

## **Strengthening (the institutional setting of) strategic advice**

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*(Re)designing advisory systems to improve policy performance*

*Research on the practices and experiences from OECD Countries*

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## Abstract

Policy-makers are facing increased complexity. Wicked issues, such as providing work for disabled people in a pressing labour market, or the transition towards a circular economy or combating terrorism, pose difficult challenges for policy-makers. They require deep insight into the backgrounds, characteristics, and dynamics of problems. However, at the same time the root cause of the problem cannot be identified entirely through traditional analysis, as the complexity cannot be fully known, mapped, or ‘caught’ in research. Knowledge, evidence, and expert-advice remain important drivers of policy making, but the question what makes knowledge fit to the purpose of wicked policy issues is hard to answer.

There are many sources of knowledge and evidence policy-makers use when designing policy. They use knowledge from academic institutions, think tanks, advisory boards, independent experts, colleagues from other organizations, statistics bureaus, research from advocacy groups, and research from international agencies. Also, apart from these many sources of knowledge for policy, there is a more formalized system of knowledge, evidence and advice that policy-makers can turn to: the policy advice system, which comprises of the set of formal advisory bodies in a countries’ policy system. The formal advisory bodies are institutional counterparts of policy-organizations that have a certain assigned capacity and mandate to conduct research and advice policy makers about policy issues.

Each country has some sort of a policy advisory system, as part of its knowledge infrastructure. The policy advisory system is comprised of various advisory bodies, but also holds certain overall systemic characteristics. For instance, about the judicial position of advice in the policy system, and the formal routes and responsibilities for the reporting of findings by advisory bodies. The policy system can be mainly oriented at parliamentary advice, at the executive branch or concentrated on political leaders or top officials. It can be more technically oriented and rooted in the academic community, or more “advisory” in the sense of a focus less on empirical rigour and more on policy-relevance. Policy advisory systems are products of institutional developments that often took decades to develop into what they are today. Some of them have been redesigned and reformed often, others have seen almost autonomous development into a deliberately chosen path.

Research and policy-advice are inherently about content. However, the features and characteristics of the system itself may be an important explanation for how advisory bodies operate, what their role and impact in the policy system is, and if and how they are able to steer and influence the policy debate in a country or domain. Part of the interplay between policy system and advisory system is about *content*, but another important part of the interplay is the consequence of the *infrastructure* of the system, the type of relations that are formalized in it, and choices that are made about the positioning and focus of the various advisory bodies in the system. Some of these design choices are probably made deliberate, while others are more a product of evolution and the historical development of the system. For each case goes that in order to better understand the interplay between the policy system and policy advisory system it is imminent to better understand the systemic properties of the advisory system, as the broader context in which knowledge from advisory bodies does or does not fit into the policy system.

Therefore, mapping the variety of advisory systems in OECD countries can help to better improve the knowledge and policy nexus, between the policy *advisory* system and the policy making system. By systematically mapping the characteristics of countries’ advisory systems, partly the product of deliberate choice and partly of evolution in time from local dynamics, we can better understand how policy advice can inform policy making in the context of different countries. This is all the more

important, because the increased complexity and wickedness of issues, the deep-uncertainty of problems, and the rapidly changing dynamics of issues, challenge the policy making capacity of government and its political and administrative leaders. For instance in attempts to create robust policies for deeply-uncertain issues that require careful and thoughtful anticipation, along with adaptive capacity to respond to developments as they emerge in practice. What kind of institutional design for knowledge and advice can help policy-makers conduct such a task, and what is the role of the policy advisory system in that?

A closer look at these institutional options shows that these are more than neutral features of the policy advisory systems. They represent dilemmas, of which each option can generate positive and negative consequences. For example, how fixed should the policy advisory system be in order to perform well in the context of policy making? Advisory systems are partly designed to counter-balance the dynamic and rapid changes of the policy context, to be reflexive and critical about management-fads or new fashionable modes of governance. Advisory bodies are partly designed to drive innovation and new ideas into the policy-system, but also have a role in safeguarding core values, established ideas, and proven methods for the system. What is the new equilibrium of these tensions that could help both the policy advisory system and the policy system move ahead amidst turbulent societal dynamics and increased uncertainty; how can policy advisory systems further strengthen the capacity of the *strategic state*?

Evidence about these characteristics and insight in the dilemmas involved, also help to reflect on future challenges for governments to organise their system of policy advisory bodies in relation to broader developments. What do new methods for knowledge-building, expertise, and advice mean for the traditional policy advisory system? Citizen generated data, open data, social media, and applications of big data analytics comprise some of the new digital sources of information that can become important informants for policy making. How can or could they be reflected in the policy-advisory system?

In this proposal we take three steps. Firstly, we present the challenges advisory systems face in their role to inform the policy making system amidst increased complexity and deep-uncertainty. We stress the importance to look at this at the systems-level rather than on the level of individual advisory bodies or sectoral relations between policy-makers and policy-advice. We also formulate a set of characteristics and properties of advisory systems. Secondly, we present findings from a first exploratory cross-country comparison we conducted as part of a research project commissioned by the Minister of the Interior of the Netherlands. In this cross-country comparison we analysed the policy advisory system of a set of seven European countries. Our findings show interesting similarities and dissimilarities between the different systems. Not only does that show the range of possibilities in the design of the system, it also signifies the importance of national context for understanding the design of a system. This helps to explain the differences between systems, but also point at the limitations of pick-and-choose strategies for adopting individual features of systems. Instead of simply *transplanting* lessons from country A to country B, the *translation* of lessons seems highly important. Cross-country comparison should take into account the role of national context, in analysing systems and in applying those lessons to other countries and contexts. Thirdly, we formulate a research-strategy for a cross-country comparison of advisory systems in the OECD-member states. This research proposal includes a design for such a study, and also indicates some of the important challenges for policy advisory systems which will be addressed. The research we propose looks at how systems *are* organized and structured, but also what the inherent dilemmas for governments are in the institutional design, and it looks at how they *prepare* for upcoming challenges, such as the role of open data, democratization of

expertise and advice, the need for adaptive strategies and robust policies, and the dealing with deep uncertainty and inherently incomplete knowledge.

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Enhancing the strategic capacity of the state*

Governments have to deal with increasingly complex, dynamic and interrelated policy challenges. Due to the pace of technological, environmental and cultural developments, policy makers are challenged to continuously find new solutions for complex issues. This requires much from the strategic capacity of the state. Governments need knowledge to be able to develop a mix of flexibility and innovation, while at the same time the ability to develop and maintain long term strategies in an uncertain and unstable environment. Governments have to create strategic capacity, which includes the ability to adapt and be resilient to new and developing problems. Public governance is ultimately tested on its ability to find policy solutions and adapt to new developments, uncertain prospects and ambiguous issues.

Policymakers are faced with increasing uncertainty in discerning the exact mechanisms that prompt their challenges, making it difficult to predict future developments and the effects of policy. Further exacerbating this situation is the underlying dynamic of interrelation and interaction between various challenges, making it impossible for any individual government agency or department to solve a problem of its own accord. These issues are referred to as ‘wicked issues’, because understanding and solving them requires a capacity greater than that of a single organization (OECD, 2013). These developments ask for a rethink on the organization and the functioning of public administration. More comprehensive, transparent and outcome focused indicators are needed to provide an understanding on the performance of the changing public administration and new evidence on the working of public administration is needed to understand how it works against a background of new developments, parameters and expectations.

To manage these complex policy challenges, it is important to enhance the strategic capacity of the state. This entails that governments need to develop a strategic approach in which knowledge and capacities from a range of parties inside and outside government are mobilized. Governments need to mobilize a diverse and cross-sectoral set of actors which can inform and advise the government about how to manage complex challenges. Thus, the only solution for these problems is to build a joined-up approach among sectors, integrating diverse insights, experience and expertise from both within and outside government. The result is an increasing emphasis and necessity for a network governance approach, where information and the use of (academic) knowledge are important means for effective governance and policymaking.

This requires fostering capacity for knowledge-building in policy making, including ensuring better co-ordination and information sharing between government and external parties. There is a need to develop a whole-of-government approach to knowledge-building and strategy-making, including longer-term cross-government horizon scanning and foresight-into-policy exercises. The nature of these complex issues call for attention on the way central governments can use, set and steer strategic capacity by adopting knowledge from a range of actors (OECD, 2013). Not only formal parties can work on the knowledge building of the state. Also other, more bottom-up initiatives, such as crowd sourcing, wikis, deliberative dialogues and deliberative pooling, can stimulate innovation and add to the development of new toolkits for government.

## *1.2 The advisory system: part of the strategic knowledge infrastructure*

To develop the strategic capacity of the state, governments need the expertise, views and information from a wide range of actors. The knowledge from these actors is necessary to deal with dynamic and complex challenges. Governments need a strategic knowledge infrastructure which exceeds the state boundaries to be responsive to new ideas and adaptive to new challenges. Part of this strategic knowledge infrastructure is the system of formal advisory bodies which operate alongside, but separate from, government. This policy advisory system positioned around governments consists of advisory councils, (ad hoc) commissions, commissions of inquiry, foresight units, special advisors, 'tiger teams', innovation fora, 'what works centers', think tanks and universities and many other bodies, all of which provide knowledge and advice to government (Halligan, 1995).

The policy advisory system is at the same time broader than the knowledge infrastructure. The policy advisory system does not also deliver advice that is based on scientific knowledge. Advice is also based on the consultation of stakeholders, a result of a lobby of interest groups or of practical experiences of professionals. Advisory bodies are an interface between academia and administration; they are a bridge between the universities and knowledge institutes and the practice of public administration and between knowledge and policy. In addition, through stakeholder consultation and a variety of data gathering processes advisory bodies are the bridge between wisdom of the crowds and political leadership.

