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Institutional Influences on the Use of Evidence in Public Policy: The Case of Policy Formulation in Ireland

This article examines the use of evidence for policy-making, with a specific focus on a policy-support tool called Health Impact Assessment (HIA). This tool aims to health-proof all public policies, at national and local levels. It has gained credence and credibility from supranational and international institutions, such as the European Union and the World Health Organisation. HIA is one of a plethora of instruments used to inform public policy. This research examines whether HIAs were used for the purpose that they were conducted- to inform policy, either directly or indirectly. Institutional theory was used as the analytical lens to examine this phenomenon. This article draws on research from a doctoral study conducted in Ireland, based on empirical evidence from four case studies within the two jurisdictions on the island; the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

Key words: Institutional Theory; Ireland; Policy Formulation; Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

Introduction

The influence of the European Union's (EU) supranational institutional infrastructure on policy formulation involves the adoption of impact assessment mechanisms in local and national policy-making. Impact assessments seek to inform the policy process, providing evidence on intended and unintended consequences of a particular policy proposal. The European Commission (EC) conducts impact assessments (IA) on its own proposed regulatory and legislative policies. This executive arm of the EU cites the rationale for IA from the Goteborg European Council (June 2001) and in the Laeken European Council (December 2001). Impact assessment frameworks, whatever their primary focus may be (regulatory, economic, environmental, health, equality-proofing) can provide evidence to be used in policy formulation.

The adoption by the EU of this instrument and policy-evidence approach lends partly to its credence in the policy-making world. The impact on policy formulation, which the EU undeniably has on member states, is significant, especially with matters concerning trade and economic liberalisation, the physical environment, health- and equality-proofing. There are a plethora of impact assessments operating on the periphery of public policy processes, with regard to the matters aforementioned. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is one such framework. It seeks to promote healthier public policy development throughout all government sectors.

However, is the evidence and knowledge created by the IA process used in policy formulation? Does it inform the policy process? This is the central question proposed for this article. If the evidence is not used- then why not? What influences the use of evidence in policy ma-

king? Do overarching politico-administrative structures imoact on the use evidence in policy? The rationale underpinning this research is to assess whether institutionalist structures influence the process of HIA utilisation in policy-making. The dependent variable has been drawn from knowledge utilisation and policy analysis literature, in order to ascertain direct or indirect use of HIAs in policy, and the *extent* of such usage.

Four Irish cases studies where HIA was conducted for local government policy-making were used in a doctoral study (O'Mullane, 2009). The empirical evidence derived from this study forms the basis of analysis for this article. 50 expert interviews were conducted for this research. Two cases were derived from Northern Ireland; a HIA conducted on the Belfast City Council Air Quality Action Plan and the Housing Regeneration of a social housing estate in Derry/ Londonderry. Two cases were included from the Republic of Ireland, namely the HIA on traffic and transport in a village in Dublin (Ballyfermot) and a HIA on a local government policy (Traveller Accommodation Programme) which plans for the housing situatiuon of the Irish traveller (gypsie) community in County Donegal. An all-island persepective has been taken for the study of HIA use in policy since the development and training of HIA has evolved on an all-island basis, crossing the jurisdictional division.

Table: Case Studies used in the Research Framework: HIA Subject and Political Jurisdictions

>	> Republic of Ireland	> Northern Ireland
> Physical Environment	Dublin >	> Belfast
> Housing	Donegal	> Derry/ Londonderry

The Instrument to Enable Analysis: Health Impact Assessment (HIA), A Policy-Aiding Tool

