

Analyzing Policy Fields: Helping Students Understand Complex State and Local Contexts

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ABSTRACT

A collaborative approach to public management is critical in an era of governance that depends upon networks more than centralized bureaucracies, yet public affairs education has not adequately responded to the need to develop new tools to support analysis of complex settings. Policy field analysis is one tool that can help professionals-in-training learn to act purposively within complex policy environments. Policy fields—public and private institutions, in a substantive public policy or program area, in a particular place—shape how state and local actors work to solve public management problems, and their pursuit of programmatic goals in turn shapes the policy field. Using a well-known teaching case, the authors present a series of analytical questions and mapping tools that help clarify the structure of complex policy environments; the institutional and inter-organizational relationships involved; and the resources that influence interactions in the policy field.

Many public affairs scholars have noted the significant transformation in public service provision over the last 30 years (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Kickert et al., 1997; Milward and Provan, 2000; Salamon, 2002). The centralized state has given way to the hollow state in which governments at all levels rely upon other public, nonprofit, and private organizations to carry out public programs. These same governments utilize a variety of investment tools—such as tax incentives, purchase of service contracts, loan guarantees, and vouchers—to work with these diverse organizations. Increasingly, unusual partnerships are being formed between nonprofit agencies and public agencies, citizen groups, and businesses to modify public programs and carry out policy ideas. There are new calls for a collaborative approach to public management and for scholarly attention to the

new governance that depends upon networks more than centralized bureaucracies (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone, 2006; Kettl, 2006).

Yet, in spite of these changes, public affairs education lags behind. As Lester Salamon argued in his keynote address at the NASPAA annual conference in 2004, the central challenge in public affairs is "learning how to comprehend, and to manage, the reinvented government that we have created, how to design and manage the immensely complex collaborative systems that now form the core of public problem solving" (Salamon, 2005). Arguably, this should be a central focus of education within schools of public policy, public administration, and public affairs.

To respond, public affairs educators need to develop new tools to support analysis of complex settings. We also need more refined processes to help students develop nuanced management competencies and program design abilities (Bingham, Sandfort, and O'Leary, forthcoming). Rather than depending on authority-based formal hierarchy, individuals must earn others' respect through their insights, their use of information, and deft interpersonal process. In this paper, we discuss how to develop these skills by the use of policy field analysis. The approach was developed to cultivate more knowledge about the dynamics of complex policy environments. Through answering a series of questions, students come to better appreciate the institutional environment in a state or local context within a particular policy area. Questions focus on important dimensions of the field: the concentration of authority, the density of networks, and the nature of financial and professional relationships. These dimensions are then captured on visual maps. The process of mapping and the maps themselves help make concrete the forces so important within state and local policy contexts.

Defining and analyzing policy fields is one important tool for those engaged in collaborative practice focused on addressing our most important public problems. Yet we do not believe that public affairs education merely entails assembling heuristic tools that can be deployed at precise moments to ensure strategic action. Instead, a tool such as policy field analysis offers an alternative way to understand complex situations. Such alternatives provide mechanisms that allow practitioners to exert their judgment as socially skillful actors (Fligstein, 2001). In other words, analysis helps them see what was previously obscured. Awareness, in turn, helps people become more purposive in their actions. Policy field analysis is one tool that fosters a public affairs education that is more focused on helping professionals-in-training be able to act purposively within complex policy environments.

ROOTING POLICY FIELD ANALYSIS IN LESSONS FROM THEORY AND RESEARCH

Let's start our discussion with the example of a significant public problem—the reality that the housing market does not allow all families to access affordable shelter. Since the 1960s, the public sector has used an array of mechanisms to

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shift market dynamics and improve the supply of affordable housing. The field involves the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, funding from the federal Department of Health and Human Services, state financing agencies, county and city governments, and various philanthropic and nonprofit agencies. Yet, the shape of the field varies in important ways across states and localities. Let's take, for example, two mid-sized metropolitan areas. In one, city and county administrators have worked together for years on constructing affordable single- and scatter-site housing units. Their collaboration is facilitated by a state financing authority that helps assemble various public revenue sources for construction and rehabilitation. Numerous nonprofits also bring specific technical expertise on land acquisition, site development, and post-construction services; these nonprofits also draw upon philanthropic partners who, through sizable donations, create funding pools to provide additional resources for these activities. When new public policy ideas get proposed, various actors within this field are mobilized. When initiatives are passed, those actors work together—trading information, insight, or frustration—to implement new policies. When the leadership in these organizations changes, many mechanisms—collaborative projects, funding meetings, policy strategy sessions—help socialize new hires to the contours of the local policy field.

In contrast, in another mid-sized community, only two nonprofit organizations work on housing affordability. The leaders of the two organizations often differ on strategy and, as a result, rarely present a unified front. For the last 30 years, one manager has headed the public housing authority and, because of an event many years ago involving the county commissioner, she is unwilling to work with the city's community development office. Private developers have an interest in constructing new units in the community but, because publicly subsidized tax credits are inadequate, they are unable to create sufficient financial packages. When leadership turns over in the one of the nonprofits, the new executive director must chart for herself the contours of this policy field.

