

# Taking Policy for Granted in the Context of Scientific Innovation

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## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to attempt to elucidate *the policy attitude* as it appears within the context of scientific innovation. A phenomenological anthropological approach to qualitative inquiry was utilized in order to explicate the human scientific meaning of a specific *attitude* driven by an *interest* in a sociocultural *context*. The policy attitude can be described as an attitude upholding a meaning based upon a collaborative ideal, marked by a hybridization of values and organizations. The policy attitude is thus submissive to political trends and business organizational structures, goals, and objectives. As the world of science becomes an integrated part of the world of policy and industry, it could be argued that policy attitude influences how we perceive knowledge, in which qualitative inquiry in the human sciences is by no means excluded.

## Keywords

policy attitude, phenomenology, anthropology, innovation, human science

As continuously noted by several ethnographers, the world of public policy making is starting to advance into the world of scientific research (Shore & Wright, 1997; Shore, Wright, & Però, 2011; Strathern, 2000; Wright & Shore, 2017). The motivation has mostly been portrayed as a way to develop future patents that could secure a future welfare state and a prosperous society. The effort can be seen as a collaboration between the world of public policy, scientific research, and industry—usually known as *the triple helix* (Etzkowitz, 2004, 2008). However, one could also argue that such a collaboration is no collaboration at all but instead a special type of *interest* that follows a *world of policy*: one permeated by an overall *policy attitude* (cf. Luft, 1998). Could such an attitude be threatening to the spirit of scientific activity itself and its fundamental virtue of self-responsibility? The problem that seems to be developing has recently been labeled as a *policy-centrism*, that is, a way of interpreting different contexts, for example, professional contexts, exclusively from the world of policy (Friberg, 2017, 2018). Within such a social context, a *policy attitude* thrives, and it seems to be taken for granted. Some have even claimed that it seems as if we are dealing with a new kind of hegemonic order in the Western sciences (Slaughter & Leslie, 1999; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). Innovation politics climbs the ladder to settle a new form of dominance over contemporary domains (universities, industries, and the regional parts of the state), including their actors, researchers, entrepreneurs, and even the policy makers

themselves (see Hall & Löfgren, 2016; Valaskivi, 2012). Working for several years of qualitative, ethnographic field research, the purpose here will be to make an attempt to disclose the policy attitude as it appears within the context of scientific innovation. By qualitatively studying the policy attitude as it makes its expressive appearance within the social world of scientific innovation, it becomes possible to conceive how actors naively following such an attitude influence how scientific research is approached.

## Background

As described by Shore and Wright (1997) and Shore, Wright, and Però (2011), people's lives today are more intertwined with policies, that is, new principles of social action are continuously being adopted by individuals and public organizations. Ethnographers have documented and analyzed how these new principles of social action influence and affect people in their everyday work situations. Thedvall (2015) and Tamm Hallström and Thedvall (2015) have described it as a new way of

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soft power, whereas Garsten and Sörbom (2017) point to the corporate influence on policy through lobbying and campaign contributions. According to Torrance (2008), qualitative researchers should become engaged with policies and policy making in order to acknowledge limits of knowledge production or to generate different forms of knowledge (Torrance, 2016). Hence, there is a modernistic ideal intertwined in Western thought regarding how to keep viewing the world as something in a continuous flux. Such a conclusion sets up a demand that public organizations and their members should change and thus improve in order to make society a better place. In other words, modernistic ideals seem to play an increasingly central role in the public sphere, especially when the world is treated as uncertain (Samimian-Darash & Rabinow, 2015) and when future prospects are ambiguous (Power, 2004). When people experience uncertainties in their everyday lives, it comes as no surprise that public organizations try to establish a legitimate solution in relation to such a situation. Thus, social reforms and policy somehow seem to stand for a sense of stability (cf. Christensen, Læg Reid, & Røvik, 2005).

Lately, the state-financed part of the academic world has been subject to increased economic and democratic governance with the implementation of new public management principles and other bureaucratic ethics (Hall, 2012; Hood, 2001). This has meant that a sense of transparency has been introduced (Strathern, 2000) in an effort that has been designed to account for taxpayers' money and thus to reassure citizens about the minimization of bureaucratic nepotism and potential corruption. Parallel to economic and democratic reforms of efficiency, state universities have also been reorganized to become more congruent with new systems of accountability and auditing practices (Power, 2000; Shore & Wright, 2015). Consequently, university professors and researchers have been forced to provide an account of their everyday work activities, with the help of (and demand from) various auditing technologies, all in order to legitimize academic type of activities for the citizens of our society. Furthermore, many business managers working in similar administrative ways tend to pay particular attention to the importance of the so-called risk management (Power, 2004), that is, organizational units whose function is to prevent plausible, future scandals or controversies. Analogously, researchers in academia have underlined the sociopolitical fact that policy makers are attempting to implement pedagogical training for university professors and to place focus on teaching students the so-called evidence-based practices (especially in professional education). The latter is also a type of risk management and a way to equip future welfare professions—for example, nursing, psychology, social work, and so on—with the “right” type of practices (Johansson, Denvall, & Vedung, 2015).

