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Dissecting External Policy Advice Content: A Comparative Study of External Policy Advisors in the Case of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

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Dissecting External Policy Advice Content: A Comparative Study of External Policy Advisors in the Case of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

Master Thesis MSc Public Administration – Specialization Economics & Governance



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Abstract

This study investigates whether different external policy advisors provide different policy advice content to the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS) in 2023. By using a newly developed framework based upon Policy Advisory Systems (PAS) theory, which assesses advisory content along a descriptive-prescriptive dimension, this research explores the relationship between the externality of advisory actors and the degree of prescriptiveness of their advisory content. A directed content analysis was conducted on 218 outsourced advisory reports, followed by statistical analysis using ordinal regression. The results indicate that as advisory actors become more external, their advice tends to be more prescriptive. This suggests that external actors exert varying degrees of influence on the policy formulation process. This study contributes to the limited empirical research on advisory content by providing a nuanced understanding that different external advisors indeed provide distinct policy advice.

Keywords: Policy Advisory Systems (PAS), externalization, policy advice content, influence, policy formulation process

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
KNGF/NVFG	Royal Dutch Society for Physical Therapy/Geriatric Physical Therapy [Koninklijk Nederlands Genootschap voor Fysiotherapie/Nederlandse Vereniging voor Fysiotherapie in de Geriatrie]
Ministry of VWS	Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS) [Ministry of Volksgezondheid, Welzijn & Sport]
NZa	Dutch Healthcare Authority [Nederlandse Zorgautoriteit]
PAS	Policy Advisory Systems
RIVM	Dutch National Institute for Public Health and Environment [Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu]
SCP	Dutch Institute for Social Research [Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau]

1. Introduction

Scholarly attention to policy advice has grown in recent years (Van den Berg, 2017; Pattyn et al. 2022; Hussain, Tsang & Rafique, 2023). Policy advice occurs within a wide-ranging context encompassing various functions, including research, data-analysis, formulation of advice for decision-makers, and policy evaluations (Veselý, 2017; Hussain et al., 2023; Craft & Howlett, 2012). In essence, policy advice is about policy relevant information (Peters & Barker, 1993).

Traditionally, the study on policy advice has leaned towards normative and philosophical approaches with a micro-level perspective on the conceptualization of policy advice (Veselý, 2013). This micro-level perspective primarily focusses on individual interactions between public policy advisers and advise-takers (Veselý, 2017; Hussain et al., 2023). However, the approach on policy advice study changed to more analytical and empirical as research on policy advice has expanded. This resulted in a macro-level perspective of policy advice in recent decades (Veselý, 2017; Manwaring, 2018; Hussain et al., 2023)

Very pivotal in this development is the work of Halligan (1995). He conceptualizes policy advice in broader context as “Policy advisory systems (PAS)”. This concept refers to “an interlocking set of actors with a unique configuration in each jurisdiction, who provide information, knowledge, and recommendations for actions to policymakers” (Halligan, 1995; Craft & Howlett, 2012). It is argued and acknowledged by many authors that policy advising does takes place in this much broader context surpassing individual actor interactions, emphasizing unique configurations of a variety of advisory actors competing in a policy arena (Craft & Howlett, 2012; Hustedt & Veit, 2016; Veselý, 2017; Van den Berg, 2017; Hussain et al., 2023; Manwaring, 2018).

Policy advisory systems (from now on “PAS”) are perceived as a crucial concept to analyze how dynamics, structures, and behavior of actors in such systems influence policy processes and outcomes (Craft & Wilder, 2017; Craft & Howlett, 2012; Veit, 2023). Halligan (1995) identified two main factors to determine policy influence: the location of the actor and the degree of governmental control over the advice. The location refers to whether an actor is located internal or external to the government. The governmental control pertains to whether the government has a high or low influence over the actor (Craft & Howlett, 2012). The use of these dimensions of were central to PAS analysis for years (Hussain et al., 2023).

However, in the recent decade, scholarship on PAS has evolved to focus on a broader range of factors. Among these, advisory content and the context of PAS saw an increase in

attention (Craft & Wilder, 2017). This led to critique on the central dimensions proposed by Halligan. Leading this critique is the work of Craft & Howlett (2012), which argues that not location and control, but the content of policy advice itself is the key factor of policy influence. They argue that influence is a byproduct of advisory content, not from location or government control. Craft & Howlett provided a framework addressing policy advice on its content, which allowed refined structuring of advisory systems based on content of its suppliers. Despite this increased attention to advisory content, empirical research on the advisory content remains very limited (Hustedt, 2019; Craft & Howlett, 2013; Craft & Wilder, 2017). This gap in empirical research raises a crucial question about advisory content:

"To what extent do different external advisory actors provide varying types of policy advice content within a sectoral advisory system?"

Recent scholarship on contemporary PAS is predominantly focused on one main context trend: externalization of policy advice (Van den Berg, 2017; Craft & Howlett, 2013; Hussain et al., 2023; Hustedt & Veit, 2016). Generally, the trend of externalization implies an increase in the use of policy advice provided by actors outside the government (Craft & Halligan, 2013; Hustedt, 2019; Crowley et al. 2020; Veselý, 2013; Howlett & Migone, 2013; Van den Berg, 2017). This externalization is fueled by continuous expanding access in diverse policy supply from outside the government, which challenges internal actors. This increasing involvement of different external advisory actors results in a growing complexity of the advisory landscape (Hustedt, 2019; Veselý, 2013; Craft & Howlett, 2013; Hussain et al., 2023).

While the externalization trend is perceived as the most prominent process of PAS in contemporary times resulting in increasing prominence of external advisory actors, less is known of the behavior of the external actors itself (Van den Berg, 2017; Hustedt & Veit, 2016; Craft & Halligan, 2012; Craft & Howlett, 2013). In particular, the policy advice provided by these external actors within a PAS remain very under-explored (Hustedt, 2019; Pollitt, 2006; Howlett & Craft, 2013; Craft & Halligan, 2012). When addressed, the focus is often on a specific external type or referred to as ‘external actors’, lacking comparative and comprehensive empirical analysis of different external actors (Howlett & Migone, 2013; Fraussen, Halpin, 2017). This results in substantial research gaps in broader examination of advisory content supply by different external actors (Veit, 2023; Hustedt, 2019; Howlett & Newman, 2010; Hussain et al., 2023). In particular, the increasing

role of private consultants merits greater examination (Hustedt, 2019; Howlett & Migone, 2013).

To address these gaps, a new framework will be introduced that builds on the work of Craft & Howlett (2012). They structure advisory actors in four distinct typologies based on their content. However, the advisory landscape is becoming increasingly complex, driven by factors such as externalization. This complexity resulting in clear boundaries between actors and the distinctions in advisory content becoming increasingly blurred (Aubin & Brans, 2021; Crowley et al., 2020). In addition, recent research indicates that different actors produce various types of advisory work at the same time (Aubin & Brans, 2021; Veselý, 2017). Consequently, clear distinctions typologies of advisory content, as presented in Craft & Howlett's framework, becomes less suitable. Literature calls for a more nuanced and detailed analysis of advisory content (Craft & Howlett, 2013).

Therefore, a new dimension will be used to analyze advisory content which specifically focuses on the level of prescriptiveness of content. This approach focusses to how specific and directive advisory content, along a descriptive-prescriptive dimension to disentangle possible variation between external actors. Besides that, the use of this dimension can provide new insights in the potential influence of advisory content. Recent research has shown that clarity in recommendations is crucial for its uptake (Capano & Malandrino, 2022; Cairney & Oliver, 2017; Liu et al., 2010). Therefore, the level of prescriptiveness of advisory content indicates the potential influence of the advice. By using a scale to analyze the level of prescriptiveness in advisory content, this framework aims to provide a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the nature of advisory content provided by external actors within a PAS.

By studying external advisory content along this framework, several academic lacunae will be addressed in this study. To start, this research adds to the scarce empirical research on advisory content in general. Furthermore, it contributes to a comprehensive analysis of different external actors, aiming to provide a more nuanced insight to the advisory content these understudied actors supply (Howlett & Migone, 2013, Veit, 2023; Hustedt, 2019). More specifically, it investigates the relationship between location of the actor and the provided content. According to Howlett (2019), researching the relationship between location and content is one of the most prominent research gaps in PAS scholarly that needs to be addressed. This focus is essential for enhancing our understanding of "the role played by different policy actors and the kinds of advice provided to governments by different advisory systems in contemporary circumstances" (Howlett, 2019: 253). Additionally, most research of

PAS is predominantly focused on Anglophone countries. Consequently, much of the existent research is based on context from these countries. However, it is acknowledged that significant differences exist between PAS of countries and even within policy sectors (Hustedt & Veit, 2016; Howlett & Craft, 2012; Van den Berg, 2017; Hussain et al., 2023; Bakvis, 2000; Veselý, 2013). This highlights the need for studies in non-Anglophone contexts (Hustedt, 2019; Howlett & Craft, 2012; Hustedt & Veit, 2016). To address this gap, the Dutch sectoral public health PAS is the central case to this research.

Besides adding to academic lacunae, studying external policy advice is crucial from a democratic perspective. The Netherlands is characterized by extensive use of external private sector advice within the government, which has been increasing even more over the years (Van den Berg et al., 2015). However, despite this significant position, very little is known about the work of private sector advisors for the government and what their influence in the policy process is (Van den Berg et al., 2015; Bortz, 2023; Veit, 2023). These actors, such as consultants, are often even referred to as the ‘‘shadow government’’ or ‘‘invisible public service’’ (Bortz, 2023; Craft & Howlett, 2012). Given the increasing reliance on private sector advice, concerns are being raised about the growing influence of these actors on the policy process, as their recommendations shape policy outcomes (Bortz, 2023). These concerns result in increasing attention in Dutch politics (Van den Berg et al., 2017; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninklijksrelaties, 2024). Given these points, studying external policy advice supply, particularly from private sector entities, is of utmost importance. As influence is perceived as a byproduct of advisory content, researching external advisory content will provide insights in how these actors influence decision-making, thus in potential our daily lives. Therefore, this research adds to societal relevance.

As mentioned before, the Dutch sectoral public health PAS is central to this research in order to study external policy advice content. More specifically, this study examines advisory reports provided to the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS) in the year 2023. This case was selected for several reasons, including the public health sector's extensive use of external advice and the practical advantage of the Ministry of VWS publishing its outsourced reports annually in a clear and organized manner, providing accessible data (Howlett & Migone, 2013; Veselý, 2013). Further details on the case selection criteria are provided in the methodology section. The publication of outsourced reports in 2023 includes 249 reports which were all initially selected as cases. To be included in this study, the reports had to be publicly accessible, supplied by identifiable external actors, and unique. This resulted in the exclusion of 31 cases, as those were either duplicates or no longer

publicly accessible. Consequently, the final dataset consists of 218 outsourced reports.

The analysis was conducted by using a mixed-methods approach. Initially, a directed content analysis was conducted to categorize the advisory content of the reports based on four levels of prescriptiveness. This process resulted in assigning each case with values for both the prescriptiveness of the content and the level of externality of the provider, which is categorized into three levels. These results were then analyzed using descriptive statistics to compare the supplied advisory content of the three categories of external actors. This was followed by an ordinal regression analysis to make more robust claims about the results.

The remainder of this thesis consists of the following sections: first, I will elaborate further on relevant scholarly literature to build a theoretical framework. Following this, the methodology is outlined, where the research design is discussed. The subsequent section presents and analyzes the results derived from the directed content analysis and the statistical analysis. This thesis ends with a conclusion and discussion section. In these sections, the research question is answered, and the implications and limitations of this study will be discussed. Furthermore, possible avenues for further research are highlighted.

2. Theoretical framework

In this section, the scholarly domains of Policy Advisory Systems (PAS) and the externalization process are elaborated on further. Additionally, existing theorization of advisory content and their limitations are discussed. In response to these shortcomings, the concept of prescriptiveness in advisory content is introduced to analyze advice in a more nuanced analytical framework. The broad conceptualization of policy advice is central in this context. To provide context and make the introduced framework applicable to a Dutch sectoral PAS, the Dutch PAS is mapped by discussing existing literature. This section ends an empirical expectation for the research.

2.1 Policy Advisory Systems

Policy advice has always played a critical role in governance and decision-making, yet the policy advice practice has undergone significant changes over time. Traditionally, policy advising was characterized by a high degree of internal government advice, primarily concentrating on the official public service. They operated in an environment which could be perceived as relatively closed. (Crowley et al., 2020; Veselý, 2013; Hussain et al., 2023). However, contemporary policy advice is characterized as by a much more broad, open, and complex system encompassing various actors. It surpasses the traditional scope of individual public service advisors and a government as advise-taker (Craft & Howlett, 2012; Crowley et al., 2020; Hustedt & Veit, 2016; Veselý, 2017; Hussain et al., 2023). Various causes underlie the more complex advisory practice that Halligan addresses. Firstly, governments are confronted with an increasing wickedness of public issues, requiring a wider variety of information and recommendations for complex problem-solving. Secondly, a wider variety of sources also requires finding common ground on conflicting values, beliefs, and knowledge bases. Thirdly, there is an increasing demand of public involvement in the policy-making process and quality standards of policy advice. These causes paved the way for more diverse sources of advice, opening and complicating the policy advice environment (Halligan, 1995; Crowley et al., 2020).

As introduced earlier, Halligan (1995) conceptualized this complex advisory landscape as PAS, referring to “an interlocking set of actors with a unique configuration in each jurisdiction, who provide information, knowledge, and recommendations for actions to policymakers” (Halligan, 1995; Craft & Howlett, 2012). This formulation of the advisory landscape has been very pivotal in describing and analyzing the place of policy advice in the policy process. It highlights complex interactions between various actors, capturing a more

holistic view of sources and their role in the advisory system. This allows a more nuanced analysis of policy advice dynamics. (Craft & Howlett, 2012; Crowley et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2023; Hustedt & Veit, 2016).

Furthermore, Halligan presented a framework to analyze policy advice within a PAS along two dimensions to determine influence in the policy process. Firstly, a locational dimension, i.e. an advisory actor internal or external to government as a key dimension of influence on decision-making. Secondly, a control dimension focusing to what extent governments are able to control actors considering their location, whether internal or external to the government (Halligan, 1995; Craft & Howlett, 2012; Hussain et al., 2023). This foundational framework for analyzing policy advice within a PAS resulted in initial research centered along the locational and control dimensions with the government as core advisory actor (Hussain et al., 2023). In scholarly literature, this research phase on PAS is commonly referred to as the ‘‘first wave’’ of PAS analysis (Craft & Wilder, 2017; Crowley et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2023).

Craft & Wilder (2017) identify a ‘‘second wave’’ of PAS analysis, moving beyond the locational and control dichotomy and the public service as unit of analysis which is reflected in the first wave approaches. Boundaries between dichotomies have become blurred and the public service is perceived more as a collaborator in the policy advisory processes along a range of other interacting and competing actors due to the changing dynamics of policy advice practice. This contrasts the first wave analysis, where the internal public service is central in these processes (Craft & Wilder, 2017; Crowley et al., 2020). Furthermore, the second wave aims to explore country and domain-specific variations. Although these variations were acknowledged early on, theoretical application to PAS has not been extensively addressed in academic literature. Moreover, content and context are emphasized as important dimensions that shape policy advice (Craft & Wilder, 2017; Hussain et al., 2023). The trend of externalization represents such key contextual factor that significantly influences the dynamics of PAS. It can be perceived as the most prominent visible process in the contemporary advisory period (Vesely, 2013; Craft & Howlett, 2013; Hustedt & Veit, 2016; Manwaring, 2019; Crowley et al., 2020). This process, together with the advisory content dimension, merit particular attention due to their critical influence on the nature and dynamics of contemporary policy advice.

2.2 Externalization

As previously mentioned, the trend of externalization refers generally to an increase in the use of policy advice provided by external actors shift from policy advice supply from internal to external actors to the government (Craft & Howlett, 2013; Hustedt, 2019; Crowley et al. 2020; Veselý, 2013; Howlett & Migone, 2013; Van den Berg, 2017). Considering external actors, one can think of think tanks, NGO's, academic experts, advocacy groups, ad hoc committees, and consultancy firms (Craft & Howlett, 2013; Veselý, 2013; Howlett & Migone, 2013). Despite the widespread consensus among scholars on the existence of externalization, there is divergence in the explanations of the underlying causes as well as the conceptualization of the externalization process itself. To better understand this divergence, it is essential to discuss various causes suggested in academic literature. Some authors, such as Crowley et al. (2020), emphasize the increasing wickedness of policy issues in contemporary times as a factor to externalization (Craft & Howlett, 2013; Veselý, 2013; Van den Berg, 2017; Manwaring, 2019). Those wicked policy issues are prone to quick, simple, or politicized problem-solving. Therefore, demanding much innovative, technical, and multi-perspective advice going beyond the internal government advisory capacity (Crowley et al., 2020). Other authors point at economic reasons for enhanced external involvement in policy advice. In times of economic downturn, it can be more cost-effective for governments to use temporary external advice rather than maintaining structural internal advisors (Bakvis, 2000; Veselý, 2013). Additionally, ideological factors have been identified as drivers of externalization. The rise of neoliberalism and New Public Management are named, resulting in downsizing of the internal government and increasing popularity in outsourcing policy advice (Craft & Howlett, 2013; Howlett & Migone, 2013; Crowley et al., 2020; Veselý, 2013; Van den Berg, 2017). The different described drivers of externalization can be considered as not mutually exclusive (Veselý, 2013). Generally, the externalization process is perceived to begin to emerge in the late 20th century (Van den Berg, 2017).

Following the analysis of the causes, different conceptualizations of the externalization process are presented. In certain instances, externalization is conceptualized as de displacement of internal advisory capacity with external capacity (Peters, 1996; Veselý, 2013). This can be conceived as a narrow definition, as it implies a substitution of internal capacity with those from external actors (Veselý, 2013). Other authors refer to the increase in the use of external advice, defining externalization more broadly by also including supplementation of the public service with more external actors instead of displacement. Therefore, this definition understood externalization as the increase in the use of advice from

actors outside the public service (Craft & Howlett, 2013; Hustedt, 2019; Crowley et al. 2020; Vesely, 2013; Howlett & Migone, 2013; Van den Berg, 2017). Van den Berg et al. (2015) presents a visual framework of externalization across different levels of public employment to grasp the process. This framework reflects a nuanced perspective as it takes into account varying degrees of externalization. It is illustrated by a concentric model (*see fig. 1*) with six circles where the public service at the core reflecting the internal advisory capacity. The graduation of circles represents different types of advisory actor, reflecting an increasing level of externality as one moves outward. The framework is based on the measurement of the level of externality of an actor, which is defined as relative distance to the policy formulation process (Van den Berg et al., 2015).

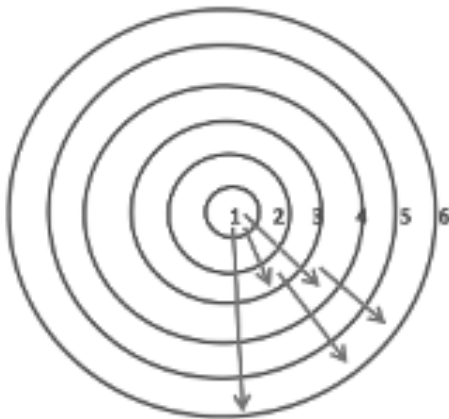


Fig 1. Visualization of the externalization process across different levels (Van den Berg, 2017)
Source: developed from Van den Berg et al. (2015)

Despite different definitions of the externalization, the trend underscores an increasing involvement of external actors in the policy advisory landscape. This reflects a shift to a more horizontal advice landscape, as the traditional vertical model which favored the public service over external actors, has been replaced by a more pluralized one. Therefore, the externalization process effectively challenged the monopoly of traditionally internal advisors and changed the nature of the advisory landscape (Craft & Howlett, 2013; Crowley et al, 2020; Manwaring, 2019; Van den Berg, 2017).

While the externalization trend can be perceived as the most prominent process in contemporary times, it is important to recognize that a substantial part of the empirical research supporting this view is centered around Anglophone countries (Van den Berg, 2017; Hussain et al., 2023; Hustedt & Veit, 2016). This may result in an Anglophone bias as contexts from these countries may not be applicable on non-Anglophone countries (Hustedt,

2019). However, there has always been a considerable empirical variation within different PAS. Therefore, changes such as externalization, emerge in different levels (Hustedt, 2019; Veselý, 2013). Although the degree externalization can differ between countries and sectors, there is broad agreement that contemporary PAS has become increasingly pluralistic and polycentric in nature due to the shift to greater externalization resulting in a complex advisory landscape (Craft & Howlett, 2013; Hustedt, 2019; Veselý, 2013; Van den Berg, 2017; Manwaring, 2019; Crowley et al, 2020).

2.3 Advisory content

Before diving into this dimension, it is essential to clarify what is meant by the term ‘policy advice’. Authors conceptualize policy advice differently, yet it still lacks a general accepted definition in research (Connaughton, 2015; Veselý, 2017; Brans et al., 2022). According to Halligan (1995) is policy advice about the activity of analyzing problems and proposing corresponding solutions. However, policy advice does not always have to include a recommendation, nor a problem. Therefore, Halligan’s conceptualization can be seen as a traditional and stricter conceptualization, as it emphasizes providing recommendations in advice (Aubin & Brans, 2021; Brans et al., 2022). Recent research indicates that solely focusing on formally labeled policy advice that include recommendations misses a considerable range of advisory work (Veit, 2023; Brans et al., 2022; Veselý, 2017). Therefore, various authors propose a broader conceptualization of policy advice. This definition includes all kinds of policy work activities such as research, evaluation, and implementation rather than focusing on advisory work that aims at recommendations for problem-solving (Brans et al., 2022; Howlett & Newman, 2010; Veselý, 2017; Crowley et al., 2020; Craft & Wilder, 2017). These differences in definitions highlight the conceptual ambiguity of policy advice, suggesting the policy advice activity has no clear boundary (Veselý, 2017). Despite the difference in scope, both conceptualizations concern provision of policy-relevant information for decision-makers (Peters & Barker, 1993; Brans et al., 2022). The content relates to the substance of the advice. To overcome the problem of overstressing policy advice that includes specific recommendations, the broad definition of policy advice is central to this research to provide a more holistic view.

Craft & Howlett (2012) introduced a pivotal framework in the analysis of the content dimension of PAS, explicitly addressing advisory content from different actors in a specified way within the advisory system. An important caveat made by Craft & Halligan (2012) is that Halligan’s original model only implicitly refers to content of policy advice related to advisory

actors. As discussed, exposure to government control can influence the advice given by an actor according to Halligan (1995). Therefore, Halligan (1995) only refers implicitly to advice content and discusses its relationship to locational considerations which is criticized by Craft & Howlett (2012). Scholarly literature has been largely silent on the topic of advisory content until their work. When addressed, policy advice content was often typified into a dichotomy: on one hand, value-based and contrasted ‘political’ advice, versus objective ‘technical’ advice on the other hand. This dichotomy did often underpin location models of PAS, assuming that internal actors offered technical advice, and external actors offered non-technical advice (Craft & Howlett, 2012; Radin, 2000; Craft & Howlett, 2013). This assumption has dominated the policy advisory research for decades (Radin, 2000). However, this perception has changed in recent decades. Shifts are notable in advisory activities related to advisory actors, both internal and external. External policy advisory actors have shown their ability to produce technical advice, competing the internal governments capacity. Furthermore, internal as well as external actors contribute to political advice for decision-makers nowadays. In addition, traditional internal actors have always provided political advice, but this was often neglected in earlier scholarly. Thus, a juxtaposition of location and content of an actor is no longer justified (Craft & Howlett, 2012). Because of this change in perception, Craft & Howlett (2012) advocate to move beyond the implicit policy content dichotomy. Their proposed framework addresses policy content explicitly by organizing advisory actors by different content typologies. They argue that policy influence is a byproduct of advisory content. Thereby, they suggest that the type of advice can significantly shape the eventual policy outcome. Their framework synthesizes two content dimensions from earlier scholarly literature, resulting in four categories. Firstly, the ‘cold vs hot advice’ dimension from Prasser (2006). This approach differentiates between rational long term/anticipatory (cold) and political short-term/reactive (hot) advice, each with corresponding characteristics. Secondly, the ‘substantive vs procedural’ dimension is introduced. Substantive advice focuses on the concrete content of policy. On the other hand, procedural advice focuses on processes supporting policy development. Therefore, the substantive dimension is about the ‘what’ and the procedural dimension about the ‘how’ of policy (Connaughton, 2010; Eichbaum & Shaw, 2008; Craft & Howlett, 2012; Connaughton, 2015).

While Craft & Howlett’s framework introduces a more nuanced and holistic perspective on analyzing advisory content, several limitations remain. For instance, the cold vs hot dimension shows some overlap with the traditional technical-political dichotomy. It

does move beyond the advisory content typically bound to location in an implicit manner (i.e. technical-internal/political-external). Yet, it does not entirely break free from the technical-political dichotomy due to the overlap. Additionally, the framework does not address grey areas of policy advice, as it includes distinct content categories. Both limitations become more prevalent as boundaries become increasingly blurred in contemporary PAS due to increasing complexity (Aubin & Brans, 2021; Crowley et al., 2020). Lastly, Craft & Howlett's model (2012) uses the narrow definition of policy advice, which excludes advisory work that does not include a recommendation or course of action. This can result in overlooking broader forms of policy advice (Veit, 2023). Taken the limitations together, the scope of their framework may not fully catch the diverse and complex nature of contemporary policy advising.

Building upon Craft & Howlett's framework, it is evident that other content dimensions are necessary to capture the full scope of advisory content. As the typologies of Craft & Halligan's framework primarily focus on policy recommendations, a more comprehensive dimension for analysis is necessary to analyze advisory work without recommendations. The descriptive-prescriptive dimensions from the policy analysis study offers this further nuance. Policy analysis is a way of processing information and knowledge to inform and support decision-makers (Howlett, 2015; Dobuzinskis et al., 2007). It encompasses a broad range of practices, such as analysis of data and problems, research, policy formulation, monitoring, evaluation, as well as more practical knowledge to support decision-making (Dobuzinskis et al., 2007; Howlett, 2015; Perl & White, 2002; Aubin & Brans, 2021). Policy analysis and policy advice overlap significantly because both concepts share a common attempt to influence the policy formulation process, whether explicitly or implicitly (Aubin & Brans, 2021). Furthermore, policy analysis holds a significant position in the advisory field, as contemporary governments are increasingly reliant on robust knowledge for complex problem-solving (Crowley et al., 2020). This results in policy analysis inherently being part of policy advice in varying degrees (Aubin & Brans, 2021).

The concept of policy analysis generally encompasses two dimensions: descriptive and prescriptive (Schober, 2017; Kunreuther & Schoemaker, 1981). Descriptive analysis focusses on describing and explaining trends, phenomena, and context without making any recommendations. In contrast, prescriptive analysis results in policy recommendations or a course of action (Schober, 2017; Knoepfel et al., 2011; Kunreuther & Schoemaker, 1981). Distinct terminology used by authors sometimes introduces a third normative dimension. This contains making recommendations or judgements from the analysis based on a desired state or

values. It answers ‘‘what should be’’ of policy (Robert & Zeckhauser, 2011; Schober, 2017; Enserink et al., 2022). Other authors group normative and prescriptive dimensions together, arguing that all recommendations inherently contain certain levels of value judgement for policy (Robert & Zeckhauser, 2011; Mayer, van Daalen & Bots, 2004). Given the focus of this research on advisory content, the distinction between the descriptive and prescriptive dimension is relevant as it captures both advisory work with and without recommendations. In addition, analyzing a prescriptive character of advisory work is crucial to understand its potential influence on decision-making. Various recent policy studies state that clarity in recommendations, particularly targeted recommendations, is a key factor in the uptake of knowledge for policymaking (Capano & Malandrino, 2022; Cairney & Oliver, 2017; Liu et al., 2010). As decision-makers are subject to bounded rationality, they are more likely to employ shortcuts. This translates into a tendency to adopt clear recommendations and solutions to policy problems (Cairney & Oliver, 2017). As influence can be seen as a byproduct of advisory content, prescriptive policy work has in potential more direct influence on the policy formulation process compared to descriptive analysis (Craft & Halligan, 2012; Robert & Zeckhauser, 2011). Taken all together, we can assume that the inclusion of recommendations will prompt much more action compared to descriptive advisory work. This makes prescriptive work potentially much more influential on policy outcomes. Analyzing advisory work along a descriptive-prescriptive dimension provides a more comprehensive view of advisory work and can enhance our understanding whether different external actors provide different advisory content. Ultimately, influencing the policy formulation process differently.

2.4 Positioning the Dutch contemporary PAS

As mentioned earlier, the second wave analysis of PAS called for greater consideration of contextual factors in which systems operate (Craft & Wilder, 2017). Earlier literature hypothesized the influence of contextual factors but often failed to incorporate these considerations into theorization (Craft & Wilder, 2017; Halligan, 1995). However, some recent studies in the second wave analysis have begun to address this oversight, with several authors providing detailed analysis of the Dutch PAS context. Although research on Dutch PAS remains limited, it is relevant to elaborate on the characteristics of it since a Dutch sectoral PAS is the central case in this research.

To start, the Dutch PAS can be characterized as neo-corporatist and consensus driven in nature. Therefore, the nature differs significantly from the Anglophone countries (Van den

Berg, 2017; Hustedt & Veit, 2016). Because of this nature, the system is recognized for its unique institutionalized actors outside the public service. In terms of the inside-outside dichotomy, these actors are situated between those terms, reflecting its unique position. These actors support the government with information, legitimation, rationalization and/or implementation capacity and often have a privileged access to the policy process. While they operate independently from the government in these activities, they maintain certain institutionalized links (Lehmbruch & Schmitter, 1977; Van den Berg, 2017). Besides this, Van den Berg (2017) shows in his work aimed at analyzing the shaping factors of the Dutch PAS that the externalization process developed rather different in the Netherlands compared to Anglophone countries. Because of the neo-corporatist and consensus driven character, the Dutch PAS was already familiar with policy advisory actors outside public service even before World War II. Post-war, a further increase in these actors was noticeable. This familiarity resulted in a different degree of the externalization within the Dutch PAS. The fiscal crisis in the late 1970s followed by the embracing of the New Public Management (NPM) movement in the late 1980s, led to externalization from the public service outwards (*see fig. 1: circle 1 to outwards*) but also from the neo-corporatist actors outwards (*see fig. 1: circle 3/4 further outwards*). Van den Berg (2017) emphasized the position of ad hoc advisory committees and external consultants in this process as those actors increasingly displaced both public service and neo-corporatist advisory actors. The latter warrant extra attention. As discussed in the introduction, these actors enjoy an increasingly significant position within the public policy advice sphere. Generally, private consultants are known for their specialized and precise advice and recommendations (Stone et al., 2021). In line with this, Van den Berg (2017) found that the primary activity of consultants within the Dutch PAS is providing policy recommendations.

In addition, Van den Berg found that the NPM-movement embraced five to ten years later in the Netherlands compared to Anglophone countries. These findings highlight the importance of country-specific context as the Dutch PAS differs in timing and degree compared to Anglophone countries. Given this context, the Dutch PAS can be more effectively captured by considering at least three distinct poles of actors, reflecting its neo-corporatist consensus driven character (Van den Berg, 2017).

Despite these differences, the externalization process did take place in the Dutch context. This reflects the Dutch PAS's relatively extensive engagement in external policy advice and further fragmentation in contemporary advisory times (Van den Berg, 2017).

2.4 Empirical expectation

Thus far, we have discussed the concept *Policy Advisory Systems*, which can be used to analyze provided policy advice in a configuration of actors. PAS-frameworks highlight how different actors behave in a system and influence the policy process. The second wave of PAS analysis underscored an increased focus on advisory content, with influence in the policy process perceived as a byproduct of advisory content (Craft & Howlett, 2012). Furthermore, an increase was noticeable in external advisory actors whose content was often unknown and unaddressed.

Craft & Howlett (2012) were pivotal in the study of advisory content, being among the first to address advisory content explicitly. They developed a framework to assess whether advice from different actors was substance or process-driven, and whether it was short-term or long-term oriented. They found that different advisory actors provide different advisory content and therefore take in a different role within a PAS structure. This provided a more nuanced view of advisory content compared to earlier literature. Despite their significant contribution to PAS scholarship, several shortcomings are evident. Their framework does not entirely break free from the technical-political content dichotomy, does not address grey areas between content typologies, and uses a narrow definition of policy advice which excludes other forms of advisory work. Therefore, I introduce a new framework along a descriptive-prescriptive dimension. This approach allows for an even more holistic analysis of advisory content, as it is more inclusive to advisory work compared to earlier models. In addition, it can be used to analyze which external actors prompt more action from decision-makers compared to other external actors and ultimately, influencing the policy formulation process differently through advisory content.

Despite the descriptive-prescriptive dimension has not been used to analyze advisory content previously, as least to my knowledge, an empirical expectation can be derived from academic literature. Various studies found that actors close to the decision-maker engage in various activities related to the policy process, rather than solely producing recommendations for problem-solving (Aubin & Brans, 2021; Prasser, 2006; Maley, 2015; Veselý, 2017). Contrary, Van den Berg (2017) found that the main task of Dutch external consultants, which can be perceived as the outermost external actor of public employment, is to supply policy recommendations. Given these findings, the following empirical expectation can be derived:

“Advisory content becomes more prescriptive as the advisory actor becomes more external”

3. Methodology

To study externalized policy advice content, a directed content analysis is conducted of 252 outsourced reports by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. The reports are categorized based on their content along the descriptive-prescriptive dimension. These results are analyzed through statistical research. In this chapter, the dependent and independent variable will be operationalized. Furthermore, the methods of data selection and analysis will be discussed. In these sections, there will also be reflected on the validity and reliability of the research design.

3.1 Operationalization

3.1.1 Dependent variable

The dependent variable for advisory content in this study is ‘the level of prescriptiveness’. To operationalize advisory content, the descriptive-prescriptive dimension was introduced in the theoretical framework to describe advisory content. As discussed earlier, this approach allows for a more holistic analysis of advisory content as it enables the analysis of advisory reports that do not include recommendations or a course of action but are still policy-relevant to the government. Therefore, this approach facilitates a broader analysis of policy advice provided by external advisory actors. Furthermore, this dimension allows for the identification of which external actors prompt more governmental action through the level of prescriptiveness of their advice, ultimately making prescriptive advisory work potentially more influential on decision-making. Critiques on dichotomies within PAS literature has highlighted a significant issue: boundaries between distinct categories are increasingly blurred in contemporary PAS (Aubin & Brans, 2021; Crowley et al., 2020). To address this shortcoming and avoid using strict dichotomies, a pilot study was conducted to create and refine a nuanced scale for the level of prescriptiveness of advisory content. As this framework is new, it required refinement to ensure suitability for the cases at hand via a pilot. This pilot study resulted in the following four-level scale of prescriptiveness:

1. Purely descriptive: The report does not include any form of recommendation
2. Moderately descriptive: The report recommends further research or hints at actions/improvements
3. Moderately prescriptive: The report includes broad recommendations or several options but leaves flexibility to the decision-maker
4. Highly prescriptive: The report includes detailed, targeted recommendations outlining explicit actions

3.1.2 Independent Variable

The primary independent variable in this study is ‘the level of externality’. As addressed before, externalization can be conceptualized differently and can occur at different levels (Brans et al., 2022; Van den Berg, 2017). The externalization process can encompass a shift from actors internal to external to government or alternatively, it can involve an increase in different actors outside the public service. This study defines externalization as the latter. Therefore, an actor will be characterized as external if it is located outside the public service. Despite critique on pure locational models of PAS, a locational dimension remains useful to structure different types of advisory actors (Craft & Howlett, 2012).

The work of Van den Berg (2017) showed that the Dutch PAS is notably fragmented. This demonstrates a limited applicability of an internal-external dichotomy. He introduced a framework that describes externality across different levels, providing a more nuanced view of externality. Given the Dutch PAS context, this framework fits this well, recognizing different levels of externality. Therefore, the initial framework of Van den Berg et al. (2015), which was constructed along five employment layers within the Dutch public sector, is used to categorize external advisory actors¹. The determination of externality in this framework based on the relative distance to the policy formulation process Van den Berg et al. (2015).

However, for this study, the five layers were adjusted to focus only on external actors, excluding the public service. This resulted in four initial layers. During the pilot, it became clear that it was empirically challenging to define clear boundaries between non-profit public-private domain actors and private law actors with public tasks, as both are funded by public means to a certain extent.

¹ The framework from Van den Berg (2017) addressed in the theoretical framework, is an adjusted version with an additional layer of the initial framework in Van den Berg et al. (2015). As the latter is constructed along the Dutch public employment, this framework is used in this study.

Consequently, the framework was further refined to three layers by merging these two categories. This resulted in the following scale to grasp level of externality in this study:

1. Advising and executive actors who operate independently under public law: this includes actors such as governmental agencies and public law autonomous administrative authorities²
2. Public-Private domain actors under public law and private actors without profit motive, both (partly) funded by public means: This includes non-profit private law organizations, such as government foundations, universities and other educational organizations and healthcare institutions as well as private law actors without profit motive who carry out tasks for the government or are nonetheless (partly) funded by public means, such as knowledge institutes.
3. Private law actors with profit motive who carry out tasks for the government on contract-base: this includes actors such as consultancy firms and similar entities.

3.1.3 Control variables

To optimize the robustness of this study, two different control variables are used prior to the analysis. Using these control variables ensures that differences in the outcomes can be more accurately attributed to variations in the externality of the advisory actor rather other factors.

The first control variable in this study is ‘nature of policy advice’. Policy advice can encompass various forms such as reports, research, consultation with stakeholders, and recorded telephone conversations. However, research has shown that it matters whether the exchange of advice is formal or informal (Brans et al., 2022; Aubin & Brans, 2021). In this study, the nature of policy advice is held constant, as only formal advisory reports are used that are publicly accessible in the analysis.

The second control variable in this study is ‘policy relevance’. As discussed earlier, the broader conceptualization of policy advice includes all kinds of advisory work activities, including those that do not necessarily provide recommendations or problem-solving. However, it is crucial that these advisory works involve the provision of policy-relevant information for decision-makers (Peters & Barker, 1993; Brans et al., 2022). In this study, the policy relevance is held constant, as the selected documents are characterized as policy relevant by the Ministry of VWS (*see Appendix A*).

² Translation of Dutch ZBO (‘Zelfstandig Bestuurs Orgaan’)

3.2 Case selection

To study external advisory content, the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS) was selected. This study focuses on the supply of external policy advice to the Ministry of VWS in the year 2023. A total of 249 outsourced reports were initially identified as cases. Each report represents a distinct case of policy advice provided by external actors outside the ministry. The selection of these cases from the Ministry of VWS is grounded in four key considerations.

Firstly, the Ministry of VWS operates in the Netherlands, which is a non-Anglophone country. This selection addresses the gap in academic literature, which predominantly focus on Anglophone countries. Therefore, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of policy advice in a non-Anglophone context.

Secondly, the public health sector is generally known for a long tradition of policy advising for sound policymaking (Perl & White, 2002; Van den Berg, 2017, Crowley et al., 2022). This tradition intensified since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministerie van Financiën, 2021). This highlights the sector's reliance on advisory input further.

Thirdly, a wide range of external advisory actors are active in the public health sector (Verschuuren et al., 2020; Ministry VWS, 2023) This diversity is essential to analyze and capture potential differences in advisory content between various types of external actors.

Lastly, these cases are selected from a practical perspective. Accessibility of outsourced advisory reports to external actors often scarce (Howlett & Migone, 2013; Veselý, 2013). The publication of outsourced reports by the Dutch Ministry of VWS in a clear and organized manner is unique among Dutch ministries as far of my knowledge.

3.3 Method of data selection

To systematically analyze external advisory content, a structured method of data selection was employed. The data selection process focused on ensuring that the reports included were extracted from a suitable year and were externalized and publicly accessible.

This study focused on outsourced reports from the year 2023. This year was selected because it represents the most recent publication of reports available at the time of data extraction. Each year, since 2019, the Ministry of VWS publishes all outsourced reports of that year in an official accessible document. The selection of the 2023 edition aligns with the intensified reliance on advisory input since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The publication can be extracted from the official online archive of the Dutch central government. A summary of this publication can be found in *Appendix A*.

To be included in this study, the reports had to meet three main criteria. Firstly, the reports must have been outsourced. As the Ministry of VWS states in the official document that the reports were outsourced, this study assumes that all reports are indeed outsourced. Secondly, the reports needed to be publicly accessible. Thirdly, the report had to be authored by an identifiable actor to determine its level of externality. These criteria ensure transparency of the data.

During the data selection process, 31 cases were eventually excluded. These exclusions were necessary because the reports were either duplicates or no longer available. Removing these reports enhances the data quality and accuracy, ensuring that the analysis was based on unique and accessible cases. This enhances the transparency of the data and prevents overestimation of certain cases. The final dataset used in the analysis ultimately consisted of 218 outsourced reports.

3.4 Methods of data analysis

The analysis of external advisory content was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Both methods are described below.

3.4.1 Directed content analysis

To analyze the content of the advisory reports, a qualitative content analysis is conducted. This method is generally known for three different approaches for execution (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Considering that this research contains a predefined research question, hypothesis, and concepts, it is deductive in nature. Therefore, a directed content analysis is the most suitable approach given the deductive character. This type of analysis is well-suited for structured large text analysis, allowing for categorization of content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Recognizing the use of the new descriptive-prescriptive dimension in this study, an inductive element was incorporated through a pilot study. This pilot resulted in refinement and more nuanced categories of the scales of the dependent as well as the independent variable. Testing of categories, in this case through a pilot study, is an essential step in creating an applicable coding scheme to the data (Elo & Kyngäs; Kibiswa, 2019). Furthermore, the pilot was essential for the creation of the coding scheme for the dependent variable. The final coding scheme can be found in *Appendix B*. The coding was done with the use of Atlas.ti software, a qualitative data analysis tool to systematically analyze large text data.

The directed content analysis led to the categorization of reports along the scales

constructed for the dependent and the independent variables (*see 3.1*). The level of prescriptiveness was categorized on a scale from 1 (purely descriptive) to 4 (highly descriptive). Emphasis was placed on analyzing the summaries, introductions, conclusions, and recommendations sections of these reports as the recommendations are typically present in these sections. The entire report was analyzed in cases where clear sections were absent. If multiple levels of prescriptiveness were present in a single report, the highest level observed was used to categorize the report. The level of externality was operationalized into three levels based on the proximity to the policy formulation process. This categorization was done with information gathered from the official websites of the actors to determine their level of externality along predefined definitions. This final categorization can be found in *Appendix C*, including the websites used.

3.4.2 Statistical analysis

The categorization values determined through the directed content analysis were recorded in an Excel sheet, assigning each case both prescriptiveness level and an externality level. This process effectively quantified qualitative data. The categorized data were analyzed using SPSS software, suitable for statistical research. Descriptive statistics were initially employed to provide an overview of the distribution of advisory content across the three groups of actors. This was followed by the utilization of an ordinal regression analysis. Given the ordered categorical nature of the data, this regression suits the dataset the best (Field, 2013). Statistical tests can effectively follow on directed content analysis to make more robust claims about the relationship being researched (Greer & Kirk, 2022).

3.5 Reliability and validity

As stated earlier, the use of the pilot study is crucial to this research design. The pilot allowed for partly constructing and refinement of the coding scheme. This approach ensured that the categories for the level of prescriptiveness and level of externality are well-defined and have extensive examples (*see Appendix B*). As this results in consistency, it promotes the reliability of this study (White & Marsh, 2006; Kibiswa, 2019). To further enhance the reliability, the analysis process is described extensively in this section. The pilot also ensured that the coding scheme accurately measures what it is intended to measure related to the theory. This adds to internal validity of a content analysis (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The issues of the external validity of this study are discussed in the discussion.

4. Results & Analysis

In this chapter, the quantitative data derived from the directed content analysis of policy reports is presented and analyzed. Initially, general descriptive statistics are presented to provide an overview of the dependent and independent variable. Following this, descriptive statistics are provided to detail advisory content, measured in the level of prescriptiveness, per category of external actors to analyze different actors more in dept. After this, results from the ordinal regression are presented. First, assessment takes place to determine whether the three assumptions for ordinal regression are met. Following this assessment, the regression results along with significance tests are analyzed. Finally, the main hypothesis is accepted or rejected based on the statistical tests.

4.1 Overview general descriptive statistics

As stated earlier, this study contains a total of $n = 218$ advisory reports. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics about the distribution of the different levels of prescriptiveness of the whole dataset. The purely descriptive category represents 63 reports, accounting for 28.9% of the total. In the moderately descriptive category, 39 reports are included, representing 17.9% of the total. The smallest proportion of cases falls under this category in relation to the others. The largest proportion of reports contains moderate prescriptive advice, consisting of 67 reports which represents 30.7% of the total. Lastly, the highly prescriptive category accounts 47 reports, accounting for 22.5% of the total. The distribution across categories is relatively balanced as there are no great outliers in frequencies.

Table 1. *Frequencies level of prescriptiveness*

	N	%
Purely descriptive	63	28.9%
Moderate descriptive	39	17.9%
Moderate prescriptive	67	30.7%
Highly prescriptive	49	22.5%
Total	218	100%

In addition to the descriptive statistics of the level of prescriptiveness, the distribution of different external actor groups is presented in Table 2 below. There are 63 reports included in Level 1, representing independently operating advising and executive actors under public law,

which makes up 28.8% of the total. Level 2 external actors, representing public-private domain actors and non-profit private law actors (partly) funded by public means, are responsible for 110 reports. This frequency makes it the largest category of external actors. With 50.5% of the total, it includes slightly more than half of the total number of reports. Lastly, Level 3 external actors, consisting of private law actors with profit motives, accounts for 45 reports. This makes up 20.6% of the total. These actors are the least represented in the dataset, though their presence does not differ substantially from Level 1, which is the second most. Mainly, the presence of Level 2 external actors differs greatly from the other two categories. This reflects a substantial dominance of these actors in the dataset.

Table 2. *Frequencies of level of externality*

	N	%
Level 1	63	28.8%
Level 2	110	50.5%
Level 3	45	20.6%
Total	218	100%

4.2 Detailed analysis of advisory content by external actor group

4.2.1 Analysis of advisory content for Level 1 external actors

Table 3. *Frequencies level of prescriptiveness Level 1 external actors*

	N	%
Purely descriptive	24	38.1%
Moderate descriptive	11	17.5%
Moderate prescriptive	20	31.7%
Highly prescriptive	8	12.7%
Total	63	100%

Table 3 presents the distribution of different advisory content for independently operating advising and executive actors under public law. Purely descriptive reports account for the highest frequency of these actors, with 24 reports accounting for 38.1% of the total. Furthermore, 11 reports are included in the moderate descriptive category, accounting for 17.5% of the total. The second most reports are categorized in moderate prescriptive. With 20

reports, this category represents 31.7% of the total. Finally, 8 reports are categorized as highly prescriptive, which accounts for 12.7% of the total.

The results show that actors in close proximity to the policy formulation process produce a majority of reports that does not include any form of recommendations or only recommend further research or hint at actions. These actors seem to be cautious in making more direct recommendations, as shown by the large number of purely descriptive or moderately descriptive advisory content. Typical purely descriptive work of these actors is monitoring or evaluation reports within public health. For example, the Dutch Healthcare Authority (NZa) has provided various monitoring reports of public health. One specific report by the NZa details the performance of accessibility to health care across different indicators in January 2023 (NZa, 2023). These types of reports focus on providing detailed information for the Ministry of VWS, without making specific recommendations. The descriptive reports reflect the executorial role under public law of Level 1 external actors. Although these actors maintain a certain degree of independence and distance from the policy formulation process, they still function within the framework of public law with assigned tasks within the public health sector. For example, the NZa is tasked with monitoring and providing data about the accessibility of public health independently from the Ministry of VWS (NZa, 2023). This independence allows them to provide objective information to the ministry.

Despite the majority of advisory content being descriptive, whether purely or moderately, it is still important to recognize that a substantial portion of the supplied advisory content by these actors is moderately prescriptive. An illustrative example of this can be found by a report of the RIVM (Dutch National Institute for Public Health and Environment). They investigated the effects of working remotely due to COVID-19 in their reports. Based on these results, they advise the government in a broad way on which topics should receive policy attention (RIVM, 2023). Therefore, the RIVM leaves flexibility to the ministry how to execute their advice.

To summarize, these results show that actors in closest proximity to the policy formulation process engage in a variety of advisory activities, with an emphasis on descriptive advisory content. This aligns with the theoretical framework, which showed that these actors play a multifaced role, rather than solely providing recommendations for problem-solving. However, Level 1 external actors do provide prescriptive content for a substantial portion. This content is mostly moderately descriptive, leaving flexibility for execution to the government. Therefore, they seem to be cautious in making specific directive recommendations.

4.2.2 Analysis of advisory content for Level 2 external actors

Table 4. *Frequencies level of prescriptiveness Level 2 external actors*

	N	%
Purely descriptive	29	26.4%
Moderate descriptive	25	22.7%
Moderate prescriptive	36	32.7%
Highly prescriptive	20	18.2%
Total	110	100%

In Table 4 the results of the distribution of advisory content of Level 2 external actors. This group of actors comprises public-private domain actors under public law and private actors without profit motive, both (partly) funded by public means. The purely descriptive category counts 29 reports, reflecting 26.4% of the total. Furthermore, 25 reports are categorized as moderate descriptive, accounting for 22.7% of the total. The moderate prescriptive category contains 36 reports, representing the largest category with 32.7%. Lastly, the highly prescriptive makes up the smallest category with 20 reports, accounting for 18.2% of the total.

The results indicate that these types of external actors provide a balanced number of advisory reports along the descriptive-prescriptive dimension. The descriptive reports, both purely and moderate descriptive, make up 49.1% of the total. On the other hand, both moderate and highly prescriptive reports accounts for 50.9% of the total. This slight majority is largely driven by moderate prescriptive content, which points at a preference for giving actionable recommendations with a certain degree of flexibility. While this moderate prescriptive content is most common, the distribution of descriptive and prescriptive content is almost equal. Given this, Level 2 external actors seem to be a hybrid category in terms of produced advisory content.

Very typical reports provided to the government from this category is research from research institutes, including academic research. For instance, Nivel (Dutch independent research institute) researched the motives for personal budgets in long-term care (Nivel, 2023a). The report mostly describes the founded motives by the research. However, in the conclusion they call for further research to explain one of the identified motives. It is notable that these reports are present in all categories across the descriptive-prescriptive dimension.

For example, Nivel also produced a highly prescriptive report on Post-traumatic stress symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic among young adults in the Netherlands. They advise that the identified risk factors should be taken into account in policy and specify which risk groups should be targeted with support and guidance (Nivel, 2023b). In addition, the Erasmus School of Health Policy and Management provided a purely descriptive research report about calculation of standard amounts for risk compensation in public health. Lastly, Movisie (2023), a knowledge institute with a public task, supplied a publication about tackling youth homelessness based on research and practical experience. They advise several approaches to tackle youth homelessness, leaving flexibility to the policymaker.

These examples are not exhaustive. The content in the reports from these categories comes mostly from research or experience, and these reports can contain all levels of prescriptiveness, even when produced by the same actor. This reflects the hybrid nature of this category of external actors.

Despite the results providing a hybrid image of the level of prescriptiveness in advisory work, an important caveat must be made. This category includes the most cases and is a merged category, as distinguishing between public-private actors and private actors without a profit motive, all receiving a certain amount of public funding, is empirically challenging to make. This may influence the results.

Taken everything together, the results show that public-private domain actors under public law and private actors without profit motive can be considered as a hybrid category as the advisory content is relatively balanced. A very slight majority is prescriptive, whether moderate or highly, but this is mostly largely driven by moderate prescriptive content. From all provided content, these actors most frequently provide moderate prescriptive content. Therefore, they prompt the government to action in a moderate degree, being concrete in recommendations but still leaving flexibility to the decision-maker.

4.2.3 Analysis of advisory content for Level 3 external actors

Table 5. *Frequencies level of prescriptiveness Level 3 external actors*

	N	%
Purely descriptive	10	22.2%
Moderate descriptive	3	6.7%
Moderate prescriptive	11	24.4%
Highly prescriptive	21	46.7%
Total	45	100%

The advisory content distribution for Level 3 external actors, which are actors in furthest proximity to the policy formulation process, are presented in Table 5. These actors are private law actors with profit motive who carry out tasks for the government on contract-base. Purely descriptive reports account for 10 reports, representing 22.2% of the total. The least number of reports are categorized moderate descriptive, with 3 reports making up 6.7% of the total. The moderate descriptive category counts 11 reports, which is 24.4% of the total. Highly prescriptive reports are the most frequent under these actors with 21 reports. This represents 46.7% of the total.

By looking at the results, it becomes evident that these actors are highly active in providing prescriptive advisory content. Almost half of the provided reports are highly prescriptive in nature. Taken together with moderate prescriptive reports, it represents 71.1% of the cases provided by private law actors with profit motive. However, it should not be neglected that purely descriptive reports contain a substantial part of the total. With 22.2%, they are closely aligned with the proportion in the moderate prescriptive category. This suggests that while these actors provide a relative substantial amount of descriptive content to the government, their primary focus remains on providing actionable recommendations through prescriptive content.

A clear example of a report falling in this highly prescriptive category among these actors is an analysis report by Andersson Elffers Felix (private consultant) about harmonization of procurement documentation in short-term care. They provide several recommendations including a step-by-step roadmap. Therefore, they provide very clear

recommendations to harmonize the documentation in short-term care (Andersson Elffers Felix, 2023).

Closely related to the highly prescriptive reports are the moderate prescriptive reports. For instance, PROOF Adviseurs (private consultant) provided a detailed guidance report that aims to inspire parties involved in depression prevention in caregivers. They outline clear steps on how cooperation for this prevention can be organized (PROOF Adviseurs, 2023). Although it contains clear recommendations, it is classified as moderate prescriptive as the report serves as a practical tool for all parties involved. Therefore, it lacks specific targeting to a party in the advice.

Contrary, an example of a purely descriptive report is a publication by Berenschot (2023) where they studied the potential administrative burden of a proposed legislative amendment within quality control of healthcare providers. Berenschot just described their findings, without making any form of recommendations. Similarly, the few moderate descriptive reports closely align with the purely descriptive reports, as they also describe situations or research findings and suggest further research by the government based on these findings (KPMG, 2023).

Despite the clear emphasis on prescriptive advice, particularly highly prescriptive content, it is essential to note that this category includes the smallest number of cases compared to the other external actor groups. This may influence the frequencies, making the differences seem larger and potentially reinforcing the emphasis on prescriptive advice.

