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# **Towards a New Professional Focus for Political Science and Public Administration in Arab Universities: A Theoretical Study**

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**Abstract:** The objective of this paper is to show how policy analysis as a new field in social sciences can help to rescue the fields of political science and public administration in Arab universities from their ongoing crisis. The crisis is embodied in the absence of a professional focus in the two fields. To achieve that objective the paper is divided into main sections discussing the present status of political science and public administration in the Arab world, the development of policy perspective in social sciences, the development of policy analysis as a profession in government, and the reason for the underdeveloped status of policy analysis in Arab universities, and concludes by proposing a multidisciplinary curriculum focusing on government policy to transform the departments of political science and public administration in Arab universities and realize the goal of professionalism.

**Keywords:** Political science, Public administration, Public policy, Policy analysis, Professionalism

## **Introduction: Objective and Methodology**

The objective of this paper is to use a descriptive, analytical and qualitative methodology to discuss the nature of the new discipline of policy analysis. It also attempts to briefly outline how political science and public administration in Arab universities can be refocused using policy analysis to serve the practical processes of policy making and policy implementation, and consequently facilitate the professionalism of

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both disciplines. To approach this objective, the paper attempts to analyze and explain briefly the underdeveloped status of public policy analysis both as an academic discipline in Arab universities and as professional practice in government settings.

To achieve these objectives, the paper is divided into main sections discussing the present status of political science and public administration in the Arab World, the development of the policy perspective in social sciences, the development of policy analysis as a profession in government, the reasons for the underdeveloped status of policy analysis in Arab universities, and conclude by proposing a multidisciplinary curricula to transform the departments of political science and public administration in Arab universities in order to achieve professionalism of both disciplines.

### **An Overview of Policy Analysis as a Multidisciplinary Field**

Public policy is a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address socio-political or technical problems. It is usually, but not exclusively, expressed in the body of laws, regulations, decisions and actions of governments. According to William Jenkins (1978: 1), a public policy is “a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve”. Thus, a public policy represents a process that consists of several decisions and is not embodied in a single decision or an isolated choice of a single policy maker.

Policy analysis is a relatively new field that involves the application of social science tools to problems of policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The study of public policy is deeply rooted in the study of politics. While the academic study of politics has a long history, the scientific study of public policy is in fact a twentieth century phenomenon. Although most scholars of policy analysis trace its roots back to Lasswell’s call for the development of a distinctive policy science, its history dates back earlier to political scientist Charles Merriam who sought in 1922 to connect the theory and practice of politics to understand the actual activities of government (Birkland, 2005).

The study of public policy concentrates on the activities of government as embodied in laws, goals, and rules that determine what

governments do or do not do to create resources, benefits, costs and burdens on individual citizens and groups. In investigating public policies, we rely on a broad base of social sciences. This is because since social problems are the subject matter of government actions and policies, these problems do not come in specialized packages that conform to the departmental boundaries of social sciences. Professor William Dunn (2004: 3) has this to say about this state of affairs:

Knowledge from multiple disciplines and professions is usually more effective in responding to real world problems than is knowledge from single disciplines and professions. Real world problems come in complex bundles that are political, social, economic, administrative, legal, ethical and more. They do not arrive in separate packages addressed to political scientists, economists, or public administrators - to name but three of the policy relevant disciplines and professions. So far, multi-disciplinary policy analysis appears to provide the best fit with the complex and many faceted world of policy making.

Therefore, the science of policy has developed gradually since the 1960s as an interdisciplinary field and an approach in political science, economics and public administration departments in many western universities and transformed their curricula, especially in universities with Anglo-Saxon traditions, to facilitate the professionalism of these disciplines.

The development of policy analysis has been a reaction to the practical needs of the government of post-war capitalist countries. It involves a series of intellectual activities that are part of a social process usually described as “the policy making process”. This consists of many stages that include: agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, and policy evaluation. Depending on the approach used by analysts, policy analysis produces information relevant to one, several or all phases of policy making (Dunn, 2004).

These intellectual developments have considerable impact on all social sciences, including political science, public administration, sociology, psychology, economics and business administration. These fields incorporate in their curricula courses that depart substantially from their traditional concerns to include a concern for studying one or other of the public policy-making processes.

This new development is accompanied, in many instances, by the introduction to the ranks of most western governments of a new professional job called “policy analyst”. Most big private corporations and NGOs appoint specialists in policy analysis to conduct research on the impact of government policy on their activities. The importance of the new field of policy analysis is also evident in the proliferation of consultancy firms and think-tanks involved in the production of analyses that are designed to help in policy making at different levels of government.

Many Arab countries, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, employ the services of many of these foreign firms to help in policy design and evaluation in different areas of public policy, for example the Qatari government has invited the RAND Corporation to help in planning public policies in different spheres of government activities.

These paradigmatic shifts in social science disciplines in the USA, Britain and other western countries has minimal impact on the curricula of political science and public administration, not to mention other social sciences, in Arab universities, which continue to do their business as usual or at best incorporate a single course on public policy to their old curricula.

### **The Status of Political Science and Public Administration in the Arab World**

The objective of this section is to review in general terms the basic problems of political science and public administration that are related to the theme of this paper.

#### **1 - Political Science: the Lack of a Professional Focus**

Political science is defined in this paper to include both fields of public administration and international affairs. The typical look at political science as an academic discipline in the popular and official mind in the Arab World is that it is a “theoretical” discipline that does not qualify its graduate to occupy or perform a certain professional or practical job. It is usually equated in the layman’s mind with “ideology” and “political thought”. This is why political science is a “no-man’s land”, since if everybody can be a political philosopher, then everybody

is a political scientist. The ubiquitous interviews conducted in the Arab media with people having the title “political analyst”, and the proliferation of newspapers articles analyzing one policy or criticizing another, attest to that fact. This popular view of political science as an academic discipline is, more or less, an outcome of the discipline’s lack of professionalism. Professionalism in this context is defined as the use of certain packages of scientific knowledge and tools to address certain types of problems. It is usually based on a certain academic field or a collection of related fields.

