

Reality of Participation in Decision-Making Process in Georgia: Challenges of Drafting Effective Policy

Giorgi Melikidze¹

Abstract

Public policy presents a way to solve the current problem in the society. Tbilisi belongs to the number of capitals where the population has increased dramatically in the last decade. Along with the population growth, a number of urban problems appeared or worsened. The law on the protection of homeless animals in the state is ineffective and useless. Animal abandonment and violence against them increased. Unregistered animals and their uncontrolled breed make the problem more complicated. Some dogs are aggressive and need to be treated. Animal protection services and dog shelters are small and cannot solve such an urgent problem. There are completely different opinions about the issue in the society, which further complicates the problem. Several dominant stakeholders appeared around the issue, although they have to be in unequal condition during civil advocacy process. We are interested in answering the question: under what conditions we can get effective policy for solving the problem? Our hypothesis is that equal involvement of stakeholders will increase the possibility of formulation effective policy. During research we used Kingdon's stream model according to which three independent stream pass through the window of opportunity to solve the problem. We use a qualitative research method, namely, focus group to analyze the stakeholders positions.

Key Words: Public Policy, Decision Making, Participation, Effective Policy

Introduction

Homeless animals and care of them is one of the challenges of the modern world. Animals rights are protected by a number of conventions but their implementation in everyday life is difficult. Despite the formally existing law, the society consider a dog as the owners property. A dog is often a gift, which will be abandoned if they get bored. Abandoning a dog of an unwanted breed or sex is another common occurrence. In western european countries, a dog is called homeless only because it does not have an owner, not because it lives on the street. According to the same experience, if a citizen wants to have a dog, then he should apply to a dog shelter. At the shelter, each dog is assigned a registration number and is divided in to categories, there are dogs that need to be cuddled, as well as animals that are completely healthy and waiting for a new owner. For example, in Germany, if a citizen wants to have a dog, he has to pay a fee for it. Fees vary and are determined by the dog's size, breed and potential risk.

An effective and efficient alternatives create a real opportunity for an effective policy. Often problem is not decision making process or its implementation but the lack of efficient alternatives. An absence of efficient alternatives is often due to both low stakeholder activism and irrelevant decision making model.

¹Assistant-Professor, Tbilisi State University

The stakeholders activism was low in post-soviet Georgia, but situation has dramatically improved recently. Enthusiasm has increased but knowledge how to get involved in policy making process is low. Such a situation creates a favorable ground for the government to isolate a policy making process. Obviously, at such a time, it is not correct to blame the only government. The government is interested in managing process itself, citizens do not have proper competence and the private sector is trying to take advantage. Each of the mentioned circumstance creates the basis to hinder the efficient alternative decision formation. The problem of the homeless dogs has low political and economic content and it is interesting how decision making process works at such time.

There are four alternative models of decision making in public policy. The Advocacy framework model emerged in the early 1990 years in the work of Paul Sabatier (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). The main advantage of this model is that it reflects accurately the process of formation of the stakeholders. At the same time, both process based changes and static factors are clearly distinguished. After stakeholders with different positions are formed, they begin to interact. Each of them after evaluating its own beliefs and resources formulates final position on the problem. The brokers try to reconcile the stakeholders and thus the final decision is made. The main drawback of this model is that it doesn't take in to account that the stakeholders are often in unequal conditions. This approach considers the process of formation the stakeholders and their interaction too idealistically. If any actor has a special power it becomes a dominant and influences the process.

According to Rounds model of public policymaking (Teisman, 2000) decision is divided into rounds, decision is never final and constantly is changed. The main advantage of this model is the opportunity of the constant change. However, what the balance of power will be in each subsequent round and how far the boat will be remains the challenge. The next theory is the Punctuated equilibrium model of public policymaking (Lindblom, 1959) according to which, agreements between stakeholders and blocking of new players are its features. This approach raises fair question about the effectiveness of this model. The multiple streams framework developed by Kingdon (2010) is a well respected approach in public policy. The main feature of this model is that the streams are completely isolated from each other. Three streams are distinguished: problems, actors and alternatives. Each stream moves into a window of opportunity and only there is the possibility of interaction. This process in public policy is called the process of „boiling the broth.“ Why is it called that? The reason for this is as follows: Streams passing through the window of opportunity begin to interact, each of them reveals its own capabilities and characteristics, they influence and interact with each other. In this way, the final result– the decision, is obtained. We think that it is the isolation of streams that determines the effective decision. At such a time, the stakeholders can no longer influence the problems and alternatives, and the process takes place in a very free environment. Their interaction in the window of opportunity creates an optimal chance to make an effective decision. How do you get to the window of opportunity? This is facilitated by the extent to which the problem is relevant, the actor is active and the alternative is viable. The main principle is that each of them competes with each other to be able to move into the window of opportunity. Thus, any alternative takes the form of a political course only if it can compete with others and prove to be more effective. Each model have its advantages and disadvantages, but we are interested in which one will work optimally in our case. We are not going to model the picture, but we rely on the existing situation in our research.