Advisory bodies help governments and its leaders to deal with the complexity of policy issues. They present research and perspectives on these issues and look ahead to identify future threats and opportunities as a means of prioritising and focusing government policies. An essential aim of advisory bodies is to ensure preparedness by the government, in the sense that knowledge from a wide range of actors should be included to inform current policy choices, longer-term planning and strategic vision. Knowledge from advisory organizations helps government consider options and outcomes, to provide 'evidence', to reflect on policies and to provide new (future) policy options. It provides answers to questions for which government does not yet have answers, thus ensuring that government remains advised, informed on current developments. Also, knowledge outside the government is often more connected to new developments in their respective fields, which can lead to new views on current and upcoming issues. The advisory system is in that perspective a large knowledge network, in which government is one of the actors. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the performance of the system of advisory organizations outside the government, which incorporates the actors who can deliver this knowledge.

Until now, the policy advisory system did not receive specific attention in the research and the reports of the OECD. Although, in the past the OECD touched upon some related subjects. In 2008 the OECD researched the role of advocacy bodies that also have some advisory functions. In 2011 published a research on ministerial advisors (OECD, 2011a). In the 2015 OECD public governance reviews of Estonia and Finland, the OECD researched the current state of evidence based decision making and advisory bodies in these countries. Insights into the policy advisory system can be of great value to the body of knowledge of the OECD. For example, in the country reviews to capture a full understanding of the policy making processes in countries. Also in attempts to create a government toolkit for policy making, or for creating a strategic state (OECD, 2013) or towards 'building blocks' for towards policy coherence for development (OECD, 2009).

There is no benchmark or understanding on what specific institutional design should be in place to offer the best functioning advisory system towards a performance-driven world class civil service.

This institutional design is partly the product of their natural emergence through time (under the influence of factors like political-historical context and national traditions) and partly of design by the governments. The greatest challenge is ensuring that information, expertise and views from advisory organization translate into the decision making and policy making process. Currently there are no agreed upon mechanisms to best organize the variety in the advisory system to improve the benefits to the policy making process. Moreover, there is little transparency on the way governments can steer and organize their advisory systems to increase the way it can be used for policy making. There is a wide range of advisory systems in different countries, but the knowledge about the way they function and can be steered is limited to the level of individual advisory bodies. We take the system as the level of analysis, to research what systems of advisory organizations exist and how this contributes to the strategic capacity of the state. A main benefit of using this whole-of-government perspective, as opposed to looking at single advisory bodies, is to research the variety and continuity of knowledge building as well as the fitting in of knowledge into decision making and policy processes. With this great variety of advisory systems in different countries, there is much to learn from the way they have emerged, contribute to knowledge development in the policy-process and steered by governments. Therefore, this research focuses on what we can learn from this to enhance the strategic capacity of the state by researching the institutional design of advisory systems.

The key goal of the research we propose is to examine advisory bodies in the OECD countries and contribute to the development of the strategic capacities of governments and its leaders. We describe and analyze the key characteristics of the advisory bodies in different countries and discuss the dilemmas and dynamics for governments when steering the institutional design of advisory systems. This leads to more insight in a number of institutional design options for (re-)organizing the advisory system, and success factors for advisory systems which can be distinguished. In addition, we will also reflect on the future of advisory systems in the light of technological and social developments. The research proposal will reflect on what governments can learn from this to improve the advisory system in their respective countries, the research aims at identifying a possible checklist for policy makers to use the advisory system as a strategic tool in the policymaking process.



## **2. Policy advice**

### ***2.1 The concept***

Policy advice analyzes problems and proposes solutions to government (Halligan, 1995). Policy advice comes in many different forms. Peter and Barker (1993) put it as follows: *'policy advice is conceived of as a means by which governments deliberately acquire, and passively receive advice on decisions and policies which may be broadly called informative, objective and technical.'* In this point of view advice can be informative, objective and technical, which points at a distinction between 'politics' and 'advice'. This model is described in literature as the 'speaking-truth-to-power' model. The content of the advice adds objectiveness and correct information to the political debate and the policy making process. Other authors recognize that policy advice does not only concentrate on speaking truth to the power, but rather 'sharing truth with multiple actors of influence' (Craft & Howlett, 2013). Policy advice can therefore not only be called, informative, objective and technical, but also political.

'Policy advice' is not only based on scientific knowledge, but can also for example also be a result of the consultation of stakeholders, a result of a lobby of interest groups or of practical experiences of professionals. It can focus on the provision of 'facts' to support the policymaking process, but it can also be focused on influencing policy outcomes in accordance with political interests. Policy advice can come from scientists or experts, but can also from interests groups and politically involved individuals.

Other distinctions with regard to policy advice can be made to the time focus of the advice, Prasser (2006) made a distinction between long-term/anticipatory or 'cold' advice and short-term/reactive or 'hot' advice. Cold advice is information based, research used, independent, long term, proactive and anticipatory, strategic, idealistic, public interest focus, open processes, objective clarity and seek/propose best solutions. Hot advice relies on fragmented information, is opinion and ideological based, short term, reactive/crisis driven, single issue, pragmatic, electoral gain oriented, secret/deal making and is aiming at a consensual solution. The period of time in which the advice should be given and the moment in time (timing and framing) the advice is published is crucial in the effect it will have in the policy making process.

Due to the variance in the content of the advice, there is no strict definition of what is 'good advice'. Good advice depends on its function in the policy- and decision making process. Advice can be of instrumental value to politicians and administrators. The advice is directly applicable by its receivers. Advice can also have a strategic value. The advice is then used in different ways to influence the processes with government. The advice is for example used to slow down the policy making process or to support the decision making process. Thirdly, the advice can be of conceptual value. The advice is not used to make decisions or policy, but rather for understanding the issue. 'Good advice' is not clear to formulate and differs in each period of time, to each actor in the process and according to its function.

### ***2.2 The function of policy advice***

Policy advice can have several functions in different moments of the policymaking and decision making process. It can serve as an agenda-setting function, by highlighting emerging (societal, technological or other) trends and themes. This provides the government and its leaders with relevant, current knowledge and insight on those topics, as well as 'evidence' proving the urgency of certain

societal challenges, and it provides new policy options for politicians and civil servants to consider. These policy options and ideas in turn form the basis for societal and political discussions on issues; they are a 'weapon' in policy discourses.

In addition, to supporting and structuring the process prior to actual policymaking, advisory bodies also serve an important role in the policymaking process itself by reflecting on proposed policies, thus helping improve organizational performance and preventing any potential for 'organizational blindness'. The bodies provide critical, independent, and knowledgeable advice, positioning themselves as knowledge brokers between the academic world and policymakers. They provide 'evidence' and 'legitimacy' that form the basis of policy proposals (evidence-based policy) and also offer reflections and counterarguments (countervailing power).

Next to that, advisory bodies have an important role in the stakeholder consultation. The process towards the actual advice often consist a consultation of different organizations and citizens. The data gathering process is not only for the use of the research, but also has a function in the eventual legitimacy of policy and in the decision making process.

Also, advisory bodies have a role in policy adoption and implementation. Advice can for example have an operational or strategic focus and influence the way in which the policy should be implemented. In addition, advice can express and underpin idea's in society or sector, which makes the adoption of policies easier. Policy advice creates a basis for the policy to be adopted by several actors.

Next to that, advisory bodies can evaluate and monitor government policies (ex-post policy evaluation). Ad hoc commissions are often asked to evaluate government policy, sometimes as a result of an incident or crisis, in order to ascertain what prompted failure, and in other cases evaluate the success of a certain policy or event in order to determine how to replicate results going forward; this contributes to the learning capacity of the government.

Advisory bodies can also formulate an overall strategy or propose solutions for a problem. They function on a wide range of fields and moments in the policy- and decision making process. Accumulating expertise, information and institutional memory can provide advisory bodies with economies of scale and scope when undertaking more than one task. Many advisory bodies conduct more then one function in the policymaking process. At the same, advisory bodies performing all functions to their full extent perhaps do not exist. Many advisory bodies concentrate on one core task. Some advisory bodies work in networks to perform a wide range of functions and to be able to be useful in the whole policy making process.

In sum, advisory bodies contribute to the development of the strategic capacities of governments and its leaders by fulfilling the following functions:

- Agenda-setting (placing or removing a subject)
- Early warning
- Exploring large and small policy issues
- Providing external and flexible expertise
- Deliver evidence/support/legitimacy Prevent organizational blindness/ contribute to the learning capacity of government
- Countervailing power/ being counter intuitive
- Bringing out new policy options
- Formulate an framework for implementation

- Evaluate and monitor policies
- Create consensus among stakeholders/ stakeholder consultation
- Creating dialogues
- Create time for governments
- Solving solutions (think and do thank)
- Formulate overall strategies

### ***2.3 Two faces of policy advice***

The advice that is given to government often has two sides and brings along dilemmas. We describe several of these dilemmas.

#### *Fact finding and framing: gathering, interpretation and presenting*

One of the functions of advisory bodies is to provide facts and evidence to governments. These facts help governments to make decisions and to formulate policies. At the same time, these ‘facts’ are mostly not pure facts and can be interpreted in different ways. The figures and numbers are used and framed in selective ways by different politicians and administrators. The framing of facts does determine the message that eventually is told by these facts. Having facts does therefore not lead to a clear cut policy or a decision.

#### *Stakeholder consultation and creating extra power: puzzling and powering*

The advisory bodies consult different parties in their research. Organizations and citizens (for example in large surveys) are consulted and their perception is gathered in an advice. The data gathering process functions as a process of bargaining and formulating compromises. At the same time, the advices lead to an extra power in the political arena and contain important information about the electorate and the stakeholders in the policy implementation process.

