T04P01 / Wicked Problems in Public Policy – From Theory to Practice

Topic : T04 / Problems and Agenda Setting

Chair : Joshua Newman (Monash University)

Second Chair : Brian Head (University of Queensland, Australia)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

In recent years, politicians and bureaucrats have expressed a desire to increase the use of evidence in policy-making. This narrative assumes a kind of linear, rational, or scientific trajectory for the use of knowledge in addressing policy problems – as if access to better quality information were the key to resolving important and difficult policy issues.

However, since the 1950s, there has been among scholars a growing dissatisfaction with the idea that some policy problems might be resolved through scientific methods or holistic design efforts – or more directly, that they might even be resolved at all. Inspired by colossal failures in social planning in the 1960s, the policy literature since the 1970s (starting with Rittel & Webber, 1973) has increasingly recognised that many issues are inherently difficult to manage or resolve, owing to increasing complexity in areas of social policy, significant differences in values, interests and perceptions, and uncertainty of outcomes and consequences that had previously gone unrecognised. This has presented something of a paradox, in that governments are increasingly demanding that policy appear to be more evidence-driven while academics (who produce much of this evidence) increasingly bring to light the challenges inherent in this task.

With this renewed emphasis on connecting evidence to policy, as well as the popular focus on ‘impact’ in academic research, it is time to re-examine the concept of wicked problems and the obstacles they present to linear, scientific models of policy decision-making. Are some policy problems wicked? How can the concept of wicked problems help us understand the inherent challenges of policy-making? Are some areas of policy more inclined to wickedness, or is all policy problems inherently wicked? How do complexity, uncertainty, and divergence of values and preferences intersect in processes of public policy?

This Panel is concerned with conceptualisations of wicked problems and the range of policy responses to wicked problems that are available to decision-makers. What are the key features of such problems? And are they really very different in nature from more routine problems? Are we developing better ways to address these wicked problems? How do approaches vary across different policy issues? How do different political-administrative cultures respond to complex challenges? Are some issues more ‘manageable’ in some institutional settings and political contexts than in other settings? Papers addressing theoretical, methodological, and practical matters in these areas are welcome.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Some types of policy problems have been described as messy, complex, intractable, open-ended and ‘wicked’. The policy literature since the 1970s (starting with Rittel & Webber, 1973) has increasingly recognised that many issues are inherently difficult to manage or resolve, owing to increasing complexity in areas of social policy, significant differences in values, interests and perceptions, and uncertainty of outcomes and consequences that had previously gone unrecognised.

This Panel is concerned with conceptualisations of wicked problems and the range of policy responses to wicked problems that are available to decision-makers. What are the key features of such problems? And are they really very different in nature from more routine problems? Are we developing better ways to address these wicked problems? How do approaches vary across different policy issues? How do different political-administrative cultures respond to complex challenges? Are some issues more ‘manageable’ in some institutional settings and political contexts than in other settings? Papers addressing theoretical, methodological, and practical matters in these areas are welcome.

T04P01 / Wicked Problems in Public Policy – From Theory to Practice

Chair : Joshua Newman (Monash University)

Second Chair : Brian Head (University of Queensland, Australia)

Session 1

Friday, June 30th 08:15 to 10:15 (Manasseh Meyer MM 3 - 2)

New agendas for the study of wicked problems

Brian Head (University of Queensland, Australia)

Understanding the governance of wicked problems from the perspectives of sensemaking and decision-making

Dewulf Art (Wageningen University)

Lost in translation: policy implementation to address health inequities as a 'wicked' problem

Matthew Fisher (Flinders University of South Australia)

Fran Baum (Flinders University)

Sharon Friel (The Australian National University)

T04P01 / Wicked Problems in Public Policy – From Theory to Practice

Chair : Joshua Newman (Monash University)

Second Chair : Brian Head (University of Queensland, Australia)

Session 2

Friday, June 30th 10:30 to 12:30 (Manasseh Meyer MM 3 - 2)

Unpacking the implications of labelling environmental issues as 'wicked problems'

Brian Coffey (RMIT University)

Intractable Water Conflict as a Wicked Problem: Two Case Studies in Mexico

Raul Pacheco-Vega (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) Mexico)

Ten Ways to Fail: Disaster Management in the Wicked Problems Framework

David Kasdan (Sung Kyun Kwan University)

T04P01 / Wicked Problems in Public Policy – From Theory to Practice

Chair : Joshua Newman (Monash University)

Second Chair : Brian Head (University of Queensland, Australia)

Session 3

Friday, June 30th 13:45 to 15:45 (Manasseh Meyer MM 3 - 2)

Affordable lifelong housing or urban social sustainability? Morphogenesis of an almost super wicked problem amidst rapid developmentalism

Daniel Rong Yao Gan (National University of Singapore)

Conceptualizing the problem of ‘unwanted girls’ and analyzing the Indian state’s response

Advaita Rajendra (Indian Institute of Management, Sirmaur)

Ankur Sarin (Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad)

Navdeep Mathur (Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad)

Identifying Policy Problems Through A Problem Structuring Flowchart: Cases of "Wicked" Problems from the Philippines

Ebinezer Florano (University of the Philippines Diliman)