We used a qualitative research method, focus group. People interested in the issue, those who have information about the problem and are involved in solving the problem participated in the focus group. During the focus group, using a discussion plan, we talked about the causes of the problem, as well as ways to solve it and possible alternatives to the solutions. During the conversation, the moderator used all

decision-making alternatives as a kind of possible action scenario and discussed them in detail with the focus group participants. We grouped the information obtained as a result of the research according to decision-making models, and attached discussion, analysis and relevant conclusions.

Advocacy Framework Model VS Multiple Stream Framework

The problem of homeless animals is relevant throughout the country, although it is felt especially actually in certain regions and the capital. The period of Soviet rule left its mark in this field as well, and modern Georgia turned out to be completely unprepared to face the problem. The existing legal framework in this direction is completely outdated and unusable. Problem solving and field management experience is scarce and inconsistent. According to recent studies, there are 30 150 homeless dogs in Tbilisi in 2024, and only 32% of them are sterilized (Chapichadze, 2024). There are many stakeholders interested in sensitive problem, but most of them are not involved in its solution. A large part of society has a positive attitude towards dogs, shows care as much as possible, but real responsibility seems to be less. For example, if they want to have a dog, they recklessly pay a large amount of money for the desired breed of dog, although they do not want to adopt a homeless pet. Dogs are often bred for commercial purpose unwanted dogs are left on the streets, further increase the number of homeless animals. „Uncontrolled sale of dogs is totally unacceptable and arranging their fights for show should be punished strictly” [Gigi, 21]. An pet monitoring agency was established in Tbilisi City Hall, in 2015, a working group and public council were launched. In Tbilisi, where there are tens of thousand of homeless animals, an agency with such small capacities will not be able to eliminate the problem. Only in extreme cases, the agency has the legal right to take a dog to a shelter. According to the law, such cases are if the dog is aggressive and citizens confirm it, if it is seriously ill, if it has rabies or there is a complaint from local residents. „Absence of relevant legislation and scare material-technical base and low civil self-awareness hinder work“ [Vako, 27].

There are different attitudes towards the corner in the society. Some people believe that taking a dog to a shelter is completely unacceptable. According to them, animals have the right to live on the streets and it does not cause problems to anyone, on the contrary, people do to dogs. Part of the citizens are scared and point out from personal experience the obvious danger posed by hungry and injured dogs. „It is not clear when they ask for transfer the experience of European countries, they have come a long way to this stage of development” [Tamta, 23]

According to some opinions, the problem of dogs can only be solved by legislative reform and cannot be done otherwise. „An effective political course requires discussion, but it is on private conversation, what does not have result“ [Levan, 30]. Taking into account the current economic situation in the country, taking care of homeless animals, while their number is increased year by year, is an urgent problem. Setting up a large-scale shelter does not only involve infrastructural costs, but is also related to animal feeding, veterinary services and staff compensation. „Setting a dog shelter for such a number dog will be a heavy burden for the state“ [Nino, 26].

After the 2021 Tbilisi mayoral elections, the problem of homeless animals began to be actively discussed. Tbilisi mayor Kakhi Kaladze pointed out that this problem could not be solved without the appropriate legislative changes. At the beginning of 2024, the member of the Georgian Dream Maia Bitadze, submitted a draft law on domestic animals. According to the mentioned bill, there should be a strict monitoring of both the registration of dogs and the cases of their abandonment. Sanctions are getting

tougher and the reform is focused entirely on regulatory policy. To be fair, it should be said that the dissatisfaction of the public and especially of pet owner is due to the regulations.

The problem of homeless animals has had a heavy impact on certain business sectors. Stray dogs near food outlets scare consumers, and the same can be said for supermarkets and bakers. „The private sector also has a responsibility in this regard and it should be shared. The shelter of a private person (Elizbarashvili) or similar shelters are only minor exceptions and can not change the situation“ [Ana, 26]. Obviously, most facility owners are willing to feed their animals, but moving dogs in large groups is really dangerous and creates a sanitary problem for this facilities. Sometimes during the winter, it becomes difficult to move because of the dogs in subway stations and underground passages. „Not only in the streets, but also in the metro station and at the entrance of the markets there are a pack of dogs. This is both dangerous and unhygienic“ [Tamar, 32].

