**TEACHING DECISIONAL ANALYSIS**

The book was written to provide both students and practitioners of public policies, i.e. people trying to design and/or generate significant transformations of the ways in which collective problems are tackled and possibly solved, the conceptual tools more appropriate to analyze decisional processes.

This is based on the rather realistic double hypothesis that:

1. the outcome of a decisional process depends
   1. on the interaction of actors with different goals, different resources both in quantity and quality and different strategies,
   2. on the content of the decision and
   3. on the rules decided or imposed, that define how actors exchange their resources;
2. decisions seem to be particularly difficult given the complexity (many possible points of view) and uncertainty (unawareness of the consequences of actions) that unavoidably characterize several policy problems, especially the ones that move significantly away from the status quo, and the fact there isn’t a univocal relation among problem types, strategies and decisional success.

Furthermore, since most policy decisions are promoted and made by people who are neither political scientists nor public policy analysts, and they often share very unrealistic ideas about how public decisions are and should be made, a good deal of failure and delays, and, more in general, the inefficiency of decisional processes depends on the fact that the actors did not pay attention to the management of the processes themselves. In particular, the worst and most common mistake is to imagine that formal and informal rules, that are valid for routine decisions, represent insurmountable constraints for transformation decisions, meaning for innovations characterized by complexity and uncertainty.

For all these reasons, teaching decisional analysis, mostly but not only, to people who do not have a political and social sciences background should follow the following sequence:

call into question the preconceptions about how policy decisions are and should be made;

introduce a realistic model of the decisions themselves, like the one we mentioned in the first chapter of the book, and explain its elements;

help interiorize this model by applying it to concrete cases, whether they be imaginary or real.

Of course, the first point depends on the characteristics of the addressees. Experience shows how implicit and almost unavoidably partial and wrong ideas are varied and often contradict each other.

Some people, for instance, either due to their background or nature, believe that decisional failures are a consequence of the cognitive limits (in plainer words: ignorance) of the actors, of the fact they are not able to choose the correct solution also because they do not let experts guide them.

Others on the contrary, tend to adopt conspiracy theories and therefore believe that the failures are the product of the existence of hidden interests that work behind the scenes.

Often enough, implicit opinions have to do with the general characteristics of the “system”, but even in this case, in a very varied way: some for instance, believe that the rules defined to make public policy decisions are not strict enough, meaning they do not constrain enough the actors, while others think they are not flexible enough, meaning they treat very different problems in an uniform way.

Finally there is also who thinks that it is basically impossible to understand these phenomena since they are generated randomly, whereas in the political science field, the most common bias regards the immediate applicability to single circumstances of middle-range models elaborated by political analysts to define a class of phenomena. There is a short circuit in this last example between different levels of analysis that leads to serious misunderstandings of important phenomena.

In general, this first important part of the learning and teaching process consists in interiorise two key concepts:

1. it is not true that public policy decisional processes cannot be known in any way: they have some important regularities as regards the elements that can influence outcomes;
2. generalizations are very dangerous since the combination of these elements is always contextual and therefore every complex process is somewhat unique.

After this important *pars destruens* of the learning process, that has the main aim to sweep away strongly rooted mental frames (and young students who do not have a specific social sciences background are more open from this point of view than doctoral students), we have to introduce the model, namely the content of the previous chapters. This is of course a traditional didactic activity that does not necessarily involve much interaction.

There is one main warning: the point is to make an effort to define and classify in which the risks of being too schematic are much less serious than the risks of being imprecise. Exactly because each decisional situation is different from another, the basic categories to be used must be defined in the most precise way possible. It is the combination of the elements that makes each case special, but the elements are always the same and are always defined in the same way. The glossary at the end of the book is also useful to avoid that training becomes a pointless discussion about the single definitions.

However, and since it is a matter of transferring the “conceptual lenses” through which we will look at policy decisions, a simple presentation of the model and of its constituent elements is rarely enough to become totally familiar with the matter. This is where the third phase begins, that consists of exercises to put the concepts to use, with real world cases so to train students to use the conceptual framework we introduced.

