

T01P03 / Knowledge and Non-Knowledge in Theories of the Policy Process

Topic : T01 / POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

Chair : Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

Second Chair : Åsa Knaggård (Lund University)

Third Chair : Sonja Blum (Universität Bielefeld)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The objective of this panel is to assess the state of theoretical, empirical, and methodological scholarship on the role of knowledge (including evidence, facts, and science) and non-knowledge (including values, norms, and emotions) in theories of the policy process. While these concepts have longstanding scholarly relevance, our interest is motivated first by its particular timeliness in face of political developments and scholarly debate on 'post-truth politics,' but also evidence-based policymaking. Second, we are interested in exploring these notions in the context of related efforts that aim to incorporate realistic notions of rational and irrational choice in policy process studies (e.g. Cairney & Weible 2017; Jones 2017). Finally, this panel is motivated by the emergence of a vibrant research community aimed at refining theories of the policy process, often with a focus on developing testable hypotheses and more rigorous concept definitions (e.g. Herweg, Zahariadis, & Zohlnhöfer, 2018's review of the Multiple Streams Framework). However, several critical concepts have received comparatively little attention so far, and in particular, the role of knowledge and non-knowledge in theories of the policy process is rarely put centre stage.

Recent studies on argumentative coupling (Blum, 2018), narrative uses of evidence (Schlaufer, 2018), problem brokers (Knaggård, 2015), and others suggest a parallel effort is underway aimed at developing these abstract concepts. This work employs research approaches that embrace the messiness and ambiguity of real-world policy processes, ranging from more positivist to more interpretive approaches. Importantly, these efforts are not mere compliments to approaches aimed at identifying regularities and predicting real-world outcomes, but are essential for rigorous comparative public policy research. With this panel, we seek to bring together recent scholarship interested in conceptual advancement related to 'knowledge' and 'non-knowledge,' broadly defined, in different theories of the policy process, including established theories like Multiple Streams Framework, Advocacy Coalition Framework, Narrative Policy Framework, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, and others, or newer alternatives such as Programmatic Actor Framework.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel aims to assess the state of theoretical, empirical, and methodological scholarship on the role of 'knowledge' (including evidence, facts, and science) and 'non-knowledge' (including values, norms, and emotions) in theories of the policy process. Despite longstanding scholarly relevance, these concepts are rarely put centre stage in policy-process research or in the on-going efforts to refine policy-process theories. However, recent studies (e.g. Blum, 2018; Schlaufer, 2018; Knaggård, 2015) suggest a parallel effort is underway aimed at developing these abstract concepts. This work employs approaches (ranging from more positivist to more interpretive) that embrace the messiness and ambiguity of policymaking.

This panel brings together recent scholarship interested in conceptual advancement related to 'knowledge' and 'non-knowledge' in different policy-process theories, including Multiple Streams Framework, Advocacy Coalition Framework, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, Narrative Policy Framework, and others. Submissions may explore questions including, but not limited to:

- 1) How does knowledge influence agenda setting and policymaking? There is a large literature on evidence and knowledge utilization, but a large part of it does not use insights from policy research. Vice versa, which insights can be drawn for policy-process theories from other fields dealing with knowledge use?
- 2) What is the role of non-knowledge in policy processes? Here we are interested in understanding situations where policy actors disregard or subvert knowledge, and/or where non-knowledge influences agenda setting and policymaking.

3) How do different forms of knowledge and non-knowledge interact to direct attention to certain issues on the political agenda and away from others? Relatedly, how do 'knowledge' and 'non-knowledge' interact with renewed notions of rational and irrational choice?

The panel is open to papers that use policy process theories and make theoretical, methodological, or empirical contributions. Studies using empirical cases to develop theoretical arguments are particularly encouraged.