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a policy-support tool, which is concerned with the biomedical and social health of populations. It seeks to enable political actors to make evidence-based decisions. The tool endeavours to involve all relevant stakeholders in the political process, and to ensure that evidence, as derived from this process, is utilised in policy formulation.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) provides such a feasible tool to use in this research; it is an instrument to aid the understanding of policy formulation in Ireland. This tool seeks to screen policies for intended and unintended consequences on population health. The information from the methodology and outcome report (arising from the HIA process) is to be used, normatively-speaking, in policy formulation of the particular sector in question, for example, traffic and transport policy in Dublin city. Health-proofing of government policies has been advocated within the EU's Maastricht Treaty 1993 (article 129) and Amsterdam Treaty 1998 (article 152). The World Health Organisation (WHO) endorses the advancement of appraising government policy proposals since the publication of its seminal consensus paper in 1999 (WHO Goteburg Consensus Paper). The government health strategies of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, where the empirical research for this study was based, advocate the need to proof government proposals and policies for their impact (positive and negative) on population health.

Clearly, HIA has a political footing, grounded in government strategies, political discourse

and within supranational institutions such as the EU and the international governance structure of the W.H.O. Normatively, the discourse surrounding HIA and IA frameworks, overall, is positive. However, based on inductive and empirical research, drawing from real-time experience, are HIAs used for the purpose that they are formed? Simply put- are HIAs used? Or do they gather dust on the shelves of state authorities? Glossy evidence profiles, nutrient soil for political tokenism and lip-servicing? This research aims to establish this, drawing from the theories of institutionalism, policy-analysis and -utilisation, examining the institutional influences on the use of HIAs in policy formulation.

Academics within the policy scientific field (a sub-discipline within the morphous shoul of political science) argue for the analysis of HIA utilisation in policy formulation (Bekker et al. 2004; Wismar et al 2007). Putters (2005) asserts that efforts should not be spent on defining HIA, but on investigating the policy context and process that it is expected to influence, manipulate, integrate and advocate. According to Putters this policy process, and the organisational culture which is unique to each institutional context, requires examination.

Research Design

It is the aim of this research to investigate Health Impact Assessment (HIA) use in public policy formulation in Ireland. The institutional influences affecting the use of HIAs will be demonstrated in this article. As HIA seeks to achieve change within the political structures, institutional theory fits best for this examination (Schmidt, 2010).

The use of case study methodology with institutionally-generated theoretical propositions is the suggested approach to proceed in political science research (George and Bennett, 2004). This has been advocated by commentators in the field who encourage this marriage between theories and methods (Peters, 1999; Lowndes, 2002) in conceiving an appropriate research model. In-depth expert interviews were conducted with informants from the Steering Committees of the HIAs. This type of qualitative interviewing has been advocated for political science enquiry (Dexter, 2006). Interviews were analysed using a combination of open-coding and structured coding frameworks (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

There was variation in case selection based on the jurisdiction divide. Two HIA cases are based in Northern Ireland (Derry and Belfast), while the other two are in the Republic of Ireland (Dublin and Donegal). This selection ensured a fair analysis of HIA use across the country, and the variability of the range of HIAs and their locations adds depth to the research.

The aim of the research is to investigate HIA use in policy formulation in Ireland. In order to investigate the use of HIAs and the knowledge they generate for policy making, influences on the use of HIAs will be examined. Previous work investigating the relationship between the policy processes and HIA use has recommended an examination of the institutional structures as influences upon HIA use in policy (Kemmm and Parry, 2004; Bekker *et al.* 2004; Putters, 2005; Morgan, 2008).

Therefore following on from this rationale, the central research question is as follows: How and why do institutional structures influence the use of HIAs in policy? The emphasis on the 'how' and 'why' aspects of the question are directly linked to case study research design (Yin, 2003). This ensures a triadic linkage between theory, methods and research model/framework (Littig, 2006).

Arising from this central research question (CRQ), more are posed for this study. The CRQ asks both a descriptive (how) and analytical (why) question in relation to the factors of influence. Therefore, sub-research questions are related to the assertion that institutional forces influence the use of HIAs for policy. These questions have been formulated within the methodological and epistemological approach of case study research design.

