

# Activism and the Policy Process

edited by  
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# Contents

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# 1

## Activism and the policy process

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ANNA YEATMAN

### Activism and the policy process

This chapter is concerned with the particular kind of activism which comes into being when policy is understood to involve not only the decisions of policy makers and their directions to others for implementation but also to be a complex process which involves a host of different kinds of actors who are engaged in different stages of the policy process. These stages are: setting the policy agenda, policy development, policy formulation, policy implementation, policy delivery, policy evaluation and policy monitoring. The relationship of these stages to one another is more complex than that of a linear-circular sequence of feedback loops as it is often conceived. These stages can overlap in time and in ways which preclude any neat systemic view of the whole feedback loop.

Policy does not have to be viewed as a complex policy process. The alternative conception of policy is one that sees policy in terms of the policy *decisions* that are made by the executive government of the day. In the Westminster system, this refers to decisions made by Cabinet. The idea is that an executive government will equip itself so as to be able to make good decisions, and that it uses whatever mechanisms are needed to ensure that these decisions are carried out

by those charged with doing this. This model of policy is not just a decisionistic one (see Majone 1991) but an *executive* one. The focus is on the quality of executive decision-making rather than on the talent, wisdom, skills and vision of all those who are affected by policy and which could be tracked into a more participative approach to policy. Emphasis on an executive conception of policy must privilege what is actually often only a relatively minor, though important, stage of policy-making: deciding what policy direction to adopt. When it is believed that sound policy emanates from strong executive leadership, this is an elitist conception of policy that must privilege the moment of policy-making that seems to exemplify strong leadership: decision-making.

The executive conception of policy is not one that can legitimately excite policy activism except of the kind which is oriented to changing the composition of the executive, either in individual membership or the nature of the party which is in power. However, when policy is conceived as a complex, multi-layered process involving a whole host of different actors, policy activism of various kinds is provoked into being. Thus, there is a phenomenological point to be made here. Policy activism is more or less legitimate, and more or less developed, depending on whether the government of the day favours an executive approach to policy or a participative approach to policy which turns it into a policy process. When the executive model is the one adopted by the government of the day, policy activism is less legitimate and developed even though policy activists of various kinds may resist the executive model. When the participative approach is favoured by the government of the day, policy activism becomes both more legitimate and developed.

For the conception of policy as a policy process to be possible, the work of state administration has to be conceived democratically. What this means is that paternalistic and top-down conceptions of state administration have to be replaced by conceptions which require state administration to be open to public accountability and to public participation. When state administration becomes democratised in this way, the work of turning policy into operational practice can become visible both in its complexity *and* its dependency on the agency of those who are involved in this work. These agents include:

- 1 The public servants who are responsible for turning general policy directions into operational policy, plus those who are responsible for turning this operational policy into programme management, and those who co-ordinate the relationships between programme management and the non-government organisations on which government depends for the delivery of policy.
- 2 The different kinds of service provider who are responsible for delivering policy on the ground.
- 3 The users, both potential and actual, of policy.
- 4 All those who give evaluative feedback on the policy process whether these be professional evaluators, ordinary citizens, organised lobby groups or political party organisations.
- 5 Ombudsmen, administrative lawyers, and sometimes the wider judiciary, who determine whether principles of justice, due process and equity have been adequately responded to within particular instances of the policy process.
- 6 A number of agencies charged with monitoring and auditing the policy process—these include the Commonwealth and State Auditor-Generals.

### The increasing subjection of social life to policy

The areas of social life which are subject to 'policy' have grown extraordinarily over the last two or three centuries. The development of the modern 'interventionist state' extends the scope of conventionalised phenomena, that is phenomena which are understood to be subject to the artful intervention of policy. For a phenomenon to become subject to policy intervention means that it is brought into the domain of political action where it is reconstructed in relation to contesting narratives about who we are as citizens, what it is we think we should do, and why (my debt to Weber 1948, and Arendt 1958, here is evident).

