

T06P05 / Desk Power: Insights Into Bureaucrats' Autonomy

Topic : T06 / Policy Implementation

Chair : Tobias Eule (University of Bern)

Second Chair : Federica Infantino (University of Oxford/Université Libre de Bruxelles)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

While we know that bureaucrats that enact policies on the "street-level" or "front-line" of the state hold significant autonomy over their actions, there is still too little attention paid to the potential consequences of this. The literature at least since Lipsky points to the fact that state agents can shape policies through implementation - but do they? In what circumstances? With what motivation? Similarly, anthropological accounts of bureaucracy point to the fact that discretion and "petty sovereignty" (Butler) can add an "illegible" element of power (Das) that furthers the reach of the executive. But does this influence the effect of policy, or clients' perceptions of the state?

This panel seeks to go further than merely pointing to the potential for messy practices on the lower echelons of bureaucracy. Therefore, it invites contributions from scholars who analyse what bureaucrats actually do with their autonomy. By focussing on autonomy in general, the panel seeks to stimulate a broader debate on how bureaucratic activities contradict and reinforce each other and how it potentially effects the actual implementation process itself. This panel is thus open to studies of state agents' practices across national context and policy fields.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel seeks for contributions that shed light onto the effects of state agents' autonomy in the implementation of policy. While we know that this autonomy exists, and that it can potentially influence or alter policy outcomes, we have too little information on whether and how it is actually exercised. This panel thus seeks to further our insight into bureaucrats' autonomy, its various causes, forms and its potential consequences. Through its broad frame, it aims to prompt a debate that goes beyond specific lines of enquiry, such as studies on discretion or corruption. Instead, we seek to understand the underlying mechanisms of exercising bureaucratic autonomy, or "desk power".

The panel is open to scholars that focus on the autonomy of state agents in all policy fields and national contexts. While papers with longitudinal, ethnographic or otherwise in-depth research designs are particularly encouraged to be submitted, the panel also invites other proposals that study phenomena like political resistance, corruption, occupational survival, creaming/skimming, etc. All papers should include original empirical material and demonstrate an intention to contribute to furthering our theoretical understanding of street-level or front-line bureaucracy.

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Session 1

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

Discussants

Tobias Eule (University of Bern)

Bureaucrats behaving badly - using administrative traditions to legitimise adherence to old ways

Prudence R Brown (University of Queensland)

Creaming practices at the frontline of welfare-to-work policies : An exploration of social workers' autonomy in a social assistance organization in Belgium.

Valentine Duhant (Université Libre de Bruxelles, GERME)

How Street-Level Bureaucrats Become Policy Entrepreneurs: The Case of Urban Renewal in Israel

Nissim Cohen (University of Haifa)

Einat Lavee (University of Haifa)

THE IMPLEMENTAION OF CONDITIONAL CASH TRANFERS PROGRAMS IN BRAZIL AND MEXICO: ANALYSING THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE STREET LEVEL AGENTS TOWARDS THE EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONALITY

Breyenner Oliveira (Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto)

Exploring the Role of Ideas in Street-Level Bureaucracies: The Case of Canada's Compassionate Care Benefits Program.

Francesca Scala (Concordia University)

Policy Friction: An Explanation of Policy Implementation Deviation in China

LEI QIAN (SUN YAT-SEN UNIVERSITY)