P07 / Making ‘Credible’ Knowledge for Policy: the Politics (and Practice) of Expertise

Topic : POLICY DESIGN, POLICY ANALYSIS, EXPERTISE AND EVALUATION

Chair : Natalie Papanastasiou (Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona)

Second Chair : Chris Hurl (Concordia University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Public policy scholarship has developed a rich and diverse literature on processes of international policy transfer and translation, and associated global networks of policy experts and institutions. However, while the impact and implementation of powerful forms of knowledge such as benchmarks, best practices, league tables, and impact assessments have received a great deal of scholarly attention, less attention has been paid to the ways these forms of knowledge are actually generated by those we call policy ‘experts’. Drawing from recent debates in Science and Technology Studies (STS), the governmentalities literature, and research on epistemic communities, this panel looks at the making of knowledge for policy. It will explore the way that policy experts package and circulate knowledge in making a case for various policy priorities and agendas, and investigate how this knowledge is embedded in particular professional practices and political technologies.

Recognising that policy experts generate policy knowledge in contrasting ways, that they draw on diverse techniques and tools, and that their work is visible to differing degrees, we ask: *How do experts work to generate credibility in the policy-making process, to what extent is their authority contested, and what kinds of political dynamics does this expose?*

The panel embraces studying policy experts in their full diversity, including those working in government, international organisations, management consultancies, think tanks, and professional service firms.

Key references

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CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite papers which explore the panel’s overarching question from a range of angles. Supplementary

questions which paper submissions are invited to investigate include but are not limited to:

- How do policy experts generate and perform credibility in the policy-making process?

- Do different types of policy experts have different understandings of what constitutes credible knowledge?

- How is the credibility of different types of experts contested, and how are these contestations negotiated?

- To what extent do policy experts make use of various technologies in making their case? Has there been a shift in the way in which credibility is constructed and performed with the development of new technologies?

- How do experts circulate policy ideas across different contexts? To what extent do international policy experts adapt their knowledge to different institutional settings? How do they respond to demands that ‘context matters’ when developing their policy recommendations?

- How do policy experts collect, identify, and present ‘best practices’ or examples of ‘what works’? How do best practice examples become transformed into exportable policy models or sources of universal Learning?

- How do we study the making of knowledge for policy (e.g. studies of epistemic communities, following policy experts, tracing the development of policy technologies, etc.)? What are the challenges involved in these different approaches?

We welcome papers exploring these issues from a range of disciplines including political science, sociology, anthropology, political geography, and STS. If you would like to get in touch with the panel organisers to discuss a paper idea please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

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Session 1Experts and Laypeople: Contested Boundaries

Wednesday, June 26th 14:00 to 16:00 (MB 3.445)

The Practice of Evidence-Based Policymaking: The Constitutive Effects of Systematic Reviews on Scientific Validity and the Power of Experts at the World Health Organization

Jan Thiel (ETH Zurich, Center for Comparative and International Studies (CIS))

The existing literature provides rich theories and evidence on the constitutive role of expert knowledge for the authority and legitimacy of international organizations in global governance. In contrast, the processes of knowledge production inside international organizations remain largely unexplored. This paper contributes to filling this research gap, using guideline development at the World Health Organization (WHO) as a case study. Guidelines are the most important policy output of the WHO. They serve as the normative gold-standard for health policy and practice worldwide. In the course of the so-called “evidence-based medicine” movement, the WHO introduced scientific meta-analyses, so-called systematic reviews, as the exclusive source of evidence for the development of guidelines in 2003. Today, systematic reviews are increasingly used in “evidence-based” policymaking beyond public health, including development, education, environment, and criminal justice. In this paper, I built on practice theory and Thomas Gieryn’s work to conceptualize systematic reviews as a formal practice to perform “boundary work” (Gieryn 1983, 1999) in policymaking to demarcate and draw boundaries “between science and some less authoritative residual non?science” (Gieryn 1999: 4f.). Empirically, I analyze the constitutive effects of such a standardized practice of knowledge production on the meaning of scientific validity and the resultant power relations between experts and bureaucrats in the definition of policy problems and solutions in WHO’s guideline development. I draw on evidence from more than twenty of interviews with staff from WHO and national health agencies, archival research, and three months of participant observations as part of an internship at the Director-Generals Office at the WHO’s headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2017. Thus this paper may be of further relevance to researchers interested in promises and challenges of using ethnographic methods inside of policy organizations.