This can happen in two different ways.

* The easiest way is to analyse a concrete decisional process, i.e. breaking it down to its constituent elements. It is a lot better to use a success story showing the actual ability to adopt a non incremental policy change. The danger in the analysis of decisional failures is that generalizations (or better, generalized stereotypes) prevent the full understanding of the micro-foundations of policy making. It is very important that the analytical framework is fully available to the students in order to force the classification of the various elements. In other words, learning decisional analysis does not consist in the ability to correctly repeat the given definitions, but it is the ability to use them in analysing (literally “tearing to pieces”) a complex episode to recognize and classify its single elements. For this reason, it is advisable to allow the students (even during exams) to use the textbook or their notes, thus avoiding adding up the difficulty of interpreting the situation and the difficulty of remembering the definition of the different concepts. Of course, the complexity of the cases that are used for teaching can vary depending on students’ level, the amount of time available and if they are individual or group activities. Nevertheless, if on one side cases must be rather complex (otherwise the methodology introduced here would have no sense), on the other side the material given to students (the narration of the “chronology”) doesn’t necessarily have to be large. In the appendix of this chapter, we give an example of a decisional case that isn’t very long and was used in individual exercises that took up more or less half a day. It is also very complex – two conflict axes, change in the behaviour of key actors, defeat of the initial promoter, etc – allowing the use of almost all the analytical concepts described above.
* The second way is only suitable for rather mature students and is good for group work. It consists of the creation of a decisional strategy for an existent project of innovative transformation proposed by the students themselves or, more often, taken from the real world. The choice of the case for which build a strategy depends on the type of students, on their level and on the time available. For instance, as regards training for planners, the logic was to choose proposals and projects for urban transformation taken from the real world, promoted by social and political actors and not likely to be accepted by public authorities due to opposition (and potential conflict) and/or due a lack of interest to implement them. In this case, work is definitely made easier by the fact that these projects have already been object of debate, so we do not start from scratch in recreating the network of important actors and their positions, with the clear advantage of not having to formulate more or less risky hypotheses about who is involved and his goals. Nothing prevents, however, us from using projects developed by students autonomously, thus simulating the chances they have of being really put into practice, and study the consequences that the feasibility imperative has on the project itself. For didactic reasons it is always better to deal with precise transformations (in which the decisional process is limited in time and space), that can however have very different characteristics: the approval of a law regarding a specific policy problem, the building of an infrastructure, the best way to disseminate a technological innovation, the design of a new organizational structure, etc. What all these things have in common is that they are solutions, although not completely defined in detail, to one or more problems. After all, innovations are generally born like this, like the identification of an opportunity, and the didactic content consists of checking the political/institutional feasibility of these proposals in the light of a realistic model to represent the actors during their interactions. From a methodological point of view, if students’ characteristics require it, it can sometimes be very useful to precede the exercise with a phase to discuss a “research plan” and identify the sources that should be used (official documentation, press review, people or organizations to interview both because directly involved or because they have useful information) according to a superficial analysis of the case based exclusively on the material supplied by the teacher. During the review phase, tutors will have to check if the methodology is correct, evaluate whether the sources are accessible and sufficient, supply information as regards other possible investigation paths. In any case, it is very important to supply the structure of the final paper so to force students to use the decisional analysis conceptual framework, checking its different elements and using them to define the “decisional strategy” which is the final goal of the exercise. The final paper can be organized in the following chapters aimed:

1. To describe the main features of the innovation and of the policy problems it wants to tackle and solve;
2. To identify of the actors that will necessarily be involved in the decisional process, their goals, resources and interactions;
3. To define the decisional problem, meaning the possible threats and obstacles that can hinder the decision;
4. To discuss the elements of the process that can be modified to anticipate the obstacles and/or solve potential conflicts;
5. To design the strategy to adopt as a mix of the possible “pure” strategies described in Chapter 6 of the book.

Of course, the analysis could end with a negative opinion about the feasibility of the proposal. This should be avoided in the teaching process since choosing problems that contain this risk often means shifting the attention to the macro level – the general features of the political-administrative system – which is a deviation from the goal to learn decisional analysis. The approach presented here must be used in fact to improve the feasibility of non incremental transformations, not to say that these are usually difficult.

