P232 / Beyond the Paperless Myth: Interoperability, Administrative Capacity, and Public Value in Digital Governance

Topic : Bureaucracy, Administration and Policy Process

Chair : Michele Gonzalez Galindo (Secretary of Science, Humanities, Technology and Innovation (SECIHTI))

Second Chair : Elizabeth Ortiz Gutierrez (Secretaría de Ciencia, Humanidades, Tecnología e Innovación (Secihti), Mexico)

Third Chair : Feliu Sagols (Secretary of Science, Humanities, Technology and Innovation (SECIHTI))

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The drive toward "paperless governance" is often presented as a straightforward administrative upgrade aimed at eco-efficiency, speed, and cost reduction. However, public administration scholarship demonstrates that digital transformation is deeply institutional and political, reshaping state capacity, inter-organizational dynamics, civil service routines, and public accountability (Dunleavy et al., 2006; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). When public agencies digitize procedures in isolation, paperless mandates frequently reproduce bureaucratic fragmentation electronically, creating siloed platforms, redundant data requests, and informal manual workarounds.

This panel places interoperability frameworks at the core of contemporary digital governance, policy implementation, and administrative reform. Defined as the legal, organizational, semantic, and technical capacity of public organizations to exchange information across institutional boundaries (European Commission, 2017), interoperability represents the critical bridge between isolated e-government tools and integrated public service delivery. Grounded in policy instrument and state capacity literature (Hood, 1986; Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007; Peters, 2015), the panel interrogates whether interoperable paperless transitions genuinely generate public value (Moore, 1995) or simply displace bureaucratic friction into new forms of "digital red tape" and compliance burdens (Bozeman, 2000; Herd & Moynihan, 2018).

To guide scholars and practitioners across diverse governance settings, the panel addresses four core research questions:

1. How are paperless directives and interoperability frameworks operationalized across distinct institutional and multi-level governance settings, and which governance mechanisms explain variations in implementation outcomes?

2. How do the legal, organizational, semantic, and technical layers of interoperability interact in practice, and which layer presents the primary bottleneck during administrative transitions?

3. To what extent do paperless transitions built on interoperable architectures and the once-only principle reduce administrative burden, as opposed to generating new compliance costs and digital friction?

4. What specific organizational capacities, civil service skills, green governance strategies, and legal safeguards are required to sustain digital reforms without compromising data preservation, democratic accountability, or equity?

The scientific relevance of this panel lies in bridging public policy implementation theory with digital public administration. Rather than treating paperless government as a technical exercise, this panel frames interoperability as a fundamental reform of the administrative state that determines how public policies are designed, executed, and evaluated in the digital era. We welcome theoretical, empirical, and comparative contributions from local, national, and international contexts.

References

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Hood, C. (1986). The Tools of Government. Chatham House Publishers.

Lascoumes, P., & Le Galès, P. (2007). Understanding public policy through its instruments. Governance, 20(1), 1–21.

Moore, M. H. (1995). Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government. Harvard University Press.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The transition toward paperless governance is widely framed as a cornerstone of administrative modernization, green transition agendas, process optimization, and reduced administrative burden. However, eliminating paper workflows without robust interoperability—the institutional, legal, and technical capacity of public organizations to exchange data securely and meaningfully—often reproduces paper-era silos in electronic form. Translating high-level digital mandates into daily bureaucratic practice poses fundamental challenges for public policy design, administrative capacity, civil service adaptation, and state-citizen relations.

Target Audience:

This panel explicitly invites contributions from scholars and practitioners working in Public Policy Implementation, Digital Public Administration, Public Management Reform, Comparative Bureaucracy, Science and Technology Studies (STS), Law and Technology, and Environmental Governance. We welcome researchers using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches, as well as single-case studies, comparative analyses, and theoretical frameworks. We strongly encourage submissions from established scholars, early-career researchers, and practitioners examining both Global North settings and developing/emerging administrative contexts.

We seek paper proposals addressing one or more of the following core thematic streams:

· **Policy Design and Implementation Dynamics** . Research analyzing how paperless policies, electronic document standards, and multi-level interoperability directives (e.g., the EU Interoperable Europe Act or national digital agendas) are institutionalized, adapted, or resisted across administrative levels.

· **Administrative Capacity and Civil Service Adaptation.** Studies evaluating the organizational, technical, and legal skills civil servants require to manage paperless and interoperable environments, including digital literacy, administrative discretion, organizational culture, and workforce retraining.

· **Administrative Burden and Digital Red Tape.** Empirical assessments examining whether interoperable architectures and the "once-only principle" genuinely reduce compliance costs and psychological friction for citizens and businesses, or conversely create new digital burdens.

· **Automated Decision-Making and AI Integration.** Explorations of how AI agents, automated workflows, and algorithmic decision-making build upon interoperable data architectures, and their consequences for accountability, legal validity, and human oversight.

· **Public Value and Green Governance.** Papers evaluating the broader institutional outcomes of paperless reforms, including eco-efficiency, carbon footprint reduction in public management, public trust, and democratic equity.

· **Comparative and Multi-Level Perspectives.** Cross-country, subnational, or cross-sectoral comparisons evaluating paperless transitions across different administrative traditions (e.g., Napoleonic, Anglo-Saxon, or emerging governance contexts).

Abstract proposals should clearly articulate the research question, theoretical framework, methodology, data sources, and expected empirical or theoretical contribution to public policy and administrative scholarship.