P08 / Defining Digital Public Policy and Its Role in Shaping Governance and Society

Topic : SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Chair : Grace Piddington (University of Bristol)

Second Chair : Susan Oman (University of Sheffield)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Digital Public Policy (DPP) is an evolving field, encompassing wide ranging issues, e.g., digital infrastructure and inclusion, data governance, and AI-enabled systems and decision-making. It intersects numerous disciplines with limited consensus on its scope and definition (Servon, 2002, Bernholtz et al., 2020, Califano and Becerra, 2024, Milutinovic, 2022), and is notably missed from areas of policy studies (Henman 2022).

Concurrently, the proliferation of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) creates increasingly interdependent and interconnected systems for public management (Fenger and Bekkers, 2012), making policy-making itself increasingly fragmented, yet interconnected. Improved coordination and collaboration between levels of governance are essential to address DPP's complexity (Servon, 2002 Oman , 2022, 2024) and the social justice issues of the digital divide (Schwab and Davis, 2018) and asymmetries in data power.

Increasing reliance on digital technologies and infrastructures makes the closing of the digital divide within and across countries an urgent as power may flow to those who already hold geographical, educational, and economic advantages while billions of others could be further excluded on the basis of income, infrastructure, language or content relevance (Schwab and Davis, 2018, p. 53). Through addressing these challenges, preferred digital futures which are equitable, inclusive and sustainable may be envisioned, invented, implemented, continuously evaluated, revised and re-envisioned (Dator, 2019). By addressing the social justice dimensions of DPP, particularly regarding the digital divide, the panel will contribute to ongoing efforts to ensure that digital technologies serve the public good, promoting equity and inclusivity in the digital transformation.

This panel has three objectives:

1. critically examine DPP: its definitions, applications, and role in shaping governance frameworks for digital societies;

2. understand context-specific uses across regions and domain applications;

3. reflect on how public policy can foster inclusive, ethical, and sustainable digital futures, whilst acknowledging negative impacts on vulnerable populations and the planet.

Research Questions

What constitutes Digital Public Policy? This question aims to clarify the key components of DPP, exploring national and regional differences.

What is DPP's role in shaping digital futures? With increasing digital dependence, we would imagine responses to this question focus on DPP's role in equitable and sustainable digital futures, addressing critical issues such as digital literacy, data privacy, and internet governance.

How do nations and stakeholders approach DPP? This question explores the varying approaches to DPP across regions and governance structures, examining how governments, private actors, and civil society collaborate to develop effective DPP frameworks.

What are the key challenges and opportunities in DPP? This question identifies the main barriers to implementing DPP, such as regulatory fragmentation and the global nature of digital platforms, while also highlighting opportunities for innovation and the protection of digital rights.

Understanding DPP is critical to designing governance frameworks for the complexities of the digital age

(Bloom, 2024), but is under-researched in policy contexts (Oman 2024) and policy studies (Henman 2022), and this has social justice implications (Schwab and Davis, 2018). This panel will address the theoretical and empirical gaps through exploration of theoretical frameworks and case studies that clarify DPP's role in shaping digital governance. It welcomes insights into best practices and challenges in DPP implementation and global perspectives, aiming to highlight DPP as a dynamic concern that is globally differentiated, but with a need for international cooperation on issues such as AI regulation, disinformation, cybersecurity, data sovereignty, and digital inclusion.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to submit papers that explore various

aspects of Digital Public Policy (DPP) outlined below. DPP touches on key issues such as digital infrastructure, data governance, algorithmic accountability, and digital inclusion, but the term remains under-defined across different contexts and sectors. We encourage submissions that offer theoretical insights, empirical analyses, critical approaches, or case studies focused on Digital Public Policy's potential to shape equitable, ethical, and inclusive digital futures.

We particularly welcome papers that address one or more of the following themes:

Defining Digital Public Policy: How is DPP conceptualized in different academic or policy settings?

Comparative Perspectives on DPP: How do countries with different levels of digital infrastructure and governance structures approach DPP?

Digital Inclusion and Equity: How can DPP address the digital divide and promote digital inclusion for marginalized communities?

Data Governance and Privacy: What role does DPP play in regulating data privacy, data security, and algorithmic accountability?

Regulation of Emerging Technologies: How do public policies govern emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT)?

Global Digital Governance: How does DPP intersect with global governance challenges, such as cybersecurity, net neutrality, and cross-border data flows?

This panel invites contributions from a variety of methodological backgrounds, including qualitative research, quantitative analysis, and policy case studies. Papers should aim to advance our understanding of how DPP can be a driving force for inclusive, ethical, and sustainable digital governance frameworks.

We look forward to submissions that engage deeply with these critical issues, offering new insights and actionable solutions for shaping the digital futures we collectively envision.

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Session 1

Thursday, July 3rd 16:00 to 18:00 (C4)

Digital Public Policy: undefined mechanisms, drivers and boundaries across social, cultural, media and economic policy

Susan Oman (University of Sheffield)

From Rule-Taker to Rule-Maker: The European Union's Evolving Role in the Governance of Digital Technologies

Nora von Ingersleben-Seip (University of Amsterdam)

(Virtual) Translating Policy to Code and Code to Public Policies: AI-Driven Policy Implementation Systems Shaping Digital Governance

Christiana Freitas (University of Brasilia)

(Virtual) The role of policy actors in achieving Digitally Inclusive Futures

Grace Piddington (University of Bristol)

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Session 2

Friday, July 4th 08:00 to 10:00 (C4)

Digital Inclusion and Equity in Kenya: Evaluating the Impact of Digital Public Policy on Marginalized Communitie

Caroline Ikiriinya (University of Nairobi)

Enabling Digital Governance through Public Policy: An Analysis of Digital Nation Pakistan Act 2025

Mahnoor Farooq (Quaid-i-Azam University)

Digital Policy Decoupling in Practice: Understanding Implementation Gaps in China's Open Government Data Initiatives

Mingxi Zhang (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology(Guangzhou), China)

Hanzhi REN (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

Polycentric Governance for Cybersecurity Resilience: Public-Private Partnerships in Australia, Singapore, and Japan (2014–2024)

Isti Marta Sukma (University of Warsaw)