

Laudation for Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf

Dear President Woll,

Dear guests, students and colleagues!

Dear Prof. Mayntz and – even in absence – dear Prof. Scharpf,

My name is Kai Wegrich, and I am Professor of Public Administration and Public Policy at the Hertie School.

It is my great and deeply felt honour to introduce you, Prof. Mayntz and Prof. Scharpf, as the first-ever honorary doctorates of the Hertie School. It is also a humbling task that comes with a good amount of nervousness and excitement. And it is also a great joy – because it gave me the opportunity to again dive into the core concepts on which our school of governance is built and to share my insights today, especially with the students.

Prof. Mayntz and Prof. Scharpf, your research over decades is the intellectual foundation on which the Hertie School is built. Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf have, individually and jointly, developed, constructed and built the field of public policy in Germany and internationally.

Your research and writing has been the nutrition on which many colleagues have grown up academically. For many colleagues on the faculty, from Presidents Michael Zürn, Henrik Enderlein, Mark Hallerberg and Cornelia Woll to Markus Jachtenfuchs, Anke Hassel and Thurid Hustedt, Mayntz and Scharpf have been either academic teachers or an inspiration for their work and thinking. For us collectively, Mayntz and Scharpf's work provide our intellectual foundation – and thereby continue to shape what is distinct about how we think about the public and its problems.

In highlighting in broad strokes some of your achievements, I try to sketch the intellectual development that has shaped how we think about public problem solving and governance.

Renate Mayntz & Fritz Scharpf

Before becoming one of the most eminent social scientists, Renate Mayntz – born in Berlin – first studied at the Wesley College in the US (with a major in chemistry, but also a course in sociology). She earned her doctorate in sociology from the Free University here in Berlin in 1953, where she also earned her habilitation and became Professor of Sociology in 1965. She later became a Professor at the Hochschule für Verwaltungswissenschaften in Speyer and then at the University of Cologne. Her early focus was on community power studies and parties at the local level and then organisational sociology. For many of us in the field of public administration, her work continues to be a foundation (*Soziologie der öffentlichen Verwaltung* was the first textbook I bought). In 1985, she became founding Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies.

In 1986 Fritz W Scharpf joined her as Co-Director of the Max Planck Institute. Born in Schwäbisch Hall, Scharpf studied Law and Political Science in Tübingen and Freiburg. He went to Yale in 1955-56 and in 1964-66, and was Assistant Professor at the Law Faculty at Yale. But in between he completed both his German law degree and his doctorate in law at the University of Freiburg. He also completed his habilitation in Freiburg, and then became Professor of Political Science at the new University of Konstanz (both in 1968). In Konstanz, he built the study programme in public administration – which, if you study what it looked like in the late 1960s – looked remarkably similar to our own Master of Public Policy programme.

Dear students, if you ever wondered why there is a core course in Law in the MPP (Law and Governance), you can trace the roots of this course design to the programme in Konstanz.

In 1973, Scharpf moved to Berlin to become a Director at the still new WZB (Berlin Social Science Center) and later became Research Professor at the WZB. In 1986, he left Berlin to join Renate Mayntz as Co-Director at the Max Planck Institute in Cologne, where he and Prof. Mayntz have stayed ever since.

The Collaboration

The close collaboration between Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf did not start at the Max Planck Institute in the 1980s but already in the late 1960s. This was the time of expanding state activities, of competition between the systems of the West and the East, and of course also of geopolitical confrontations.

And it was the time when policy analysis took roots in many western governments. In the US, President Johnson initiated the war on poverty as part of the Great Society programme and brought policy analysts from think tanks (such as RAND and Brookings) into government. In Germany, the long post-war period and the dominance of the centre-right party of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in government ended, and then the first Grand Coalition of CDU and the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) started, which led to an SPD-led government (in a coalition with the Liberals).

To tackle the challenges society was facing, the German government wanted to change how government and bureaucracy made policy and managed bureaucracy. Already during the Grand Coalition of 1966-69, the federal government set up a reform commission charged with developing concepts and proposals for improving how ministerial bureaucracy developed and formulated policies. The reform commission was composed of higher civil servants and a range of scholars – who became household names in public policy and management later. And the leading scholars in this reform commission were Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf.

This commission allowed Mayntz and Scharpf to empirically study how ministerial bureaucracy actually takes decisions, how policies are made in the engine room of government. They carried out case studies, analysing how policies are actually formed and formulated – and in these case studies they discovered the critical policymaking role of the ministerial bureaucracy and in particular the small, specialised working units in policymaking.

Theoretical concepts like negative and positive coordination and the reformist approach of “active policymaking” resulted from these studies.