#### *Providing countervailing power and increasing complexity*

The advice of the advisory bodies is not always in line with the proposed plans of government. Where some of the advices underpin the suspicions and plans, can other advices be contrary to the expectations and plans of government; advisory bodies can bring out the ‘inconvenient truth’. Advisory bodies have a countervailing power and shed a new light on issues. Although the advices improve the current policies, it also complicates processes that government already started or in which already is invested in terms of money and time.

#### *Finding evidence and bury a subject*

Research and advice from advisory bodies provides new information to government, but at the same time requests for policy advice slows down the policy making and the decision making process. The request for a research or a policy advice can be an excuse for politicians or administrators to not discuss the subject until the research is finished. Researches are used to bury to subject for a while and to give politics some time to over think the policy issue.

#### *Obtaining advice and taking risks*

Advisory bodies have all sorts of functions in the policy- and decision making process. It helps government to make decisions and to formulate policies. At the same time governments take risks by asking for policy advice, because government never knows what the advice will be. The advice cannot be in line with the current plans or point view of government and therefore complicate the processes: what if politicians want to go the other way?

### 3. Advisory systems

#### 3.1 The advisory system within a knowledge infrastructure

Policy advisory systems can be thought of as a part of the knowledge infrastructure, which consists of three components: a supply of knowledge, knowledge brokers and knowledge users (Lindquist, 1998; Craft & Howlett, 2013). The knowledge producers are located in academia, statistical agencies and research institutes who provide the basic scientific data upon which analyses and decisions are made. The knowledge brokers are the intermediate between the knowledge producers and the decision makers, they repack data and knowledge into usable forms (Craft & Howlett, 2013). These include, among others, lobby groups, consultancy firms and interest groups. The knowledge users, or the 'proximate decision makers' are the consumers of the knowledge and the advices. These include, parliaments (politicians), legislators and administrators. Advisory bodies can function as a knowledge supplier or as a knowledge brokers, but can also combine these tasks and do both intensive research and give advice.

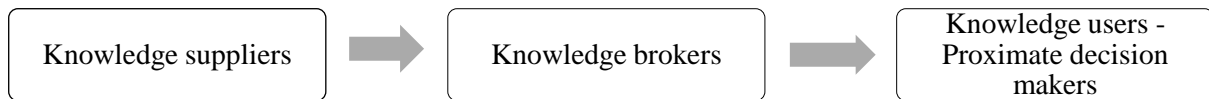


Figure 1: Knowledge infrastructure (source: Lindquist, 1998; Craft & Howlett, 2013).

The policy advisory system can be described as a part of the knowledge infrastructure of a country. The total knowledge infrastructure consists of a wide range of actors and flows of knowledge. The knowledge infrastructure does imply all sorts of knowledge. Some of the knowledge can be used in the policy making process, whereas also a large part is being used by the private sector and the society. Government is one of the parties on which knowledge suppliers and knowledge brokers focus. The policy advisory system of a country is narrower than the knowledge infrastructure and focuses its knowledge supply and knowledge brokering on the policy making and decision making processes of government. The advisory system is at the same time broader than the knowledge system, because the advice that is produced by the policy advisory system is not only based on scientific knowledge. Advice also comes from other suppliers, such as lobby groups, interest groups, groups of professionals and other groups that inform government on policy issues.

The word 'system' does suggest the existence of a logical and rational design, but this is not in all countries the case. The incremental development and change of state structures, policy crises or political issues make that new advisory bodies appear or suddenly disappear, which results in a gathering of advisory bodies that together make a 'system'. In addition, the word 'system' does unjustly suggest that there is a logical relation between the different advisory bodies. Therefore, the advisory system can also be perceived as a *network* of advisory bodies that together provide government with advice, but in which government is also one of the actors. Still, in this research we will use the word 'system', because this is in line with the body of academic literature on the subject,

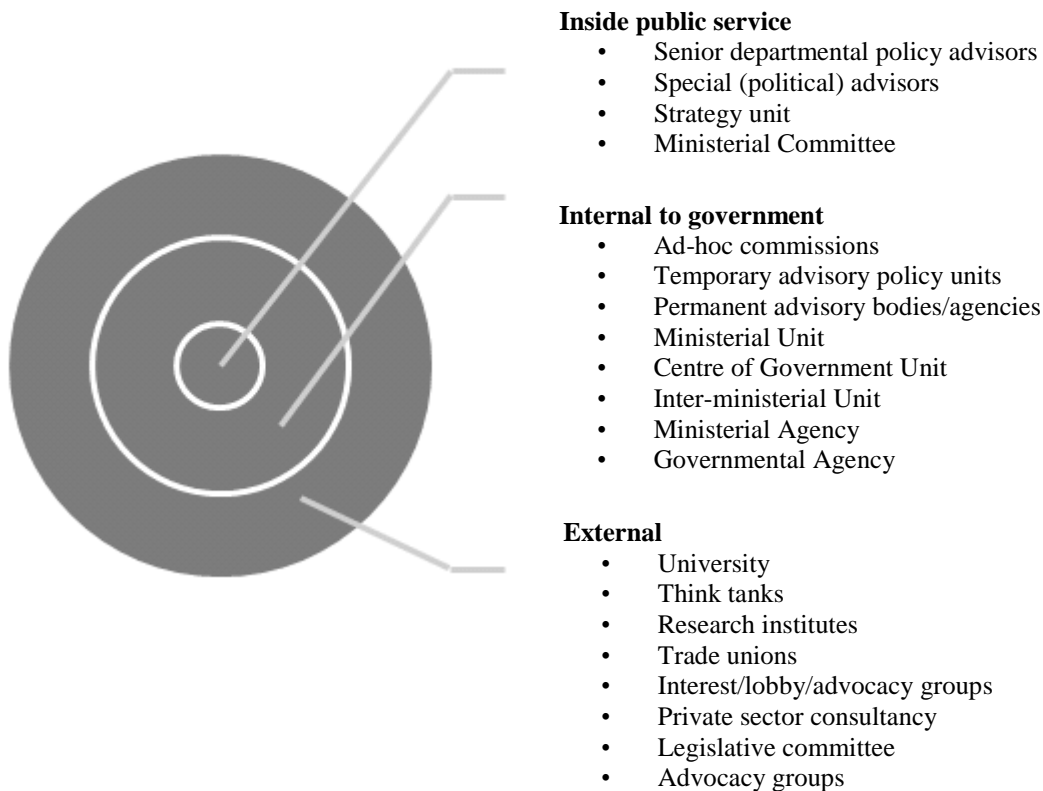
#### 3.2 Locating the constituent parts of the advisory system

Halligan (1995) sought for a model to understand the policy advisory system. Halligan pointed at the different locations of the bodies to government. Some policy advice comes from the inside of the public service: senior policy advisors, political advisors and strategy units advice politicians and administrators in the policy making and decision making processes. These advisors are employed by

government and function as a part of the public service. They function inside of the executive branch of government and do not have a formal organization (OECD, 2011).

Another source of advice is the advisors and the bodies that function internally to government and are related to government, but are not a part of the public service. These bodies function at an administrative or organizational distance from government. Examples of these policy advisory bodies are (ad-hoc) commissions, temporary advisory commissions and permanent advisory bodies. These advisory bodies function inside of the executive branch of government and do have a formal (separate) organization.

Next to that, advice can come from sources external to government, with or without a formal organization. These organizations function outside of the executive branch of government. They are autonomous to government. Examples of these organizations are universities, think tanks, research institutes, trade unions (with an advisory function), interest groups/lobby groups/advocacy and legislative committees. In addition, there is a large group of private, commercial advising and consulting agencies (the so-called ‘invisible public sector’) that advise the government based on their strategic interests.



*Figure II: location of advisory bodies (own illustration, based on Halligan, 1995).*

The advisory systems consist of a wide range of organizations and persons that inside, internally and externally of government provide government (politicians, legislators and administrators) with policy advice. In the research on advisory systems we focus on all three parts of this system.

## 4. Advisory systems across countries

### 4.1 Explaining the variety in advisory systems

The institutional design of advisory systems is influenced by different factors that result in different structures of the system. Firstly, the variety of advisory systems has grown along with the influence of societal and technological developments, incidents and changing political climates. These developments follow the tides of growth in general, with advisory bodies' prominence developing incrementally along with their interests; the 'systems' are a *product of history*. In addition, the system is a result of *constitutional arrangements*. Only a few countries have general laws regulating their policy advisory system. These laws can determine the size (number of bodies) and the functioning and the composition of these bodies and thus structures the systems to a high extent. However, there are also more specific laws, regulations and responsibilities generated by the government which influence the features of the system. Also, the *size and the geography* of the country matters for the development of the advisory system. For example, larger countries or specific geographical zones with many inhabitants perhaps have found the need to establish larger and more advisory bodies to meet the diverse challenges in these countries.

The system is also a product of the *political-administrative* context in the nation in which it develops. Pollitt & Bouckaert (2011) distinguished five key features of politico-administrative systems, namely the state structure, the executive government, the minister/mandarin relations, administrative culture and the diversity of policy advice.

