

T02P34 / Urban Policies: Charting a New Territory for Policy Studies

Topic : T02 / Comparative Public Policy sponsored by Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis

Chair : Fritz Sager (University of Bern)

Second Chair : David Kaufmann (ETH Zürich)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Cities offer an important venue for political science as political phenomena present themselves in a dense form. While many political science classics such as Dahl's "Who Governs?" or Hunter's "Community Power Structure" studied urban societies, the focus of political research on cities is on politics, institutions and governance rather than on public policy. This is surprising given that urban areas are confronted with specific policy problems that differ from both rural communal problems and national challenges and demand specific urban policy solutions. We argue that there is a need to a more explicit focus on urban policies linking urban policy analysis to the large body of research on urban politics and metropolitan governance. Furthermore, policy studies to this day lack a policy sector approach to urban policies. This panel aims at filling this gap by inviting paper dealing with urban policy problems in different policy sectors. The focus should be on the specificities of urban policy processes, design, and effects. The long time objective is to put together a handbook of urban policy presenting the full range of urban policy sectors from tax policy to culture.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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Session 1 Urban Policies: charting a new territory for policy studies

Wednesday, June 28th 16:15 to 18:15 (Block B 3 - 6)

Urban consolidation and its policy design: exploring a policy-centred approach to critical urban analysis

Mitchell Johanna (Curtin University)

This paper responds to growing calls for a wider lens of critical urban analysis that grants sufficient explanatory power to the cultural and political histories of the local context. By focusing on urban housing outcomes in a context of urban consolidation, the paper highlights that explicit unpacking of policy goals and instrumentation can provide a suitably comprehensive and nuanced analysis of urban governance and its outcomes.

A policy design approach is presented in this paper and its potential benefits for critical urban analysis and policy advocacy are highlighted. Using a policy design framework, and specifically using Michael Howlett's (2009) 'multi-level nested model of policy instrument choice and policy design', the paper examines urban consolidation policies in Australia, with a focus on higher density housing. Drawing on interviews with local policy makers, secondary literature, and strategic urban policy documents the research asks the question 'what is the potential role of government in the production of socially sustainable higher density urban housing?'. It argues that first understanding the 'architecture' of the existing policy design is crucial to successful advocacy of potential roles for government in the space. In addition, the paper highlights several insights offered by a policy design framework which provide a valuable addition to existing critical urban perspectives.

The dominant political economy approach to critical urban analysis has proven insightful in many ways. Authors have noted the contradictory and varied ways in which neoliberal policy making has shaped the morphology and composition of the city. Despite this revealing body of work, some have questioned the overly structural focus that leaves the critic prone to pre-determined conclusions, as well as the attribution of minimal agency to local actors via assumptions regarding neoliberalism as hegemonic. A counter literature, utilising a post-structural approach, has focused on the particularities of urban contexts, providing valuable insights about the alternate forces to neoliberalism operating in the urban realm. These accounts, however, can lead to neglect of structural forces, in favour of a focus on these local particularities.

In response, this paper employs a policy-centered approach to critical urban analysis as this provides a balanced assessment of both the macro and micro factors operating in any given context. It argues that critically unpacking the logics and political rationales leading to government intervention allows policy advocacy to proceed from a suitably informed platform of understanding. In addition, granting analytic power to these logics demonstrates that policy actors possess agency in the governance of urban development, making space for the possibility of change. Such an approach, it is argued, would therefore prove fruitful in the 'charting (of) a new territory for policy studies' in urban political studies.

Policy Path dependency and the Strategic Adaptation of Cities in Federal Systems: Comparing Canada and the United States

Charles Conteh (Brock University)

The proposed paper advances the extant literature on literature on urban politics, institutions and governance by drawing conceptual frameworks from the discipline of public policy to investigate economic development policy governance in city-regions. In particular, the paper will investigate the institutional resilience and adaptability of mid-sized cities in the face of structural changes in the global economy since

the Great Recession. The focus of the discussion will be on exploring and comparing a sub-set of cases in Canada and the United States. Cities are experiencing realignments of power relations across levels of government as globalization creates new opportunities and imposes new challenges for industrialized economies. These power realignments are rooted in frameworks of public policy governance that give a central importance to “local spaces,” not only as geographic but also as institutional constructs. A closely related implication of this realignment is the building strategic alliances among a wide range of public and non-governmental actors in implementing policies in highly politicized environments. The discussion focuses on a sample of cities in Ontario and New York to illustrate the institutional infrastructure of governance underpinning the economic landscape of city-regions and the challenges of reform that such local regions face in an age of unprecedented global socioeconomic change.

The paper will utilize the concept of path-dependency in public policy formulation and change as an analytical framework for understanding the challenges and complexities of institutional adaptation at the subnational level. The notion of path dependency is rooted in the well-established research tradition of historical institutionalism, one of the variants of neo-institutionalism. The academic literature on the new institutionalism, however, has tended to focus on the national level of analysis. But there is a growing recognition of cities and regions as the main engines of socioeconomic change in the current age of seismic global economic perturbation. Their historic and current significance has thus made them arguably the most organic units of governance than modern states or supranational regimes.

The implications of the discussion in the proposed paper extend far beyond North America as cities around the world confront the challenges and exploit the opportunities of post-recession global economic restructuring. The ultimate aim of the paper is to contribute to the current discourse of urban studies by applying concepts and frameworks from the field of public policy to shed light on the growing complexities urban policies.

Cities, local growth and devolution: England’s noncodified urban policy

Pugalis Lee (Institute for Public Policy and Governance, University of Technology Sydney (UTS))

The nature, significance and utility of urban policies continue to evade international political, professional and research consensus. Since the early 2010s, UK governments have deployed the narratives of localism and devolution as part of a state rescaling strategy attempting to recast the inherited English urban and regional policy system, which was scripted as being outdated and unresponsive to contemporary economic and societal requirements. This critique and the subsequent partially reconstituted, albeit noncodified, urban policy framework, in part, responds to an empirical experience of widening regional disparities. In addition, England is one of the most politically and fiscally centralised countries within the OECD.

The notion of a Northern Powerhouse is the latest urban policy episode in the fast developing story of decentralisation in pursuit of urban economic growth: framed as the strategy that will begin to resolve the longstanding, entrenched and growing spatial economic imbalance in England. At the heart of the Northern Powerhouse agenda is the policymaking practice of different tiers of government (and nongovernment actors) negotiating place-based deals, with the latest variant known as Devolution Deals. However, the Northern Powerhouse agenda has a nebulous relationship with broader cities and local growth policy.

This paper examines England’s noncodified urban policy and, in particular, the symbiotic relationship and cleavages between cities policy, local growth policy and devolution policy. Derived from fieldwork conducted over the past seven years, including a comprehensive body of semi-structured interviews with key local, regional and national policy actors, we piece together England’s largely unwritten urban policy framework and critically interrogate it. Analysing urban policy rhetoric and urban policy action, we question whether this noncodified urban policy is likely to contribute to reducing economic disparities between the North and South East of England.

Our research results lead us to conclude that while there is significant enthusiasm for what is perceived as a city-focused growth agenda to boost the economy of the North of England, it is coupled with a lack of clarity and wariness among local stakeholders of central government’s intentions and motives. Our investigations reveal that lurking behind the public policy pronouncements, the opaque crafting of deals has been an intensely political process that shows little signs of helping to rebalance the spatial economy of Northern England. Furthermore, we find that place-based deals are highly spatially discriminatory as some places are omitted from the purview of this modality of state practice, which raises new issues, in particular, those concerning the spatial implications of pursuing place-based deals on an exceptional basis. The research speaks to a broader international audience about the tensions replete in urban policies that simultaneously invoke the principles of competition and collaboration.

Change and resistance in cultural urban policy. Madrid as an scenario.

Maria Velasco (UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID)

Rosa M. De la Fuente (Complutense University of Madrid)

Since urban policies are more than local policies and planning (Subirats 2012), it is relevant to develop methodological approaches in order to comprehend the complexity of this kind of policies. In that sense, the urban policy is a multi-actor policy, but also it is a multi-sectoral policy, and therefore those conditions should be included in any analysis of an urban policy (Cochrane, 2007; Hall, 1988; Ward, 2004; Glasson and Marshall, 2007).

However, after analyzing the change and continuities of the urban policies in general in the case of Madrid and other Spanish cities (Iglesias et al. 2012, Velasco & de la Fuente 2012, de la Fuente, Walliser y Velasco 2015,) we consider it is also essential to analyze deeply an particular urban policy using a longitudinal approach and comparing its change or continuity with the city model in each period.

Our papers is focused on cultural policy. Cultural policy deals with a very complex object: culture as collective identities; culture as creativity and personal growth factor and culture as common heritage that must be preserved (Bradford, Gay and Wallach, 2000; Miller and Yudice, 2002, Mulcahy, 2006).

The urban level is the most relevant scenario for the confrontation of discourses on culture and the formulation of cultural policies. The urban context, close to the needs and demands of citizens, promote collective decision-making in relation to cultural policy (Evans, 2001, McGuigan, 2004; Grodach and Silver, 2014). Therefore, we are particularly interested in observing how, in this arena it is possible to observe the dynamics of change and resistance in the formulation of urban policies. And therefore we will use the case of Madrid, since a new coalition of civil organizations and polital parties won the local election (2015) and defined a new government with the aim of changing conservative policies developed since 1989.

Beyond the green: new urban policy approaches to public space and transportation

Andrea Restrepo-Mieth (Cornell University)

An emphasis on urban sustainability is found in global agendas such as Habitat III as well as countless municipal plans. Urban policies centered on sustainability tend to be conceptualized around 'greening', thus emphasizing increasing the number of hectares of park space, opening reservoirs and waterways to the public, increasing the number of journeys made using public transportation, and improving pedestrian and non-motorized infrastructure – among others. While the benefits of greening a city are hard to dispute, the fiscal and political costs associated with green policies are hard to justify for state actors in cities in the Global South where limited resources face multiple and competing demands. This however fails to account for all the ways urban sustainability policies can go 'beyond the green', which leads to this article's central question: what characterizes interventions in public space and transportation that manage to go beyond the green? Using Medellin, Colombia as a case study, this article argues that sustainable urban policies on public space and transportation can take into account not only important environmental considerations but also the transformative socio-spatial power of interventions in these sectors when integration, affordability, and equity are incorporated as guiding drivers and coupled with considerations of quality and creativity. In-depth semi-structured interviews with state and non-state actors, direct observation, and document analysis were employed to understand what motivated different actors to embark in these transformative interventions, what policy obstacles were faced along the way, and what elements led to more or less effective outcomes. Medellin's policies on public space and transportation in the past 15 years have emphasized physical and social integration – all while achieving some of the greening objectives of sustainable policies in these two sectors. This paper seeks to contribute to the panel on 'urban policies: charting a new territory for policy studies' by heeding the panel proponents' call for greater analysis of urban public policy sectors.