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Session 1

Thursday, June 27th 16:30 to 18:30 (MB 1.437)

Knowledge and Non-knowledge in Theories of the Policy Process

Åsa Knaggård (Lund University)

Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

Sonja Blum (Universität Bielefeld)

This paper reviews the state of theory on the role of ‘knowledge’ (including evidence, facts, and science) and ‘non-knowledge’ (including values, norms, and emotions) in the policy process. Recent studies that embrace the messiness and ambiguity of real-world policymaking often touch on these notions, but they are rarely put center stage in policy process research or in ongoing efforts to refine policy process theories, despite their long-standing scholarly relevance. These notions, however, are essential for rigorous comparative public policy studies as policymakers navigate the demands of evidence-based policymaking and the challenges of ‘post-truth politics.’ In recognition of this gap, our review seeks to evaluate some of the major public policy theories of today, including the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the Multiple Streams Framework, the Narrative Policy Framework and Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, in terms of how they conceptualize and characterize the role of ‘knowledge’ and ‘non-knowledge’ in the policy process. The study will consider questions such as: (1) How does a given theory conceptualize and label the notion ‘knowledge?’ Under what circumstances do these theories argue that policy actors successfully employ knowledge, or disregard or subvert it? (2) Does the theory consider the notion of ‘non-knowledge,’ and, if so, how is this notion conceptualized? (3) What can we learn from policy process theories on the ways in which knowledge and non-knowledge interact to influence the policy process, for example to direct attention toward certain issues on the political agenda and away from others? To answer these questions we draw on fields that discuss knowledge and non-knowledge more explicitly, for example the literatures on knowledge utilization and on emotions in politics. In our review, we include both the original policy process theories and later developments and applications. By clarifying how existing policy process theories engage with these important concepts, we seek to identify crucial gaps in our theoretical understanding of agenda setting, alternative selection, and policy decisions.

Conceptualizing emotions as causal mechanisms in policy process research – theoretical considerations and an empirical illustration

Johanna Kuhlmann (Universität Bremen)

Although emotions have been mentioned in core readings of the discipline (Weible and Sabatier, 2017), their role in theories of the policy process has rarely been put center stage. Quite surprisingly, the same holds true for interpretive approaches, where emotions also lead a rather shadowy existence (Durnová and Hejzlarová, 2018). This gap results partly (but not only!) from a lack of clarity on how emotions can be conceptualized when studying the policy process. As a result, the role that emotions play within the policy process remains opaque.

Against that background, the proposed paper has several aims: First, by a thorough reading of the literature, the paper aims to systematically take stock of the role that emotions play in different theories of the policy process. Second, the paper conceptualizes emotions as causal mechanisms that can contribute to an explanation of policy change. The paper illustrates the added value of conceptualizing emotions as causal mechanisms by analyzing the protests of the “gilets jaunes” in France.

In sum, the paper argues that adopting a mechanism-based approach to emotions can contribute to a more

profound understanding of emotions in the policy process. Moreover, it puts forward the concept of causal mechanisms as a complementary perspective on the policy process, which can stimulate scholarly exchange across different theoretical perspectives on the policy process (van der Heijden et al., forthcoming).

References

Durnová, Anna P./Hejzlarová, Eva M. (2018): Framing Policy Designs through Contradictory Emotions: The Case of Czech Single Mothers. *Public Policy and Administration* 33 (4), pp. 409-427.

Van der Heijden, Jeroen/Kuhlmann, Johanna/Lindquist, Evert/Wellstead, Adam (forthcoming): Have Policy Process Scholars Embraced Causal Mechanisms? A Review of Five Popular Frameworks. *Public Policy and Administration*.

Weible, Christopher M./Sabatier, Paul A. (2017): *Theories of the Policy Process*. Fourth edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

The contribution of narrative choice to institutional memory

Rodney Scott (University of New South Wales)

Amidst the churn of elected leaders, a permanent public service is expected to act as a repository for lessons from past policies and programmes. This memory of what works and what doesn't is claimed to be central to the pragmatic task of governing. Public management scholars regularly lament the decline of institutional memory over the past thirty years. They claim that the regular rotations of managerial generalists have displaced technical specialists; collaborative and network governance now augments static institutions; and the indiscriminate storage of files in vast disorganised electronic libraries has replaced smaller, more organised repositories of physical files maintained by librarians. While public servants have access to more information than ever, it has been argued that they are more ignorant of the past.

This view is not held universally. Recent literature conceives institutional memory more dynamically, as the narratives about past events that are passed down and between the broad array of actors who contribute to policies and programmes. Humans have been characterised as 'the storytelling species', making sense of experiences through the creation of narratives. Narrative memories are constructed socially, are contested, are passed on to others, and evolve over time.

Memory through storytelling is more suitable for remembering certain types of information than others. Stories typically contain less information than static files, but can disseminate lessons more widely. As complicated experiences are reduced to stories, certain lessons are retained and others suppressed or actively forgotten.