It is true that graduates of political science departments may occupy posts in governments and NGOs or even the private sector, as civil servants and administrators, but with small likelihoods that they will apply their political knowledge and its tools to the jobs they are performing. Even those who occupy jobs with clear political content, like foreign affairs, may find the political knowledge and theories they have acquired from their undergraduate or post-graduate studies inapplicable or inadequate in practical situations; or perhaps they do not know how to apply them because they do not possess the necessary “know-how” for applying them. This is a very common complaint usually voiced by students in classes and after graduation.

This alienation and separation between theoretical knowledge and practice explains the declining demand for political science departments in Arab universities. This fact is clear from the declining rates of students’ enrolments in departments of political science in many Arab universities and even the abolition or relegation of some of these departments in others. In all the Egyptian universities, there is only one independent department of political science. In Arab Gulf universities, the department is either non-existent, e.g. in the Sultanate of Oman and most Saudi Arabian universities, or is relegated to an inferior status in history departments, e.g. in Qatar University. The program of political science does not have an independent status in all of the Gulf area except in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait universities.

However, in all shapes and statuses, the program’s attractiveness to students is very low. In a study conducted on a sample of political science graduates from selected Egyptian universities, the researcher noticed that a number of finalists and graduates had expressed their sorrow in choosing to study political science (علي الصاوي، ١٩٩٤). Very few

students graduate from secondary education with political science in their fresh minds as a first option in their university education. In most cases, those who have actually enrolled in the field find out that their existence in departments of political science is dictated by their poor achievements in their higher secondary school certificates. The private sector universities which have proliferated in many Arab countries, and which are very sensitive to factors of supply and demand, never risk the introduction of a “political science program” to their academic offerings.

Unlike the student of medicine, accounting, law, business, or even economics, the graduate of political science is not armed with a professional toolbox readily applicable to a certain professional occupation or government activity. This is said not to deny the fact that in a variety of capacities, people educated and trained in political science can add value and expertise to public and private corporations, but in most cases not in their capacities as political scientists per se.

This state of affairs may be explained by the fact that political science as a social science in the Arab World, concerned primarily with the study of the theory and practice of politics and the description and analysis of political systems and political behavior, has distanced itself from the nuts and bolts of government activities and policies in different fields. Notwithstanding the fact that political scientists study the allocation and transfer of power in decision-making, the roles and systems of governance including governments and international organizations, political behavior and public policies, their contribution to the “technical” aspects of policy design, implementation and evaluation in Arab governments is minimal and, at best, indirect.

Traditionally the study of politics in Arab Universities often provides the intellectual frameworks within which political scientists and other commentators contribute to journalistic and political debates, work as activists in special interest groups, serve as political advisors, and sometimes, in cases of democratic systems, provide the electorate with general knowledge to analyze issues of public policy and select policy options. This is an undeniably important role, but it is not sufficient. Arab political scientists may serve as advisors to specific politicians, or even run for office as politicians themselves, without possessing the necessary tools to shape government programs and evaluate the outcome of public policies in a professional manner.

Although few Arab political scientists may be concerned directly with measuring the success of governance and specific policies by examining many factors, including stability, justice, material wealth, and peace, their technical expertise is seldom called upon to evaluate in a scientific, professional manner the outcomes and outputs of these policies. This job is now undertaken by other social scientists, such as economists and sociologists, in disintegrated and partial ways that do not take into consideration the different dimensions of government policy, most important among which is political feasibility and political costs and benefits. Some people correctly blame the unfocused curricula of political science as responsible for this state of affairs. The current traditional curricula include many areas, for example:

- 1 - **Civics and Comparative Politics:** This field involves the comparison of different forms of government in different settings. In some cases, it may also include regional studies, i.e. focusing on a particular state, province or region.
- 2 - **Political Theory:** This field involves the study of normative questions of government, ideology, regimes, movements, and the history of political philosophy.
- 3 - **International Relations:** This field focuses on the study of the dynamics of relations between states, and, more recently, on transnational issues, such as the environment, human trafficking, trade, social movements, labor and terrorism.
- 4 - **Political Economy:** This field focuses on the complex interplay of economic and political choices, where political science tries to understand the normative implications of economic structures and theories.
- 5 - **Political Sociology:** This field focuses on studying political elites and political behaviors, and the interplay between them.

It is not necessary to say that this curriculum teaches the student how to *talk* about politics, but not how to help in designing actual policies.

#### 2 - **Public Administration: The Crises of Identity and Lack of a Separate Focus**

Public administration as an academic discipline in Arab universities suffers from a crisis of identity, that is to say it has no clear subject matter. In the case of the traditional public administration in Western



universities, this crisis is evident in the existence of contending paradigms in the discipline (See for example, Lovrich, 1985; Muslof and Seidman 1980). The subject matter of public administration, i.e. government activities, is claimed by other disciplines, e.g. economics, sociology, accounting, and management. Therefore its curriculum in some Arab universities, where public administration has an independent departmental status, shares many features of the business management curricula. This crisis is both a blessing and an omen, in that it means that the discipline can develop a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to the study of government activities by cooperating with business, politics, economics and other social sciences, but it also means that the discipline has no recognized identity. However, and in varying degrees, the discipline in Arab universities has not succeeded in going beyond the conventional curricula. University programs in Cairo, Algeria and the UAE are rare examples of limited attempts towards multidisciplinary curricula in public administration and political sciences. One problem in those programs is that they have no specific focus on “policy” as a tangible output of government activity.

