P02 / Bringing the voices in: emotions, vulnerablity and new modes of governance in public policy

Topic : POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

Chair : Anna Durnová (University of Vienna)

Second Chair : Christopher Weible (University of Colorado Denver)

Third Chair : Felix Ihrig (University of Vienna)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel highlights the essential role of emotions and vulnerability in shaping public policy, examining their impact on policy formulation and policy implementation across a range of governance contexts. By exploring current understandings of emotions in public policy, this panel aims to bring into conversation diverse approaches to how emotions—often an underexamined yet powerful element—drive and shape policy processes. Addressing the emotional dimensions of governance, this session will create a space for innovative discussions on the transformative potential of emotionally informed and inclusive policymaking.

Panel Objectives and Scope
The primary objective of this panel is to recognize emotions not only as influencing factors but as conceptual tools fostering a deeper understanding of how affective dimensions impact governance structures and policy frameworks. By emphasizing vulnerability, this panel seeks to illuminate the processes through which emotions shape and reshape policy, potentially allowing for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to policy processes.

This panel is designed to embrace diverse perspectives and research stages. We encourage contributions that explore emotions through various policy theory orientations, methodologies, and research experiences. A key objective is to create a collaborative and reflexive environment, one where scholars feel comfortable discussing both the successes and challenges encountered in their work. Contributions need not present fully established methods; instead, we value the openness to explore innovative approaches and to critically reflect on methodologies that enhance our understanding of emotions in public policy.

This panel seeks to bring together research that addresses emotions across different policy domains, with an emphasis on critical insights into governance and vulnerability. Key areas of focus include:

- Emotions from Individual to Collective: Examining the transition from personal emotional responses to collective affective phenomena, such as how individual privacy concerns aggregate into broader political movements or social concerns.
- Emotions and Expertise: Exploring the role of emotions in the age of "postfactual politics" and questioning how expertise interacts with emotional narratives in public decision-making.
- Emotions as Knowledge: Delving into the role of emotions as a distinct form of knowledge, where affective responses provide insights that are different from, yet complementary to, traditional expert knowledge.

We invite scholars from diverse backgrounds and career stages to foster a dynamic exchange of ideas and methodologies that enhance our collective understanding of emotions in policy and governance. This panel promises to enrich the conference’s objectives by opening space for new insights and collaborative learning on the role of emotions in creating responsive, inclusive, and empathetic public policies.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Incorporating emotions into the study of public policy is an increasingly significant aspect of policy process theories, with scholars now examining emotions as pivotal drivers that impact the political landscape, policy debates, and governance processes. This panel reflects this shift toward acknowledging the substantial influence of emotions in public policy,o moving beyond the notion of emotions as secondary to rational decision-making processes. By inviting work that considers emotions not only as a subject but as a conceptual cum methodlogical approach to study governance, the panel aligns with recent calls for more inclusive, emotionally sensitive policymaking.

This panel invites papers examining the essential role of emotions and exploring how emotions influence

both the formulation and implementation of policy, moving beyond traditional frameworks to emphasize the transformative potential of emotionally informed, inclusive governance. We welcome contributions that engage with emotions as both influencing factors and conceptual tools in governance, particularly those that explore vulnerability as a pathway to more empathetic policy approaches. The panel seeks diverse perspectives across policy theory orientations and methodological approaches, encouraging both established and exploratory research. Contributors need not present fully developed methods; instead, we value openness to discussing successes, challenges, and reflections on the role of emotions in policy studies.

Key themes include:
Emotions from Individual to Collective: How personal emotional responses scale to broader political movements and social issues.
Emotions and Expertise: The interaction between expertise and emotional narratives, especially in "postfactual" policy contexts.
Emotions as Knowledge: Recognizing emotions as a unique form of knowledge that complements traditional expertise.

By bringing together varied perspectives, this panel seeks to foster a collaborative environment that advances understanding of emotions as crucial to governance and public policy. Scholars from all backgrounds are encouraged to submit.

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Session 1Vulnerability, Memory and Collective Agency

Wednesday, July 2nd 13:45 to 15:45 (SME-F3)

(Virtual) Integrating Reflexivity into Medical Education: Tensions and Promising Practices

Gemma Hunting (Simon Fraser University)

Reflexivity, the practice of critical self-reflection on one's positionality, experience, and privilege, is increasingly recognized as essential for equity-informed and social justice-oriented policy processes. While literature around critical pedagogies and transformative education have extensively explored reflexivity, its integration into mainstream public policy research and practice remains limited. This paper addresses this gap by examining reflexivity within medical education, drawing from preliminary doctoral research looking at Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) considerations in Canadian medical schools.

Informed by intersectional and decolonizing approaches, I will explore the challenges and tensions of embedding reflexivity in medical education content and policy, particularly against dominant constructions of biomedical hegemony and zero-point epistemology. By highlighting promising practices, I demonstrate how fostering reflexive environments—where transformative learning and discomfort is embraced—can enhance medical education policies and practices. Key components of these practices include continually addressing power imbalances, engaging with diverse epistemologies (including Indigenous ways of knowing), and reorienting the work to be more patient and community driven. This work contributes to a broader understanding of how reflexivity and the subjective emotional self can be reframed as critical to transformative and inclusive medical education and medical practice, in pursuit of equity and social justice.

(Virtual) Affective Spheres of Governance – Navigating the Maze of Trans Healthcare

Felix Ihrig (University of Vienna)

Anna Durnová (University of Vienna)

Our contribution explores the intersection of inclusive governance and the critical policy studies tradition with a particular focus on the role of emotions in policy processes. The empirical case of trans, intersex, and nonbinary (tin*) healthcare in Austria provides a compelling context to examine these dynamics. Despite the increasing public, governmental, and medical attention to the needs of tin* individuals, significant gaps persist in the healthcare sector due to the exclusion of tin* voices in policy processes, which we discuss through the concepts of “vulnerabilization” and “responsibilization”.

We propose an “affective governance” research approach examining how emotions influence the debate, acceptance, and legitimation of knowledge contributing to policy. It further explores how emotions play a structural role in shaping deliberation and the ways in which policy problems are framed and understood. The concept of vulnerabilization, more specifically, offers us a critical lens for understanding this process in the context of inclusive governance frameworks. As we posit in our paper, people are not inherently vulnerable but are instead made vulnerable through social, institutional, and systemic processes. While vulnerabilization can lead to protective measures designed to address systemic inequities, it also carries the risk of reinforcing stereotypes. For instance, portraying individuals or groups solely through the lens of their vulnerability may inadvertently perpetuate a paternalistic view that denies them agency, and with that also expertise. By centring the voices and capacities of marginalized groups, responsibilization could move beyond a top-down imposition and become a collaborative process that amplifies agency and fosters collective accountability for addressing systemic injustices.

By scrutinizing the advocacy efforts of tin* activists in Austria, we shed light on the affective processes of

policies – vulnerabilization and responsibilization in particular. Tin* activists have employed various strategies to address healthcare inequalities, including community networking, the creation of informative booklets for healthcare providers, direct engagement with authorities, and organizing or engaging in educational events. Through this empirical case, we underscore the importance of including marginalized voices in policy processes and highlight how viewing the process as an affective maze makes the emotional component of knowledge and power visible. By integrating emotional analysis into the study of governance, the discourse on inclusive governance and the transformative potential of emotionally informed policy processes can be advanced.

The politics of the heart-mind: emotions in driving the feminist collective movement in Peru.