The *state structure* consists of two dimensions. The first refers to the degree of vertical dispersion of authority – that is how far authority is shared between different levels of government. Along this dimension Pollitt and Bouckaert recognize three types: unitary and centralized states, unitary but decentralized states and federal states. Some countries are highly centralized (France, New Zealand and the UK) and others are extensively de-centralized (Nordic states, where many powers have been delegated from ministries to agencies and where local governments are to a high extent independent from the central government). In these countries the central government retains its ultimate sovereignty, whereas in federal systems prescribes some sovereignty between different bodies. The greatest diversion tends to be in a federal state and least within constitutions of unitary and centralized states. Countries such as Germany and the USA know a federal system. The second dimension concerns the degree of horizontal co-ordination at the central government level, that is how far all ministries together move into the same direction. This dimension ranges from 'highly co-ordinated' and 'highly fragmented'. This is difficult variable to estimate, because it is more of a convention and less clearly written down in constitutions or statutory provisions.

Scholars (a.o. Lijphart, 1984) have described a useful typology to describe the *nature of the executive government* (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Single party or minimal-winning or bare majority (1): where one party holds more than 50 per cent of the seats in the legislative. Minimal-winning coalitions (2): where two or more parties hold more than 50 per cent of the legislative seats. Minority cabinets (3): where the party or parties composing the executive hold less than 50 per cent of the legislative seats. Oversized executives or grand coalitions (4): where additional parties are included in the executive board beyond the number required for a minimal winning coalition. Although the composition of the executive boards can vary in each election period, the electoral system in most countries produces fairly stable results. The types tend to create a different set of governing principles. Single party governments tend for example to have fairly adversarial styles of governance, while minority cabinets tend to behave in a more consensual fashion – and thus changes will be less rapidly.

Lijphart (1984) distinguished along this line of arguments two models: the Westminster model of democracy and the Consensus model of democracy and their respective systems of policy making of pluralist and neocorporatist policy making. These different models influence the advisory system in a country. In a Westminster model there is a preference for the 'speaking truth' type of policy advising, although this shifts more towards a 'sharing of influence' or 'sharing truth with multiple actors of influence' that fades the strict distinction between 'politics' and 'advice' (Craft & Howlett, 2013). In Consensus models of democracy advisory bodies have a bigger role in the consensus builder, which has consequences for the composition of the advisory bodies. In countries with consensus models have a relatively large number of advisory bodies (Cawson, 1982; Lembruch & Schmitter, 1977). In addition, it can be expected that policy makers in a Consensus model have a preference in the involvement of stakeholders in the advisory councils (Fobé et al., 2013).

In addition, centralized presidential systems, such as the system in France or the United States of America have large advisory units surrounding the president and other high officials ('T Hart et al., 2009). For example, France has the ministériel cabinet that function inside of executive branch of government that provides ministers and the president with advice.

The relationship between *politicians and public servants* varies considerably from one country to another. Pollitt and Bouckaert distinguish two dimensions. The first dimension concerns the question whether political careers are separate from or integrated with the careers of the civil servants (Pierre, 1998). For example, In France, with a system of the grand corps, are the careers of civil servants and politicians intertwined, whereas in the Netherlands the career paths are fairly separated. The second dimension is the extent to which senior civil servants are themselves politicized, in the sense that most of the civil servants have specific party political sympathies. The USA knows a 'spoils system' results in an incoming president rapidly replacing a large number of senior civil servants. This is contrary to the systems in Canada and New Zealand where civil servants are neutral 'mandarins'

With regard to the *administrative culture* two models can be distinguished, the Rechtsstaat model or public interest model. Although very few systems fall between these two models (Pierre, 1998). From a Rechtsstaat model the state is a central integrating force within society. Most civil servants will be trained in law and a large and separate body of administrative law is created. The bureaucratic stance is one of the leading principles, and the actions civil servants and citizens are set in this context of correctness and legal control. The public interest model states a less extensive or dominant role within society. In this model ministers and civil servants are constantly held to public account by elected parliaments and through other means. Also in this model, the law has an important position, but is not as central as in the Rechtsstaat model. In the Rechtsstaat model civil servants mostly did not have a specific training.

In terms of the administrative (and democratic) culture others also speak about the Anglo-Saxon model or the continental model of capitalism (Cernat, 2004). In the Anglo-Saxon model (the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand Australia) the focus is on the free market economy. The characteristics of this model include low levels of tax and regulations and a relatively lower level of services for the public. Continental Europe (The Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, Spain and Portugal) has more elements of the welfare state, also known as the Rhine model, social market economy or the German model. This model is characterized by a government that intensively is involved in all sorts of issues in society.

The final aspect concerns the *diversity of policy advice*. This concerns the main channels through which the ideas come to government. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) have specifically focused on

advice on reforms. Other sources of advice may come through different channels. Political executives can take advice from a wide range of management advice from a wide range of sources: their own political parties, from civil servants, from management consultants, from academic specialists or from political or policy think tanks. France for example has the grand corps, whereas UK uses many think tanks in their reform processes. Some of the countries have an external focus of taking new ideas into consideration, whereas other countries gain advices within from their own civil servants.

Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) visualized the different aspects of the countries in the following scheme.

|                    | <b>State Structure</b>                   | <b>Executive Government</b>                 | <b>Minister/Mandarin Relations</b> | <b>Administrative Culture</b>  | <b>Diversity of Policy Advice</b>   |
|--------------------|--|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Australia</b>   | Federal Coordinated                      | Majoritarian                                | Separate Mildly politicized        | Public interest  | Mainly civil service until 1980s  |
| <b>Belgium</b>     | Federal                                  | Consensual (though becoming more polarized) | Politicized                        | Rechtsstaat  | Mainly consultants and Universities   |
| <b>Canada</b>      | Federal                                  | Majoritarian                                | Separate                           | Public interest  | Mainly civil service but more political advisers since c.2000                                       |
| <b>Finland</b>     | Unitary Decentralized Fairly fragmented  | Consensual                                  | Separate Fairly politicized        | Used to be Rechtsstaat, but now more plural                            | Mainly civil service  |
| <b>France</b>      | Unitary Formerly centralized Coordinated | Intermediate                                | Integrated Fairly politicized      | Predominantly Rechtsstaat  | Mainly civil service Some consultants since 2000  |
| <b>Germany</b>     | Federal Coordinated                      | Intermediate                                | Separate Fairly politicized        | Rechtsstaat  | Mainly civil service (plus a few academics)   |
| <b>Italy</b>       | Unitary Increasingly decentralized       | Coalition                                   | Politicized                        | Rechtsstaat  | A broad mixture   |
| <b>Netherlands</b> | Unitary; Fairly fragmented               | Consensual                                  | Separate Fairly politicized        | Originally very legalistic, but has changed to pluralistic/ consensual | A broad mixture: Civil servants, academics, consultants, other experts                              |
| <b>New Zealand</b> | Unitary Centralized Mildly fragmented    | Majoritarian (until 1996)                   | Separate Not politicized           | Public interest  | Mainly civil service  |
| <b>Sweden</b>      | Unitary Decentralized                    | Intermediate                                | Separate Increasingly politicized  | Originally legalistic, but has changed to corporatist                  | A broad mixture. Corporatist processes bring in academic experts, business people, and trade unions |
| <b>UK</b>          | Unitary Centralized Coordinated          | Majoritarian                                | Separate Not politicized           | Public interest  | Mainly civil service until 1980s Recently think tanks, consultants, political advisers              |
| <b>USA</b>         | Federal; Fragmented                      | Intermediate                                | Separate Very                      | Public interest  | Very diverse: political appointees, corporations,   |



|  |  |  |             |  |                          |
|--|--|--|-------------|--|--------------------------|
|  |  |  | politicized |  | think tanks, consultants |
|--|--|--|-------------|--|--------------------------|

*Table II: types of politico-administrative regime: five key features of public administration systems (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, p. 42).*

The key features of the public administration do influence the advisory system of a country. With regard to the state structure, unitary and centralized governments could for example have an advisory system on a central level, whereas federal states have more advisory bodies on the federal or local level. Next to that, the nature of the executive government influences the advisory system. It can be argued that in majoritarian governments the need for advice is smaller than in a consensual model where parties have to look for shared solutions. This also relates to the minister/mandarin relations. In a politicized civil service the consensus on a subject may be reached sooner than in a neutral civil service. In a Rechtsstaat model the law and the bureau takes a central place, whereas in the public interest model the society and the elected politicians have a more central role. It can be argued that policy advice is more needed in a public interest model, due to the position government has in society and the less central and leading role of the law in this system. Pollitt and Bouckaert studied the diversity of policy advice with regard to public management reforms, whereas it can be expected that also the sources of advice in other domains of governments highly differ across countries.

#### **4.2 The translation of lessons**

Advisory systems are often a product unique to each nation's history. Advisory systems move in tandem with the developments of their nation, making it impossible to use insight into the advisory system of any single country and simply 'transplant' its success into another nation. The functional, beneficial parts or structures of an advisory system in a particular country cannot be exported or copied to other countries without considering the national context and history. Insight into the advisory systems of different countries can be used for purposes of 'translation'. By considering the performance of advisory systems within the specific context of they operate, we can draw lessons about design options, dilemmas involved and success factors which can be used by other countries.

Insights from other countries can shed new light on traditions in a country. In the Netherlands commissions are for example criticized. Commissions are sometimes seen as a lack of ideas and leadership in government, whereas in Sweden commissions are a standard element of policy making process. In Sweden the opposite of the Netherlands is true: too few commissions are a sign of ambitions and ideas. Another example is that in some countries the government uses commissions to bypass their civil servants and to create new windows of opportunities, whereas in other countries the advisory bodies support the work of the civil servants. Also, some countries install an internal advisory body, whereas other countries focus on the external parties to gain their knowledge. This research we identify lessons and new ideas to think about the institutional set up of advisory systems, without prescribing a blueprint of one ideal model and ignoring the historic traditions in a country.