The crisis of identity of the discipline of public administration reflects itself in the legitimacy and location of the discipline in Arab universities. As in the case of political science, most universities in the Arab world have no separate departments of public administration. With the exception of Cairo University, some Jordanian, and some Saudi Arabian universities, the general trend is toward either relegating the department to a subfield status in political science or management departments, as in the cases of Qatar and the UAE universities respectively, or abolishing the department altogether as in Khartoum University. In most other universities, especially Egyptian universities and North African Arab universities (with the exception of an Algerian university), which are influenced by the French academic tradition, the discipline exists as a legal course in colleges of law. In some cases, the discipline is housed marginally in the faculty of economics as a service department, as in Kuwait University. In other cases it is located as a track within the department of political science or marginalized within management departments, as in Qatar University. However, in many Saudi universities, the discipline has acquired an independent departmental status.

The fact that public administration is sometimes housed within departments of political science is not without benefits. It encourages the development of multidisciplinary approaches in these departments to the problems of politics and governance. However, and despite the claims of some public administration professors in Arab universities, the organic relationship of public administration as an academic discipline with political science cannot be easily overlooked. It is, in fact, an offspring of political science departments in the Anglo-Saxon academic tradition. It is even called by some prominent scholars in the field “political public administration” to distinguish it from business management (Piffner, 1985).

However, like political science, public administration is not well regarded by students, especially after the proliferation of privatization policies which are conceptualized wrongly as evidence for the declining importance of the public sectors as an employer. Consequently, it suffers from the same problems of student enrolment that are encountered by political science departments. A survey conducted in Yarmouk University in Jordan concluded that students change their specialization from public administration to other fields because of, *inter alia*, the boring nature of the discipline and its weak prospects for employment after graduation (ياسر العدوان ورفعت الفاعوري، ١٩٩٤). To a large extent this is an outcome of the lack of a professional focus, and therefore the lack of a clear identity, which work to alienate students of public administration.

The adoption of policy as an academic focus in many American and British universities has transformed the discipline by giving it a professional dimension. Public administration in these countries studies the implementation, determination and outputs of public policies (Elhussein, 1989). David H. Rosenbloom and Robert S. Kravchuk (2005: 351) have this to say about this practical role of public administration:

Major influences of public administration on economy and society have fostered concerns about how well the activities work and how their implementation can be improved. Public administration is the active organ of government because it is the tool by which government intervenes in society and the economy and policy. When it is called to play that role public

administration implements policy. The magnitude of its success or failure in carrying out government policies raises questions about the suitability of implementation or the goodness of policies. *Trying to answer these questions is policy analysis and program implementation. This explains why systematic policy analysis has become the standard functions only in the 1960s and 1970s.*

### **The Development of the Policy Perspective: The Need for an Interdisciplinary Field**

Public policy analysis requires at least a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to social problems. Therefore and since the nature of the field is very important to its underdeveloped status in Arab universities, a review of this nature is in order. Since the need for such an approach is felt in all social sciences with interest in government policy, it is interesting to open this section with the words of the famous economist N. Gregory Mankiw (2007: v), who prefaced the fourth edition of his book “Principles of Macroeconomics” with the following words:

I had grown up in a family that often discussed politics over the dinner table. The pros and cons of various solutions to society’s problems generated various debate. But in school I had been drawn to the sciences. Whereas politics seemed vague, rambling, and subjective, science was analytic, systematic and objective. While political debate continued without end, science made progress..... My fresh course on the principles of economics opened my eyes to a new way of thinking. Economics combines the virtues of politics and science. It is, truly, a social science. Its subject matter is society - how people choose to lead their lives and how they interact with one another. But it approaches the subject with the dispassion of a science. *By bringing the methods of science to the questions of politics, economics tries to make progress on the challenges that all societies face.*

This is a clear, simple case for the need to approach the solution of social and political problems by using a multidisciplinary approach that cannot be easily provided by a single discipline. This is because of the “tendency of the separate academic disciplines to focus on only certain

elements of complex problems” (Balaam and Veseth, 2005). This is so because every discipline has a different unit of analysis. Whereas economics has the individual as a unit of analysis, politics and sociology concentrate on the whole social and political systems (Cullis and Jones, 1998).

What Professor Mankiw is talking about in the above quoted passage is, in fact, not traditional economics, which was itself plagued with most of the ills he had found in politics, but modern economics which is blessed with all the goodies of interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches that made it policy relevant. In fact the Mankiw book itself is a good treatise in policy analysis. Many economists now abandon the traditional abstract approaches of the discipline and opt for a focus on public policy (See, for example, Friedman, 2002; Levy, 1995).

The use of social science tools to help policy makers is not novel because social scientists have been providing inputs to public policy making for many decades. However, these contributions were often one-sided and disjointed, reflecting the particular dimensions of the particular discipline offering the advice. The publication of Lerner and Lasswell’s *Policy Sciences* (1951) marked an upsurge of interest in policy-focused analysis (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984). However, it was only in the sixties and the seventies, in the USA and to a lesser extent in Britain, that an interest in refocusing political science and other social science to serve policy makers has developed (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984). In a book review in *Public Administration Review* Stuart S. Nagel (1980: 391) has noticed that:

Since 1970, an exciting new development has been occurring within political and social science, namely the increasing use of a policy studies perspective in research and teaching. Such a perspective involves systematically studying the nature, causes, and effects of alternative public policies, with particular emphasis on determining the policies that will achieve given goals. It is meant by public policy government actions designed to cope with social problems, where the government decisions have a prospective influence on future government decisions, rather than just the immediate parties”.