Social life becomes subject to policy to the degree that it is denaturalised, that is, no longer left to the implicit direction of customary practice. In all societies, social actors think about what they are doing and why. In many societies, the grounds of this reflection does not implicate 'policy' but, rather, refers to a body of

customary law and practice which requires to be interpreted by those who are seen as closest to its divine source (elders, a priestly caste etc.). Policy occurs when social actors think about what they are doing and why in relation to different and alternative possible futures. To consider different possible futures means that social actors arrogate to themselves the power of determining their own fate. This is a project which requires them either as individuals or collectivities to weigh alternative courses of action in relation both to explicit statements of value or purpose and to consideration of the consequences of following one course of action rather than another. It also requires the collectivities to enter into dispute and contestation regarding alternative and contrary views of their shared future.

The state can be seen (Durkheim 1965) as the organised centre of social life. It is the sphere of action in which a society names itself to itself. This is why Durkheim was able to take law as the index of social solidarity. Law names and thereby constitutes particular ways of instituting social relationships, status and obligations. This constitutive role of the state (see also Franzway, Court and Connell 1989, p. 52) is expressed not only in how the state names social phenomena but in how it proceeds to regulate them and to subject them to policy. Viewed in this way, the history of the state is coterminous with the history of the subjection of social life to policy. The interventionist state, thus, is as old as the emergence of the modern state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the constitutional and absolutist monarchical regimes of Western and Middle Europe.

There are quite different types of policy regime which constitute the history of the state. For instance a patriarchal-absolutist monarchical state enjoins a different type of policy regime from that of a patriarchal-liberal democratic constitutional state, or that of a post-patriarchal and post-colonial liberal democratic constitutional state. In each case, how the culture of policy-making operates and who is constituted as being appropriately participant in, and/or influential with regard to, policy-making, varies. In addition, each type of policy regime has its own distinctive type of administration. From a top-down perspective, the business of administering, or as it has come to be called, managing, the state is the business of turning policy directives or decisions into authoritative operational guidelines, instructions and regulations for the conduct of all those (including

a host of non-state organisations) which come under the jurisdiction of the state. This business extends also to the monitoring of the impact of the state's programmatic action on the conduct of those who are affected by it.

### **The issue of the democratic accountability of the administrative state and its impact on how policy is conceived**

Policy, then, is inseparable from the state, and both the state and policy are dependent upon the apparatus of state administration or management. In a liberal democratic state-society, the question arises as to how the policy regime as the work of this administrative state is to be accountable to those whom government is meant to represent. As the work of the administrative state became, in the era after the Second World War, both more extensive and more complex, this question became a pressing one. There have been two responses to this question which work in different directions and, together, provide for a serious degree of incoherence in contemporary ideas of democratic accountability. The first response would have the elected executive level of government ('the government of the day' or, simply, GOD), with the assistance of its most senior officials, design and institute a series of controls over those who manage the work of the administrative state, including all the non-government agencies to whom the work of the state is contracted. These controls are intended to reduce the degree of slippage which occurs between the various stages of formulating and implementing a particular policy decision. This is the executive model of policy referred to above.

The second response to the problem of democratic accountability for the administrative state is to make the work of this state more open to the observation and participation of those who deliver and use its services and who are subject to its regulation. Where the first response is control-oriented and top-down in character, the second response is collaborative and bottom-up in character. The second response works in terms of metaphors of partnership and co-production. The policy process is seen as needing the input of *all* those who contribute to making it happen.

Different kinds of partnership and co-productive relationships are

indicated at different levels. For example, policy *development* may need a partnership approach which involves senior government officials working with community-based groups and non-government providers to identify what needs to be done, and what kind of response to this need makes most sense. However, a different kind of partnership approach is indicated at the point of policy *delivery* when, for example, a domiciliary care physiotherapist makes a home visit to an individual whose bed needs adjustment for her to be more comfortable, to be as mobile as she can be, and to permit ease of her transfer from bed to wheelchair. In this instance, the physiotherapist may need to talk with someone from the domiciliary care workshop in dialogue and consultation with the client and her carer to undertake the problem-solving that will bring about an outcome that the client, carer and the professional find to be satisfactory or good enough. The partnership here may be four-way, and the outcome of the problem-solving process is one which depends on co-production.

The two responses to the problem of accountability of the administrative state are, then, respectively the *executive model* and the *partnership model*. To the extent that these two models coexist, they do so as an unexamined incoherence of the policy regime (what the left hand is doing is independent of what the right hand is doing). There is a current attempt to force coherence where control-oriented models of performance management, using performance targets, measures and monitoring, are synthesised with market-oriented models of competition for clients. Here, the service user or client does not get to participate in the policy process. Rather, the policy regime presents as a given to the citizen and instead, he or she is invited to 'choose' which particular service he or she wishes to use.

### **The difference between policy (the policy process) and politics (the political process)**

The policy process is related to what is called 'politics' and 'the political process', but these also need to be kept distinct. As before, the policy process refers pre-eminently to the work of developing, formulating, implementing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating policy. To be sure, all of these aspects of policy—policy formulation, policy

implementation and policy evaluation—are subject to politics. More accurately, they invite their own distinctive type of politics. This politics is one internal to the policy process and is shaped by it.

While the policy process intersects with official politics and the political process, they are not the same thing. Politics and the political process refer to the organised public theatre and private backrooms of party political contestation over governmental power and its distribution. When a Senate Estimates Committee, for example, calls before it senior public officials to explain and account for some aspect of policy, this process of accountability is likely to be driven by party political point-scoring and a zero-sum competitive game of wins and losses. In this case, the policy process is subordinated to the political process. However, when a politician becomes a minister with a particular portfolio, and discusses policy direction with the senior public officials managing this portfolio, party political concerns present a series of constraints on such exchange but they do not direct its substance. Something like the reverse of the former case occurs here: as long as those political constraints can be worked within, the political process is subordinated to the policy process.

Agenda-setting is the one aspect of the policy process which might appear to fall more into the party politics game than into the networks of the policy process which scoop up state bureaucratic agencies, non-government providers, advocacy organisations, professional associations and, often, professional educators. However, as Julie Nyland's (1998; and see her chapter in this volume) work shows, activism in agenda-setting is pre-eminently associated with such *policy networks*. While party political activists may be committed to particular policy positions, these are more like a framework for policy direction than a policy agenda. When political activism and policy activism converge in policy agenda-setting it is because the political activists are seeking and using the advice of policy activists who may be ministerial advisers, think-tank staff, or policy activist academics.

### The policy process and the conditions of its emergence

There are older bodies of literature which refer to a science of statecraft (*staatswissenschaften*) intended for the instruction of an

elite stratum of officialdom responsible for the work of administering the state (see Burke 1991; and Hunter 1994, chapter 5). The science of statecraft was never intended for the eyes or participation of those cast as the objects of state administration. Thus, whether the ethos of elite statecraft is that of advice to a prince (Machiavelli), the management of national wealth (Adam Smith) or the moral education of a national population (Durkheim), this conception of policy is not one that has to work with the problematic of democratic accountability.

These older conceptions of policy tend to equate it with rational decision-making and the specific kinds of expert knowledge on which this particular type of reason depends. The decision maker in question can be a policy adviser to a king, an administrator of a particular bureau structured in terms of the classical bureaucratic model theorised by Weber, the doctor in charge of a government department of health, an inspector of a public school system or a teacher in a public school classroom. The idea is that if the decision (diagnosis, judgment) is sound, that is, based in expert knowledge and good reasoning, then the action sequence the decision is to orient can be left to take care of itself. Where this action sequence implicates others, as it invariably does, we have to hand an authoritarian and, or, paternalistic set of presuppositions that these others can be effectively commanded, manipulated or induced to do what the decision requires them to do. In short, these others do not have to be positively engaged in the carrying out of the policy in question. There is no policy *process*, there is only policy.

