P04 / Post-Truth and Alternative Facts: What Role for Critical Policy Research?

Topic : POLICY DISCOURSE AND CRITICAL POLICY RESEARCH

Chair : Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin)

Second Chair : Doug Torgerson (Trent University, Canada)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Post-truth and “Alternative facts” have become a noticeable feature of politics and public policy. Scientists have stepped out in the March for Science to assert that alternative facts have no place in science. Scholars have sought to understand whether alternative facts influence public opinion and in what ways. Critical Policy Studies can contribute by asking a different set of questions about truth and alternative facts and the role that they play in politics and public policy debates. Namely: what do alternative facts do? Do post-truth politics affect the relation between knowledge and power and if so, how? How do alternative facts shape policy discussions and ultimately policy formulation?

Critical and deliberative policy scholars have long challenged empiricist and technocratic assumptions that policy analysis should strive to separate “facts” from values, ideas and meaning in order to provide politics with an allegedly objective, solid and neutral knowledge base. Post-truth politics challenges interpretive researchers to become clearer on how and why facts matter, even as they continue to challenge these mainstream assumptions. For instance, one interesting commentary on Donald Trump’s post-truth politics asserts that if we focus on what is true versus what is not true we will miss the point. That is so because the use of alternative facts reveals a much deeper problematic: alternative facts are about claiming the authority to determine what is truth and what is reality, and especially troubling, regardless of any connection to verifiable evidence or experience. What are the chances of and the challenges for interpretive, pragmatist and deliberative approaches in policy analysis concerning these developments?

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel aims to understand what “alternative facts” do in policy controversies, how political actors use them, and to what effect and how alternative facts challenge critical policy studies.
We invite submissions that draw on critical and interpretive theoretical frameworks and methodologies to address such questions as:

- What are alternative facts? How can they be distinguished from framing processes?
- Are alternative facts expressions of ideological discourse and as such open to critical interpretive analysis? Or are alternative facts more aptly conceptualized as strategic tools used to influence policy discussion more directly?
- How do alternative facts operate? How do they shape discussions about policy issues such as climate change or immigration (among others)? What are the practices of producing alternative facts?
- Have the chances of deliberative politics diminished in the era of alternative facts? How can deliberative democratic processes respond to this challenge?
- Are alternative facts only tied to right-wing populist movements or do they also find expression in progressive social movements seeking to make social change?

We also encourage researchers to address the charge that interpretive researchers are responsible for creating a post-truth world because of their focus on the social construction of reality through narratives and discourses, and by observing that alternative knowledges can be created to justify different courses of action.

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Session 1Post-Truth and Alternative Facts: What Role for Critical Policy Theory? (I)

Thursday, June 27th 10:30 to 12:30 (MB 3.210)

Discussants

Doug Torgerson (Trent University, Canada)

Post-Truth and Cimate Denial: In Defense of Social Constructivism

Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin)

Understanding emotions in post-factual politics. the rage against science.

Anna Durnová (University of Vienna)

Tools of Influence

Carolyn Geiser (Colorado Technical University)

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Session 2Post-Truth and Alternative Facts: What Role for Critical Policy Theory? (II)

Thursday, June 27th 16:30 to 18:30 (MB 3.210)

Discussants

Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin)

"Social" Media and Violence in India: Post-Truth constructions of Deviance in India

Navdeep Mathur (Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad)

Fear and the Affective Politics of Vaccine Hesitancy

Michael Orsini (University of Ottawa)

Post-truth from a Brazilian Perspective

Rosana Boullosa (University of Brasilia/Brazil and Enap/Brazil)

Policy interventions under climate denial and post-truth: The challenge for critical policy research

Piyapong Boossabong (Chiang Mai University School of Public Policy)