In addition, researchers and policy makers in recent years have increasingly argued for the establishment of innovation in the academic world: an effort that can be understood as a struggle to produce entrepreneurs in a way that will benefit regional social and economic growth. The policy makers

orchestrating such strategies are thus trying to hybridize universities with society by connecting them to the government and to the world of business and in the most unlikely collaborative clusters (e.g., Etzkowitz, 2008). Apparently, innovation policy is becoming the organizational principle within the academic world, especially in relation to teaching and research activities (Shinn, 2002). In this context, it should be noted that the trend toward innovation policy implies a theoretical shift in terms of the main driving force of innovation, that is, from modern neoclassic economic theory focusing on *competition* to an economic theory concerned with *collaboration*. Several researchers have suggested that this theoretical shift could be viewed as abandoning the 1990s New Public Management principles (with focus on *homo economicus*, self-interest, market mechanism, and investment in existing things) to pave the way for another kind of governing principle: New Public Governance, which includes the notion of the collaborative human, common interest, and investment in things to come (Hedensted Lund & Vaaben, 2014; Vaaben, 2014; Wiesel & Modell, 2014). The key stakeholders in these collaborative situations are universities with their researchers, industries with their entrepreneurs, and the state with its regional policy makers, which expresses the logic of the triple helix policy model (Etzkowitz, 2004, 2008). Thus, the main goal of the triple helix is to instigate a collaborative effort in order to produce innovative, entrepreneurial subjects and objects.

The triple helix has often been portrayed as the second revolution in the history of universities, spanning a period of 800 years. Within this new context, the university turns into an entrepreneurial university and is provided a key role in the collaborative processes because researchers are seen as the main producers of new knowledge (Waluszewski, 2013). This implies that representatives of the triple helix model interpret it as a type of natural progression, that is, starting from teaching (the circulation of knowledge), to teaching and research (the circulation and production of knowledge), to a final stage of entrepreneurial activities (the circulation, production, and capitalization of knowledge; Krige, 2004). Etzkowitz (2004, 2008), contrasts the triple helix to the centralized model (in which the state controls academia and industry) as well as with the *laissez-faire* model (in which academia, the state, and industry collaborate to a certain extent across explicit boundaries). Hence, the novelty of the triple helix model is that it goes beyond the strict boundaries and autonomous viewpoints of its stakeholders (university, industry, and the state) and instead seek to hybridize them in a collaborative, joint effort; all for the purpose to capitalize on new knowledge to further develop and strengthen a local region.

## Method

To go beyond a conceptual analysis of the policy attitude, we turned to a phenomenological anthropological methodology. The qualitative material analyzed was drawn from a 1-year ethnographic field study (to be further elaborated below). Phenomenology has been interpreted as a movement that follows

Husserl's (1970a) original dictum "to return to the matters themselves" and, according to contemporary phenomenologist Zahavi (2017), a dictum that unites most phenomenological inquiry. In general, Husserl's discovery of the general thesis of the natural attitude, as it correlates with the lifeworld (Luft, 1998), becomes our main interest in our attempt to disclose the policy attitude. According to Husserl (1970b), within the natural attitude, we operate on the basis of our judgment, making the a priori meaning constitution as it comes through prior to judgment (e.g., perception) invisible, as if, for instance, perception and judgment was a one-step process. However, as soon as we encounter an ambiguous situation, we notice that (continuing our example) perception and judgment is a two-step process (e.g., Is that a mannequin in the store window or is it a person?). The phenomenological method referred to by Husserl (1970b) as the *epoche*—bracketing or suspension of judgment—was utilized in approaching the fieldwork material to illuminate the policy attitude as it appears within the social context of scientific innovation. Hence, it becomes possible to utilize an *epoche*, leading to a reduction (e.g., the phenomenological method) in order to bracket our judgment and describe the phenomenal field prior to judgment. By "going back to the matters themselves," it is possible through the *epoche* to clarify the a priori structure of consciousness, that is, to explicate our meaning constitution within the lifeworld, including the pre-reflective attitudes that we take for granted in the overall natural attitude.