It is when those others are drawn into the light, and are seen as others on whom the carrying out of a particular policy depends, that we begin to think about a policy *process*. This permits us also to think about the different aspects and stages of the policy process. There are three distinct sets of others who become progressively drawn into the policy process. They are: first, the public officials (sometimes called bureaucrats, public servants, public managers) charged with the transformation of a political decision (a piece of legislation, an executive decision, or a judgment of the judiciary) into an operational line of conduct for policy. This work falls in-between the operational formulation of a policy direction and its delivery on

the ground. It includes what is nowadays called programme management.

Second, the on-the-ground deliverers of a policy or, what can be called, direct service deliverers. In the area of public schooling, these are all those who staff a school ranging from its principal through its teachers to its ancillary staff. In health, they include the various professionals and paraprofessionals engaged in the direct delivery of publicly funded and, or, publicly-regulated health services.

Third, the users of a particular policy as well as those who may not use it but who are subject to its regulation. Thus, users include citizens who receive public income support, citizens who need publicly-funded services for people with disabilities, citizens whose compliance is needed for effective public taxation collection and citizens who find themselves within publicly-funded institutions of detention.

How is it that these three distinct groups come to be seen as contributing to the carrying out of policy? It is because their agency becomes visible, and their agency becomes visible to the extent that it is problematised for purposes of carrying out a particular policy. The problematisation of their agency occurs in two modes: first, realist and pragmatic—this is an acceptance that top-down control models cannot work as they are intended to because human beings are not bureaucratically-oriented automatons, and it is best to reckon with, rather than to bracket out, their agency; second, democratic and anti-paternalistic—this is a normative commitment to the idea that policy will be the more democratic, intelligent and effective the more it depends on the active and informed participation of those who are affected by its processes and outcomes. A participative conception of policy permits it to be linked with what Lindblom and others call social problem-solving (Lindblom and Cohen 1979; Lindblom 1990), namely processes of public learning that allow problems to be publicly and dialogically probed, solved, attacked or, merely, better understood.

Paternalistic and control-oriented models of policy have by no means disappeared, but they have lost legitimacy. It is difficult for proponents of the executive model of policy to openly declare their attachment to an elitist and non-participative conception of policy. Instead, the executive model is reinstated by means of representing

certain problems as not just pressing and urgent but as *technical* in character, thus requiring the advice of experts not the participation of citizens. This is the function of the recent take-over of the policy agenda by a libertarian neo-classical economics where the most important policy issues are represented as economic ones. This particular brand of economics is especially salient because it not only privileges the private power of business corporations who command enormous political influence but it seems to speak on behalf of the freedom of choice of the ordinary person. This is an executive model of the policy process which works in the direction of substituting market outcomes for government intervention, and status as an individual consumer for individualised participation as a member of a citizen community.

Neo-classical economics is committed to a scientific and decisionistic view of policy: good policy is policy decisions which are appropriately informed by economic science. For the economic rationalist, there is no policy process, there are only policy decisions and consumer choices. In addition, the economic rationalist assumes that there is no such thing as a public or common interest. There are only private interests and privately-oriented choices. For this reason, and as far as possible, market action should substitute for government intervention. Government is far too prone to capture by government employees or groups seeking to make policy over to the pursuit of their own private interests. To this end, every effort to avoid such capture must be made. Such effort includes the conversion of tenured career positions with a stipend for public servants into time-limited contracts which offer performance pay and other kinds of incentive designed on the premise that a public servant is motivated by private utility rather than public interest. Where stipendiary support for a life-long career in public service guaranteed a professional independence of the public service in relation to the government of the day, the performance contract is designed to bring public servants into line with the executive model of policy.

The emergence of the policy process as a complex, multi-levelled and, to some degree at least, discontinuous process traversing very different spheres of agency and types of agent (politicians, public officials, service deliverers and service users) into the light of day is entirely contingent on struggles to democratise the policy process and

to engage the agency of these very differently positioned players. It is worth elaborating a little on how public officials, direct deliverers and users have been brought into the policy process, although it is to be remembered that this is a contentious and non-establishment view of policy.