How are students to make sense of the diversity in local field conditions? If they are placed as protagonists in each setting, how could they craft strategic action to develop and implement a new program idea? Certainly, they could refer to factors commonly attributed to such local differences: economic conditions, political ideology, demographic characteristics, managers defending turf. Yet, these explanations do not promote focused analysis into the situation. Nor do they suggest how individuals can work strategically within these contexts to improve system operation. For such an analysis, students must undertake more subtle analysis that takes the policy arena, the intergovernmental relationships, the networks of local actors, the relative power of these actors and their relationships seriously. They must come to understand how the structures that shape the local policy fields in both communities are also shaped by the insight and energy of individual actors, in the small and large decisions they make. They must under-

take policy field analysis. We developed this tool through a synthesis of research and theory from political science, sociology, and public management.¹ Because policy context, institutions, organizations, and individual actors are all significant in complex policy environments, we must use concepts relevant to these various levels of analysis.

We begin with the work of political scientists, who study the workings of policy domains. This stream of literature draws attention to the sets of institutions and organizations involved in the policy process in a particular substantive area or issue, such as national defense, the environment, or health care (Burstein, 1991; Granados and Knoke, 2005; Knoke and Laumann, 1982; Laumann and Knoke, 1987). Research usually focuses at the national level, exploring public and nongovernmental institutions and organizations involved in legislative acts or regulatory judgments that alter the policy arena. A policy field analysis begins with the recognition of the unique knowledge and limited pool of organizations involved in particular substantive policy area, such as education or housing. To work within a policy field, practitioners master very specific content knowledge within the domain: Are the formulas used to calculate housing affordability accurate, given disparities in regional median incomes? To be conversant with others in the field, one must know the answers to such basic questions. Many graduate courses in educational administration, urban planning, and public policy focus on this type of foundation knowledge. Such courses help to familiarize students with the basic terminology, programmatic knowledge, and important institutional actors in the field. What they learn through such courses, or from months on the job, is often technical knowledge about the public issues. In fact, because of the specific content knowledge they develop, many individuals spend their careers moving back and forth between nonprofit and public organizations within a particular field. In this way, fields often are somewhat closed systems.

Secondly, policy fields have both vertical and horizontal bounds. Political scientists also study intergovernmental relationships. Although often presumed to be hierarchical, research documents that each level of government—national, state, and local—often possesses the ability to exert influence in policy implementation (Cho and Wright, 2004; Elazar, 1965; Peterson, 1995). While focused on state and local settings, policy field analysis includes an awareness of the national and inter-governmental relationships that establish the local boundaries. Certainly, legal and regulatory frameworks created by federal, state, and local governments are quite significant. Often, they define the nature of the public problem and the range of remedies that can be employed to address it. Laws and history also often directly inform where administrative authority is concentrated. Although government at various levels sometimes has overlapping roles, there is an awareness of historical concentration of administrative authority. For example, the federal role in housing production was established in the late 1960s and changed significantly in the mid-1980s. As others note (Cho and Wright, 2004), heated

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public debates in many fields often center upon the altering of historical centers of authority within the intergovernmental context.

Policy field analysis also highlights the horizontal relationships that structure a policy field at the state and local levels. Sociologists offer the concepts of societal sectors and organizational fields to this endeavor (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Scott and Meyer, 1991). In a particular place, there is a pool of organizations interested in a particular issue (Galaskiewicz, 1979; Goetz and Sidney, 1997; Hjern and Porter, 1981; Milward and Wamsley, 1984). The pool of organizations can include government, private nonprofits, small or large businesses, or philanthropic institutions. Their interest in a particular issue emerges from organizational reputation and staff expertise, as well as their assessments of the economic or political viability of engaging with others to work on the problem. One of the most interesting findings from the study of public policy implementation is how organizations that should have conflicting relationships often work together in different roles and capacities (Hjern and Porter, 1981). To be considered legitimate within the field, organizations attend to norms, values, and beliefs in the local institutional environment. This leads to a local social order that helps actors frame their actions in relation to each other (Fligstein, 2001). The horizontal bounds of a policy field are both framed by and come to frame this local social order. DiMaggio and Powell (1991, 1983) describe the order that emerges from the ongoing process of interaction and information sharing as the "structuration of organizational fields."

The concept of organizational fields builds upon the work of other social theorists (Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984) who conceptualize social structures as both constraining and enabling. Structuration theory seeks to explain how the constraining nature of institutions and the enabling elements of human knowledge and action can exist simultaneously. This theory highlights how the pre-existing rules and resource distributions within institutions operate as sources of power. Individual actors can use their social skills to both reproduce and form new institutions. The reproduction of fields depends on skills of actors in dominant organizations, often under conditions of relative field stability (Fligstein, 2001). Yet, in highly turbulent, crisis situations, individuals or coalitions do challenge the existing institutional order using social skills to create entirely new fields or transform existing ones (DiMaggio, 1988).

