

T01P15 / Multiple Streams Framework: The View from 40

Topic : T01 / POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

Chair : Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Second Chair : Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

Third Chair : Rob DeLeo (Bentley University)

Fourth Chair : Dana Dolan (George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government)

5th Chair : Annemieke van den Dool (Duke Kunshan University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The year 2024 marked the 40th anniversary of the publication of *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, John Kingdon's landmark study that heralded the era of the Multiple Streams Framework as one of the most accessible and widely applied theories of the policy process. Indicatively, in a recent study, Rob DeLeo and colleagues (2024) found that a simple Google Scholar search yielded over 30,000 citations of Kingdon's 1984 (2003) volume and its subsequent editions. These include a wide array of applications at all levels of governance and stages of the policy process (except for evaluation), and a variety of political and country contexts and policy sectors. Further, another recent review (Petridou et al., forthcoming) revealed that a significant number of MSF applications have theoretical ambitions beyond the mere explanation of an empirical policy phenomenon. Part of what has contributed to MSF's broad appeal has also constituted criticism leveled against it: that MSF's language is metaphorical and that concepts often function as heuristics, two conditions that lower the entry barrier for using MSF and therefore have resulted in imprecise research. Having said this, the theoretical robustness of the framework is indisputable (Dolan, 2021; van den Dool, 2023) and a changing world has placed a premium on the concept of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2007; 2014; Zahariadis et al., 2023; Rob DeLeo et al., 2024).

So, where do we go from here? During an MSF roundtable at the ECPR general conference in Dublin in 2024, we identified fruitful trajectories for the future. In terms of method, MSF research must remain pluralistic in its methodological preferences, test existing hypotheses, and use quantitative approaches to complement small-N studies, where justification of research design and methodology are transparent and rigorous. Additionally, MSF research must move towards a more standardized definition and measurement of common terms. Theoretically, it would be beneficial for future research to synthesize lessons learnt and in turn make these lessons more relevant to practitioners.

References

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The year 2024 marked the 40th anniversary of the publication of *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, John Kingdon's landmark study that heralded the era of the Multiple Streams Framework as one of the most accessible and widely applied theories of the policy process. Indicatively, in a recent study, Rob DeLeo and colleagues (2024) found that a simple Google Scholar search yielded over 30,000 citations of Kingdon's 1984 (2003) volume and its subsequent editions. These include a wide array of applications at all levels of governance and stages of the policy process (except for evaluation), and a variety of political and country contexts and policy sectors. Further, another recent review (Petridou et al., forthcoming) revealed that a significant number of MSF applications have theoretical ambitions beyond the mere explanation of an empirical policy phenomenon. Part of what has contributed to MSF's broad appeal has also constituted criticism leveled against it: that MSF's language is metaphorical and that concepts often function as heuristics, two conditions that lower the entry barrier for using MSF and therefore have resulted in imprecise research. Having said this, the theoretical robustness of the framework is indisputable (Dolan, 2021; van den Dool, 2023) and a changing world has placed a premium on the concept of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2007; 2014; Zahariadis et al., 2023; Rob DeLeo et al., 2024).

So, where do we go from here? We argue that fruitful trajectories include a methodologically pluralistic approach, including testing existing hypotheses and use quantitative approaches to complement small-N studies, which would greatly benefit from justification of research design and transparency and rigor in their methodological approach. What is more, given the maturity and versatility of MSF, a fruitful focus for future MSF studies would be syntheses of lessons learnt and in turn making these lessons more relevant to practitioners. In this panel, we welcome papers focusing on the entire framework or on one or more of its components. We especially seek papers making explicit theoretical and/or methodological contributions to the framework in novel settings including those applicable not only to Western democracies, but also the Global South and autocracies.

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