This paper draws results from four recent case studies from three countries: the justice sector in New Zealand; family violence in Tasmania, Australia; electricity metering in Victoria, Australia; and energy efficient housing in the United Kingdom. The four cases demonstrate how dynamic memory becomes simplified, losing nuance and detail as it is passed between parties. These simplified memories tend to take the form of parables, fables, metaphors and analogies, usually with an overall narrative theme. Lessons that are consistent with the overall narrative tend to be retained, while those that run counter to the narrative are forgotten. Thus the choice of narrative theme is important to the task of remembering.

These case studies illustrate three aspects of storytelling in dynamic institutional memory: how complex experience is resolved into narrative; how those narratives evolve over time; and how past narratives influence contemporary decisions and behaviours. We contend that actively remembering, through crafting stories, should be considered a key leadership task for public managers.

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Session 2

Friday, June 28th 08:00 to 10:00 (MB 1.437)

The respective effects of knowledge and non-knowledge on policy learning in the European liberalization policy process of Belgian network industries

Stéphane Moyson (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Policy actors involved in decision-making processes interact and gradually accumulate evidence about policy problems and solutions. As a result, they update their policy beliefs and preferences over time. Existing studies adopting such a “learning” approach (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, 2018; Moyson & Scholten, 2018) to knowledge use in policy processes provide mixed evidence. While some suggest that policy actors do acquire and use knowledge (see Riche et al., 2017), many others are more skeptical and argue that policy learning is very unlikely, because of its numerous obstacles (e.g., Birkland, 2006; Leach et al., 2014; Moynihan, 2008; Fischer, 2016). Among these obstacles, “non-knowledge” such as emotions (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2017) or cultural values (e.g., Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014) is often pinpointed. Yet, there is no study providing an empirical assessment: what are the respective effects of knowledge and non-knowledge on policy learning?

To address this question, I adopt the conceptualization of belief systems in the advocacy coalition framework (ACF: Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018), in which policy actors’ preferences are modelled by factual beliefs (i.e., knowledge) and normative beliefs (i.e., non-knowledge) at a “deep core” level (i.e., applicable to all policy subsystems) and a “policy-core” level (i.e., specific to one policy subsystem). The paper relies on a web survey conducted among 413 policy actors (from 38 organizations) involved in the European liberalization policy process of two Belgian network industries: the railways and the electricity sector. Policy learning is measured with a “simple gain scores” approach (Moyson, 2018) and related with several sets of questions operationalizing the factual beliefs (or “knowledge”) and normative beliefs (or “non-knowledge”) of policy actors, based on multilevel regression analyses (to account for the effect of organizations).

The findings suggest that factual and normative beliefs explain the nature of policy actors’ preferences more than their evolution (i.e., learning: hypothesis 1). Second, deep core beliefs are more influential than policy core beliefs (hypothesis 2). While these findings are very consistent with the ACF, the surprise lies in a detailed analysis of the effect of each factual and normative belief on policy preferences and policy learning: the relations are not uniform, which is not expected by the ACF. For example, while some beliefs do not influence policy preferences as such, they can be a factor of their evolution, and the other way around. Last but not least, normative beliefs are more influential than factual beliefs (hypothesis 3). While this gives credit to a skeptical view on knowledge use, again, a refined analysis of the effect of each belief brings a more nuanced answer to the research question.

Overall, this paper concludes that the respective role of knowledge and non-knowledge in policy learning and policy processes is less a matter of quantity (how much knowledge and non-knowledge?) than of quality (what are the influential beliefs, exactly?). In doing so, From an ACF perspective, the paper also provides a better understanding of the structure of belief systems and of their role in policy learning. I conclude with some implications.