Husserl's discovery of the natural attitude (and the lifeworld as its correlate) also opened up for the possibility of a phenomenological psychology (Husserl, 1977) and a phenomenological sociology (Schutz, 1967). Thus, Husserl's (1970b) philosophical work paved the way for a study of many different attitudes within the many worlds within the lifeworld, for example, the business attitude in the business world (e.g., Embree, 2011; Luft, 1998). Such an insight opened up for the possibilities to phenomenologically analyze empirical experiences of phenomena as situated within the psychological and social sciences (as opposed to phenomenology being a method exclusively for philosophical studies). The phenomenological method enables us to study and to elucidate the *attitudes* that we take for granted and that spring from a certain *interest* (Luft, 1998). To encompass the human being, situated within the sociocultural context, the *anthropos* in the human sciences, a phenomenological anthropological attitude (cf. Embree, 2011), with a reduction (or scientific focus) on disclosing the a priori *human meaning* of an attitude embedded within a sociocultural context will be utilized. To use anthropology as an umbrella term for the human sciences might provoke some scholars, however, in terms of our specific project here, it is meant as a possibility, that is, as a beginning and not as an end. Undoubtedly, attitudes could be elucidated just as well using another scientific reduction—such as psychology, sociology, economics—and that such sciences could also account for *human meaning*. However, a phenomenological anthropology was used here as an attempt to broadly account for the *logos* of the

human (*anthropos*) and also as an epistemic direction of fit with the ethnographic fieldwork.

Nevertheless, since Husserl's philosophical project of a phenomenological psychology, some methodologists have extended the phenomenological method within the realm for qualitative inquiry and the human sciences. For example, Giorgi (1970, 2009) was one of the first scholars to argue for and develop a human scientific, qualitative methodology based on phenomenology. Instead of the more philosophical approach toward psychological phenomena that was suggested by Husserl's (1977) phenomenological psychology, Giorgi's (1997) qualitative methodology opened up for the possibility of studying phenomena at the human scientific, empirical level, such as learning, motivation, rites de passage, fads, mob hysteria, and so on. As opposed to a phenomenological psychology or a phenomenological sociology, with a focus on psychological or sociological phenomena, the modern anthropological method known as ethnography has been paired with phenomenology in order to make an *inquiry into a sociocultural type of attitude as it is adopted in a sociocultural type of context*. This methodology includes anthropological fieldwork in terms of participant observation paired with a phenomenological analysis, in which the *contextualized attitude* carrying an *interest* is to be disclosed (cf. Ram & Houston, 2015). With such a focus, ethnography, if it adopted an *epoche* to its "procedures," could provide for a human scientific, phenomenological anthropological inquiry in which the judgment about what is considered "sociocultural facts" is suspended in order to disclose the sociocultural a priori human meaning of the different attitudes within the different worlds within the overall lifeworld. From such a rationale, we will attempt to specifically elucidate the policy attitude *within* the specific world of scientific innovation.

## The Policy Attitude Within the World of Scientific Innovation

There are several different contexts in which the policy attitude could thrive. However, our focus here has been to describe and exemplify using ethnographic field data collected within the context in which it has recently emerged—in the social context of scientific innovation. The policy attitude within the world of scientific innovation is here described as an attitude within the natural attitude, and thus unreflective, meaning that the people who adopt it might not be fully aware of its meaning constitution. The policy attitude can be described as follows:

The policy attitude is characterized by a contextual background of intensifying sameness, a uniformity, in terms of hybridization of values and organization, with a vision of a prosperous future, following a collaborative effort. The policy attitude is an attitude that takes a proactive and commercial stance for granted and is thus a naive and uncritical direction towards its own idea of a prosperous future. Also, the attitude is submissive to political fads and

business organizational structures, goals and objectives supportive of such trends.

Hence, the scientist or the policy maker who naively adopts this attitude leaves out the respect for possible differences, and the result is an unreflective uniformity. As we pointed out earlier, the scientists (who adopt the policy attitude) are hybridized with the politicians and business people, and perhaps, most importantly, they become cultivated into the world of policy making and business, with its traditions (e.g., epistemic tradition) and system of organization. The ideal researcher adopting the policy attitude within the scientific innovation context is a person who will become a semiautonomous actor (cf. Etzkowitz, 2008), having his or her focus on entrepreneurial processes, that is, a multifunctional approach type of actor, outside the different regions of science, and thus not attempting a critical, academic type of thinking. In German, the ideal researcher becomes a *Grenzgängers* (a person who can cross cultural boundaries without any type of hesitation).

