Chapter 2
Who Decides? Actors and Their Resources

Abstract In public policy analysis the actors and their behaviours represent the core of any possible theoretical model. The analysis therefore starts with the definition of the actor and by a presentation of the different goals he can pursue. Then the types of resources used in the interaction are specified and this makes it possible to classify the actors into five groups. After a presentation of the different roles the actors can play in the process the attention is shifted to the decisional networks and to their different properties.

Keywords Policy actors · Resources · Networks · Complexity

2.1 Who are the Actors?

The first, essential, step of a public policy analysis approach to the study of decision-making, is to identify the actors.

In order to understand what happened or what might happen in a decisional process, the first question we have to ask is about who has contributed or could contribute to its development and outcome by adopting the relevant behaviours.

To answer the question "who are the actors?" by stating the **actors** are the ones who act is less tautological than it might appear.

This definition tells us that not everyone who has an interest in acting nor whoever should act is necessarily an actor. The actors are only those who actually act. Of course, the fact there are people interested (the *stakeholders*) is important, because they could behave, after the decision has been taken, in such a way as to cause consequences for the outcome. The actors, therefore, will have to take into account the chances of further reactions in so far as they can be anticipated. However, those who are absent cannot be considered actors, just like their "non-actions" are not part of the public policy.

It is even more important to understand that actors are not only those and all those who should take part in the process, as stated by the rules that in contemporary countries define the ways in which public policy making should take place.

As regards the first aspect, it is common experience that a wide range of subjects participate in public decisions although they are not actually legally entitled to do so; actually, in many cases these interventions are actually unlawful and represent a crime that can be sanctioned by a court. However, this type of behaviour is often very important and in some cases predictable and expected. Corruption, namely the attempt to influence public decisions promising money or other advantages to a bureaucrat or a politician, is as old as the hills and is considered totally normal in some political systems, although fortunately, this is not always the case. Anyhow, the participation of actors who are "not foreseen" by the regulations can be, and often is, perfectly lawful: the committee that protests against the construction of a parking lot or an expert who suggests a specific policy decision, are an added value for the process, often able to improve the final decision in the collective interest.

As regards the second aspect, it is important to notice that even if a public administration is legally bound to intervene in a process, this does not mean it actually will or that the intervention will be significant or able to influence the final outcome. For example, the concession for the use of a public good (a beach to establish a bathing establishment or a sidewalk for the tables of a café) usually depends on the administrative body that is in charge state property; this office, however, doesn't have any particular interest in deciding who to assign the good to, as far as all the applicants fulfil the necessary requirements and the price to be paid is already determined by regulations. Therefore, during the initial phase of the decisional process, the subject formally responsible for the decision may not actually play an important role, limiting its duties to drafting the final act, like a notary in a contract between private parties. The real decisional process in fact, could take place between other subjects and acknowledges the decision made by others, e.g. influential politicians.

This is an important clarification, since one of the most common mistakes is to restrict the analyses, especially when acting in a prescriptive logic, to the subjects that should participate, simply because the regulations say so. Too often the answer the question "how is land use decided?" is a mere paraphrase of the planning law. This type of mistake is called *methodological constitutionalism*, i.e. the idea that laws describe how public policy processes are carried out. Hence, a series of proposals to transform the legal procedures to make them coincide with an ideal decisional model. Actually, laws only prescribe (and more often prohibit behaviours and assign certain advantages to specific actors, but there is a large area in which they don't want to and cannot intervene. From this point of view, the analysis of decisional processes is a sort of *empirical constitutionalism*, namely a way to understand how real world processes are carried out (for the distinction, see Hjern and Hull 1982).

One last warning that at this point is probably unnecessary: of course, the decision not to intervene in a decisional process is sometimes an important factor

to be considered in order to explain the results, therefore whoever makes this decision is an actor. In fact, it can be the result of interactions with other subjects, an act of will that has a specific goal. However, inaction can also be explained by a series of reasons that have nothing to do with the decision not to act: the simple unawareness that a decisional process is taking place, the lack of preferences, the idea that one's participation is totally irrelevant, and so on. In all these cases, the *stakeholder*, who could theoretically be interested in the results, and the actor, do not coincide.

Having said that, and considering what we already mentioned in the previous chapter regarding the fact that rational actions address a goal (they are *purposive* to use Herbert Simon's definition), it is clear that only single individuals can be actors, only women and men acting for a certain reason. If a dog attacks a politician, stopping him from participating in a meeting in which an important decision will be made, it will surely influence the outcomes of the process, but certainly will not become an actor for this reason. If anything, the person who set the dog on the politician to hinder his participation could be an actor, even if his attempt is not successful.

It is however common experience that most individual actions in public policy decisional processes are carried out on behalf of other subjects. After all, as noted by Scharpf (1997, p. 12), in most cases it would be completely impossible to explain decisional processes if we had to investigate the reasons of every single individual taking part in the process.

It is therefore necessary to try and understand when the action can be referred to a higher entity than the acting individual, to what we can call a composite or collective actor.

The criterion we must use is quite simple: a group of subjects can be considered a collective actor if the mechanisms governing the interaction among the members of the group are sufficiently stable and binding to make sure everyone acts in the interests and for the goals of the superior unit, and not for their own.

First of all, this means that we cannot report decisions within policy processes to simple aggregates of individuals that act autonomously and only pursue their own individual goals, even when these coincide for various reasons. We can therefore affirm that the electorate is not an actor, and neither are farmers, artists nor, as we will see, the public opinion.

On the contrary, and starting from one end of an ideal continuum, public or private organizations can be considered policy actors if they respect two basic conditions: there has to be sufficient internal consistency and a collective control of the resources used. The same goes for public institutions, as stated by March and Olsen (1989, p. 17).

At the end of the day, the problem is empirical: we must observe if, in the specific situation, all those acting on behalf of the collective actor adopt a type of behaviour that can be referred to a specific and not contradictory group of goals. For instance, if all the departments of a municipality dealing with the same issue behave consistently, it is totally reasonable to assume that the actor is the municipality. But if, on the contrary, they implicitly or explicitly have

contradictory positions, we must assume that the actors are single departments and not the municipality as a whole.

The most difficult analytical problem occurs when it is not possible to assume there is a central control on the use of the action resources, meaning when the single members of the collective actor maintain the freedom to take part in the collective effort or not. This happens especially in *coalitions* (where single members do not even have the same goals) or in *social movements*, where members are free to participate or not, even if they certainly have common interests.

In the first case, even if it is true that the long-term advantages of participation in a coalition can facilitate agreements, as stated by Scharpf, and therefore indirectly introduce a collective control on resources, it is still safer to treat the single members of the coalition as actors, both in a descriptive and predictive way; by doing this, it is easier to understand under which conditions each of them will be led to defection.

On the contrary, as regards social movements, it is reasonable to assume that the movement's leadership is or may be a policy actor until it remains compact, and that the participation of single individuals can be a resource (often the main one) for leadership itself when interacting with the other participants.

To conclude, we can say that for a collective actor to be such, it must have its own preferences that will be different from the single preferences of its members. This depends on the following conditions (Scharpf 1997, pp. 60–66):

1. there must be a form of *self-interest* at the level of the major unit, meaning the conditions for its survival, autonomy and development must be clear;
2. those who act on behalf of the collective actor must be aware of and respect any formal or informal rules;
3. there must be a minimum *collective identity* shared by the members and this will make it easier to define the preferences of collective actors in a decisional process.

However, even under these conditions, we cannot exclude that the representatives of the composite actor have interests and goals that contrast with the organization, thus not identifying with it and breaking the formal or informal rules they should respect. When we say that a politician has no "sense of the State", we actually mean that he doesn't care about the collective interests he should represent, but only about his own or about those of the faction he belongs to. This actually happens quite often and the difficulty of empirical research—and even more of the attempts of guiding an innovation through the complexity of the decisional process—lies in the fact that individuals often move away from the roles assigned to them and act on the basis of different goals from the ones of the organisations they represent.

This situation is often determined by the fact that these individuals have contradictory identities: the minister of a government is at the same time a representative of the state as a whole, the collaborator of the prime minister and a member of a political party; a member of the military is certainly obliged to follow

the government's indications, but he also has his own political points of view and is part of a social group to which he is linked by the *ésprit de corps*.

To conclude, the identification of who the "real actors" are is not easy at all and this is the reason why, in studying decisional processes, interviews with the actors do not aim to "understand what has really happened", as too often is believed and practiced, but to understand what goals they were actually pursuing.

2.2   The Actors' Goals

As we already mentioned, actors of decisional processes are rational, which means that we assume that their actions always aim to a certain goal, are purposeful.

It is reasonable to assume that not only is this aim consistent, but also in direct connection with their interests. Whether it be to earn money, improve their reputation, or to implement values that contribute to the definition of their identity, all actors act if they have reason to.

However, affirming that goals are defined by the interests that influence preferences only shifts the problem: where do these interests come from?

We cannot deal with an issue here that goes further beyond the economy of this volume, yet we must introduce at least two considerations.

The first, is that the preferences of a subject, that will define his/her goals in an interaction and therefore also in a decisional process, depend on how he/she perceives his/her own interests. It is one's perception of personal interests that determines preferences and not the "real" interests. It is certainly possible that not only I choose the wrong path to implement my preferences and my goals, but that I even believe it is in my interest to make a decision that will end up damaging me. This means that my perceptions can be wrong. The fact of consistently pursuing what I believe can be beneficial to me and choosing the alternatives that seem to be more appropriate to reach my goal does not make my behaviour less rational, even if my beliefs are fallacious.

The second remark is that, both at a macro and micro level, it is hard to believe that all our preferences are *exogenous* with respect to social interaction. It is certainly true that human beings have some basic needs that make survival impossible when they are not fulfilled, like eating, reproducing and so on. However, most of our preferences depend on a socialization process, on the fact that in a specific society and at a specific moment, we are offered a limited range of possibilities. As Wildavsky noted (1987, p. 4), we do not choose our preferences *à la carte*, but we can only choose one alternative among a small range of fixed-price menus. This means that preferences are endogenous with respect to social interaction and, as March and Olsen stated, (*Political preferences* are moulded through political experiences, or by political institutions).