The method of process-tracing will be conducted on each case study in order to describe the hypothesised influence on HIA use (independent variables) and the degree of use in policy (dependent variable) (George and Bennett, 2004).

The influence (independent variable) upon HIA use (dependent variable) is the changeable effect that will be investigated in this research. The hypothesised outcome, which in this case is the extent to which HIAs are used in policy processes, will be assessed in terms of the degree of knowledge utilisation. Policy analysis and knowledge utilisation theories informed the construction of this variable and the direct and indirect utilisation indicators. For the purpose of this research, the relationship of the institutional influence to the dependent variable (extent of HIA use) is explored in a holistic sense; the influence is examined and the extent of HIA use is examined, as illustrated in the conclusions drawn from the research framework in this article. Greater detail of the variable relationships will be presented in the next section.

Independent Variable: Institutional Influences:

“How do institutional structures influence Health Impact Assessment utilisation in policy?”

HIA is a policy support tool that aims to inform policy decisions by making explicit the health impacts of each policy document or proposal. It strives to maximise the benefits and minimise the negative aspects of policies, and policy proposals (Scott-Samuel, 1998; Barnes and Scott-Samuel, 2002). The concept of institutionalisation (the degree of embeddedness of the HIA tool within institutional structures) with regard to HIA in this research, refers to the systematic integration of HIA into the decision making process (Wismar *et al.* 2007). HIA institutionalisation involves the tool, its evidence and knowledge, becoming part of the rules and processes of decision making across the relevant institutions (decision making bodies and statutory agencies), thus making use of one the strengths of HIA as a policy-aiding tool; it being an intersectoral mechanism for all stakeholders to participate (Banken, 2001; 2003). Kearns and Pursell (2007) concluded in their evaluation of the Irish Ballyfermot Traffic and Transport HIA that the role of the local government authorities in institutionalising HIA into its policy process rules and procedures is a vital step in embedding the tool in public policy formulation. Without this vital step, the future development of HIA is tenuous and uncertain, as has been the experience across European countries with HIA institutionalisation (Wismar *et al.* 2007).

The influence of the institutional norms (polity) are hypothesised as shaping the use, nor non-use, of HIAs. The extent to which institutional structures support the utilisation of HIAs in Ireland will be established in this research. A theoretical indicator has been employed in order to ascertain the degree of this proposition. Normative institutional influences will be examined, in order to establish what *should* be happening in the institutional frameworks. This choice of normative institutional influences has been conducted in the European evaluation of the tool's use and effectiveness across the continent (Wismar *et al.* 2007), thus ensuring this study is comparable within the wider context of research design and findings.

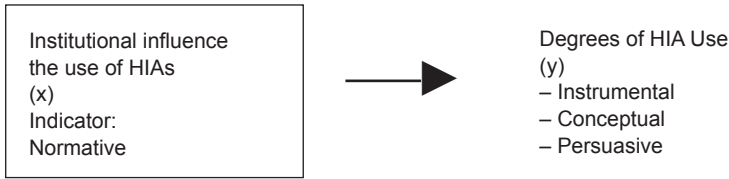
Institutional Influence: Normative dimension