### The Scientific Innovation Context

In the following section, exemplifications of the policy attitude have been drawn from Friberg's 1-year ethnographic fieldwork. By drawing upon an ethnographic description of an interregional project in the Öresund region (southern part of Sweden and the Copenhagen area), the example is meant to concretize the policy attitude (as described in the section above) and to clarify the empirical material in relation to the typicality of the findings. The first part of the example will provide a description of the innovation context in which the policy attitude is situated, whereas the second will more directly exemplify the enactive expression of the attitude.

During late summer of 2015, Friberg was invited to an unofficial opening of the newly financed interregional project in the Öresund region. This interregional project intended to form a collaboration between science and society, with the explicit aim that scientific researchers, private entrepreneurs, and public policy makers would be able to better cross traditional boundaries between their respective professions. The overall idea of the project was to hybridize dissimilarities in order to strive toward a kind of unity. The project had been designed following the overall question: "How to make the most out of the construction of two world leading research facilities—ESS<sup>1</sup> and MAX IV<sup>2</sup>?" Implicit in this question was an attempt to *intensify sameness* among the three involved groups: academic researchers, public policy makers, and business entrepreneurs. The political background of the project was set up as a response to the fear that citizens are living in an uncertain global world and to find new ways to finance welfare and create a prosperous region. This particular background becomes a layer within the context of the world of scientific innovation, in the sense that the collaborative regional project could become a remedy for the underlying fear. According to the policy makers, close collaboration between different groups

and domains became the strategy in securing a successful future for the region.

About a month later, Friberg received an invitation for the official opening for the project. From this particular meeting, Friberg's field notes point to that the managers of the Swedish regional development department saw the collaborative project as very important for economic and social innovation. For instance, one of the managers announced the following to the guests:

This project is going to generate growth, innovation, and development. The project is about world-class research investments, which are going to have an enormous impact. However, the project is not about a solitary business—instead, the research will feed from its own environment. It is of great importance to take advantage of the opportunity and collaborate. We must set this as the agenda for our development strategy. We are going to share the fruits of our work. We will become "growth engines" (*tillväxtmotorer*) that need to be geared up! We need this kind of "job boost" because today we lack job opportunities. We all benefit when we collaborate . . .

The manager's statement is rather pertinent to the collaborative project as a whole. What is striking here is the use of the Swedish metaphor *tillväxtmotor*—which could be literally translated as "growth engine." This metaphor seems to be circulating in the Öresund region (whether one finds oneself in Sweden or in Denmark) in relation to most issues concerned with the two research facilities: ESS and MAX IV. Friberg traced the metaphor "growth engine" back to region Skåne (the Swedish regional council). The metaphor seems to be built around a political strategy to promote development, productivity, internationalization, workforce competence, and innovation within business organizations and the public sector. The regional policy makers thus wanted to attract investors and strengthen capital and opportunities for financial investments, thereby shaping the southern part of Sweden (*Skåne*) to turn the region into a sustainable innovative region. The strategy was primarily meant as a collaborative effort to create regional social security within the labor market and a well-functioning welfare system. In terms of a working metaphor, the political strategy seems to communicate the idea of a global competitive world, reflecting an age of uncertainty where science is supposed to be integrated into society (cf. Strathern, 2005, pp. 466, 467). Within such a project, suggesting a deconstruction of the boundaries between society and science sets up an underlying assumption that scientific researchers would hybridize themselves as professionals, including a hybridization of their scientific virtue and their type of organization with the more dominant organization (and market agenda) of business and industry.

### Exemplifying the Policy Attitude

To exemplify the enactive expression of the policy attitude, the following two interviews (with policy makers in the same region as the project described above) will illustrate similar

observations made during the actual fieldwork. In an interview with a typical policy maker, Friberg (as the interviewer *F*) discusses the collaboration between the scientific community and the business world:

*Policy maker:* It is within these kinds of hybridized organizations that universities become more like companies, concurrently, as the companies become more “academized.” When they drift together, this creates possibilities for new collaborative projects. One can walk in, out, and over to academia. This is an innovative way to work together. It might have been the life scientists who first started collaboration between universities and companies . . . The triple helix boundaries are very fluid, and I am positive that this will increase in the future.

*Interviewer F:* So . . . there are no longer any explicit boundaries, as in the case of modern society?