In general terms, the further we move towards the micro level, the more it is reasonable to assume that actors' goals and preferences are exogenous. Actors approach the decisional process with a range of values, beliefs, experiences and

habits they built up long time before. Denying it would be silly and those theorists of deliberative democracy who say that the dialogue process established within an interaction can lead to a complete redefinition of actors' identity, preferences and positions, really do go over the top.

However, some preferences can be generated in the interactions of a decisional process. For instance, an actor's arrogant attitude often determines an equivalent and opposite reaction among the other participants, with a consequent radicalization of the conflict that could have been easily avoided; but it can also contribute to modifying other subjects' positions, shifting them from potential allies or observers to opposers.

This example is useful to highlight an important aspect that is underestimated too often or even ignored in decisional analyses. It is natural to assume that the subjects involved in the decisions of how to transform the treatment of a collective problem have preferences and goals as regards the problem itself and/or the solution to adopt. We call these goals **content-related goals**. However, one of the peculiar features of political systems in which policy making processes take place, is that interactions always have to do with how authority and public power are shared. This means that often enough, the goals of policy actors have nothing to do with the problem, but are essentially linked to their relations with the other actors. The alternative solution they tend to prefer is not chosen on the basis of its capacity to meet the need, the demand or the opportunity at the basis of the decisional process, but for the consequences it has on resources and on other participants' positions. These goals are called **process-related goals**.

An environmentalist group fighting for the protection of a natural area, and a real estate operator who wants to build a hotel there, will only clash on their definition of what the basic value to pursue is, of what the problem is: environmental protection or economic exploitation. But the game will most probably change if we bring this controversy within the political system: whatever the preference of the majority of public authority that has to make the formal decision, the opposition will tend to support the other side of the conflict, to weaken political competitors. The preferences of opposer groups will be endogenous to the process and referred to the relations with the majority, rather than to the collective problem.

The difference between content-related and process-related goals is an essential aspect that political scientists tend to take for granted and that, on the other hand, scholars studying public decisions from other points of view (e.g. economists) tend to ignore. In policy making processes, actors sometimes have and other times don't have both preferences and goals as regards the substantive issue (problem and/or solution) and their relations with other actors. The influence of process-related goals is often a key factor when explaining the outcomes, the success or failure of the attempts to change public policies. Ignoring this aspect is often the main cause of the reform failures.

2.3   The Actors' Resources

Before a further analysis of who actors are and of the dynamics through which they participate in decision-making, we must discuss the resources they use.

It is quite obvious that, for an actor to be able to actually shape the results of a decisional process, his actions should, at least potentially, be able to generate relevant effects for the other participants in the decision. The fact that the solution he/she proposes is the best possible one, is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to make his/her action effective. The history of public policies is full of failures depending on the fact that some alternatives, that should have solved the problem, and that were present on the intellectual market, were not even considered, or were brutally defeated, due to the fact they were proposed by subjects who were incapable of capturing other participants' attention. Just like having the nuclear bomb is useless if you have no way to deploy it near your enemy, and far away from you, the same goes if you have a great idea that will not change the world unless you are able to share it, disseminate it, to open a debate and so on.

In order to understand how and when actors are able to effectively intervene in a policy making process, we can use the concept of **political exchange**. It has been defined (Coleman 1964, Chap. 6) as the ability of actor A, who can control outcome X, which is of interest to actor B, to influence the latter, who can in turn control outcome Y, which is of interest to actor A. It is easy to understand how this concept is widely based on the idea of power, considered as the ability to influence other actors (actor B's behaviour can only be explained as a result of actor A's behaviour), adding the consideration that this is due to actor A's capacity to generate results that actor B is interested in.

These capacities are action resources (or actors' resources), that consist of the transfer of any good that has a value for the receiver.

One of the main features of action resources is their replaceability: the problem of not having a certain good in a sufficient quantity can be solved by replacing it with something else. What counts is the ability to contribute to the determination of the behavioural change of whoever is, metaphorically, on the other side of the table, and this can be achieved by altering the distribution of various goods. We will use the examples reported in the following pages to further clarify this concept.

A complete classification of action resources is probably impossible and anyway, it would end up being a long list of very different elements, like physical strength or beauty, that are not necessarily part of policy interactions. The typology we will introduce in this paragraph is deliberately brief and does not take into account some important elements. Before introducing it, we must at least underline one omission.

The possibility to resort to violence is surely an action resource, even in the field of public policies: the threat of organized crime can have consequences on a series of policies, from waste disposal (in many countries this is a "dirty business" in many respects) to land use, public procurements, gambling regulation and so on.

If the Mayor of a municipality knows that making or not making a certain policy decision threatens his own and/or his family's safety, he will certainly be pushed to act accordingly. And obviously the use or the threat of violence is an important element in relations between countries or between the State and specific social groups: war and violent repression of dissent are common practices in conflict resolution. The monopoly of legitimate violence is part of the actual idea of state (that does not necessarily mean the state will always use it legitimately or for the common good).

However, in contemporary democracies the resort to or the threat of violence, whether it be legitimate or illegitimate, is not normally used to introduce or hinder a policy transformation. Even organized crime, that can be a significant actor in many cases, usually tends to use less bloody resources when relating to the public authorities, (like the control on voting or corruption, for instance), whereas it uses violence mostly to solve its internal problems, or to threaten private citizens.

Therefore, we will only highlight four types of resources that are easy to distinguish and are the most common in public policy processes: political resources, economic resources, legal resources and cognitive resources.

2.3.1 Political Resources

Political resources are the amount of consensus an actor is able to get. It can refer to the whole population or to specific social groups involved in the different public policies. It can be confirmed through elections or referendums, it can be modified through information and communication campaigns and often suffers from external events (a particularly ferocious murder alters the consensus to policies to combat crime). It can derive from countless factors: charisma or personal status of the policy actor, ideology of who grants it and who receives it, recognition of the fact that an actor has the intellectual capacities to tackle a policy problem, perception of the convenience of the proposed options, or simply tradition.

This is a fundamental resource for all public policy decisional processes, if what we said in the previous chapter is true, namely that the chances of changing the ways a collective problem is solved, whether it be big or small, depend on whether the actors involved in the process are able to reach an agreement. In democratic governments, consensus towards the elected representative is the basis of their legal powers and explains citizens' level of trust in political and administrative institutions. It is the general loss of trust in the public authorities' capacities to solve collective problems, which in turn depends on the crisis of political ideologies of the XIX century (liberalism, socialism, Christian democracy) and on the disappearance of traditional legitimation (meaning, the natural respect for those who have important positions), that highly increases the importance of all those subjects able to modify a policy actor's consensus and political resources. The often obsessive attention that politicians have for the media, can also be explained as follows: they know that their ability to influence policy decisions not only

depends on the choices they are promoting, but also, and especially, on the idea citizens and social groups have of their personal characteristics, of their integrity, their determination and so on.

The availability of political resources is essential from the specific point of view of the policy innovator, the actor who tries to transform in a non-marginal way the treatment of a collective problem. We can somehow say that all the other resources are important only if they are able to turn into consensus during the political exchange, meaning they gather other participants' agreement as regards the opportunity to make the decision. Whether they do it because they rationally believe it is the best possible solution to implement their preferences, because they fear reprisals or simply because they trust who suggests the decision, the result does not change: what counts is that at the end of the process, the innovator's political resources exceed the minimum threshold that is necessary to take and implement the decision.

For example, show business people's commitment to humanitarian campaigns is aimed to increase popular consensus towards a cause, and therefore will be used by the promoters in order to persuade public authorities to adopt the policy decisions. From this point of view, the commitment of an actor like Richard Gere for the rights of the Tibetan people isn't very different from his colleague's, George Clooney, for the promotion of a coffee brand (and, actually, for the resolution of conflicts in Sudan): it is a matter of using the popularity and authority these people have to cause changes in politicians or consumers' behaviour.

However, we must remember that resources have to be important for those who receive them: if an individual already has a huge amount of a certain type of resource, then he/she probably won't be interested in having any more. The newly elected politician, who received the majority of the votes, probably won't be excessively worried to make unpopular decisions, exactly like the Pope will not see his authority decrease due to his very controversial position against the use of stem cells for scientific research. On the contrary, two opposing political coalitions in an electoral competition cannot be too queasy in accepting the support of heterogeneous social groups, even if this will almost surely have dysfunctional consequences on the government capacity of the winning party: even a minimum amount of consensus can in fact be decisive for the outcome of the elections.

2.3.2 Economic Resources

Economic and financial resources consist of the ability to mobilize money or any form of wealth in order to modify other actors' behaviour. What we just said is applicable here too, meaning that what counts is the importance of the wealth for whoever receives it: it is absolutely impossible to modify the position of a billionaire by promising a few hundred Euros and the same consideration applies, whatever the amount is, for all those actors whose personal enrichment is not a relevant objective.

But this also means that simply fact of having money is not a sufficient condition to predict the importance of a specific actor in a decisional process: the almost unlimited availability of economic resources of a multinational company does not make it particularly important in a policy process in which fundamental values or collective identities are at stake.

The fact that an individual became very rich through his work, is more likely to increase his credibility, his political resources, generating comments like "if he was able to do this, it means that he has exceptional abilities, qualities that make his reform proposals trustworthy and persuasive". Surely, there can also be an opposite reaction: many people tend to be suspicious of those who become too rich too soon. In these examples, anyway, it would be totally inappropriate to state that economic resources are playing a role.

This is somehow true also as regards the instrumental use of wealth. For sure, if you have money you can buy useful resources to make innovation proposals better and more attractive. The possibility to invest a lot of money in the design of a solution, mobilizing well known and expensive experts, can certainly improve its quality and consequently its external communication, thus modifying public opinion. In these cases, the effectiveness of economic resources is only indirect: it depends on the importance of the other resources that can be acquired. In fact, sometimes we can obtain the improvement of the quality and or external communication of projects without a huge amount of resources. For example, the development of electronic communication, of the Internet and of the World Wide Web, dramatically reduced the cost of knowledge and mobilization of consensus. Just think of the success obtained by Linux, an *open source* operating system, developed with the mobilization of a community of IT experts who worked practically as volunteers and effectively overcame the huge investments of ICT multinationals. Or think of the possibility offered by the Internet to organize information and communication campaigns with a minimum use of resources. Many actors already started exploiting these opportunities in tackling collective problems.