Public officials became positively situated as agents in their own right in the policy process within the so-called 'new public administration' movement of the 1970s (see Alaba 1994; Yeatman 1990, chapter 3; Wilenski 1986). This movement transported the rhetoric of 1970s 'new left' participatory democracy into the administration of the state. It not only espoused ideas of a more representative and democratically accountable public bureaucracy, but it insisted also that the 'implementation' of policy was not simply the technical translation into reality of decisions made by the government of the day. This was an insistence that the work of implementation of policy was itself a creative exercise demanding skill, judgment and value commitment. Thus, it was not that the discretion of public servants in undertaking this work of implementation should be curbed; rather their agency in this type of policy work was to be recognised and understood. Peter Wilenski (1986, p. 63) offers an eloquent statement of this conclusion, one that moves in an entirely different direction to the neo-classical economist's recommendations for the avoidance of bureaucratic capture. Where the latter seeks to harness the bureaucrat's desire for private gain and advancement to the work of the state and to minimise their policy activism, Wilenski seeks to harness the policy activism of the bureaucrat but to make it politically and socially accountable:

We cannot continue to debate whether it is legitimate or not for the administrator's personal values to intrude into his or her decisions; the fact is that they do and, as our system of government operates, they must. Once this is accepted we can move to the far more important question which current public service ideology evades or ignores: what are the legitimate values in different circumstances and how are specific value choices to be justified?

The new public administration theorists offered a non-decisionistic model of the policy process. The formulation of a policy

offers only a general framework for action. The work of making this framework operational all the way from the adoption of departmental policy, through its delivery as a programme, to the point of its delivery on the ground is itself a contribution to *policy-making*.

If the agency of public servants is to be recognised as a valid and important contribution to policy-making and understood in this way, then it has to be accorded legitimacy within this more complex conception of the policy process. As we know this is difficult to achieve under the Westminster model of representative democracy which centres democratic legitimacy on the sovereignty of an elected parliament and the executive government of the day. If public official agency is to be accorded its own place within the policy process, there are a number of ways of making it democratically accountable. These include: the new administrative law which develops the principle of public power as subject to administrative review (Tang 1997); a more representative bureaucracy where the merit principle is interpreted in terms of the principle of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination; access to government information, including freedom of information legal provisions; direct participation by citizens—including consumer and provider groups—in the policy process; the localisation of programme delivery in ways which make it more accountable to and informed by local ecologies of service users and providers in family and community context. In addition, the doctrine of separation of powers is an approach to democratic government which reconciles public official agency with the more established plurality of democratic decision-making authorities: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

The closer we move to the point of delivery of policy, the more policy becomes embedded in the pragmatics of delivery systems in both local and regional contexts. In the case of publicly-funded providers and direct service deliverers, what they understand to be their core or 'real' work is undertaken within the parameters and constraints supplied by the wider policy environment. At least this is how most service deliverers understand the relationship of their work to policy. Policy represents a set of parameters, requirements, constraints and regulations over which they see themselves as having little control. Their real work comprises the business of attending to the needs of students in a particular classroom, giving a university

lecture, co-ordinating services for an elderly woman in need of assistance at home, for example.

When the policy process is designed in terms of the executive model of policy, this service deliverer perception of the relationship of policy to their real work makes sense. The executive model of policy treats the service delivery level of the policy process as a given, as a variable to be manipulated and controlled, not as the agency of people who should be invited to get involved in the making of citizen-responsive, wise and intelligent policy. In these circumstances, it is hard for service deliverers to understand that how they interpret and implement policy in the classroom, lecture theatre, community service setting is contributing to the *making* of policy.

Service deliverers can make more or less creative 'adjustments' (Ball 1993, p. 13) with regard to the policy that is delivered from on high. For example, quality assurance imperatives can be understood as an external imposition which is oriented to the control orientation of an employer and/or funder, or, they can be understood as an opportunity for improvement, and made over to a creative process of action research where practices of service delivery are reviewed, experimentally improved, these improvements evaluated and their achievements incorporated into normal, ongoing practice.