How institutions impact upon policy-making and individual behaviour in such processes has occupied the analysis of policy academics over previous decades (Finer, 1954; Kiser and Ostrom, 1982; Immergut, 1992; Peters, 1999; March and Olsen, 1984; 1995; 2005). Political institutionalism propounds the view that policy formulation is the result of internal value and belief systems (norms), as opposed to the sole influence of external forces (Skocpol, 1985; March and Olsen, 1989; 1995). A branch of this institutionalism is known as socio-historical institutionalism, or statism, which views the state as the leading political-process agent and dominant societal establishment. However, in practice, the hegemonic role played by the state in all public affairs is improbable (Przeworski, 1990). In reality, the approach is used as an analytical tool to enable an assessment of the state's role upon institutional actions. In addition, the emphasis of institutional influences and the placement of ideas, norms and discourses underlying such impacts is an important aspect of this theoretical branch (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Empirical investigation in political science, utilising historical institutionalism as an analytical lens, has become an increasingly useful mechanism in demonstrating the influences upon the policy-making processes (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Peters, 1999; Schmidt, 2010), with a particular focus upon inertia within the policy-making process. Steinmo *et al.* (1992) published a seminal piece of work pertaining to this branch of 'new' institutionalism.¹ This research puts forth socio historical institutionalism as a very tangible theory in explaining influences within institutions, and in explaining institutional actions. More in particular, however, this theory seeks to explain the inaction and inertia within institutions (*ibid*; Rose and Davies, 1994; Rothstein, 1998). Indeed Genschel's (1997) study highlights this aspect. This approach is appropriate for this research, as inaction, institutional inertia and lack of utilisation of HIA knowledge is one of the defining features of the relationship between the policy process and HIAs in Ireland, as learnt from exploratory interviews (O'Mullane, 2009).

However, due to the short length of time of the HIA processes being examined here, and their subsequent journey into the public policy processes being relatively short (on average less than five years for each contemporary HIA case study) an undiluted historical institutionalist approach will not be used. A mix of theoretical concepts will be employed, as is suitable for the research question (Knill, 2001; Grix, 2004). Institutional theory, which has been advocated as more of an 'organising perspective' than a prudent causal theory in the behavioural sense (Gamble, 1990; Rhodes, 1995; Lowndes, 2002; Schmidt, 2010), is used in this research to enable an examination of policy making structures, which HIAs aim to inform. This will be looked at by adopting a normative and empirical institutionalist approach (March and Olsen, 1984; 1989; 1995; Peters, 1999).

This study will establish the theoretical framing from these elements of a system-centred approach to analysing influences on evidence use in policy-making.

¹ March and Olsen (1984) coined this phrase, so as to delineate the difference between the recognition of institutionalist forces as being very distinctive, tangible and measurable variables in explaining institutional actions and policy process within them, from the old institutionalist traditions of viewing nothing spectacular in such an analytical theory (Lowndes, 2002).

Figure 1: Research framework: Institutions influence the use of HIAs

The Dependent Variable: The Extent of Utilisation

Why is the degree of utilisation, both direct and indirect, varied in different contexts?

The influence (independent variable) upon HIA knowledge utilisation (dependent variable) is the changeable atoms of effects that will be investigated in this research. The hypothesised outcome, which in this case is the extent to which HIAs are used in policy processes, is assessed in terms of the degree of knowledge utilisation, as indicated in table 1. Policy analysis and knowledge utilisation theories informed the construction of this variable and the direct and indirect utilisation indicators. The following section outlines the theoretical approach adopted from the policy analysis conceptual paradigm.

Table: The Degree of Utilisation of HIAs in Policy Making

> Independent variable: Degree of utilisation	Instrumental (<i>direct</i>)	Conceptual (<i>indirect</i>)	Persuasive (<i>indirect</i>)
> Dublin		>	>
> Donegal		>	>
> Belfast		>	>
> Derry		>	

Policy Analysis and Knowledge Utilisation Theories:

Policy Analysis: The Art and Craft (Wildavsky, 1979)

Policy analysis is a branch of study that seeks to inform and prescribe solutions and formulae to decision makers, regarding the direction and content of public policies (Weimer and Vining, 1992; 1999). The purpose of policy analysis is to “deepen, broaden and extend the policy-makers’ capacity for judgement- not to provide him with answers” (Milliken, 1959:167). Political judgement can be conceptualised as utilising knowledge within a rationalistic model or one of a more pluralistic nature (Steinberger, 1993). Although with different emphases, impact assessment has a place, conceptually and ontologically, within the policy analytical paradigm (Bartlett, 1989; Kemm and Parry, 2004; Kraft and Furlong, 2004). Stone (2002) has produced a body of work that examines the processes of policy making and the underlying values and politics, which have an impact upon the boundary and scope of policy analysis. This work looks at the

extent to which policy analysis can inform, objectively or subjectively (depending on which body or individual is providing the information) the public policy pathways.