This policy perspective has developed since the 1970s into two main streams: firstly, as a field in itself, and secondly, as an approach that is used in all fields of political and social sciences. Policy analysis as a field

in itself has a distinctive methodology, emphasizing policy design and evaluation coupled with an interest in certain substantive policy area that do not fit well into the usual political science fields of international relations, comparative politics and political theory. As an approach applicable across political science fields, policy analysis is incorporated within the boundaries of each discipline and becomes subject matter in that discipline that produces information relevant to the nature, causes, and effects of alternative public policies (Nagel, 1980).

The two perspectives are, however, complementary rather than antithetical. Because it is not possible to prescribe policies or evaluate their outcomes meaningfully using policy analysis as a field without an awareness of the structures and processes that determine their political feasibility, which is provided by policy studies as an approach. Likewise, an awareness of the likely outcomes of alternative policies may help to understand the processes of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation which are the main focus of policy analysis as an approach. However, the two perspectives do not represent two autonomous extremes, but rather two points in a continuum that show interacting variations of the policy analysis perspective.

Studies of policy analysis are classified into retrospective and prospective studies. A prospective study produces *ex ante* information about social problems before policy actions are taken. As such it involves the coordinated contributions of economics, systems analysis, and operation research and decision analysis, as well as political science and public administration. This is the approach which is referred to in the literature as “policy analysis” as distinct from the term “policy studies” which is frequently used to describe the work of political scientists (Mood, 1983). This approach is mainly interested in developing alternative solutions to practical social and technical problems. In contrast, policy research (or policy studies), which is largely conducted by some political scientists, employs statistical scientific methodology to describe policy or determine the relationships among different policy variables.

On the other hand, retrospective *ex post* policy studies concentrate on policies after they are implemented. William N. Dunn (2004) distinguishes three groups of analysis in this approach: discipline-oriented analysis, problem-oriented analysis and application-oriented analysis. These developments represent a significant departure from the

traditional orientation of political science and public administration in American and British universities. Therefore, policy analysis has helped to reconceptualize the traditional dichotomy between policy and administration (Savara, 1985) and bridge the gap between them.

The concentration so far on American and British universities is not intended to suggest that the growth of policy studies is confined to these two countries. Most universities in Western Europe, and especially the Scandinavian countries, witnessed similar intellectual developments. In Africa, economic crises and the failure of traditional development planning on the continent has helped to shift the focus of social science research from the traditional concerns of political science and public administration to a concern with the processes of policy making which is considered to be at the roots of these failures. The African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) (1987) has played a leading role in this respect. However, the traditional concerns of political science and public administration and their intellectual orientation persist in most academic programs of political science and public administration in most Arab universities that offer courses in political science and public administration. Before we explain this state of affairs, a detailed review of the two perspectives of policy analysis is in order.

### **Policy Analysis as Prospective Field: A New Profession in Government**

This variety of the policy perspective, unlike the approach or retrospective stream, is mainly interested in practical prescription rather than theoretical description of the policy process. Therefore policy analysis is defined in this field as the systematic analysis and evaluation of alternative ways available to policy makers to realize societal goals. Another definition of the field holds that policy analysis is “a process of multidisciplinary inquiry designed to create, critically assess, and communicate information that is useful in understanding and improving policies (Dunn, 2004).

The methodology of this version of policy analysis may be considered as a process of inquiry designed to find solutions to real social problems. Although it adopts scientific methods, it also depends on art, craft and innovative abilities of the analysts. The discipline itself is a pragmatic one that employs the mechanisms of human understanding in

solving policy problems. Its problem-solving orientation, more than anything else, distinguishes it from disciplines that “prize knowledge for its own sake” (Dunn, 2004). In this version of policy analysis, microeconomics plays an important role by contributing to prospective and prescriptive aspects of policy analysis. Microeconomics is proved to be a very powerful approach to public policy. Blended with political science and management sciences, microeconomists provide very powerful tools to address “what happen when questions” with regard to public policies of taxation, subsidy, regulation, and all government policies that have economic impact on society. Levy (1995) explains the central position of microeconomics in policy analysis in the following words:

In the interdisciplinary public policy programs that have grown enormously at our best universities, microeconomics is acknowledged to be the most influential specialty.

In fact, microeconomists use their welfare economic tools to find solutions to social and political problems that were not previously considered within the boundaries of traditional economics, such as drug trafficking, security, defense, safety, speed limits and the arms’ race. Moreover, microeconomics helps to clarify the political as well as economic costs and benefits of government policies in different fields and the effects of those policies upon individuals and groups. This is so because most government functions are to a great extent economic in nature and it is difficult to think of any government policy that does not have economic consequences on individuals and groups (Levy, 1995). This approach has produced very innovative solutions to social problems, the most notable of which is the movement of “reinventing government” in the USA and the Citizen Charter in Britain (See for example, Bendell and Kelly, 1994; Osborne and Gaebler, 1995).

### **Policy Perspective as a Retrospective Approach in Political Science**

This approach is mainly interested in description rather than prescription, yet it is not without practical relevance to policy analysts. It is strongly preferred by some of those trained in political science. It is part of what we have called in the previous sections “the retrospective *ex post* studies”. It includes discipline-oriented, problem-oriented and application-oriented studies. Discipline-oriented analysis is mainly carried out by political scientists and sociologists in search of testing

discipline-based theories that attempt to provide an explanation for the causes and results of public policies after implementation.