On the contrary, the need to stimulate students to consider the possibility of changing the project is a vital element. Of course the basic features described in point 1 must be respected, but the students must consider introducing the changes that seem necessary to guarantee its implementation. One of the main goals is in fact to make them understand the tight interaction between designing the “solution” and organizing the decisional process.

**DECISIONAL ANALYSIS EXERCISE**

Analyse the following case and answer the questions:

1. Identify the main phases of the decisional process and for each phase the problem it deals with
2. For each phase:
   1. list the actors of the process specifying what type they belong to, the nature of their goals, the type of resources they have and their role in the interaction
   2. analyse the stake (content of the decision)
   3. identify the main patterns of interaction
   4. draw the network and calculate its complexity and density
3. Identify the decisional strategies adopted

**THE DIACCIA BOTRONA WETLAND**

This case concerns the creation of a Nature Reserve in the Diaccia Botrona wetland, a vast area of marshland situated on the west coast of Italy between Grosseto and Castiglione della Pescaia. The wetland covers an area of 1200 hectares and has environmental and geological features which provide an ideal habitat for a variety of bird species (particularly herons) and a transit site for a number of migratory species.

In 1935 the Ministry of Finance, which owns the site, granted a concession for its use to the Provincial Government which entrusted the management of the site to the National Hunting Association (the Federcaccia)

The first request for the conservation of the Diaccia Botrona wetland area dates back to 1976 when the Italian League for the Protection of Birds (Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli LIPU), requested that the zone be converted into a protected area

However, in June 1987 the Provincial Government renewed the management contract with the National Hunting Association for a further 6 years, despite the fact that the concession from the Ministry of Finance was due to expire at around this time.

Two months later the Italian League for the Protection of Birds (LIPU) approached the Regional Government of Tuscany, and all the local authorities, in the area to relaunch the proposal to create an area for the protection of wildlife in the Diaccia Botrona marshlands and the adjacent pinewood forests along the coastline.

These proposals encountered opposing views:

Those in favour of the conservation of the area included the newly-created Ministry for the Environment and the WWF which already manages other nature reserves in Italy.

Those strongly opposed to the proposals included the local authorities who have a particular interest in the development of tourism in the area, the National Hunting Association, and a small number of private businesses with locally-based economic activity. These groups drew strength from the support they received from the Provincial Government.

In December 1987 the concession for the area held by the Province expired and was not renewed. The area therefore reverted to being the property of the Ministry of Finance.

In January 1988 the WWF asked the Ministry of the Environment to create a Nature Reserve on the site. The following year, in June 1989 the WWF submitted a formal request to the Ministry of Finance for the concession to manage the area.

In the early months of 1988 the Environmental Protection League (Legambiente) entered the debate proposing a public discussion on the subject involving all interested parties.

Towards the end of 1988 Legambiente, WWF, the Green List and the Antivivisection League jointly signed a document sent to all the local, provincial and regional government bodies, in which they requested the inclusion of the Diaccia Botrona wetland area in the Maremma National Park, or, alternatively, the creation of a protected area. The National Hunting Association proposed tighter restrictions on hunting in the area

In March 1989 the Minister for the Environment, the socialist Ruffolo, sent a letter to the President of the regional government of Tuscany requesting the preservation of the area.

At the end of 1989 the WWF requested that the judicial authorities open a legal case against the members of the Provincial council in power in 1987 and a number of private businesses in the area. They were accused of generating environmental damage by the decision taken by the Provincial Council 2 years earlier to renew the National Hunting League’s management contract for the area despite the imminent expiry of the Council’s concession for the use of the land. The case also alleged environmental damage caused to the Diaccia Botrona marshlands as a result of its earlier management.

In January 1990 the WWF obtained funding from the European Community to undertake a exploratory study for a management plan for the area. The study identified the desired status for the area (Nature Reserve), the dimensions of the area to be preserved (1200 hectares) and proposed a series of environmental protection measures.