Policy analysis, for the most part, refers to the analysis of policy options and alternatives (Patton and Sawicki, 1993; Kraft and Furlong, 2004). By this understanding, the type of knowledge that is fed into the policy process, and the epistemological underpinning of it (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Rossi *et al.* 2004), must be taken into consideration (Weiss, 1977; Stone, 2002). In the seminal work ‘Speaking Truth to Power,’ Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) conceptualise that knowledge and policy are two distinct spheres, and the relationship between the two are linked by a bridge of ‘information flow’ which may or may not ‘fit’ suitably to all policy processes. For the most part, information does not find its way into policy. Weiss (1977) questioned this rationality of the linkage attributed to this information stream between policy and knowledge, stating that values of the policy actors and researchers, and the reality of ‘compromise-making’ in policy processes, needs to be acknowledged. Values throughout the policy process are an important consideration, whether implicit or explicit. Weiss (1980) and Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) put forward the hypothesis which is more posited on the side of incrementalism; that policy develop as a result of ‘knowledge creep’ and is formulated through a process of incremental decision making and gradual policy evolution (Bekker, 2007). Indeed the rationalistic approach defies and denies the political dimension of knowledge utilisation for policy. Knowledge is not often used in a non-partisan, apolitical and technocratic manner. Oftentimes, there exists a politics of use and non-use of knowledge within the policy process; the evidence of certain knowledge put forth may be factually correct but politically inexpedient (Patton, 1997). This must be taken into account in order to form an accurate picture of knowledge utilisation within the public policy making process (Chelimsky, 1995).

Weiss (1991) conceptualises this newfoundland of knowledge utilisation for policy as adopting a more incrementalist stance towards the domain; a long-term utilisation of knowledge is incorporated into her new hypothesis.

Weiss (1991) categorises models for knowledge utilisation into three groups, as cited in the work of Bekker (2007:54/55) regarding the investigation of HIA as a tool for Healthy Public Policy:

1. Knowledge as provider of facts to fill a knowledge gap
2. Knowledge as provider of ideas for conceptual policy development
3. Knowledge as provider of arguments as ammunition in the policy arena

This categorisation builds on the work of Janowitz (1970) who recognised the potential for conceptual utilisation of knowledge over time, labelled as ‘enlightenment.’ The consideration of politics underlying the use of knowledge and the evaluation of policy rejects the rationalistic approach to evaluation, and recognises the degree of policy learning that can occur in the policy processes; direct use of knowledge is no longer the only form of utilisation that is recognised, given the political nature of using knowledge in policy (Patton, 1997; Sanderson, 2002).

Rossi *et al.* (2004:411) have moved this school of thought onwards with their conceptualisation also, with the following categorisation of utilisation of knowledge in policy:

1. **Instrumental utilisation:** The documented and specific use of knowledge.
2. **Conceptual utilisation:** The use of knowledge “to influence thinking about issues in a general way.”
3. **Persuasive utilisation:** The use of knowledge “to either support or refute political positions- in other words, to defend or attack the status quo.”

A similar typology was also used in the European-wide evaluation of HIA effectiveness in policy making (Wismar *et al.* 2007: 19/20). Degrees of effectiveness (of use in policy) varied across the cases:

1. **Direct effectiveness:** The HIA has contributed to and modified the policy decision.
2. **General effectiveness:** The HIA was taken into consideration but the results did not modify the decision or policy.
3. **Opportunistic effectiveness:** Appears to have an effect, but in fact the HIA was only commenced because it was expected to endorse a particular policy stance
4. **No effectiveness:** The HIA had no impact on the policy process whatsoever.