However, there are some instances (for example, the Australian school reform movement as exemplified in the National Schools Network) where the providers and service deliverers are invited into the policy process. This occurs when these agents are seen as being vital to the improvement of what happens by way of delivery of policy on the ground. For example, the core assumption of the school reform movement might be that: the improvement of teaching and learning outcomes for students in schools depends on the effective improvement of teachers' work in both classrooms and on a whole school basis and, in turn, this improvement of teachers' work depends on their own learning and development in harness with that of the students.

When, in this way, the 'street-level' or the chalk-face (the level of direct service delivery) is seen as an inherent part of the policy process, policy-making encompasses all that occurs from the point of policy formulation to the point of its delivery. When the delivery of policy is seen to be contingent on the culture and practice of the

providers and service deliverers, it is possible also to see them as central to ensuring that policy gets delivered in ways which make sense to those who use it. Making sense, in this connection, means that the policy is delivered in ways which are creatively adapted to the ecology of users' needs and wants in a particular context. Given this conception of policy, it is impossible to design a policy process which leaves out the creative and dynamic role of those who work at the point of policy delivery. Moreover, this is a conception of policy which reconceives the ethos of the work of those who are positioned as the public officials who formulate, manage, and monitor operational policy. Instead of these being viewed in a relationship of control to the workers at the coalface, they are now viewed in a role of *facilitation* of creative, dynamic work and learning at the coalface. On this approach, an active and continuous feedback loop of dialogue is required between the officials and the providers or deliverers.

The National Schools Network has exemplified a more complex conception of feedback of this kind as it is linked to a more inclusive idea of partnership. At the national level, the network brought together participating schools, the two levels of federal (which up until 1997 was the principal funder of the network) and state government, academic associates, and the two national education unions (the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Union).<sup>1</sup> This instance indicates how a participative and collaborative approach to the policy process might open up into a wider stakeholder partnership.

What of those who use services, or whose compliance is needed for the production of a particular public good (for example, traffic safety, taxation)? If policy is to make sense to those who use it, or whose compliance with particular rules and regulations is worth maximising, then policy needs to be designed in ways which take account of user or client views of what might enhance their use or compliance. The participation of the user or client in the policy process, then, is a necessary condition of good policy which makes sense to users and clients. This point can be taken further. If policy is also to be designed in ways which are creatively adapted to the needs of those who constitute particular and different communities of need, then it requires the active participation of these communities

in its design. Furthermore, if users or clients are to be responsible and realistic in what they can expect of policy, then they need to be engaged in an active and ongoing understanding of the policy process in both its systemic and point of delivery features.

In my experience arising out of the evaluation of major intergovernmental programmes in both home and community care and disability those who represent the actual or potential clients of the programme can be both responsible and resourceful if they are invited into a shared process of problem-setting and problem-solving with those who are responsible for managing the programme. More than anyone, it is the clients who understand the economies of good-enough service provision: what it is to combine reliance on services in kind with those which are professionalised and paid for; what it is to 'stretch' local resources and adapt them on a 'make do' and 'can do' basis. However, for this intelligence and co-operative creativity to emerge as a central asset of the programme in question, it has to be elicited, informed and resourced. To develop this kind of community-based asset for policy delivery, governmental systems not only have to invest much more in public learning of all kinds, but to promote designs for living which value and enhance what Eva Cox (1995) calls 'social capital'.

When the policy process is understood and designed so as to include users, or client participation, on an ongoing basis, we have to hand a coproduction model of the policy deliverer (user) relationship. That is, it is understood that the service, product or need for compliance cannot be 'customised' without the production of policy at the point of contact with the user or client being understood as a coproductive relationship. Schools which are supporting teachers in the development of negotiated curriculum and learning contracts with students are experimenting with a coproduction model. These schools are presupposing that an individual student's capacity to learn cannot be enhanced and developed without this individual participating in determining the what, why and when of his or her learning process. It may seem obvious that the quality and outcomes of services such as teaching and learning strongly depend on their coproduced features. However, until there are models of service delivery which explicitly emphasise and resource this relationship of

co-production, it cannot be turned into an asset of the relationship (see Yeatman 1994b, p. 292).