ACTION = LIFE: “Life Work” and the Ontological Shift in Canadian AIDS Policy, 1988-1994

Chris Hurl (Concordia University)

This paper revisits the history of AIDS activism in Toronto (Canada) as a way of shifting the conversation away from policy experts and engaging with debates on the divide between lay and expert knowledge in public policy-making. There is a wide array of literature that explores AIDS activism as a forerunner of embodied health movements, asserting the primacy of patients’ rights and the capacities of people to generate their own knowledge about their condition (Brown 1997; Epstein 2008; Gould 2009). Our study contributes to this work by focusing on how activists came to know and confront the policy regime itself as a barrier to living with HIV/AIDS. We look at activist ethnographer George W. Smith’s concept of ‘life work’ as a contribution to this literature and, more broadly, as an incitement to develop new forms of engagement with policy expertise. Attending to his work with AIDS ACTION NOW and with the Treatment Information Exchange, we detail how Smith utilized the notion of ‘life work’ in calling attention to the time, thought and energy that people with HIV/AIDS put into “the daily living that they depend on.” We also argue that the concept of ‘life work’ goes beyond simply addressing HIV/AIDS as a biomedical problem to recognize the relationship between the everyday work that people do in accessing social institutions essential for their survival and the collective work undertaken by social movement in confronting barriers to living embedded in the policy-making process itself. In this sense, understanding and confronting the materiality of the policy-making apparatus is itself constitutive of the capacity to live.

The Notre-Dame-Des-Landes airport project versus the actual Nantes airport reorganization: how experts shape the most « credible »solution ?

Dounia Khallouki (ENTPE)

Lots of big infrastructure projects led to conflicts and tensions with the local population in the past few years. We argue that those tensed projects are very relevant situations to question the role of experts in policy making. Indeed, conflict shows decision and mobilization processes in a way sharper than other situations, which enables us to see how experts and the knowledge they produce is involved in those processes.

The case of the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes airport project in France is a relevant example of a particularly tensed situation: the conflict led at first to important delays, until the project was definitely aboard by the government in January 2018. In that case, many experts were mobilized, whether by French government or by the opponents to the project. Experts and the knowledge they produce play a key role: project owners tend to use it to legitimize the new airport project. But as the conflict grows, different experts also support the idea that the reorganization of the actual Nantes airport instead of the construction of a new one could be a suitable solution. This led to a technical war, where the different actors use expertise as an argumentative weapon, with different experts involved on both sides of the conflict.

Our intention in this paper is to understand, by studying discourses, practices and argumentative strategies of the different actors, how the authority of government experts, at first well established, has been challenged over time by the opposition, and how the production of concurrent experts became more and more “credible”.

To do so, we will focus on the carrier of two concurrent solutions: the Notre-Dame-Des-Landes project versus the actual Nantes airport reorganization. We’re going to show how the opposition contest the authority of government experts by trying to produce a “credible” expert knowledge supporting the actual Nantes airport reorganization. We argue that the participative procedures that occurred, by helping shape the opposition and also enlightening technical aspects, may have played a key role in the development of concurrent expertise.

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Session 2Generating credible knowledge: expert communities and policy mobilities

Wednesday, June 26th 16:30 to 18:30 (MB 3.445)

Knowledge curation and soft power persuasion: The OECD’s role as a global policy influencer of school funding debates

Glenn Savage (University of Western Australia)

Elisa Di Gregorio (The University of Melbourne)

The government funding of schooling is exemplary of Easton’s (1953) framing of policy as ‘an authoritative allocation of values’. Funding decides, in the crudest of terms, ‘who gets what’, and is thus a fundamental articulation of the values of government (Gerrard et al. 2017). While debates about school funding are typically dominated by national and subnational politics and contingencies, recent debates have become increasingly ‘global’ as policy learning and borrowing between systems intensifies (Lingard 2010) and governments seek international data about ‘what works’ to improve schooling (Lewis 2017).

Over the past decade, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has expanded its work in an attempt to influence policies relating to the funding of schools. In 2013, for example, it launched a major ongoing project, the ‘Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools’, which seeks to ‘help countries exchange best practices and learn from one another, and to gather and disseminate evidence of what works in school resource policies’ (OECD 2017).

This paper examines the OECD’s role in seeking to influence global debates by presenting a theoretical analysis of OECD policy documents and initiatives relating to school funding. Our analysis combines insights from: 1) policy assemblage theory (e.g. Clarke et al. 2015); 2) the interpretive policy research tradition (e.g. Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012), and policy problematisation literature (e.g. Li 2007) to examine: a) how school funding has been ‘made problematic’ by the OECD; b) how certain forms of knowledge and data have been assembled to frame particular policy responses as ‘solutions’ to such problems; c) the potential effects of such problem/solution dynamics.

