Litteraturgranskningar

SUSAN GERARD MARTON: *The Mind of the State: The Politics of University Autonomy in Sweden, 1968-1998*. GÖTEBORG 2000: DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Description

This dissertation is a description and analysis of higher education policy in Sweden from 1968 to 1998, with the fundamental point of the inquiry being an attempt to understand how and why public policies change. Susan Marton provides a thorough description of the numerous policy changes in this one policy field, focusing on the theme of the degree of autonomy that the central State grants to individual universities and to academics as a group. During this period a succession of governments adopted a variety of policy changes, often oscillating back and forth between greater State intervention and greater latitude for independent action by the universities. These changes in policy were to some extent a function of the partisan composition of the government but also varied as a function of the particular policy demands and political issues facing the country at the time. These changes were argued by Dr. Marton to fall within four identifiable time periods, each period associated with a particular orientation toward autonomy in higher education.

In order to understand the range of patterns of policies conferring more or less autonomy on institutions of higher education, Susan Marton develops four models of the relationship between the State and universities. These four models are based on a simple typology, with the cells being defined by the interaction of two variables. One of these variables is the degree of control being exercised by the State over higher education, with the two ends of the continuum being defined as centralized and decentralized, with the latter implying greater autonomy for the universities. The second variable is the purposes for which the universities are assumed to be put within the society. On the one hand universities may be the carriers of the dominant culture for society, while on the other hand universities may be seen in a more utilitarian light and as aiding in the economic and social development of the society.

The first of the models defined by this typology is termed the "Honor Society" model, meaning that the universities are conceptualized as having more latitude for managing their own affairs and are concerned primarily with the transmission of the dominant cultural values. The strongest contrast with the Honor Society model is labeled "Social Goals", with the State exercising substantial control and using the universities to achieve broader social and economic goals. The other less clear contrasts are the "Security Guard" and "Invisible Hand" models. The former model involves using the power of the State to protect the universities but those institutions are primarily cultural as opposed to economic actors. The latter model implies that the universities should be used to achieve broader social goals but that they should be able to make more of their own decisions.

Marton discusses educational policy making in four time periods, structured primarily on the basis of the dominant political party in government. These four periods were characterized by different locations in the typology of university policies and autonomy. In general, Social Democratic governments were less willing to grant the universities autonomy, although there were differences even among governments drawn from that one party. Interestingly, there did not appear to be as much difference between the parties in their use of higher education for developmental or cultural purposes.

In this analysis the government and political parties were conceptualized as the principal actors in making education policy, but they were by no means the only actors considered. Susan Marton was interested in the role that interest groups and policy experts played in constructing and legitimating policies about higher education. She therefore included in her research the submissions made by the entire gamut of participants in the process, with some emphasis on the input from members of academia itself. Perhaps most interestingly there was far from unanimity within the academic community itself concerning issues of autonomy. In discussing the making of policy she distinguishes between decision and non-decision actors, pointing out that although the policy making process is relatively open, there are still some members of the networks that are more influential.

The methodology used to address this question involves primarily detailed, and extremely extensive, analysis of public documents. She has identified a wide range of official and semi-official documents associated with the decisions under investigation, and has used those documents to identify the positions taken by the actors involved. These documents also were used to identify the contents of the final disposition during that round of policy making. This examination of documents was supported by interviewing of the participants but that interviewing was not systematic nor were the results used in the document to substantiate the interpretations made of the official documents. Given that the focus of this investigation is on those formal decisions this methodology is able to identify the major sources of the ideas and the decisions that were put into effect.

The most fundamental finding of this dissertation is that institutions do matter, and further that a range of institutional structures tend to influence the process by which decisions are made, as well as the substance of those decisions. The open and participative nature of Swedish government is of course one of the principal institutional factors involved, but in addition the structure of interaction among the participants in the process is also crucial for understanding who wins and who loses in the policy process. The large number of public commissions and consultation bodies involved in policy making in Sweden provide an arena for making decisions but do not determine the outcomes.

The other theoretical approach invoked in attempting to understand these policy decisions is network analysis. The participatory nature of Swedish politics already described is a natural locus for networking in policy making, and Marton identifies the variety of participants in networks surrounding the major policy decisions during the time period being investigated. She also attributes some portion of the variations in the policy decisions to the values of the participants involved within these stable patterns of interaction. For each of the case studies presented she maps the apparent beliefs of the participants and the natural coalitions that may exist within the networks.

Comments and Observations

This dissertation is very deeply steeped in the history and experiences of the Swedish university system. This is one of its strengths, but it is also in some ways a set of blinders to some possible comparative observations. One of these is that in the Swedish context the major threat to university autonomy clearly appears to be the State, but this is far from the case in all countries. This focus may cause Marton to play down somewhat too much the role of non-State actors in restricting autonomy. In my experience universities tend to be more controlled when they are at the mercy of business interests and local elites than they are when more influenced by public sector actors. This control is powerful in part because the controls are more subtle and therefore more difficult to oppose. Further, there are not the democratic means of accountability that can at least restrain the impact of political controls.

The above comment leads to a second and more comparative observation. The Swedish context is one in which the State has a great deal of authority over higher education, and has been quite willing to exercise that authority. Susan Marton's dissertation discusses a number of decisions made by central government using the rubric of "decentralization". Coming from another university tradition, it strikes me that even

the decisions that appear to be decentralizing in the Swedish context reflect an immense amount of State authority. For example, deciding how to appoint professors and the mix between teaching and research at the level of central government, whether by a ministry or by some sort of commission, reflects an immense amount of public power over decisions. Thus, although there is certainly change that has been well-documented here, all of that change is occurring within a very narrow ideological and policy range.

Questions

The description of the changes in higher education policy in Sweden is interesting and useful, but this dissertation is also embedded in several strands of theoretical discourse. It also reflects a particular approach to research into public policy issues that is by no means the only way to investigate this particular set of intellectual concerns. Thus, the major questions posed by this dissertation are not substantive but are primarily theoretical and methodological. The majority of this discussion of the dissertation, therefore, will be concerned with those questions and the need to place this one piece of research into broader frameworks. The fact that the dissertation raises a number of questions should be considered a positive feature of the document. A less interesting or important dissertation could not provoke this sort of reaction or touch upon this range of theoretical concerns.

Theory

The first theoretical question arising from Susan Marton's dissertation is whether there is not a rather fundamental theoretical problem involved when attempting to combine rational choice institutionalism with network theory. The former theory implies individual level explanation, while the latter relies on groups, and more even on the interaction of those groups, for its explanations. Therefore, this study is faced with the problem of attempting to integrate the rather different ontologies and epistemologies implied in these theories. One way out of this

apparent contradiction is to posit that the outcomes of deliberations in the networks making policy are primarily the product of the elites who dominate the policy deliberations. In particular those deliberations may be structured by the policy preferences of those elites and their capacity to shape the decisions. That synthesis is implied in this dissertation but in subsequent work it might be elaborated more fully as a means of both enhancing the understanding of the cases and elaborating the theories.

There is, however, perhaps an even more basic question that is raised by this attempt to integrate the two strands of theory in order to explain policy decisions in higher education: What does the institutionalism and network argument add to the study of educational policy making in Sweden? In at least the first of the case studies presented in the dissertation it strikes me that the ideologies of the participants explain most, if not all, of the positions taken by the actors involved, or at least the positions of the "decision actors" in this case. Also, the real shifts in the focus for educational policy appear to occur around major changes in the political landscape when power shifts between the Social Democrats and the bourgeois parties.

The emphasis on institutionalism and networks appears to underplay the political and strategic actions of the participants in the policy process. For example, it is not clear that the VPK was the natural political party of academic freedom, but they found themselves in league with the Moderates (pp. 148-50) in defense of that principle (almost in the "Honor Society" approach to the university sector). Is this ideology (belief) guiding the behavior of these parties, or is it a strategy in order to build coalitions on other issues, or simply to oppose the government party? How do we know? Similarly, all the way through the paper we are dealing with small majorities, minorities and/or somewhat strained coalition governments (see p. 166). What is belief and what is coalition politics?

The use of the network approach as the major approach to understanding policy in higher education in Sweden during this time period raises a number of questions about these cases, as well as about the general utility of this approach. One of

these questions is that Marton attributes the stability and effectiveness of policy networks to the existence of rules within those networks. The problem is that such rules are difficult to identify independently, especially using the methodology that she used. i.e. the examination of documents.