Policy, then, is reconceived as the *policy process* when the distinctive contributions to policy of public officials, direct deliverers and clients are accorded visibility and valued. This is a conception which is emergent in public policy and management discourse but which still has to vie with establishment models of policy which are oriented in terms of the efforts of rational decision makers to control those who do the work of carrying out those decisions (for the idea of the policy process as a new 'post-bureaucratic' paradigm of public management, see Yeatman 1994b).

It is also a democratic conception, one that values the participation of all those who are positioned as subjects within the work of conceiving, implementing and evaluating policy. To see policy as a *policy process* emphasises the need to develop mechanisms of using and valuing this participation so that these differently positioned subjects within the policy process enter into dialogue with one another. It is this which constitutes the intersubjective character of the policy process.

Elsewhere (Yeatman 1994b), I have argued that it is not just the democratisation of our social relationships which underlies this conception of policy as a policy process. It is also the dynamics of increased complexity and uncertainty in our lives. When attention is paid to these two dynamics, it becomes clear that rationalistic and intellectualistic models of policy that are predicated on some idea of rational mastery engage those who follow them in a rather dangerous kind of fantasy. We cannot predict or plan for our futures in ways which enable us to subject our lives to rational direction and control. Rather, we have to learn to live in ways which enable us to adapt to ongoing change, complexity and uncertainty.

To be sure, we can attempt to push the burden of uncertainty, as Marris (1996) calls it, onto the shoulders of those who are too weak to protect themselves from it. This is how a competitive rather than a co-operative management of uncertainty works. For example, we can turn the business of managing uncertainty over to the dynamics of how privately-oriented 'choice' operates in a market of competitively priced goods. By doing so, we create incentives for actors to operate in self-regarding ways, and to work to enhance

their own market power in competition with each other. On these dynamics, those who have relatively more market power to start with tend to accumulate such power at the expense and relative impoverishment of their fellows. This impoverishment extends to the environment because these same dynamics encourage asset-stripping of anything that can be converted into a commodity and, thus, into private market power for somebody. Since actors are social beings dependent in multitudinous ways on their social connectedness, this competitive strategy of managing uncertainty is self-defeating. It risks undermining the social capital on which this connectedness, if it is to be well-functioning, depends, as well as undermining the ecological capital on which species wellbeing depends. Co-operative strategies of managing uncertainty on the one hand, and responding to complexity on the other, demand that we begin to think in terms of a policy process which is informed by a culture and infrastructure of public learning.

### Policy activists

Activism is a category of political action which is wed to the participatory conceptions of democracy that have come to displace paternalistic models of democracy in the last several decades. Paternalistic models of democracy are those that cast the vast majority of the subjects of democratic government in whatever jurisdiction is considered (nation, organisation or school) as those in whose interests a professional elite of some kind rules. This elite may or may not be elected. Sometimes, the scientific expertise of the elite is used as a surrogate for election as a basis for authority, as in the case of Lenin's conception of the professional revolutionary. In the paternalistic models, it is the professionalism of the politician, mandarin-bureaucrat and service deliverer (archetypically, the priest or doctor) which is to underpin their work in making decisions on behalf of all those who are subject to their authority.

As mentioned previously, when paternalistic models of democracy prevail, activism is neither legitimate nor effective. This is not to say that these paternalistic models are not challenged by activist movements, for example, the workers' movements of the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries; they are. Rather it is to underline the fact that in order to be effective these movements had to be organised in ways which matched the structures of paternalistic democracy. Typically, then, movements of this kind were directed by a professional elite of unionists, Labor politicians or professional revolutionaries and, depending on how open or clandestine their organising could be, the mass base of the organisation was structured either bureaucratically or as a series of cells. An activist who is required to act in ways which are secretive, unaccountable, and not open to dialogical engagement with others is an activist who is displacing activism in favour of professional elitism.