We suggest the OECD seeks to steer conversations about funding in four main ways: 1. Shifting conversations away from historically dominant questions about whether more money improves outcomes, to a different set of questions about impact and what schools do with money (a ‘what works’ approach); 2. Highlighting the importance of spending efficiency in terms of ‘what works’ to make funding more efficient and how different governance arrangements help or hinder efficiencies; 3. Advocating for needs-based funding models based on a rearticulated version of equity as an economic good; 4. Warning against the potential negative impacts of private and market-based models of school funding and provision.

Overall, we suggest the OECD has evolved to assume a major role in funding debates, strategically assembling data and arguments to present forms of knowledge about funding that it claims are apolitical, objective and neutral. These processes of ‘knowledge curation’ work hand-in-hand with the organisation’s soft power credentials and claims to ‘global expertise’, providing a powerful platform for policy influence. Importantly, the OECD frames its knowledge and expertise as transcending domestic concerns, speaking truths about the relationship between money and schooling that it suggests are unable to be adequately articulated by national and subnational governments facing local pressures that constrain what is ‘sayable’ in funding debates. This allows the OECD to operate as a powerful external reference point to disrupt local disputes and historical arrangements.

Knowledge broker organisations and the making of ‘credible’ knowledge for policy

Eleanor MacKillop (Cardiff University)

The role of evidence in policy-making has become of increasing importance for research and policy alike. A significant body of research on Evidence-Informed Policy-Making (EIPM) has been produced from the 1990s that has sought to analyse, but also advocate for the use of evidence in policy-making (Nutley et al., 2007). The role played by policy experts and knowledge brokers who work in-between research and policy is a growing topic of interest as they are seen as the latest ‘solution’ to the evidence-policy ‘gap’ (Dobbins et al., 2009; Ward et al., 2009).

A large number of knowledge broker organisations (KBOs) have emerged in the last two decades. These include the Mowat Centre in Ontario, Canada, California Lab in the United States and the Sax Institute in Australia, as well as What Works Centres and university-based evidence institutes in the UK. The emergence of these organisations in various countries calls for research into their creation, their relationships with policy-makers, and their strategies for the creation and transfer of ‘credible’ knowledge into the policy-making process. Although research into think tanks and epistemic communities is plentiful in policy studies and there has been some discussion in work on EIPM, the existing literature is lacking critical and theoretically-informed frameworks for examining how and why such KBOs have emerged and how policy experts within these organisations participate in the making of credible knowledge to inform policy (Freeman and Sturdy, 2014).

As part of an ongoing wider research project into the role of knowledge and evidence in policy-making, this paper focuses on the fairly-recent phenomenon of British university-based bodies set up to transfer and/or broker knowledge for policy-making. Our review suggests that there are over thirty such bodies with different organisational set-ups, practices and examples of impact on policy. The data include interviews (still ongoing) with a range of these bodies to explore comparisons across our cases on the practice of expertise, their understanding of what makes up credible knowledge, and how they mobilise this knowledge. We also analyse each body’s website and strategic documentation to examine the importance of context and politics. Our methods are retroductive, moving between theory and the empirical data in order to devise concepts to understand and explain the complex politics of knowledge transfer and the making of ‘credible’ knowledge. In doing so, we draw on multiple-streams analysis (Kingdon, 1993), discourse (Howarth, 2013)and the practice literatures (Fischer, 1990; Yanow, 2007)to build a multi-faceted arsenal and develop critical understandings of the different politics at play.

Word count without references: 414

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‘Irrational’ Knowledge Sharing (or how the myth of policy success is circulated). The Case of Gender-biased Sex Selection in Asia

Laura Rahm (Center for Population and Development, University Paris Descartes)

This paper assesses cross-national knowledge sharing and policy diffusion using gender-biased sex selection (GBSS) as a case study. Global and national policy efforts to address son preference and sex selection have increased over the past three decades. The SDG 5.3 has called for the end to all forms of

harmful practices including GBSS and the first Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and Undervaluing of Girls was launched by the EU and UNFPA in 2017. This international policy platform has led to increased knowledge sharing on “what works and what doesn’t” to address the growing demographic masculinization throughout Asia, Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

The proposed paper corresponds to the panel topic by asking: How do experts circulate policy ideas across different country contexts in the case of sex selection? To what extent do international policy experts adapt their knowledge to different institutional and socio-cultural settings when developing policy recommendations? And, how are ‘best practices’ or policy ‘success stories’ being circulated and transformed into exportable policy models? This paper draws from historical analysis of policy files and expert recommendations, participant observation, and qualitative interviews conducted with policy makers and representatives of international agencies in three socio-politically diverse countries, namely South Korea, India and Vietnam. The theoretical conclusions drawn from the empirical evidence indicate a mismatch between reported policy success and the evidence for this success, raising doubts about how the ‘politics and practice of expertise’ is generating ‘credible’ knowledge for policy.