Cristina Miranda-Beas (Université de Montréal)

MARCELA TORRES WONG (FLACSO MEXICO)

The escalation of the global environmental crisis, the deterioration of biodiversity and social inequalities have given impetus to ecofeminist movements in Latin America. In Peru, one of the countries with high rates of violence against women, an emerging indigenous feminist collective is struggling to achieve equal rights between men and women, defend their territories from extractivism and achieve food sovereignty in the face of the growing climate crisis. Distinguishing themselves from the male indigenous leadership that dominated the Peruvian political scene during the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s-period of the rise of Latin American indigenous movements-women's organizations bring new airs to environmental movements that put “Pachamama” at the center. We analyze the case of the National Federation of Peasant, Rural, Indigenous and Salaried Women of Peru (FENMUCARINAP), which was born with the dual objective of defending women's rights from patriarchal violence and defending nature from the onslaught of extractivism in its multiple manifestations. We delved into the political empowerment of the members of FENMUCARINAP, their networks with feminist organizations and their environmental and gender proposals. We found that this feminist collective promoted by its leader Lourdes Huanca, an indigenous Peruvian with 30 years of leadership, places emotions and the mind-heart connection at the center of its decisions. From the approach of the politics of emotions, we analyze the leadership exercised by “Femus” emphasizing the emotional responses of its members to counteract the onslaught of racism and machismo in Peru. Specifically, we analyze how this type of leadership has allowed FENMUCARINAP to play a decisive role in the process of prior consultation of the regulations of the Forestry and Wildlife Law in 2014, a participatory process that laid the groundwork for the work between Andean and Amazonian indigenous peoples and the Peruvian government.

Participation and Fragility: Rethinking Collective Action through the Representation of Traumatic Stories

Francesca Gelli (Università Iuav di Venezia)

The paper focuses on the capacity of structured participation in deliberative practices to create a framework for representing traumatic stories, shifting the perception of sensitive issues from the sphere of individual experience to that of collective processing, thus fostering a socialization of the experience of pain and suffering. It highlights the representation of vulnerabilities in decision-making processes, transforming them into aspects of strength and courage. At the core of this reasoning lies an awareness of the profound implications of the emotional and affective dimensions in the construction of public problems, particularly when dealing with complex and potentially contentious matters that involve significant technical and scientific content, as well as substantial political, social, and human implications.

Participatory public policies can be effective in designing interactive settings that inclusively and creatively bring together worlds and subjects from different domains (e.g., science, politics, citizenship), working across boundaries. The cases investigated, which will be presented to support the argument, refer to participatory processes related to public decisions (including infrastructure projects and healthcare policy decisions in different territorial contexts) with strong social and environmental impacts. Experiences related to complex contractual planning paths that have dealt with the management of natural and environmental resources (such as lagoon contracts, river contracts, and lake contracts) will also be analyzed. The ecological transition, in fact, raises the urgent issue of the interaction between the human and the non-human, between society and nature. The rights of the non-human are subjectivized in participatory processes, towards forms of co-agency. The relationship between the human and the non-human comes to the forefront of the interests and positions held by the participants, as well as the underlying affectivity and ethical motivations.

The essay also provides an opportunity to revisit Forester's essay, “On Not Leaving Your Pain at the Door:

Political Deliberation, Critical Pragmatism, and Traumatic Histories" (1999), which serves – from the author's view – as a foundational text on the topic, highly relevant for rethinking the relationship between instrumental rationality and the rationality of values in collective decision-making. The point raised is that decisions and the implementation of large-scale projects can have traumatic consequences and be experienced as events that leave a strong mark on territories and communities. They can also become wounds that do not heal, due to the intensity of the conflicts they provoke, the distress they cause, the breakdown of trust, the irreversible transformation of places, and the discovery of institutional practices and people previously unimagined. Often, this discomfort is not socialized, particularly in its emotional aspects, while efforts focus on protest, adaptation to the new situation, or the search for an exit strategy. The prevailing bias is that in a conflict, the party that highlights pain and suffering weakens in comparison to the stronger side, thereby increasing its power. The type of interactive engagement that can be developed through a Public Debate process, in a setting prepared by conflict mediation and facilitation experts aimed at fostering mutual understanding among participants, represents an opportunity for the representation and narration of problematic aspects related to the affective and emotional sphere. The outcome can be a new awareness among participants of what is at stake, including shared suffering—the trauma that has been experienced but kept under the surface for self-protection or due to the pressures of public exposure.

Listening for the unspoken: Co-creating inclusive spaces for young people with disability and young carers in public policy

Laura Davy (Australian National University)

Molly Saunders (Australian National University)

This paper examines how fostering inclusive institutional cultures of listening can strengthen the participatory rights of young people with disability and young carers. Drawing on findings from an Australian co-designed research project, it investigates the conditions that enable or constrain opportunities for these groups to have their voices heard within the organisations and services shaping their lives.

Framed by political listening theory, the paper highlights how vulnerability and emotional connection shape opportunities for voice within governance structures. While listening theory often assumes the presence of voice, our research revealed the need to attune to both its presence and absence. We argue that opportunities for voice must be co-created by both potential speakers and listeners through communication spaces shaped by hope, recognition, safety, and creativity. Hope involves a shared belief in the possibility of making absent voices present. Recognition requires mutual acknowledgment of each other's power to speak and to listen. Safety ensures that potential speakers feel secure enough to share their experiences without fear of harm. Creativity enables the exploration of new and disruptive modes of communication, allowing diverse voices to emerge in unexpected ways.

By examining how these relational and emotional dynamics influence institutional listening, this paper rethinks governance as a process that responds to vulnerability and fosters belonging. It demonstrates how reimagining listening practices in care services and policy environments can address structural exclusion and promote more inclusive and empathetic policy processes.

The Fragmented Tenant: Unveiling the Relational and Communicative Impacts of Behavioural Segmentation

Hannah Absalom (University of Birmingham)

Hannah Absalom (University of Birmingham)

The emotional terrain of English social housing is shaped by the tensions between its hybrid governance—where market logics, regulatory mechanisms, and philanthropic legacies intersect—and the increasingly datafied nature of tenant-landlord relations. In this evolving landscape, behavioural segmentation has emerged as a means of categorising tenants, promising service efficiency while tacitly reinforcing hierarchies of deservingness. Yet, rather than resolving the relational fragilities inherent in social housing, this paper argues that segmentation technologies deepen epistemic injustices—particularly testimonial and hermeneutical forms—by reshaping whose knowledge is recognised and how tenant subjectivities are rendered intelligible within institutional frameworks.

Drawing on qualitative research with 21 housing practitioners and tenants, this study examines how segmentation regimes operate as affective infrastructures, embedding emotional asymmetries into landlord-tenant interactions. Through the lens of Miranda Fricker's epistemic injustice and Deleuze and

Guattari’s ‘desiring-machines,’ the analysis reveals how these technologies discipline tenant behaviours while occluding the material and relational realities that shape their lives. The algorithmic gaze abstracts tenants’ narratives into predictive risk categories, silencing affective knowledge and trust-building in favour of actuarial logics that prioritise control over care.

The paper contends that social housing must move beyond technocratic abstractions that displace relational engagement and instead reimagine analytics through participatory, tenant-centred approaches. Action research and storytelling analytics offer pathways to foreground lived experience, challenge the erasures of segmentation, and reconfigure the role of technology in fostering trust, equity, and recognition. While grounded in the English context, these findings hold broader significance for global debates on the emotional and ethical stakes of data-driven governance in public service delivery.

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Session 2Emotions in Frontline Public Service

Friday, July 4th 08:00 to 10:00 (SME-F3)

‘Nothing to fear about’: Street-level Bureaucrats’ Experiences of Fear in Public Sector Organizations

Lihi Lahat (Sapir Academic College, Israel/ Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Department of Political Science,Concordia University, Montreal.)

Authors: **Lihi Lahat & Zehavit Levitats:**

While research on emotions in public administration and public policy is increasing (Durnova, 2018; Fullerton et al., 2024), exploration of the role of fear remains limited. Fear is one of the six core emotions (i.e., enjoyment, anger, disgust, fear, surprise, and sadness; Levenson, 2011) and significantly impacts organizational practices and policy processes (Jung et al., 2020; Yordy et al., 2024). We focus on the distinct role of fear among street-level bureaucrats, addressing a gap in the literature where research on fear is scarce (Jung et al., 2020; Yordy et al., 2024 as an exception). Fear is a fundamental emotion that profoundly influences individuals' lives. Thus, understanding how it affects street-level bureaucrats' (SLBs) willingness to take action, express their opinions, and make decisions is essential, especially in today's complex environment (Rossi, 2020; Bartels & Turnbull, 2020).

Over recent decades, the role of SLBs has expanded beyond implementation to encompass aspects of policy design, leading to increased responsibilities. This expanded role subjects SLBs to greater scrutiny from peers and other stakeholders within and outside public sector organizations, including service users, auditors, the media, and social networks. Consequently, fear of potential adverse outcomes and various other factors has embedded itself into their broader role and may impact policy implementation and design. This exploratory study addresses that gap through the following research questions: (1) What types of fears do social workers experience in public sector organizations? (2) How does fear influence their actions and decision-making at work? To explore these questions, we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 20 social workers in Israel, and the presentation will highlight the preliminary findings. The initial findings reveal four main themes: (1) “Fear, really!?” – a denial of the emotion; (2) “Fear of what?” – various sources of fear; (3) diverse levels of experiences of SLBs' fear; and (4) the connection between fear and coping mechanisms. These findings provide insights into the complex and often hidden role of fear within public organizations and its impact on policy implementation and design, emphasizing its diversity and importance as an underrecognized emotion. The findings offer essential insights into how this emotion shapes our understanding of the relationship between expertise and emotional narratives as knowledge in organizational complexity and policy implementation among SLBs.

Emotion is More Important than Knowledge?: How Emotion Drives Local Tax and Social Welfare Policy Implementation in Thailand

Pawinee Chuayprakong (National Institute of Development Administration)

Even though emotion has been considered as a key driver for both policy initiation and policy change in the interpretive policy studies (Durnová & Weible, 2020)—particularly with the accumulation of empirical evidence by such research programs of Social Construction Framework (Cairney & Heikkila, 2014; Schneider et al., 2014) and more recently those of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016), Multiple Streams Framework (Herweg et al., 2023), and the Ecology of Games Framework (Lubell, 2013). To enunciate this association, this paper argues that emotion is more important

than knowledge in policy implementation, especially in the domains of local taxation and social welfare. As a preliminary study, it employed a qualitative approach to understanding the existence of emotion and its impact as the policy implementation progressed (Leavy, 2017). Furthermore, a comparative case study was conducted as an effort, first, to develop a broad and informed picture from the particular instances and, later, to develop testable or generalizable propositions (Dion, 1998; Gerring, 2007; Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). Representing a diverse case, the focus of data collection was on emotional labor's deep acting (Choi & Guy, 2021; Hochschild, 1979; Lu, 2019) and administrative burden's psychological costs (Deluca et al., 2023; Herd & Moynihan, 2019) during the citizen-state interactions while the local revenue collectors were collecting tax dues and while the social welfare applicants were registering for the scheme, respectively. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with those two target groups. Constant comparative analysis, classical content analysis, and in-vivo coding were the techniques for analyzing the interview transcripts (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, 2008; Miles et al., 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These findings suggest that emotional factors play a crucial role in determining the efficacy of policy implementation and, consequently, in prompting policy revisions aimed at optimizing the status quo. Emotional labor's deep acting among local revenue are piece and parcel for making taxpayers understand the new property tax's structure, automatically boosting the tax compliance successful policy implementation. Without this type of emotional labor, heated arguments emerged and were followed by tax avoidance and tax revolts. Policy learning can proceed when the citizens are heuristically prepared or, in other words, when they are emotionally ready for new knowledge. Meanwhile, the citizens (informal workers) who registered for the social welfare scheme were afraid and shy to inquire about additional information or basic knowledge on the benefits from the Social Security officers using legal terms and not speaking in their dialect. This psychological cost caused these citizens in terms of opportunity loss—access to health care services and life insurances. These two diverse cases confirm that emotion is imperative and a prerequisite for policy learning. Policy recommendations and future research endeavors are also discussed.

Empathy as practice: How do Australian public servants use empathy in their work?