Often there is a conflict between the people who try to keep the dog out of the territory and the opponent. „I understand that it sounds inhumane, but in such a difficult situation tough decisions are necessary“ [Ana, 26]. Dogs walking on highways and overpasses create an emergency situation and their lives are in danger. Pet owners report that homeless, injured dogs often attack their dogs while walking on the street. „As long as there are too many dogs on the street the government can not solve this problem by the prevention alone“ [Gigi, 21].

During the last decade, a kind of trend has emerged in Georgian society, which involves giving a dog as a gift. There are many cases when a young child asks for a puppy, the parents give it to him on his birthday, but after some time, when the child is no longer entertained by the „toy,” the dog ends up on the street. „people need to understand a dog or any animal is not only to play with or entertain. If there is no awareness, strict bill is needed“ [Nino, 26]. Breeds of dogs that require special training and ownership have multiplied in Tbilisi. Unfortunately, there are many people in society who are aggressive towards pets. It became known about such cases many times, the footage of the violence was also spread on social networks. Many people beat dogs and then these frightened animals become aggressive. Some people do not even know how to treat an animal. In November 2023, the police arrested a man who threw his dog from the eight floor. It should be noted that this was one of the first cases when a man was sentenced to four years in prison. „Buying a dog requires tightening a relevant procedure and in case of abandonment of it, a fine should be imposed. For example, an experience of Germany will be useful“ [Anamaria, 23].

The global pandemic of 2020 has dramatically worsened the country's economic situation. A number of businesses were closed, some regulations were suspended and the field of homeless remained uncontrolled. The Russia-Ukraine war significantly complicated the economic situation of the country, thousands of refugees and Russian citizens entered the country, which increased the prices of primary consumption products. During the pandemic, people who were left unemployed faced a difficult economic period. In the last three years, citizens dissatisfaction with the City Hall due to homeless pets has noticeably increased. „Near my house when I walk the dog in the square, is very difficult for to repeal street dogs. Not safer for dogs not owner“ [Dato, 32]. The government team started working on the legislative package. In this way, a group was created that began to talk about the need to tighten the regulatory policy. Opponents of the government and a certain part of animal rights activists are the stakeholders that opposed this initiative. The chairman of the animal protection committee pointed out the shortcomings of said draft law. In particular, animal rights defenders dissatisfaction was caused by the note in the draft law according to which the term kennel appeared instead of shelter. This kind of approach creates uncertainty, because it also has a commercial load focused on the breeding of kennel animals. The opponents did not agree with the

initiative that the neighbors' contest is required for dog's owner, because it can be subjectively used by the neighborhood itself.

In the interaction phase, a special problem was created by the division of the opposing groups of the government. Non-coordination of the interest groups in the civil advocacy is a challenge in Georgian public policy. Despite the fact that the animal defenders are fighting for the protection of the pets rights, it was not possible to form a unified position on a number of issues. Some of the people interested in the issue think that the shelter should be used only in cases of extreme necessities. Opinion is divided as to when and how the number of dogs can be reduced. A part of society is categorically against euthanasia of dogs in any case. The government team made good use of the disintegration of the opponents and the public demand for a solution to the problem. Such a time, the greater the public pressure, the less likely it is that the government will make concessions to its opponents.

