Aims and Objectives

This course provides students with an overview of the theory and practice (selected cases) of policy analysis.
• To understand the institutional framework and main drivers of public policy
• To focus on the key conceptual stages of the policy making process – agenda setting, formulation, decision making, implementation and evaluation
• To explore various models of the public policy process
• To investigate Irish public policy through selected cases – health, environment, street level bureaucrats.

Contents

We study public policy because we want to know why particular decisions are made or not made. Public policy is important because the scope of the state encompasses almost all aspects of our daily lives. It involves everything from building roads to providing education and health care services, regulating business activity and influencing climate change talks. Although the main subject is the decisions and actions taken by governments (at all levels), many other actors – including international bodies like the European Union, UN and the World Bank, businesses, trade unions, community groups, religious leaders, journalists, celebrity activists etc. – can play key roles in setting policy agendas, formulating and marketing proposals, implementing decisions, and stirring up public support and/or indignation for the outcomes.

Questions of interest are:
1. How and why do governments choose specific policies at specific times and under specific circumstances?
2. Why is it challenging to give effect to policy prescriptions?

Part one of the course introduces key policy actors that set policy agendas, formulate proposals, broker decisions and implement public policy. It also focuses on key concepts – power and accountability – in the public policy process. Part two presents different stages in the policy cycle – agenda setting, formulation, decision making and implementation. Part three presents selected cases (e.g. health, environment, fiscal) and theories (rational choice, advocacy coalition framework, policy transfer) used to interpret policy decisions.

Core Readings

Core text:

Supplementary Texts:

