P07 / Achieving EDI as a Policy Objective: How Policy Contradictions Subvert Its Agenda?

Topic : INEQUALITIES AND PUBLIC POLICY

Chair : Merli Tamtik (University of Manitoba)

Second Chair : Roopa Trilokekar (Faculty of Education York University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) through strategic policy development has been increasingly at the forefront of institutional change (Zhao et al. 2024). Yet there continues to be a disconnect between equity goals and those of other policy objectives, ultimately impacting the intended outcomes and the real-life experiences of equity-seeking individuals (AbouAssi et al., 2019; de la Riva Agüero, 2024). This disconnect between the (mis)alignment of larger policy objectives with EDI is often caused by policy contradictions, leading to subversions of EDI objectives that may emerge in policy design and/or policy implementation (Viswanath, Sabharwal & McCandless, 2024).

The objective of this panel is to examine the complex relationships between Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives and other public policy goals. It focuses on the policy contradictions that can emerge when two or more policy objectives diverge, clash or contradict in philosophy, approach or outcomes. Those contradictions can lead to both intended and unintended consequences for systematically marginalized individuals (Henry et al., 2017). The main research question that guides this panel is: How do policy contradictions emerge and how can policy makers account for and address policy contradictions to meet the EDI objectives within public policy?

Policy contradictions typically occur within systems of governance especially in complex social contexts like (higher) public education, healthcare, legal services, staffing of public services and other public sector enterprises. Policy contradictions arise when policies aimed at supporting equity are undermined by other systemic practices, such as economic austerity measures, rigid bureaucratic norms, or legislative gaps (Hermele, 2021, Smith & Jacques, 2022). Critical scholars consistently point to ongoing structures of colonialism that perpetuate inequities particularly through public policy, creating skepticism regarding the authenticity of EDI policies associated with tokenism and performativity (Henry et al., 2017; McNair, et. al., 2020; Whatley & Raby, 2020). For example, policies aimed at providing equal access to education often conflict with restrictive immigration policies (O'Connor, 2018). Language policies that enforce a single official language in schools or government services can contradict with integration policies that claim to value multiculturalism and diversity (Vavrus, 2002). Health policies that promise universal care may contradict with financial policies that limit resources for vulnerable populations (Hayvon, 2024). Consequently, policy contradictions can lead to undermining EDI goals by reinforcing barriers rather than dismantling them.

Our guiding theoretical and methodological framework is Critical Policy Analysis (CPA), (Allan, Iverson & Roper-Huilman 2010; Diem et al. 2014, 2015) that examines the circulation of power and the ways policy can create unequal hierarchies in society and prevent systematic structural change (Diem et al., 2014, p. 1072). This panel is grounded in the perspective that policy is not value-free but an interpretive process enacted in specific historical, geographical, social, economic, cultural and political contexts (Ball, 1997; Bowe et al., 1992; Ozga, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). We align with Bacchi (2012) who argued that policy is something to be critiqued and troubled rather than accepted at face value. As such, this panel will explore how policy contradictions emerge, how they may infuse power dynamics and eventually shape institutional priorities and practice. Thus the focus of our panel is both on policies designed specifically to promote EDI and on different, possibly unrelated policies that may have conflicting effects on the achievement of EDI. Through various case studies panelists will reveal those contradictions and analyze how policy contradictions not only hinder progress on EDI but may also perpetuate broader systemic failures that prevent dismantling institutionalized forms of discrimination and oppression.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite submission of research papers that explore the complexities of the public policy process as it pertains to achieving EDI goals within various sectors of the public policy domain. The focus of our panel is both on policies designed specifically to promote EDI and on different, possibly unrelated policies that may

have conflicting effects on the achievement of these EDI objectives. Ideally, we would like to bring together a panel that is composed of papers that examine EDI in public policy from different jurisdictions and public policy sectors. Some examples could include education (K-12 and higher education), health, immigration, public-sectors hiring practices, and more. Our goal is to assemble a panel of papers that provide a diverse, multi-jurisdictional perspective on EDI in public policy. We are particularly interested in studies that:

· Use a case study approach to delve into specific policy contexts;

· Examine how and why contradictions arise between EDI and other public policy goals;

· Investigate the impact of these contradictions on the success and sustainability of EDI initiatives;

Through this panel, we hope to generate insights that contribute to a deeper theoretical and practical understanding of the public policy process as an interpretive and often contested domain.

Key Themes for the Papers

EDI Policy Contradictions: Papers should examine EDI-specific policy contexts within a particular jurisdiction or sector, highlighting unique factors that have contributed to the emergence of policy contradictions. Authors are encouraged to articulate the significance of their cases and discuss how these cases lead to a more nuanced understanding of policy processes and limitations.

Critical Theoretical Approaches: While various analytical approaches are welcome, we particularly encourage submissions that use critical policy analysis or other critical frameworks to examine the intersections between EDI policies and competing policy objectives. This approach enables a more focused understanding of unpacking the tensions inherent in the policy process.

Actionable Insights for Policymakers: Each paper should include a section dedicated to offering practical recommendations or action items for policymakers. These recommendations should focus on ways to navigate or overcome policy contradictions that currently hinder EDI objectives. Overall, this panel is envisioned as the first step toward building a scholarly community interested in collaborating on an edited book dedicated to examining EDI policy through the lens of policy contradictions. We look forward to receiving papers that engage with the complexities of EDI policy, offer fresh perspectives on policy contradictions, and contribute to a growing body of critical public policy scholarship.

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Session 1

Thursday, July 3rd 08:00 to 10:00 (A1)

(Virtual) Contradictions in Canadian International Student Policy and its impact and consequences for achieving DEI goals

Roopa Trilokekar (Faculty of Education York University)

Policy contradictions are not uncommon. They are a regular feature of policy making as often different policies or actions contradict each other resulting at times in policy's goals undermining other policy goals (Cairney, 2022). However, policy contradictions can lead to highly problematic consequences, both intended and/or unintended, causing the subversion of some key policy agendas, as is the case with international student policy and its subversion of broader EDI goals within Canadian society.

While historically the domain of education policy, the role of international students in higher education systems around the world has expanded dramatically and now encompasses multiple policy domains (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018; (Brooks & Miljan, 2003). This paper will capture the complexity of overlapping policy contexts in relation to international student policy in Canada which has now developed “spill overs” between several distinct policy areas namely trade and international development, immigration and citizenship and labour market and the economy (Tamtik, Trilokekar & Jones, 2020). This paper argues that this spill-over of international student policy has (1) created challenges given tensions and disjunctures in policy alignment (2) the inclusion of several new non-governmental and government actors with differing policy objectives and (3) thereby created key policy contradictions in terms of policy objectives that diverge, clash or contradict in philosophy, approach or outcomes with the broader goals of DEI within Canadian society.

Using the international student policy context in Canada as a case study, this paper will illustrate how policy contradictions are exacerbated by inevitable and pervasive policy silos caused by many government departments pursuing divergent aims resulting in multiple authorities making policies without a sense of a ‘holistic’ government approach, typical for a decentralized federal state like Canada (Cairney, 2022; Tamtik, Trilokekar & Jones, 2020). More importantly, the case study will illustrate how these policy contradictions eventually lead to undermining Canada’s broader goals for EDI, impacting not only international students but also creating challenges for EDI within the domestic population. Tannock (2018) has already powerfully stated how in the case of the U.K. international student recruitment eventually led to the undermining of national demands for educational equality and justice. He therefore argued for the demands for educational equality and justice, currently framed at the national and sub-national level,

to be conceptualised at a global level.

Grounded in critical policy studies, this paper will speak to policy as not value-free but an interpretive process enacted in specific historical, geographical, social, economic, cultural and political contexts (Ball, 1997; Bowe et al., 1992; Ozga, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Using critical policy studies as a theoretical frame, it will examine international student policy in Canada to reveal and understand policy contradictions and how these contradictions are politically motivated to undermine and hinder progress on EDI goals by reinforcing barriers rather than dismantling them. This insight will be valuable for academics and policy makers alike in better understanding how and why policy contradictions occur and how they can be mitigated.

The Pilot Model of Systemic Discrimination (PMSD) : analysis of the politics of discrimination in health, employment higher education and accommodation sector.

MEZIANI Yamina (University)

Addressing the efficiency of public policies in the field of EDI requires first of all building a holistic model of discrimination, which is indispensable for producing a typology of the intentional and unintentional institutional processes that lead to unequal treatment of certain populations in terms of access to social resources.
We believe that this presupposition has not been fully taken on board by scientific research into systemic discrimination. This is why the European Horizon-Europe Undeterred research project is developing interdisciplinary research aimed at designing such a model, the only one capable of providing access to the complexity of both the experience of discrimination experienced by minority populations and the persistence of the high probability of inequality of access that affects them, and even of proving its predictability.
This essential research stage makes it possible to identify, understand and explain the reasons why the contradictions in EDI policies persist.
The central research question guiding this work is as follows: How can processes of systemic discrimination be identified, understood and countered within institutional structures in order to promote equality, equity and dignity (EED)?
Rooted in the systemic discrimination framework, we examine the persistence of barriers to EED in four specific sectors: employment, housing, education and health. By deploying an innovative model, we aim to dissect the mechanisms that sustain discrimination over time and across all or most sectors of social life.
The validation of the MPDS methodology is based on large-scale legal and statistical research, combined with a qualitative component based on 1,000 semi-structured interviews, 32 focus groups and 24 quasi-experimental studies.
The Undeterred programm represents an ambitious international research initiative incorporating European and Canadian perspectives. The consortium includes research teams from the universities of Amsterdam, Utrecht, Barcelona, Bordeaux, Bucharest and Laval (Quebec). It also includes partnerships with several metropolitan institutions, associations supporting immigrant populations, businesses and cultural organisations. This collaborative framework provides a multidimensional understanding of systemic discrimination and fosters synergies between academic and non-academic players.
Our theoretical approach creates the concepts of systemic boundary, normative asymmetry, normative interaction, normative configuration, sectoral dynamics and systemic chaos that model how prejudice, stereotypes, legal norms, institutional norms/rules and/or individual practices create inequalities that are institutionally and socially reproduced over time and underpin the contradictions inherent in the deployment of public policies.
Thus, this paper contributes to the panel's research question by addressing the contradictions of institutional policies aimed at achieving FDI. Using examples from the Undeterred programme, such as discrimination in employment or access to education for migrants, we highlight how systemic problems manifest themselves in the actions of institutions providing access to social resources.
Our conclusions underline the need for close collaboration between research and institutions, which is the only way to neutralise the active system of discrimination. We propose courses of action for policymakers, including the implementation of SIPM-based assessments and the promotion of closer collaboration between academia and institutions.
This work not only aligns with the panel's focus on exploring policy contradictions, but also provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing systemic discrimination. By bridging the gap between theoretical critique and practical intervention, this paper offers avenues for reimagining public policy to achieve inclusive and equitable outcomes.
AUTHORS : Fabien Sabatier is professor of history and expert in interdisciplinary research at the University of Bordeaux, France.
Yamina Meziani, in charge of EDI policy development at the University of Bordeaux, is a sociologist specialising in the implementation of equality policies. Her work examines the intersections between policy design, the promotion of equality and anti-discrimination objectives. Her research focuses on how institutional frameworks shape and hinder the achievement of equity, in particular through the analysis of field bureaucrats involved in gender, young age and race issues in the public and private sectors.

(Virtual) Framing Food Poverty: How Policy Design and Implementation Shape Food Security

Alessandra Orsini (Universitá degli Studi di Teramo)

Food security is a wicked problem in the realm of social policy. It is characterized by uncertainty, complexity,

and divergence (Head, 2022), and—although indeed not new—it shows an exceptional resistance to solutions (Turnbull and Hoppe 2019). Granted, the causes of food poverty can be as different as the stakeholders' worldviews, myths, and values and are rooted in the foundations of contemporary societies, welfare systems and social policies.

The paper aims to explore how different framings of the food poverty issue influence the design of policy responses. The literature concentrates on different methods for transforming unstructured problems into structured ones through a series of problem-processing stages in an iterative process of problem sensing, problem categorization, problem decomposition, and problem definition (Hoppe, 2018). We know that this process gives rise to exclusions; it can selectively neglect issues, ignore potential beneficiaries and distribute costs and benefits according to the unequal perception of target populations (Schneider and Ingram 1993). Less known is how operational needs during policy implementation may conflict with the initial policy problem, subtly influence design details, and even subvert the initial policy response.

We analyse the case of Italian Solidarity Emporiums—a food assistance program implemented by third-sector associations. Emporiums are organized as a market where people in need can come and shop for free upon referral from municipal social services. They aim to respond to food security in a more dignified way than the traditional distribution of food parcels. Emporiums seek to go beyond simply ‘providing sufficient and high-quality food’ to food- insecure individuals but aim to help people more broadly in overcoming deprivation.

This problem framing and the centrality of food security is officially uncontested. However, its full implementation clashes with the limited responsibility of social services (for which food assistance is an emergency short-term situation with no public program attached) and a system of voluntary associations dependent on food donations (for which managing food procurement and avoiding food waste is vital). How do these implementation problems and framings conflict with the goal of food security? How do they influence policy design? The article uses mixed methods to answer these questions. Data is derived from interviews with Emporium volunteers, staff from third-sector associations, and social services and a survey of beneficiaries. The analysis includes two different emporiums implemented by local committees of the Red Cross in two different cities.

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Reconciling the Irreconcilable: Policy Contradictions in Indigenous Governance and Mainstream Higher Education

Merli Tamtik (University of Manitoba)

Reconciliation between Canadian higher education institutions and Indigenous communities has emerged as a crucial institutional policy objective. Universities are increasingly called upon to decolonize their governance structures to better reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Pidgeon, 2016; Brunette-Debassige, 2021, 2023; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Walter & Aitken, 2019). Despite this recognition, longstanding governance models within Canadian universities remain deeply rooted in western, colonial ideologies (Tamtik, 2024). This tension highlights a key policy contradiction: while institutions publicly commit to reconciliation and inclusivity, their governance systems continue to perpetuate unequal power dynamics and marginalize Indigenous voices.

This contradiction is evident in the reliance on traditional bicameral governance models that prioritize meritocracy, individualism, and competition (Eastman et al., 2022; Debassige & Brunette Debassige, 2014), which inherently conflict with Indigenous governance principles of community involvement, consensus-building, and respect for diverse knowledges. Elders and other Indigenous knowledge keepers are often part of Indigenous governance models (Pidgeon, 2016). Moreover, despite growing calls for Indigenous representation, governance models often fail to adequately integrate Indigenous voices, leaving Indigenous communities dependent on policies developed by mainstream, western-oriented institutions. This highlights a systemic resistance to transformative change, creating a disparity between the stated goals of reconciliation and the operational realities of institutional governance.

Critical policy analysis (CPA) serves as a valuable theoretical framework for examining the underlying power

dynamics and structural inequities embedded in policy processes. Grounded in critical theory, CPA interrogates how policies are not merely neutral instruments but are shaped by and reinforce existing power relations, privileging certain groups while marginalizing others (Allan, Iverson & Roper-Huilman 2010; Diem et al. 2014, 2015). By emphasizing the sociopolitical contexts in which policies are developed, implemented, and interpreted, CPA unveils the ways in which dominant ideologies, such as colonialism, neoliberalism, and meritocracy, are institutionalized through governance structures (Ball, 1997; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Through its focus on power relations, CPA not only critiques existing structures but also supports the development of transformative, equity-driven policies that challenge the status quo.

The findings identify several factors contributing to the policy contradiction between reconciliation efforts and the marginalization of Indigenous voices in university governance. These include the colonial roots of traditional governance models, limited Indigenous representation, reliance on Western frameworks, and resistance to structural change. Universities' rigid, compartmentalized governance structures conflict with Indigenous holistic approaches, while tokenistic reconciliation efforts fail to address systemic inequities. Furthermore, power imbalances in decision-making processes perpetuate the marginalization of Indigenous perspectives, hindering meaningful progress toward decolonization and reconciliation.

This policy contradiction is significant because it exposes the complexities and limitations of policy processes, particularly in addressing reconciliation within entrenched colonial structures like university governance. It reveals gaps between symbolic gestures and substantive actions, highlighting unequal power dynamics that marginalize Indigenous voices. The contradiction demonstrates how colonial frameworks perpetuate inequality and limit meaningful change, emphasizing the need for alternative governance models better aligned with Indigenous principles. This case encourages reflexivity in policy-making and provides insights for developing more inclusive, transformative policies that address systemic barriers and foster genuine reconciliation.

