

Intellectual devices: studying managerialised care practice without managerialism

I look at a specific reform, the Czech social care reform, which at some point successfully problematized 'quality' of social care as a key policy issue, and invented 'quality service' as a remedy to the problem. We are looking at the years 1998 onwards. A substantive part of the reform was carried out as a Czech-British twinning project between the years 2000 and 2003. The reform climaxed in 2006 when the Social Services Act was legislated. It introduced new elements like quality standards and quality inspection. Since then all providers of social care are to meet quality standards and this way make 'quality services' everywhere locally.

The Czech case could be told as a story of neoliberal managerialisation of social work and social care (e.g. Pawlasova 2012). In the end, since 2006 there is a burgeoning discourse on quality which has been interpreted as a close ally of neoliberal reforms; there is the ordering of social care practice through quality standards; and there is quality audit, intensifying surveillance over practitioners. All that could be placed within a critical understanding of the post-socialist transition as being part of the neoliberal governance, marketisation and the spread of New Public Management (Shore and Wright 1997, 2011, Clarke 1998, Clarke and Newman 1997, Kirkpatrick and Lucio 1995). This way, the reform could be understood as similar to the case of British higher education reform where, according to Shore and Wright, audit mechanisms mark new forms of "coercive neo-liberal governmentality" (Shore and Wright 1997). It could be also be seen as similar to recent Danish social care policy where, according to Dahl (2011), the introduction of quality standards in 2002 produced a "Danish version of New Public Management", with standards as a tool for governing 'at a distance'. Dahl argued that

quality is believed to be reached by codifying care; that is, making it visible and measurable through the outlining of standards. Here the neo-liberal quest for competition creates a bureaucratic mastery of care (Dahl 2011, manuscript, highlight mine).

Similarities with the the Czech case are at grabs. However, there are equally troubles with this sort of explanation. For it doesn't fit the case, certainly not in any neat way. As soon as one looks at other places than government documents – say professional journals, workshops and conferences, when one traces the genealogy of the reform and speaks to the policymakers back then, and managers and practitioners today, one begins to see some disorderly associations. For example, there is no marketisation agenda to be pointed to as the breeding environment for quality reform. Well, there was a project of marketisation of social care, but it was both politically and structurally unrelated to the later calls for quality. Also, there is no emerging class of managers (like in the UK) who could be pointed to as the upcoming holders of the 'right to manage'. Insetad, there is strangely overstretched reliance on procedures which tends to constantly break down, especially in inspection exercises. And there are no technocratic

advocates of accountability and management techniques (like the Audit Commission) generating necessary knowledge for the reform. Instead, there were practitioners trying for years to influence national policy with their practice oriented reform ideas who – when an opportunity came – associated their fate with a call for quality. What I am trying to say here is that it is not easy to link the reform to our settled analytics of a New Public Management ‘mentality’ of governance, and to find a ‘policy coalition’ pressing for it.

The analytical question of how to understand the making of ‘quality services’ and the role of standards and audit in this process is therefore at the same time a methodological question – how to explain the outcome – managerialised care – without linking the quality reform to the larger formations of managerialism and New Public Management as directly acting (and therefore explanatory) frameworks? What I have done instead is following the policy innovation (i.e. the making of ‘quality service’) from its inception to its present day dispersed life. Based on this I asked how was social care practice re-organised in the making of ‘quality service’ and what were the key ‘intellectual devices’ in this process?

In the course of the reform, ‘quality service’ was composed as a new equipped agent in care provision. As such, it re-organised social care practice in two important ways.

- (1) It created a horizontal extension whereby a range of forms and practices previously associated with administrative contexts of care are turned into matters of care practice itself.
- (2) It created a vertical extension whereby the delivery of practice is no longer a matter of equipped practitioners but is instead re-assembled as a matter of equipped ‘quality service’ through the mediating work of procedures.

I explore in detail four specific intellectual devices: ‘process’, ‘individual need’, ‘service’, and ‘procedure’. My approach is an attempt to socio-material semiotics (Law 2004) of policy and governance which would build on and develop interpretive and anthropological insights into policy (Yanow 1996, Strathern 2000a, Shore and Wright 1997, 2011). The notion of ‘intellectual devices’ refers back to the work of Miller and Rose on ‘intellectual technologies’ which they understood as a key “mechanism for rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of action” (Miller and Rose 1990: 32). The term ‘intellectual’ in ‘intellectual devices’ refers to the *kinds* of materials often at work in policy – concepts, ideas, formulas, and models. Standard representational mode takes these at face value as representations, and they are judged primarily as more or less accurate. However, as Brown (1997) put it, what emerges through more material analysis is the “machinery of a concept, or rather the processual manner in which a concept enables a number of elements to be ordered in time and space” (Brown 1997: 66). Exploration of specific ‘intellectual devices’ is thus equally an answer to *what* the matter of policy is, and *how* they matter in holding policy worlds together.

On the level of theory, I argue about the role of 'intellectual devices' in emerging policy worlds, such as the Czech social care reform, is twofold. They are to be enlisted among the *matters* of policy where they have a constitutive role to play alongside many other kinds of agencies, e.g. people, politics, alliances, interests, or organizational routines to name a few. Second, they *matter* in the sense of having effects on the working (or not) of the policy arrangements such as the 'quality service'. That is also why, analytically, they should matter more than just means of detecting larger organisational logics at work.

Staying with the devices and understanding where they come from and what they *do* in the composition of policy worlds rather than what they *stand for* may harness greater understanding of how policies come to being. I referred to the seminal work of Peter Miller and Niklas Rose who two decades ago outlined an important move beyond the analytics of power as situated in singularised actors like the state. At the same time, taking their critics seriously implies the need to deal with certain bias towards mapping 'mentalities' of governing rather than their 'technologies'. My proposal to account for 'intellectual devices' may thus offer a way of conducting more materialist analysis of policy.