

# What is policy implementation?

- ▶ Implementation is the stage at which a political decision (law, plan, program) is transformed into concrete actions: it is the transition “*from words to deeds*”.
- ▶ This phase comes after defining the problem, putting it on the agenda, and choosing a solution, but it is often at this stage that a policy succeeds or fails.

# The ‘reality’ of implementation and why it is difficult

- ▶ In practice, what is actually achieved often differs from what was decided on paper: modified goals, different timelines, partial results.
- ▶ A first set of difficulties depends on the nature of the problem.
  - ▶ Problems with multiple causes (e.g. domestic violence, failure at school) are difficult to solve with a single policy, as a policy can solve one or more causes, but not all causes.
  - ▶ The size of the social group targeted by the policy; the larger is the group, the more difficult it will be to implement the policy. It is easier to regulate car safety, and therefore involve car manufacturers, than to make policies to ensure that distracted drivers obey the rules of the road.
  - ▶ Policies that call for changes in habits and values (e.g. reducing sexist or racist behavior) are much more complex to implement.

# Other factors affecting implementation

- ▶ Social, economic and technological changes are constantly altering the context in which politics operates:
  - ▶ Social transformations (ageing, increase of unemployment) can make old welfare programs inadequate.
  - ▶ Economic transformation influences the implementation of a program (e.g. depending on the economic cycle, whether it is a crisis or recovery, programs to combat unemployment and poverty change).
  - ▶ The technological process can change the way programs are implemented (example: pollution control policies are often revised because more effective technologies are developed, which allow for less pollution).
- ▶ The organization of the administrative apparatus also plays a significant role: the more administrations involved, the greater the potential for interests, conflicts, and operational inconsistencies, which can threaten policy implementation.
- ▶ Finally, the power and resources of the target groups (which can support or hinder the policy) and public support are also important factors; without social consensus, many policies are watered down or changed along the way.

# Top-down approach to implementation

- ▶ THE TOP-DOWN APPROACH STARTS “FROM THE TOP”: POLICYMAKERS CLEARLY DEFINE GOALS, TOOLS, AND PROCEDURES, AND PASS ON INSTRUCTIONS TO THE BUREAUCRACY THAT MUST CARRY THEM OUT.
  - ▶ Advantage: clarity of responsibilities, uniformity of application, strong central control (useful, for example, for fiscal policies and national security).
  - ▶ Limitation: tends to underestimate the role of lower levels (officials, field workers), who in reality have discretionary powers and must adapt policy to very different local contexts.

# Bottom-up approach to the implementation

- ▶ The bottom-up approach reverses the perspective: it first looks at those who actually implement the policy (street-level bureaucrats, local authorities, social workers) and their strategies, networks of relationships, and margins of autonomy.
- ▶ Starts from the idea that the success of a policy depends on the ability of those implementing it to adapt the tools to local conditions, negotiate with the recipients, and build cooperation in the area.

# Logic behind the choice of policy instruments

- ▶ Implementing a policy means choosing and combining instruments (regulation, taxes, subsidies, information, direct services, etc.); the question is: why does a government choose one instrument over another?

## ECONOMIC MODELS

- **Welfare economics:** the most effective and least costly instrument is chosen to correct a specific market failure (e.g., environmental taxes, subsidies, regulations);
- **Neoclassical/public choice model:** politicians, voters, and bureaucrats pursue their own interests, tending to use tools such as public spending, taxation, and state intervention (nationalization, public enterprises).

# POLITICAL MODELS

## theory of three political scientists.

- ▶ **Doern** → talks about a “scale” of coerciveness: it starts with the softest instruments (information, self-regulation) and moves up to the most coercive ones (hard regulation, sanctions), even though in practice states often jump straight to strong instruments.
- ▶ **Hood** → on the other hand, talks about experience, i.e., the state chooses the tool to implement by learning from previous tools used and their effects on the social group. Hood argues that the primary tool to be used is information, as compared to other tools, it is defined as “inexhaustible”.
- ▶ **Linder** and **Peters** → show that policy instruments differ in terms of: resource intensity, targeting capacity, political risk, and ideological constraints. In addition, national political culture, social fractures, and the professional background of decision-makers also play a role in choosing the policy tool to use.

# Synthetic model on the choice of instruments.

- ▶ By combining the conclusions reached by economic and political models, a synthetic model is created, which provides a new perspective on the choice of instrument.
- ▶ There are 4 categories of tools that can be used.
  - market mechanisms (taxes, subsidies);
  - family- and community-based tools (volunteering, self-organization, community);
  - regulation, public enterprise, or direct provision of services;
  - mixed instruments that combine multiple logics;

The choice depends mainly on

- The state's ability to plan and influence social actors (high capacity → easier to use regulation, the market, direct provision; low capacity → more likely to resort to information, incentives, voluntary instruments).
- Number and complexity of the actors involved (highly complex and conflicting systems push towards market-based or voluntary instruments; small and homogeneous groups allow for direct or mixed instruments).

This model suggests that although choosing which tool to use remains a complex process, general policy implementation patterns can be identified and used.