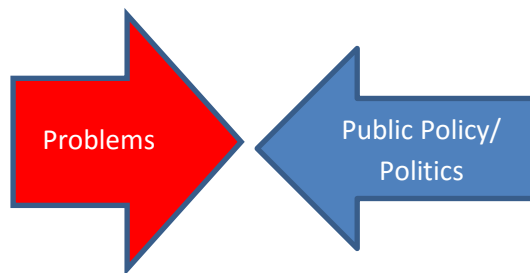


Problem Solving and Beyond

1. Problem solving

Public policy implies managing public tasks and problems in the best possible way. If we consider tasks and problems as given, public policy simply appears as problem solving. Politics is then perceived as a more or less sluggish process of decision-making to problem solving - the functionalist interpretation of political affairs (see figure 1).

Figure 1: *The functionalist concept of political affairs*



According to this concept, public policy arises as functional response to existing socio-political problems. Hence the bigger the problem, the bigger the scope and intensity of a responding policy - a concept of **negative respectively anti-cyclical steering**. See for instance the upcoming of environmental policy that is considered to be a steering response to environmental problems in the industrialized society.

The **rationale** of this way of thinking is quite evident: Public policy appears to be necessary - a very good precondition for legitimating, developing, and implementing a championed policy. That's why the concept of problem solving constitutes a core element of any practical policy initiative and a significant rationale of policy networks.

Political analysis has to respect this rationale as practically relevant and as often sensible in terms of practical success. The idea of policies being nothing

but functional responses to given problems, however, is not undeniable. That can be shown on the basis of comparative case studies, such as the case of no smoking policy.

2. Problem-solving and beyond: The case of no smoking policy



Smoking appears to be an obvious issue of functional problem-solving: Since the 1930s first research results on correlations between tobacco consumption and lung cancer have been published. Since the early 1960s gravely negative health impacts of smoking have been an established issue of medicinal research and public debate. Since the 1970s a vivid political discussion on that issue has arisen in the USA and in a growing number of other countries around the world.¹ Meanwhile legislators routinely cite scientific evidence that shows tobacco smoking is harmful to the smokers themselves and to those inhaling second-hand smoke. Proponents say, smoking bans were enforced to protect people from the effects of second-hand smoke, which include an increased risk of heart disease, cancer, emphysema, and other diseases. In addition, such laws may reduce health care costs, improve work productivity, and lower the overall cost of labor in the community thus protected, making that workforce more attractive for employers.²

Against this background, no smoking programs and enforced measures has been launched in the USA and many other countries since the 1970s.³ Meanwhile a distinct majority of countries all over the world exhibits no smoking policies, from patchy protection up to comprehensive smoke-free law covering indoor areas (see the following figure 2).

Figure 2: No smoking policies by country⁴

¹ January 24: Smoking ban (Wikipedia): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoking_ban

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Source: Smoking bans/Wikipedia/ January 22, 2015: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_smoking_bans



- no known smoke-free regulations (or no data)
- patchy or incomplete protection, low enforcement
- no national smoke-free law, some localities have more comprehensive indoor restrictions
- national smoke-free law for public areas except entertainment and restaurants, or weak enforcement in indoor entertainment areas
- national smoke-free law for public areas except entertainment and restaurants, some localities have comprehensive indoor restrictions
- comprehensive national smoke-free law covering all public indoor areas (sometimes with specific exceptions)

This figure may become even more impressive by referring to particularly **advanced practices and plans of no smoking policy in single countries**: Bhutan is the first country in the world to completely outlaw the cultivation, harvesting, production, and sale of tobacco and tobacco products under its *Tobacco Control Act of Bhutan 2010*. New Zealand hopes to achieve being tobacco free by 2025 and Finland by 2040. In March 2012 Brazil became the world's first country to ban all flavored tobacco including menthols. It also banned the majority of the estimated 600 additives used, permitting only eight. In several parts of the world, tobacco advertising and sponsorship of sporting events is prohibited. The ban upon tobacco advertising and sponsorship in the European Union in 2005 prompted Formula One management to look for venues that permit display of the livery of tobacco sponsors, and led to some of the races on the calendar being cancelled in favor of more *tobacco-friendly* markets.⁵

These efforts and successes might have had essential impacts on reducing smoking in many countries during the last decades. So in Germany the consumption of cigarettes (number of duty paid cigarettes) dropped from over 140 billion in the year 2002 until about 80 billion in the year 2013 (see the following figure 3).

⁵ Source: ibid

Figure 3: Consumption of cigarettes in Germany from 1991 to 2013⁶



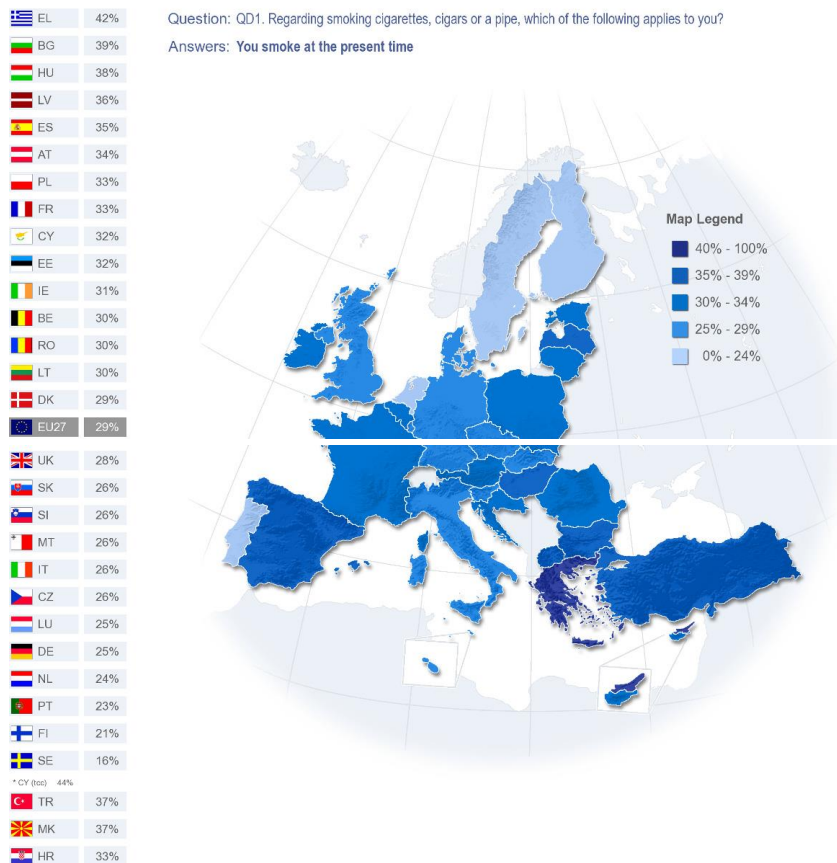
Looking back at figure 2, indeed, we see a yellow belt of countries that have enacted only patchy or incomplete protection of low enforcement.⁷ Are these countries characterized though a lower degree of smoking hazards? Certainly not! In the contrary, intense smoking has a long tradition in countries of this belt, particularly in Asian countries; and Chinese urban agglomeration areas additionally suffer from extraordinary strong air pollution produced by industry, heating, and car traffic - what might make health problems produced by tobacco consumption even worse.

Vice versa, relatively tough no smoking regulations are valid in many countries where the percentages of smokers have been relatively low for decades and lie now at an extraordinary low level. So the most strict and comprehensive no smoking policies have been launched in Northern European countries which show the lowest percentages of smokers in the EU (see following figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentages of smokers in the EU-member states and Turkey

⁶ Source (24 January, 2015: <http://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2014-01/infografik-raucher>

⁷ This result has to be relativized regarding China because meanwhile a new smoking ban has been enacted there. See: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/video/2011-05/02/c_13855260.htm



Source: Eurobarometer (Tobacco), 2010, p.9

These data don't speak for the functional thesis of a positive correlation between the strength of a problem and the strength of a counter policy (problem solving). In contrast, they stimulate the impression of a negative co-variance between the percentage of smokers and the strength of no smoking policies. That is: **The lower the percentage of smokers the tougher no smoking bans.**

Also regarding the **historical development** of no smoking policies, a negative co-variance between (objective) problem severity and strength of enacted measures arises. Looking at three countries, the USA, Great Britain, and Japan, we see quite high percentages of smokers before the beginning of modern smoking bans: 51% of adult males in the U.S. smoked in the year 1960, 61% in Great Britain and even 81% in Japan (see following table 1.

