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)

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)

Design, designing and public health: some questions
Hal Colebatch (UNSW Australia)

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)

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)