Other sociologists and public management scholars use network analysis to conceptualize the horizontal relationships present within policy fields (Galaskiewicz, 1979; Isett, 2006; Kickert et al., 1997; Klijn, 1997; Klijn et al., 2000; Milward and Provan, 2000; O'Toole, 1997; O'Toole and Meier, 2004; Provan et al., 2005). Networks can be analyzed in terms of their centrality and density, or by the nature of their ties, management, and outcomes. Managers and organizations may form networks to assess community problems and strategize about policy innovations or policy making processes. They may work together on

project-based initiatives and conduct program assessments. In a study of collaborative management within local economic development, Agranoff and McGuire (2003) found that variation in collaboration could be explained by both variation in environmental conditions—such as economic conditions or the presence of private philanthropic resources—and the tools, actions, and perceptions of local managers.

The final element of policy field analysis focuses on the individual beliefs and the resources found in particular localities. The insights offered by structuration theory suggest that both material resources and the understanding that develops from human relationships are significant in shaping the contours of the local system. As our example of affordable housing in two mid-size communities illustrates, localities vary significantly in the number of nonprofit organizations, the availability of philanthropic dollars, the engagement of private business in public affairs (Foundation Center, 2006; Grønbjerg and Paarlberg, 2001; Pratt and Spencer, 2000). Yet, as our example also highlights, local knowledge about people and organizations—the reputations and perceptions of effectiveness (or lack thereof) and capabilities—are also significant in shaping how resources flow among organizations and how work gets done (Sandfort, 1999). By the same token, though exhibiting “social skill” (Fligstein, 2001), individuals can analyze this context and persuade others to act, sometimes in ways that break with the prevailing local knowledge. In the second city in our example, the city manager could choose to adopt new practices that would fundamentally shift the dynamics in the policy field. Perceptions combine with tangible resources to become significant factors in policy field analysis.

We can now begin to explain variations between our two mid-sized communities in how the system to provide affordable housing is structured. Although environmental factors, such as economic, political, or demographic circumstances are important, policy field analysis would suggest that policy domain, intergovernmental relations and administrative authority, pool of organizations and networks between them, and reputations and social meanings shared in a place are essential. Yet how can teachers bring these various threads of research and theory into the classroom? How can they translate these lessons so they are palatable to practitioner-students? The policy fields tool provides a way to walk systematically through the levels of analysis and to create a visual map that simplifies field dynamics.

Before turning to how a teacher might work with students to conduct policy field analysis, it is important to note that our policy field construct resembles earlier political science writings about “policy subsystems.” As Milward and Wamsley describe (1984), policy subsystems were initially conceived as a construct that cut across conventional divisions of power and levels of government, involving multiple actors and possessing both vertical and horizontal linkages. It sought to provide more explanatory power to the games that happened between local actors

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and organizations (Long, 1958). Yet utilization of the policy subsystems construct has remained sadly underdeveloped. In part, this might be because most research focuses on the national level (Goetz and Sidney, 1997) or because it has been associated with the Iron Triangle metaphor largely rejected within public administration.² Recent studies seem to use "policy subsystem" as a heuristic for describing case study research rather than as a viable analytical construct. The advances in institutional, structuration, and network theories in the intervening years cause us to change terminology and incorporate these vibrant streams of more recent scholarship into our process of policy field analysis.

We also want to emphasize that, although policy field analysis focuses on state and local conditions, one should not ignore national and international conditions when teaching this tool. The passage of federal legislation, with the specification of a new policy problem or the creation of new means for ameliorating it, can fundamentally shift local policy fields. New policy tools can bring different institutions into the local organizational pool. New regulations can mandate the creation of new planning or service networks, or new funding priorities can shape how resources flow within that field (Goetz and Sidney, 1997). However, by understanding what already exists within a field, actors can better navigate the opportunities or constraints that accompany significant public policy change.

TEACHING OTHERS TO ANALYZE POLICY FIELDS

In the classroom, policy field analysis involves the systematic application of a series of questions to a particular situation. Through this application, visual representations of the actual policy field are created (Anderson et al., 2005; Dobel and Day, 2005). These representations allow people to understand the structure of the institutions and the nature of their relationships. They also provide a mechanism whereby students can communicate with others about the results of their analysis; the visuals may function like boundary objects that help with the sharing of complex, practice-based knowledge (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002). In this paper, we are specifically concerned with exploring how this construct can be taught to master's students in management, policy analysis, and topical courses offered in schools of public affairs.