The paper makes three major contributions to existing literature. First, I call into question that it is mostly successful policies that are being shared across countries. The paper provides evidence that this is not the case. Instead, a popular myth or narrative of policy success is being shared where lessons learned are passed back and forth and locally adapted without questioning whether in fact they reduced sex selection. Second, I shed light on the actors involved in knowledge and policy transfer, especially policy experts, epistemic communities and international organizations. Rather than contributing to progress, as often assumed, these actors tend to reproduce the same policy ‘prescriptions’ for decades, across multiple countries, with minimal adaptation to institutional or socio-cultural contexts. One narrative sticks out. South Korea’s anti-sex selection policies are widely considered a ‘success story.’ Multiple experts and international agencies have promoted the ‘Korean model’ to countries like India or Vietnam, without seeking actual evidence of policy efficacy and ignoring doubts about policy transferability across vastly different social, economic and political terrains. Third, this paper adds to the burgeoning literature on the use of ‘expert knowledge’ in policy making. It shows that international expertise to address GBSS is often used as ‘a stamp’ to legitimate predetermined policy procedures. In sum, this paper makes an important contribution to the panel, not only by revealing the specific case of ‘irrational’ knowledge sharing in Asian anti-sex selection policies, but also by questioning how ‘credible’ knowledge for policy is being generated and applied in the international context.

Making scientific knowledge for promoting agricultural issues in global climate policy: three epistemic communities in competition

Océane Biabiany (INRAE)

Jean-Francois LE COQ (CIRAD - CIAT)

hrabanski marie (CIRAD)

Since 1992 and the signing of the Climate Convention (UNFCCC), climate negotiations have become increasingly important on the international political agenda, however it seemed too politicized and controversial to allow international co-ordination in this sector to progress (Caron and Treyer, 2015).

However, at the end of the 2000s, a window of opportunity seems to open up in favor of the emergence of agricultural issues in the climate agenda.
Three so-called "scientific" concepts have emerged in the climatic arenas, first, to bring closely agricultural issues and climate issues (Newell and Taylor, 2017), and secondly to promote a particular framing of adaptation and mitigation of agriculture to climate change: climate smart agriculture, agroecology and ecosystem based management. How did these three concepts emerge in the climate arena, and what frames of agricultural and climate issues do they support? Which actors are promoting them and for which objectives?

We hypothesize that these three concepts are promoted by three distinct epistemic communities (Haas, 1992), which sometimes even oppose each other. The composition of the members of these three epistemic communities will be analyzed. The concept of climate smart agriculture is a so-called scientific concept first promoted by FAO experts and then also by CGIAR experts, research centers experts and academics (Lipper et al., 2014, Neufeldt et al., 2013). Since the beginning of the mid-2010s, the concept has been an important success both in scientific arenas (as illustrated by the number of publications on this theme) and the climatic agricultural policy arenas (UNFCCC COP). Proponents of the concept of agroecology, previously focused on food system issues and agroecological practices (Altieri, 1983, Altieri, 2009) also mobilized in the late 2000s to bring together agricultural issues and climate issues, proposing an alternative agricultural development (Altieri and Nicholls, 2013, Altieri et al., 2015). Finally the third concept of

ecosystem based management is carried by actors from the world conservation (Nesshöver et al., 2017). Each of these three epistemic communities is composed by different actors (national or international civil servant, academics, private sectors…) and promotes different interests and frames, but each of them nevertheless uses the scientific register to legitimize itself. These results allows us to discuss the use of scientific knowledge by policy-entrepreneurs (King, 1991) in environmental arenas, especially climatic arenas (Biermann, 2000, Granjou and Arpin, 2015, Jasanoff 2005, Pestre, 2006, Jasanoff, 2012).

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Session 3Performing Expertise

Thursday, June 27th 08:00 to 10:00 (MB 3.445)

Practices of making international policy knowledge: the case of a European Commission Working Group.

Natalie Papanastasiou (Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona)

This paper contributes to the study of expert groups by examining the process through which epistemic communities construct collective notions of credibility. Credibility is understood as the quality of being believable and trustworthy, and is thus an essential aim of any expert group. Collective credibility underlines that it is not sufficient for an expert group to consist of individually credible experts but that credibility needs to be generated at the level of the group.

