P02 / Making Sense of Complex Policy Worlds Using Interpretive Methods

Topic : POLICY DISCOURSE AND CRITICAL POLICY RESEARCH

Chair : Prudence R Brown (University of Queensland)

Second Chair : Michael Orsini (University of Ottawa)

Third Chair : Warner Sarah (University of Queensland)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

There is increasing recognition that policy institutions are complex and studying structure and culture on their own is not enough – scholars need to understand the totality of the 'policy world' within which agents operate. The concept of a policy world draws on Shore and Wright (2011) who saw policies as having complex 'social lives' and 'agency', both shaped by interactions with actors and agents as well as shaping them (3). It also draws on Glynos and Howarth (2007) who see policies enacted within a policy regime as well as within an established system of social and political practices. As such, policy worlds are at heart radically contingent and open up ambiguous spaces in which actors and agents compete for influence.

Mainstream scientific methods are often reductionist, subordinating real-world complexity. If we are to be able to make sense of complex policy worlds, policy analysis needs to embrace the larger context, including the political. Interpretive methods provide the means required to delve into the complex, mediated and ambiguous realities within which policies are developed and implemented.

Interpretivist scholars are interested in the practical ways that policy practitioners recognise and manage the complexity that confronts them. As such, much interpretive analysis concentrates on close, micro-level interactions and contextualised self-interpretations. The challenge is to scale up established interpretive methodologies to make sense of 'policy worlds' in ways that consider the complexities at a larger scope of policy analysis, but which still express the variety of conflicting interpretations of actors.

References:

Glynos, Jason, and David R. Howarth. 2007. *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory*. Vol. 26. New York, NY: Routledge.

Shore, Cris, and Susan Wright. 2011. "Conceptualising Policy: Technologies of Governance and the Politics of Visibility." In *Policy worlds: anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power*, edited by Cris Shore, Susan Wright and Davide Però, 1-25. New York: Berghahn Books.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Interpretivist scholars are interested in the practical ways that policy practitioners recognise and manage the complexity that confronts them, how they interpret actions and discourses, and contribute to their formulation in turn. Interpretive policy analysis has been dominated by close, micro-level interactions and contextualised self-interpretations. The challenge for interpretivists is to scale up interpretive methodologies to make sense of 'policy worlds' of a much greater scope, but which nonetheless express the variety of conflicting interpretations of actors.

This panel seeks papers using interpretive methods to apprehend policy worlds. Papers are sought which make theoretical, methodological or empirical contributions to the extension of interpretive methods to a more holistic analysis of the complex, mediated and ambiguous realities of policy worlds. This might include comparative analyses of discourse across policy fields or countries, large-scale interpretations of policy worlds beyond micro-level ethnographies, or interpretive accounts of the state and other political institutions. We welcome contributions from interpretive scholars who draw on intersectional approaches to policy, or approaches that foreground intersections of race, gender, class, and ability.

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Session 1

Thursday, June 27th 08:00 to 10:00 (MB 3.285)

Discussants
Michael Orsini (University of Ottawa)
Warner Sarah (University of Queensland)

Ethical critique of a supported housing policy
Nicole Shepherd (University of Queensland)

Making-up the National- Globalisation in Australia's school education policy
Warner Sarah (University of Queensland)

Social Housing Reform in New Zealand: An Interpretive Perspective
Jordan King (University of Auckland)

The intersubjective creation of the Youth Protection Act (LPJ) 2007 amendments meaning: sensemaking and sensegiving processes
Naïma Bentayeb (ENAP)