Economic resources are actually important since they can be used directly to influence the behaviour of the subjects whose agreement is useful to make the decision possible and effective. They are therefore part of the political exchange.

The easiest example refers to a public authority that promises to transfer resources to another body in order to overcome the dissatisfaction about a controversial choice: this is what happens during environmental conflicts when compensations are offered. But the same goes for the incentives, used to stimulate the behaviour of private firms that is essential in order to achieve some objectives (from the diffusion of green technologies for energy production to the establishment of new factories in the case of development policies). And finally, corruption is a typical example of how money can be used to influence the behaviour of political and governmental authorities.

It is in these situations that the availability of economic and financial resources represents an important condition to make and implement policy decisions.

This explains why reforms often take place in historical periods in which the level of public expenditure does not represent a big constraint for decision makers. In this case it is much easier to "buy" the consensus of potential counter-interested parties by using lateral payments, through long transitional periods, or other similar and expensive arrangements. The same happens if the promoters are private subjects: an industry with strong perspectives of expanding its business will be more inclined to change its investment decisions to obtain a policy change, than an industry fighting for survival in a shrinking market.

We must immediately add however, that the potential enrichment effect of the target groups, that leads them to change their behaviour in the desired direction, can be achieved with different resources besides money. For example, if important politicians support an entrepreneurial initiative, that generates business enlargement perspectives, this could lead a company to grant the public authority its consensus, or the know-how needed to implement a policy transformation: in this case, the political resources of the public authority determine the same effect as a financial transfer. But the clearest example refers to when enrichment takes place thanks to a regulatory change: the transformation of the regulation that establishes land-use, definitely generates important economic consequences for the owners of the areas that used to be agricultural and then became residential, without the need for the public authority to invest its own money. Of course, the promise of such a transformation has important consequences on relations among urban policy actors.

2.3.3 Legal Resources

With this last example we have approached the theme of legal resources. We consider legal resources as the advantages or disadvantages, attributed to particular subjects by legal regulations and in general by legislative and administrative authority's decisions.

Examples of legal resources are:

- the fact that according to the law, a certain duty is entrusted to a specific office (competence principle);
- the fact that certain behaviour is forbidden and violations are sanctioned;
- the fact that any individual has the possibility to challenge in front of a judge a public authority decision that violates his rights;
- the fact that the sequence of the activities needed to reach a legally valid decision is strictly predetermined (existence of formal procedures).

Ever since the rule of law was established after the American and French revolutions of the 18th century, all these situations, as well as many others, have been considered very important because they contribute to the definition of how policies are "made" and to determine, as a consequence, the outcomes of many decisional processes.

However, in order to understand the real importance of this matter, we must distinguish between **jus** and **lex** (*droit* and *loi* in French, *derecho* and *ley* in Spanish, *Recht* and *Gesetz* in German, *diritto* and *legge* in Italian).

It is not just a lexical distinction, although words are important, and the fact that it is difficult to explain in the lingua franca of public policy analysis (English) has led many authors to underestimate its importance (Dente 2009).

In organised societies the **lex** is a regulatory act, prescribing a certain type of behaviour, approved by a legitimate authority: the Senate in ancient Rome, the king in absolute monarchies, the Parliament in democratic/representative regimes. These acts carry out all the above mentioned activities: they give advantages or disadvantages to some subjects (for example, they define the legal competence to take care of a problem), they define the behaviours that are forbidden and specify the applicable sanctions, and they prescribe the procedures a citizen has to follow in order to obtain a judicial redress.

Jus, on the other hand, is not only the set of existing laws, but also a corpus containing the principles according to which laws should be interpreted. The distinction between **jus** and **lex** does not coincide with the distinction between constitutional laws (rules on how to make laws) and ordinary laws: even constitutional laws have to be interpreted in the light of the principles of jus, as they consolidated throughout a long evolution, with the works of legal doctrine and jurisprudence (that take part in the creation of jus). It will then be up to constitutional courts, where they exist, to use these principles to decide whether a specific ordinary law violates the constitution or how it has to be interpreted to avoid this conflict.

The principles of jus aren't written in any law, and anyway, even when this does occur, it is not terribly important. The rules *pacta sunt servanda* (respect agreements) or *nemo ad factum cogi potest* (no one can be forced to do something) are valid, regardless of the fact that the Civil Code regulates contracts, or that slavery was abolished a long time ago and is nowadays a crime. To make an example that all those dealing with public law know very well, the three "defects" that make an administrative act illegitimate (incompetence, law violation and excess of power) were elaborated by the jurisprudence of the supreme administrative courts and, only afterwards, became part of the law.

This does not mean that jus is immutable. It also changes, but very slowly and not because the change of the laws. Jus is not a resource at the actors' disposal: it defines the boundaries within which interactions take place, it is part of the decisional context and contributes to the meaning and value of laws as defined above. The attempts to change the principles of jus through an act of political will often face difficulties and resistance: just think of how slow many countries are in moving towards federalism, or how slowly typical traditions of administrative law states are being abandoned notwithstanding repeated efforts.

On the contrary, the lex is a real resource of the actors that can be used selectively and the use of which depends on the interests and goal to pursue. "Methodological constitutionalism's" mistake is to imagine that what is foreseen by law is the description of how the public policy processes actually work. Laws

need to be acted, and the "law in use", meaning the use made by the single actors of legal resources, is what actually counts in the decisional processes.

The various and different situations we find in the analysis of public policies confirm this conclusion.

- First of all, an actor can decide not to use the legal resources available due to the simple fact that it is not convenient. For example, a subject not appealing against the administration's illegal behaviour, (that the Court would almost definitely sanction), because the costs (in terms of money, time and stress) involved would exceed the benefits of receiving recognition of one's rights. This means that public and private subjects often adopt illegal behaviour simply because they know there are no counter-interested subjects that will object or might profit by using the law to modify, or to sanction, this behaviour. This is a very common situation in public policies: for example, the law stating that in Italian Universities the student fees cannot exceed 20 % of the state grant is often ignored, since the central government is interested in decreasing public expenditure and academic authorities can reach agreements with student representatives about how to use the resources generated by an increase of the fees above the legal threshold without the risk of being sued.
- Secondly, the decision as how to use legal resources also depends on the other resources participants can use. For example, if an innovator knows that he will need the cooperation of other actors in the policy implementation phase, to force the decision by using its own legal prerogatives would be a bad strategy, since in the best of cases it risks generating a partial and reluctant cooperation. In other words, the importance of political resources can greater, in a given situation, than legal resources.
- Moreover, as all lawyers know, law is not a set of inflexible rules that bind all participants' behaviour. Jus, usually recognizes the discretionary power of public administrations, that can make the application of rules more flexible, for example extending the level of tolerance of a forbidden behaviour, in exchange of the promise of a better future implementation, or allowing the people involved to take part in the decisional process. Examples could continue, for instance recalling the fact that in *multi-level-governance* situations, which characterize contemporary policy making processes, all participants have legal powers, and the possibility to decide depends on the will of all the parties to reach a compromise on what features cannot be derogated and which ones can be changed according to the needs. After all, it would be naive is to consider the "State", meaning the public power, as a totally predictable monolithic unit: it is actually composed by a set of different institutional subjects, each with a certain degree of legitimacy, but with very different missions. Whoever believes that simply changing the rules is enough to avoid conflicts among institutions will surely be disappointed, and, after all, it is not certain that the unity of command is always a good idea.
- Finally, the fact that laws are actors' resources has another main characteristic: they can be produced during the policy making process. There are policy actors,

in fact, that are in a special situation, meaning that on one side they are bound by existing rules, but on the other they can "make laws", meaning that they are able to modify rules in order to modify the interaction outcomes. The clearest example is probably the recourse to the so-called "external constraint", a situation when governments commit to establish strict rules at international level in order to overcome internal oppositions. But the possibility to intervene in decisional processes through the production of legal resources that will later be used by the actor producing them is even wider and represents a fundamental prerogative of public authorities.

To conclude: we spoke enough about this matter as it represents, one of the most important and peculiar aspects of the public policy analysis, along with a few more elements (distinction between content-related and process-related goals, that we already spoke about, and the importance of the content of the decision in determining the process outcome, that we will see later). We have to emphasize this point: after distinguishing between *lex* and *jus,* the correct way to deal with laws is to consider them actual resources available to each participant of the policy process, whose importance derives from their use and whose absence can be replaced by political consensus, money or, as we will see, knowledge.

2.3.4 Cognitive Resources

The last type of resources that can be mobilized in decisional processes are cognitive resources, meaning the availability of important information or conceptual models for the decisional process.

Knowledge is a required element to make appropriate decisions and this is implicit in various theorizations about the decisional process.

The rational model that we discussed in the previous chapter clearly links the possibility to choose the best alternative to having the best possible information about the available alternatives and the associated costs and benefits. Max Weber's theory about the role and importance of bureaucracy is based on the fact that it has a specialized knowledge in treating public affairs (Weber 1922). The need for bottom-up participation that characterizes many modern approaches to economic and social development starts from the need to exploit "local knowledge" that would otherwise be lost (Barca 2009, pp. 25–27).

However, we should not believe that this pervasiveness of knowledge as an input in decisional processes is totally obvious. The 7th president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, stated that governing a State is so "plain and easy" that any person with normal intelligence, and with no specific preparation, could do it. It is interesting to note that this theory was, and somehow still is, at the basis of the democratic paradigm and of the principle of public office appointment, and was used by Jackson to justify clientelism and the so-called *spoils system*, namely the appointment of officers on a political basis.

After all, the limits to "scientific" knowledge in policy processes were highlighted a long time ago in literature (Majone 1989; Lindblom and Cohen 1979; Nowotny 1990; Weiss 1977, 1980).

However, in the contemporary age characterized by the complexity and uncertainty of collective problems (and we need to remind what we already pointed out: this uncertainty is also an unwelcome consequence of the increase of knowledge, that highlights relations among phenomena that were previously considered independent, with the consequence that their evolution is hard to predict), the importance of scientific and technological knowledge, but also of social and political phenomena, is constantly reaffirmed.

