

Preface

Policy analysts are accustomed to thinking in terms of policy tools and instruments. It is widely accepted that they have been developed for, and are used at, all stages of the policy process. But in the public policy literature, most of the debate amongst academics and practitioners has focused on only one sub-set of the main tools and instruments – those for *implementing* the policy objectives that have been decided upon. Well-known policy implementation instruments include regulations, subsidies, taxes, and voluntary agreements, to name but a few.

But another, equally extensive subset of policy tools has remained in the analytical shadows and thus somewhat outside the mainstream of public policy research. This includes tools for forecasting and exploring the future (for example, scenarios), tools for identifying and recommending policy options (for example, cost–benefit, cost-effectiveness and multi-criteria analysis) and tools for exploring different problem conceptions and frames (for example, participatory brainstorming). These tools have typically been developed to perform a different set of tasks, namely collecting, condensing and interpreting different kinds of policy relevant knowledge. Together, they are the tools of *policy formulation*.

Policy formulation is a very different stage to those that precede and/or follow it in the well-known policy cycle. If agenda setting is essentially concerned with identifying where to go, the policy formulation stage is about determining *how* to get there. In many ways, policy formulation is the point at which some of the most critical decisions of all are made. As such, it constitutes the very essence of governing. But in comparison with the other policy stages, it is relatively difficult to observe directly and hence to study. Consequently, policy researchers have struggled to study it. But among more and more policy researchers there is a feeling that it may well constitute the final ‘missing link’ in policy analysis.

It should be completely natural to conceive of or study policy formulation by thinking in terms of the tools used. Yet, some time ago we were struck by the fact that the policy instruments literature remains fixated on the implementing instruments. This book represents our combined effort to remedy what we perceive to be a significant gap in our collective understanding of public policy. In it, we present the first book length account

of the main policy formulation tools, coupled to an exploration of their origins, the actors involved in their development, the venues in which such tools may (or may not) be used, the capacities of actors to employ them, the uses to which they are put by different policy formulators and the effects that they eventually produce. In doing so, we seek to reveal what is gained by bringing the study of policy formulation tools back into the mainstream of public policy research. We say ‘back into’ because having been a central, possibly even *the* central concern of policy analysts in the 1950s and 1960s, tools in general gradually fell out of fashion. As Chapter 1 explains, although the developers of certain tools, many of them specialists in economics, computing and systems analysis, continued to push ahead in the quest for greater policy relevance, policy researchers gradually turned their attention either to the detailed design of policy implementing instruments or to understanding and explaining wider policy dynamics.

We believe that now is absolutely the right time to look afresh at policy formulation tools. Policy analysts are becoming more interested in policy formulation – one of *the* most poorly understood of all the policy process stages. Interest in policy design is also re-awakening as the number of complex problems such as climate change stack up. And having invested heavily in the tools in the past, the tool developers and practitioners are desperate to understand how – and indeed if – they perform in practice, a task which requires bridges to be built with public policy researchers.

Conscious that this still has the look and feel of a very promising sub-field ‘in the making’, we devote considerable space in Chapter 1 to elaborating a typology and definition of the main policy formulation tools, and an analytical framework for understanding their uses and effects. Given the current state of knowledge, we believe it is especially important to engage in such foundational activities to ensure that future work develops in a cumulative fashion.