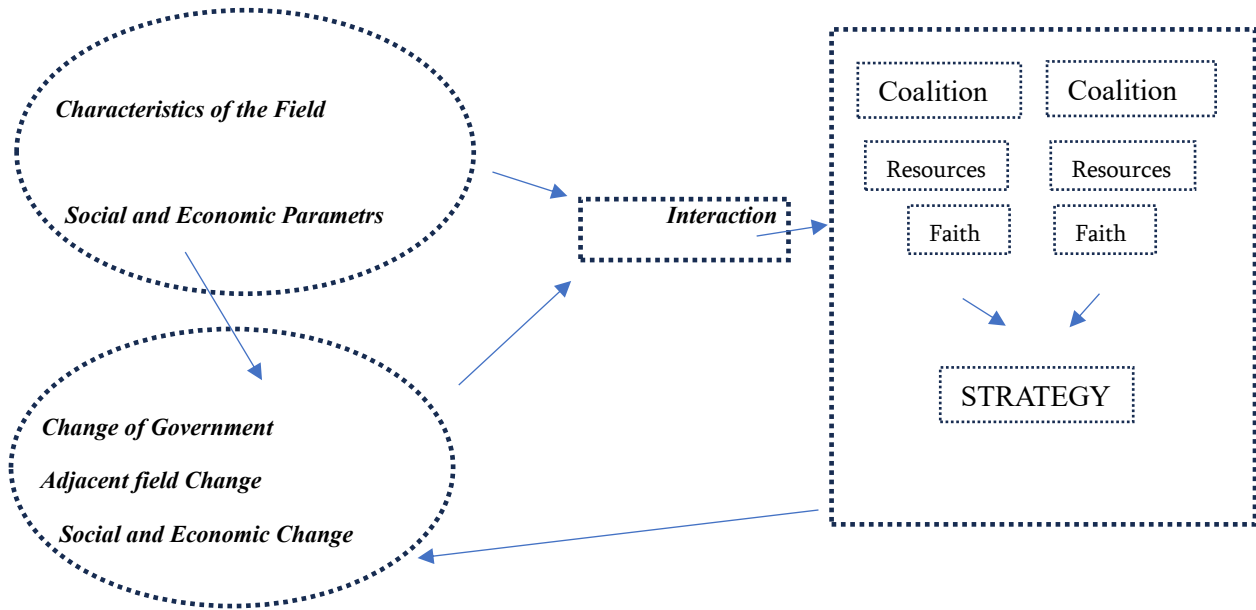
Some animal rights activists are particularly opposed to the idea that any breed of the dog can be considered a particular risk. „I do not understand why my neighbour should decide how many dog I can have. If I have it in my space [Natia, 27]. Proponents of the regulation demanded that the owner of the special breed of dog undergo a psychological examination and submit a certificate of conviction. Such are the beliefs and resources of the government team, it is focused on neutralized of political burden of homeless animals placed on it, and at the same time it is accountable on the European standart. Obviously, the government could pursue a more rigid even without initiating the draft law, although that would have a great political cost. Animal rights activists have very limited resources and rely on citizen enthusiasm and financial resources of the civil sector. The difference in values between interest groups was also reflected on the formation of beliefs. The position of the government team taking in to account the existing resources and values, was that the legislative change should have an effective and among them rigid character to solve the problem. Opponents, despite pointing out the flaws of a project in a number of directions and recognizing the need for radical change.

The government team was able to mobilize the resources. The mentioned political course has been extended a time, achieving a real result is a distant prospect. The reason for this is that the mentioned political course is focused on gradual change, has a large-scale goal was developed on the principal of concession and consensus and this does not allow for flexible action. Optimum results could be achieved if the focus of the political course was narrowed. In such a case the problem would be presented in different streams. The used model serves to form coalitions and pursue their interests.

The main feature of the used model is that it is focused on the formation of coalitions of oppositions around the issue and then a battle between them. In order to win at such a time, it is necessary to mobilize the appropriate resources, which is a great advantage for the influential forces, while putting the other stakeholders in a disadvantageous position. It should be noted here that political influence can be understood in different ways. As a rule, political influence in hybrid regime involves the ability to mobilize resources or persuade / coerce support. This model can not ensure the equality of political actors and its use in a fragile democracy raises questions about pluralism. Why do they apply to him? We can answer this in two ways, the first, developed democracies provide equality behind this model and apply it to reveal as effective strategy and second, hybrid regime - to achieve operational decision making.

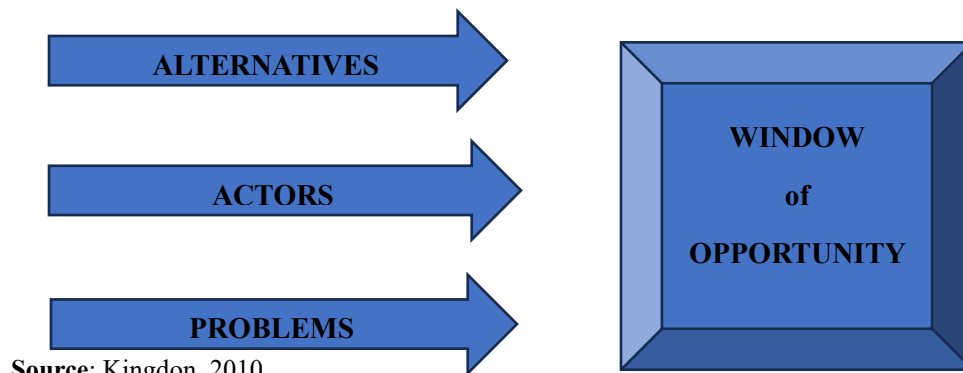
What happened in the case we discussed? The government group was able to mobilize the resources, Tbilisi City Hall and the Legislature acted jointly and delivered common strategy. Oppositional interest groups could not unite and their final strategy turned out to be contradictory and superficial. It was highlighted here that when forming into coalition the stakeholder that is not able to form itself as an independent force or unite in a coalition is lost. Interest groups could not converge their positions, which is