The imperative of "know before deliberating", that Luigi Einaudi, the first president of the Italian republic, preached as a vital requirement, gives meaning and value to all important knowledge for the solution of a collective problem. It is therefore natural to think that actors who have such knowledge are in a better position in pursuing their goals compared to actors who do not have it. However, the rules of the political exchange even apply to knowledge: they are important only if and in so far as they are important for the actor receiving them, and they can be replaced, or counterbalanced by other types of resources.

Differently from the culture defining the framework in which actors move (that is part of the decisional context), knowledge, just like consensus, money or legally recognized authority, only operates in the interaction among actors. The fact that experts can agree on the idea that a specific reform project of the government will be totally unable to achieve its goals, since it is intrinsically contradictory, since it doesn't consider fundamental aspects of the problem, since it is based on unrealistic statements about the target group behaviour, or for any other reason, can be totally irrelevant for its adoption, if it formed the object of a long political negotiation and the main actors see it as the only possible mediation. The history of public policies contains various examples of these "reforms" that are not able to change anything essential, but are approved anyway because they are the only thing it is possible to agree upon.

And it isn't even necessary for the knowledge to be correct to ensure its importance in a decisional process, as long it is regarded as such. For example, in Great Britain, in the field of education policy it was for a certain period mandatory to create classes homogeneous from the point of view of the level of intellectual abilities, measured with the so-called intelligence quotient. Supported by psychological and pedagogic theories and researches, the idea was that a student could learn more if in a group of classmates who were neither more nor less intelligent than him/her. This was clearly a controversial theory, because it favoured the segregation of students from poor families, ethnic minorities or disadvantaged socio/cultural contexts. The controversy was temporarily solved thanks to cognitive resources, scientific studies that "proved" the superiority of this solution, but that later were found to be unreliable because of the statistical methodologies employed. It is possible to find dozens of similar situations and not only in the field of social sciences—just think about economic policies—but also in "hard" sciences: the anti-seismic regulation, for example, was the object of very harsh scientific debates

among experts, because some of them contested the correctness of the criteria adopted, urged by other experts, in guaranteeing the safety of buildings.

Since the importance of resources is proved by their use within the interaction, it is actually impossible to say what is, or is not, important knowledge in policy processes. Basically, any form of knowledge can be important for a specific actor and might contribute to modify his behaviour. The previous reference to "local knowledge" is a clear example of how even apparently marginal aspects can be important and how, after all, the importance of knowledge also and mostly depends on the interlocutors' ignorance: a real estate operator who makes a proposal for a new building is not necessarily familiar with specific features of that territory but the surrounding residents are. An example could be the proposal to build a water purification plant exactly in the same spot where a ferocious Nazi massacre took place during the Second World War and that, for this reason, was particularly important for all the inhabitants of the area.

In order to enrich the toolbox of the analyst of decisional processes and help understand what kind of knowledge was used, or would be needed, in a specific case, it can be useful to create a classification dividing resources in three different groups: data and information, theories and models and knowledge about the process.

- **Data and information** are certainly important resources. Having reliable statistics on a population or a territory, being able to quantify costs and expected outputs of a specific technology, or to measure the level of satisfaction of the beneficiaries of a policy or of the users of a service, are certainly all elements that can be important in decisional processes. Indirect proof of this statement is the quite obsessive attention newspapers and media pay to information that can be quantified. The scientific and objectivity aura attributed to figures shows how the importance of raw data can be absolutely essential also for communication, even when they mean very little. For example, a factor that strongly influenced the intergovernmental relations in many countries, especially in the past, was the fact that even the smallest municipality was able to claim having relevant information about its territory, that higher authorities—Region or State—did not have and were not able to question. If used properly, this information could be crucial to obtain funds, hampering infrastructural decisions and, in general, modifying the power balance between centre and periphery. This is the reason why all policy actors—public authorities, but also other groups—try to increase their influence by collecting and/or producing data they are often jealous of and that are available to the actors only through very difficult negotiations.
- However, and this is the second element that forms the set of cognitive resources, data alone often do not mean much if not interpreted and set in **theories and models** that give a sense to numbers. Therefore the availability of these theories and models is an important resource for the actors which often means giving alternative explanations of the same set of data. A rise in public expenditure, or in the inflation rate, have very different meanings in a Keynesian or monetary approach to economic policies. The fact that there are less

enrolments in university can mean that the labour market is more attractive and therefore young people have better opportunities, but also that the university system lost in credibility and/or does not offer attractive courses. Knowledge, in this second definition, often comes in the form of more or less persuasive arguments, aimed at organizing information and guiding its interpretation in a specific direction, that coincides with the interests and goals some actor. Therefore, in policy making processes cognitive resources will tend to correspond to the role of the experts that we will talk about in the following paragraph.

- The third and last knowledge component that we need to highlight is knowledge about the decisional process itself. The ability to correctly conceptualize the ways through which it is possible to achieve the modification of a public policy, by identifying the actors who participate in the interaction and their specific characteristics, and in general understanding their dynamics and forecasting the possible outcomes: all these aspects are essential resources for a policy innovator. This specific type of knowledge is called **strategic knowledge** and we will discuss it again in the following pages.

2.4 Rationality of Action and Types of Actors

After this necessary digression on resources we can go back to talking about the actors and their characteristics.

The starting point is that one of the fundamental features of policy processes in contemporary societies is **complexity**, namely the plurality of the points of view actors adopt in their interventions and of the criteria upon which they base their decisions. This is probably the main element of distinction between political processes and other types of social interactions: in fact, while in economic exchanges we tend to assume that the evaluation of the possible alternatives is basically homogeneous, and has directly or indirectly to do with the economic question "how much will I earn?", the same does not happen in the public sphere. It is in fact absolutely normal for the same problem to be analysed in utilitarian terms by some participants, ("is it worth it?"), in terms of value by some others ("is it correct?"), and in relational terms ("with who or against who should I act?") by others still. Utilities, values and relations can be very different even for single individuals, as noted by Vilfredo Pareto:

> Theologians and metaphysicians, out of a love for the absolute, which is one; moralists, in order to induce individuals to concern themselves with the good of others; statesmen, to induce the individual to confuse his own utility with the public utility; and other sorts of people for similar reasons use to reduce, sometimes explicitly, often implicitly, all the different utilities to one and one only.

All the more so, this plurality is recognizable in public policy decisional processes. This determines a complexity that is often considered the biggest difficulty

governments have to overcome. In particular, the existence of criteria to evaluate different and incommensurable alternatives sometimes makes it difficult to find an analysis procedure that is able to balance the needs of all participants. An attempt was made to create techniques able to face these decisional situations. So, instead of the cost-benefits analysis that translates all the alternatives in economic terms, looking for the one that maximises the so-called "net present value" (NPV), they proposed the multi-criteria analysis, with the aim to reach an evaluation of the convenience of an intervention considering various criteria, examined in an autonomous or interactive manner.

Without underestimating the usefulness of these techniques to structure the actors' decision, we must remember that the analysis can never replace the decision, but is only needed to help the actor to try and solve the problem. The mechanical application of any model is always somewhat arbitrary in weighting the importance of the various criteria and inaccurate in the evaluation of the consequences.

Moreover, this plurality of expected utilities and types of goals achieved is important, especially for the fact that each one of them is often associated to a specific style of intervention, a series of constraints regarding how one's relation with the other participants is structured, a specific way of analyzing the decisional situation.

We call these styles "rationalities (or logics) of action", assuming that in order to simplify reality, and to make behaviour more predictable, it is possible to identify a limited number of typical action modalities that correspond to the different categories or types of actors that we find in policy processes.

These logics of action also contain what we sometimes call the actor's "general goals", meaning the basic preferences defined by his/her vision of the world and that, in turn, define the limits within which he/she identifies his/her mission. The goals that an actor will pursue within a specific decisional process also depend on that vision and that mission: they appear to be short-term, while general goals refer to a longer period of time than the single decisional process.

This is clearly an analytical shortcut. Each single participant in a decisional process has different characteristics, deriving from his history and can still behave unpredictably by breaking the rules he should theoretically respect. However, some simplification is necessary to make the matter manageable, and it is better to do it explicitly, to avoid the basic assumptions from being left in the background, making it very difficult to test how realistic they are.

In any case, to suggest a classification of the types of actors is needed in order to be able to measure the level of complexity of the decisional network, an indicator that summarizes the plurality of points of view and is useful to figure out of how large is the decisional "space", intended as the number of possible outcomes, for the policy innovator.

It is therefore necessary to find the clearest criterion on the basis of which we will make this classification. Many authors tend to suggest formal criteria, for instance the public or private legal nature, assuming it determines different logics and actions.

The most appropriate criterion derives instead from the consideration that in contemporary states public policy processes are codified. This means that regulations or the praxis almost always specify who must and who can intervene, and how the decision should be made. The idea is that the solution to a collective problem cannot be left to the spontaneous initiative of the first person to come along, but needs to follow a predictable process. In other words all interventions must be considered legitimate, which means that there must be recognition, on the basis of socially shared values, of the validity of the motivations that lie beneath each action.

The basic criterion we have adopt therefore regards the **nature of the claim to intervene in the process**. In the name of what general principle, should a specific actor expect other participants to take into consideration his goals, his point of view, his proposals? Why does he believe his intervention is legitimate or even necessary?

As we will see, sometimes this request is essentially based upon the fact that the actor has resources the other participants cannot legitimately go without. In other cases, what seems to stand out is the nature of the interest. But some claim of the legitimacy of one's intervention is always necessary, and constrains the actor's behaviour, both reducing what can be considered acceptable and influencing the ways he refers to other participants. We assume that this "claim of intervention" defines the style, rationality and logic of action of that specific actor and therefore, presumably, of all those who belong to the same category.

As often occurs, the classification is not strict, meaning that the same subject can be included in different categories and that his behaviour during the process can change as a consequence. However, the classification is an important tool for the analysis, since it allows to make plausible hypotheses about the reasons explaining the observed behaviour and, most of all, reliable predictions on the type of actions the subject will carry out during the process.

We can divide actors into five categories: political actors, bureaucratic actors, special interests, general interests and experts.

