P05 / Advancing the Policy Design Framework

Topic : POLICY DESIGN, POLICY ANALYSIS, EXPERTISE AND EVALUATION

Chair : B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

Second Chair : Guillaume Fontaine (FLACSO Ecuador)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Advancing the Policy Design Framework

The 1980s shift from social theory to policy design has provided comparative policy analysis with an encompassing framework bridging research and practice. From then on, theories of the policy design have combined models of causation, intervention and evaluation with theories of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Four foregrounding theories of the policy design have emerged based on different ontologies, which are summarized below.

The neopositivist approach continues the analysis and modelization in the tradition of main stream political science, using intensively cost-benefit analysis and econometrics, semi-experiments, time-pooled series and formal process tracing. It focuses on program design and law-like theories aimed at explaining policy change, implementation styles, government efficiency, policy coherence and congruence and instruments constituency through policy mixes, portfolios or bundles. From that standpoint, scholars treat actors´ values and preferences, State?s capacity, regulation, spaces and administrative structures as independent variables of policy design.

The realist agenda deals with governance interplays as a result of the transformation of the State and the relationships between the government, non-State actors, international organizations and local communities. It conceives policy design essentially as a combination of actors, social values and instruments according to a logic of appropriateness, or perhaps a strictly political logic. Scholars intend to explain policy implementation in actual situations, therefore instrumentation is essentially context-dependent. They treat policy instruments as institutions enjoying a certain autonomy from individual and collective actors. Most recent research underlines the role of ideas in institutional change and it reckons that policy change is produced by complex causal mechanisms articulating ideas, interests and institutions that cannot be treated as independent variables.

The analytical school put actors´ perceptions, representations and interpretations at the core of policy design. It considers policy design a contingent process in which problems and solutions are socially constructed. Initially scholars addressed the problem of disconnected cognitive levels and maps between policy “designers”, implementors and target groups. From that standpoint, policy design was above all a way to make actors do something they would not do otherwise, using policy instruments to influence their behavior towards compliance. Research then focused on how policy design shapes the social construction of a policy?s target population, according to their identity and power. This lead to a theory of “degenerative policy design” which underlined framing and translation as a way to correct the unbalanced relationships between the administration, the experts and the public. Further research addressed the drivers of change in target populations and how the status of targeted actors could evolve. Most recent research from this tradition deals with the “design talk” in the process of governing, which refers to policy design as a framing activity in the practice and analysis of policy.

The reflexivist approach initially contributed to research on policy design with a taxonomy opposing “reasoned consensus” to positivism, social engineering and relativism. Reasoned consensus could be reached either by dismissal (e.g. the accommodation of truth to power) or by critical enlightenment, aimed at correcting the systematic communication distortions created by power relationships, through dialectics, the equalization of capacities, holistic experimentation and institutional innovation like mediation and broad scale discursive exercises. From that standpoint, policy design is an emancipatory strategy in the power relationships opposing the State to non-State actors. Later on these scholars embraced the “argumentative turn” and the introduction of the critical theory in public administration and planning. Against the hegemony of instrumental rationality in social sciences, they advocate for a cognitive approach to the policy process, consistent with the theory of rational-critical communication. This implies a preference for heuristic, deliberative analysis and thick descriptions of historical events. Eventually the focus on the relationship between policy design and the sociological locus of the researcher derived in theories of participatory problem-solving, deliberation and practice.

Our panel seeks to engage in a dialogue between these four schools of thought, in order to advance the

policy design framework. The following questions may be addressed as guidelines for the discussion:

Who is involved in a policy design?
How are complex and wicked problems addressed in a policy design?
How does a policy design deal with contingency?
How are policy instruments selected and combined in a policy design?

We also look forward to discussing the methodological challenges raised by the foregrounding theories of the policy design. In particular, we wonder how scholars combine research and practice in their professional context.
The participants may contribute to the discussion with an 8000 word paper based on a within-case study or cross-case comparison of small-n or large-n scale. Theoretical and methodological papers are welcome as long as they are grounded in empirical research

CALL FOR PAPERS

Since the mid-1980s the research on policy design has provided comparative policy analysis with an encompassing framework, albeit sometimes oversimplified. Four foregrounding theories coexist within that framework, based on different scientific and philosophical ontologies, which combine different models of causation, intervention and evaluation with conventional theories of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

The neopositivist approach continues the analysis and modeling in the tradition of mainstream political science, focusing on program design and law-like theories aimed at explaining policy change, implementation styles, government efficiency, policy coherence and congruence and instruments constituency. Here actors´ values and preferences, State?s capacity, regulation, spaces and administrative structures are treated as independent variables of policy design.

The realist agenda deals with governance interplays as a result of the transformation of the State and the relationships between the government, non-State actors, international organizations and local communities. It conceives policy design essentially as a combination of actors, social values and instruments according to a strictly political logic or a logic of appropriateness.

The analytical school put actors´ perceptions, representations and interpretations at the core of policy design, which is a contingent process where problems and solutions are socially constructed. Initially scholars addressed the problem of disconnected cognitive levels and maps between policy “designers”, implementors and target groups. Further research focused on the theory of “degenerative policy design” which underlined framing and translation as a way to correct the unbalanced relationships between the administration, the experts and the public.

The reflexivist approach initially contributed to research on policy design with a taxonomy opposing “reasoned consensus” to positivism, social engineering and relativism. Scholars from this tradition embrace the “argumentative turn” and the introduction of the critical theory in public administration and planning, which sees policy design as an emancipatory strategy in the power relationships opposing the State to non-State actors. The focus on the relationship between policy design and the sociological locus of the researcher derived in theories of participatory problem-solving, deliberation and practice.

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Session 1Theories of the policy design

Friday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (MB 3.270)

Discussants

B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

Dealing with the Darkside of Policy Design: Policy Resilience and Volatility in Policy Mixes

Michael Howlett (Simon Fraser University)

Policy design studies to date have focussed almost exclusively on the “good” side of policy formulation, that is, dealing with concerns around ensuring that knowledge is marshalled towards developing the best feasible policy in any given context under the assumption of well-intentioned governments and accommodating policy targets. This work has looked at issues around how policies evolve over time and focused upon understanding how such policies can be made more robust and resilient but without carefully examining or allowing for the possibility that government intentions may not be solely oriented towards the creation of public value, or that policy targets may indulge in various forms of ‘misconduct’ from fraud to gamesmanship, undermining government intentions of whatever kind. While self-interested, corrupt or clientelistic policy-making has been the subject of many studies in administrative and regulatory law, even the best of policy intentions can be perverted in implementation and the need to design policies to be resilient against conscious and determined efforts on the part of policy targets to undermine them is pressing. Although the question of intentional efforts to undermine or pervert policies and programmes in less than benign ways on the part of policy targets has only now become a source of interest among policy scholars some lessons can be learned from these other studies of policy tools and instruments about improving policy designs to deal with malicious behaviour.

Deliberatiave Policy Design: From Theory to Practice from Khon Kaen, Thailand

Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin)

Piyapong Boossabong (Chiang Mai University School of Public Policy)

Deliberative policy analysis, employed in the policy design process, has its origins in the argumentative turn in policy analysis. It emerges as an alternative to the use of standard empirical-analytic methods of the social sciences to solve public policy problems. Not only has the conventional technical-empirical approach failed to produce the promised results, it often seen to operate with a technocratic, and in too many case an anti-democratic, bias. Basic to deliberative policy design is a method for bringing together a wider spectrum of citizens, politician and experts in the pursuit of policy designs that are both effective and democratically legitimate. This essay begins with an outline of the theoretical perspectives underlying deliberative policy design. Then, the process and practice are illustrated by the case study based on a participatory governance process in the city of Khon Kaen in Thailand, which shows how the deliberative approach has successfully moved from a theory to a practical method for policy design and decision-making.

Design, designing and public health: some questions

Hal Colebatch (UNSW Australia)

Public health is seen both as an opportunity for policy design, and as a challenge. The benefits of policy success seem to be large, but the factors which might produce this success seem to be beyond the direct control of the policy-makers. This paper takes one case seen as an example of successful public health policy-making – anti-smoking policy in Australia – and explores what it shows about the way that policy is framed and policy outcomes explained, and goes on to discuss the implications of this examination for practice-relevant research in policy-making for public health.

Agency in the policy design process: Introducing design coalitions to explain policy output

Leonore Haelg (ETH Zurich)

Sebastian Sewerin (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich)

Tobias Schmidt (ETH Zurich)

Despite a renaissance of policy design thinking in public policy literature, and a renewed interest in agency in policy process literature, agency in the policy design process has, so far, not received systematic attention. Understanding the agency at play when designing policy, however, is crucial for better comprehension of policy design choices and variation in policy design across cases. Here, we build on the notion of the basic design elements that constitute each policy to investigate the design elements around which actors coordinate. Our aim is to establish different actors' roles in specific policy design choices in an inductive, single-case study using the empirical case of the Swiss renewable energy feed-in. Generally, our results suggest that the decision-making process sequentially moves from high-level policy goals and instrument logics, to mid-level policy objectives and instruments, to low-level specific settings and calibrations. Once a design element is formally decided upon, it is not revisited in the same designing process. Yet, high-level design elements continuously influence lower-level design choices. Importantly, we identify coalitions which form around particular design elements. These coalitions are not static, but realign during the design process. Based on our exemplary analysis, we derive the generalisable concept of design coalitions that we define as sets of actors who gather around, and advocate for, particular design elements. Policy design coalitions are dynamic, strategic and boundedly rational, and constitute the determinants in translating policy problems into final policy designs during policy designing. Our approach allows us to shed light on the role of agency in policy designing in general.

Policy design and performance: a Qualitative Comparison Analysis of 12 Dutch provinces

Marijn van Geet (University of Groningen - Faculty of Spatial Sciences)

Tim Busscher (University of Groningen)

Stefan Verweij (University of Groningen)

Policy design aims at realizing objectives by matching goals and means. This instrumental approach is very appealing in a policy context in which growing multilevel and cross-sectoral interdependencies complicate policy implementation. This study takes interest in the performance of this neopositivist approach to policy design in such a policy context. Through a qualitative comparative analysis, this research studies the relation between successful policy designs and performance. In doing so, we adopt a multi-level perspective to policy design and acknowledge that policy goals and means exist at three levels of abstraction: macro-level, meso-level and micro-level. Consequently, we argue that successful policy design is achieved when: (i) policy aims, objectives and targets are coherent; (ii) policy instruments, tools and calibration are consistent; (iii) goals and means are congruent at all levels of policy design abstraction. Performance is determined along the extent to which policy aims, objectives and targets have been successfully implemented.

Findings will be derived from a comprehensive cross-comparative case study on the Dutch regional transport policy designs. Data is obtained from all 12 Dutch provinces using policy document analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Using Qualitative Comparative Analysis, we assess whether all conditions – coherent aims, consistent means, and congruent policy aims and means – need to be present, or if other configurations in which only one or two conditions are present, also result in successful policy implementation. Our results will provide important insights for policy designers. It will not only help them in their search for ideal policy mixes, but it will also show which policy elements are an absolute necessity (necessary condition), which are sufficient (sufficient condition), and which are unnecessary (redundant condition) in order to achieve implementation.

Furthermore, we believe that the neopositivist design approach to dealing with complex policy issues, the multi-level policy design perspective, and the methodological approach that characterize this study offer interesting input for an engaging dialogue in order to advance the policy design framework.