In February 1990 the Court, as a result of the case brought by the WWF, placed a judicial sequestration order on the entire Diaccia Botrona wetland area. This measure prohibited all hunting or fishing in the area during the investigations into the allegations of environmental damage.

The National Hunting League requested that the right to continue hunting in the area be preserved given that regulated hunting plays a vital role in the conservation of the area. Meanwhile the WWF continued to promote its own plan for the creation of a Nature Reserve and proposed the establishment of a management committee for the area composed of local, provincial and regional representatives to support the WWF approach.

In March 1990 the Provincial Government, and the local authorities of Grosseto and Castiglione della Pescaia organised a public meeting on the subject of the Diaccia Botrona wetlands. The purpose of the conference was to analyse the current state of the marshlands and to consider the most appropriate solution. At this meeting the idea of preserving the area was generally accepted. The debate then moved to considerations regarding the form of protection, the role of hunting, potential extension of the preservation area and the form of management. The Green party proposed that hunting be banned throughout the entire area; The LIPU wanted to transform the area into an educational area for the study of birds and the promotion of wildlife tourism; the WWF’s aim was to create a National Nature Reserve; The Regional Government of Tuscany was pushing for the creation of a regional preservation area, given that the management of the protected area was to include the establishment of a committee representing all the interested parties (environmentalists, hunters and farmers).

In February 1991 the Ministry for the Environment declared the wetland a national Nature Reserve. The Regional Government appealed against the decision in front of the Constitutional Court maintaining that the Ministry of the Environment could not make a decision of this kind without consulting the relevant local authorities.

In November 1991 The European Commissioner for the Environment urged the Italian government to ensure the preservation of the Diaccia Botrona wetland area.

At the end of 1991 the Constitutional Court upheld the case made by the Regional Government of Tuscany and repealing the decree issued by the Ministry of the Environment.

At the beginning of 1992 the Diaccia Botrona was chosen to be a pilot area in an international project – jointly managed in Italy by the Ministry of the Environment and the WWF - for the preservation of Mediterranean wetland areas (Medwet). The aim of the initiative was to raise the awareness of government bodies and the public of the value of marshland areas from a social, ecological and economic perspective.

At the same time other solutions were also being developed: The National Hunting League proposed that the area be transformed into a hunting reserve, emphasising again the importance of hunting for environmental management and conservation. The Provincial Government decided to allocate funding to the Region for the management of protected areas in Tuscany (including a significant sum for the conservation and maintenance of the Diaccia Botrona wetlands). The Provincial Hunting Committee formulated a wildlife-hunting plan for the Grosseto Province which provided for the continuation of hunting activity in the area.

In light of the inertia demonstrated by the Regional Government and the local authorities, in May 1993 the Minister for the Environment Rutelli (who was in post for only 6 days) issued a decree establishing a provisional ban on hunting in the area.

All the reactions to this measure had one thing in common: the awareness of the need to develop appropriate means for protecting the area. The Grosseto and Castiglione della Pescaia municipalities requested the repeal of the ordinance because of the lack of consultation with local authorities; the National Hunting League proposed a conference of key stakeholders to discuss the subject again; the President of the Provincial Council suggested the possibility of keeping both environmentalists and hunters happy by creating separate protection and hunting zones.

In August 1993 the Grosseto Municipality and the Province organised a meeting with the Regional Government and the Ministry of the Environment to discuss a solution based on the studies already undertaken.

Meanwhile, in July of the same year, the criminal case against the Provincial Council and a number of local businesses for environmental damage began.

At the end of 1993 the WWF made public the exploratory study for the environmental management plan for the Diaccia Botrona financed by the European Community which proposed the establishment of a nature reserve and a series of initiatives for reclaiming and consolidating the area.

While the interested parties continued to advance their own proposals, mediation attempts were started between Grosseto Province and the National Hunting League, the Ministry for the Environment and the WWF.