In our experience, policy field analysis can be undertaken in two ways. The first involves students identifying policy areas of interest and conducting supervised field-based research to fully investigate each of the analytical questions. In addition to visual maps, more detailed memoranda can be created to document dimensions of the analysis difficult to reduce to visual representation. For more limited application, faculty may also utilize a written teaching case. These cases typically paint vivid pictures of the management and leadership dilemmas embedded in contextual detail. For the remainder of this article, we will pursue this second strategy to better illustrate the analytical steps. We will draw upon a widely available teaching case, "Integrated Housing and Social Services," from

the Electronic Hallway case series, focusing on segment A.³ We chose this segment because it provides a description of local context that is important for the protagonist to understand in order to act effectively; any teaching case with such characteristics could be used in the classroom for policy field analysis.

The Integrated Housing and Social Services case highlights a nationally honored local housing authority that has worked collaboratively with nonprofits and local government agencies to develop an innovative program, Project Self-Sufficiency (PSS). The program has successfully graduated 400 motivated families from public assistance. The case begins with the main protagonist, Steve Holt, needing to respond to a new national mandate from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Suddenly, PSS must provide universal access to all welfare families rather than just those the program operators define as motivated. Program operators believe strongly that the use of motivation as a selection criterion has led directly to the overall success of PSS. (See Appendix 1 for a more detailed summary of the case).

In our policy field analysis, we will take the perspective of Steve Holt, the director of the Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO). Because the contours of policy fields often vary by institution setting, it is important to initially identify from whose perspective the analysis will originate. The following questions, built from the research and theory surveyed earlier, comprise the essence of the policy field analysis. They are summarized in Table 1.

What policy domains are the actors working within? What are the large public problems they are working to solve? In this case, the primary policy domain is public housing. However, because the PSS initiative involves providing a range of social and community supports to participants, it also involves other policy areas: mental health, family support, education. The PSS collaborative focuses on creating more stability for low-income families so that they can successfully use public housing subsidies to transition off public assistance. In the case, Steve Holt is now grappling with how to respond to mandated change in program implementation.

What laws and regulations, national programs, and funding streams are being used to solve the problem? Where does administrative authority lie? This policy problem is not contained within any particular public agency. At the local level, many laws and regulations, national programs, and funding streams come into play. From Steve Holt's perspective, the laws, regulation, and funding coming from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are central. The unique component of PSS was its ability to leverage Section 8 housing certificates for families in poverty. These valuable certificates offer publicly funded vouchers that people can take to access rental property in the market. Many communities, including Snohomish County, have long waiting lists to access these vouchers. Additional funding for PSS, however, comes from the Community Services Block Grant program of the federal Department of Health and Human Services and is administered locally by the county's Division of Community Services.

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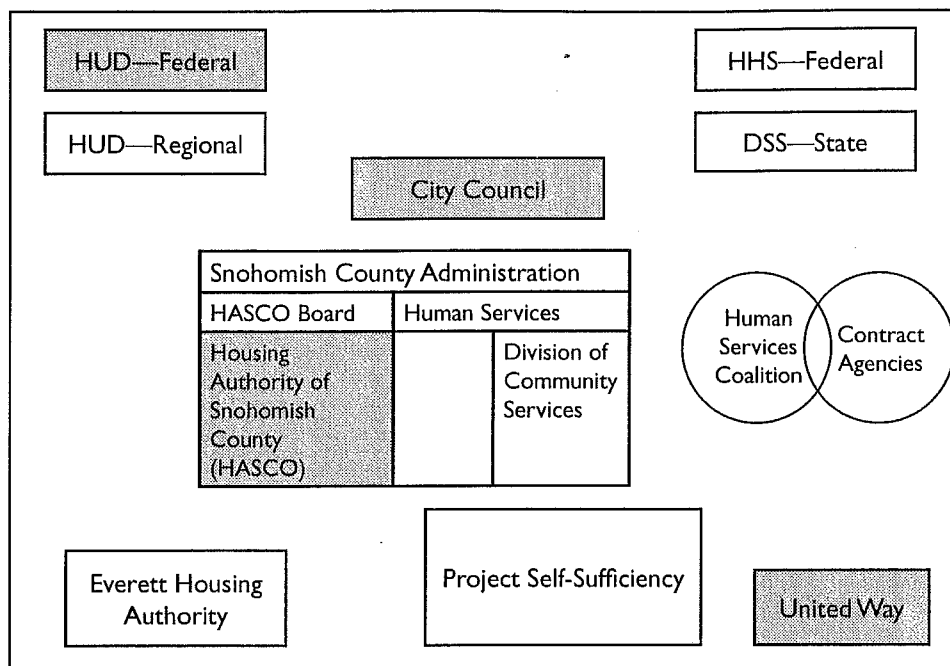
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To begin to represent some of these intergovernmental relationships and policy tools, visual maps are useful. Most broadly, causal maps (Bryson et al., 2004) are word-and-arrow diagrams that link ideas and actions. They can be used to explore relationships among interconnected values and goals or to articulate specific strategies and action. They also can trace both vertical and horizontal influence

