Collaborate to innovate

Who to invite to policy design processes to come up with new policy strategies?

Carla Cordoncillo and Mireia Borrell

Introduction

In a context where societal problems are characterized by being "wicked" (Geyer & Rihani, 2010; Wagenaar, 2007) and governments' power is increasingly fragmented and distributed (Rhodes, 2007), policy innovation has become an imperative. Policymakers need to come up with new policy strategies that better deal with complexity. Additionally, citizens are not only demanding to have more voice in decision-making processes but also have risen their expectations of governments' actions (Bentzen et al., 2020). As a consequence, even if systematically exploring new directions for better policies and services is not something public administrations usually spend their time on (Bason, 2018), public managers are forced to renew their approaches and tools (Bason, 2017; Bourgon, 2011; Head, 2022).

How must they do it is, however, less clear. Techno-bureaucratic and New Public Management reforms have proven useless to answer to complexity (Fung & Wright, 2003; Torfing, 2016). The defenders of a paradigm shift in public management to new forms of networked and collaborative governance (Ansell & Torfing, 2014; Bingham et al., 2005; Emerson et al., 2012; Hartley, 2005; Osborne, 2006; Paquet, 2009) state that dealing with wicked problems requires multi-actor collaboration. In fact, multi-actor collaboration is said to stimulate public innovation (Torfing, 2016).

Nevertheless, literature on collaborative governance has hardly empirically explored the relation between governance networks and changes in policy strategies. Most of relevant empirical contributions studying the link between networks and policy change have been conducted by researchers focusing on policy dynamics. In particular, Howlett (2002) made a significant contribution when he concluded that those sectors with more membership change and growth, and thus less insulated and symmetric networks were more open to policy change.

This means that public managers can direct network management towards specific outcomes. Indeed, they have the capacity to influence who gets involved in policy

design processes. Hence, who should they invite to the table to come up with new policy strategies, better suited to deal with complexity?

This article discusses the manner in which network composition relates to changes in policy strategies. More specifically, we analyze to what extent the type of actors involved in policy design processes are linked to propensity for specific types of policy change. Based on the existing theoretical and empirical evidence, several hypotheses are formulated and tested against evidence from 500 policy design processes promoted by the Barcelona City Council. We use regression analysis to complement existing descriptive, qualitative and comparative evidence, and to identify who should be invited to the policy design table to foster policy innovation. With our research we expect to be able to make specific recommendations to policymakers willing to find new and better solutions to societal problems.

The link between governance networks and policy change

Since Rittel and Webber (1973) argued that technocratic approaches were no longer adequate to tackle some issues of social policy, a lot of attention has been paid to characterizing societal problems and understanding this new and complex context. The proliferation of theoretical and empirical studies about "wicked problems" evidences a general concern about complexity, as well as a need for new approaches to policymaking.

Linear and standardized procedures are no longer useful to answer to most societal challenges (Head, 2022). The cross-cutting character of wicked problems directly challenges the simplistic sectorial approach that has characterized public sector bureaucracy (B. Crosby et al., 2016). Wicked problems cannot be broken down into component parts; they demand to be analyzed holistically and they require cross-sectoral solutions (Agranoff, Robert, 2003; Weber & Khademian, 2008), since in complex systems, the whole exhibits properties that cannot be explained by understanding its parts separately (Kauffman, 1995 cited in Wagenaar, 2007). Therefore, public managers are forced to renew their approaches and tools (Bason, 2017; Bourgon, 2011; Head, 2022). Both techno-bureaucratic and New Public Management reforms failed to convert organizational and procedural innovations into policy innovation (Fung & Wright, 2003; Torfing, 2016). And that's precisely why public policy literature has been concerned by what has been called "policy failure" (Bovens & Hart, 1996; Brugué et al., 2018; Mcconnell, 2015).

In this attempt to renew policymakers' strategies and tools, many authors have pointed out that dealing with complexity requires collaboration: system diversity and system interaction (Fischer, 1993; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Wagenaar, 2007). Since today's problems cannot be solved through the isolated efforts of a single

authority (Bason, 2018), multi-actor collaboration appears as a "key tool for creating innovative solutions that can break policy deadlocks and improve public organizations and services" (Torfing, 2016:12). In fact, that need for collaborative structures is on the base of the last paradigm shift in public management, from traditional public administration and New Public Management to what has been called networked governance (Hartley, 2005), collaborative governance (Ansell & Torfing, 2014; Emerson et al., 2012; Paquet, 2009), or new public governance (Bingham et al., 2005; Osborne, 2006).

Contemporary policymaking increasingly relies on pluricentric negotiations among relevant stakeholders and surpasses formal organisational boundaries (Jones et al., 1997; Shearer et al., 2016; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009). According to Bason (2018:109), "the actual policy or service design must inevitably be the result of multiple departments, agencies and other actors working closely together in new ways, achieving their results through others, not only on their own". Therefore, governance networks provide a collaborative alternative to command-driven public hierarchies (Torfing, 2016).

