T10P02 / Relational Approaches to Policy Analysis

Topic : T10 / Methodologies
Chair : Nick Turnbull (University of Manchester)
Second Chair : Hendrik Wagenaar (University of Sheffield)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Relational, non-dualist, approaches to policy analysis offer a new way of addressing some of the most vexing issues in our field. In aiming to find a way beyond individualist and holist epistemologies, relational social scientists claim to support new theories and methodologies that will uncover significant insights into the operation of social forces. In particular, they claim that relational approaches are most appropriate for revealing the scope and dynamics of network society. A central feature of relational approaches is also that they operate in close interaction with the everyday world of public policy and society. Cultivating such a politically and socially relevant policy analysis both involves revealing the often taken-for-granted, cognitive and practical horizons of policy issues, and enabling and facilitating groups to free themselves from oppressive conditions or practices by jointly designing workable alternatives. This implies that the methodological and ethical imperatives of relational approaches are to engage in theoretically innovative and empirically grounded research that is both appreciative and critical of daily policy practice, as well as the practical and discursive processes that constitute it. Relationality also aims to integrate an analysis of power relations within policy networks and fields.

Relational approaches to policy analysis are especially important in a world that is characterized by dynamic complexity, urgency and unpredictability. Problems such as climate change, migration, the erosion of democracy and the ascent of relatively successful non-democratic forms of governance, the rise of the giant transnational corporation, the difficulty of global governance, mass surveillance and the demise of privacy, the governance of pluralist and conflicted urban spaces, and large private and national debt, are not only beyond the remit of traditional policy approaches and instruments but also do not allow much margin for error nor procrastination. While diagnoses of the antecedents of these issues abound, and many have been linked to the dominance of a neoliberal world order, we lack a framework that ties critical analyses to a clear and consistent conceptual vision that inspires practical transformations. We believe that relational approaches to policy analysis promise to take us in this direction.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The use of relational approaches is increasingly common in organization studies, international relations, development studies, cultural Marxism, urban studies, and planning. However, they have been less frequently used in policy analysis and public administration. In this panel, we invite scholars to propose papers dealing with relational approaches to policy analysis and public administration. Papers may treat either theoretical or methodological questions, or demonstrate an applied relational analysis in an empirical study. The aim is to facilitate, widen and deepen understandings of the theoretical, empirical, and methodological ways in which relational approaches to policy analysis enable us to understand, intervene in, and transform the world.

T10P02 / Relational Approaches to Policy Analysis

Chair : Nick Turnbull (University of Manchester)

Second Chair : Hendrik Wagenaar (University of Sheffield)

Session 1 Conceptualizing relational approaches to public policy

Wednesday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (Block B 4 - 3)

Discussants

Nick Turnbull (University of Manchester)

Hendrik Wagenaar (University of Sheffield)

Relational Public Administration

Nick Turnbull (University of Manchester)

Koen Bartels (University of Birmingham)

The idea has recently started to spread that relationships are at the heart of public administration as well as a vision for transforming it towards greater effectiveness and democracy. While this idea resounds with many relational approaches in our field, a widespread appreciation of the significance of relationality seems to be missing. Remarkably enough, there is no overview of the great variety of relational approaches and interpretations, their similarities and differences, strengths and limitations, and emerging insights and joint research agenda. Therefore, this paper canvasses relational perspectives in public administration and related fields to articulate what relationality means, how it has been used, and what this implies for future research and practice. In close conversation with the subfield of relational sociology, we propose a categorisation of relational approaches into four types. We especially highlight the differences between studies that analyse and conceptualise how relationships manifest themselves and matter on the one hand and studies of relational theory and practice which make epistemic arguments about relationality. Altogether, we argue that relational public administration enables us to better account for socially situated individual practices, understand social power and inequality in the new public governance, and foster more productive and democratic relationships.

What is a Policy Field? A Relational Approach to Policy Theory.

Hendrik Wagenaar (University of Sheffield)

The purpose of this paper is twofold: to further develop the concept of policy field by articulating a link between systems thinking, practice and dialogical meaning, and to map how the concept might inform policy theory.[1] The concept of policy field is common in the German-speaking world, but less so in Anglo-Saxon theory (Hösl & Krueger, 2014). Policy fields are seen as configurations of ideas, actors, interests and institutions. In that sense they are meant to transcend common concepts such policy subsystems and policy networks. In this paper we articulate the concept of policy field through a relational approach to policy analysis. Relational thinking is anti-dualist and focuses on processes instead of entities. Its unit of analysis is practices, and how these evolve and constitute the world around us. Its aim is not only to formulate representations of the world but, deliberately taking the perspective of the policy actors, who design and instigate change in complex, densely interconnected, dynamic systems. This requires a rethinking of the nature of knowledge as being animated and enabled by experience and practice.[2] Using examples from the domains of prostitution policy as well as climate change and human-nature relations, particularly water, the paper articulates how such a relational approach to the concept of a policy field policy analysis can be understood and enacted.

[1] Ison, R. (2010) Systems Practice: How to Act in a Climate Change World, Springer
[2] Wagenaar, H. & Cook, S.D.N., (2011) "The Push and Pull of the World: How Experience Animates Practice", Evidence and Policy, (7), 2: 193-212; Cook, S.D.N. & Wagenaar, H., (2012), Navigating the Eternally Unfolding Present; Toward an Epistemology of Practice". American Review of Public Administration, (42) 1: 3-38;

Seeing Ahead -- Relationally

Amanda Wolf (Victoria University of Wellington)

Policy analysis can be likened to driving full-speed ahead with a fractured windscreen, navigating by a tiny stream of data flowing in from a foggy rear-view mirror. Safely delivering citizen–passengers to their future wellbeing depends in part on the driver/analyst's skills in iterating between the 'known' past and the unknown future. This conceptual–methodological paper considers the potential of relational approaches to policy forecasting. To see ahead, relationally, an analyst—bearing the standard of practical wisdom—iterates between what 'evidence' the present/past potentially offers and what the future plausibly requires. Relational policy analysis privileges case-to-case reasoning in support of a more insightful sifting of complicated policy experiences and evidence. The analyst apprehends localised policy-relevant situations, extracts relevant information from them, and works with people in them with respect to what may be, and then maps out and scrutinises possible routes to future, improved situations and how to get there. For example, a long-time homeless man who has rejected all support in the past is offered by chance an opportunity to volunteer at a garden centre, discovers a gardening passion which a social worker notes, and finally accepts a supported place in a house in order to continue to garden.

Initial assumptions set the scene as follows. Policy change is experienced locally, in diverse receiving environments. Ex ante, each policy-receiving environment is envisaged as the status quo plus the policy change at t +1. Therefore, whereas others use depersonalised trend analysis, theoretical prediction, 'big data' or experiments to estimate the future from the present, the relational analyst can profit from a case-wise comparison of a known situation with a desired one. Case comparison preserves the full range of relationships, and proceeds intersubjectively as emergent changes in the case are experienced and interpreted by both analyst and those whose behaviours policy would influence and whose wellbeing is ostensibly of interest. Consistent with a pragmatic tradition, relational policy analysts 'talk' with their passengers en route and adjust their speed, direction of travel and destination accordingly.

In sum, as elaborated in this paper, analysts work between cases (localised, current/immediate past and the next evolution), work in a second-person dialogic mode (iterating between stories in context as told and interpreted in the past and emerging situations of interest), and employ their own expertise (as any skilled driver must). Various 'between-case' methods are summarised and assessed, and illustrated with stylised examples.

T10P02 / Relational Approaches to Policy Analysis

Chair : Nick Turnbull (University of Manchester)
Second Chair : Hendrik Wagenaar (University of Sheffield)

Session 2 Applied relational policy analysis

Wednesday, June 28th 16:15 to 18:15 (Block B 4 - 3)

Holding a referendum or not? Analyzing the decision process in the case of Stuttgart 21

Heike Brugger (University of Konstanz)

Antje Witting (University of Konstanz)

Melanie Nagel (University of Tuebingen)

Stuttgart 21 is a huge infrastructural project to rebuild a railway hub in the heart of Europe. This project had been discussed controversially because of financial, technical, environmental, urban developmental and democratic reasons. Many citizens demanded more public participation and asked for a referendum about the project. Grassroot-activists and civil society groups initiated public protests and successfully used social media to attract crowd support. In our article we introduce a newspaper article-based case study combining discourse and social network analysis. The study explores the potential of the Institutional Analysis Development (IAD) framework comparing the process leading to the rejection of a referendum in 2007 and its acceptance in 2011. It consists of two backward-flowing diagnostic analyses: one between 2002 and 2007, leading to the rejection of the petition to hold a referendum. The second was between 2008 and 2011, leading to the 2011 referendum.

Applying Text Mining to Improve the Interpretation and Analysis of Network Subgroup Effects in Urban Environmental Governance Assessments

ROGER S. CHEN (Chinese Cultural University, Taiwan)

In recent years, social network analysis has been largely applied in literature of environmental governance and resource management, which illuminates how cooperation and social capital play a part in building stakeholder relationship and multilevel governance. However, the application of social network analysis still encounters the vagueness inherent in its subgroup analysis and the difficulties of data collection in an urban setting. In the paper, text mining is proposed to construct networks with specific stakeholder interactions that are able to assist the analytical interpretation of subgroup effects, specifically the indications of bridging/bonding ties. Furthermore, applying text mining on solid and traceable information extracted from event-based digital data is not only able to identify stakeholders and their interactions, remedy the problems of data reliability, but also construct stakeholder networks in desired dimensions for subgroup network analysis. Based on the stakeholder networks with specific meanings, social network analysis is applied in the paper to assess the water-related resilience building in Tainan city, located in the south of Taiwan. The results of the analysis suggest that incorporating text mining in social network analysis offers an useful alternative for data collection and data processing to encompass the urban complexity and helps to advance the theoretical interpretation of bridging/bonding measurements that are important concepts in social network analysis for studying environmental governance and management.

A relational analysis of a public policy implementation tool: the Brazilian Single Registry for Social Programs

Natalia Koga (Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) and ENAP)

Denise Direito (Ministery of Social Development-MDS)

This article proposes a relational approach for the analysis of public policy implementation. Starting from the literature more recent criticism on the limitations of the traditional "top down" and "bottom-up" perspectives of public policy implementation, this investigation argues for the potential contribution that a relational perspective can bring to build more comprehensive models of analysis that provide additional explaining elements such as the political and interactional aspects to the long-established rationalist and linear representations of the social action.

In order to test this main argument, this investigation developed and analytical and methodological framework based on a relational approach in order to examine the transactional dynamics of the main tool of social policy implementation in Brazil, the Singly Registry for Social Programs (Cadastro Único). The Cadastro Único is the main tool for the identification and social-economic characterization of the Brazilian low-income families. It gathers updated and extensive data on the living conditions of 27 million families that correspond to around 80 million people. These data are used by all the more than 30 existing federal social programs for purposes that go from beneficiaries' selection, policy planning and monitoring as well as outcomes assessment. To collect and to keep these data updated and accessible for all social programs, the Cadastro Único's functioning involves a complex operational network of more than 9.500 local facilities which covers the whole national territory. Besides this main role, the Cadastro Único was normatively conceived to play an additional strategic role that is to provide integration amongst all social programs that use its resources.

The main investigation question of this research is thus to understand the level of policy integration that an implementation tool of this dimension and complexity can provoke within Brazilian social protection system. By means of social network analysis techniques and semi-structured interviews with key public managers, this investigation analyzed Cadastro Único in its interaction with several social programs that take part of this system.

The article is divided in five sections. Firstly, the article examines and attempts to build a dialogue between the literature on tools of public policy implementation and impacting works from the relational sociology such as the ones produce by Mustafa Emirbayer and Anne Mische. The second part of the article is dedicated to briefly introduce the trajectory of the object of analysis – the Cadastro Único and the public policies of the Brazilian social protection system. The third part depicts the methodology adopted in the investigation. The forth part shows the results of the analysis, including the sociograms constructed by the social network analysis techniques and the examination of the interviews with managers of the 17 main social programs that the investigation inquired from April to June 2016. Finally, the fifth part discuss the potentialities and limitations of Cadastro Único to induce public policy integration as well as the contributions of the relational approach to this inquiry and to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of public policy implementation.