P15 / Comparing Poverty Reduction Strategies

Topic : COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY

Chair : Geranda Notten

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Following an international trend in public policy making, many governments engage in a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) process because they expect / claim that it leads to more poverty reduction than traditional policymaking. A PRS process typically involves creating new governance structures, adopting strategic management practices, and the engagement of more stakeholders at more stages in the policy cycle (Head & Alfort, 2015). PRS's were first implemented in developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as part of a reformed process by which developing countries could qualify for conditional loans and debt relief (Levinsohn, 2003). In 1997, Ireland was the first advanced economy to launch a PRS process, followed by the European Union (EU), the UK and so on (European Commission 2010; Collin 2007; Social Exclusion Unit 2004). PRS's have been implemented at supra national, national and sub-national levels with the latter also including municipalities.

The emphasis on strategic practice and reforming policy-making processes around poverty exemplifies a broader paradigm shift in public governance, viewing improvements in the policy-making process as a solution to tackling wicked problems (Roberts, 2000; Head & Alford 2015). A key characteristic of a wicked problem is that it is impossible to define the problem without delineating already a course of action towards its solution (Roberts, 2000). This also holds for PRS processes, which are seen as the means to improve a policy process that subsequently leads to more poverty reduction. A better process for poverty reduction is seen as key because a broad swath of policies, made and executed by many political executives, their respective ministries and complex delivery systems, influence the prevalence and reduction of poverty.

Despite being such a widespread government practice, public policy policy scholars have understudied the role of PRS processes in anti-poverty policymaking and its potential effects on poverty reduction. This panel invites papers that **compare PRS's between jurisdictions with the aim to answer (part of) the question: "Whether, why and how PRSs can lead to more poverty reduction than policymaking without a PRS?"**

CALL FOR PAPERS

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The panel defines PRSs as a governance process that aims to reduce poverty by changing the way poverty reduction policy is made. Reforms often include the creation of legislation and/or new organizational structures such as an executive committee and advisory bodies. Stakeholders, including those outside the traditional government realm, become increasingly involved at more stages of the policy cycle. A key output of the process is a medium-term strategy, which states a long-term policy goal and explains how the government expects to make and measure progress towards poverty reduction over the next 5 or 10 years. There is an expectation that multiple strategy cycles are needed.

The panel invites papers comparing PRS's (or aspects of) between least two jurisdictions. There is a preference for studying PRS's where the choice to engage in such a process has been largely driven by local stakeholders (as opposed to being an externally imposed condition). Papers can focus on comparing aspects of PRS's such as the governance process (including stakeholder participation and dynamics between groups and over time), the politics, resulting priorities, budgets and policy outcomes (poverty reduction and/or indicators associated with it). Case studies can include PRS's in developed and developing countries, involving either quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods.

See the description of the panel for an explanation of the broader context of PRS's.

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Session 1

Friday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (MB 2.255)

How the Origin of Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategies in Canada affects their Persistence

Peter Graefe (McMaster University)

Carol-Anne Hudson

Provincial poverty reduction strategies (PRS) can be seen as part of an international trend, holding the promise for states that they can get more poverty reduction bang for their social policy buck. The Canadian federal government's recent movement to adopt its own strategy has given existing strategies a new lustre, but nevertheless reminds us that a number of provinces have been unable to sustain momentum around the strategies that they adopted a decade ago. While the development of five-year plans has persisted in Quebec and the policy has at times shaped important decisions around social assistance, the absence of any discussion of renewing Ontario's strategy in 2018-19 is striking. Meanwhile, in Newfoundland and Labrador the two-year cycle of community consultation and strategy review has continued yet important social programmes have been cut and overall funding for the policy significantly reduced. What explains these differences?

We argue that provincial poverty reduction strategies need to be seen as part of a broader politics of resistance to regional economic concentration/corporate monopolies and consequent labour market restructuring. Efforts at "raising the floor" include movements around minimum wages, social assistance rates, basic income and affordable housing. For antipoverty movements, aspects of the strategies such as consultation and the development of planning and monitoring institutions provided useful openings into the state. These aspects also held the danger of allowing governments to mask inaction on core issues such as minimum wages, investment in housing, or adequate social assistance benefits.

We work from the proposition that where antipoverty movements were key initiators of the PRS and could claim to be co-constructors of it, the PRS has been able to better sustain itself as it can partly engage movement claims for farther-reaching redistribution. By contrast, where these policies have been more tightly politically controlled, movement mobilization and demands-making has moved outside the PRS, which has in turn shifted political attention to new concerns (such as the minimum wage or income security) rather than to tending the PRS process. We develop this contention through tracing the arc of antipoverty movement and state engagements with poverty over the past fifteen years in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador. In particular, we consider the origins of these strategies as well as the extent to which they channelled (or did not channel) subsequent movement claims-making and state policy-making. In our choice of provinces, we capture a range of social movement involvement in introducing and co-constructing the policy. Quebec stands out for the extent to which the policy emerged from movement mobilization and reflected the ideas of that movement. At the other pole, while there were organizations calling for such a strategy in Ontario, the idea of the PRS and its subsequent development owed a great deal to the electoral and governing strategies of the Liberal government. In the middle we find Newfoundland, where the idea of a PRS originated as an electoral strategy of the Progressive Conservative Party but its subsequent development reflected the ideas of movement mobilization.

Ideas, Institutions and the development provincial poverty reduction strategies

Rachel Laforest (School of Policy Studies, Queen's University)

Geranda Notten

Since the early 2000s all of Canada's provinces and territories have adopted a poverty reduction strategy and, in 2018, the federal government announced its own poverty reduction strategy. This provides a perfect canvas for a comparative study of the policy processes that lead to the development of these strategies. In this paper, we will examine the interplay between the institutions, and in particular the frequency and timing of consultations, with the strategies of organized interests who have mobilized in order to affect change. It

illustrates how the ideas and content of the policies adopted are shaped by these dynamics. The analysis is based on 75 interviews conducted in seven provinces.

Poverty risks and provincial poverty reduction policies in Canada

Geranda Notten

Charles Plante (University of Saskatchewan)

Over a span of nearly two decades, every provincial and territorial government in Canada adopted a so-called poverty reduction strategy (PRS) process typically involving the creation of a strategy, new institutions and new processes. Starting with Quebec in 2001 and ending with British Columbia in 2018, each jurisdiction individually decided to make poverty reduction a government priority and, thus far, none of the subsequent governments officially removed the issue from the agenda. Governments claim that a better governance of poverty reduction policies, programs and initiatives leads to more poverty reduction. Policy documents further detail many investments but except for some high profile programs and initiatives, it is very challenging to assess the magnitude, destination and changes of such public expenditures over time and across jurisdictions. Additional government-driven poverty reduction from a PRS process may have thus come from two sources: doing better with the same budget and/or from a higher level of expenditures on poverty reduction initiatives.

This paper assesses whether provinces' poverty reduction efforts can be associated with concordant reductions in provinces' poverty (rates and gaps). Using various decomposition techniques, we decompose provincial poverty trends into changes associated with changes in the characteristics of provincial populations and those associated with changes in poverty risks. Such correlational analysis relies on the assumption that government's policies tend to have a more contemporary and direct effect on poverty risks while its effects on population characteristics (if any) are lagged and smaller in magnitude. This study focuses on working-age adults and (if any) their dependent children, as this is the constituency most affected by provincial policies in Canada. Within this population, we highlight families with dependent children and single adults, as the Canadian literature on poverty and social policy consistently suggests that the first group has been a prime beneficiary of new or enhanced policy initiatives while the second group has received much less attention.