Nevertheless, the relation between governance networks and policy change has hardly been empirically explored. Even less the link between governance networks and changes in policy strategies. Despite claiming a big potential to influence policy dynamics, governance network literature has remained mostly theoretical and descriptive, focusing on the factors explaining their proliferation and trying to identify the key participants, as well as their roles, interactions and power struggles (Torfing, 2016). The latest empirical analyses explore the causal link between specific network features (leadership, management, internal dynamics) and governance performance. Thus, they tend to focus on the capacities that governments must develop to successfully implement collaborative approaches to innovation (Bommert, 2010; Brown & Osborne, 2005; Daglio et al., 2014; Eggers & Singh, 2009; OECD, 2017; Sørensen & Torfing, 2016; Torfing, 2016), but when does innovation mean policy change is not clear at all.

Therefore, to understand the relation between networks and the potential for policy change we must resort to more traditional literature on policy dynamics and the concept of policy networks. In fact, the concepts of governance networks and policy networks are frequently used interchangeably since their definitions clearly overlap. While Sandström and Carlsson (2008:498) define policy networks as "organized entities that consist of actors and their relations engaged in processes of collective action for joint problem solving", Klijn and Skelcher (2007: 3) use the term governance network "to describe policy making and implementation through a web of relationships between government, business and civil society actors". Therefore, the difference is not substantial, but a matter of perspective. However, according to Blanco et al. (2011), governance network literature tends to focus on

general past-present comparisons (comparing the new horizontal, collaborative and adaptative forms of governance with traditional hierarchical or neo-liberal forms of governance), while policy network literature aims to explain variations between networks based on its characteristics and is more concerned about the impact of networks on policy outcomes. And policy change is probably the most studied policy outcome.

Networks in the policy change literature

Policy change is one of the most studied fields in political sciences. According to Capano "all aspects of policy change have been dealt with" (2009:7): its definition, its motors, the different types of change and its explanatory factors, all of it considering all the possible independent variables. Generally, networks have been considered explanatory variables of policy change (Capano, 2009). However, during the 90's a debate emerged around the potential of networks to affect policy process and outcomes. Some critics argued that policy network theory was useful for descriptive purposes but not for explaining policy change (Dowding, 1995, 2001; Howlett, 2002; Kassim, 1994; Pappi & Henning, 1998).

Howlett (2002) made a significant contribution to the debate when he analyzed how different subsystem configurations relate to particular processes of policy change. After proposing and testing an operational model of policy change, he concluded that "the presence of a specific kind of network in a given policy sector reveals a great deal about the propensity for it to experience intra o inter paradigmatic types of policy change" (2002:260). A contribution with which he was proving that "networks matter".

Linking network composition to changes in policy strategies

From his analysis Howlett (2002) pointed out that the fact that network structure affects policy outcomes in a relatively predictable way implies that governments could direct network management towards specific outcomes. Along similar lines, Agranoff (2007) emphasizes the value of network management to enable governments and policymakers to find solutions to complex problems. After all, looking for new and better solutions to societal problems "calls not for less management, but for a different kind of management and governance" (Bason, 2017:55, citing Ansell and Torfin, 2014). Since governance networks emerge alongside and even within traditional bureaucratic forms of governance (Torfing, 2016), policymakers still have the capacity to influence those network structures and to encourage the creation of collaborative arenas that facilitate problem-reframing and problem-solving (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Ansell & Torfing, 2014). More specifically,

they continue to manage policy design processes, or at least to be able to influence who is part of it. According to Bason (2010:33), "the overall challenge to public leaders is to give up some of their power and control by involving people (…) to achieve the desired outcomes". Hence, assuming they are willing to share they power, **who should they invite to the table to foster policy change? Who should they encourage to be part of policy design processes to come up with new policy strategies, better suited to deal with complexity?**

The literature is clear when pointing out that answering to wicked problems requires inter-sectorial approaches. New Public Management reforms favored expertness, managerial efficacy, and allocative efficiency and resulted in a technocratic style of policymaking, in which expert public managers control entire societal sectors (Wagenaar, 2007). However, today, policy design demands to take into consideration a far wider array of contingencies and interrelated factors that oblige decision-makers and public managers to act unitedly, rather than from traditionally bureaucratic silos (Doz & Koskonen, 2014). An integral understanding of problems requires a kaleidoscopic vision (Kanter, 1988).