The first act of this initiative was the signing of a Protocol of Agreement in March 1994 between the Provincial Government and the Grosseto and Castiglione della Pescaia Municipalities. The agreement identified an area of 1050 hectares to be protected, of which 900 were wetlands and 150 coastal pinewood forest. The signatories undertook to urge the Ministry of Finance to renew the concession for the management of the area to the Province, and to request that the Region begin the necessary procedures for the creation of the Regional Nature Reserve. The Province also promised to create a protected area in the short term, and to prohibit hunting in the wetlands and adjacent areas.

In the following months this agreement was widely debated. The Mayor of Castiglione della Pescaia organised a public meeting to explain the reasons behind the Protocol of Agreement (including the opportunity to access funding from the European Community and the possibility of including the Diaccia Botrona in the network of regional parks). The Grosseto Municipal Council approved the signing of the protocol of agreement. The National Hunting League opposed the agreement, arguing the importance of hunting in maintaining the balance of the ecosystem of the wetland. The Arcicaccia (a left-wing hunting association) adopted a position along the same lines, proposing a solution which enabled hunting and environmental protection to co-exist.

In June 1994 The Provincial Government passed a resolution creating the Wildlife Preservation Area in the Diaccia Botrona covering an area of 900 hectares. During the period necessary for the adoption of the final decision on the classification of the area the resolution also included a temporary measure banning hunting in an area equivalent to 500 hectares.

In August 1994 the Regional Government announced that it was in favour of granting the management of the area to the Province. The Ministry of the Environment confirmed that it was examining this proposal.

In February 1995 the court case against a number of members of the former Provincial Council fully acquitted all the defendants of the charges of environmental damage.

On the 11th of April 1995 the Regional Council passed a general law regarding nature protection. Four categories of preservation areas were created: Regional Parks, Provincial Parks, Nature Reserves and Protected Areas. The first regional programme for protected areas also includes the Diaccia Botrona.

Finally, in February 1996 the Region established the Regional Nature Reserve with an area of 1050 hectares and granted its direct management, although at this stage only provisionally, to the Province. A plan for the preservation and the conservation of the wetland area was proposed. The relevant regulations were to be defined in the following six months. At the same time a social and economic development plan for the protected area should be formulated. In addition an adjacent area, also managed by the Province, will become a hunting area.

**the solution of the case**

**PHASE I:** 1986 - February 1990 (judicial sequestration of the area)

**Problem:** Should Diaccia Botrona become a protected area?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ACTORS | TYPE | RESOURCES | GOALS | ROLE |
| LIPU | general interests | political | content-related | promoter |
| WWF | general interests | political | content-related | promoter/  director |
| Province/Municipalities | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/  legal | content-related | opposers |
| LegaAmbiente, Lista Verde, etc, | general interests | political | content-related | allies |
| Ministry for the environment | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/  legal | content-related | ally |
| European Union | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/  legal | content-related | ally |
| Federcaccia | special interests | political | content-related | opposers |
| Region | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/  legal | content-related | gatekeeper |
| Courts | bureaucrats | legal | process-related | gatekeeper |

**Stake**: zero-sum game; costs are concentrated and benefits shared

**Interaction patterns**: confrontation

LIPU REGION ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY

LEGAAMBIENTE WWF EUROPEAN UNION

LISTA VERDE

PROVINCE FEDERCACCIA COURTS

**Density**: 17/72 = 23.6

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| DIMENSION OF THE INTEREST | TYPES OF ACTORS | | | | |
| Politicians | Bureaucrats | Experts | Special interests | General interests |
| International |  | EU |  |  |  |
| National |  | Ministry for the environment |  |  | WWF |
| Regional |  | Region |  |  | LIPU, Legaambiente |
| Local | Province,  municipalities | Judiciary |  | Federcaccia |  |

**COMPLEXITY INDEX**: 16

**PHASE II:** February 1990 - May 1993 (decree of Minister Rutelli)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ACTORS** | **TYPE** | **RESOURCES** | **GOALS** | **ROLE** |
| WWF | general interests | political | content-related | promoter/director |
| Environmentalists | general interests | political | content-related | allies |
| Ministry for the environment | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/legal | content-related  process-related | ally |
| European Union | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/legal | content-related | ally |
| Federcaccia | special interests | political | content-related | opposer |
| Region | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/legal | process-related | opposer |
| Province/Municipalities | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/legal | process-related | opposers |
| Constitutional Court | bureaucrats | legal | process-related | gatekeeper |