a vicious practice in Georgian civil society. Thus, not frequently, the discussion is stopped in the initial stage and the government uses this for its advantage. When forming a coalition resources and beliefs are reconciled. The principle of concession and compromise comes into play, anyone who does not have adequate resources or fundamental beliefs could not form a coalition. The mentioned model increased the efficiency of decision making, but cannot ensure pluralism. Ensuring a level playing field is not a future of this model.



Source: Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993

Which decision model is most effective? In our opinion it is appropriate to use multiple stream framework at such a time. The determinant of its effectiveness is the main principle of the work and construction of the model. The construction of this model is as follows, it consists of three streams completely isolated from each other. One is the stream of problem, the second is the stream of actors and the third is the stream of decision making alternatives. No actor can influence another, limit or encourage the process, he is just an ordinary participant. It is this condition that created the possibility of democracy and pluralism.



Source: Kingdon, 2010

Discussion

What is his challenge? Conflict of opinions may take a lot time and delay the process. What problems would go in to stream of problems? Shelter, dog registration and legislative changes. The research revealed that there are different opinions about dog shelter in society. A certain part society is categorically against taking animals to shelter. Animal defender believe that taking a dog to a shelter is completely unacceptable and it has right to live in public space. They consider such action as a kind of punishment, imprisonment. A part of society thinks that only in a case of special necessity, for example, during illness can be a dog taken to a veterinary clinic. Some citizens believe that the dog registration will have only a formal character and is devoid of meaning. Their scepticism is related to the fact that the registration of the animal living on the street only serves to improve statistics. The initiative included in the draft law that for certain breeds of animals it will be necessary to submit appropriate reports is considered discriminatory by part of society. Opponents disagree with the rule that one person will not be allowed to own more than three dogs and will need the consent of neighbours. In this way, every initiative of the mentioned interest groups passed the articulation stage, but they were not allowed to proceed. Their involvement in the process would increase the possibility of effective decision. It is generally known that the diversity of actors and alternatives in public policy increases effectiveness but decreases efficiency. It should be noted that in hybrid regimes there are many decisions to be made quickly, government often uses this argument. The government is interested in making as few concessions while society is unable to conciliate. In developed democracies, public political process is not limited by time factor and states of our type make most decisions under four major.

Conclusion

If we use the method of comparative analysis, then the actual difference that exists, when using these two models will be clearly seen. If the political course were developed according to the stream model, we would get pluralism, discussion and broad alternatives. Post facto we got, rigid political course, accelerated discussion and dominance of influences. The study of the mentioned case has confirmed that delayed reform creates a force majeure situation. Less effective sharing of foreign experience without taking into account the local circumstances.

During the focus group, it was revealed, that all stakeholders confirm the necessity of legislative initiative, but there are different views regarding its content. It is worth noting that everyone recognizes the importance of regulations, although the discussion revealed that their scope and rigidity is controversial. As a result, it became clear that it was possible to reach an agreement on the regulations provided for by the draft law under the conditions of public involvement in the discussion. The study showed that the polarization of the stakeholders around the problem is due to the irrelevant discussion and neglect of certain interest groups by the government. The participants of the discussion explained the public nihilism by the fact that in order to be included, a proper political weight is needed. Respondents pointed out that the draft law was prepared in an accelerated manner and it serves more to relieve the city of animals. A significant opinion was expressed that such a reform should be preceded by the information campaign and citizens should be fully responsible for the process.

Bibliography:

1. Chapichadze, T. (2024), „Three is 30150 homeless dog in Tbilisi,” Business Media, <https://bm.ge/news/tbilisshi-30-150-miusafari-dzaghlia-mayhew-georgia>, retrieved 05.05.24
2. Kingdon, J. (2010), *Agendas Alternatives and Public Policy*, (2nd ed). New York: Pearson
3. Lindblom, C. F. (1959). The Science of „Muddling Through,” *Public Administration Review* 19, 79-88.
4. Sabatier, P. and Jenkins-Smith, H. (Eds.), *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
5. Teisman, G.R. (2000), Models For Research in to Decision-Making Processes: On Phases, Streams and Decision-Making Rounds. *Public Administration*, 78 (4), 937-956.