Table 1. Summary of Policy Field Analysis Using the
"Integration of Housing and Social Services" Case

<i>Analytical Questions</i>	<i>Theoretical Base</i>	<i>Case Elements to Highlight</i>	<i>Conceptual Points to Highlight</i>
What are the policy domains actors are working within? What are the large public problems they are working to solve?	Policy domains	Housing, social services; supporting employment and self-sufficiency among public housing residents	Focus on a substantive policy issue involving one or more parts in the policy process
What laws and regulations, national programs, and funding streams are being used to solve the problem? Where does administrative authority lie?	Inter-governmental relations; societal sectors	Project Self-Sufficiency pilot program; federal mandate; vouchers and block grants; federal/local control	Attend to forces that shape the local and state policy fields. Consider historic and current locus of administrative authority.
Within the state/local context, what organizations have an interest in this problem? Which organizations have power to make change related to it?	Organizational fields; structuration theory	Coalitions and range of local organizations involved in program development and delivery	Pool of possible organizations; stakeholder power and interests
What ties exist between these organizations?	Network theory	Diverse linkages existing within the county among organizations in the field.	Nature of network ties—legal authority, funding, service, reputation and trust
How can resources and social rules be shaped by field actors?	Structuration theory	Protagonist's understanding of available resources and relationships	Social skill needed to navigate the field and resolve the situation positively

Figure 1. Initial Map of Organizations in a Policy Field Illustrated by Teaching Case Facts



and resource flows. In our analysis of the Integrating Housing and Social Services case, we use causal mapping to visually display vertical flows of influence from the two key policy domains and the vertical and horizontal relationships within the local field. Through the process of mapping, students better understand how major laws, regulations, and funding streams shape local policy fields. They can visually see where administrative authority lies.

In Figure 1, we illustrate with a map drawn to represent the facts of this case. It depicts the broad contours of the relevant policy domains as well as local policy field boundaries. When fully developed, maps can become quite complex. Yet, it is important to realize that the *process* of creating the maps—of asking and answering the key questions about the important laws and regulation, the significant national programs and funding streams, the source of administrative authority, and other factors defining a policy field—comprises the actual analysis.

Within the statelocal context, what organizations have an interest in this problem? Which organizations have power to make change related to it? In the Integrating Housing and Social Services case, numerous organizations comprise the pool of potential organizations to be involved in the field. In addition to HASCO, the Everett Housing Authority (the housing authority of the county's largest city), the members of the Human Service Coalition, other nonprofit health and human service agencies, and the county council all had received national visibility from the innovative PSS program. In analysis of the organizational pool, we have found it helpful to ask students to brainstorm all of the potential organizations

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involved in the policy field. Throughout the discussion, we refer to concepts from social sectors to delineate both vertical and horizontal dimensions of PSS's task and institutional environments. In the Integrated Housing case, funders and government agencies at multiple levels vertically shape the task and institutional environment. The HUD regional office is significant, as is the state's Department of Social Services. The county council also has considerable power in legitimating the effort. Numerous organizations also are involved in the horizontal provision of services: human service coalition members make referrals, local United Way funds supplement public dollars, partners are found with local educational institutions. Asking carefully about what is needed both from the task and institutional environment is important. In some situations, professional associations or accrediting bodies might be part of the institutional environment and have some normative or regulatory authority over the field actors.

Once the organizations with an interest in this area are identified, dimensions of power and authority can be unpacked using stakeholder analysis (Bryson, 2004a, 2004b; Freeman, 1984). A stakeholder is any person, group, or organization that can "place a claim on an organization's attention, resources, or output or that is affected by that output" (Bryson, 2004a, 35). The analytical technique highlights the multiple and often competing stakeholder interests at play, especially salient for public and nonprofit organizations who must respond to the interests of various stakeholders even when they diverge. Although there are many variations of stakeholder analysis (Bryson, 2004b), all focus on trying to understand the distribution of power and interests. A basic analysis includes brainstorming the relevant actors, considering their current expectations of the organization, and identifying both their power and interest in the issue at hand. The Integrating Housing and Social Service case can illustrate how to implement these steps in the classroom. For the organizations identified in the brainstorm regarding organizational pool, consider their current expectations of the PSS program. Also ask about other players not currently represented. For each, discuss their specific interests in the PSS program and the power they could wield in the federal mandate situation. For example, the federal HUD's interest in this issue is fulfilling their Congressional mandate. Federal law gives HUD formal authority to mandate local compliance with the new regulations. However, there are multiple levels within HUD, and the staff at the regional office has an interest in sustaining the innovative work of PSS. These staff might have some ability to influence how federal laws are interpreted. The Human Services Coalition, on the other hand, has an interest in helping deliver a full set of services to get families out of poverty and in maintaining the current PSS program. Its power is based upon the six years of experience with PSS, but some agencies have board members who might be tapped to leverage other local philanthropic resources for supplemental funding. By systematically considering each actor's interests, expectations, and power, students can begin to see different possibilities for strategic