*Policy maker:* No, it is about new frames. The old industrial society—with its manufacturing industry—was part of a different period. As I said, companies today are becoming more research oriented, and the universities are becoming more entrepreneurial. It is natural that people are crossing boundaries. And the personal relationships are becoming tighter and tighter.

*Interviewer F:* What role do you think today’s companies have in regional development?

*Policy maker:* It is all about collaborations between companies and universities. Companies like to be close to universities, research, and development. They usually drift together in the long run.

*Interviewer F:* So . . . what do you think will happen to the critical practices as universities collaborate with companies? Is it possible to critique triple helix, for example?

*Policy maker:* Well . . . those universities that depend on government funding will have no problems criticizing policy makers and the state . . . even though they get their money from the state. But sure, if the universities are completely in the grip of the companies, there may be some problems. It might be easier for a life science-oriented university rather than a humanities-oriented university to work with companies. If a university brands itself as red [for example, left wing politics], it will have difficulties attracting money from the business world. Well, I mean it is a free choice . . . but, sure, there is a certain complexity to the problems.

This dialogue illustrates how regional companies and universities are supposed to merge into a common identity, that is, to an *intensifying sameness*. In other words, the modern boundaries between the domains are becoming more liquid and thus easier to cross (see Bauman, 2000). However, a critical, scientific stance seems to be marginalized in this particular process.

In another interview with a policy maker, Friberg (as the interviewer) brings up the question of applied research and its relation to the social and human sciences, that is, in particular, on the importance of making use of research findings (e.g., the commercialization of knowledge to specific needs and development of customer-friendly products). The policy maker views such knowledge as something to be implemented in the overall public system. The policy maker refers to this knowledge as “mixed knowledge” and states:

We need to introduce SSH [social scientists and humanists] perspectives on everything. I don’t think that SSH researchers really understand this. Not to be critical, but they ought to make a better effort to find their role in society. There are many examples of success.

When Friberg later points out that a commercial role in society stands in contradiction to a critical, scientific stance and interest in knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the policy maker pauses to reflect. After a few seconds, the policy maker brings up a recent meeting with social scientists and humanists (SSH) researchers. The policy maker stressed that the researchers themselves claimed that their research and knowledge production were usually “retroactive,” meaning that they analyzed and critiqued what had gone wrong. In temporal terms then, the policy maker claimed that the people in the seminar agreed to work with a model that was more “proactive, as a way to participate” in society. According to the policy maker, “the SSH researchers needed to become active participants in the collaborative process in order to make it [the future] better.” In other words, even though Friberg’s fieldwork was within the context of scientific innovation, there is little doubt that the world of policy and the policy attitude is now also making its way into the human sciences and qualitative inquiry.

## Concluding Remarks

As the policy attitude is usually expressed in terms of “collaboration” in the scientific innovation context, it seems possible to argue that we are dealing with an approach of trying to *intensify sameness*. Against the background of the fear that we are currently living in an increasingly uncertain global world, the interest driving the policy attitude is pointing toward an economic solution to contemporary problems. If individual and organizational autonomy can be unified (no tension involved), people could work together for the “greater good” of society—as a new approach for securing a welfare state and bringing prosperity to a specific region. In this innovation policy context, the sciences seem to lose their critical role—one that could slam the breaks on the taken-for-granted idea of a “growth engine.” Becoming part of the innovation context and adopting the policy attitude means to resign the fundamental virtues of science, that is, in terms of a critical and autonomous self-responsibility for the development of knowledge, independent from political and business interest. In other words, the

scientist has to submit herself to the hegemony that now defines prosperity and welfare.

Having said that, even the human sciences appear to be at risk of adopting the policy attitude and taking its *interests* and *focus* for granted. The community of human scientists, perhaps introduced to human or social innovation, might take its own activities for granted when generating new theories and explanations of social reality. Hence, the human sciences need to find the courage to differentiate themselves from the world of policy and to remain within the fundamental virtue of science, that is, to remain autonomous and to cherish analytic tension—thereby, challenging the policy maker to see that uniformity is simply not the same as unity.

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1. The European Spallation Source is to become a multidisciplinary research center based on the world's most powerful neutron source. It is planned to be finished in 2019 (<http://europeanspallation.source.se>).
2. The MAX IV laboratory supports three areas of research: accelerator physics, research based on the use of synchrotron radiation, and nuclear physics using energetic electrons. Construction started in 2010, and the opening ceremony was scheduled for 2016 (<https://www.maxlab.lu.se>).

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