The first group includes **political actors**, who base their claim of intervention in decision-making the fact that they represent citizens, having a significant consensus both in general terms and, specifically, referred to the matter that is being discussed. Their idea is that in a democratic political system, decisions can't be made without popular consensus. This means that the elected representatives have and need to have access to the decisional arenas and the same goes for who speaks on behalf of a committee, a professional association, a social movement and, of course, a political party. In the claim of intervention there is a clear link to the type and quantity of resources that the subject has and is able to mobilize: he will claim a bigger role the bigger the consensus he attributes to himself and that the other participants acknowledge. This link to resources is valid also the other way round: political actors will obviously pay attention to changes in the public opinion, to all those factors, like the position of the mass media, that can influence the consensus and popularity they enjoy, and they will search for allies able to further enlarge their representativeness. The utility function of a political actor is fairly obvious,

mainly if he has to undergo the electoral test on a regular basis (like for political parties), and it is legitimate to think that in each circumstance he will choose the alternative that maximizes consensus. This is the main reason why the willingness to search and reach compromise is part of the political actor's logic of action. Since consensus is often associated to the fact that the subject is able to solve problems, the ability to reach the final agreement in a debate, even sacrificing non-essential political aspects, appears to be very important. And, finally, the decisional style of this category gives huge importance to communication, to the ability to publicly prove the importance of the actor's role during the process (or, on the contrary, to keep all the aspects that could weaken his consensus hidden).

Bureaucratic actors base their claim of intervention on the consideration that legal rules give them a specific responsibility in the decisional procedure, meaning that they have the formal competence to intervene. The basic hypothesis is that in administrative political systems with a high internal differentiation, rules have to clearly define who is entitled to take the decision, which procedures must be followed and which are the constraints regarding the content of the decision. This is the essence of the so-called legal-rational legitimation that, according to Max Weber characterizes the liberal state. Even though this feature can be explicitly associated to the liberal state era, in the following phases it still maintains a central importance for different reasons.

As a consequence, bureaucratic actors will justify all their actions on the basis of their interpretation of the law, on the observance of legally predetermined procedures and on the respect of the roles they defined. Refusal to intervene in a process will be motivated by the existence of legal limits to their action, while the content of the final decision will probably be presented as non-discretional. These features of the bureaucratic action rationality, to which we could add a natural vocation to confidentiality or even to secrecy, inevitably tend to collide with the other participants' orientation and in particular with political actors'. In fact, if we state that all choices are limited both in form and in content, accepting a compromise will be very difficult, and this is what happens when entering a negotiation process. This contradiction can be a key element in policy processes, if only we think that in democratic/representative states it is totally normal for those appointed to positions with legal authority, therefore bound to laws, to have political legitimation. The mayor of a municipality is elected by citizens to exercise powers assigned by a legislation that contains various and strong limits to how he can use them.

In the interpretation of a specific decisional process it is therefore absolutely necessary to understand if and how the actions of a mayor, for example, can be interpreted in a political logic or in a bureaucratic logic: it will often be a mix of both, but one of the problems, both in predicting or explaining, is to understand which style tends to prevail and how the contradiction is solved.

One last consideration: it is normal to think that the image of the bureaucrat we presented here is actually connected to the liberal state phase, where regulatory policies and the respect of freedom and individual rights prevailed. In modern welfare states, on the other hand, in which the emphasis is on public services and

on the satisfaction of expressed needs, and on innovation, the bureaucrat is a manager, more similar to a professional or to an expert and works with different logics. This is certainly at least partly true, but the fact that most of the ways to solve collective problems are regulated by law has consequences and it extends the role of bureaucratic rationality even nowadays and in the predictable future. Just think about the growing role of Courts, at all levels, in defining public policies around the world: the Supreme Court of the United States introduced the right of a woman to interrupt her pregnancy, the Constitutional Court in Germany defined strict limits to the possibility to delegate important economic decisions to the European level, Italian administrative Courts are constantly called to assess policy decisions in various sectors, from the determination of electricity rates to the localization of public parking spaces. The law remains an important element in governing, so bureaucracy remains central in public policy decisional processes.

We can briefly analyse the third category of actors, namely **special interests**, who base their claim of intervention on the fact that the choice among the possible alternatives directly influences their interests, meaning they totally or partly bear the costs, and/or draw benefits from it. May they be firms, individuals, organizations representing specific categories, or people who live in a specific area, decisional processes often witness the intervention of subjects that try to influence the outcomes in a utilitarian logic. Even formally bureaucratic actors can behave like special interest groups, as pointed out by Niskanen (1971) when he stated that the main utility function of a bureaucrat is the enlargement of his available budget. The hypothesis upon which this category's claim of intervention is based, is that in contemporary societies, whoever has authority must consider the legitimate interests of citizens and social groups, and therefore the latter have the right, although not formalized by law, to represent their position in the public arena and defend themselves in any legally acceptable way. It is worth emphasizing how in this case there is no bi-univocal connection between the type of actor and type of resource: differently from politicians who need consensus, and from bureaucrats, who depend on law, special interests can indifferently use all types of resources that are important for the other participants. In any case, their logic of action is clear: they will try and maximize the benefits and minimize the costs, therefore they will choose the alternative that allows them to reach this goal. And since participation in the decisional process involves costs, they will be available to accept agreements and compromises according to their interest to conclude the process they are involved in.

General interests are those actors who, even without any political or legal legitimation, base their claim of intervention in the decisional process on the premise they represent subjects and/or interests that cannot defend themselves, that are not structurally able to act directly. Environmentalists, animal rights organisations, consumer protection organisations claim that, as the interests they represent cannot speak for themselves, they have the right, indeed the duty, to defend those interests and therefore represent them in all arenas where public policies are formulated or implemented. This is a spreading phenomenon in contemporary societies. There are foundations and NGOs that take care of the problems of poor

populations in the southern hemisphere, suggesting governments of developed countries how to shape development policies. There are civil society organizations (CSOs) that raise problems regarding privacy protection or public action transparency. The basic idea is that these issues all have in common the fact that they are matters of low interest for politicians, since they are problems that can only be solved in the long term and are difficult to translate in electoral consensus. The claim of intervention regards the fact that, on the contrary, it is necessary to protect these values to avoid them being totally neglected in contemporary political/administrative systems. This call to values, to "do the right thing", is fundamental, since it deeply influences the action of this category, usually not prone to compromise also because these actors often base their interactions on a claim of ethical superiority. This easily makes all the conflicts on the decisions that must be made when facing collective problems particularly harsh and inhibits chances of mediation. Moreover, since they state they give voice to subjects or interests that are structurally unable to participate in policy making processes, it is also terribly difficult to evaluate their representativeness: after all, it is impossible to define what the preferences of the future generations will be. This can have devastating consequences in all the cases where different organizations representing "general interests" have different positions, triggering a process that very often sees the prevalence of the most radical approaches refusing any compromise. Apart from what we just mentioned about the adopted decisional style, which is basically conflictual, the other recognizable elements regard the connection with resources. These organizations sometimes are able to mobilise relevant knowledge, but they usually base their action strategies on the use of political resources. Press campaigns, militant and visible actions (just think of Greenpeace), petitions, meetings and demonstrations, are the daily bread and butter of general interests. Also the use of legal resources (for example, class actions against polluters and/or public authorities that do not fulfil their control duties) have often the goal to publicize specific positions that influence the public opinion, essentially with the aim to generate a loss of consensus for public authorities, as they do not meet their requests. However, since these actors are mostly interested in ensuring the full legitimacy of the issues they worry about in front of the public authorities and the public opinion, they are always particularly sensitive to the possibility to formally or informally participate to public policy making, since such a step acknowledges the importance of their mission and of their vision of the world.

The last category of actors are the **experts**, who base their claim of intervention on the fact they have the necessary knowledge to structure the collective problem and/or to find the most appropriate alternatives to solve it. The underlying assumption is that only those who deal with these issues professionally have the appropriate expertise to make judgements, thus decisional processes must involve them as much as possible. It is totally natural to think that this category of actors follows a specific logic of action: respect of the scientific method to collect and elaborate the significant empirical evidence, availability to debate and peer evaluation, refusal of ideological bias and of everything that appears "non-scientific" or irrational. A point is particularly important. Disagreement between experts of

the same sector, as everyone who took part in a scientific meeting or a research group knows, can also be very harsh: the theories used can bring to very different interpretations of the same phenomena, different models of analysis of the same empirical evidence can suggest different conclusions, there can be disputes regarding the appropriateness of the available data. This is true for the so-called "hard" sciences and even more for social and human sciences: the same picture can be considered a masterpiece by an art critic and a total failure by another. This is the key of all scientific and intellectual debates and it represents one of the main factors that are able to ensure the progress of knowledge. New discoveries were possible only after the main theories were strongly criticized. However, when these scientific and doctrinal disputes emerge within a policy process, the expert has a difficult dilemma to solve: to him, it would be natural to criticize the definition of the problem or the solution proposed by a colleague, but then he would risk devaluate the importance of knowledge, and therefore of the claim to have the right and the duty to intervene and to be listened by political decision makers. The debate among experts that is perfectly acceptable in a scientific conference could be totally inappropriate and counterproductive if it were transposed in a policy making arena with the participation of many experts, as it would end up with decreasing their value. This kind of situation took place about 20 years ago at a preparatory conference of international scientific societies regarding the Rio de Janeiro Conference on sustainable development that put the problem of climate change at the centre of attention of worldwide governments. During the conference, experts who belonged to different important disciplines— like climatology, oceanography, atmospheric physics and so on—appeared to be in contrast and it seemed the conference could not reach a common proposal. However, in the last plenary session, an expert spoke to the assembly, reminding participants that there was more to agree on than to disagree on and that if scientific communities were unable to agree on their position, they would have left things in the hands of the governments who probably would have chosen to ignore them until it was too late to effectively face them. These events are obviously much more common in social sciences that are closer to public policy decisional processes. For example, the attempt to find acceptable alternatives to the dominant economic orthodoxy, monetarism, indicated as the co-responsible for the large financial crisis of 2008, did not have success till now, despite the fact that debates and meetings were organized to this end. Apparently, the truth is that good "non-orthodox" economists, who surely exist, only agree on the inadequacy of monetarism, but not on the available alternatives. The role of knowledge, and of experts in policy processes could be further analysed, recalling that there is often more than one important scientific discipline for a specific policy problem and each of them has its specific way of facing and solving the problem. So, for example, with the policy against industrial pollution, solutions also tended to depend on the fact that who guided the legislative and/or administrative activities were chemists (who privileged technological solutions that purified effluents from their most polluting elements), physicists (that proposed solutions able to increase gas dispersion in the atmosphere) or engineers (that favoured changes in the production technologies)

(see Dente et al. 1984). Or we can mention the data protection policy in Italy, where the appointment of a new head of the independent authority in charge of the matter substituting an experienced private law professor with a public law expert with a strong administrative experience, contributed to radically redirect the works of the authority, from a judicial approach essentially aimed at establishing the principles of protection through the answer to private citizens' complaints, to a totally different approach, based on regulations, inspections and sanctions (Righettini and Tassone 2009, p. 205).