Problem-oriented analysis, which is related to studies that are also done by political scientists and sociologists, is not interested in developing and testing theories like the first group. It is rather concerned with explaining the causes and consequences of policies by identifying various variables that may explain social problems using statistical tools.

Application-oriented analysis, which consists of studies done by applied psychologists, applied sociologists, as well as public administration and social work specialists, is an application-oriented approach and is concerned with investigating the causes and consequences of policies, as well as evaluation research to guide policy implementation. This group, unlike the first two groups, is concerned with policy goals and their outcome. Whereas discipline-oriented and problem-oriented analysis, like pure sciences, seldom produce information that provides direct inputs to policy makers, application-oriented studies provide a lot of useful information for the policy making process. Nevertheless, discipline-oriented and problem-oriented policy studies are extremely important for application-oriented studies because they help in illuminating different aspects of policy issues and problems.

The retrospective approach concentrates on the processes by which policy is made. Unlike the prospective approach, the adherents of this approach make considerable efforts to define public policy as a continuous process. Political science contributions to this approach are classified into four main categories. These include (Sabatier, 1995).

- 1- **Substantive area research** is research that concentrates on studying the politics of a specific policy area, such as health, education, transportation, natural resources or foreign policy. The case studies handled in this area are useful to practitioners because they illuminate the most important variables relevant to a certain policy area.
- 2- **Evaluation and impact studies** concentrate on evaluating the outcomes and impact of policies on targeted and non-targeted groups. This approach has helped to transform the traditional government auditing of public policies away from a concentration on legality of expenditure to program



evaluation (See for example, Chelmsky, Eleanor, 1985). Welfare economists also contribute to evaluation research using economic criteria, such as consumer surplus and consumer choice to evaluate the impact of public policies (See for example, Stockey, and Zeckhauser, 2000)). Political scientists help to broaden economic evaluation criteria by introducing the concept of effective citizen participation and distribution.

- 3- **Policy process studies** concentrate on the factors affecting policy formulation, adoption and implementation, as well as the subsequent effects of policy. Adherents of this type of studies believe that focusing on the policy process would provide opportunities for using and integrating accumulated political knowledge in various institutional settings for practical purposes
- 4- **Policy design studies** are undertaken by some political scientists to bridge the gap between *ex ante* and *ex post* approaches by focusing on topics like the efficacy of different types of policy instruments. Many subscribers to this approach propose a radical departure from the behavioral traditions of the discipline, yet most of them try to build on contributions by political scientists over the past decades.

Comparisons between the two types of policy analysis, retrospective and prospective analysis, reveal a very important conclusion: discipline-oriented and problem-oriented studies are inherently less useful than application-oriented studies and retrospective studies as a whole are less directly useful to policy makers than prospective analysis. Although this conclusion may have merit from the practical policy maker perspective, who seeks practical advice on actions to solve political problems, it overlooks several important benefits of retrospective analysis. By concentrating on results of actions rather than the expected outcome of actions, retrospective studies help policy makers to concentrate on results of different policies. Moreover, discipline-oriented and problem-oriented studies may provide a framework for understanding policy-making processes, and challenging conventional formulations of policy problems.

In practice, application-oriented analysts find it difficult to communicate their findings to *ex ante* analysts who are mostly drawn from

economics. In real, working settings, *ex ante* analysts, whose job is to find optimal solutions to problems, often have little access to information produced by retrospective analysts because of the fragmented nature of both groups of studies which were done in isolation from each other in the past, reflecting the traditional academic division of labor in which scholars focus on a narrow range of methods and issues. Although this division of labor enhances intellectual specialization and the efficiency that goes with it, it also encourages a kind of “blindness that originates in staring too long at just one side of a multidimensional problem” (Balaam and Veseth, 2005).

The new field, like any academic enterprise, has its negative as well as positive critics. It is not our intention in this paper to argue that policy analysis is a perfect enterprise. Many critics, e.g. Professor F. F. Ridley (1979), have said that the field of policy analysis:

... hides an ambiguity of meaning which sometimes leads to practical confusion when those involved in entirely different activities, as likely as not with different interests, meet on the assumption that they are pursuing a common aim.

Professor Ridley’s criticism is definitely correct and applicable to policy analysis in its infancy (he was writing in 1979) when the field was disintegrated and still developing, but it is not applicable now. However, a more persistent criticism of the field is that it is conservative and does not facilitate change (See for example, Kolb and Maanen, 1985; Laurence, 1999). Policy scholars believe that the discipline is “for working within a political and economic system, not for changing it” (Stockey and Zeckhauser, 2000). Therefore, most of the tools employed in policy analysis are “applicable to a socialist, capitalist, or mixed-enterprise society, to a democracy or a dictatorship, indeed wherever hard policy choices must be made” (Stockey and Zeckhauser, 2000: 4).

### **The New Profession of “*Policy Analyst*” in Government**

The intellectual development of policy analysis in its two approaches ended up by introducing a new profession in government circles: i.e. *policy analyst* (Weimer and Vining, 1999). This new profession is firmly founded on the premises of the new discipline of policy analysis. In 1974, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPA) adopted policy analysis as one of the five subject-matter areas

to be pursued in professional master degrees programs. Similar developments have taken place in undergraduate teaching in American universities, such as Syracuse, Michigan, Berkeley, Stanford and Cornell. In contrast, British universities, lacking the coordinating role of professional bodies like NASPA, act individually to incorporate policy analysis in their post-graduate and undergraduate programs. Examples include Manchester, London, Birmingham and other reputable universities (Elhussein, 1989). Out of these professional programs a new specialized job is introduced to governments.