Table 1: Percentages of smokers in USA, GB, Japan 1960 and 2010 (adult males)

	USA	GB	Jp
1960	52%	61%	81%
2010	22%	22%	38%

Source: 25 January, 2015: <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/223534/umfrage/raucheranteil-unter-der-maennlichen-erwachsenenbevoelkerung-usa-uk-japan/>

Therefore I come to the **conclusion**: Smoking policies probably fostered the further reduction of smoker percentages during the last two decades; the decreasing smoker percentages since the 1950s/1960s, however, were a significant precondition for no smoking policies to be developed and to be enacted. That's why the analysis of no smoking policies has to go beyond the concept of simple problem solving. It should include the question how growing problem perception and public problem pressure have come into being.

3. Disaster paradox and capacity theory

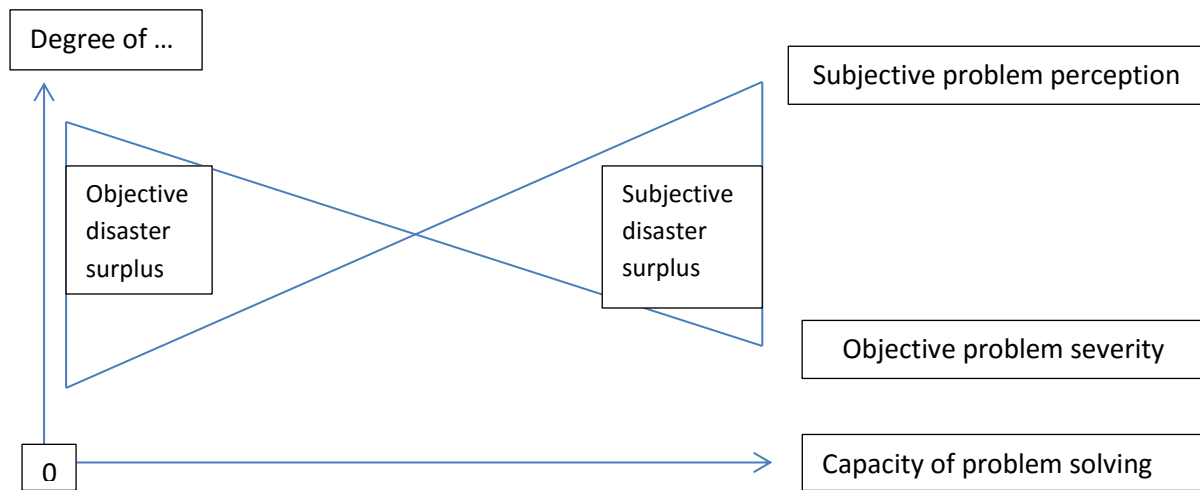
Pure cognitive problem perception is not the point in politics. For any problem perception has to stand public opinion. That standing, again, requires practically realizable options. Without disposing at a practical alternative to the given situation, the notion of a problem would destabilize the fundamental self-concept and integrity of political communication.⁸ Functional alternatives or substitutes to smoking are necessary prerequisites to avert from smoking. In politics, this psycho-social constellation has to be implemented by winning parliamentary and executive majorities for no smoking policies. That's why there has been a connection of arising majorities for no smoking policies with enacting those policies.

This insight seems to modify the functional model of problem solving only slightly: Still no smoking policy appears to be a rational response to existing health hazards. Yet between existing or non-existing alternatives (capacities), subjective problem perception, and objective problem severity, strange up to **paradoxical options** can arise (see following figure 5).

⁸ A conclusion corresponding with Leon Festinger's theorem of cognitive dissonance, see: Festinger, L. (1957). A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. California: Stanford University Press; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance

If there are no functional alternatives towards health damaging behavior, the objective problem severity will become disastrous. Simultaneously the subjective problem perception will be very low - with the consequence of even further denying any problem and reinforcing the objective problem, a paradoxical situation with **objective disaster surplus (ODS)**. So massive smoking usually *belongs to war* (without good alternatives to smoking as tranquilizer). And meanwhile relatively poor and weak people (with fewer alternative capacities) are the main candidates for being fixed smokers without being aware of a (health) disaster.

