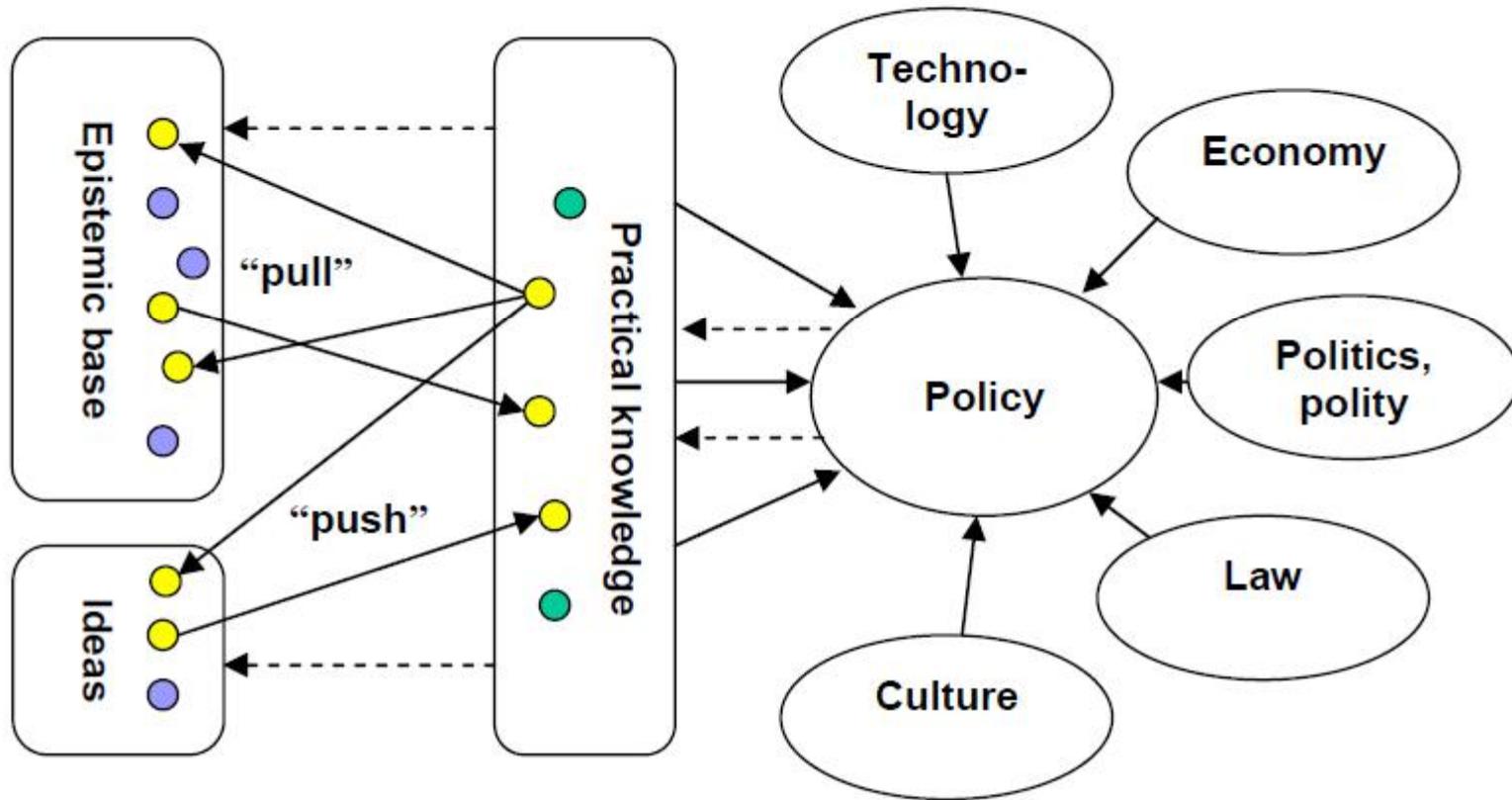
- Agenda setting
- Policy formulation
- Policy adoption
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation
- Policy modification (or policy termination)

Role of ideas

- Research and ideas play a role at all these stages
- General frames are more important in earlier stages and at mid-level
- Operational ideas are relatively more important at later stages

Figure 1

Stylized relations between knowledge, ideas and policy



Inspired by Mokyr (2002).

EUROPEAN ANGST

Purpose of EuroCPR

- Match the telecommunication policy research effort in the US by developing a European research capability, in part to avoid simply importing US regulatory models and their accompanying politico-cultural ideological assumptions.
- Also to bring that capability into a dialogue with policy makers with the objective of ensuring a more rational policy-making process with policy based upon the best available evidence and dispassionate analysis, rather than the crude interplay of economic and political interests.

Garnham's lament

- Was not achieved
- Silly to have thought they could be achieved
- Academics have vested interests too, etc., etc.

MELODY'S MESSAGE

Imperfect markets; imperfect policy

- With limited knowledge, bounded rationality, and a significant degree of uncertainty, contested markets are the best place to decide issues of resource allocation and economic efficiency. The overriding objective of policy here is to maintain a structure and process for the functioning of markets, not to determine or predict the results. The best results are unpredictable and likely to come from open, contested markets. They are characterised by contradictions and to outside observers apparent confusion.

Muddling through

Imperfect policy research can inform imperfect policy development to shape imperfect markets to align more closely to public interest goals [**what are they?**]. The imperfections in markets can only be mitigated by effective policy and regulation [**as judged by whom and how?**]. The imperfections in policy and regulation can only be mitigated [**how much is enough?**] by better information and knowledge generated from research. This is the continuing formidable challenge to the research community in the years ahead [**how do we know whether met?**].