**Problem:** Who should be in charge of protecting Diaccia Botrona?

**Stake**: zero-sum game; costs are concentrated and benefits are shared

**Interaction patterns**: confrontation

ENVIRONMENTALISTS ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY

REGION

WWF EU

PROVINCE/MUNICIPALITIES

CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

FEDERCACCIA

**Density**: 13/56 = 22.2%

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| DIMENSION OF THE INTEREST | TYPES OF ACTORS | | | | |
| Politicians | Bureaucrats | Experts | Special interests | General interests |
| International |  | EU |  |  |  |
| National |  | Ministry for the environment  Constitutional Court |  |  | WWF |
| Regional |  | Region |  |  | environmentalists |
| Local | Province,  municipalities |  |  | Federcaccia |  |

**COMPLEXITY INDEX**: 16

**PHASE III:** May 1993 - February 1996

**Problem:** how should Diaccia Botrona be protected?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ACTORS** | **TYPE** | **RESOURCES** | **GOALS** | **ROLE** |
| Ministry for the environment | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/legal | content-related | ally |
| Federcaccia | special interests | political | content-related | opposer |
| Region | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/legal | process-related | promoter |
| Province | politicians/  bureaucrats | political/legal | content-related | director |
| Municipalities | politicians | political | content-related | allies |

**Stake**: positive-sum game; costs are shared and so are benefits

**Interaction patterns**: problem solving/bargaining

REGION ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY

MUNICIPALITIES PROVINCE FEDERCACCIA

**Density**: 10/20 = 50%

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| DIMENSION OF THE INTEREST | TYPES OF ACTORS | | | | |
| Politicians | Bureaucrats | Experts | Special interests | General interests |
| International |  |  |  |  |  |
| National |  | Ministry for the environment |  |  |  |
| Regional |  | Region |  |  |  |
| Local | Province, municipalities |  |  | Federcaccia |  |

**COMPLEXITY INDEX**: 9

**THE IDENTIFICATION OF DECISIONAL STRATEGIES**

The process can be divided into three phases.

During the first phase there is conflict between those who support the protection of the area (initially LIPU and then WWF with a very important role) and hunters, the latter supported by local authorities. The WWF’s strategy was to manipulate resources by searching for allies at a European and national level (the ministry for the environment) making good use of its organizational ability and by using political resources. The crucial move was the decision to refer to the courts that contributed to changing the attitudes of the institutional actors towards the opportunity of protecting the Diaccia Botrona area by sequestrating the area and opening a penal proceeding against local administrators.

During the second phase WWF maintained its strategy obtaining the declaration of natural reserve from the Ministry for the environment and was entrusted with the management of the area. This opened a conflict between Region Tuscany, allied with local administrations, and the Ministry that ended with the sentence of the Constitutional Court that declared the illegitimacy of the ministerial measure because the region was not involved in the decision. This determined the turning point of the issue: a decision was made to assign the protection of the area to the regional administration whereas the management would be local. During the delays of the decisional process, the Ministry simply forbid hunting to protect the area when the sequestration order expired.

The third phase was internal to the Tuscan public administrations and defined the levels of protection bargaining with the hunters the extension of the protected area. The environmentalist groups disappeared and the process reached a consensual solution.

It is interesting to notice how there are two orthogonal conflict axes (protection of the area or use for hunting/tourism; national decision or local responsibility): the WWF’s strategic choice (recourse to courts against local administration and alliance with the Environment Ministry: manipulation of the resources) in favour of national protection was self defeating since it precluded the attainment of real goal, which was to be entrusted with the management of the natural reserve. The real winner was the regional government and the local authorities who, by choosing confrontation at the national level (appeal to the Constitutional Court: manipulation of the patterns of interaction) and bargaining at the local level (change in the boundaries of the protected area: manipulation of the content of the decision) were able to reach their own – mostly process related – goals.