P03 / (In)action in Public Policy

Topic : INEQUALITIES AND PUBLIC POLICY

Chair : Advaita Rajendra (Indian Institute of Management, Sirmaur)

Second Chair : Ankur Sarin (Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Despite its limitations, “what governments do” has served to be an enduring definition for public policy. Among the many things that governments do as they try to “tame wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber 1973; Crowley and Head 2017), they also look away (Mander 2015), exclude and reinforce inequalities (Schneider and Ingram 2005). Although not limited to them, feminist, dalit, black and other voices have drawn attention to experiences of being invisibilized (Star & Straus, 1999; Hatton, 2017; Daniels, 1987; Singh, 2014). Accounts of being devalued and dehumanised via (in)action (McConnell and ’t Hart 2019) are often central to these accounts; accounts that have also come to the forefront from an anthropological turn in public policy (Wedel et al. 2005) that have pointed to the deliberateness of policy (in)action and not just spaces of oversight or ignorance.

Talking (to and about) policy is important to jolting policy decisions out of (in)action. Contemporary policy landscape of (in)action is rife with dilemmas of (in)action (Howlett, 2009). For example, several discussions on worker safety, substance abuse, sex-selective abortions, dowry, pollution, climate change, have been wicked and often fall into easy framings of deviant, normalise, disillusionment. Unlike the global north, where formal governmental committees, formal hearings and appeals may be invited even from dissenting voices, several regions across the world dissenting voices are actively punished.

In some contexts, it might be particularly important yet difficult to bring on board those who are being invisibilized through (in)action. For example, in problems like Climate Change, conversations with the most important stakeholders, future entities, like the future biodiversity (including animals, plants and humans) does not seem possible. How does one challenge inaction, with the current stakeholders without encouraging dystopian disillusionment. As boundaries between truth and falsehood are blurred, in times defined by a ceaseless access to information, poses further challenges to policy inaction (Fisher, 2020, 2021; Boullosa, 2022).

CALL FOR PAPERS

Entering and challenging spaces of policy (in)action poses unique theoretical, epistemic, methodical and empirical challenges and we invite work that several questions around (in)action in policy:

1. What are the origins of (in)action? In what forums and how can accountability be ascribed for the absence of action that lacked articulated responsibility in the first place?
2. How and where do voices speak when they are not recognized? How can issues come to matter when they are assumed to not exist?
3. What strategic communication choices do those working towards challenging inaction?

We invite academic as well as practical accounts grounded in the pursuit of promoting ideas of justice, fairness and equity in public policy. Recognizing the sustenance of (in)action to be situated in existing ways of knowing and colonised forms of understanding, we are particularly keen to bring together work that attempts to critically challenge dominant reference frames. While we would like to emphasise rigour, we advocate for benchmarks that are defined by the resistance – epistemic and practical – the work poses to exclusions rather than conformity to privileged forms of inquiry. We specifically encourage conversations with a diverse and creative use of methodology. For example, action research projects may help us understand the horizon of possibilities. While questioning norms around what constitutes good evidence, the panel encourages reflective papers on what good bars might be when discussing methodological questions, like causality in complex systems.

The panel invites conversations on methods not only in policy spaces, but also in social purpose organisations where funders may demand capturing different kinds of data, raising important questions of

what should count as data.

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Singh, B. (2014). Unseen: The Truth about India’s Manual Scavengers (R. Talwar, Trans.). Penguin Books.

Star, S. L., & Strauss, A. (1999). Layers of silence, arenas of voice: The ecology of visible and invisible work. Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW), 8(1–2), 9–30.

Wedel, Janine R., Cris Shore, Gregory Feldman, and Stacy Lathrop. 2005. “Toward an Anthropology of Public Policy.” The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 600 (1): 30–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716205276734.

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Session 1

Wednesday, July 2nd 13:45 to 15:45 (D4)

Navigating Education Reform: Transforming Mindsets for Systemic Change

Apoorva Bhatnagar (Dream a Dream)

Sreehari Ravindranath (Dream a Dream)

Joseph Thomas Rijo (DREAM A DREAM)

Amit V Kumar (Dream a Dream)

Addressing Educational Inequities in Early Childhood Care: The Role of Public Policy Inaction and Digital Transformation in Anganwadi Centers

Shalini Kumari (Magadh University)

The relationship between perceptions of social service quality and subjective well-being (or vice-versa?)

Chen Sharony (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)

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

Nir Sharon (Tel Aviv University)

Guy Van-Dam (Tel Aviv University)

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Session 2

Wednesday, July 2nd 16:00 to 18:00 (D4)

Single-mother families: the role of policy in exclusion and inclusion

Greta Skubiejute (Mykolo Romerio university)

(In)action in Public Policy – Liquor Prohibition in Bihar vs Gujarat: Ineffective Policy Formulation in Bihar, India

Pankaj Kumar Mishra (Magadh University)

Urgency yet Deferral: Tracing Policy (In)Action on Manual Scavenging in India

Advaita Rajendra (Indian Institute of Management, Sirmaur)

Ankur Sarin (Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad)