

# T08P13 / Policy Narratives: Frameworks, Methods and Case Studies

**Topic :** T08 / Policy Discourse and Critical Policy Research

**Chair :** Farhad Mukhtarov (International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

**Second Chair :** Leong Ching (Institute of Water Policy, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore)

**Third Chair :** Raul Lejano (New York University, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology)

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

### Panel Description

Policy narratives are gaining increasing attention in the world of policy analysis and practice. Roe came up with the framework to study policy narratives (1994), and a wave of research focusing on discourses and stories in the 2000s made this line of research well-established in the policy literature (e.g. Fischer and Forester, 1993; Hajer, 1995; Lejano et al., 2013). In this panel, we invite contributions which further our understanding of policy narratives.

Narratives are attractive to study for several reasons. First, we make sense of the world in stories and these become an epistemological and an ontological category. Second, stories allow for agency and structure to be combined in one coherent account. Stories also often combine many different elements of decision-making, such as emotions, reason, norms, values, culture and facts. Furthermore, narratives allow both human and non-human objects to be analyzed for their agency and influence on policy processes (Latour, 1993).

This literature makes a number of important propositions, which need to be further studied empirically. Moreover, the discussion of new frameworks and methods to study policy narratives is an on-going process and contributions in this field are very welcome. One proposition is that narratives keep policy networks together and are key to understanding those (Lejano et al., 2013). Another proposition is that narratives, especially in the form of myths, are key to how international relations function (de Guevara, 2016). Similar line of research proposes that narratives are key to the functioning global governance in various fields (Dany and Freistein, 2016; Mukhtarov, 2009).

## CALL FOR PAPERS

In this panel, we are interested in the role of policy narratives in policy change and stability, both in terms of case studies and conceptual and methodological contributions. We ask the following questions:

- 1) How can narratives contribute to understanding policy change and stability?
- 2) What are the theories, frameworks and models to study policy narratives?
- 3) What are the methods available to researchers to study policy narratives and their impact on public policy process?
- 4) What are the empirical results of analyzing policy narratives through case studies?
- 5) How can we approach policy narrative analysis in a comparative fashion?

This brief overview of the emerging literature demonstrates the complexity involved and the major trends in policy thought in this direction. Based on these thoughts, we would like to invite contributions, which deal with these subjects and will help move the discussion on policy narratives further.

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## Session 1 Policy Narratives: Frameworks, Methods and Case Studies 1

Wednesday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (Block B 5 - 3 )

### Discussants

Farhad Mukhtarov (International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Raul Lejano (New York University, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology)

### The Power of Narratives: Explaining Inaction on Gender Mainstreaming in Uganda's Climate Change Policy

Peter Feindt (Wageningen University and Research Centre)

Margit Van Wessel (Wageningen University)

Severine van Bommel (Wageningen University)

MARIOLA ACOSTA FRANCES (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture & Wageningen University)

The integration of gender issues into climate change adaptation and mitigation policies has progressed steadily in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. However, expectations that gender-mainstreaming efforts would usher in a more gender equitable society have been partially fulfilled at best. Examining the causes for this apparent disconnect, we focus on the narratives through which policy-makers engage with, and relate to, gender issues in climate change. Following an interpretative approach to policy analysis we develop an interactional conceptualization of policy narrative. We identify and reconstruct the gender and climate change adaptation narratives that policy-makers use in Uganda to explore the embedded discursive power. The study presents a novel analytical strategy in narrative policy analysis: We first identify story episodes from interviews and multi-stakeholder meetings, based on which we reconstruct stories and narratives. The study reveals a complex narrative landscape populated by twenty-two different stories, which cluster around five main narratives. Most stories on gender issues unfold a feminist narrative, but four competing gender narratives, emerge. Shifts during conversations from the feminist to one of the other narratives betray tensions between a superficial dominance of gender mainstreaming (from a feminist standpoint) and a co-present resistance, deconstruction or even revocation. As a result, policy-makers are able adopters of the official feminist gender mainstreaming narrative, but frequently use competing narratives to express skepticism and create distance. Such micro-processes are likely to maintain the marginalization of gender issues in policy-making spheres not only in this case, but more generally. We therefore argue that gender mainstreaming policymaking needs to take into account micro-processes of narration that express doubt and resistance in order to improve the conditions for change.

### Narratives, discursive imaginaries and cultural codes: healthcare in post-communist societies

Karel Cada (University of Economics Prague)

The paper explores the relationship between discourses, narratives and institutional change in the post-communist transformation of the Czech health care. In the paper, based on discourse analysis of the Czech health care since 1990, two dominant discursive imaginaries are identified: (1) the discursive imaginary of health hopes connected with promises of better care, medical innovations, shifting away from an outdated and inefficient care, and increasing life expectancy and quality of life and (2) the discursive

imaginary of fiscal fears connected with concepts such as increasing government debt, healthcare spending, insecure fiscal future and economic responsibility. With respect to Laclau, these imaginaries can be defined as a horizon or an absolute limit which structures the field of intelligibility. Both discursive imaginaries can produce different narratives based upon their relation to broader cultural systems of rules and values of community solidarity.

Narrative perspective is ideal for studying the dynamic of health policy, which is characterised by a tension between citizens' rising expectations, on the one hand, and the imperative of permanent austerity, on the other hand. Using the cultural theory developed by Mary Douglas, narratives can be defined according to how they articulate societal constraints for individual members and how they defy or circumvent the rules and boundaries of their particular social environment. Different regulatory codes construct different types of disorder. Whereas crisis in the individualist code is connected with lack of incentives, crisis in the hierarchist code is associated with lack of reputation.

After 1989, the first period of transformation was characterised by a dominant individualist code, focusing mostly on basic market-oriented reforms such as a pluralistic health insurance model to guarantee up-to-date treatments. It resulted in a growth of total health care expenditure. In the context of accession to the EU in 2004, as reforms of public administration and transposition of European norms were being conducted, a hierarchist code stressing the need to consolidate rules prevailed. The last complex reform was proposed after the parliamentary elections in 2006. The reform plan corresponded with a global shift towards a neoliberal paradigm in health care, focusing on consumer-oriented services obtained in the market and patients as responsible and rational actors.

In the Czech context, the individualist code served predominantly to articulate a combination of the health hopes imaginary and the fiscal fears imaginary. On the contrary, the hierarchist code was often employed to express the fiscal fears imaginary. This historical configuration marked significantly the character of post-socialist welfare, because the positive imaginary of modernisation of health care was always associated with the individualist discourses of market-driven reforms. Efforts to strengthen rules and hierarchies, on the contrary, were much more underscored by fiscal doomsday scenarios.

### **From meaning to action: The power of narratives upon collaborative implementation of Integrated Water Management in Colombia**

Gustavo Valdivieso (University of Twente/Universidad Externado de Colombia )

Following up on the results of earlier analyses that found agreement on the problem (problem structuredness, Hoppe, 2010; Valdivieso 2016) significantly linked to collaborative implementation results for a series of IWRM projects in Colombia, this paper takes a step further in analysing the possible role of narratives in explaining different levels of problem structuredness and, through them, the easiness of collaboration.

Of the six projects analysed in the initial research of the implementation of Colombia's Integrated Water Management policy for the period 2012-2014, the paper focuses on one, the Rio Cauca flood control project. This happened to be the most successful project, and also the one with the highest agreement on problems to be solved, yet not all the measures proposed were approved by key actors on whom implementation depends and at least one key initiative had to be abandoned by project leaders to be able to move on with the project. Why? The analysis looks at both the most contested -and finally abandoned- initiative within the project and also at the least contested of them, studying how the narratives of key actors could have affected collaborative decision making inside what was conceived as a "governance network" (Klijn&Koppenjan, 2012).

In both cases, the creation of (permanent) "conservation corridors" for animal species and the designation of small areas as optionally floodable in a controlled fashion in the event of floods that might occur every 25 years, the key actors were the same, yet the permanent corridors faced significantly less resistance than the temporarily floodable areas, especially from the sugar cane growers organizations economically affected by both measures.

A thematic narrative analysis (Feldman et al., 2004; Riessman, 2008 but also Lejano and Leong (2012) is used to identify common, but also complementary narratives between actors. The analysis includes coding narrative interviews to eight of those actors as well as their separate "verbal protocols" (Isenberg, 1986; Payne, 1994) for solving a proposed problem and documents produced by them during the period studied. In all cases, the narrative interviews are about "what happened" during the discussion of both the conservation corridor and the floodable areas. Also in all cases, the verbal protocol is the answer to the following question: Given the following problem, Rio Cauca, a) how would you define it? b) how would you solve it, stepwise if possible?.

The thematic analysis is complemented -and its results triangulated with- a structural narrative analysis

(Riessman, 2008) of the responses of the four key actors, using Labov's (1972) categories of abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation and resolution to search for common/different patterns in the form of their stories, and for possible differences of form in each one's stories of the supported and the not-supported measure. The triangulation of methods allows for robust conclusions on the narratives of these key actors, that will then be linked back to their actions during the discussion process as recorded in project accounts and their own stories.

The hypothesis is that narrative commonalities/differences will be identifiable not only regarding themes, but also regarding forms of storytelling (Labov, 1972; Riessman, 1989; Riessman, 2008) used as proxies of intensity, telling us not just how different groups of actors understood themes differently but also how important a given theme of difference/coincidence was for them, therefore connecting narrative theme/form (meaning) to likelihood of collaboration (action), both directly through common/uncommon approaches to problems and indirectly through perceived interdependence between actors.

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- Valdivieso, G.E (2016). Frames, decision rules and concerted action: within-and between systems challenges to Integrated Water Resources Management in Colombia. Paper presented at the Netherlands' Institute of Government Annual Work Conference in Antwerp, 24 November 2016.

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## Session 2 Policy Narratives: Frameworks, Methods and Case Studies 2

Wednesday, June 28th 16:15 to 18:15 (Block B 5 - 3 )

### Discussants

Leong Ching (Institute of Water Policy, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore)

Raul Lejano (New York University, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology)

### Nexus narratives and resource insecurities in the Mekong Region

LOUIS LABEL (UNIT FOR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH)

**Rationale:** Several distinct waves of global discourse around water security have reached the Mekong Region. In the latest reincarnation, academics, bankers and business persons have called for greater attention to a water-food-energy nexus. It is not clear however, that they are talking about the same thing, with the same purpose, or that decision-makers are listening.

**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to identify the key features of nexus discourses and analyze how they are being used and critiqued by different actors.

**Study Design:** As rhetoric around the nexus often includes story-like elements we opted to use the Policy Narratives Framework to guide analysis. To understand the role of different policy beliefs, or biases, we drew on the contrasts suggested by Culture Theory. The main dataset included 285 texts of which 167 referred to the Mekong or countries in the Region. Texts included printed reports, journal articles, newspaper articles, magazine articles, presentation slides, and press releases.

**Findings:** Increasing resource scarcity which undermines security was a shared setting in all five nexus narratives (with Culture Theory associations) identified: neo-liberal (individualist), technocrat (hierarchist), environmentalist (hierarchist-egalitarian), local justice (egalitarian), and skeptical (fatalist). Technocrat and neo-liberal narratives work to de-politicize nexus security issues, whereas local justice narratives identify victims and villains. Environmentalist and technocrat narratives assign heroic roles for experts and bureaucrats, while in neo-liberal narratives business takes the lead in developing solutions. Fatalist narratives believe efforts to manage the nexus are not new and like their predecessors will often fail. Neoliberal narratives were articulated by big business and banks, sometimes in partnership with NGOs or academics. Technocrat narratives were the purview of bureaucrats and academics. Local justice and skeptical narratives were largely articulated by academics from the social sciences.

Evidence of impacts on decisions was not found, but at the level of discourse the different policy narratives were sometimes used to support a stance on, for example, hydropower development, irrigation expansion, or bioenergy crop expansion. Neo-liberal narratives, in particular, were strongly pro-resource exploitation and development, whereas technocrat narratives called for 'balance'. Local justice narratives highlighted insecurities at local scales, whereas most other narratives zoomed out to express concerns about insecurities at national or even planetary scales.

**Significance:** Overall, nexus narratives were shown to have had a measurable influence on stakeholder discourses in the Mekong Region. But as of yet, there is little evidence of impacts on policy, plans or operations on the ground. There is still a long way to go to convince policy elites of the significance of the nexus concept, let alone how it should be steered.

## **Narrative Settings in Policy Narratives**

Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

The role of policy narratives in the policy process is being increasingly studied. The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), in particular, has taken an iterative approach to the study of policy narratives to understand the import of specific narrative elements (e.g., characters) and strategies (e.g., causal mechanisms). While narrative elements such as characters and plot have been well-studied using the NPF, what remains absent from NPF work is the role of settings.

Settings are surprisingly complex. Their prevalence is so pervasive that setting, despite its importance, often goes unnoticed. Settings are where characters take action; settings are where the plot unfolds. Settings are spatiotemporal contexts, connected in some coherent manner (Herman, 2012).

In this study, we focus on the role of settings in flood hazard policy narratives. In the American West, floods shape and re-shape our landscape; our policy response is at multiple levels: federal, state, county, and local. We interviewed 26 flood plain managers along the Yellowstone River. The questions we address in this study are: What are the various settings used by flood plain managers? Do these settings vary by geographic location, administrative position, or cultural cognition type? How do settings interact with each other and with characters? The interviews will be coded by three researchers to develop a conceptual map of how settings operate in these hazard policy narratives.

## **The Case for Hope: Good Storytelling in Foresight and Public Policy**

Ian Roberge (York University)

This paper is interested in the relationship between foresight, narratives and storytelling. How do narratives and storytelling strengthen foresight to increase its appeal in policymaking? Foresight is the scientific study of futures. From a public policy perspective, foresight provides an opportunity to strategically plan long-term for desirable futures, or to look to avoid less attractive ones. Foresight can be particularly useful for crisis planning and management by considering the 'unimaginable'. Yet, foresight is under-used in public policy. Foresight scholars have long sought to make their field more applicable for policymakers; they have had limited success. Proponents of foresight emphasize its strategic benefits, as well as its scientific credentials as a basis for legitimacy. Foresight as science, however, has distinct limitations. Foresight is not about predicting the future – it is about analyzing futures – but, the perception is that too often it simply gets it wrong. Foresight needs to surmount its own limitations in order to become more policy relevant. In this paper, I argue that foresight to be useful, and to be viewed as such, needs to construct more developed and full narratives about futures via better stories. What are the characteristics of a good foresight story? At a minimum, foresight is pertinent insofar as it can provide hope. When it fails to do so and when the purported image is of a dreary future, foresight has difficulty gaining traction. Foresight stories need to remain anchored in scientific analysis; however, compelling narratives and stories to have influence ought to provide images of preferable futures.

This paper uses the developing and competing narratives about the Fourth Industrial Revolution to support its arguments. Undoubtedly, the Fourth Industrial Revolution creates major political, economic, social, cultural and ethical challenges. Foresight is an important instrument for policy relevant research relating to these developments. The Fourth Industrial Revolution's current and prospective impacts are, however, subject to debate. On the one hand, the Fourth Industrial Revolution promises that artificial intelligence, robotics, Biogenetics and other new technologies and discoveries are to fundamentally transform human existence to everyone's benefit. Alternatively, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is argued, will challenge our very humanness. By participating in the construction of a confident narrative that lays out policy options using good storytelling, foresight can be effective in bringing about positive policy change. Foresight that uses better stories, therefore, can assist in identifying a discernible path in 'unpredictable times' to a more progressive and inclusive future.

## **Energy security narratives and renewable energy in Australia**

Giorel Curran (Griffith University)

Renewable energy is at the policy crossroads in Australia. On the one hand, it is at the cusp of considerable success, having demonstrated its capacity to make a significant contribution to the energy mix and to addressing the climate problem; on the other, this success has prompted anti-renewables' interests to

intensify their resistance. With discourses and narratives central to articulating and advancing one's interests, particularly in modern democratic societies, a central feature of this resistance strategy has been the narrative construction of renewables in ways that cast doubt on their promise. Most energy narratives are constructed in terms of energy security, feasibility, affordability and reliability. These are clearly important attributes of a successful energy system, helping to explain the relative success of anti-renewables narratives cast in these terms. The feasibility narrative dominated anti-renewables' positions for quite some time. However, in the face of successful technological developments and the consistent popularity of renewable energy among the public, this narrative has lost much of its force. With the significant reduction in the cost of renewable energy technologies such as solar panels and wind, the affordability issue has also lost some of its sway, even as it remains central in the renewables' conversation. This paper is interested in exploring the Australian government's recent redeployment of the energy security narrative, alongside associated elements of the reliability narrative, as central to its attempts to diminish the renewables' momentum. Using an electricity blackout event across the state of South Australia in September 2016 as its illustrative case, the paper considers the construction of this narrative – particularly in light of the strong resonance that national security narratives have at a time of global political insecurity – and its intended effect.