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Policy analysis in Ireland

John Hogan & Mary P. Murphy (Eds) (Bristol: Policy Press; 2021; ISBN: 978-1-447350-89-7; 296 pp; £90)

Policy Analysis in Ireland is a collection of essays edited by John Hogan, Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer in the School of Business at Technological University Dublin, and Mary P. Murphy, Professor of Irish Politics and Society in Maynooth University. The essays contribute to a comprehensive study of policy analysis in Ireland, with chapters focusing on the history of policy analysis, policy analysis from local to EU level, the role of think tanks and interest groups, and finally how the public, science and the media contribute to the wider policy analysis environment in Ireland. In doing so, *Policy Analysis in Ireland* aims to accurately describe and critique all facets of policy analysis in Ireland, both past and present. The book forms part of the International Library of Policy Analysis series published by Bristol University Press. Now encompassing sixteen countries, the aim of the series is to bring together a detailed examination of the theory and practice of policy analysis systems at different levels of government and by non-governmental actors.

Part One of *Policy Analysis in Ireland* focuses on the history, styles and methods of policy analysis in an Irish context. Essays within this section describe the evolution of policy analysis in Ireland from a variety of perspectives. Clare O'Mahony's essay focuses on the evolution of economic policy analysis in Ireland, elucidating Ireland's journey from a protectionist, inward-looking country to a state favouring foreign direct investment, and how economists' analytical skills developed over time as a result. Fiona Dukelow then examines the evolution of social policy analysis in Ireland, looking at the actors and institutions involved in Ireland's move towards modernity. In addition to this, Frances Ruane explores the introduction of evidence

into policymaking in Ireland in Chapter Five. This piece highlights the value of empirical analysis being used in policymaking and describes several factors as to why evidence has become increasingly relevant in policy analysis. Ruane goes on to illustrate the move away from a generalist model in the Irish civil service towards a more skills-based model after the financial crash in 2008, highlighting the establishment of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) as an important step in this process. Ruane discusses the growing importance of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and its role in collating data for policy analysis. Ruane finishes the chapter by remarking on the future of statistics and data for policy analysis in Ireland, expressing concern at the significant data gaps in areas such as the health sector and calling for the CSO to maintain high governance standards in order to maintain public trust in data. A further essay by Muiris MacCarthaigh examining the development of the state's capacity for policy analysis brings Part One of the book to a close.

Part Two focuses on policy analysis at various levels of government: from local to the EU. It begins with Aodh Quinlivan's essay, which takes a comprehensive look at how local government, and the capacity for policy analysis within local government, has developed since the Local Government Act of 1898. Quinlivan then charts how a decidedly centralised approach to government was reinforced over the years from independence until 1999, when a referendum enshrined the role of local government in defining local priorities and providing local services. The essay then describes the effects of the recession on local authorities' staff numbers and ability to provide services, which provides important context for the evolving functions of local government in Ireland, particularly in light of the 2014 Local Government Reform Act. This Act saw a reduction in the number of local authorities from 114 to 31, a complete abolition of town councils and a reduction in the number of councillors from 1,627 to 949, leaving Ireland with a low level of local government autonomy, with Moldova being the only European nation more centralised than Ireland. In analysing the current capacity of local government for policy analysis, Quinlivan highlights the aforementioned 'unique blend', in which Irish local authorities are simultaneously hamstrung by a lack of finance and centralisation of power yet also engaging in innovative methods of policy development like the public participation networks. Part Two is rounded off by a chapter from Richard Boyle and Joanna O'Riordan examining the development of policy analysis in the civil service, which

discovers that a balance between generalists and specialists continues to be pertinent for policy analysis developments in the Irish civil service. Mary C. Murphy then reviews how the EU has influenced the policymaking process and policy analyses in Ireland in Chapter Nine, allowing Part Two to convey an accurate account of the breadth of policy analysis occurring in Ireland at all levels.

Part Three concentrates on the varying roles that think tanks, interest groups, political parties and gender-based policy analysis play in political analysis. This section of the book begins with Rory O'Donnell examining policy analysis in the institutional arrangements taken by the state to involve social partners, with a particular emphasis on the role of the National Economic and Social Council in the policy process.

After further chapters on the role of think tanks and civil society groups in policymaking and analysis, Chapter Thirteen examines the role of Irish political parties in the policy process. The essay, by Maura Adshead and Diarmuid Scully, begins by exploring the impact of Ireland's unique Proportional Representation with a Single Transferable Vote electoral system on agenda setting, highlighting how it can lead to highly personalised and localised electoral competition within a system that prioritises consensus politics. The internal policy process of Irish political parties is then examined, with the varying policy influences within each party being clearly described along with how the characteristics of the Irish system leads to it being the only EU nation that elects independents in any large numbers. Regarding how political parties influence policy formation, it is again highlighted that the consensus model of politics and need to secure votes beyond the first preference can lead to generally not moving outside what is seen as the middle ground, something exacerbated by the historical tendency towards coalition governments in Ireland. The Dáil reforms of 2016, which were recommended by the Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform and subsequently passed by the government of the time, then feature heavily in describing the current state of policy adoption and evaluation in Ireland, with the introduction of more Dáil committees allowing for more effective interrogation of proposed policy. Ultimately, the chapter concludes that while there are new developments in the Irish political system, the policy process amongst political parties remains much the same as before.

Part Four inspects the wider policy analysis environment in Ireland, focusing on the public, science and the media. It begins with Chapter

Fifteen, written by Clodagh Harris, which examines methods of public consultation and participation in Ireland, using the Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change as an example. It begins by introducing Ireland as a world leader in deliberative democracy that, at a time of 'rising democratic malaise' (p. 219), has introduced methods to place citizens at the heart of the deliberative process, albeit only on a select few policy areas, with the introduction of the Constitutional Convention and later with the Citizens' Assemblies. The establishment of the Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change is described as an example of climate change policy development and innovation, but it is also noted that Ireland is still considered a climate laggard. The process and outputs of the Citizens' Assembly are then explained, whereby thirteen recommendations were made and forwarded on to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, which ultimately led to a report being published that was described as heavily influencing the government's *Climate Action Plan* of 2019. The chapter then examines the potential of Citizens' Assemblies as a method of policy analysis, noting that there were concerns over the under-representation of farmers and certain socio-economic groups, and that the assemblies' lack of influence on policy could hamper progress. However, Harris concludes that Ireland has bucked the general trend of Citizens' Assemblies failing to achieve impact in terms of contributing to wider public discourse, effecting change and reforming political processes, noting that the impact of the Citizens' Assemblies on climate policy in Ireland is strong with many influences. Harris concludes by putting forward Citizens' Assemblies as an effective tool to engage citizens in policy analysis in a useful, engaging and transparent manner. Part Four is rounded off by an essay using Irish national science policy as a case study, and then finally a piece by Brendan K. O'Rourke on media discourses on the economy in Ireland, which highlights the importance of the discursive power of economists in policy discourse in Ireland.

In conclusion, *Policy Analysis in Ireland* admirably achieves its aim of accurately describing and critiquing all facets of policy analysis in Ireland, both past and present. In utilising the knowledge of several eminent figures within the policy analysis community, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the path that policy analysis has taken in Ireland, whilst also allowing a focus on specific examples and case studies in order to highlight the complexities of the Irish policy environment. Whilst more research is undoubtedly needed on policy analysis in certain policy areas in Ireland, this book encompasses a

large range of issues that are critical to understanding contemporary policy analysis in Ireland, and is an important contribution to a more effective and in-depth understanding of policy analysis, both past and present, in Ireland.

Toby Finch