Activism, I am suggesting, by its nature is a publicly declared and open contribution to political life. It is a commitment, statement of vision, declaration of values, and offering of strategic action, all of which are publicly declared. The activist is an actor who is prepared to stand for and by his or her vision and values within what is an openly contested territory concerning which and whose values are to prevail in setting the culture and orienting the structures of a particular governmental jurisdiction (again bearing in mind, this may be a nation, province, agency, school, hospital, for example). The activist does not stop being an activist if and when he or she succeeds in having this vision adopted as policy. Until the contest itself subsides, those who are prepared to publicly stand for particular value commitments and visions are required to be activists on their behalf.

To be sure, when the policy process is defined in terms of an executive model of policy, activists who are positioned in strategic organisational and, or, policy roles may find that they cannot be open about their vision and commitments, or, at least, that this openness has to be disciplined within a professionalised discourse of intrabureaucratic or intraprofessional talk. For example, a senior public official who chairs a committee of senior officials from both federal and provincial levels of government in a particular policy area undertakes this task in ways which cannot help but betray how he or she prioritises closed-bureaucratic relative to open-stakeholder types of politics in relation to policy discussion. If this public official consistently champions an open-stakeholder conception of policy (policy as a policy process), no doubt in ways which deploy

management discourse of the kinds that support such an orientation, then he or she has declared himself to be a policy activist.

I am offering a normative definition of *policy activist*, then, as anyone who champions in relatively consistent ways a value orientation and pragmatic commitment to what I have called the policy process, namely a conception of policy which opens it up to the appropriate participation of all those who are involved in policy all the way through points of conception, operational formulation, implementation, delivery on the ground, consumption and evaluation. Within this conception we may want to distinguish between bureaucratic, professional, practitioner and consumer types of policy activist. It would make sense to do this.

To define policy activist in this way means that we can enter into some interesting debates concerning the extent to which particular types of policy actor were or are policy activist. For example, are policy actors who are willing to offer accounts of their policy action in relation to vision, ideas and values within the public domain policy activists: Hugh Stretton, H.C. Coombs, for example? Are femocrats policy activists? Each of these in qualified ways might be termed a policy activist. Policy actors who are also policy intellectuals like Hugh Stretton are prepared to be publicly accountable for their ideas, and to locate those ideas within processes of public learning. However, this does not necessarily carry over into a conception of policy as the policy process. It may still sustain a professional elitist view of policy. Femocrats, on the other hand, can be seen as partial champions of policy as the policy process to the extent to which they believe policy should be open to the participation of women. However, when femocrats champion the cause of women in ways which de-authorise the participation of men in policy (as some femocrats have done), this is surely a shift away from policy activism toward cadre activity (or, professional revolutionary type action).

On this approach, we may want to introduce a number of distinctions between different types of policy agency, those which are more open and participatory in relation to those which are more closed and top-down. The idea of policy entrepreneur, as discussed by Roberts and King (1991), is a conception of policy agency which is non-participatory and top-down. Much the same might be said of Hecló's (1978, p. 100) idea of policy professional.<sup>2</sup>

The normative definition of policy activist that I am offering is contestable, of course. Its virtue is that it draws attention to a particular model of policy that legitimises as it invites different kinds of policy activism from different kinds of policy actor. It is a definition located within a democratic participatory conception of policy as an open policy process. As I have argued, a conception of policy as a policy process is located within a complex of value commitments. These include: a positive evaluation of government as a public authority working on behalf of public values and public interests; a belief that these public interests include the governmental provision of infrastructure of public learning and social problem-solving; and, a fundamental belief in the capacities of citizens in their various roles (public servants, professionals, clients, carers, neighbours, volunteers) to wisely explore how problems need to be defined and, then, addressed.