

T08P14 / Policy Narratives and Public Policy

Topic : T08 / Policy Discourse and Critical Policy Research

Chair : Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The study of narratives has a long and rich history in the field of public policy. This body of work engenders a range of epistemological approaches, from interpretive and contextually based (e.g., discursive politics) to the more quantitatively oriented (e.g., Narrative Policy Framework). In turn, the accompanying assortment of narrative methodologies has been used in the analysis of a broad array of substantive public policies at multiple scales and in a variety of contexts. This diversity of approaches and policy substance has produced conceptions of policy narratives that invoke diverse theoretical and philosophical traditions and varied operational protocols. While many of these approaches to the study of policy narratives converge, there are also critically important areas of divergence. In the interest of illuminating these points of convergence and divergence, the goal of the Policy Narratives and Public Policy panel is to hear scholarly works that are centered on how narratives operate in the public policy process across different policy contexts.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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Chair : Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

Session 1 Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework

Friday, June 30th 08:15 to 10:15 (Block B 4 - 6)

Discussants

Elizabeth Shanahan (Montana State University)

LOUIS LEBEL (UNIT FOR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH)

Policy narratives and the imposition of state power - Case of India's "criminal tribes"

Commuri Chandra (California State University, Bakersfield)

Previous research on policy narratives has shown how such narratives serve the strategic goals of interest coalitions on contested policy issues (Roe, Stone, McBeth, Shanahan, Jones). Actors use policy narratives not only to promote their interests but also to contain the gains of rival coalitions. Previous research has identified various policy elements (like characters and story types), and has shown how these elements contribute to the overall effectiveness of a policy narrative. Among the various ways for studying policy narratives, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) offers a robust and detailed framework for analysis. The NPF has been applied in a variety of policy contexts, and has been shown to be compatible with quantitative and qualitative methods. In this project I attempt to extend the NPF by exploring a historical case, and by examining macro level connections between policy narratives and the larger political goals of powerful policy actors.

The policy case I am studying concerns what used to be called the “criminal tribes” of India. These are predominantly nomadic tribal peoples that have been categorized as criminals by colonial British rulers in India. Between 1871 and 1924, the colonial administration has passed a series of laws that label and punish these tribal peoples as criminals. The dominant theme in the broad policy narrative is to criminalize and marginalize millions of nomadic people in certain areas. This policy narrative relied on specific strategies in terms of developing characters and presenting a specific story about cause and effect. I use the NPF to understand the narrative elements, and how those elements contributed to the effectiveness of the policy.

But beyond this I explore further two themes: (1) how the narrative of “criminal tribes”, especially the development of characters in certain ways, helped the colonial administration establish and expand its power, and (2) how policy narratives become sticky, especially when they are presented by very powerful actors. I show how the criminal tribes narrative continues to impact these tribal peoples even decades after the official policy has ended. By doing this, I hope to explore the usefulness of the NPF to study the connections between specific policy narratives and the exercise of political power broadly.

Applying the narrative policy framework to charter schools within the news media

Nevbahar Ertas (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Andrew McKnight (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Policy debates in the public arena are increasingly dominated by polarizing emotional narratives. The recently developed Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) approach offers guidelines to systematically study the narrative elements and strategies that policy actors use to influence policy debate. The NPF approach defines a policy narrative as having four core structural elements (setting, characters, plot, and moral) that can be applied across different policy contexts. In this study, this approach is used to examine the news media narratives on charter schools, an understudied policy area within the NPF scholarship. Charter schools are a public-private hybrid on the education landscape in North America, as publicly funded independent schools established and managed by non-profit or for-profit groups under the terms of a contract with a local or national authority. Educators, policy makers, advocates, and skeptics express their disagreement in many areas of the charter school debate by using

selective information and cases. Since news media still plays a central role in disseminating information to the public, identifying the setting, characters, plots, and morals used in the circulating narratives would clarify the different ways these elements are used and perceived.

In order to provide an in-depth case study of narrative elements in stories on charter schools, we limited the analyses to one particular state, the state of Alabama, where the proposed charter legislation has led to a charged debate in the last few years regarding whether or not to adopt charter school legislation. We will discuss findings of a content analysis of articles published in local newspapers to evaluate how the news media covers different issues associated with charter schools in the recent years prior to adoption of the legislation. Prior research has shown that the composition of pro and counter charter advocacy coalitions reflects the political context of each state and locality in the United States. This case study approach will also enable us to go beyond looking at the general politics behind the educational choice policy movement and examine whether the narratives are shaped by educational alliances in the local context. If narrative frames and stories can shape opinions and beliefs about charter schools, and if public opinion, in turn, can shape policy outcomes, then scholars, policy makers, educators, and parents should pay close attention to the nature and quality of these frames and stories.

Demonetization in India: deconstructing the "common man"

Gautam Prateek (Arizona State University)

The policy of demonetization announced by the Government of India on November 8th, 2016 has created intense debates and discussions in India and abroad. Amidst all these discussions, the 'common man' has emerged as the central character used by the ruling and opposition parties as well as the print media to defend or oppose the policy. Using insights from narrative policy analysis and the Narrative Policy Framework, our article analyzes the narratives around the characteristics of the common man as created by the ruling and opposition parties. We have specifically investigated the characteristics of the common man as depicted in the assertions of the ruling and opposition parties by conducting a content analysis of a sample of 779 newspaper articles published by four leading English newspapers in India. Our analysis reveals that the narrative strategy of the ruling parties has been to defend the policy by focusing on diffused benefits to the common man and invoking values of bravery, vigor and sacrifice. The opposition parties have adopted a strategy of focusing on the diffused transaction costs to the common man by appealing to various identities such as housewives, small traders, vendors, middle-class, poor, farmers and people in rural areas. The print media appears to be playing a neutral role by catering to opposition and ruling parties as well as the common man. Our analysis also reveals an urban bias in the depictions of common man by the ruling and opposition parties as well as the print media coverage on the issue of demonetization.

The transformation of reform narratives - evidence from NPM reforms in Germany

Jens Weiss (Harz University of Applied Science)

Narratives are of essential importance for political and administrative reforms, especially when it comes to mobilizing adequate support. But evaluations of reform outcomes are also tightly interwoven with narrative practices, as will be shown.

The paper uses a qualitative approach based on the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) for an analysis of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in German local governments. The case is of particular interest because NPM reforms in local governments have never been promoted by the German government or federal states but were mainly driven by non-governmental actors.

It can be shown how the perceptions and interests of these reform actors led to a special variation of reform ideas. The main focus of the paper lies on the transformations of reform narratives. Therefore, narratives of early reform phases (1993–2000/2000–2006) as well as narratives after major reform evaluations (2006–2012) are analysed.

The main question of the paper is if transformations of reform narratives show typical patterns. At first, there may be a typical pattern of disenchantment during earlier reform phases. Second, the case gives an example of how narratives can influence evaluations and can inhibit the formation of a shared opinion, even between academic scholars. Last but not least, the results allow some reflections on the relations between the coherence of a reform narrative, the persuasiveness of that narrative, and the perceived success of a reform.

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Session 2 Policy Narratives of Cultural, Institutional, and Social Policies

Friday, June 30th 10:30 to 12:30 (Block B 4 - 6)

Discussants

Commuri Chandra (California State University, Bakersfield)

Nevbahar Ertas (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

The narratives of end-of-life policy: How dying becomes a policy issue?

Nathalie Burlone (University of Ottawa)

When, why and how did the issue of end-of-life care management entered the public discourse? By studying the Québec End-of-Life Care Act implemented in December 2015, this paper aims to explain public action towards singular and highly emotional issues. Through the study of narratives, this paper explores opposing or complementary representations of the end of life that shaped the framing of the Act. The case puts forward a certain conception, a framing, of the issue of the end of life and of its modalities of inclusion in a continuum of health care. However, a range of stakeholders and stakeholder networks have been involved in its formulation. These actors, because of their identities, their social functions, their interdependence and their roles, construct different interpretations of the issue at stake. These interpretations, considered here as social representations, concern several dimensions associated with the issue of the end of life and their study help question and discuss the privileged policy frame. Indeed, policy framing is the product of interpretations and reconstructions of information (Fischer, 2003) (Negura, 2006; Moscovici, 1988) that emerge from a socially constructed world and inform on the importance and democratic possibilities of civil society, the targets of public action and the privileged values ??in the policy process (Ingram and Schneider, 1993, 1997). Studying social representations through narratives puts forward their dynamic nature: social representations come from the communication (social dimension) of individual perceptions (cognitive dimension). They are sociocognitive construction (Abric 1994) carried by individuals who have an active rather than passive role in the creation of their realities, which are constructed through their experiences and perceptions.

An analysis of the rhetorical foundation that has generated this recent policy change has been conducted through a systematic review of Canadian newspaper articles published between 2000 and 2015. The emergence of this issue, its multiple problem definitions, chronology of events and types of actors involved have been traced using Nvivo. Results are discussed in light of the Canadian and international contexts and the literature on morality policy. Implications for research, policy analysis and qualitative methodology will be discussed.

Integration narratives and large-scale infrastructure development in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region

LOUIS LABEL (UNIT FOR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH)

Rationale: Large-scale infrastructure development with transboundary components or implications typically requires the support of multiple elite actors to be successfully pursued. In the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), a grouping established with help of the Asian Development Bank, it has been common to appeal to policy narratives that emphasize the merits of integration to support such schemes. The mechanisms through which such transboundary policy narratives have influence are not well understood.

Research questions: (1) How and under what conditions do integration narratives influence public policy support for large-scale infrastructure development? (2) What are the consequences of such support for impacts on the ground?

Study Design: This a comparison of two case studies: transport infrastructure development in the East-West

Economic Corridor and water resources development in the Mekong River basin. It uses a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, to explore the story-like features of policy narratives, how they are used, and with what influence.

Findings: Regional integration is promoted through the use of stories with powerful imagery. In the ‘energy grid’ covering the GMS, Lao PDR is the ‘battery’. The seasonally dry north-eastern region of Thailand is supplied water from the international Mekong River to provision a ‘water grid’. Flood and salinity control structures in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam secure the ‘rice bowl’. Interlinked highways are forming the ‘new silk road’.

The East-West Economic Corridor project – spanning over 1400km from the coast of Vietnam through Lao PDR and Thailand to the coast of Myanmar – has been propped up by a narrative in which ‘shared prosperity’ will come from improved transport infrastructure, together with policies that facilitate the free flow of trade, investment, tourists and labor across borders. The shared prosperity narrative helped maintain a coalition of support from governments in the region for a program that in many other respects (tourism, cargo, investment), failed to live up to promises made.

In the Mekong River Basin arguments for hydropower development have made use of a ‘nexus’ narrative to argue that the interactions between water, food and energy can be synergetic and even optimized. Multi-purpose dams, it is argued, can both generate electricity and provide increased flow for irrigation diversion in drier times of the year. Other actors have used ‘nexus’ narratives to oppose hydropower development because of its impacts on fisheries and thus food security, and to critique expansion of bioenergy crops because of impacts on availability of land grown for food crops as well as high water demands. Despite the prevalence of nexus narratives in expert discourses they have so far had only very modest impacts on policy, plans or operations on the ground in the GMS.

Conclusions: The persuasive power of integration narratives lies in their ability to simplify and promise benefits. Integration narratives, because they are difficult to oppose in principle, are also useful for deflecting criticism of negative impacts of individual projects away from the policy as a whole. The problem is delivery: money is invested, infrastructure is built, but integration remains elusive.

Polarization and controversy: Effects of narrative strategies in peacebuilding policy (Colombia)

Ortiz Pedraza Erika J. (National University of Colombia)

Dialogues in Havana (2012-2016) between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) have involved a transformation in the political paradigms of the country generating reforms in public policies, making emphasis on a peacebuilding project. Nevertheless, this process developed in a context of high polarization, creating a scenario where in the midst of the negotiation, a strong coalition against the peace process was consolidated, and played a decisive role in putting to circulate narrative and discursive strategies that generated a high influence in voters, public opinion, and the formulation of the so-called “Territorial Peace” or draft peacebuilding policy.

In order to understand the complexity caused by the high polarization, the attempts to try to minimize it, and the high influence that the coalition against the peace process achieved, this research conducts an analysis of narrative policy and the interactions of the different stories. It should be noted that viewing narratives as strategic, and the use of discourse analysis, helps ground them in traditional policy theory as narratives are told by political actors (particularly interest groups and elites) in efforts to expand their power and ultimately win in the policy process using policy stories to get more people involved, these tactics potentially expand the scope of conflict (Jones & McBeth, 2010) and increase the controversy as it happened during the studied period.

In that sense the research questions are: How do that coalition tried to challenge the others policy narrative(s) producing alternative and dissident ones? Which were their political narrative strategies? How that crystallize into peacebuilding policy? To answer them, this paper will review the stories of four actors: the guerrilla, the civil society who participated in the different forums, the government of President Santos led by the negotiating team in Havana, and finally will make an emphasis in the political narrative strategies and tactics of the coalition against the peace process in the head of the Democratic center party and their concrete effects on the peacebuilding policy.

Policy narratives of formation of comprehensive support system for parenting and child care in Japan

Mutsuko Takahashi (Graduate School of Social Welfare Studies, Kibi International University)

This research aims to analyse the distinctive features in the policy narratives in relation to the recent formation of comprehensive support system for parenting and child care in Japan. Recently, the Japanese Government has

been reforming the support system for parenting and child care. It is local municipalities who will be in charge of managing the comprehensive support system by re-integrating a variety of care and support services provided by several sectors of public health, medical care, daycare for children, child protection. This reform has been legitimized by public discourse about declined fertility rate, decreasing number of newborn babies and youth population. The emphasis on vital economic growth has been dominant in mainstream policy narratives in Japan for years, whereas not a few younger citizens are reluctant to be engaged in parenting and child care in addition to such working life. Here is obviously a discrepancy between policy narratives and the realities. Another distinctive features with Japanese public discourse is marginalization of issues on gender inequalities, even when current policy reform attempts to improve the coherent provision of care and support services for parenting and infants. The Japanese model of comprehensive support system has got inspiration from the Finnish system of providing continuous and coherent support and care from early stage of pregnancy to preschool age. Interpreting the Finnish system in Japanese social context, the essence of gender equality, which is important in Finland, is neglected. Instead, attention has been paid to relatively high fertility rate in Finland where dual-earners model is prevalent. In conclusion, it will be illuminated how policy narratives focus on some specific factors and skip others through discussion about the formation of comprehensive support system for parenting and child care in contemporary Japan.

Transformation of the Narrative Construction of EU and its Relationship with the German Cultural Policy

Ruirui Zhou (Institute for Social Economic Science)

This paper makes an elementary research on the causal relationship between the narrative – construction of EU and its relationship with the German Cultural Policy.

The European Union as a successful political community in transnational form with growing impact draws attention from beyond academic sides. It is confirmed that beyond organizational institutions a political community needs a set of narratives which, by extracting some sacred values from the parts, points to “an ultimate road” in the future. Noticeable enough is that until now, neither does EU have narrative of ultimacy, nor does it based merely on the economic globalization and handover of the politics to a higher power from national states, which the traditional theory assume. Moreover, it appeals on, comparatively to the other transnational organizations, a cultural identity which constructs itself from a “bottom – up” process.

The second part traces the causal relationship back to the construction of the cultural policy in Germany. This paper is convinced that the “leading” role of Germany in EU is not only legitimated by its economical advantage, but also by its cultural political approach which is “emerging” the European society. Dating back to the 70s, when “Cultural Politic as Social Politic” came into being in Germany, a trend of culturalization of the society and the socialization of culture went through. Cultural construction of living community influences and changes the political discourses. The traditional borderlines between politics, society and culture go blurring. A new form of narrative

appears. The third part endeavours to explain it through the theory of social mechanism and process tracing. Recent researches on multiplicity of mechanism have shown that cultural and institutional processes routinise themselves and transform to each other. The observation on EU – narrative suggests that a transformation of social construction of polity has taken place, which is originated from the

transformation of cultural policy approaches.

This paper is triggered by the observation of a transformation of narrative-construction and searches the answer in polity made by cultural policy, a field which has so far been neglected. It affords not only an innovative perspective for cultural policy research, but also a theoretical interdisciplinary contribution both to political and social science.