Assel Mussagulova (University of Sydney)

Colette Einfeld (Australian National University)

In the current environment of increasingly frequent health crises, natural hazards and economic pressures an empathetic approach to policy processes can help people cultivate hope to cope with fear (Boossabong & Chamchong, 2024). It can also enable public servants to draw meaningful insights about people's experiences, which can be used to understand broader social and political patterns in society and how they contribute to structural contexts.

A number of vocal scholars have called for bringing 'emotional public administration' sensibilities to policymaking through the integration of empathy (Dolamore 2021; Edlins 2021; Mussagulova, 2024). However, our knowledge on how empathy is practiced by policy makers (or system-level bureaucrats) is limited. To integrate empathy more seamlessly into government work, it is essential to understand if and how empathy is currently practiced by public servants.

We set out to explore how empathy is practiced by public servants in the Australian government, which recently experienced a major public service scandal characterised as a loss of empathy (Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme, 2023, p.637). Our study is guided by one central research question – How is empathy practiced by public servants in their work? In doing so we rely on practice theory which posits that the social world is constituted by collectively shared practices (Nicolini, 2011). These practices are the basis on which members of collectives, such as organizations, relate to each other, and make sense of the world. We use practice theory as the theoretical lens for our study in a bid to understand whether practices of empathy are common across the public service, constitute reoccurring activities and contribute to sensemaking of individual and collective actors.

We interviewed policymakers in the Australian federal and state government (n=15). We found that policymakers practice empathy through direct engagement with and interpretation of, evidence; engagement with stakeholders during consultations; crafting messages to the public about important policy decisions; through institutional processes and leadership activities, and internalising empathy as identity and applying it to decisions throughout the policy process when evidence is not available. Our research has theoretical and practical implications for bringing empathy to the forefront of public policy and public administration research and practice.

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Emotions, Religious Discrimination, and Public Health Policy: The Indian Government's Response to COVID-19

Heewon Kim (Aston University)

This paper examines the role of emotions in shaping the Indian government’s public health policy response towards religious minorities, particularly Muslims, during the COVID-19 pandemic. While existing scholarship has documented discriminatory practices in the Indian government's response, the influence of emotions as a distinct form of knowledge in shaping and legitimising these policies remains under-researched, particularly in the context of religious discrimination. This study addresses this gap by analysing how emotional narratives and knowledge intersected with, and at times superseded, traditional expert knowledge in crisis management, particularly following the Tablighi Jamaat event.

Drawing on Affective Intelligence Theory, this research employs emotions as elements of knowledge and examines three critical dimensions: the transformation of public health issues into communal narratives, the discriminatory practices in public healthcare delivery, and the emergence of counter-knowledge/narrative challenging dominant discriminatory discourses during the pandemic. This approach helps understand how emotional responses override technical expertise in crisis management, the role of emotions in strengthening existing discriminatory dispositions, and how emotion operated as a legitimate form of understanding that shaped discriminatory governance practices and policy implementation during the pandemic.

Through analysis of the lockdown policies and its policy process, quarantine policies, community experiences related to hospital segregation and restricted healthcare access, and other series of policies that disproportionately affected religious minorities, this study demonstrates how emotional knowledge shaped institutional responses to the pandemic. The findings show that emotional narratives shaped policy implementation through a transformation of public health issues into communal concerns, institutionalised discriminatory practices in healthcare delivery, and legitimised differential treatment through official discourse.

This research makes significant theoretical and empirical contributions by extending Affective Intelligence Theory beyond its Western context to analyse emotional dynamics in South Asian governance. It highlights how emotional systems operate in contexts of deep-rooted religious divisions and provides evidence of how institutional mechanisms reinforce discriminatory practices through the disposition system. The findings offer critical insights for developing more inclusive public policies for crisis management in diverse societies.