Active policymaking was a concept that aimed at strengthening the political leadership capacity of the ministerial bureaucracy to put executive politicians in a position to move beyond a policymaking style that is only reacting to short-term demands. At the core of active policymaking was the idea to equip executive politicians with the intelligence and support to take decisions with a longer-term outlook. Current discussions about evidence-based policymaking and bringing data scientists into government remind me of this reform period.

But it turned out that longer-term planning often did not lead to the intended results, and more intelligence did not directly lead to better policymaking. In sync with the new development in policy research internationally, Mayntz and Scharpf explored the implementation of public policies as the key site or moment of success and failure. Studies on the enforcement of environmental policy and the implementation of labour market programmes showed not only the importance of administrative capacities, but in particular the significant role of societal and political actors during implementation – for example when the enforcement of environmental standards is subject to bargaining on the local level between companies, politicians and enforcement agencies; or when the networks of firms, unions and the labour market administration drives success of labour market activation programmes – to name just two examples.

Implementation, it turned out, is much less a hierarchical top-down process than expected. It is actually the continuation of politics at the street level.

But something else came out of these studies on policy formulation and implementation. Namely that it does not make so much sense to view policymaking as a process that starts in the halls of political institutions and is delivered at the street level. The process is more lateral, less hierarchical and more interactive. Bargaining, collaboration and conflict do not only shape implementation, but they also characterise the whole policymaking process.

Moreover, when looking at individual policy sectors – health care, welfare, telecommunication, the labour market – it became evident that the interactions between the different actors in these sectors are shaped by institutional rules. These institutional rules shape the interaction of the actors, who has a say in what. These sectors are shaped by a mix of state (hierarchy), networks and markets.

Let me underline the shift in the understanding of public problem solving that this conceptual development entailed: policy analysis and research started out with the idea of optimising the policy design with more intelligence, and found out that the process of policymaking is better captured as multilateral interaction in the web of government than a hierarchical process; implementation research resulted in the further departure from the traditional understanding of policymaking as a hierarchical process; and under the governance paradigm the patterns of interaction between state and non-state actors – and how they are regulated – shape how public problems are addressed.

Of course, policy design, intelligence, data, good management and implementation matter. But if you want to summarise this intellectual development in the form of a mantra, it could go something like this: policy design and instruments matter, but actors and institutions matter more.

This intellectual climate

Many more aspects, dimensions and plots characterise Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf's work. Just to mention Renate Mayntz' work on large technical systems and the sociological theory of modernisation; and Fritz Scharpf's highly impactful work on federalism and multi-level governance (in Germany and Europe – the “joint decision trap”). Unfortunately, I do not have the time to present these contributions in detail, but I trust that you will now feel inspired to go to the library and find out more yourselves!

Please allow me to finish on one final remark concerning the nature of intellectual debates that characterised the 1980s and 1990s. Mayntz and Scharpf had a veritable intellectual opponent in Niklas Luhmann. This highly imminent German sociologist developed the theory of social systems. According to this theory, increasing complexity of society leads to functional differentiation and the development of social subsystems that function according to their own logic and code of communication. The theory came with a nihilism regarding the possibility of government intervention (i.e. policymaking) into such a system. Policy interventions – for example into the economic system – could lead to not much more than the flickering of a disco ball. Scharpf and Mayntz have engaged intensively with the work of Luhmann and his followers. Insisting and demonstrating that political governance is possible and working on defining the conditions

under which such governance is possible. For example, the aggregation of interest by intermediary organisations (lobby groups) is considered to be a factor contributing to the possibility of steering – because it allows negotiations and credible commitment to follow through with policies that are agreed on. In 1988, Luhmann and Scharpf had a public controversy at the conference of the German political science association debating these issues.

Such debates might seem pretty general, maybe even abstract, from today's perspective. In particular here, where we are concerned with addressing tangible problems and teaching the skills to solve them. I disagree. I think that the conceptual tools and intellectual mindset, one that combines fundamental insights about political governance and their societal foundations with their application to concrete (policy) fields and issues, is what helps us avoid the risks of technocracy – the idea that well-conceived policies, those based on the right data, can ever be sufficient for public problem solving. In understanding today and shaping tomorrow, the work of Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf remains fundamentally important as guiding posts of how we think about public problem solving in a political world.

It was thus a natural choice to select both of them for our first-ever honorary doctorates. It is a bow to the academic work they have accomplished, a recognition of the strength of internationally connected interdisciplinary scholarship rooted in Germany that provided the key intellectual foundation for building the Hertie School. And it is also a heartfelt thank you from the Hertie School faculty on behalf of all the generations that have followed and could build on your insights.

Please give both scholars a round of applause!

Thank you very much!