The epistemological and ontological viewpoint of the concept ‘knowledge’ is a contentious point underlying the policy research of knowledge utilisation; what is meant by knowledge? (Weiss, 1980; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Cooper, 1999; Rossi *et al.* 2004; Nutley *et al.* 2007). The meaning of knowledge is a socially constructed concept and term. The latent, and not so latent, meanings and interpretations underlying the ‘knowledge’ concept must be clarified at the beginning of policy processes. This point has been highlighted in the work of Bekker (2007), who investigated the policy processes and the manner in which HIAs can be redesigned so as to inform policy and aid decisions in the maximum way possible in the Netherlands.

The paradigm of policy analysis, as one approach to policy study, is indeed an art and a craft, and demands the intuitive creativity and insightful foresight of both researchers and policy makers to ‘make best use’ of available knowledge for pending decisions. It forms the theoretical basis for the dependent variable in this research.

Conclusions from the Research Framework

Each case study was analysed using the method of process-tracing in order to describe the hypothesised influences on HIA utilisation (independent variables) and the degree of use in policy (dependent variable).

The central research question, which is as follows, was the seedbed from which more specific theoretically-based questions were devised:

How and **why** do the overarching structures influence the use of HIAs in policy?

The proceeding sections illustrate the suitability of the chosen theories and schools of literature in eliciting relevant data, in order to answer the research question.

Institutional Theory

How do institutional structures influence Health Impact Assessment utilisation in policy?

New institutional theory was chosen to explain the influence of overarching structures that have the potential to shape individual behaviour and action, or non-action (Immergut, 1992; March and Olsen, 1984; 2005; Peters, 1999). The degree of convergence and divergence in the themes that arose from the interview data will be used to illustrate the practicability of this theory to explain the phenomena of influence on HIA use in policy making.

Normative Dimension

By employing a deductive and inductive approach to data analysis (Fenno, 1978), and ensuring that analytical induction was facilitated rather than raw empiricism (George and Bennett, 2004), contingent generalisations have been concluded from this case study research.

In response to the question of institutional constraints and these impacts upon individual behaviour and the way in which HIA utilisation may be affected, there was a mix of convergence and divergence of themes. The categories that came from the detection phase, after the indices of data arising from the interview transcripts was analysed, formed a thematic map of issues and findings. All cases converged on the categories of institutions as an influence upon behaviour at a macro-level, and the HIA process and the policy process as influences on the lower micro-level. This convergence indicates the degree of institutional influences, and the norms that such institutional structure exudes as influences, across the cases despite the difference in case study settings, topics and geopolitical locations.

The category of 'evidence' arose in the two Northern Irish cases, Belfast and Derry. Both cases highlighted the issue of accessing local evidence for policy-aiding mechanisms such as HIA. A lack of local evidence and community profiles constrains the HIA process and the subsequent use of the knowledge that comes from this process for policy, as well as delaying the HIA as local evidence may have to be gathered as part of the impact assessment methodology.

In both the Derry and Donegal cases the influence of values, beliefs and ideas acted as institutional constraints. In the former case values and beliefs, the entrenched attitude of a senior architect in constrained statutory engagement in the HIA process, due to his own beliefs that he 'builds houses, but does not design communities.' In the Donegal case, ideas were deemed constraints as the subjective values and beliefs people held about the area of Traveller accommodation overtook the objective worthiness of the evidence that came from the HIA (Davenport, *et al.* 2006)

In divergence, some categories arose from the cases that were specific to each the individual HIA. In the Donegal case, the area of Traveller policy was itself a constraint and the institutional prejudices and attitudes acted as barriers to the willing engagement in the HIA. In the Derry case, the absence of the planning services was highlighted as a key constraint on the activity of other stakeholders around the table, as this is a vital partner missing from the process. The lack of community resources and infrastructure in the Belfast HIA was identified as a constraint upon behaviour of the statutory stakeholders, and added time delays in engaging with the community sector for the HIA.