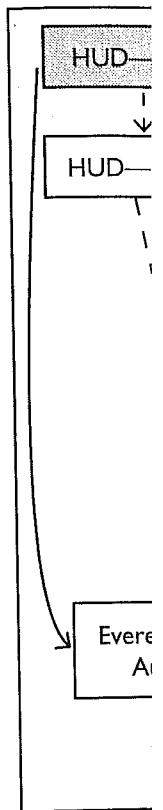
actions given the contours of the policy field. A stakeholder analysis illuminates areas of competing interests and expectations as well as points of convergence that actors might utilize.

What ties exist between these organizations? Social network analysis encourages us to emphasize the nature of ties among entities in the policy field (Provan et al., 2005). Network theory suggests that organizations at the center of a large number of ties to other organizations are significant (Provan and Milward, 1994; Provan and Milward, 1995). It also differentiates among ties and introduces the concept of multiplexity. Organizations might be tied to others through joint programs, shared resources, clients, or funding. These ties might be evoked annually, monthly, or daily. They might be at various governance, administrative, or operational levels. Some ties are formal; they are created by positional or legislative authority or from formal contracts. Others are informal; they emerge out of social relationships (Isett, 2006). This variation stresses the multiplexity of relationships often present in local and state policy fields.

Drawing upon the initial map created in Figure 1 and enhanced by the identification of more stakeholders and discussions of power, students can begin to map the relationships in the Integrated Housing and Social Service case. Clearly HUD has power and legal authority in this case—its policies allowed for the development of the PSS pilot and its mandate causes the crisis to be resolved. The County Council has significant power and holds legal oversight of the county’s administration. The county’s housing administration spearheaded development of the initiative and will likely spearhead the communities’ response, working with the other partners. Figure 2 illustrates how such relationships are represented through causal mapping.

In this example, we have highlighted three types of formal ties—legal authority, funding, and service delivery—in the HASCO case. In some cases, or if student are creating maps based on field-based research, it may be important to also represent more informal ties such as social relationships or information exchange. Again, as students struggle to interpret the nature of the relationships, of identifying the types of linkages between the relevant organizations, they are actually doing the analysis of this policy field. The visual is just a representation of this analysis. Given the facts of the case, PSS is represented as central in this network. Yet, the case does not reveal important details that would affect the flow of resources and sense-making within this field. We do not know, for example, who comprises the PSS task force that acts as a governing body. It may be that certain nonprofit service providers sit on the task force, receive service contracts, and actively shape the agenda of the county’s Human Services Coalition. Such a group of nonprofits would be considered a coalition that has developed a similar interpretation of events and would be able to mobilize itself to act. Similarly, a set of local foundations could exist that fund these nonprofits, sit on the project’s task force, and fund it as well. Holt must identify the network characteristics of

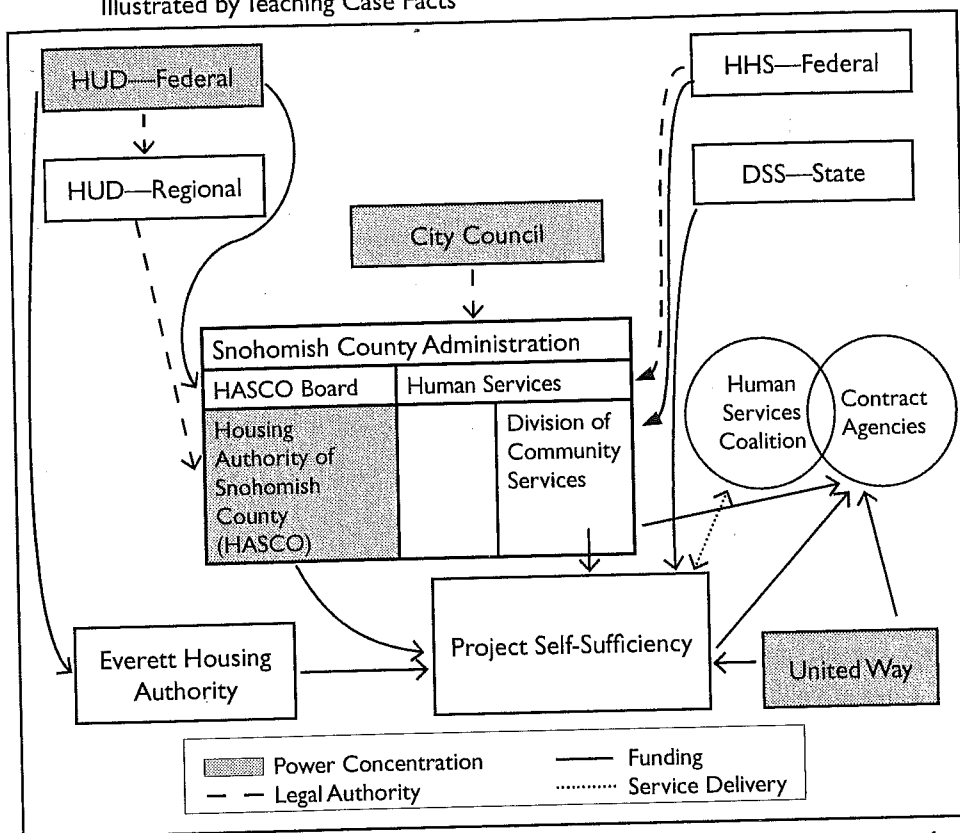
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Figure 2. Map of Formal Resource Flows Among Field Policy Illustrated by Teaching Case Facts