The immigrant 'guest' seeking a home in Canada: Contested spaces of hospitality

Nathalie Piquemal (University of Manitoba)

Hospitality has often been linked to migration studies in their examination of host-guest dynamics between newcomers and the nation/communities which they seek to call home. Competing tensions inherent within a nation's own agenda around quotas, validation of foreign credentials, workforce needs and benevolence/humanitarian orientations have undoubtedly shed a light on hospitality's paradox and inherent contradiction: That is, those claiming to offer hospitality are not only concerned about ways to delimit it, but often struggle with the test of altruism, focusing instead on desired outcome. In Canada in particular, immigration policy can be articulated as a contested space as the recruitment, acceptance and retention of immigrants for the purpose of economic and demographic development/sustainability denotes an instrumental value that competes with an ideal of benevolence. While Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) recognizes the need to uphold "humanitarian values by supporting vulnerable populations," their mandate remains articulated around market demands, economic growth and safety challenges (IRCC, 2018).
This paper presentation focuses on hospitality as a conceptual lens (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Rosello, 2001) when making sense of the rights of the 'guest' and the responsibilities of the 'host', with special attention to the experiences of minoritized immigrants in their pursuit of equitable integration. The panel on "Inequality and Public Policy" focuses on policy contradictions that subvert the agenda of equity, diversity and inclusion. An example of contradiction that will be examined is Canadian immigration's use of a point system in which education and/or professional credentials have a significant weigh pre-migration but lose value once immigrants are in the country, leading to a phenomenon that has been articulated by Madibbo (2020) as "reverse inclusion." Barriers to hospitality are further intensified when the 'guest' holds minority identity markers, often leading the 'host' to erect more walls. In the midst of these systemic barriers, however, immigrants find spaces of agency and develop anti-hegemonic responses.
This paper presentation will begin with a brief reflection on the meaning of hospitality for 'host' communities in the context of settler colonialism in Canada. It will then present a synthesis of select immigration policies with special attention to the Francophone minority context in Canada. These documents will be analyzed through the lens of hospitality with a specific focus on host-guest dynamics, mandate, positioning and voice. The paper presentation will then present qualitative data on immigrants' perceptions of some of the contradictions they experience when seeking to move from the status of a guest to that of a full member of the home. This presentation will end with a reflection on host's responsibilities.

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(Virtual) EDI and robust health care provision: Exploring the construction of contradictions

Gemma Hunting (Simon Fraser University)

There is increasing acknowledgement that EDI policies, strategies or frameworks cannot be “added onto” existing policy priorities and processes of institutions and organizations, but rather need to be effectively integrated across policies, systems, and the ways policy processes occur. In addition, doing the work of EDI within policy requires time and space to engage with critical reflection and critical approaches to the value of EDI, the role of policy actors to EDI, and exploring how taking up EDI across various policy sectors can result in more inclusive, impactful and effective policy outcomes. With the exception of emerging promising practices however, EDI often is constructed as irrelevant compared to the “real” issue-based policy work of insttiutions, including the health care system. This paper looks at the Canadian health care system as a case example of how EDI has often been constructed as unnecessary due to interrelated factors:

· including dominant discourses of a “universal” system where any access issues can improve by amping up health promotion and interventions

· polarizing constructions of EDI as a reflection of woke culture and harmful to the “majority” population; and

· the recent media debate on how adding EDI into the revision of the Canadian Medical Physician competency framework weakens health provision (CANMeds)

This paper discusses how “contradictions” between EDI and the policy goals and related competencies of health care provision in Canada are rooted in are often constructed by both misconceptions of EDI and how it can be integrated in policy, and processes of power.

Drawing on the beginnings of my doctoral field research looking at promising practices related to EDI in Canadian Medical Schools, I will propose some key ways in which the EDI policies can be positioned and integrated by policy actors and organizations into broader policy priorities, such as those focused on improving medical interventions in ways that are synergistic and work towards social justice. These will include taking up critical policy approaches such as intersectionality, ensuring space and resourcing for critical reflection and cross sectoral work, and prioritizing policy processes informed by community engagement.