Many governments in the USA, Western Europe and even some developing countries outside the Western hemisphere now employ policy analysts to help in the process of policy making. In the USA, Congress and the executive branch are the most important consumers of policy analysis (Beckman, 1977). State and local governments also employ professionals specializing in policy analysis (Schneider and Switon, 1979).

Now many universities in both the USA and Britain offer professional Master's degrees in policy analysis (MPP) and several other universities provide bachelor and doctoral degrees in public policy that are based on multiple disciplines to provide advanced training for policy analysts. The majority of these programs draw their curricula from a broad base of social and behavioral sciences (Birkland, 2005).

In American, and to a lesser extent in British universities, this perspective has developed into a science that has attracted professionals from different social backgrounds and even from the natural sciences. Therefore, policy analysts can come from many backgrounds, including sociology, psychology, economics, geography, law, political science, public policy, social work and public administration. This fact facilitates the enrichment of policy analysis methodology with diverse tools, drawn from different social sciences, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. These include, for example, case studies, survey research, statistical analysis, and model building, among others. Scientific research methodology is extensively used to evaluate the outcomes of policies, as well as to investigate the key variables that can be used by policy makers to influence the behavior of individuals and groups (O'Sullivan and Rassel, 1995). Tools related to the different stages of the policy process have been designed a new or readapted from other social and natural sciences to be used in analysis (Bingham and Ethridge, 1982).

Although policy analysis is intended mainly to address public sector and social problems, it is also used by NGOs and, in some cases, business organizations (Lawrence et al., 2005). On the other hand, many professional journals have emerged to reflect the academic and professional interest in this new field. The most notable in the USA are *the Journal of Public Policy Analysis and Management* and *Policy Studies, Policy Studies Review, Urban Policy Analysis*, and several other professional journals. In Britain, *Public Policy and Administration* and *Public Administration and Development* emerged with clear emphasis on public policy. Several social science journals, e.g. *Public Administration Review* and *Public Interest* in the USA, and other traditional social science journals in Britain, have reoriented themselves to embrace the new field of public policy analysis.

The United Nations has also received the new discipline and its professional promises. The Department of Technical Co-operation for Development sponsored the effort of using policy analysis for development policy. A report produced by an expert working group in 1979 recommended the use of policy analysis in developing countries and concentrated on the following themes: (a) possibilities and limits of policy analysis; (b) the use of social sciences for policy analysis; (c) systems analysis; (d) institutional arrangements for policy analysis and development; (e) policy implementation and review; and (f) requirements for policy analysis and measures for actions (United Nations, 1979).

Moreover, professional organizations that are concerned with policy analysis have been established everywhere to provide consultation and advice on different policy levels. The most notable among these include:

- RAND Corporation
- National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration
- AARP Public Policy Institute (United States)
- Hoover Digest
- Brookings Institute
- Global Public Policy Institute
- Canadian Policy Research Networks
- Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy
- Institute for Research on Public Policy
- Ethics and Public Policy Center

- Association for Public Policy and Management (APPAM)

### **The Underdeveloped Status of Policy Analysis in Arab Universities**

The objective of this section is to investigate the reasons for the underdeveloped status of the discipline in Arab Universities. Arab governments and academic institutions did not give due attention to this new field and the profession which is based on it. There are several reasons for this state of affairs which can be summarized into three main groups: (1) academic tribalism and academic fields zoning; (2) the indifference of Arab governments; and (3) privatization policies and their perceived diminished roles of government and public sector entities.

#### **1 - Academic Tribalism and Academic Fields Zoning**

There is a lot of lip service about the need for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches in Arab Universities. This trend is rarely reflected in academic curricula and research in Arab academic institutions. The reason for this is the phenomenon of *academic tribalism* which is characterized by most of those working in the fields of social sciences (economics, political science, public administration, sociology, business administration and other related disciplines).

*Academic tribalism* refers in this context to the tendency of each social science discipline to lock itself up within rigid boundaries and to practically deny any interrelationships with other disciplines. Although specialists in these fields theoretically accept the multidisciplinary nature of their disciplines, they ignore this fact in their actual teaching, consultancy and research practice. Most Arabic textbooks in social science disciplines mention in their opening chapters the interrelationships among social sciences, but this fact has no influence on other parts of these books. It is clear that this academic tribalism is not consistent with the integrated multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches required by the field of policy analysis.

The phenomenon of *academic tribalism* has led to rigid field-zoning which refers to the practice of drawing up rigid boundaries to each academic discipline with specific and *legitimate* topics allocated to each discipline. The allocation of academic topics within these rigid boundaries and zones has resulted in splendid isolation among the social sciences. Consequently some subject matters became the monopoly of a certain social science. For example, if the public budget, which is itself a

public policy, is mentioned, it is usually thought of as a subject matter in accounting or public finance. In fact, the public budget, as a public policy, has political, economic, sociological, and accounting dimensions. This makes its partial study within the isolated boundaries of each social science similar to the story of the elephant and the blind men. There is no doubt that *academic tribalism* is responsible for the delaying of the development of the policy analysis field as an academic orientation and a professional government job in Arab universities and government agencies.

## **2- The Indifference of Arab Governments**

Arab Governments do not encourage the development of policy analysis as a profession in government organizations because of their relative indifference towards using scientific knowledge in designing, implementing and evaluating the outcomes of public policies. This may be explained by the nature of the governing elites in these countries and the lack of mechanisms for political accountability in the political system. Therefore, the costs of ill-designed policies and their devastating outcomes on society do not affect the political status of the government and policy makers.