(Virtual) Protective Policies as Emotional Safety Nets: An Agenda for MSF Research

Moshe Maor (Reichman University)

Public policies often provide more than just material goods or services; they offer a sense of stability, security, and emotional comfort, particularly during times of crisis or uncertainty. In this context, protective policy emerges as a critical tool for creating emotional safety nets that support individuals and communities facing various forms of stress, anxiety, and vulnerability. A key question arises: which type of emotional safety net best aligns government responses with the emotional needs of target populations. Drawing on the role of emotional intensity in the processes through which emotions influence interpretation, as well as extensive research showing that individuals within groups share and shape collective emotional states—states that inform group identities and actions—this paper conceptualizes the emotional dimension of protective policy as a multidimensional phenomenon. Two dimensions that are interrelated, yet capture distinct aspects of emotional safety nets, include the intensity of the emotions targeted and the extent to which emotional needs are similar across groups. These two dimensions give rise of three distinct emotional

safety nets?namely, Basic Reassurance Safety Net (low intensity/high similarity), Emotional Empowerment Safety Net (moderate intensity/ moderate similarity); and Restorative Emotional Safety Net (high intensity/low similarity). These categories provide policymakers with a structured framework to assess the emotional needs of target populations and tailor their protective policies accordingly. Drawing on the Multiple Streams Framework, the paper generates numerous hypotheses. Process tracing, among others, will effectively demonstrate how emotional safety net strategies are chosen and implemented.

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Session 3Emotional Dynamics in Policy Discourse and Public Perception

Friday, July 4th 10:15 to 12:15 (SME-F3)

Integrating Emotion Analyses to Understand Transgender Policy Debates

Christopher Weible (University of Colorado Denver)

Anna Durnová (University of Vienna)

Allegra Fullerton (West Virginia University)

Authors:

Authors: Christopher M. Weible, Anna P. Durnová, Allegra H. Fullerton, Dhani Freeland, and Paul Apperson

There are multiple approaches to understanding the policy process; however, using more than one approach and then integrating the insights remains elusive. This paper employs an application of the Advocacy Coalition Framework's (ACF) Emotion Belief Analysis, a mainstream social science approach, and the Interpretive Emotion Analysis, an interpretive social science approach, and then integrates insights from both. The case is transgender debates in the news media surrounding the election of President Donald Trump and the Executive Orders involving transgender people in the United States. The findings identify a pro-transgender and an anti-transgender coalitions. The findings also specify the degree of polarization and cohesion between these sides and their most and least frequent expressions of beliefs and emotions via the Emotion Belief Analysis and identifies the metaphors, symbols, and other evaluative languages used strategically and performatively as the two sides engaged in the debate, via the Interpretive Emotion Analysis. By integrating these two analytical approaches, this paper demonstrates that such a dual approach yields a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the policy conflict than either approach provide in isolation. This paper concludes with a research agenda for more multi-lens analyses, particularly those bridging interpretive and mainstream approaches, and offers tips for doing so.

"Emotions as The Glue and The Triggers: A Framework for Understanding Policy Discourse Coalitions"

Rodrigo Espinola (Chiang Mai University School of Public Policy)

Abstract

The affective dimension in policy analysis, advocacy, and design is still less emphasized. This study explores the role of emotions in policy discourse coalitions. Through the case study of a sea turtle suffering from a plastic straw, it examines how compassion influences coalition formation, advocacy, and policy outcomes. This highly charged emotional case demonstrates that emotions can be a powerful foundation for coalition building, sustained advocacy and behaviors. A video of a sea turtle suffering from a plastic straw catalyzed a global movement, first against plastic straw use and then against plastic in general. The findings reveal that emotions act as “the glue” to form the anti-straw coalition and as “the trigger” for later actions. Thus, this research offers a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics shaping public policy, highlighting the need to consider emotions alongside traditional rational models. The insights have important implications for policymakers, advocacy groups, and researchers.

Keywords: Emotions, Policy, Coalitions, Decision-making, Discourse.

Scientists as Producers of Emotions in Policy Agendas

Eric Montpetit (Université de Montréal)
Erick Lachapelle (Université de Montréal)

The work of Baumgartner and Jones teaches us that emotions play a crucial role in defining public policy agendas. Since policymakers can only focus on a limited range of issues in a world where the number of problems is infinite, the mechanisms that govern attention are inevitably key to understanding public policies. Baumgartner and Jones have argued that these mechanisms are driven by emotions, which direct policymakers' attention to certain problems, encouraging overreactions, often at the expense of issues that remain ignored.