Overall, the results for private entities with profit motives demonstrate a strong emphasis on the supply of prescriptive advisory content, with highly prescriptive reports being the most frequent. This relates to the theoretical framework, as Van den Berg (2017) found that the primary task of these actors, such as private consultants, is to provide recommendations to the government. Moreover, these actors are known for their increasing specialized role with delivering precise advice in the public sphere (Stone et al., 2021). This is reflected in the amount of highly prescriptive advisory content provided by these actors.

4.3 Comparative analysis of advisory content results by external actors

Together with the findings discussed in section 4.2, in this section a comparative analysis of the advisory content provided by the different external actor is conducted. For a more comprehensive comparison of the results, Table 6 presents a cross-tabulation of advisory content in percentages across the external actor groups. This allows for a more comprehensive

comparison.

Table 6. Cross-tabulation of Level of prescriptiveness by Level of externality

Level of prescriptiveness	Level of externality			Total
	Level 1 (N = 63)	Level 2 (N = 110)	Level 3 (N = 45)	
Purely descriptive	24 (38.1%)	29 (26.4%)	10 (22.2%)	63 (28.9%)
Moderate descriptive	11 (17.5%)	25 (22.7%)	3 (6.7%)	39 (17.9%)
Moderate prescriptive	20 (31.7%)	36 (32.7%)	11 (24.4%)	67 (30.7%)
Highly prescriptive	8 (12.7%)	20 (18.2%)	21 (46.7%)	49 (22.5%)
Total	63 (100%)	110 (100%)	45 (100%)	218 (100%)

In the analysis of the provided advisory content per external actor group (see 4.2) became clear that the emphasis of provided content by Level 1 external actors is on descriptive content, with purely descriptive content the most prevalent. The results of Level 2 external actors are relatively mixed compared to the other actor groups in general, but the most prevalent produced content is moderate prescriptive in nature. For Level 3 external actors, there is a clear emphasis on prescriptive content with the vast majority being highly prescriptive.

These results could indicate a trend that the level of prescriptiveness increases when the actor becomes more external. This potential trend becomes more evident by comparing the differences in percentage distribution per actor group presented in Table 6. The proportion of purely descriptive content decreases as the actor group becomes more external. Moreover, the highly prescriptive content increases when the actor becomes more external, with a substantial increase visible from Level 2 to Level 3.

The change in percentages in the moderate descriptive category. It rises from Level 1 to Level 2, followed by a substantial decrease from Level 2 to Level 3. For the moderate prescriptive, the percentage rises very slightly from Level 1 to Level 2, followed by a small decrease from Level 2 to level 3. This can be explained by the fact that moderate prescriptive advice is well-represented overall in the dataset and across the different external actor groups.

It is also notable that all external actor groups provided advisory content from all prescriptiveness categories. In some instances, the same actor produced similar types of research but with varying degrees in prescriptiveness. A potential explanation of this could be

based on the strategic choices made by the policy advice actor. Depending on situational context, advisory suppliers change can their behavior in order to maximize their influence (Veit, 2023). Together with the mixed results in the moderate categories, these findings highlight the complex and nuanced nature of advisory content. It shows that advisory content cannot easily be classified into strict distinct categories.

Despite the visible nuances in the results, it is still possible that the trend exists between the level of prescriptiveness and the level of externality. However, to make more robust claims about trend, results of the ordinal regression are analyzed in the next section.

4.4 Regression analysis

4.4.1 Testing assumptions

As the dependent variable in this study is ordinal, an ordinal logistic regression is performed to test the assumed relationship. However, before robust conclusions can be drawn from these regression results, the following three key assumptions have to be met (Field, 2013):

- Independence assumption
- Proportional odds assumption
- Expected frequencies assumption

The independence assumption requires that all observations contribute to only one cell. This assumption holds as all the cases are unique, duplicates are excluded, and there are no repeated measures in the dataset. To test the proportional odds assumption was tested using the Test of Parallel Lines. The results of this test indicate that the assumption holds ($p > 0.05$), stating that the relationship between the independent variable and the odds of being in higher categories of the dependent variable is consistent among the categories. This validates the use of ordinal logistic regression. As last, the expected frequencies assumption holds as well, as all expected values are greater than 5. Detailed results for the proportional odds and expected frequencies assumptions can be found in *Appendix D*.

4.4.2 Main statistical results

Table 7. *Parameter estimates ordinal regression³*

		Est.	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% int. bounds
Threshold	[Prescriptiveness = 1]	-1.895	.307	38.069	1	<.001	[-2.497, -1.293]
	[Prescriptiveness = 2]	-1.100	.292	14.212	1	<.001	[-1.672, -.528]
	[Prescriptiveness = 3]	.354	.281	1.591	1	.207	[-.196, .905]
Location	[Externality = 1]	-1.404	.365	14.772	1	<0.001	[-2.119, -.688]
	[Externality = 2]	-1.024	.329	9.709	1	.002	[-1.668, -.380]
	[Externality = 3]	0 ^a	.	.	0	.	.

Link function: Logit.

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant

To start with the statistical results, the parameter estimates are presented in Table 7. The threshold boundaries reflect the estimates for the boundaries between the prescriptiveness levels of the dependent variable. For threshold 1 and 2, the findings are highly significant (<0.001). This indicates that the data supports a distinct difference between purely descriptive and moderate descriptive (threshold 1), as well as between moderate descriptive and moderate prescriptive advisory content (threshold 2). Contrary, threshold 3 is not statistically significant. A clear distinction between moderate prescriptive and highly prescriptive categories is therefore not supported by the data. This could be due to several factors, such as the interreference of subjectivity in the content analysis, contextual factors, and the distribution of cases. As moderate prescriptive reports are most present in the dataset (30.7%), it is possible that this overrepresentation blur this boundary. Despite this, the significant

³ The default setting of SPSS uses the highest category value automatically as reference category. Given this, Level 3 externality is used as the reference method. Although this contrasts with the hypothesized causal flow, the results still indicate robust findings.

results for the other thresholds and the location parameters still allow for robust conclusions (Field, 2013). The relationship becomes more evident when looking at the location parameters. The Level 3 external actor group is used as the reference category. Given this, the statistically significant negative estimates of the location parameters indicate that Level 2 and Level 1 external actors are less likely to produce higher levels of prescriptive content compared to Level 3 external actors. These estimates are presented in natural logarithms of the odds. To provide better insight into the magnitude of the effect, the estimates must be exponentiated to derive the odds ratios. This results in an odds ratio of 0.359 for Level 2, indicating that the odds of Level 2 external actors producing higher levels of prescriptive content are 64.1% lower compared to Level 3 external actors. For Level 1 the odds ratio is 0.245, indicating that the odds of Level 1 external actors producing higher levels of prescriptive content are 75.5% lower compared to Level 3 external actors. Taken together, these estimates provide statistically significant evidence that advisory content becomes more prescriptive as the advisory actor becomes more external.

Further supporting the robustness of the results, several model fitting tests are performed. These results are presented in Table 8 and Table 9 below. The highly significant Chi-Square in Table 8 tells us that the model with 'Level of externality' as predictor makes the model significantly better at explaining the data compared to a model with no predictor. Therefore, the level of externality is a significant predictor of the level of prescriptiveness of advisory content. In addition to this, the results of the goodness-of-fit tests, which are presented in Table 9, show non-significant p-values. This indicates that the used model fits the data well, further supporting the validity of the used model.

Table 8. *Model Fitting Information*

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	58.751			
Final	44.172	14.579	2	<.001

Link function: Logit.

Table 9. *Goodness-of-Fit statistics*

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	7.702	4	.103
Deviance	7.457	4	.114

Link function: Logit.

Finally, the results of the pseudo R-square are presented in Table 10. These results indicate that the level of externality explain the variability of the level of prescriptiveness in a modest manner. It ranges from 2.5% to 6.9%. This indicates that factors other than the level of externality, which are not included in this model, also influence prescriptiveness of advisory content.

Table 10. *Results Pseudo R-Square*

Cox and Snell	.065
Nagelkerke	.069
McFadden	.025

Link function: Logit.

4.5 Validation of hypothesis

The results in this analysis strongly point to the conclusion that advisory content becomes more prescriptive as the advisory actor becomes more external. The analysis of frequencies suggested an initial trend. The ordinal regression analysis made this finding more insightful and robust. The statistically significant negative estimates for the location parameters indicate that Level 1 and Level 2 external actors are less likely to produce higher levels of prescriptive advisory content compared to Level 3 external actors. The assumptions for the ordinal regression hold in this study and the model fitting tests further support the robustness of the identified relationship. Therefore, the empirical expectation can be confirmed: advisory content becomes more prescriptive as the advisory actor becomes more external.

5. Conclusion & Discussion

In this section, a summary of the main results of this thesis is presented. Based on these results, the central research question is answered. Following this, theoretical implications are discussed, linking the results back to the theoretical framework. In addition, practical implications are discussed. Subsequently, several limitations of this research are highlighted. Based on the implications and limitations, possible avenues for further research are presented at last.

5.1 Conclusion

Policy advice is increasingly being externalized to advisory actors outside the public service. This results in external advisory actors gaining a more prominent place in the advisory landscape. This trend of externalization is acknowledged as the most prominent process in Policy Advisory Systems (PAS) scholarship in contemporary times. Despite this widespread recognition, less is known about these external actors itself. This results in lacunae over what advice external actors provide and how they influence the policy formulation process. Given this, Howlett (2019: 253) argues that it is crucial to enhance our understanding “the role played by different policy actors and the kinds of advice provided to governments by different advisory systems in contemporary circumstances” To address this gap, the following research question was central to this study: *“To what extent do different external advisory actors provide varying types of policy advice content within a sectoral advisory system?”*

To study policy advice content supply from external actors, 218 outsourced advisory reports by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS) from 2023 were selected. These reports were analyzed by using a mixed-methods approach. First, a directed content analysis was conducted to structurally analyze and quantify the reports based on four levels of prescriptiveness of the content. This was followed by a statistical analysis examining the relationship between the level of prescriptiveness and the level of externality of the actor for each report, categorized into three levels of externality.

Based on the analysis of the results, it became evident that advisory content becomes more prescriptive when the supplier becomes more external. The odds of a report being highly prescriptive in content drop significantly when the external actor is closer to the policy formulation process. This finding confirms the expectation that advisory content becomes more prescriptive as the advisory actor becomes more external. However, nuance must also be added to the confirmation of the relationship between the level of externality and the level of prescriptiveness. Externality explains the level of prescriptiveness only for a modest manner.

Relating to the research question, this study found that different external advisory actors provide substantial different advisory content in terms of prescriptiveness in the Dutch sectoral public health PAS. The more external an actor becomes, the more specific recommendations it provides to the government. This finding also indicates that different external actors try to influence the policy process differently in terms of content. Since influence can be seen as a byproduct of advisory content, prescriptive work exerts more direct influence on the policy formulation process compared to less prescriptive work. While the difference between provided advisory content is significantly different across groups, it became also evident that other factors than the level externality itself may play significant roles in determining advisory content variance. In conclusion, different external advisory actors provide substantial different advisory content in terms of prescriptiveness in the Dutch sectoral public health PAS.

5.2 Theoretical discussion

Following the answer to the research question, it is crucial to discuss theoretical implications that arise from the results. The most significant implications are highlighted below.

To start, the theoretical framework proposed by Craft & Howlett (2012) served as a strong foundation for this study. The emphasis they put on using a content dimension, combined with the proximity to the decision-maker to structure a PAS, proved to be valuable in disentangling variance of external actors in terms of advisory content. This approach identified significant differences in the advisory content supplied by different external actors, resulting in a better understanding of these actors. Despite the value of their framework, the results also indicate some remarks. Craft & Howlett (2012) categorize various advisory actors, internal as well as external, into a single distinct typology of advisory work. Although this study used a different dimension to depict advisory content, it becomes evident that more nuance is necessary in frameworks to structure and analyze behavior of advisory actors. The results in Table 6 show that all three external actor groups per supplied advisory content from all levels of prescriptiveness in various degrees. These findings indicate that advisory behavior of external actors cannot be strictly categorized into a distinct category. This highlights the complexity of contemporary PAS clearly. Given this, future frameworks addressing advisory content should incorporate more nuance, such as the use of a scale, into their framework to capture the complexity of PAS. This will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of PAS.

This call for nuance is also evident in the classification of external actors. As stated earlier, there is often referred to actors outside the public service as “external actors”. However, Van den Berg (2017) suggested that externality can exist in varying degrees. He distinguishes between four layers of different external advisory actors related to their relative distance to the policy formulation process. This classification already brought more nuance and detail in distinguishing between external actors. The findings of this study support distinguishing between different levels of externality. It shows that these actors provide advisory content with substantial varying degrees of prescriptiveness. Therefore, they behave differently and influence the policy process differently. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing and categorizing external actors more nuanced within PAS.

The work of Van den Berg (2017) also proved very valuable for positioning the Dutch PAS. As addressed earlier, there is an increasing attention for context within PAS scholarly, such as national and sector-specific contexts (Craft & Wilder, 2017; Van den Berg, 2017; Hustedt & Veit, 2016). This analysis revealed that the Dutch PAS characterized by a rich involvement and variety of advisory actors. More specifically, it is known for its neo-corporatist character. This refers to a system where certain advisory actors hold an institutionalized public position to the advisory landscape. This character is clearly reflected by the presence of institutionalized actors from Level 1 External actors, such as the SCP (advisory and research institute) and the RIVM. In addition, this character is also notable in Level 2 External actors, such as Nivel (Dutch independent research institute) and the KNGF/NVFG (Professional association for physiotherapy). Many of these actors are active in the advisory landscape of Dutch PAS (see Appendix X for all actors). Therefore, the results of this study show that the neo-corporatist character is also reflected in the Dutch sectoral public health PAS. This confirms Van den Berg’s (2017) context findings further. These findings emphasize the importance of considering national and sector specific contexts as they significantly influence the advisory landscape. Moreover, these characteristics also underscore the Anglophone bias in PAS research. The unique character of the Dutch advisory landscape suggests that frameworks from Anglophone countries may not be fully applicable on the Dutch context, or vice versa. Therefore, recognizing a PAS context is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of how such systems are structured.

As last, the results of this study contribute to the ongoing discussion about the conceptualization of policy advice. As addressed, policy advice is generally defined in a strict or a broad sense. The latter one was central to this research, resulting in inclusion of advisory work that does not necessarily provide recommendations. Table 1 shows that 28,9% ($N = 63$)

of all reports are purely descriptive in content. Thus, those reports do not contain any form of recommendations. This highlights that a substantial proportion of reports would have been excluded if the strict definition was used, stating that policy advice is about providing recommendations. This confirms the point of several authors that the strict definition misses a considerable range of advisory work, potentially overstressing policy advice that do include recommendations (Veit, 2023; Brans et al., 2022; Veselý, 2017). Consequently, future research should carefully consider which definition of policy advice to use, as it can heavily influence the scope and results of the study.

5.3 Practical implications

Besides several theoretical implications, practical implications arise from this study. As the Dutch government is increasingly reliant on external advisory capacity, concerns are being raised about the increasing influence of private sector advisors on the decision-making process. The results indicate that private sector entities (Level 3 externality) provide significantly more highly prescriptive content compared to the less external advisors. This means that their provided content, which carries more specific recommendations, has a higher potential for the uptake in nature as decision-makers are more inclined to adopt clear recommendations and solutions to policy problems (Cairney & Oliver, 2017). Therefore, the raised concerns about the influence of these private entities are not entirely unwarranted.

Decision-makers should consider these findings when engaging with private sector advice. They need to be aware that private entities have the tendency to deliver more prescriptive advice compared to less external advisors. They should critically assess provided recommendations rather than taking the easy route by adopting the advice because it is specific, thus easier to act on. By doing so, they can mitigate the risk of private sector entities gaining too much influence on policy outcomes that affect our daily lives.

5.4 Limitations of this research

While this study provided valuable implications, it is also important to acknowledge several limitations. The first limitation concerns the low degree of generalizability of the findings. This limitation is embedded in several aspects. To start, the research design has a low external validity. This is because this study focusses exclusively on advisory reports from the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS). The used reports are also from the same year. Besides the low validity, theoretical considerations also add to the low degree of generalizability.

As discussed, PAS are considered as national and sector specific (Craft & Wilder, 2017). Consequently, the results may not be generalizable to other sectors or countries. At best, these findings might be applicable to other Dutch PAS. However, this is rather speculative.

The second limitation concerns a potential bias in the data. This study solely focuses on the supply side of advisory content, specifically the reports provided by external advisers. This neglects the demand side, namely the reports requested by the government. Some external advisor work on contract base for the government (Veselý, 2013; Bortz, 2023). Therefore, these actors can be restricted in their work on client contracts (Bortz, 2023). Given this, it may be possible that the government restricted external actors on what advisory work they should produce. This can influence the eventual supplied content, resulting in a bias of the used data. However, such influence could not be confirmed based on the used reports in this study. Nonetheless, it is important to keep this potential bias in mind.

The last limitation concerns the subjectivity that is inherently associated with qualitative content analysis. Great care was taken in creating the coding scheme through refinement via an extensive pilot study. Furthermore, the regression analysis allowed to eliminate minor inconsistencies from the categorization process. Despite those efforts, coder subjectivity can never be fully eliminated. The use of multiple coders could have been valuable to this research. This is a common approach to tackle coding subjectivity. However, such an extension did not fall within the scope of this research.

5.5 Possible avenues for future research

Based on the results and limitations of this research, several avenues for future research arise. This research introduced an innovative framework for assessing external advisory content along the descriptive-prescriptive dimension. However, the analysis was limited to cases from the single year 2023. However, The Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport (VWS) has been publishing its outsourced reports since 2019. These reports could be analyzed using the framework and coding scheme of this study. This opens up several interesting avenues for future research. To start, several authors address that few efforts have been taken to analyze policy advisory systems over time (Van den Berg, 2017; Hustedt & Veit, 2017). As longitudinal data is available from the Ministry of VWS, it allows to examine whether the nature and distribution of advisory content, in terms of prescriptiveness, fluctuate over time. For example, future research could explore whether the supply of highly prescriptive advice increased since the onset of COVID-19. Furthermore, the availability of more outsourced reports allows for analysis on domain-level. The advisory reports of VWS are divided into

different policy domains within public health, such as cure and care. Exploring whether domain-specific contexts are relevant to PAS dynamics could provide valuable insights.

Beyond further exploration of the Dutch public health advisory landscape, future research should delve deeper into explanatory factors of policy advice variance. The results of this study highlighted significant variance in content across external advisors. However, the level of externality explains this variance in a modest manner. This suggests that other factors significantly shape external advisory content. While this research offers an initial exploration into the factors driving external policy advice variance, future research should aim to identify additional key factors. This will enhance our understanding of the complex advisory landscape in which we find ourselves today.

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Appendix A. Summary advisory reports

Rapporten van of voor het ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport 2023⁴

Het ministerie van VWS geeft regelmatig opdracht aan instellingen en bureaus om onderzoek te doen op het gebied van volksgezondheid, welzijn en sport. Dit document geeft een overzicht van de beleidsrelevante rapporten uit 2023. De rapporten zijn ingedeeld op de volgende thema's:

- Care
- Cure
- Gezondheidsbevordering en -bescherming
- Sport
- Welzijn
- Jeugd
- Overige rapporten

Thema Care

Leren en verbeteren met inzichten over ervaren kwaliteit van zorg en leven **Nivel, 9 januari 2023**

Jaarrapportage budgetcyclus Wlz 2021 **NZa, 18 januari 2023**

Wzd bij een PGB, hoe kunnen we dat betalen **Significant, 18 januari 2023**

Magazine bewonersinitiatief De Sleutel **Movisie, 20 januari 2023**

Magazine bewonersinitiatief Badhuis **Movisie, 20 januari 2023**

Bekostiging en financiering van zorgtechnologie in de verpleegzorg **NZa, 23 januari 2023**

Vergelijking opties maatschappelijke jaarverantwoording **Improven, 24 januari 2023**

Monitor Toegankelijkheid van Zorg - 26 januari 2023 **NZa, 26 januari 2023**

Inspiratiewijzer: dagactiviteiten voor mensen met dementie **Movisie, 31 januari 2023**

De buurtbaan als sleutel voor innovatie **Movisie, 31 januari 2023**

Beoordelen van informatie uit patiëntendossiers over kwaliteit van zorg aan het levenseinde in ziekenhuizen: beoordelingsvragen en stappenplan **Nivel, 1 februari 2023**

Kwaliteitsindicatoren en zorggerelateerde schade aan het levenseinde: een retrospectief dossieronderzoek bij patiënten overleden in Nederlandse ziekenhuizen **Nivel, 1 februari 2023**

Factsheet verkenning discriminatie in de sociale basis **Movisie, 2 februari 2023**

Ontsnappen aan aanbesteden **Movisie, 2 februari 2023**

Ervaren discriminatie: een peiling onder sociaal professionals **Movisie, 3 februari 2023**

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⁴ This is a summary of the original publication of Ministry of VWS. Due to its length, a summary is provided. The original document was retrieved from the central government archive on 04-04-24. This document can be requested from the author or the thesis supervisor.