Finally: the mobilisation of experts within policy processes is surely connected to their knowledge, but it is also necessary to underline how this often happens with the aim of increasing the political resources of who proposes (or opposes) a policy innovation. In other words, we shouldn't think that this category of actors could only take part in the creation of the solution to the collective problem. Actually, since they are able to strengthen, using their knowledge, a specific position, they are often involved to justify decisions that are already made instead of contributing to their elaboration. In this case, it is doubtful that they have different goals from their client's, and therefore that they are real actors and not simple political resources of some of the participants. But this is an empirical problem that only a close analysis of the specific decisional process can solve.

Summarizing what we stated in this paragraph, we can say that the **complexity of contemporary public policies** consists of the plurality and heterogeneity of the points of view represented within a policy making process. Complexity can be measured by classifying actors according to the nature of their claim to intervene in decisional processes, since it constrains the actors to specific types of behaviour and to the use of specific resources, meaning it defines their rationality or logic of action. Especially in a predictive key, but also in an explicative key, it simplifies the innovator and analyst's task in reconstructing the possible dynamic of the decisional process, reducing the range of possible options and providing a key to understand the actions observed.

2.5 The Scale of the Interests Involved

We can briefly talk about a further aspect that contributes to the definition of the total complexity of a decisional process.

We can summarize the matter as follows: actors belonging to the same category, who therefore act using the same logic of action, can act at different levels, which influences their interests and goals.

A political party that suggests a public policy at the national level supposing it will increase its appeal in the electors' eyes can be in conflict with its local section, for which this policy is disadvantageous, given the specific nature of the population of reference. For example, when the Conservative Party in Great Britain wanted to promote a strict policy to limit immigration, responding to its electors' concerns, the mayor of London, who was also a conservative, strongly opposed

this choice it since any limitation to the entry of foreign nationals entailed the danger of compromising the cosmopolitan character of the city and its attraction for talents from all over the world, an essential feature for maintaining its position as a "global city" it is, similar only to New York and may be Paris.

An industrial association that pursues a strategy for the liberalization of economic activities, by abolishing all restrictions to the creation of new enterprises, could enter into conflict with the firms that may suffer the competition of the new entries, thus loosing profit.

And of course, intergovernmental conflicts are common in contemporary states that see the intervention of a plurality of government levels on every important matter, each one of which has its own legal competences and democratic legitimation.

After all, at different scales, the same problems and the same solutions can be viewed in a radically different way: if for a regional government committed to the adoption of a plan for waste disposal, the creation a network of incineration plants on its territory is a very desirable solution to solve an environmental problem, the same proposal is negative for the quality life of the communities where these plants will be built.

The complexity of a process, defined as the plurality of possible points of view, must therefore not only consider the interests, goals and logics of action that the various categories of actors have, but also the dimension, from a local to global scale, of the interests themselves, since it has important consequences on the solution of collective problems.

Two last warnings.

First of all the global–local axis regards the territorial dimension, but it does not fully coincide with it. Actually, the conflict among territorial levels is just one aspect of a bigger genre, meaning the contradiction between general and special interests, or "particular" interests as Machiavelli wrote. Multi-level governance, as shown by Marks and Hooghe (2003) develops on two axes: one has to do with the geographical dimension, the other with the sectoral dimension. In other words, there is a hidden contradiction when breaking down any group in its components and the analyst has to take this into account, without supposing that the biggest dimension is always able to substitute the smaller one. In contemporary political systems, basic units are able to autonomously mobilize resources that the higher levels need, therefore the typical dynamic is interdependence, not hierarchy.

Finally, one of this volume's *leitmotivs* is that complexity not only is unavoidable but it can also represent an advantage from the policy innovator's point of view. The conflicts that are generated among the same types and the same level of actors are often so harsh they become unsolvable, also because they are zero-sum games. On the contrary, since a non-incremental transformation of the ways to deal with a collective problem is difficult and therefore rare, the existence of a plurality of points of view allows to imagine different possible approaches to the problem, different intervention methods, and different decisional procedures. That is, complexity increases the number of possible alternatives and is often an important asset.

This surely makes the analysis and the management of the decisional process more difficult, but this is inevitable if we don't want to run the risk of immobilism in the short term and stagnation in the long term.

2.6 The Actors Within the Process: The Roles

The heterogeneity of the actors, of their goals, of the interests they represent and of the resources they can mobilize makes the decision-making processes, and surely all the ones that tend to modify the status quo in a non-incremental way, different from each other.

This does not mean, however, that we cannot find even important regularities, as we already saw in the actors' logic of action. The same goes for the structure of the decisional process.

Similarly to what happens in the Commedia dell'Arte, where the masked types (masters, servants, lovers) are always the same regardless of the plot, in policy decisions it is possible to identify a limited number of roles that actors have.

For the purpose of this book, we can define the role as the function an actor fulfil within the process and that imply limits to its behaviour. We need to underline how the role is not linked to the categories in which we have classified the actors, but only to the *dynamics* of that specific process. This means that in different processes or even in the same process, the same role can be played by politicians, bureaucrats or any other kind of actor. Therefore each actor will have two different sets of constraints, one coming from the category and the other from the role. This should also simplify the analysis, especially in a predictive way, as regards the behaviour to expect during the interaction.

The recognizable roles are: promoter, director, opposer, ally, mediator, gate-keeper and filter.

The **promoter**, or initiator, is the actor who raises the problem, that states the need to intervene in order to modify the treatment of a collective problem and/or proposes a specific solution. One of the specific features of policy innovation processes, that represent the focus of our analysis, is that they can always refer to the existence of an innovator, of a subject that gives the first impulse to overcome inactivity. The two main features of this role are (a) content-related goals and (b) determination. As regards the first aspect, there is not much to say: it is almost inevitable that the preferences of who decides to start a transformation are essentially linked to the fact he believes the problem is important and the proposed solution is useful; this does not exclude the possibility of other reasons, linked to the relations with the other subjects, but in general who simply wants to appear will unlikely commit himself or herself to a difficult mission. As regards the second feature, perseverance and persistence seem to be vital conditions especially when the proposed transformation is radical and requires a prolonged effort. A successful promoter follows the advice that in *The Hotel New Hampshire,* Coach Bob gives his grandson who wants to become a professional athlete: "get obsessed

and stay obsessed" (Irving 1981, p. 121). The combination of these two elements, the almost obsessive focus on the merit of the proposal, is a common feature of many examples of public policy transformation, and it is probably one of shared characteristics of the public policy innovator and the private entrepreneur. In his history of the English civil service in the XIX century Parris created the "zealots" category to characterize the senior officers whose work identified with the reform of the policies they dealt with: Rowland Hill for the postal service, James Kay-Shuttleworth for the education policy, James Chadwick for public health (Parris 1969, Chap. 5). However, this obsessive attention to the innovation can also interfere with the initiative's success. Exactly because the promoter has content-related goals, usually regarding the problem's solution, he is probably so tied to his initial idea that he does not understand that only by changing it in a non-marginal way it will become "politically feasible". In fact, if this change is, in his eyes, a worsening of the effectiveness or of the quality of the proposal, it is possible that the promoter will resist, with the risk of wrecking his own initiative. Obviously this also depend on the type of logic of action of the actor involved: if the promoter is a politician or the representative of special interests he will be more prepared to compromise, while bureaucrats, experts and representatives of general interests will probably be rather inflexible.

With this last remark, we already entered the description of the second role we always find in policy processes: the **director** (or fixer, or pivot) of the decisional process. We can define this role as the subject who guides the process, from the first proposal to the end. This is an essential role, since meaningful changes of public policies always encounter difficulties: conflicts with those who profit from the status quo, lack of interest of essential actors, unexpected events that jeopardize the whole process. The director's role is particularly important when not only the decision, but also its implementation, depend on the contribution of various subjects with different logics of action and interests. In this case, the presence of an actor who facilitates the interaction and stimulates each actor to adopt the decisions and the behaviours needed for the success of the policy change is essential. This is true both in the event that the change generated, or can generate conflict, as well as in the more common event that this does not happen and the main obstacle is the low level of interest of the people whose contribution and participation in the process are essential. The director and the promoter often coincide: the *policy entrepreneur*, described in literature, is the result of these two roles mixed together (Kingdon 1984 Chap. 8). However, this does not always happen, also because the qualities required for this role and the connected characteristics are different from those that are typical of the promoter. If the level of determination must remain high, it is however also necessary to have the ability to adapt the definition of the problem and the technical solution according to participants' needs, to raise the interest of other actors, to effectively communicate the reasons and the importance of the proposal, to choose the most appropriate moment to act, and so on. In other words, the director must also have **strategic resources**, as previously defined, the knowledge of the decisional process and of the actors operating in it. This knowledge doesn't necessarily need to be formalized: experience, intuition and

even luck help in the implementation of innovation, but a deep knowledge of some analytical dimensions, like the ones we are explaining in this volume, is certainly an asset for the director who wants to ensure the effectiveness of his actions. It is important to underline another element: it is possible that the director's goals are only process-related; meaning that he does not have strong preferences as regards the problem or the solution, but is very interested in his relations with the other actors. The director can instrumentally understand the importance of a transformation he did not personally promote, as the opportunity to increase his status or his visibility, or to weaken his political and bureaucratic opposers. In this it is possible that decisional success, namely the fact that the decision is formally taken, does not correspond to a substantial success, meaning a contribution to the solution of the collective problem. This can happen quite often in reform processes, when the starting idea, proposed by the promoter, whatever his rationality of action was, is later managed by a politician only interested in exploiting it, in linking his name to a law, to a plan, to an intervention programme. For the decision to be approved, the director then accepts any sort of compromise, cancelling the innovative character of the proposal, and turning it into a modest adaptation to the status quo. A way to verify this kind of process is to compare the declared goals to the tools and the resources invested: the existence of internal contradictions and/or the incongruence between aims and means are a clue to the fact that the process director was actually not able, or was not interested, in a real reform, but only in gaining visibility. However, bearing in mind that the two figures can coincide, there is always need for a director and a promoter to generate a meaningful change, and it is often the contribution of a *fixer* that can unblock a decisional process that seems to have reached a dead-end or that is not able to take off. A good example is represented by the introduction, in the Netherlands, of the so-called *standard cost model*, a methodology that allows quantifying the administrative burdens that legislation puts on the shoulders of firms and citizens. The attempt to develop a better regulation policy through the introduction of the measurement of administrative burdens had been already launched in 1984, and was initially implemented between 1992 and 1994, but it met a series of obstacles and it translated in marginal savings, despite many study commissions and the creation of an independent *watchdog,* with the aim of starting a cultural change. The real transformation took place only in 2003 when Gerrit Zalm, previously Minister of Finance, but also vice-prime minister in the new coalition, was appointed with the mission to coordinate the policy to reduce administrative costs. He defined an important reduction target (25 % by 2010), elaborated a measurement model (*standard cost model*), created a technical unit at his ministry, linked the implementation of the reduction programme of administrative costs to the budget cycle, and in general, used the available political resources to force all the ministries to act effectively. The result was that when the Government fell in 2007, there was already a 23.9 % reduction (Coletti 2013).