In order to study the practices of generating collective credibility, the paper adopts a practice lens which draws on political discourse analysis (PDA) which is rooted in poststructuralist theory (Howarth 2000; Glynos & Howarth 2007). The paper uses PDA to re-visit the four characteristics of epistemic communities proposed by Haas (1992) who argues that they display shared (i) values, (ii) causal beliefs, (iii) validity criteria, and (iv) policy enterprise. From a poststructuralist perspective these characteristics can be understood as hegemonic practices which are inherently unstable, characterised by power struggles, and subject to challenge. Understanding epistemic communities in this manner, the paper poses the following questions: Through what kinds of practices is collective credibility constructed? How are tensions over defining the group’s collective credibility negotiated and overcome? And how does this contribute to our understandings of epistemic communities?

The paper explores these questions by studying an empirical example of an expert group coordinated by the European Commission which produces best practices for governing school systems, called the Working Group on Schools (WGS). The WGS consists of country representatives from national ministries of education across Europe who generate best practices in meetings that take place in Brussels. By examining the documents produced by the WGS, the paper identifies how Haas’ four characteristics of an epistemic community are emphasised as part of creating collective credibility. Using interview and observation data, the analysis is able to identify how each of the four features of collective credibility are constantly contested and negotiated during meetings, and highlights the hegemonic practices which are necessary for overcoming these tensions. The paper points to the need for more studies of epistemic communities (as well as other conceptualisations of expert groups) which adopt a poststructuralist lens in order to reveal more about the practice of expertise as well as to question the apparent internal coherence of expert groups.

Performing expertise: the case of government statisticians

Cosmo Howard (Griffith University)

Government statisticians are among the most important experts engaged by the modern state. This paper explores how official statisticians perform their expert authority in liberal democracies. It summaries the findings of interviews with senior government statisticians in Australia, Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Utilising a framework derived from Maarten Hajer’s concept of performative governance, I explore the stages on which government statisticians perform, the scripts they develop and enact, and the audiences and publics they seek to reach and convince. I argue that statisticians must perform on multiple stages to dissimilar publics, and that these performances are frequently in tension. Statisticians face challenges of enacting different dramaturgical styles and managing contradictory audience expectations and needs. Statisticians also confront problems of handling public access to and exposure of the ‘backstage’ of government statistical work. I further suggest that government

statisticians disagree about the best performative styles to deploy in defending and augmenting their authority. The research offers original empirical data on how a key group of state experts performs its authority and also contributes to the advancement of theories of performative governance.

Trust in Number-Makers – Expert Legitimacy in Transnational Governance

Justyna Bandola-Gill (University of Birmingham)

This paper explores the basis of the epistemic authority of experts producing metrics in International Organisations. The practices of quantification – increasingly central to the remit of IOs – not only impact on the way organisations operate but also create new social and political realities in which IOs are increasingly interconnected. This generative power of global measurement regimes has profound implications for the ways in which International Organisations interact and for the environments, these new interrelationships come to generate. One such change lies in the understanding of expert credibility. The canonical view of expert legitimacy linked it to objectivity and autonomy from the politics. Yet, in the transnational governance such 'epistemic gains' (Jasanoff, 2011) stemming from the separation of facts and values are problematic as practices of quantification inherently combine moral and technical considerations. This paper, drawing on a larger European Research Council-funded study 'International Organisations and the Rise of Global Metrological field', addresses this puzzle by exploring a case study of a collaboration of IOs in the production of sustainable development indicators. Building on the empirical exploration of expert practices relating to the production of metrics, this research contributes to the interdisciplinary debates on expertise. In particular, the paper builds on Jasanoff's (2005) concept of three-body expert legitimacy. As such, it explores the notion of expert credibility in global governance by carrying out three interlinked inquiries: i) into the disciplinary and organisational backgrounds of data collectors, rankers and experts, their key competencies and epistemic framings (hence 'body of knowledge'); ii) professional standing of experts, moves of experts and expert practices between organisations ('body of an expert'); iii) the institutionalised notions of expert authority and its venues as well as organisation-wide framings of the policy issues ('body of an institution'). Combined these three lines of inquiry point to the notion of expert legitimacy in IOs as a negotiated and interlinked phenomenon that is constructed via navigation of competing epistemologies, value systems and interests. As such, this study contributes to the theoretical debates over the epistemic authority of experts by exploring both its robustness and its (limited) capacity to travel across different institutional settings.