## 5. Exploring the features of advisory systems

### 5.1 Options for institutional designs

In 2014, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands asked The Netherlands School for Public Administration (NSOB) to conduct an *exploratory* international comparative research study on advisory systems, in which the NSOB compared the systems of the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders)<sup>1</sup>, Sweden, Italy, France, the United Kingdom and Germany. Mapping and comparing the features of national advisory systems is a first step in developing a better understanding about options for governments to (re)design their knowledge infrastructure. Although they appear to be simple choices at first sight, a closer look shows that these involve dilemmas which reflect the real challenges for governments.

Describing features of the advisory system gives insight into institutional design of the advisory systems. Based on an intensive literature and document study, the NSOB identified features of an advisory system. The NSOB clustered these features into five aspects:

- Configuration
- Regulation
- Positioning
- Composition
- Functioning (role)

The first aspect, '*configuration*,' concerns the size and design of the advisory system: how many formal, institutionalized advisory bodies does the system consist of? What kind of advisory bodies are there? Do the advisory bodies have a strategic, technical/specialized, or operational focus? If the body strives to serve multiple functions, what is the resulting ratio of functions? And does the ratio relate to the permanent, temporary or ad-hoc advisory bodies? The responses to these inquiries result in better grasp on the advisory system's bigger picture. In some cases the design of the advisory system is designated in detail by law or regulation, whereas in other cases it exists as an implicit part of government.

The second aspect is '*regulation*.' How does government steer and organize the system? Are advisory bodies formally assigned? What is the mandate of the advisory bodies? Is advice solicited or unsolicited? Is there a law or regulation that controls the advisory system? What are the powers of the advisory bodies? Are they permitted free access to government documents?

The third aspect is the '*positioning*'. This aspect focuses on advisory bodies' relationship with government. Are the advisory bodies autonomous, semi-autonomous, or controlled by the minister and the ministry? Are the advisory bodies financed publically, privately or through mixed means? Are they separate from the business operations of government or are they part of the government (e.g. agency)? Is there a specific part of government, like the cabinet, the minister, or parliament, which is the target of advising efforts? Is the minister obliged to respond to advice from the bodies? Is the response targeted to someone in particular, like the advisory body, the cabinet, the parliament, society or a particular sector/policy domain? Does the request for policy advice persist during a changing political situation?

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<sup>1</sup> We studied Belgium, with special attention for Flanders.

The fourth aspect is the *'composition'*. This aspect concerns the members and staff of the advisory bodies. Do the advisory bodies have a maximum number of members? Do the members have a fixed or a temporary contract? What is the (professional) background of the members? Who is the chairman of the body? What is the size of the staff in comparison to the council as a whole?

The fifth aspect is the *functioning (role)* of the advisory bodies in the country. What role does the advisory system have in the policy making and decision making process? Does it have an agenda-setting role, or do create consensus among societal partners, or to deliver evidence to legitimate and support policies? Are there other functions to describe? What is the visible and invisible effect of advice? What is the effect on the policy- and decision making processes? This element focuses on the functioning and the performance of the advisory system with the policy making and decision making process.

| <b>Category</b>      | <b>Features</b>   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Configuration</b> | <p><i>Structure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of advisory bodies: number of informal and formally-appointed bodies</li> </ul> <p><i>Focus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematic focus: strategic, technical/specialist, operational or political</li> </ul> <p><i>Sustainability over time</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duration of appointment: permanent, temporary or ad hoc</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Regulation</b>    | <p><i>Powers &amp; tools</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to empirical material</li> </ul> <p><i>Mandate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of law/regulation</li> <li>• Autonomy of the bodies</li> <li>• Solicited advice/unsolicited advice</li> <li>• Timeslot to complete the advice</li> <li>• Determination of the focus and function of the bodies</li> </ul> <p><i>Transparency</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency in the policy request</li> <li>• Transparency in the use of the policy advice</li> </ul> <p><i>Constitution</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal appointment: basis of existence of the bodies</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Position</b>      | <p><i>Location</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational form: distance from and responsibility to government</li> <li>• Relations with minister in regard to advice: autonomous, semi-autonomous or controlled</li> <li>• Relations with minister in regard to organization: autonomous, semi-autonomous, or controlled</li> </ul> <p><i>Resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financing: public, private or mixed</li> <li>• Business model: part of a ministry or independent</li> </ul> <p><i>Reporting</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaction to advice by government: obliged to respond or freedom to respond</li> <li>• Petitioner of advice: cabinet, minister or parliament</li> <li>• Petitioner of reaction from the government: advisory body, cabinet,</li> </ul> |

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
|                           | parliament, sector or society<br><i>Changing political situation</i><br>• Continuation or stop of the request for policy advice  |
| <b>Composition</b>        | <i>Council</i><br>• Size and composition of the advisory body: (maximum) number of members, permanent contracts<br>• Background of the members: experts (professionals, scientists), government (civil servants, representatives) or citizens<br>• Responsibility of advisory body: minister or chairman of the body<br><i>Staff</i><br>• Size of the staff: number of staff members relative to entire advisory body<br>• Organization of staff: permanent, temporary or ad hoc |
| <b>Functioning (role)</b> | <i>Role:</i><br>• Role in phases of the policy making process<br>• Role in the decision making process<br><i>Impact/performance</i><br>• Impact in the political/societal debate<br>• Impact on the policy making process<br>• Impact on the decision making process   |

Table II. Aspects of the advisory system

## 5.2 First findings of the research

The NSOB studied the advisory systems of the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), Sweden, Italy, France, the United Kingdom and Germany. The first step in this exploratory research was to describe the system's configuration, regulation, positioning, composition and functioning (role). In our research, it is shown that the systems differ significantly from one another. In addition, the level of development and the institutionalization of the systems vary between the systems. These differences are not the consequence of simple design 'preferences', but instead are a product of the different developments in these countries, which have led to very different outcomes for the role of policy advice. In this chapter we present some of the findings of our exploratory research.

### *Composition*

With regard to composition, it appears that system designs share little in common and are each unique to the circumstances and preferences of their nation. Some advisory bodies are relatively small; Belgium (Flanders), for example, has a law establishing that its advisory system should formally consist of 12 strategic advisory bodies focusing on 12 specific policy domains. Other countries have a relatively large advisory system; Germany, for example, has around 400 advisory bodies providing government with advice with operations on both the federal and local level. Countries also have different approaches to permanent and ad hoc advisory functions. Germany has many permanent councils and few ad hoc commissions. In Italy, we discovered the opposite to be true; the design preference there is for just a few permanent bodies and many ad hoc commissions. In other countries, such as the Netherlands, the division between permanent and temporary advisory bodies is less clear. We found that all the countries have permanent and ad hoc functions in their system. In these systems we see a need for advising continuity and the need for a stable factor in a political context, as well the need for flexibility to quickly respond to specific situations.

### *Regulation*

It is interesting to note that most of the systems are regulated, though in different ways. The Netherlands has a law that prescribes the nature of the system in detail. Sweden does not have a distinct law regulating the advisory system, but has institutionalized the use of the commissions of inquiry (Utredninga) in its policymaking process. Germany does not have any national regulation of its advisory system, which is a result of the federal structure of Germany. The 'Länder' have significant space in their policymaking process and have their own advisory bodies; some federal states established regulations with regard to advisory bodies. The United Kingdom has a regulation code of practice that contains instructions for the advisory bodies; the code of practice extends, for example, to the period of time in which it is appropriate to provide advising services. In addition, the United Kingdom has a Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) in each department, who is in charge of providing scientific advising to the department.

#### *Positioning*

It is interesting to note that the independence of the advisory bodies receives explicit attention in most countries, especially with regard to advisory systems' positioning in relation to government. The Dutch law, for example, prescribes protections for advisory bodies' independence of research. Also, the Swedish government offers an only limited number of preconditions to guide commissions of inquiry. In the United Kingdom, there are few terms of reference guiding advisory bodies' research or advising which guarantee researchers' freedom - even when their advice stands contrary to government policy. In addition, there are different regulations for government to handle advice from these bodies. In the Netherlands, the government is obliged to respond to the advice of the advisory bodies. In Belgium (Flanders), the government is only obliged to respond if the government was also obliged to ask for advice. In Germany there are no clear rules with regard to government response. The policy there is diffuse; some of the councils are obliged to respond, whereas other councils are not. In the United Kingdom, we did not find any obligation for government to respond.

#### *Composition*

Our research shows that the composition of advisory bodies differs across nations. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom have advisory bodies that in most cases consist of (only) people that have been selected for their expertise. There is a strict division between 'advice' and 'representation'. In most of the advisory councils in the Netherlands and in the United Kingdom, there are only scientists and experts. In the other countries studied, we also came across advisory bodies consisting of both experts and representatives of societal organizations. In Germany there are several councils consisting of both representatives and experts.

#### *Functioning (role)*

In each country the advisory bodies play a different role in the policy making and decision making process. In Sweden the commissions of inquiry have for example a standard position in the policy making process. Before the Swedish government proposes a new law a commission of inquiry is installed and is asked to reflect on the proposal. The report is then published as part of a series called the Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU). After a commission of inquiry has submitted its proposals and recommendations in a report, the Government forwards the report to relevant public agencies, organizations, and/or municipalities in order to receive their comments. Then these comments are used in the decision making process on the new law. The commissions of inquiry thus play an important and standard role in the governmental processes. Most of the countries have a variety of advisory bodies that play both in the agenda setting (strategic foresight), the policy making and the decision making role an important role. The Netherlands has example both commissions to deal with 'hot advice' and statistical bureaus that deal with 'cold advice' that is important for the long

term policies. The concrete effect of the advices is difficult to determine and more research is required on this element.