Moreover, the lack of communication between academic and research institutions on the one hand and policy-making institutions on the other, work to block information developed in the former to be used by the latter in policy making. Despite the existence of many government research organizations in Arab countries, they lack in most cases the multidisciplinary approach required by policy analysis, the outputs of these institutions are not used as inputs in the formulation of public policies (أحمد الحسين، ٢٠٠٢).

## **3 - Privatization Policies and the Role of Government**

The privatization movement, which has pervaded the Arab World under globalism, is a major recent factor that militates against the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary integration of the social sciences and therefore policy analysis. It has worked to enhance the tendency towards *academic tribalism* and the rigid compartmentalization of these sciences within firm disciplinary boundaries. The debate over the policy of privatization has divided policy makers, as well as social scientists, in the Arab World, between those who stick to the welfare role of

government on social equity bases, and those who propose and defend the supremacy of economic efficiency, presumably a private sector domain, against the economic inefficiency of the public sector. Consequently the social sciences that have a primary focus on government policy, like public administration and political science, became vulnerable to attacks from other academic disciplines, i.e. *tribes*.

The debate has also divided academic circle, especially among Arab students of Public Administration and Business Administration, with the latter aggressively questioning the right of the former to exist and continue as an academic discipline provided by independent departments in Arab universities. In many cases in the Gulf States (notably in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar) the battle ended up with the triumph of business warriors over public ones and, therefore, departments of public administration were either abolished or marginalized within political science or business departments. Ironically enough, the discipline and programs of public administration and public policies are flourishing in the universities of countries where capitalism and privatization are entrenched social philosophies.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Professional Curriculum Focusing on Government Policy**

Most political science and public administration programs in Arab universities include courses from other related social sciences. In some Arab universities with programs founded on the semester system, the student of political science and public administration is subjected to a vast range of courses, including economics, sociology, political economy, statistics and other subjects. However, these subjects are taught in isolation from each other and lack a specific focus on 'policy' that serve to integrate the knowledge acquired from them. For example, statistics, which is a powerful tool in policy analysis, is handled in political science and public administration programs as an abstract pure science concentrating on mathematical formulas and equations. Most often the student does not know how to use these tools in designing or evaluating policies or even apply them in his or her research methodology courses. The status of macro and micro economics courses is not better. Now many modern economic textbooks are published with a clear orientation towards policy analysis.

We suggest that these programs use government policy as a professional focus for integrating the different elements of the political science program. The use of this focus in teaching and research will help to develop an integrated and a practical policy-oriented discipline. Integrated policy analysis curricula should join prospective and retrospective types of analysis in one continuous process. This means that policy analysis need to combine the different pillars of policy analysis - namely, political science, economics, and public administration in a unified whole.

This can be done in Arab universities by the departments of political science, economics and public administration, which at present are more concerned with producing intellectual knowledge for its own sake. They provide no useful and practical help for policy makers. Moreover, using these disciplines individually to address social problems produces more often than not one dimensional polices that fail in practice. Here we may cite the tendency of some Arab economists to blame *politics* for the failure of policies they recommend. However, this failure may be explained by the absence of the political component in the design of these policies, i.e. political feasibility.

The major idea behind the curriculum suggested in this conclusion is to provide the graduate of political science and public administration with a toolbox and an intellectual framework that will allow him or her to analyze and design solutions for social problems addressed by government, as well as evaluating them. This curriculum is based on the fact that “(t)he practice of public policy requires a combination of technical skills with a crucial sensitivity to political issues” (Baum, 1982: 213). The intellectual framework aims at providing the student with knowledge about the environment of policy making systems within which policies are processed and adopted.

We will outline in this final section of the paper a general map for refocusing programs of political science and public administration in towards the policy analysis approach. The suggested curriculum is based on dividing the program into main subject areas around which specific courses can be designed and customized to reflect the needs and conditions in particular countries. These subject areas include (1) the general theory of policy studies, (2) policy substance and policy issues, (3)



the policy-making process, and (4) policy analysis methods and tools. The major topics within these areas will be briefly reviewed below.

### **1 - The General Theory of Policy Studies**

This subject area must be directed towards introducing the student to policy analysis. Political science should be the core of this area. Courses designed to serve this subject area would introduce the student to policy analysis in social sciences. These may include political science, microeconomics and macroeconomic for policy analysis, sociology and public administration.

However, these courses must not be taught in isolation from each other. Policy variables within each discipline should be related to variables in other disciplines in a political economy approach. Emphasis is required here on the political environment of policy-making because this will help in emphasizing the importance of the political feasibility of different policy alternatives. Political feasibility means the acceptability of policies by policy makers. The political environment determines political feasibility which in turn influences the content and presentation of recommended policies so as to make these recommendations more likely to be adopted and implemented.

### **2 - Policy Substance and Policy Issues**

In this subject area courses would concentrate on issues and substance of specific policies and policy areas (e.g. health, transportation, education, defense and foreign policies). A key factor here is what kind of social problems are important for training, teaching and research purposes. There are considerable variations in these respects among different Arab countries. Concentration here is on description (retrospective) and prescription (prospective) approaches to study. A descriptive approach will pay special attention to policy issues for which governments deploy substantial amounts of resources and money on their budgets to resolve the problems associated with them. Prescriptive approaches consider the issues that governments should devote a substantial amount of resources and money to solve them regardless of whether they do or not.