Hence, if this bureaucratic culture of hyper-specialization has repeatedly been identified as one of the main barriers to public sector innovation (Bason, 2018; Eggers & O'Leary, 2009; Eggers & Singh, 2009), its opposite, cross-cutting collaboration, might be considered a driver. And that is why we propose to explore the link between public cross-sectoral networks and changes on policy strategies. Indeed, we hypothesize that:

> **H1**: *changes in policy strategies are more likely to result from cross-sectoral networks than sectoral ones.*

Still and so, many authors claim that public sector innovation requires collaborative interaction between different public and private actors (Bommert, 2010; Borins, 2001; Eggers & Singh, 2009; Nambisan, 2008). Indeed, that is pretty coherent with Howlett's (2002) findings that paradigmatic policy changes require new ideas and interests to penetrate policy subsystems. Thus, it is debatable to what extent new ideas and interests can emerge from policymakers. That is why we hypothesize that:

> **H2**: *changes in policy strategies are more likely to result from design processes involving non-state actors.*

In fact, literature on co-creation -"roughly defined as a joint effort of citizens and public sector professionals in the initiation, planning, design and implementation of public services" (Brandsen et al., 2018:3)- presents public-citizens collaboration as a tool with the potential to generate new policy solutions to complex societal problems (Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Bentzen et al., 2020; B. Crosby et al., 2016; B. C. Crosby & Bryson, 2010; Torfing et al., 2021). Nevertheless, despite being insistently

claimed, co-creation's innovative potential has poorly been empirically proven yet. As used to happen with co-production literature 10 years ago (Verschuere et al., 2012), much of the research on the capacity of co-creation to foster public sector innovation remains primarily theoretical and descriptive. Existing empirical evidence sustaining a positive relation between co-creation and policy innovation is mostly sustained on single case studies (Brandsen et al., 2018; Nabatchi et al., 2017). Hence, we aim to contribute to filling this gap by exploring its potential for policy change.

> *H3: changes in policy strategies are more likely to result from design processes involving citizens.*

However, should we expect more than changes in policy strategies from involving citizens in the policy design process? Following co-creation defenders, the main reason to involve citizens in the policy process is that they are experts in their own lives (Bason, 2018). As experts, we would expect them to bring new ideas to the design process, which, following Howlett's (2002) conclusions and, as Bentzen et al. (2020) already stated, should lead to more radical forms of policy change. That is, to changes in policy goals, which in that case will be operationalized as a complete reframing of the problem. Thus, our hypothesis is that:

> *H4: paradigmatic change is more likely to happen when citizens are involved in the design process.*

With our research we expect to better understand how policymakers can spur the emergence of new policy strategies, by encouraging specific actors to participate in policy design processes. We analyze the type of actors involved in more than 500 design processes, as well as the type of policy strategies and instruments resulting from them, to identify links between network composition and policy change.

Data and methods

To empirically test our hypothesis and understand the effect of networks composition' on policy change, we use the program *Pla de Barris* as a case study. Promoted by the Barcelona City Council, the *Pla de Barris* program represents a unique experience of collaborative governance. Even if Barcelona has a consolidated participatory tradition (Parés et al., 2015), public-public collaboration and public-private collaboration had never been so directly fostered for problem-solving and policymaking before. *Pla de Barris* is an extraordinary policy against urban segregation endowed with a 150 million euros budget to spend in 4 years (2016-2020)

in the 16 poorest neighbourhoods of Barcelona (grouped in 10 Areas[1]). Compared to other Catalan, Spanish, and even European policies against urban segregation, a municipal investment of 150 million euros can really be considered extraordinary[2]. However, what is meaningful for the purposes of this research is that policy actions were designed across several networks involving the relevant public and social agents in each Area: the municipality, other public administrations, community-based organizations, non-profits, citizens, and even private companies and universities in some cases. In sum, 713 policy actions were designed and most of them were successfully implemented.

Furthermore, we can affirm that *Pla de Barris* was developed in a context that favoured innovation for several reasons. On the one hand, the program was a major political bet of a very progressive City Council that fostered a climate receptive to change, which is crucial for innovation (Bason, 2018; Eggers & Singh, 2009; OECD, 2017). On the other hand, there was a team in charge of the metagovernance of the Plan, which according to Torfing (2016) is a key element to meet the innovative potential of governance networks. In fact, the analysis is based on the monitoring data collected by that team of project managers over the 4 years of implementation.

Operationalizing governance networks: who gets involved?

[Pending]

Operationalizing policy change

[Pending]

Method

[Pending]

Results

[Preliminary results will be presented during the Congress]

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[1] The program *Pla de Barris* is implemented in 10 areas of Barcelona that cover 16 different neighbourhoods. Some areas cover just 1 neighbourhood, others cover 2 neighbourhoods and just one of them (Zona Nord) covers 3 neighbourhoods.
[2] The URBAN Program, driven by the European Union, invested 112M€ in the hole Spain between 2000 and 2006 (European Commission, 2011).