## **6. The institutional design of advisory systems: dilemmas and success factors**

### *6.1. Dilemmas and dynamics in the institutional design of advisory systems*

We have discussed and mapped different options for the institutional design of advisory systems. Many of these features can be influenced by governments, which mean that governments have the possibility to shape their advisory system to a certain extent. This leads to the question what the best performing institutional design would be. Should advisory bodies be located closely to the executive branch of government, or should they remain distance to the daily operations of government? Should advisory bodies be large organizations with much in-house expertise, or should they be organized small and flexible by leaning on variable external experts? Does the government benefit more from specialized advisory bodies, or from organizations who are involved on many different terrains in the public sector?

If we look more closely at these options, it becomes clear that these are essentially dilemmas. For each of these choices there are two, contrary options which both can lead to positive and negative results. Dilemmas represent a choice in which there is not a 'good' and 'bad' option, but a choice between two 'good' or two 'bad' options. This means that choosing between these options can be uncomfortable or even seem impossible. In theory, both choices could lead to a positive result, but also to a negative result. For each advisory body, these dilemmas occur when considering their configuration, positioning, regulation, composition and functioning. At the same time, these dilemmas also occur on the level of the advisory system, since there can be choices in the kind and amount of variation in the system.

Moreover, these dilemmas are not static, because they create their own dynamic. In practice, the choice for one option does not only lead to the positive results, but also to the manifestation of negative results. When these negative consequences persist, the voices will rise to change it into the contrary option. The same results occur here: the contrary option also yields positive and negative consequences. This dynamical character of dilemmas may lead to a pendula effect between two options. The dilemmas will be researched and identified in the proposed research, but in advance we explore some of these dilemmas below.

#### *Dilemmas of configuration*

##### 1. Specialized or multiple-topic advisory bodies?

What type of advice does the government need? In many policy domains, there are highly specialized researchers who could advise the government in the policy making process. Specialized advisory bodies have the advantage of a large knowledge on the scientific literature and the policy history. However, they can also be so embedded in the current system that they might fail to deliver deviating views or put the issues in a larger governance perspective. Advisory bodies who can advise on many public issues have the advantage that they have a broader view of developments in the public sector and often use different scientific approaches to examine the issues. It is important to consider the right balance in the advisory system between these types of advisory boards.

##### 2. Many or few advisory bodies?

Another dilemma is about the right amount of advisory boards. Many advisory boards can have the advantage of not only gathering much information but also getting different viewpoints to make sense of complex and ambiguous issues. However, it is also often stated that too many advisory boards

leads to the ‘erosion’ of advice. To prevent that advice has less impact and politicians start ‘shopping around’ in different reports, one could argue for an advisory system with few, high impact boards. Again, this will have advantages and disadvantages and it is important to keep balancing this through time.

### *Dilemmas of regulation*

#### 3. Solicited or unsolicited advice?

How much influence should governments have on the work of advisory boards? One dilemma is whether advisory boards should mainly give solicited advice, to make sure that the advice is relevant and part of the policy making process, or unsolicited advice. This would enhance the intellectual freedom of advisory boards to choose their own topic and research questions, thereby increasing their space to come up with surprising and unexpected advice. This relates to a larger dilemma, whether ‘advice’ should be functional in its purpose, or more focused on being inspirational and confronting.

#### 4. Obligation to respond or freedom to respond to advice?

The relationship between advisory boards and governments also leads to dilemmas on the position of advice in the policy making. Is advice an optional source of information for policy-makers, or should it be an obligation to respond to advice in relation to its use on the policy agenda? The obligation to respond can strengthen the position of advisory boards in relation to the government, because they cannot be ignored. However, it can also elicit vague responses from the government, which in that case ‘neutralizes’ the impact the advice could otherwise have. The freedom to respond does not carry the risk of ignoring important advice, but it might also open up the opportunity for other ‘routes’ for the advice to make an impact.

### *Dilemmas of positioning*

#### 5. Positioning close to the executive branch of the government, or at a distance?

Positioning advisory boards within the government can improve the policy relevance of their advice. When they know the insights of the policy issues and the political situation, this could lead to advice which is better fitting and up to date. However, there is also a risk that these advisory boards are too close to the daily business of government to reflect on this from a wider perspective. They could become encapsulated, thereby losing the critical vision of an outsider. Positioning advisory boards at a distance from could resolve these negative consequences, but also has the risk that advice becomes less relevant and is considered as ‘easy’ criticism from the side-line.

#### 6. Financed by government or (partly) by private parties?

In different OECD countries, there is a great variety of financial constructions for advisory bodies. Some are fully financed by government, while others have partly or mainly other financial sources, for example from universities, private projects or even crowd sourcing. This is also one of the dilemmas when considering the institutional design of advisory boards. Full finance by the government might prevent the image of being under the influence of financiers with a political agenda. It can also be an assurance that the advisory board has a stable financial basis, and is not dependent on economic fluctuations in the market. However, having other (incidental) financial sources could strengthen the financial household of these boards and their embeddedness in other networks instead of only the government. It could lead to advisory boards which are learning from projects in a wide range of topics, causing more innovative strategic advice towards the government.



## 7. Continuity or change in political shift?

Advices are solicited during a certain political period. For example, the parliament asks for an advice on one of their policy proposals. This raises questions in the case that the political parties shift and other policy proposals are formulated. Countries should decide on the 'natural lifespan' of an advisory body and a policy advice. Should the requests for policy advices be stopped when the leading political parties change or should they continue their work?

*Dilemmas of composition*

## 8. Flexible or solid advisory bodies?

The composition of the advisory bodies can be flexible or solid. A flexible composition of the advisory bodies brings along a greater variety of expertise and more interactions between different disciplines. Depending on the project, advisory bodies can hire the right people. At the same time it also brings along the risk of less continuity and less knowledge building in the advisory body. Solid organization have a positive effect on the continuity and the profiling of the advisory body, but makes the advisory body also less flexible and agile to new issues.

## 9. Political or scientific advisory boards?

An advisory body composed of political members or representatives makes that the advice is possibly more useable and applicable for government. The members have a better feeling for political arguments, which makes that the advice fits better and has more impact. At the same time, it brings along the risk of the growth of political games and less high research skills. An advisory body composed of members with a scientific background and orientation produce more knowledge and an independent and neutral advice. At the time it contains the risk of producing advices that are abstract and have less practical applications.

### ***6.2. Assessing success factors of advisory systems***

#### ***6.2.1 Tracing the effects of policy advice***

General success factors of advisory systems are complicated to identify because actual effects of advices are difficult to estimate. First, we will elaborate on some of the issues in measuring effects of policy advices.

*Effects: indirect and direct - expected and unexpected – preferred and un-preferred*

Although, the actual effect of the policy advice is one of the most important aspects of the value of the advisory system, it is complicated to measure the direct and the indirect effects of policy advice (Bekkers et al., 2004). The direct value of the advices can be traced back in documents that are the result of the policy- and decision making processes, such as policy proposals, policy documents, notions and letters. Mostly, policy advice has an indirect effect on processes within government, for example in the agenda setting phase or in the stakeholder consultation. In these phases the advice can help governments to make steps into certain directions, without this is noticed by a wider audience. Next to that, policy advice sometimes can play a large role in the media and in the societal debates, which indirectly raises the attention of politicians and administrators. Some of these effects are expected, but other effects cannot be predicted by the policy makers nor the policy advisors and can at the same time be preferred or not-preferred by government.

### *Effects on different actors: society and government*

Policy advice is mostly targeted on the government policy making process. Still, some advisory bodies have a broader scope and focus for example on influencing ideas and perceptions in the media. The effect of the advice can thus be large in the sense that it reaches many people in society and creates a wide political debate, or a large effect on a small group of policy makers that directly influence the policy making process.

### *The use of policy advice*

Another element complicating the measurement of effect of a policy advice, is the varying use of it. Policy advice can be of strategic, instrumental and conceptual use for policy makers. *Strategic use* implies that the advices are used for other purposes than was meant by the advisory bodies, for example to slow down the policy making process or to create support in negotiation processes or political discussions. *Instrumental use* implies that the analyses and the advice are directly applicable in solving a policy or societal issue. Advice that is used in a conceptual way contributes to the changing policy paradigms. The advice creates a new line of thoughts and new thoughts concerning policy issues. The effects of the advice therefore differ according to the way they are used in the policy making processes.

### *The environment of the advice*

Also, the effect of policy advice does depend on several characteristics of the policy advice. Firstly the *quality* of the advice is important for the eventual use of the advice. Secondly, the political environment and the *acceptance* of the advice play a role. Advice needs in some cases some time to 'land' and to be accepted by all actors in society. The position of the advice in the societal and political debate is important for the effects of the advice. Also the features that we identified in chapter five, *configuration, regulation, position, composition and function*, are important elements in considering the effects of the advice. These features determine the context in which the advisory body functions. For example, an individual advice of an advisory body in a large advisory system perhaps has less effect on the policy making process due to the battle for voice.

### *Success on a system level & success for an individual advisory body*

The 'success' of the advisory body is different from the 'success' of an advisory system. Individual advisory bodies might have an impact on the policy advisory processes, where the advices of other advisory bodies are less influential. The impact of the system as a whole is therefore complicated to measure. The sum of the effects of the individual bodies does not make the effect of the system because also the interaction between the advisory bodies effect the policy making process. The same situation we see in the field of education, where the quality and the effect of one teacher does not tell us anything on the functioning of the system as a whole.

## **6.2.2 Different perspectives on the use of advice**

In the study of public administration four perspectives on government can be identified, in which different values are at stake. These perspectives influence the perception on what a successful policy advice system is. We elaborate shortly on these perspectives.