Finally, although Marton does a thorough and exceptionally good job of analyzing the manner in which decisions are made, the analysis (and many others in policy studies) begs the question of how the agenda for making policy was set. In other words, we may know how issues are resolved by the political system and by the networks associated with them, but we are less certain about how they became issues in the first instance. The capacity to shape the agenda, and particularly the capacity to keep certain issues from reaching the agenda, may be more important for interest groups and political parties than is the capacity to determine the outcome of controversies once they have arisen. Agenda setting is often forgotten in political science, in the rush to analyze decisions, but it remains a crucial element of the policy process.

Methodology

The principal methodology involved in this dissertation is case study analysis. When employing case study methodology theory is simultaneously a friend and an enemy On the one hand, a strong theory is a guide for the research and tells the researcher what to look for and provides criteria for what information is important. On the other hand, that same commitment to a theory may blind the researcher to other possible explanations, other types of information, and may subtly persuade the scholar that the original theoretical ideas are correct. This influence from theory is, of course, found in any research design but is a particular problem for case research because the individual researcher is the major research instrument (Peters, 1999). This problem is evident to some extent in this research, although it is mitigated partly by having several theoretical ideas involved in the research. There is no real protection against the natural bias that comes from our own theoretical persuasions,

other than extreme care, but the presence of multiple lenses available here certainly does help.

The research presented in this dissertation also raises the question of what is a case. The four assortments of decisions identified as the cases in this dissertation are quite extended, some more than others. The first "case" — of 1968-1977 with the Social Democratic governments predominant — in particular covers over a decade, and involves a number of separate decisions. Harry Eckstein (1975) among other students of the case method (see also Ragin and Becker, 1992) argues for a very restrictive definition of cases as a single decision. If these data were conceptualized as a number of cases, each involving a single decision, then there would be that many more data points that could be used to build theory about decision making in this policy area.[1] For example, in the second time period (1978-1990) there appear to have been four cases in which the actors behaved very differently and the networks involved in making those decisions also were structured differently. This could easily be four cases rather than one, and the entire time period would yield about two dozen data points.

One problem that emerges in the use of network analysis as a framework for understanding decisions taken concerning higher education in Sweden is that although the dissertation is based on the concepts of policy networks and communities, it provides rather little evidence of interaction among the members of these policy networks and/or communities. A central assumption of network analysis is surely that the members of these social structures interact and shape policy in the course of that interaction. The components of the networks are assumed to influence, and to be influenced by, the other members. Rather, the non-decision actors appear to react to the ideas of government in their own terms, rather than as a function of their membership in networks. It could be argued that the preferences of the actors are largely exogenous to the process, while the network conceptualization appears to argue for more endogenous processes that shape and reshape the ideas of the participants.

The final aspect of the network approach that should be considered here is that the more bottom-up, consensus building implied by the network approach does not appear to be supported in the case studies presented here. Rather, the evidence presented in these cases make policy making appear dominated by the political elites and especially by the political parties and career bureaucrats in the ministry. The open, indeterminate nature of networks does not appear to be demonstrated in these cases, albeit some examples presented do demonstrate greater openness than do others. Similarly, the presentation of the network approach discusses variations in the integration of policy networks and communities and predicts differences in their behavior on the basis of those presumed differences. I did not see, however, clear criteria for determining the level of integration, and therefore the predictions did not appear to have a clear basis. One standard criterion for social science is that the criteria used for analysis should be intersubjectively transmissible, so we need to be ale to identify those criteria.

Conclusion: What do We Learn About Policy in General?

This dissertation focuses on higher education policy in one wealthy, democratic, country. This focus raises several important analytic questions. One question is whether the findings might have been any different if another policy area had been selected for the analysis. Gary Freeman (1985) has argued, for example, that there is greater variance across policy areas than there is across countries, so that findings in one policy area may not really be generalizable to other policy areas, even in the same country. The findings here, however, appear to conform to many of the stereotypes of policy making in Sweden, so that we might expect these findings to be similar to those of other policy areas.

Following from the above point, it would be useful to identify and to consider the particular characteristics of higher education, or perhaps education in general as a policy area, that may influence any findings about policy making in these case studies. For example, Giadomenico

Majone (1996) and other scholars have discussed the utility of "non-majoritarian" institutions, e.g. central banks and even the bureaucracy, as important remedies to the problems encountered in some policy areas. Their expertise and their separation from partisan politics are important sources of legitimation for institutions of this type. The autonomy granted to institutions of higher education in recognition of their expertise, professionalism, and their isolation, or at least attempted isolation, from politics may be one of the crucial elements to keep in mind when considering higher education policy.

