P07 / Information Sources, Processing and Use in Policy Formulation

Topic : POLICY FORMULATION, ADMINISTRATION AND POLICYMAKERS

Chair : David Aubin (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Second Chair : Eric Montpetit (Université de Montréal)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

How do policymakers gather, process and use information in policy formulation?

Information is a critical resource in policy formulation, notably in highly technical, educated and democratically accountable societies. Information, defined as knowledge about a problem and possible solutions, is a prerequisite to governmental action. Information in policy-making contexts can be contested, making governmental action all the more complex (Montpetit, 2016). Information can also reveal new dimensions of problems, further complexifying policy-making, but also opening possibilities for innovative governmental action. As argued by Baumgartner and Jones (2015) “Information is at the core of politics” and a prime driver of policy stability and change. Digging in an issue is deemed to reveal its multiple dimensions and call for more state intervention (e.g. poverty alleviation). Technological developments and innovations, and their commercial applications, also challenge existing laws and regulations, sometimes making them outdated. Public policy needs adaptations when problems are shifting and technology evolves.

Within a policy subsystem, information comes from various sources in the policy advisory system, that is the “interlocking set of actors and organizations, with a unique configuration in each sector and jurisdiction, that provides recommendations for action to policymakers” (Craft & Wilder, 2015). Both public officials and external actors (e.g. consultants, scientists, NGOs, media or think tanks) produce and provide information and advice to the politicians and independent regulatory authorities. Information available within governments remains the main source that public officials use (Aubin & Brans, 2018). It takes the form of implementation reports, legal documents, monitoring database, proceedings from consultation procedures, etc. The shift from government to governance must not hide the importance of in-house information in policy formulation.

Collected from various public and private sources, information is processed and used in various ways by policymakers. Information use has two dimensions: (1) to enlighten and guide the decisionmaking process towards ‘fit’ regulations; and (2) legitimize the decision. To be turned into usable knowledge, information is sorted, classified, and analyzed. Process information becomes policy advice, that is advice about “clarifying the problem, identifying alternative course of action and systematically determining the optimal response” (Colebatch et al., 2010: 13; see also Halligan, 1995: 139). Advises either remain internal documents, but they can also be formalized (e.g. impact assessments). Impact assessments constitute both a statement about the process, but also a legitimation effort.

For this panel, we invite papers on the sources of information, on its processing by policy-makers and on its use and translation into public policy. Although the analysis of information use is still in its infancy, it gave rise to several theorization attempts, for instance those evolving around policy learning (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2017), policy networks (Leifeld & Schneider, 2012), and knowledge utilization (Weiss, 1980; Landry et al., 2001). Even if they are still in a description phase, research on policy advice (Craft & Wilder, 2017), policy work (Colebatch et al., 2010), as well as policy expertise (Weible, 2008) can be used as well. The papers will address the issue of information use in policy formulation in any policy system and level of authority. They can deal with the formulation of both primary and secondary law and concern policy-making as well as regulatory governance.

We hope to attract papers that theorize the relationship between information and policy-making, as well as present empirically grounded research on the topic. It is expected from the contributors that they apply a relative degree of formalization. The methods can be both qualitative and quantitative, but the papers must explicitly refer to the methods followed and the tools used for data analysis. Scholarly work that applies innovative methods is welcomed.

Reference list

Aubin, David, Brans, Marleen, 2018. Policy advisory styles in the francophone Belgian civil service. International Review of Administrative Sciences, preview.

Baumgartner, Franck R., Jones, Bryan D., 2015. The politics of information. Problem definition and the

course of public policy in America. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Colebatch, Hal K., Hoppe, Robert, Noordegraaf, Mirko (Eds.) 2010. Working for Policy. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.

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Dunlop, Claire A., Radaelli, Claudio M., 2017. Learning in the bath-tub: the micro and macro dimensions of the causal relationship between learning and policy change. Policy and Society 36, 304-319.

Halligan, John, 1995. Policy advice and the public service, in: Peters, B.G., Savoie, D.J. (Eds.), Governance in a changing environment. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, pp. 138-172.

Landry, Réjean, Amara, Nabil, Lamari, Moktar, 2001. Utilization of social science research knowledge in Canada. Research Policy 30, 333-349.

Leifeld, Philip, Schneider, Volker, 2012. Information exchange in policy networks. American Journal of Political Science 56, 731-744.

Montpetit, Eric, 2016. In defense of pluralism: Policy disagreement and its media coverage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weiss, Carol H., 1980. Knowledge creep and decision accretion. Knowledge 1, 381-404.

Weible, Christopher, 2008. Expert-based information and policy subsystems: A review and synthesis. Policy Studies Journal 36, 615-635.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Information is a critical resource in policy formulation, notably in highly technical, educated and democratically accountable societies. Information, defined as knowledge about a problem and possible solutions, is a prerequisite to governmental action. Information in policy-making contexts can be contested, making governmental action all the more complex. Information can also reveal new dimensions of problems, further complexifying policy-making. It might also enable innovative governmental action; courses of action that had not been imagined before. As argued by Baumgartner and Jones (2015) “Information is at the core of politics” and a prime driver of policy stability, change and innovation.

Information comes from various sources: interest groups, scientists, consultants, the general public, NGOs, the media, the civil service, think tanks, etc. The processing of this information by policymakers is influenced by political and psychological factors that sometimes induce biases. The use of information and its translation into public policy is further influenced by institutional and administrative settings. This panel seeks to shed light on the various aspects of these processes.

Specifically, we invite papers on the sources of information, on its processing by policymakers and on its use and translation into public policy. Topics such as policy learning, policy advice, policy networks, policy-science interface, policy work and policy expertise appear particularly relevant. We hope to attract papers that theorize the relationship between information and policy-making, as well as papers that present empirically grounded research on the topic. Scholarly work that applies innovative methods is welcomed.

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Chair : David Aubin (Université Catholique de Louvain)

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Session 1Information use in policy formulation: Formal and interpretive approaches

Thursday, June 27th 08:00 to 10:00 (MB 9 EFG)

Discussants

David Aubin (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Louis-Robert Beaulieu-Guay (University of Saskatchewan)

Problem Definition, Information Supply, and the Governance of Food Security

Samuel Workman (West Virginia University)

Clare Brock (Texas Woman's University)

The Mood of Business toward Government Regulations : Insights from Canadian Regulatory Impact Assessment Statements

Louis-Robert Beaulieu-Guay (University of Saskatchewan)

Marc Tremblay-Faulkner (Université de Montréal)

Eric Montpetit (Université de Montréal)

From Information Sources to Policy Formulation in Health: The Case of France and Turkey

Ozge Uluskaradag (Concordia University)

Explaining the substantiating function of expertise: The cases of harm reduction and food supply.

Vincent Caby (Sciences Po Grenoble)

THE USE OF INFORMATION DURING THE FORMULATION OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT POLICY: THE CASE OF THE LITHUANIAN SUNSET COMMISSIONS DURING THE PERIOD 1999-2016

Vitalis Nakrosis (Vilnius University)

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Session 2Roundtable about The Politics of Information with Frank R. Baumgartner

Thursday, June 27th 10:30 to 12:30 (MB 9 EFG)

Discussants

Eric Montpetit (Université de Montréal)

Vincent Caby (Sciences Po Grenoble)

ROUNDTABLE WITH FRANK R. BAUMGARTNER

Frank Baumgartner (UNC-Chapel Hill)

ROUNDTABLE WITH FRANK R. BAUMGARTNER 1

Eric Montpetit (Université de Montréal)

ROUNDTABLE WITH FRANK R. BAUMGARTNER 2

Vincent Caby (Sciences Po Grenoble)