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Een brede blik op Bijstand **SCP, 9 juni 2023**

Corona scepsis in Nederland **SCP, 23 juni 2023**

Corona scepsis in de media **SCP, 23 juni 2023**

Op zoek naar alternatieven **SCP, 23 juni 2023**

Sceptische visies in het coronadebat **SCP, 23 juni 2023**

Op weg naar een nieuwe armoedegrens **SCP, 30 juni 2023**

Thema Jeugd

Verkenning naar het verminderen van de behandelduur in de jeugdzorg **AEF, 24 februari 2023**

Verleiden en verrijken **DSP, 8 mei 2023**

Andere kijk op groeiend jeugdzorggebruik. Voor een hoopvolle wereld om in op te groeien **NJI, 23 mei 2023**

Inzicht in niet-SKJ- en niet-BIG-geregistreerde professionals die werkzaam zijn in de jeugdhulp **Significant Public, 19 juni 2023**

Onderzoek uitgaven gemeenten aan Oekraïense ontheemden voor Jeugdzorg, Wmo en Wpg
Van Berkel en Sira Consulting, 11 september 2023

Werkwijze gemeentelijke aanpak seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag **NJI, 12 oktober 2023**

Discriminatie schaadt mentale gezondheid van jongeren met migratieachtergrond
Verwey Jonker Instituut, 6 november 2023

Visie van mentale zorgprofessionals over culturele sensitiviteit **Verwey Jonker Instituut, 6 november 2023**

Overige rapporten
Aanbiedingsbrief rapport Signalen fraude in de zorg 2022 **IKC, 31 mei 2023**

Verkenning naar optimale vertegenwoordiging naastenverenigingen **Significant, 4 december 2023**

Jaarbeeld 2022 **IKC, 31 mei 2023**

Onderzoek inkoop PBM. (deel 2) Verslag van Handelingen **Deloitte, 1 juni 2023**

Rapport aanvullend (deel)onderzoek inkoop PBM **EBBEN, 9 Juni 2023**

Ongewenste mijding van mondzorg om
financiële redenen **BS&F, 23 juni 2023**

De veertiendagengrens in de Embryowet
Gezondheidsraad, 31 oktober 2023

De effectiviteit van Persoons Gebonden
Budget **Robert Capel, 14 november 2023**

Appendix B. Coding scheme directed content analysis

<p>Introduction</p> <p>This study contains an analysis along the dimension ‘level of prescriptiveness’. This level is operationalized along a scale which is presented below. The codes and characteristics of the ‘level of prescriptiveness’ were developed iteratively through a pilot conducted with a subset of the cases. Additionally, example sentences are provided for each category to clarify their meaning.</p> <p>Disclaimer: The example sentences have all been translated from Dutch. This is because all the reports used in this study were published in Dutch.</p>
<p>Level of Prescriptiveness</p>
<p>1. Purely descriptive: <i>“Report only provides information, such as describing a problem or a situation without any kind of recommendation.”</i></p>
<p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description of context - Description of situation <p>Ex 1. <i>“This report provides an overview of the application process at the NZa (Dutch Healthcare Authority) and the budgetary framework for the Long-Term Care Act (Wlz) for 2021. It offers insights into the utilization of contracting space, other compensations, and personal budgets.”</i></p> <p>Ex 2. <i>“In this report, we provide an inventory of the information flows from (small) healthcare providers, which data requests overlap, and to what extent providers find this burdensome.”</i></p> <p>Ex 3. <i>“In this exploration, we have investigated the possibilities, usefulness, and desirability of measuring and utilizing data in the social foundation.”</i></p> <p>Ex 4. <i>“The results of both parts indicate that AIOTO (General Practitioner in Training with Research) trajectories contribute to the academization of General Practice in various ways.”</i></p>
<p>2. Moderately descriptive: <i>“Document recommends further research or hints at actions/improvements but doesn’t include specificity about what should be done, who should do it, and/or when it should be done”</i></p>
<p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hints at further exploration - Hints at further research - Hints at changes or places for improvement - Mentions that the insights could be used for policy <p>Ex 1. <i>It is up to the initiators, the neighborhood director, the municipality, and the housing</i></p>

corporation to work together to repair the relationships that have become strained, so that all residents of Buitenoord feel comfortable with the Buurttuin.

Ex 2. *“The findings in this study raise the question of how far the knowledge and skills of healthcare providers not specialized in mental health, such as general practitioners or mental health practitioners, should extend, and what can and cannot be expected of them in the care of people with complex mental health issues.”*

Ex 3. *"Additionally, there may be opportunities for CZ healthcare office to optimize the information regarding ZIN."*

Ex 4. *"Clarity about where elderly people can turn to with questions about practical support also seems desirable."*

Ex 5. *“The report also investigates which groups are at the greatest risk of developing these symptoms. This provides starting points for policy.”*

3. Moderately prescriptive: *Document provide broad recommendations what should be done. Therefore, it leaves flexibility in how to it or who should do it.*

OR

Document suggests several possible courses of action, offer best practices, practical tips and/or tools. These recommendations guide action but leaves flexibility in which course of action to follow or how to implement it.

Characteristics:

- Recommendations that guide action in a broadly formulated way
- Document includes actionable best practices, practical tips or practical tools
- Recommends several options but doesn't favor any
- Focusses on what can be done instead of what should be done

Ex 1. *"We distinguish five themes that contribute to good collaboration in an IGO. You can start with one or more themes at the same time."*

Ex 1. *“We recommend that quality staff and managers of healthcare organizations improve the feedback of insights into client-relevant outcome measures to healthcare professionals.”*

Ex 2. *“Below are 11 tips from local practice to make this possible”*

Ex 3. *"We recommend that the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport reconsider the voluntary deductible based on the results and discussion points. Ultimately, which arguments carry the most weight is a political decision."*

Ex 4. *“Ensure a diverse group of participants that represents all perspectives in the process.”*

4. Highly prescriptive: *‘Document provides detailed, targeted recommendations directed at specific stakeholders, outlining explicit actions and/or the methods for implementing them.’*

Characteristics

- Focusses on what should be done in specified way
- Suggesting one course of action instead of providing suggestions
- Recommends step-by-step plan for execution/implementation plan

Ex 1. *We recommend further developing the scenario in which team A is established with healthcare professionals. These professionals are available to fulfill the various roles in the step-by-step plan within the personal budget (pgb) setting.*

Ex 2. *‘Transition from a facilitating role in the region as a care office to a guiding role for healthcare providers who are lagging in the implementation of healthcare technology. Identify which providers these are and assist them in making progress, through sharing knowledge and experience, engaging in discussions with the board, and effectively using tariff differentiation.’*

Ex 3. *"To prevent conflicts and disputes and ensure that clients do not (wrongly) face maximum reimbursements or personal contributions, our recommendation is to integrate paramedical care for Wlz clients into one domain."*

Ex 4. *"We start with recommendations for reaching the elderly and their relatives (1), followed by recommendations on the practical implementation (2) and necessary conditions."*

Ex 5. *"We propose to use three surcharges for chronic respiratory support, based on the VSCA profiles:*

- Low surcharge (VSCA profile 1 & 2) with a maximum rate per day of €62.12.*
- Medium surcharge (VSCA profile 3) with a maximum rate per day of €142.55.*
- High surcharge (VSCA profile 4) with a maximum rate per day of €260.24."*

Ex 6. *‘Based on the outcomes of the research, we propose an alternative solution that, in our view, is (moderately) effective for the identified problem. This concerns the HKC for selected insured individuals with a cost limit of €100,000 and a pool percentage of 75%.’*

Appendix C. Overview categorization external advisory actors

Level of externality	Organization	Website used	
<i>Level 1 external actors</i>	Gezondheidsraad	https://www.gezondheidsraad.nl	
	Informatie Knooppunt Zorgfraude	https://www.ikz.nl/onderwerpen/over-het-ikz	
	NZa	https://www.nza.nl/over-de-nza	
	RIVM	https://www.rivm.nl/over-het-rivm	
	SCP	https://www.scp.nl/over-scp	
	Inspectie Gezondheidszorg en Jeugd	https://www.igj.nl/over-ons	
	Taskforce Integriteit Zorgsector	https://www.nza.nl/over-de-nza/ons-toezicht-in-vogelvlucht/taskforce-integriteit-zorg	
	<i>Level 2 external actors</i>	ACTA	https://acta.nl/nl/over-acta
	Erasmus Universiteit	https://www.eur.nl/en/eshpm	
	KNGF/NVGF	https://nvfg.kngf.nl	
LUMC	https://www.lumc.nl/over-het-lumc/		
Movisie	https://www.movisie.nl/over-movisie		
NJI	https://www.nji.nl/over-het-nji		
Nederlandse School voor Openbaar Bestuur	https://www.nsob.nl/over-nsob		
Nivel	https://www.nivel.nl/nl/over-het-nivel		
Pharos	https://www.pharos.nl/over-pharos/		
SEO Economisch Onderzoek	https://www.seo.nl		
Stichting Rutgers	https://rutgers.nl/over-rutgers/		
Universiteit Maastricht	https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/over-de-um		
Verinorm	https://www.verinorm.nl		

	Verwey Jonker Instituut Zorgverzekeraars Nederland	https://www.verwey-jonker.nl/over-ons/ https://www.zn.nl/over-zn/
<i>Level 3 External actors</i>	Anderson Elffers Felix BS&F Berenschot Bureau HHM CQT Gezondheid en Zorg Deloitte EBBEN Equalis Gupta Strategists Improven KPMG KWINK Group Lysias Advies BV Motivaction PROOF adviseurs PWC Rebel Strong Society BV SiRM Significant Public Sira Consulting XpertiseZorg Zorgweb	https://www.aef.nl/over-ons-nieuw https://www.bsenf.nl https://www.berenschot.nl/over-ons https://www.hhm.nl/over-bureau-hhm/ https://www.qconsultzorg.nl/over-ons https://www2.deloitte.com/nl/nl.html https://ebbenpartners.com/nl/over-ebben/ https://equalis.nl https://gupta-strategists.nl/en/about-gupta https://www.improven.nl/nl/over-ons/ https://kpmg.com/nl/nl/home/over-ons.html https://www.kwinkgroep.nl/over-ons/ https://www.lysiasadvies.nl https://www.motivaction.nl/over-ons https://proofadviseurs.nl/over-ons/ https://www.pwc.nl https://rebelgroup.com/nl/een-sterkere-maatschappij-met-rebel/ https://www.sirm.nl/over-sirm https://significant.nl/over-ons-significant-groep/ https://www.siraconsulting.nl https://www.xpertisezorg.nl https://www.zorgweb.nl/data-en-diensten/

Appendix D. Results assumption tests ordinal regression

Table 11. *Cross-tabulation of Level of prescriptiveness by Level of externality Exp. count*

		Level of externality			Total	
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3		
Level of prescriptiveness	Purely descriptive	Exp. count	18.2	31.8	13.0	63.0
		% within Prescriptiveness	38.1%	46.0%	15.9%	100.0%
		% within Externality	38.1%	26.4%	22.2%	28.9%
		% of Total	11.0%	13.3%	4.6%	28.9%
	Moderate descriptive	Exp. count	19.4	33.8	13.8	67.0
		% within Prescriptiveness	28.2%	64.1%	7.7%	100.0%
		% in Externality	17.5%	22.7%	6.7%	17.9%
		% of Total	5.0%	11.5%	1.4%	17.9%
	Moderate prescriptive	Exp. count	19.4	33.8	13.8	67.0
		% within Prescriptiveness	29.9%	53.7%	16.4%	100.0%
		% within Externality	31.7%	32.7%	24.4%	30.7%
		% of Total	9.2%	16.5%	5.0%	30.7%
Highly prescriptive	Exp. count	14.2	24.7	10.1	49.0	
	% within Prescriptiveness	16.3%	40.8%	42.9%	100.0%	
	% within Externality	12.7%	18.2%	46.7%	22.5%	
	% of Total	3.7%	9.2%	9.6%	22.5%	

Table 12. *Test of Parallel Lines^a*

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	44.172			
General	36.715	7.457	4	.114

The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.

a. Link function: Logit.