Policy Analysis and Utilisation Theories

Why is the degree of utilisation, both direct and indirect, varied in different contexts?

The influence (independent variable) upon HIA knowledge utilisation (dependent variable) is the effect evaluated in this research. The hypothesised outcome, which in this case is the extent to which HIAs are used in policy processes, will be assessed in terms of the degree of knowledge utilisation.

The work of Janowitz (1970) who recognised the potential for conceptual utilisation of knowledge over time, labelled it as 'enlightenment.' The consideration of politics underlying the

use of knowledge and the evaluation of policy rejects the rationalistic approach to evaluation, and recognises the degree of policy learning that can occur in the policy processes; direct use of knowledge is no longer the only form of utilisation that is recognised, given the political nature of using knowledge in policy (Patton, 1997; Sanderson, 2002).

Rossi *et al.* (2004:411) have moved this school of thought onwards with their conceptualisation also, with the following categorisation of utilisation of knowledge in policy, which is used in this research:

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3. **Persuasive utilisation:** The use of knowledge “to either support or refute political positions—in other words, to defend or attack the status quo.”

This section will examine each case for the three degrees of utilisation of HIA knowledge, taking account of the independent variables. Firstly the convergence of categories that were deducted from data analysis indicates contingent generalisations that can be made across the cases regarding utilisation.

It has been found that in the Ballyfermot (Dublin), Derry and Belfast cases, the recommendations were used **instrumentally (directly)** in policy formulation. The HIA in the Donegal case was not used instrumentally (directly), neither to inform present day policy, nor improve the Traveller Accommodation Policy (TAP) retrospectively. Whether or not the HIA will inform the future TAP remains to be seen, but is beyond the scope of this research. The policy making process, and policy environment in the case of Ballyfermot, was informed directly by the findings of the HIA and the knowledge was used to inform policy. However, a full utilisation of all recommendations was not found in all cases, with greater instrumental utilisation evident in Belfast and Derry, to a lesser degree in Ballyfermot, and the Donegal case displaying the least instrumental utilisation of the HIA.

In all cases, the HIA process highlighted the degree to which the findings of the process would be used. The HIA indicated the level of factionalised power in the Belfast case which acts as an inhibitor to the use of knowledge in the long run; in the Ballyfermot case the future of the HIA is guaranteed in its sustainability, evident by the re-establishment of the Local Action Group. The HIA process in Derry highlighted the benefits of cross-sectoral collaboration and the policy learning and enlightenment that can come from such processes. A ‘wait-and-see’ attitude exists regarding the Dove Gardens regeneration project, and the extent to which the HIA has impacted on health gain into the future will be evaluated, in order to establish the linkages made between improved health status and the HIA recommendations. The HIA process in the Donegal case highlighted the need for political will and genuine statutory stakeholder commitment to the project.

In terms of **conceptual (indirect) utilisation**, whereby the HIA will be used in a general way to inform policy indirectly, all cases fit into this categorisation.

Interviewees in the Ballyfermot case indicated the manner in which the HIA would “drip into policy, not (be) an explosive contribution to policy but may inform it indirectly” (9th October, 2007). This point was reiterated by another interviewee in the case also (12th October, 2007). The HIA was identified as contributing findings on traffic and transport that the community could use into the future. The findings were also used to inform health promotion activities in the vicinity, which indicates the indirect utilisation of HIA knowledge.

Interviewees in the Donegal case also highlighted the fact that although the HIA may not be immediately used in policy, it may be a “brick in the wall towards something more substantial. It started as a process and may show results down the road (24th March, 2008). This was also raised by other interviewees in the case, but the overwhelming negativity and the hostile polarisation of attitudes towards Traveller accommodation between the stakeholders in this case acts more as a barrier to the use of HIAs findings, rather than any implicit failing of the policy-aiding tool.