The structural difficulty of introducing policy innovations explains why the **opposer** is another common figure, acting and committing his resources to avoid changes. There isn't much to say about this matter, apart from the fact that at the

basis of the opposition there can be both content-related goals and process-related goals and this second possibility is more likely in the case of political and bureaucratic actors and it is more unlikely among those with special and general interests, and experts. And obviously, the possibility to effectively influence the process is linked to the availability of relevant resources and their effective use.

The same considerations go for the next character in our gallery of roles, namely the **ally.** The ally has content or process-related goals consistent with the promoter and/or the director's, and brings his resources to the innovative coalition by carrying out actions, or even just by declaring his support. The only great difference lays in the fact that, given a problem and/or solution, while it is always almost impossible to choose the opposers, to a certain extent, the process director can select his allies. This is a particularly important matter: enlarging the coalition can also have dysfunctional effects, for example because it increases its heterogeneity over the threshold that guarantees its effectiveness, or because it undesirably modifies the patterns of interaction. Therefore, for example, the fact that in the conflict opposing social actors who want to change a public policy and a municipality ruled by a left-wing coalition, the right-wing minority sides with the promoters, certainly increases the resources of the innovating coalition, but can also radicalize the conflict, hindering compromise that would have been satisfactory for all the original actors.

The role of the **mediator** is more interesting. We can define him as the kind of director that only pursues process-related goals and in particular is only interested in favouring an agreement among the actors. It is important to note that the effectiveness of a mediator is connected with the existence of a conflict among interests, even a potential one, that can be mediated: if it is a zero-sum game, where the only alternative is between outright victory or total defeat, there is no chance for mediation. The same goes when a conflict regards the cognitive dimension, for example among supporters of different theories on the causality between different phenomena: just think of the debate between opposers and supporters of Darwin's theory. The first consideration as to this role is that it is relatively rare: if we always meet promoter and director and, as the problem's complexity grows, also opposers and allies, the same does not apply to the mediator. It is also worth repeating what is already implicit in the definition: the essential characteristic lies in the absolute absence of content-related goals, of preferences for a specific definition of the collective problem and/or for the any feature of the solution. In his pure form, the mediator must be completely impartial and his only goal is to complete the decisional process in a satisfactory way for the main actors. This is clear in private transactions, when even the mediator's compensation is conditional on the fact that an agreement is reached but, as we will see in Chap. 6, professional mediation is used also in collective problems, especially in conflict resolution. However, most public sector mediation activities are carried out outside a professional relation, and are often stimulated by third parties. A good example is the process to extend Malpensa airport, in Milan. Apart from the usual and predictable conflicts with the citizens of nearby towns, who were obviously worried about the noise, there was a specific problem regarding the

new road that had to connect the old airport to the new terminal. The conflict was between the (municipally owned) company that managed the airport system in Milan (SEA) and planned the whole project, and the Parco del Ticino, an association of municipalities in charge of protecting the environment on the Lombardy side of the river, on the basis of a regional law. This dispute was particularly embarrassing for the Region, great supporter of the need to build an important airport hub, but also the main funder of the Park to which it also delegated its protection powers. In order to find a solution, the president of the Region instructed the general director of the territorial planning department to act as mediator, by identifying mitigations and compensations that could lead the Park to abandon its opposition and convince SEA to include these changes in the project for the new road.

If the mediator is, theoretically, always functional to the resolution of a conflict, the role of the *gatekeeper* is always quite negative. With this term we describe a subject who can stop the decisional process—he has veto-power—thanks to the resources he controls, although he does not have content-related goals and the policy solution does not imply any costs or benefits for him. A typical example is the president of an assembly or of a commission: he can influence the formation of the agenda and is therefore able to accelerate or delay the discussion of a specific proposal. As we can see from this example, the gatekeeper is usually a subject who uses his resources to stop the promoter from acquiring essential resources, not because he is against the proposal, but to affirm his own importance in the interaction. In other words, he only has process-related goals. His presence is therefore always dysfunctional for the decisional outcome, and the strategies the director will have to adopt will try and cancel the veto power he has, avoiding its use. For the same reason, the involvement of potential gatekeepers, able to avoid or at least to delay the process is one of the strategies opposers use the most: the growing use of courts against many innovative proposals represents a clear example of this practice.

The last role we have to explain is the **filter**, a subject that enters the process representing the goals and the interests of others and using almost only their resources. Somehow, this is a "non-actor", as he doesn't have real goals to pursue and his actions imply a minimum use of his own resources. A local body forwarding the petition of a group of citizens to a higher authority, but also a newspaper that carries out a press campaign on a particular issue, certainly belong to this category. The presence of a subject with these features is therefore totally irrelevant in the determination of the outcomes of a decisional process, if the process director does not make the mistake giving it too much importance. This wrong perception can lead to actions whose target is the actor who acts as a filter, generating equal and contrary actions in the opposed party. A political party that reacts to a critical newspaper article and personally attacks the journalist to question his credibility, can cause the reaction of all the press, worried its prerogatives are being questioned and strengthening the position of the real opposer. Folk wisdom, in these terms, says that we shouldn't "shoot the messenger", but in contemporary politics it is a common mistake.

This last example is useful to show how the attribution of a limited number of roles to actors is not for purely academic reasons. In fact it allows to better understand the process dynamics and to adjust behaviour in order to make decisional success more likely.

Understanding if a specific actor acts by himself or if he is a filter, if the threat to use a veto comes from someone who has genuine counter-interests regarding the proposal or from a gatekeeper, only interested in improving his position in the decisional context, understanding if it is appropriate to accept the entrance of a new ally in the coalition or if an individual has the impartiality characteristics to successfully carry out the role of mediator: these are all elements that can interfere with the possibility to reach important results in the policy transformation. And, most of all, the crucial passage is often the promoter's decision to manage the innovative process on his own or to allow a director to do it. It is often the lack of awareness about the need to make this decision that explains the failure of reform processes that would be totally feasible if properly managed.

2.7   The Actors in the Interaction: Decisional Networks

The last matter we have to discuss in this chapter moves the focus of the analysis from the single actor to the group of actors involved in the policy making process.

Until now we tried to understand who the actors are, what kind of goals they pursue, which resources they use, what logic of actions they follow and their role in the decisional process. These are all questions that we must answer in order to understand the reasons of specific outcomes, but this is not yet enough. In fact, it is necessary to ask ourselves if, and to what extent, the way the interaction is structured is a further causal factor.

The attention goes on the set of actors that intervene in a process and the question is: are there features of this set that can contribute to highlight the solution dynamics of collective problems?

This is the main focus of the so-called *network analysis* (Marin and Mayntz 1991; Rhodes 1997) that became popular towards the end of the past century and that generated sophisticated methodologies for the study of a decisional network. We will consider this word equivalent to *policy network* (for a book on the formal analysis of networks, see Hanneman and Riddle 2005).

The analysis of these ideas is not possible here, nor particularly useful for our study. We will just highlight some decisional network dimensions or characteristics that appear to be important, quite easy to measure and, as we will see in Chap. 6, can be modified through specific decisional strategies.

The most obvious characteristic of a group, a network of actors, is its **size**. The fact it includes many or a just a few actors, is important since it is reasonable to expect that the dynamics of the two cases are different. However, classifying decisional networks for their quantity is not useful for the analysis, for two different reasons.

1. First of all we have to say that, empirically, the size of a decisional network is normally rather limited, at least in the processes that are object of our attention. Generally there are no networks with less than 4/6 or more that 12/15 actors, if we concentrate on the ones that have a real role, contributing to the determination of the results. The reason is basically due to the difficulty to intentionally introduce transformations in the way collective problems are tackled because the relevant resources are shared by a plurality of subjects with different logics of action and with often contrasting goals. If these subjects only 2 or 3, there are three possible alternatives: they either define decisional rules in order to institutionally decide (thus no longer being part of our observation field), or the process turns into a non-negotiable conflict and it will only be solved through the domination of the actor that has more resources or finally the conflict will simply not be solved and the process will get stuck. If, on the contrary, there are a lot of actors, the difficulty in finding an adjustment among them will overcome the cognitive capacities of any director, even if very capable, and a model similar to the *garbage can*, that we discussed in the Chap. 1, will be generated. In other and more simple words, literature on reform processes, may they be small or big, tells us that a transformation effort can be successful if the number of actors is neither too big nor too small. For example, the German policy liberalising telecommunications (surely a major process) has seen the constant presence of less than 15 subjects of few homogeneous categories (big enterprises, entrepreneurial associations, central and local institutions) (Schneider and Werle 1991). This clearly does not mean that there is no exception to this rule and that it is not possible to generate important outcomes also within very crowded networks, but these are exceptions for which we would have to carry out ad hoc analyses and find specific explanations.
2. The second reason why a simple analysis of the size of a network doesn't seem to be particularly useful, lies in the fact that the number of actors has a significant influence also on the other network's characteristics, as we will see in the following pages. Therefore, to characterize a network on the basis of its size risks considering the same phenomenon twice with dysfunctional effects on the clarity of the analysis.