### *The Old Public Administration perspective (OPA): justification of input*

Old Public Administration (OPA) is the classic perspective on government, and describes government as a bureaucracy (Weber, 1922). The role of the civil servant is directed by demarcated tasks, competence profiles and responsibilities (Reich 1985; Frederickson 1997; Goodsell 2003; Kohlberg, 1983). Politics determine public interest and policies are formulated accordingly, which civil servants

subsequently execute and perform in practice. Public interest and objectivity are important values, as well as equality and equity. The loyalty of civil servants is highly important and civil servants execute what the hierarchy of the organization asks them to do with constant reference to rules, laws and procedure to prevent subjectivity (Kaufman 1967; Wilson 1989; Van Eijk, 2011; Hartley, 2005). This perspective highlights the importance of legalistic values, such as the rule of law, the need for equal treatment, and the procedural logic of government. Also, this perspective highlights the importance of maintaining the distinction between political choice and the neutral execution of those decisions by civil servants. In this perspective information and knowledge are about ensuring the quality of the *input* of the public process. Knowledge and information are used to inform the political system, organize accountability, maintain transparency, and to provide insight in what civil servants do. *An successful advisory system is in this perspective a system that makes the system more accountable, transparent and organized.*

*The New Public Management perspective (NPM): measuring output*

During the late 1980's the public administration perspective was criticized, primarily for to the waste associated with its bureaucratic administrative system (Pollit & Bouckaert, 2004; Ferlie et al. 1996). Goals should not merely be set, more important was that they should be met. In order to improve the actual performance of government organizations, techniques from the business community were introduced in public organizations. The New Public Management (NPM) perspective emerged and in this perspective the focus lay heavily on the efficient and effective output (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011; Rhodes 1996; Hood 1991). Government became oriented towards output, quantitative results, and measurable 'SMART' targets. Public goals became 'policy results', measured in quantified outputs. This value set centers around measurably achieving 'results', rather than the more procedural and political justification of these goals. From this perspective government is about achieving the set goals in the system, with an efficient and optimal use of the available means. Knowledge and information is primarily about measuring performance and assessing the causal relation between government intervention and societal *output*. This perspective is closely related to the principal-agent theory; information about performance provides the basis for steering. In order to fulfill its role as principal, the central government needs information about the performance of agents that constitute the system. *In this perspective a successful advisory system furthers the output of the policy making processes and by making these processes more effective and efficient.*

*The Networked Governance perspective (NG): ensuring throughput*

In practice, government is hardly able to provide solutions for 'wicked' problems all by itself (Rittel & Weber, 1992; Coen & Thatcher 2008; Klijn 1996). Many of the most pressing social problems cannot be solved by stand-alone intervention of government, but require active participation of actors in the context of which they are a part (Inglehart, 1997; Peters & Pierre, 2000). Government needs to collaborate with other actors in society. From this idea, the perspective of Networked Governance took flight. The idea was that government should find other organizations and formalized partners in society to solve to problems with (Sørensen, 2002). This more outward development is often labeled as the shift from government to governance; government steering as co-productive effort, of government alongside others (Marin & Mayntz, 1991; Kooiman, 2003; Sorensen & Torfing, 2007; Osborne, 2010). This puts heavy emphasize on managing the process of cooperation between actors and keeping them 'inside' the process despite their inherent differences in goals, perspectives, and stakes. Networked governance focuses on throughput, the running of a good-quality process that will eventually lead to an outcome that can often not be precisely defined beforehand. From this perspective government is focused on the quality and effectiveness of the various collaborative arrangements. Networks still have to produce outputs, but it is also important that networks are

adequately maintained, new alliances are formed, and enough partners and stakeholders are involved. From this perspective a successful policy advisory system is a system in which knowledge and information also go beyond the boundaries of government itself and involves many other actors in their networks to create a ‘whole of government’ approach.

*The Societal Resilience perspective (SR): dealing with emerging initiative*

More recently, in literature and in practice there is good deal of attention for an emerging fourth perspective. In this perspective, actors in society take initiative themselves and become active in the public domain to create public value (Van der Steen et al., 2013) This is a break-away from the previous perspectives, because here societal actors themselves take the initiative and confront government with activities in the public domain. This is labeled ‘societal resilience’, because initiatives by active citizens and social entrepreneurs enhance the capacity in society to deal with problems (Field, 2003; Hilhorst & Van der Lans 2013; Van der Steen et al 2013). The government is changing in conjunction with this development and civil servants are required to create space and possibilities for bottom-up initiatives (Verhoeven & Tonkens 2011; Van der Steen & Van Twist, 2008). These new networks are less institutionalized, less predictable and constantly changing. Creating public value in these networks involves the ability to respond to emerging initiatives and apply the appropriate repertoire to the initiatives as they come up. Sometimes this means facilitating the initiative, sometimes it means staying away from it and letting it be, sometimes it means to terminate the initiative because it interferes with the interest of others. Good government is the ability to recognize initiatives and to deal with them productively, as it fits in the local context. From this perspective a knowledge and information infrastructure also involves other, more societal and interactive forms of knowledge, such big and open data, social media, and wisdom of the crowds. Being system responsible in this perspective means having attention for these new forms and sources of knowledge and using it in productive ways. *A successful policy advisory system requires insight in what is happening in the system, outside the direct scope of government, while at the same time not being directly involved in these processes.*

Defining an advisory system as ‘successful’ depends on the (public) value that is produced by the advisory system. In his seminal work on public value, Mark Moore (1995) defines public value as the sum of the appreciation of individuals for a certain social system or a government policy, both in long and in the short run. Countries have different perspectives on the value, the aim and the goals of the advisory system and thus have different interpretations of a successful advisory system. Some countries for example value the contribution of advisory systems in obtaining evidence based policy, that is in line with the perspective of old public administration in which accountability, transparency and uniformity are important values. Other countries value the consensus building capacity of advisory system, that is more in line with the perspective of the networked governance perspective that emphasises the value of networks and knowledge and information that goes beyond the borders of government. In improving the ‘strategic capacity of the state’ it is therefor important to consider from what perspective governments want to achieve their public value and what implication their perspective has on their attempts in creating a strategic state.

### **6.2.3 First ideas on the success factors of advisory systems**

In the research we will not identify a blue print for government to adopt, but we identify lessons and ideas for governments to learn from each other. Below, we elaborate on the initial success factors which can be derived from the existing knowledge and research, but again – in this phase of the research – these factors appear to be dilemmas.

1. Adaptability & continuity

Advisory bodies are important communicators of change. They signal new developments in their field, deliver different perspectives on them and reflect on the role of government towards them. It is important for governments to have advisory bodies that concentrate on long term issues: the 'cold' advice. This is important to ensure the continuity and the consistence of the research. While advisory bodies require stability to follow developments over a longer period of them, they also need to adapt and be responsive to innovations and upcoming issues. This requires the right conditions in the system and the commitment from these bodies to be flexible and learning organizations. On the one hand advisory systems thus need to adapt to new challenges and trend, but on the other hand they need stable elements to ensure the continuity of the system.

## 2. Reforming & stability

The stability of the advisory institutions within the system is also a key aspect of performance. In many countries the advisory institutions have a historical tradition which increases their ability to place developments in a wider tradition and analyze larger lasting changes. The survival of these institutions is also a requirement which is closely linked to their ability to be adaptive and responsive to the changing environment and to develop foresight. This does not mean that the institutional constellation of advisory systems should not be adjusted when new issues emerge or other expertise is requested, but it does mean that a system with too many reforms, implemented in haste and without proper consultation of the field, may lead to losses in the quality of knowledge produced by the system. The natural process of the 'battle for voice' that exists between the advisory bodies can be disrupted by a (re)structured advisory system.

## 3. Variety & overload

The performance of the advisory system also depends on the variety of organizations in the system. By having a variety of types of advisory bodies, in terms of their positioning between government and society, fields of expertise, organizational form and output, the government is informed from multiple angles and on multiple levels. Also, the advisory system requires a form of competition between knowledge institutions, to enrich the knowledge which is produced by the system and prevent the coagulation of knowledge. Although, if too many advisory bodies are concerned with certain policy issues, this can also complicate the decision making process of government. There can be overload of advice and it is difficult for government to compile one policy proposal out of the variety of advices. Advisory systems thus certainly need variety, whereas this leads to risks that a battle for voice only complicates the decision making process.

## 4. Interaction & action

Another key factor in the performance of advisory systems is the communication towards government, stakeholders and the broader public. However the direct communication towards the government is one important aspect, it is not necessarily the only end of the advisory line. Advisory organizations need to be embedded in a wider range of actors to make sure that ideas are shared and discussed between professionals and in the wider public debate. In that sense, they are more than organizations who deliver the facts; they are also advocates of their views and key issues. This also requires a government which actively and responsively listens and participates in these discussions, to make sure that advice can either directly or indirectly contribute to policy development. There is a growing importance to tap into new sources of knowledge sharing, like social media, where a more interactive form of knowledge sharing and production takes place. This asks for government to not

only request and receive advice, but also play an active role in the process at the end of the advisory line.

#### 5. Connected & autonomous

Advisory bodies need to be connected to government, but at the same time have to operate autonomously and deliver independent advice. Having a clear mandate and the right powers to operate independently in this field are therefore a prerequisite for the performance of advisory systems. A key factor is that these advisory bodies have a large status in their field and have the means to attract the right talents and perform distinguishing research. Governments can formulate terms of reference for the advisory bodies to make sure that they have an independent position and can deliver objective advice and information, but still produce advices that are connected and applicable for government.