Despite their importance, the role of emotions in the mechanisms that govern attention remains underexplored, with the few existing studies focusing on the emotions experienced by policymakers. In this presentation, however, we will focus on the emotions produced by scientists, as the problems requiring public action are often documented by them. A significant body of literature even advocates for the subordination of public policy decisions to scientific evidence. While scientific evidence can indeed justify public action on a particular issue, it often proves insufficient in attracting policymakers' attention to one subject over another. Incommensurable across domains, evidence does not allow for a reasoned conclusion that the problems in one field deserve more attention than those in another. For instance, while the evidence showing the importance of acting to counter climate change is abundant, it cannot be directly compared to evidence documenting the harmful consequences of population aging to prove that the former deserves more attention than the latter. If policymakers were to focus more on the first issue than the second, it is likely that emotions, rather than evidence, would be the driving force.

Where do these emotions come from? This presentation will address this question by examining the role of scientists. Contrary to conventional views, we will explore how scientists intentionally or unintentionally participate in the production and diffusion of emotions. The presentation aims primarily to clarify the theoretical reasoning behind the mechanisms that govern attention, drawing on illustrations from the management of the COVID-19 crisis and the fight against climate change.

Extending the 'We': Shared Emotional Codes in the Politics of Climate Change.

Anna Durnová (University of Vienna)

The paper has a fifth co-author Susanna Soosaar

This paper examines the role of emotions in shaping collective identities ("we") and how the structural dimension of emotions influences political discourse, particularly in the context of climate change. We argue that the current crisis of climate change is also a crisis of collective emotional identity, where neoliberal individualization and imperial logic of competition fracture the potential for a shared response. Drawing from affect theory, political psychology, and social theory, we explore how emotions mediate between individuals and the collective, shaping perceptions of democracy, responsibility, and action. We introduce the concept of emotional codes to analyze how emotions structure discourse, political behavior, and social belonging. Through an interdisciplinary lens, we map out the cognitive processes underlying climate emotions, the political mechanisms that polarize them, and the affective barriers that prevent the expansion of the "we." Finally, we explore possibilities for re-politicizing climate emotions in ways that rebuild trust, hope, and democratic cohesion, offering a framework for extending the "we" necessary to meet global challenges.

We begin by framing the "we" as a necessary but contested concept, emphasizing the need for an interdisciplinary approach that integrates affect theory, political psychology, and social theory. We then theorize the "we" through the lens of social identity theory, political boundaries, and affective structures, illustrating how emotions construct and maintain collective identities. Next, we analyze climate change as a site of emotional polarization, showing how cognitive and emotional processes shape individual responses to environmental crises and how these emotions are politicized. We extend this argument by discussing the erosion of democratic emotions like trust and hope, emphasizing how a fractured emotional code undermines collective action. Finally, we outline future directions for reimagining the "we,"proposing ways to repoliticize climate emotions productively and develop methodologies for studying shared emotional codes. By highlighting the structural dimension of emotions, our work aims to contribute to democratic renewal and collective engagement in the face of global challenges.

From Individual Support to Systemic Change: Emotions and Vulnerability in Building Multi-stakeholder Networks for At-risk Children

Karel Cada (University of Economics Prague)

This paper examines how emotions and vulnerability shape collaborative networks supporting at-risk children across six Czech municipalities. Based on 76 in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, we analyze how emotional dimensions influence the implementation of a support system for vulnerable children.

The study reveals how emotional responses of practitioners transform into collective action through multi-stakeholder platforms. Our findings demonstrate that emotional aspects played a crucial role in three key areas: (1) building trust between stakeholders, (2) recognizing expertise across professional boundaries, and (3) developing empathetic approaches to vulnerable families.

The study also reveals how emotional vulnerability of practitioners themselves - their uncertainties, fears, and sense of inadequacy - influenced their ability to engage in collaborative networks.

The research contributes to understanding emotions as both barriers and enablers in policy implementation, showing how recognition of emotional dimensions can lead to more empathetic governance structures.