This last reason also applies to a different aspect of decisional networks: their **morphology**, or form. It is possible to graphically represent the actors' networks in different ways and therefore it was natural to imagine a classification based on their form.

In Fig. 2.1 we introduce some typical forms that give an idea of the morphological variety of decisional networks. The dots are actors and the arrows are their connections that, in our analytical model, are the exchanges of resources.

Besides difficulties in the representation, that we will not discuss now, the main problem for the classification of a network based on the typical forms (starting from the upper left corner and going clockwise to Fig. 2.1, we have the star, the linear, the total interaction and the nested networks), is that it shows in a too synthetic way characteristics that should be kept analytically separated.
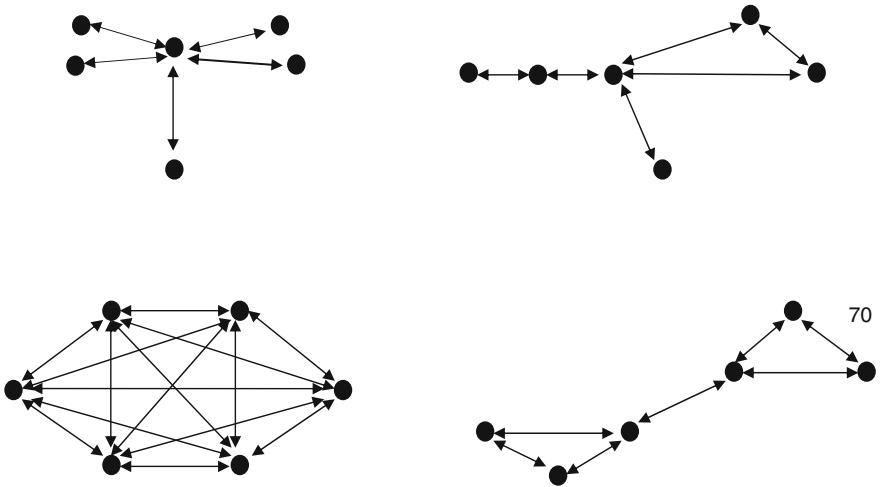
Fig. 2.1 The forms of the network

The most important characteristics are therefore different.

The first one reflects a dimension of decisional processes that we often referred to: **complexity** defined as the existence of a plurality of points of view within processes. In fact, it can be more or less high and it can only be measured by analysing the actors' network.

We have already seen how an actor's "point of view", that contributes to determine the way he defines the decisional problems, and at the same time contains limits to his behaviour, depends on his logic of action, defined by the nature of the claim of intervention in the process, and by the level (global/local or general/sectoral) of the interest represented.

In order to measure the complexity of a process and therefore of a network, we can create a matrix like the one in the following figure and put the actors in the various cells. Please note that in the matrix the dimension used to measure the level of interest is the global/local one. If the general/sectoral axis is important, it will have to be consistently modified and if both axes are important, we should add a third dimension (Fig. 2.2).

The underlying logic is that if all actors are of the same type and at the same level, therefore in one single cell, we will have a minimal level of complexity. They may even have different and opposite goals, but will inevitably tend to define the solution and evaluate the solutions homogeneously, according to the same criteria.

On the contrary, maximum complexity does not mean that all the cells are full (and even less equally full: actors do not have the same importance, since what matters is the quantity of resources they are able to mobilize), but that there is at least an actor in all the rows—for each territorial level—and for all the columns—for each type.

DIMENSION OF THE INTEREST	TYPES OF ACTORS				
	Politicians	Bureaucrats	Experts	Special interests	General interests
International					
National					
Regional					
Local					

Fig. 2.2 Measuring complexity

It is possible to calculate a complexity index by multiplying the number of rows filled in by the number of columns: in Fig. 2.1. It will vary between 1 (if all the actors are in the same cell) and 20 if there is at least one actor for each territorial level and one actor for each type.

This is clearly a conventional measurement, that can have different calculation bases if the levels of interest are classified differently (the categories of actors are fixed in our model), which can be very useful to give a synthetic indicator of the process complexity, to compare with similar cases but also to verify if its increase and its decrease in time makes it easier or more difficult to reach the decisional success.

In particular, a complexity measurement can be useful to test the hypothesis that will be presented at the end of Chap. 6, according to which decisional success depends on the fact that the process and the network complexity reflect quantity and type of interests influenced by the problem or solution. One of the main reasons for the failure of innovation processes in the field of public policies is that the decisional networks are too simple, not including some of the interested actors, or too complex, as they include subjects without any relevant goal or interest for the solution of the policy problem.

A further characteristic that is certainly important is its **density**, meaning the intensity of the relations between the actors of a decision-making process.

It is common experience that within any group of persons, the fact that direct, face to face, relations might have important consequences on the interaction outcomes. For example, it can be useful to share information, avoiding bad surprises in following phases, or increasing empathy and trust, but it can also be reason for conflict, confrontation between the participants, and so on. Even in a time of instant and global communication, all the organizations keep calling meetings to discuss and/or to take decisions: direct exchange, non verbal communication, body language, the possibility to react immediately, and so on, are irreplaceable opportunities.

However, these interactions can be very different: an *ex cathedra* lesson or a unilateral briefing, a formal meeting of the members of a coalition to decide how to deal with the opposition, a brainstorming session, and so on. The form must be appropriate for each decisional process.

In these last examples, what changes is the network density that can be measured as the proportion of actor actual links between the actors out of the total possible number of links. The formula to make this calculation is quite easy:

$$D = \sum k_i / (n^2 - n)$$

where:

D   density coefficient varying between 0 and 1;
n   number of actors;
ki   number of links of each actor.

In the four examples in Fig. 2.1 it is quite clear how the maximum density is in case of total interaction, where the coefficient is 1 since all the actors are related to each other, while it is minimum in case of the star where the exchange only takes place between the central actor and the other individual participants (the coefficient is $10/(36 - 6) = 0.33$). The other two cases have average values (0.4 in the linear network and 0,46 in case of the star network).

The consequences of a network density on the results of the decisional process can be contradictory: a rise in trust among participants or the development of a learning process, but also a rise of entropy and of the possibilities of unsolvable conflicts. In general we can say it amplifies and strengthens the other characteristics of the decisional network: the obstacles or benefits that we could expect from a process that shows a high level of complexity will be strengthened if the network has a particularly high density and weakened in the opposite event.

The same is true for the relation between density and the last characteristic of decisional networks: **centrality**, namely the fact that one or a few actors monopolize relations with participants. It can be expressed in many ways. One of the easiest is to measure the proportion of all the relations of a network that are monopolised by a specific actor, with the formula:

$$C = k_i / \sum k_i$$

where:

C   centrality coefficient that varies between 0 and 1;
Ki   number of links of each actor.

The network's centrality will be the highest coefficient identified. To go back to the examples of Fig. 2.1 it is clearly much higher in the network with the star form, than in case of the linear network.

Calculating centrality helps to understand if in a specific decisional configuration there are one or few central actors who are probably the process director(s)

or, in the event of a conflict, the leader(s) of the opposition. On the contrary, a low centrality network inevitably shows a low capacity in directing the process: centrality is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to create power relations. If I don't have an, even mediated, relation with a subject, it will be unlikely that I am able to influence his behaviour.

The relation between density and centrality is very clear as well: a high level of centrality in a low density network proves the existence of a dominating actor, able to influence the outcome of the process. This can actually be a very awkward condition: if an actor with process-related goals does not have enough resources to introduce a policy transformation and is in the middle of a low density and high centrality relation network, in which he receives highly contradictory requests from various subjects that all have important action resources, he can be embarrassed when choosing how to stand, since he will displease some of his powerful interlocutors and will lose centrality, that was actually his only goal. This explains, for example, why initially ambitious reforms end up setting for compromise leaving things basically as they were: when facing often contradictory oppositions, a promoter/director who fears losing the consensus of other important actors, will end up diluting innovation and generating only incremental changes.

In conclusion, network analysis supplies important information and allows quantifying different dimensions of the interaction (although with the usual inaccuracy typical of social sciences), that can represent important variables in the hypotheses more appropriate to explain or predict the outcomes of decisional processes. It therefore adds further instruments to the analyst's toolbox.

It is therefore useful for both those who would like to understand the reason of a specific result and those who want to engage in a major transformation in the solution of a collective problem, to dedicate a certain amount of time and attention to drawing—even graphically—the decisional network, because it makes it easier to understand the dynamics and calculate complexity, density and centrality, that are important elements sometimes able to explain the results. This graphic representation, which can include a lot of additional information or be totally elementary, is also useful to communicate both outside and inside the process the way in which a specific actor sees the interaction and therefore contribute to clarify a story that often appears very complicated.

2.8 Conclusions

In this chapter we set the basis of the analytical framework, focusing on who decides: the actors of the policy process.

Actually, the real starting point is to understand that the actors are those individuals or organizations that make the actions able to influence the decisional outcomes and that do it because they pursue goals regarding the problem and its possible solution, or regarding their relations with other actors.

   To carry out these actions they have to spend resources, the availability of
which is a condition for their action's effectiveness, and they are constrained by
their role in the process and, especially, by the nature of their claim of interven-
tion, that tends to define their logic of action. These analytical categories are
needed to simplify the analysis, as they supply useful guidelines to interpret (and
forecast) the behaviours.

   We finally used a concept we have already expressed, the complexity of public
policy processes in contemporary societies, defining it as one of the decisional
network's characteristics. We define complexity as the plurality of points of view
present in the process, to be considered with the other network's characteristics
like density and centrality.

   At this point it should be clear that the proposed conceptual framework supplies
a breakdown of the phenomenon we called policy decision, in order to identify all
its elements, hoping to define its typical modalities, in order to enable the policy
innovator to try and implement the desired transformation. In Chap. 6 we will see
the importance of these elements in supplying a guide to the interpretation of the
phenomena we are interested in: non-incremental transformations in the ways
collective problems are dealt with. But we first need to complete the identification
of the important elements of the decisional process that are not directly referred to
actors.

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