both coalitions in order to align and manage their interests, given the events that unfold in the case. These types of hypothetical situations can add richness to a case analysis where the local institutional context is made more concrete through the use of such visual maps. This now leads us to the final component of policy field analysis.

How can resources and social rules be shaped by field actors? Theories of networks and structuration that inform policy field analysis acknowledge the roles individuals play in shaping the structures of local contexts. For students of public affairs, it is important to cultivate an awareness of structures—their power to shape events, resource flows, and shared beliefs. Yet it also is important to promote awareness that public affairs leadership often requires strategic action in light of these same structures, sometime to change them, sometimes to ensure that the aim of public policy is truly carried out. In the Integrated Housing and Social Services case, the natural question that arises—given the policy field in Snohomish County with the power differentials, coalitions, and relationships—is what is Steve Holt to do? How can he take advantage of formal professional and organizational ties? How can he utilize the informal ties existing between individuals and organizations?

To facilitate a deeper analysis of the informal relationships and social processes—and to illustrate how such an awareness can help Steve know how to navigate the existing system—we find it helpful to explicitly discuss elements emphasized in structuration theory. In this tradition, resources are defined as anything that serves as a source of power in social interactions. They include human attributes, such as physical strength or knowledge and concrete objects, such as raw materials or written information. Virtual objects, such as wealth or status, are also resources. Rules are the virtual norms or conventions of social life. Rather than being formally written or stated, they often are informal and implicit. They are the knowledge people develop and share during routine actions within a group or an organization. As Table 2 illustrates, resources and rules of social life can be enabling or constraining, and Holt needs to understand them in order to move effectively within the local policy field and resolve his current dilemma. Specifically, certain social factors limit the possible actions that can be taken; the mandate rules out the possibility that current PSS clients can be served, people see the Regional HUD office as a force mandating compliance, and the HASCO board supports “housing only” in its mission. Yet at the same time, there are

Table 2. Analysis of Resources and Social Rules in “Integrated Housing and Social Services” Case

	<i>Constraining</i>	<i>Enabling</i>
<i>Resources</i>	New mandate takes Section 8 vouchers away from PSS clients	PSS has given Regional HUD legitimacy and prestige
		DCS using more “hard money” from County Council to fund PSS
		Broad-based collaboration in place
		Program results
<i>Social Rules</i>	Regional HUD represents compliance mandates	Collaboration has created new methods for problem-solving
	HASCO board supports “housing only” mission	Broad conception of problem domain: need for multiple and well-coordinated services to lift families out of poverty
	History of conflict between nonprofits and county DCS over block grant monies	

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many enabling forces. The HUD regional office has gained a great deal of positive, national attention from its involvement in PSS in Snohomish County. The program has more sustainable funding from the county and a broad coalition exists of diverse players who can advocate for ongoing support and draw upon solid program results. A new capacity has been built among the service network, and, among diverse constituencies, there is a palpable belief that a multiple service model like PSS is needed to help troubled families.

The analysis that emerges in the classroom from this simple table illustrates more completely how the social dynamics of the policy field shape the action possibilities. Often, when faced with complexity, people focus on the constraints that would need to be overcome. Yet, this analysis helps students to parse through the details and identify the reserves that can be tapped to deal with the situation at hand. Policy field analysis is, in the end, undertaken to help individuals better understand the complex contexts of public affairs and to make strategic choices within that context. Often strategic action hinges upon actors' abilities to see that which constrains and enables them, and choose viable avenues.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have defined policy field analysis and have reviewed the research and theoretical foundations upon which it is built. We developed the foundation from a close reading of the literature in political science, sociology, and public affairs, all of which grapple with the complex working of public systems. The power of this tool comes from its ability to aid the work of those occupying many positions within local and state contexts. Policy field analysis can help those in public organizations see and appreciate the interdependence on others in the policy environment. It can help nonprofit managers see and appreciate their dependence and their ability to influence institutions within their local context. Policy field analysis can also allow private funders to see the context within which they make investments of grant dollars, staff time, and political capital. With this broad applicability, the tool is useful for public affairs students who might well spend their careers moving among those institutions.