#### 6. Quality time & time pressure

Requested advice is needed in a certain period of time. In some cases the advisory body can conduct an intensive research that covers several years, whereas in other instances government needs the advice in a short period of time. Advisory bodies work under time pressure and still need to deliver high quality reports. The performance of the advisory system is dependent of the extent to which the system is able to find a balance between giving time to advisory bodies for guaranteeing quality and dealing with time pressure in the political and administrative arena.

#### 7. Transparency & untraceable effects

The transparency in the policy making process is important in a democratic state. Transparency in the advice that influences the policy making process is therefore an important element. At the same time, the actual effect of the advices is in most cases difficult to measure. This is especially the case when more advisory bodies are involved and the advices have an invisible effect on the policy- and decision making process. Transparency is thus an important value, but is also difficult to practice.

## 7. Looking forward

Advisory systems are a crucial part of the strategic knowledge infrastructure of governments. By researching their institutional design, as a product of emergence and design, we draw lessons for the enhancement of the strategic capacity of the state. Also, it helps us to reflect on the future challenges for governments in relation to organizing their advisory systems. These systems are more than static entities. As a result of societal developments, advisory bodies and the system as a whole are continuously changing in their form and function. This raises important questions about future directions and challenges for advisory systems. These challenges connect to broader societal, cultural and technological developments which governments face and which connect to other topics which have the attention of the OECD. We will highlight three of these directions, as guidelines for further exploration in the research we propose.

### 1. More flexibility and innovation in the institutional design of the advisory system?

There exist many different forms of advisory bodies in different countries. There are classic forms, while there is also a growing variation of newer (more flexible) organizational forms. The development and existence of new variations of advisory bodies creates the opportunity to respond to ad hoc questions with flexible structures. This flexibility is, at the same time, complicated. At the expense of flexibility, more classical values in public service may be neglected, such as perseverance, security and trustworthiness. The tension between stability and continuity on the one hand, and innovation and flexibility on the other hand, requires attention in the light of these developments.

### 2. An increasing role for citizens?

The technological developments of social media and other communication tools increase the interaction between public actors and citizens in the public sector. This could also mean that the ‘wisdom of the crowd’ can become more important in the advisory field. Citizens’ assemblies are seen as a variation on the well-known advisory bodies in public administration. The involvement of citizens also leads to different forms and places of knowledge sharing. For example, by posting and sharing information through internet consultations and cooperation, a “living document” is being created, similar to the way a ‘wiki’ functions, to preserve and add to the knowledge acquired different actors. There is a growing importance of knowledge stemming from own experiences of citizens involved in the public sector. This challenges the traditional meaning of knowledge, because it might not be the exclusive terrain of experts anymore. What knowledge is, is no longer based on facts alone or on the more or less authoritative meaning given to knowledge by experts, but on the authoritative meaning given to facts by laymen. A characteristic of this new variation in the experimentation with commissions is that it is not made up by expert insiders, but rather by a (preferably large) group of outside ordinary citizens. In the currently accepted procedure of citizens’ assemblies like this one, these outsiders are first brought up to speed in their knowledge levels, concerning the theme at hand. They then discuss and advise by covering different angles from their rather unbiased points of view.

### 3. Inclusiveness and democratic values?

The advisory system can become a forum for different organizations and people to give advice to government. Depending on the impact and the role of the advisory bodies they have a significant impact on the policy- and decision making process. This also raises questions concerning the democratic values and about the inclusion of all groups in society. Unorganized groups without a strong lobby have a less influential role in these processes. At the same time the inclusion of new sorts

of data and data gathering processes such as wisdom of the crowd, data mining and online conversations, can give opportunities to a diverse group of people in society that normally would not reach the political domain. Not only is the inclusiveness important in a democratic sense, this is also in the interest of the policy advice. Wicked issues ask for more than distinguished and 'elite' insights that are gathered according to academic standards.

#### 4. New ways of reporting and responding?

Advice comes in many different forms. Some countries have terms of reference for the advisory bodies in which they also make notions about the time that the body has to give the advice, ranging from several years to several weeks or even days. The dimension of time and timing becomes more central. Especially in the case of wicked issues, situations and issues can come unexpectedly and government needs quick and external advice. In these cases advice may come in letters or short reports instead of solid and (time) intensive reports. In addition, governments do not only need think tanks, but also do-tanks that not advice on policy issues, but also thinks about the implementation and the steps after the advice.



## 8. Proposed research

### 8.1 Follow up research

Internationally, there is no established research tradition on advisory systems (Fleischer, 2012). The international literature mainly concentrates on the relationship between ‘policy advice’ and ‘government policy making’ and focuses on individual institutions. Most research on advisory systems concerns just a single case study in a specific policy domain in one individual country. Comparative case studies mostly concentrate on an arrangement in different political-administrative contexts and compare, for example, educational commissions in different countries. Up until now, there is very little comparative research on the *advisory systems* in different political administrative contexts. In 2003, Glynn et al (2003) conducted research on advisory bodies as an assignment for the European Commission.<sup>i</sup> This research specifically focused on *scientific* advising to government; it should be expected that the descriptions of the systems provided in that report have likely changed over the past 12 years.

In 2014, the NSOB conducted an exploratory international comparative research on advisory systems, as an assignment of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands. This research resulted in some interesting findings and lessons for the Dutch context. Furthering this research is interesting to gain a better understanding of the functioning of advisory systems in different contexts, to draw lessons for governments and get a better grasp on the interaction between the advisory system and the policy making process. It adds to the knowledge building of the NSOB in the field of public administration. The NSOB proposes to conduct a follow-up research both to deepen the current research findings and to research new (OECD) countries.

### 8.2 Aim of the research

Advisory bodies serve different functions in the policymaking process. The infrastructure of the advisory system is an important factor for the actual impact of these bodies on the policy making process. The infrastructure determines for example the role of the bodies and to what extent they can be influenced or steered by government. Insight into the advisory system makes the policy making process more transparent. In addition insight into the advisory system can help to formulate lessons to use the advisory systems in the strategic capacity of government and its leaders to deal with complex issues that they are confronted with.

The proposed follow-up research has five aims:

- The key goal of the research we propose is to examine advisory systems in the OECD countries and contribute to the development of the strategic capacities of governments and its leaders; to describe and analyse the key characteristics of the advisory bodies in different countries in their politico-administrative context and describe the dilemmas and dynamics for governments when steering the institutional design of advisory systems;
- To describe a number of institutional design options for (re-)organizing the advisory system, and to distinguish success factors for advisory systems;
- To identify lessons for governments to improve the advisory systems and to identifying a possible checklist for policy makers to use the advisory system as a strategic tool in the policymaking process;
- To reflect on the future of advisory systems in the light of technological and social developments.

The research will result in a research report or a working paper and in international academic articles.

### **8.3 Research questions**

The research aims to answer the following question:

- How can advisory bodies in the OECD countries be examined and how can they contribute to the strategic capacity of governments?

This research question leads to six sub-research questions:

- What are the key characteristics of the advisory systems in terms of its *configuration, regulation, positioning, composition and functioning (role)*?
- What are the dilemmas and dynamics for governments when steering the advisory system or the network of advisory bodies?
- What are the intuitional options for (re)organizing the advisory system?
- What success factors for the performance of the advisory system can be identified?
- What lessons for governments can be learned to create a possible checklist to use the advisory system as strategic tool for government and its leaders?
- How should we look at the future of advisory systems in the light of technological and social developments?

## 9. Conclusion

Governments and its leaders have to deal with increasingly complex, dynamic and interrelated policy challenges. Due to the pace of technological, environmental and cultural developments, policy makers are challenged to continuously find new solutions for complex issues. This requires much from the strategic capacity of the state. This entails that governments need to develop a strategic approach in which knowledge and capacities from a range of parties inside and outside government are mobilised.

Advisory bodies help governments to deal with the complexity of policy issues. However, there is still little understanding on what specific institutional design should be in place to offer the best functioning advisory system towards a performance-driven world class civil service. This institutional design is partly the product of their natural emergence through time (under the influence of factors like political-historical context and national traditions) and partly of design by the governments. Currently there are no agreed upon mechanisms to best organize the variety in the advisory system to improve the benefits to the policy making process. Moreover, there is little transparency on the way governments can steer and organize their advisory systems to increase the way it can be used for policy making.

Mapping the variety of advisory systems in OECD countries is important to better improve the knowledge and policy nexus, between the policy *advisory* system and the policy making system. By systematically mapping the characteristics of countries' advisory systems in terms of their configuration, regulation, positioning and composition, we can better understand how policy advice can inform policy making in the context of different countries. It makes it also possible to address the inherent tensions between different options in the institutional design of advisory systems, for example between positioning advice close to government or at a distance, or organizing mainly specialized advisory bodies or organisations that give advice on a wide range of topics. All of these choices represent a dilemma with possible positive and negative consequences, and insight in these dilemmas supports governments in considering their knowledge infrastructure. What is the new equilibrium of these tensions that could help both the policy advisory system and the policy –system move ahead amidst turbulent societal dynamics and increased uncertainty? Moreover, evidence about these characteristics and dilemmas, also helps to reflect on future challenges for governments to organise their system of policy advisory bodies in relation to broader developments. For example, what do new methods for knowledge-building, expertise, and advice mean for the traditional policy advisory system?

Therefore, the NSOB proposes a follow-up research for the OECD by conducting an in-depth research on features, dilemmas and dynamics in national advisory systems in OECD countries. This research is aimed at deepening the current understanding of the options in the institutional design of policy advisory systems and deliver governments practical insight to review their own advisory system. The research we propose looks at how policy advisory systems have emerged and are organized and structured, but also looks at how they can be discussed in the light of upcoming challenges, uncertainties and wicked issues. The key goal of the research is to contribute to the development of the strategic capacities of governments and its leaders by contributing to the performance of policy advisory systems.

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