The policy areas and issues may be classified into four parts or more according to the peculiar nature of government activities in a certain country. These parts may include (1) economic structure, which includes,

for example, issues like inflation, unemployment, consumer protection, agricultural policies, grants, subsidies and energy, (2) quality of life issues, which consists of environmental issues, urban problems, natural resources, education, health and social services, (3) social structure problems, which include policy issues of ethnicity, race relations, civil rights, crimes, public services and law and order, (4) foreign relations issues, which include international trade, emigration, security, transfer of technology, aid, terrorism and the environment. Issues can also be classified according to the disciplines they are most often associated with. For example issues related to political science (defense, civil liberties, and social services), and economics (taxes, house rent, and insurance). However, in each issue area the importance and interaction of social, political, administrative, economic and other related factors must be highlighted. Moreover, the search for and study of policy issues may not be confined to national or central government levels only, but it is important to consider micro-level policies at different levels of local government in order to prepare students for giving advice to policy makers at these levels.

### **3 - The Policy-Making Process**

Courses designed for this policy area would teach the student the particular processes by which policies are formulated, adopted and implemented in a particular political system. The approach should again be descriptive and prospective. For example a descriptive approach will describe analytically the stages of the policy processes and the formal and informal institutional networks involved in each stage. Knowledge acquired about this process will enable the student to appreciate the political feasibility of different alternatives to a policy problem.

Although government structures are important, considerable emphasis should be placed on the dynamics of the process which can be decomposed into two parts: (1) pre-adoption processes, which include agenda setting, formulating policy proposals, legitimating policies, and budgeting funds to carry out policies, and (2) post-adoption processes, which include the implementation and evaluation of policy outcomes. Whereas the first stage is the main, but not the exclusive domain, of political science and public administration, the second stage falls within

the domain of public administration, economics and other related disciplines.

Prescriptive approaches to the study of the policy-making process may concentrate on the production and use of information relevant to each stage of the policy process, and the appropriate methods of collecting information and analyzing them to produce rational policies and to provide suggestions for reforming the policy-making process as a whole. Implementation and evaluation stages may be conducted in relation to other pre-adoption stages of policy processes. Therefore, besides discussing the different technical approaches to implementation, due care must be given to the importance of administrative feasibility in the design or formulation phase and the search for alternatives.

#### **4 - Policy Analysis Methods and Tools**

The objective here is to provide the student with the basic tools of policy analysis and to indicate the relevance and the use of these techniques in different stages in the policy process. Tools should include both qualitative and quantitative types. These technical tools should facilitate the collection and organization of information about the consequences of alternative possible solutions for problems with explicit concern for the political context of policy-making.

The tools can be grouped into classes related to the disciplines they use them in analyzing policies, for example, (1) political and social sciences tools; (2) economics tools, (3) statistical tools; and (4) tools of management and operation research. They could also be classified according to their use in the policy process, e.g. (1) tools for gathering information; (2) tools for specifying alternatives; (3) tools for ranking alternatives; (4) tools for organization and decision-making; and (5) evaluation tools.

In addition to the toolbox described above, the student needs to know the framework of analysis and its key steps in arriving at policy recommendations. These key steps include (Nagel, 1980: 394): (1) the definition of the problem; (2) the criteria for choice; (3) the alternative policies available; (4) models for relating the alternatives to the choices; (5) arriving at a decision as to which alternative is the best; and (6) conveying and reporting recommendations. The use of policy tools must be related to these key steps according to the problem at hand.

One important final note in this regard is that the study of public policy analysis is, in many respects, country and even culturally bound. Therefore teaching and training in policy analysis should primarily be based on material produced by serious research efforts and text-books related to the political process and social variables in the country concerned. The books cited in the text of this paper are not intended to be used in classes, because they reflect the values, social problems and processes of American and British policy-making systems. They can be used only for guidance and comparative purposes. Policy tools and techniques, of course, are useable across cultures provided that they are adapted to particular social values and problems in different countries.

Moreover, for the new field of policy analysis and the profession it creates to succeed, it has to be accepted as legitimate and useful by its clients; i.e. government institutions, NGOs and private business organizations. Therefore, there is a need for a marketing plan. This marketing plan must follow the clear objective of linking the program to its clients and the actual policy problems they encounter. A useful approach in this respect is to tie students' class term papers, graduation projects and faculty research to actual policy problems faced by these clients. Contacts with relevant institutions, such as government ministries, municipalities and other public organizations must be sought, and these institutions must be encouraged to provide and coordinate research and teaching. To facilitate this cooperation, practitioners in these institutions may be invited to participate in teaching and training, as well as designing curricula and courses.

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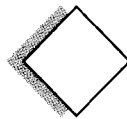
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## نحو تركيز مهني جديد للعلوم السياسية والإدارة العامة في الجامعات العربية: دراسة نظرية

أحمد مصطفى منصور\*

### الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توضيح كيف أن "تحليل السياسات" - كحقل جديد في العلوم الاجتماعية - يمكن أن يساعد في انتشار حقل العلوم السياسية والإدارة العامة في الجامعات العربية من أزمته الراهنة. وتتجسد الأزمة في كلا الحقلين في افتقارهما لنقطة تركيز مهنية وتطبيقية. ولتحقيق ذلك الهدف قسمت الدراسة إلى أقسام رئيسة تناقش وضع العلوم السياسية والإدارة العامة في العالم العربي، وتطور منظور تحليل السياسات في العلوم الاجتماعية، وتطوره بوصفه مهنة حكومية، وأسباب تخلف الحقل في الجامعات العربية. وتخلص الدراسة في نهايتها إلى اقتراح منهج متعدد المداخل العلمية، يركز على سياسات الحكومة لإعادة صياغة مناهج العلوم السياسية والإدارة العامة في الجامعات العربية وتحقيق هدف مهنية الحقلين.

**المصطلحات الأساسية:** العلوم السياسية، الإدارة العامة، السياسات العامة، تحليل السياسات، المهنة.

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