As an educational tool, policy field analysis heeds the call to develop ways to help students and practitioners comprehend and manage the complex systems at the center of public problem solving (Salamon, 2005). More explicit knowledge must be built about inter-governmental relationships, institutions, organizational operation, network management, and group dynamics. Ways to cultivate implicit knowledge about how to work across boundaries—facilitating groups of actors where no one is in charge, values may conflict, and communication is challenging—also must be developed. From our experience, applying this analytical tool is a first step in cultivating an awareness of effective practice within an inter-organizational context. Through modeling the use of causal maps to represent complex relationships, students also experience how such visuals can aid commu-

nication with others. When creating such representations in the classroom, faculty are able to discuss how such representations facilitate work across boundaries by sharing the analysis with others. With more explicit knowledge of complex environments present in the classroom, teachers can then cultivate more of the soft skills needed to be effective within such settings.

Like others (Fligstein, 2001; Agranoff and McGuire, 2003), we presume that more awareness of institutional and social structures is necessary for skilled, strategic management. As we have observed from practice, policy field analysis helps individuals make sense of ambiguous information, resolving the ambiguity inherent in much that is policy making and policy implementation. Awareness of institutional and social structures also helps individual actors choose among conflicting strategies by helping to narrow possible choices and prioritize action. For these reasons, public affairs education requires the development and use of tools, such as policy field analysis, that distill critical concepts from social science research and theory and apply them to public problem solving.

NOTES

1. For a more complete discussion of the theoretical foundation of policy field analysis see Stone and Sandfort (forthcoming).
2. This literature explores relationships between administrative bureaus, congressional committees, and interest groups as fairly closed systems.
3. Electronic Hallway is a teaching service of the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington and can be accessed through www.hallway.org.

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**Appendix
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**Appendix I.
Summary of "Integrated Housing and Social Services: Local Initiative
Versus Federal Mandate (A)"**

Steve Holt, director of the Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO) in Washington State, faced a dilemma. After seven years of operating a nationally honored project, Project Self-Sufficiency (PSS), Holt and other housing authority directors were being told by HUD in Washington, D.C., to cease operating such programs in favor of a new standardized, federally mandated project. As one of the original demonstration sites, Snohomish County's PSS had a national reputation for bringing single parents out of poverty. However, one of the keys to its success was that families were selected to receive precious Section 8 housing vouchers based on indications of initiative and motivation. The new mandate was to provide "uniform and universal" rather than selective access to Section 8 vouchers, thereby removing a principle element of the program's success.

HASCO developed PSS in 1984 in response to a federal initiative to develop innovative programs for unemployed and underemployed low-income, single parents. The initiative provided additional Section 8 housing vouchers to PSS clients to help them become self-sufficient. PSS itself was developed as a collaboration of local government entities, nonprofits, and other private providers of a broad range of services. In Snohomish County, the Human Services Coalition—a private consortium of health and human service providers; local elected officials; private citizens; civic, service, labor and business organizations; and low-income groups—endorsed the PSS concept, largely because it would give the Coalition's service agencies access to highly coveted Section 8 vouchers for their clients. Everett Housing Authority, representing the County's largest city, came on board early and agreed to dedicate some of its Section 8 vouchers to PSS.

Because HASCO's Board had decided that it should focus solely on housing, PSS was housed within the County's Community Services Division of the Department of Human Services. The Division received substantial sums from the federal Department of Health and Human Services through the Community Services Block Grant program and decided to initially use these funds to support PSS. This was a controversial move. In the past, local nonprofits had been critical of how much of the block grant funds the Division actually passed through to them. If suddenly funds were being kept for PSS, less money would be available to these nonprofits for other programs.

PSS operated through referrals from participating nonprofit agencies, educational institutions such as the local community college, and county agencies. Upon acceptance into the program, clients received from PSS referrals to needed services, Section 8 housing vouchers and case management services that coordinated the set of needed services. Over the years, PSS had developed and coordinated a broad network of service providers and referral agencies. Its work was overseen by a task

force consisting of representatives from the housing, education, and social service agencies, as well as clients, themselves.

PSS was successful. It carefully selected clients based on indications of their personal initiative and motivation. More than 350 families had graduated from the program and 400 were currently enrolled. It had received awards for excellence in service delivery from the National Association of Counties and a HUD Sustained Performance Award. The HUD Regional director was a frequent participant in PSS awards ceremonies and a close friend of the program. Importantly, PSS convinced the Snohomish County Council, the County's elected oversight body, to put PSS into its annual budget. The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services had also begun to contract with PSS to provide pre-employment and life-skills training to low-income families on welfare assistance.

Holt needed to fashion a local response to the new federal mandate that salvaged PSS and kept the successful public-private collaboration together.

The full case, along with segments (B) and (C), is available at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Affairs at <http://www.hallway.org>.

ABSTRACT

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