Figure 5: The Disaster Paradox



Vice versa, well-doing people that dispose at good alternatives to smoking tend to stop or to never begin smoking. Therefore the percentage of smokers and the intensity of smoking go down with increasingly given alternatives to smoking (capacities). Politically, this development finds its expression in increasingly tough policies against smoking - a situation with **subjective disaster surplus (SDS)** that usually implies particularly tough policies.

Both forms of surplus constitute the so-called disaster paradox - a pattern that can be empirically shown not only referring to no smoking policies, but also to many other issue-areas, such as health policies, environmental policies, and security policies.⁹ The main explanatory factor of the paradox is the degree of **problem solving capacities**: Problems are usually not perceived as long as they

⁹ Prittwitz, Volker von: Das Katastrophenparadox. Elemente einer Theorie der Umweltpolitik, Opladen: Leske+Budrich 1990; http://www.volkervonprittwitz.de/katastrophenparadox_12052011.pdf

are not practically manageable because a system without sufficient capacities would overtax itself by getting aware of an (over-complex) problem. In those situations, rational actors, tend to problem shifting or similar strategies. In case a problem is manageable by existing or easily gettable means, also complex problems can be clearly perceived as a challenge for goal-directed action. Sometimes problems are even constructed in an overextended *artificial* manner. In doing this, actors who dispose at capacities for problem solving, try to find and to publish problems that can legitimate and foster the use of existing capacities.

Together with the concept of problem solving, the capacity concept opens up new perspectives for policy analysis. In policy consulting based on these concepts, capacities of different types, such as technical, economic, political, institutional, and organizational, can get weight. The concept of *capacity building* is sometimes considered to be a combination of using problem solving and capacity analysis. The main conclusion from an analysis beyond problem-solving, however, should consist in sensitively getting aware of given capacities of public policies.

3. Complementary factors: Authoritarian rule and emancipation

Sometimes public policies may be explained also by complementary factors, such as authoritarian rule and emancipation from it. So the history since the 16th century is full of smoking bans proclaimed by religious and feudal rulers:

One of the world's earliest smoking bans was a 1575 Roman Catholic church regulation which forbade the use of tobacco in any church in Mexico. In 1604, King James I of England published an anti-smoking treatise (*A Counterblaste to Tobacco*), that had the effect of raising taxes on tobacco. The Ottoman Sultan Murad IV prohibited smoking in his empire in 1633 and executed smokers. Pope Urban VII also prohibited smoking in Church in 1590, followed by Urban VIII in 1624. Pope Urban VII in particular threatened to excommunicate anyone who *took tobacco in the porchway of or inside a church, whether it be by chewing it, smoking it with a pipe or sniffing it in powdered form through the nose*. The earliest citywide European smoking bans were enacted shortly thereafter. Such bans were enacted in the German areas Bavaria and Kursachsen, and certain

parts of Austria in the late 17th century. Smoking was banned in Berlin in 1723, in Königsberg in 1742, and in Stettin in 1744.¹⁰

Aside of fire hazards by tobacco consume, those bans may be explained as expressions of authoritarian power over the people: While diverse forms of smoke belonged (and belong) to religious cults - see incense in Catholic worship or Rastafari dopes - smoking by believers was banned. And also princes and nobles (that often smoked themselves) prohibited general smoking. That's why it's no surprise that these bans were repealed in political revolutions, particularly the revolutions of 1848. Also the fact that the percentage of female smokers increased from the mid of 1960s until 1970s and dropped then slower than then the percentages of male smokers in European countries such as Germany, can be explained as expression of (alleged) emancipation: For many women smoking was the first sign of their social emancipation.

In religiously dominated regions, possible tensions between religious rule and individual emancipation cross over with the discussion on modern requirements of health care: Although Quran does not comprise any comment or norm on (no) smoking, smoking is deemed as prohibited by many Islamic scholars. In Ramadan, Muslims have to refrain from smoking, as they have to refrain from eating and drinking, during daytime. Nevertheless smoking is widespread amongst Muslims, and in Islamic countries the percentage of smokers is significantly higher than in Europe - a statement that leads back to aspects of problem solving and capacities of public policies.¹¹

¹⁰ 26 January, 2015: Smoking ban (Wikipedia): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoking_ban

¹¹ See figure 2