Interviewees in the Belfast case stated that in addition to the HIA informing the action plan concurrently, it also is being used in policy formulation within the Environmental Health section of Belfast City Council, and will be used to inform the planning review as led by the planning services, providing in particular the community perspective for the city’s Masterplan.

Interviewees in the Derry case stated that in alongside the HIA being used instrumentally to inform the redesign and regeneration of the Dove Gardens estate, it is being used by the health services and the community health forum (BBHF) to provide adequately tailored local community health services.

In terms of **persuasive (indirect) utilisation**, whereby the HIA will be used to endorse a particular standpoint, two of the cases can be categorised in this grouping.

Interviewees in the Belfast HIA, in particular those on the management team, stated that the HIA was used as another means of facilitating collaboration and partnership between the statutory stakeholders. Entrenched attitudes, institutional dormancy and immovable institutional standpoints had brought the formulation of the draft air quality action plan almost to a standstill. It was at this point the HIA was introduced, to facilitate collaboration and to inform stakeholders of the wider determinants of health, which was not considered by the majority of non-health sector statutory stakeholders. In this case, the HIA was used as an advocacy tool, endorsing a particular direction and with underlying motives for improving collaborative mechanisms.

Interviewees in the Donegal HIA explained how the HIA was introduced as a mechanism that could “cut through politics” (13th December, 2007) and could facilitate better working relations between the County Council and the Donegal Traveller Project in particular. A history of conflict was characteristic of the subject area, and the HIA was expected to reduce these polarised attitudes, or at least keep them outside the HIA process.

Interviewees in the Derry also viewed the HIA tool as a means of diluting the politics of housing, as this subject is a historically controversial one, and the HIA mechanism was viewed as a means of neutralising any friction in the debate on the urban regeneration project. It was also a means of including the policy receivers in the process, who had been historically excluded from the processes in Derry, which had devastating effects, which are still in the communal memory of the area.

The following indicates the degree of applicability that the utilisation typology has for this research. Belfast and Derry are the only two cases that fit into each of the three categories, whilst Ballyfermot is applied to instrumental and conceptual use, and Donegal applied to conceptual and persuasive use.

Instrumental: Ballyfermot (Dublin), Belfast, Derry

Conceptual: Ballyfermot (Dublin), Donegal, Belfast, Derry

Persuasive: Donegal, Belfast, Derry

Overall, the theories of knowledge utilisation and policy analysis have informed an appro-

appropriate and feasible utilisation measures for policy. There is variance in the applicability across the cases, which can be explained by the institutional influences that impacted upon utilisation in this research.

Conclusion: Are HIAs Used in Policy Formulation?

When combining the theoretical and empirical findings of this research, the overall conclusion is that HIAs are used in policy development.

It is clear that the extent of such use varies, and a linear and rational investigation of HIA use in policy that focused on direct instrumental utilisation would have proven superficial and lacking depth. By using the institutional theory to form the basis of the independent variable and investigating the relationship between the variable and the congruence of these theories and schools of literature with the findings, all cases displayed conceptual use of HIA for policy formulation. This indicates the conclusion that the tool does impact on policy development and can be used instrumentally in the future. The Ballyfermot, Belfast and Derry cases indicated instrumental use of the HIA. The fact that the Donegal case has not (within the temporal timeframe of this research) displayed use of the HIA for policy development may be more related to the topic area of Traveller accommodation being implicitly controversial than the infeasibility of the HIA tool. The Donegal, Belfast and Derry cases indicate their use was of a persuasive nature. This would concur with previous research, whereby the HIA can lead to “a politicisation of knowledge rather than to the rationalisation of policy” (Bekker, 2007:194). This research has provided greater insight into the influence on HIA utilisation in policy, and more specifically, the *extent* of that utilisation. This study has indicated that the use of HIAs is influenced by its contextual and institutional conditions which could be foreseen prior to project commencement. The findings of this study are applicable to all policy-aiding tools that aim to inform policy formulation, from the macro-level of the EU to the local government structures.

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