Finally, we have been talking about higher education in relative isolation from other policy areas, but there is a question about whether this policy area, or any other policy area, is as airtight as this dissertation, and most other policy research, at times makes them appear? In particular, there appears to be at least one case among those included in the dissertation in which labor market considerations intrude, and higher education may be a means of keeping unemployment from increasing in the face of economic pressures. Likewise, higher education is becoming increasingly linked with economic development policy more generally, and also with regional development issues, so that higher education is far from an isolated policy but embedded in a complex web of policy and politics.

In summary, this dissertation makes a major contribution to understanding higher education policy making in Sweden. It also makes a contribution to developing the theory of policy making in Sweden, as well as more generally. The network approach to understanding policy, and the relationship of that one approach to others such as the "new institutionalism", provides a useful framework for this analysis. The findings contained in the dissertation point to some of the possible difficulties in applying network theory, as well as some ways in which this form of analysis could be improved.

B. Guy Peters

Note
1. These multiple decisions could, for example, be used as data for an analysis using Boolean algebra to test various theories about the policy process.

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WILHELM HENNIS: *Regieren im modernen Staat: Politikwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen I.* Tübingen: J C B Mohr (Siebeck), 1999.

I den mån svenska politiker och forskare på senare år intresserat sig för Tyskland gäller det knappast landets författning. Det ambitiösa arbete för att återställa det parlamentariska folkstyret som inleddes efter 1945 har självfallet bemötts med respekt. Men det kvalificerade vetenskapliga intresset från vår sida har inskränkt sig till någon enda avhandling. Få tycks i Sverige ha varit beredda att riktigt efter förtjänst uppskatta den rättsstatligt intressanta och politiskt stabiliserande insats som 1949 års västtyska grundlag utgör. Förbundsrepubliken Tysklands från oss förvisso avvikande federala uppbyggnad kan bara delvis ge nyckeln till denna svaga reaktion. En omständighet till som säkert har hållit intresset begränsat är att det tyska förlitandet på en naturrättslig tradition har tyckts främmande för svenskt politiskt liv, och i varje fall för våra författningsutredningar. Medan den tyska grundlagen starkare framhäver folkstyrets indirekta, representativa drag, och även innehåller fler in-

slag av maktdelning, såg Sverige under intryck av 1970-talets politiska stämningar inte skäl att begränsa folkmakten t ex genom utförligare rättighetsparagrafer eller grundlagsfästa motvikter till riksdagen.

I Tyskland har förutsättningarna på flera sätt varit andra. Efter att politisk opposition under Hitleråren varit olaglig strävade upphovsmännen bakom den tyska grundlagen 1949 att med tillämpning av västvärldens centrala författningstraditioner infoga Tyskland i folkstyrenas krets. Det var dock inte bara fråga om att återföra utvecklingen till före 1933, utan även om att överge de rester av konstitutionell monarki och korporativ överhetsstat som hade kvarstått ännu i Weimarförfattningen från 1919. Enligt denna behövde t ex ingen regering i princip framgå ur en parlamentarisk majoritet. I Weimartyskland hade ett av partierna, DVP, t o m monarkins återinförande som en tung utgångspunkt i sitt program. Tyskland 1945 hade mycket osäkra förutsättningar i utgångsläget. Demokratin var inte på samma sätt som i Storbritannien, USA m fl länder en beprövad beslutsmetod, och det fanns inte samma vana som i de anglosaxiska länderna att göra fria sammanslutningar till en skola för frihet och politiskt självbestämmande. Den nya grundlagen fick i denna omgivning drag av experiment.

Den tyske rätts- och statsvetaren Wilhelm Hennis gör i sin bok *Regieren im modernen Staat: Politikwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999,428 s) ett stimulerande försök att ringa in den moderna tyska författningsutvecklingens förlopp och egenart. Hans bok rymmer belysande uppsatser och tal från det halva århundrade som denna grundlag varit i funktion. Skarpsinnigt speglas egenheter i den tyska grundlagen och dess samband med tidigare regelverk och inhemsk rättstradition.

Vad som skapades 1949, menar Hennis, var starkt beroende av Tysklands historia och ej minst dess roll av "försenad nation". Det var en nyordning t ex redan att en tillträdande förbundskansler framlägger sitt regeringsförslag för själva förbundsdagen, inte som tidigare för statschefen. Även partierna tedde sig alltjämt i det sena 1940-talets Tyskland på visst sätt som ovana företeelser. Det berodde inte bara på att de