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Svallfors, Stefan (2020). *Politics for Hire. The World and Work of Policy Professionals.* Edward Elgar Publishing. ISBN: 978 1 80037 518 5. 160 pp.

Zusammenfassung
Ellen Fobé vom Public-Governance-Institut der Katholischen Universität Leuven in Belgien diskutiert in dieser Rezension den Beitrag von Stefan Svallfors Buch mit dem Titel "Politics for Hire. The world and work of policy professionals". Die Rezensentin erklärt, wie es Svallfors gelingt, die faszinierende, aber oft unsichtbare Welt der politischen Berater*innen zu enträtseln. Svallfors identifiziert Merkmale, die diese Akteur*innen länderübergreifend miteinander verbinden. Er untersucht die beruflichen Aktivitäten dieser vielfältigen Gruppe und erforscht auch ihre persönlichen Bestrebungen und Ansichten über Politik und Demokratie. So bietet er seinen Leser*innen einen Einblick in die Blackbox der Politikprofis. Seine umfassende Analyse führt Svallfors zu dem Schluss, dass Politikberater*innen die repräsentative Demokratie sowohl untergraben als auch beleben. Seine Argumentation ist fundiert, weil sie auf einer wirklich vergleichenden Perspektive beruht. Das ist bisher nur wenigen Arbeiten auf diesem Gebiet gelungen.

Political advisers are omnipresent in pluralized advisory systems (Craft & Howlett, 2012). They are located in public organizations, in ministerial cabinets and in parliaments, as well as in political parties, think tanks, interest organizations or policy consultancy agencies. These political agents share the goals and values of their principals and operate from that shared perspective to provide advice on strategic, political or electoral matters. Because of the political nature of their advice they are different from other actors in the advisory system, such as academics or bureaucratic advisers. Traditionally, scholarly attention for political advisers has been directed to ministerial political advisers located in ministerial cabinets. Their presence and role have been scrutinized extensively in view of the close proximity and certified access to political power, and due to the fact that they do not neatly fit the typical Weberian politics-administration dichotomy (Shaw & Eichbaum, 2020). Similarly, corporate and interest group lobbyists operating in Brussels and Washington have attracted much scholarly attention. Researchers have gauged, in particular, the strategies that such political advisers adopt in pursuit of policy influence or their success at actually achieving impact (Beyers, 2004).

The presence, role and advisory activities of political advisers in ministerial cabinets, corporate lobby groups and beyond have raised some important questions for re-

dms – der moderne staat – Zeitschrift für Public Policy, Recht und Management, 14. Jg., Heft 2/2021, S. 505-507
https://doi.org/10.3224/dms.v14i2.09

searchers and policy practitioners, such as who is accountable for policy-decisions, who exerts political control over unelected advisers, how do these advisers impact on the position and activities of the public service, and ultimately to what extent do they strengthen or reduce the quality and legitimacy of democratic political systems. While several authors have attempted to provide an answer to these broad questions, much of the more detailed inner-world of political advisers remains unexplored. To be precise, we still know very little about who exactly political actors are, where they come from and where they go, what skills they bring to the table, and what drives them professionally or personally. Moreover, there is a lack of comparative accounts in the field, specifically studies that examine different types of advisers simultaneously. Empirical works mainly investigate one group of political advisers at a time, and few accounts have tried to identify and assess the traits that bind all of them together. With this in mind, Stefan Svallfors' 2020 book 'Politics for hire. The world and work of policy professionals' takes up a valuable place. Its aim is to converge on the many similarities between a diverse and growing group of political advisers, labelled by the author as a community of 'policy professionals'. Svallfors sets the stage in the first two chapters of the book for the main questions he wants to answer, namely how policy professionals put their particular skills and resources to use in policy-making, where their professional and ideological motivations lie, and why they pursue a career in such a specific societal niche. To provide an answer to these questions, the author draws from insights and information in Sweden mainly, and adds to that the insights from four other European jurisdictions. For this purpose, the author and the researchers who helped him compose this book have collected an impressive amount of qualitative data by speaking with more than 150 policy professionals. As a result, the book offers a deeper understanding of 'the world and work of policy professionals' indeed.

Svallfors builds his narrative in the book upon the intriguingly contradictory nature of policy professionals. Paradoxically, he shows, policy professionals are inherently process-generalists whose competencies are nonetheless only limitedly transferrable to other political spaces, or ideological and organizational contexts. He comparatively assesses and practically exemplifies this in three chapters of the book. As generalists, policy professionals are adept at gatekeeping and framing policy problems, at knowing the political system and the pathways to navigate complex processes, and at mobilizing relevant actors, as well as accessing and communicating relevant information. Yet despite such valuable professional resources, policy professionals are career-wise confined to very particular organizational contexts. Interestingly, the book provides evidence against the popular view that there is a 'revolving door' between the world of politics and the world of business consultancy. To most policy professionals it is simply of essence that their personal and professional interests or ideological values are somehow aligned. The ideological commitment of policy professionals to the causes of their principal(s) with whom they share values and interests is one crucial factor that binds all policy professionals in different organizational settings and across various countries. This element also distinguishes them from other advisers in the policy advisory system, such as traditional bureaucratic actors or scientific advisers. Svallfors goes on to illustrate this, thereby opening the black box of policy professionals further. One chapter of the book provides a detailed account of the personal experiences of policy professionals. It discusses their motivations to gain access to power or to remain as close as possible to it, their desire to influence politics, and their mixed or even skepti-

cal views on the bureaucracy and their political masters. In doing this, the author sheds light on a world that is rarely visible to outsiders. In fact, policy professionals themselves clearly also shun public visibility. On the positive side, this means that they simply take pride and satisfaction in serving their political or organizational principal and do not seek public attention. On the negative side, they avoid being held accountable for their actions. The latter is to be considered more problematic and it reveals another important paradox in the world of policy professionals: These actors wield political power because they influence or even decide upon policy-decisions while at the same time not being held or not wanting to be held responsible for those decisions by the public or the media. Based on these observations, Svallfors comes to the conclusion that policy professionals "both undermine and invigorate representative democracy" (2020, p. 7). Indeed, as a group of highly skilled, highly educated and highly resourceful policy professionals can certainly facilitate policy-making and strengthen the decision-making process. Yet that same process is negatively impacted because policy professionals compete with or even supplant substantive, technical and scientific knowledge and expertise. Because of their diversity and increasing numbers, policy professionals also add more complexity to a decision-making process that is already difficult to grasp for a substantive part of the population. With this ultimate paradox on the systemic benefits and drawbacks of policy professionals, discussed in the final chapter of the book, the author connects his in-depth sociological study with the grand questions in the field and he redresses some of the popular misconceptions about political advisers.

In sum, 'Politics for hire. The world and work of policy professionals' makes a welcome contribution to an underexplored subject of research. In his book, Stefan Svallfors applies a truly comparative lens to approach the subject and he uses a variety of resources to offer us a rich understanding of an invisible yet very intriguing world.

The eBook version is priced from £20/$26 from eBook vendors while in print the book can be ordered from the Edward Elgar Publishing website.

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