Green infrastructure as policy concept

Åsa Knaggård (Lund University)

Green infrastructure is a concept increasingly used in policy-making to promote biodiversity and enhance ecosystem services through the protection, creation, restoration and connection of natural and man-made green areas. The concept has its origin in both urban planning and conservation, by recognizing the beneficial outcomes for people and wildlife by connecting green spaces, and was first promoted in the United States in the 1990's. Green infrastructure was later introduced as a conservation tool within the EU in the 2000's, and adopted as a strategy in 2013. Within the scientific field of ecology there are, however, uncertainties concerning how biodiversity and ecosystem functioning is best promoted; by the size and configuration of such areas or by their interconnectivity. This uncertainty, along with the wide range of practitioners and scientists using the green infrastructure concept, opens up for different policy interpretations. In a policy context, the interconnectivity is often in focus, leading to the establishment of green corridors where species could disperse. This interpretation has been pronounced as policy-makers see green infrastructure as a strategy and adaptation to climate change, necessitating the need for range shifts and dispersal of species when the environment is changing. Another interpretation, which has also been promoted, is that the problem is the destruction of habitats through human activities. As a response, the size and spread of green areas come into focus. Protecting existing values and well-functioning ecosystems incorporates concerns about the well-being of people and wildlife, but also how resilience towards negative impacts from climate change could be increased.

In this paper, we analyze the process in which green infrastructure has become an important policy concept for biodiversity protection. We use Sweden as a case study, as it has adopted the concept and is in the process of implementing it on the regional and local levels. We investigate how the different scientific understandings have been interpreted by policy-makers and coupled with policy concerns and different policy problems, including climate change, habitat loss, recreation and health, as well as with economic considerations. We use the Multiple Streams Framework to explore how multiple problem definitions and scientific understandings of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning has been intermingled with political values and emotions of urgency in an agenda-setting process over several years. Our conclusion is that green infrastructure is a melting pot of several ideas about problems and solutions. The paper explores what this means for policy-making, both practically in a Swedish context and theoretically.

Building Integrative Capacity for Public Policy: the Role of 'Relational Knowledge Management' in Combining Legitimate Knowledges, Improving Receptivity, and Negotiating Boundary Troubles

Richard Simmons (University of Stirling)

There is a range of potentially 'legitimate knowledges' in relation to public policy issues - from individual and community knowledges, to specialised, strategic and holistic knowledges. Each legitimate form of knowledge provides a potential contribution for policy, but each is also subject to important critiques (Funtowitz & Ravetz 1996). Moreover, controversies remain over the extent to which encounters between these knowledges generate complementarities and creative solutions, or incompatibilities and conflicts of opinion. Hence, while each legitimate form of knowledge may be considered to produce 'valid' information for policy actors, there are important differences in these actors' receptivity to this information (Argyris 1976). Important questions therefore lie in the notion of 'boundary troubles' between different forms of knowledge.

Such receptivity issues and boundary troubles lie at the heart of many theories of the policy process (eg. ACF, PET, NPF). At least two perspectives are useful to understand them better. The first perspective examines the application of practical reason/practical wisdom. This includes an assessment of the relative 'purity' or 'pollution' associated with different knowledge claims (Swedlow, 2007), and how this is framed during the 'opening up' of policy discourses (focused on revealing wider policy discourses and interpretations of the available evidence), or their 'closing down' (where the aim is cutting through the messy, intractable diversity of views to develop clear, authoritative recommendations; Stirling, 2006). These insights are important, and a novel application of the complex dynamics produced in response to these mechanisms will be presented as a foundational contribution in this paper.

While the first perspective is practical, the second is relational. Receptivity is dependent on the willingness and ability to find ways to broker relationships between different legitimate points of view. Moreover, the notion of boundary troubles acknowledges the need for negotiation based as much on 'cultural' (values, norms) as on 'rational' (evidence-based) concerns (Brett, 2000). This paper offers a further novel contribution here in the notion of 'relational knowledge management' (RKM) as a tool for engaging with these issues and building 'integrative capacity' (Liao et al, 2009). An outset assumption for RKM is that distinctive, legitimate knowledges may be 'managed' in relation to one another through combinatory approaches that can contribute to policy innovation - and that doing so can help contain negative

contingencies.

In either case, 'non-knowledge' becomes important. For example, decisions over when to 'open up' or 'close down' policy discourse are often a matter of 'craft' or 'feel' (Rhodes, 2015). Similarly, cultural and emotional factors are often important in defining the nature of 'boundary troubles' and the nature of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) - including 'relational work' (Cloutier et al, 2015) - that might be required to negotiate them. Finally, the extent to which knowledge and non-knowledge go hand-in-hand in contributing to policy innovation, and with what effects is currently under-explored in research. As an additional contribution, the paper therefore offers insights from recent empirical work examining the effects of greater receptivity and cultural congruence on citizens' perceptions and service innovation in UK public services.