P221 / Bridging Policy Process and Project Management Research: The Strategic Organization of Major Public Projects

Topic : Policy Process Theories

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Major public projects—including high-speed rail networks, cross-border transport corridors, renewable energy infrastructure, large-scale digital transformation programmes, and urban regeneration projects—are central to governments' responses to contemporary grand challenges. Through investments in physical infrastructure and technological systems, they translate policy objectives into concrete interventions addressing public needs and priorities. Yet their development entails more than technical planning and managerial execution. Major public projects are embedded in policy processes shaped by political conflict, institutions, competing interests, and uncertainty.

Research on policy processes and project management has developed along distinct trajectories. Project management scholarship has traditionally emphasized project design, planning, delivery, and performance, while public policy research has examined how ideas, interests, institutions, and power relations shape collective decisions. Recent studies demonstrate the potential of integrating policy and project perspectives to explain project development and governance (Hudon & Floricel, 2023; Brunet & Choinière, 2025; Esposito, Hudon, & Terlizzi, 2026). This integration can advance public policy research by providing insights into how political, institutional, and organizational dynamics shape agenda-setting, policy design, implementation, and policy change over time.

Building on these developments, this panel seeks to bridge policy process and project management research by focusing on the strategic organization of major public projects. Strategic organization is understood as a politically embedded process through which actors define policy objectives and instruments, mobilize resources, build policy capacities, coordinate collective action, and navigate competing objectives over time. This perspective moves beyond conventional strategic planning by integrating anticipatory governance, context-sensitive policy design, and stakeholder coordination (Esposito & Terlizzi, 2026).

The overarching research question is: How do policy processes and project-level governance interact in shaping the strategic organization of major public projects?

The panel invites contributions exploring interconnected questions. How do political and institutional dynamics influence policy design, project shaping, and governance? Under what conditions do policy capacities facilitate collective action? How do institutions and narratives contribute to strategic alignment or conflict? How do policy instruments and governance arrangements adapt to changing political priorities and unexpected events? Can anticipatory and participatory approaches reconcile long-term strategic objectives with democratic accountability and competing societal interests?

The panel aims to identify complementary explanatory mechanisms and advance public policy research on the strategic organization of complex, long-term interventions.

References

Brunet, M., & Choinière, O. (2025). Governance framework trajectory for major public projects: The case of Canada. Project Management Journal, 56(1), 74–89.

Esposito, G., & Terlizzi, A. (2026). Introduction to the special issue: Megatrends and grand challenges: The strategic organization of long-term and large-scale policy interventions. International Review of Administrative Sciences, 92(2), 196–212.

Esposito, G., Hudon, P.-A., & Terlizzi, A. (2026). Theories of the policy process meet project management: Insights for megaproject shaping. International Journal of Project Management, 44, 102906.

Hudon, P. A., & Floricel, S. (2023). The development of large public infrastructure projects: Integrating policy and project studies models. Policy and Society, 42(2), 148–163.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions examining how policy processes and project-level governance interact in the strategic organization of major public projects. Particular attention is given to how political, institutional, and organizational dynamics shape project design, collective action, and adaptation over time. Contributions are expected to explore these dynamics through insights from policy process and project management research.

Contributions may address three interconnected dimensions of the strategic organization of major public projects:

- Policy processes, policy design, and project shaping: How do agenda-setting, policy formulation, political attention, and policy instrument choices influence the emergence and design of major public projects? How do political and institutional dynamics shape project objectives and configurations? -
- Policy capacities and collective action: How do governments and project organizations mobilize resources, develop policy and administrative capacities, and coordinate heterogeneous actors? How do institutional arrangements, stakeholder coalitions, and competing narratives facilitate or constrain strategic alignment and collective action? -
- Strategic adaptation and institutional change: How do major public projects and their governance arrangements evolve in response to changing political priorities, institutional constraints, and unexpected events? How do actors adapt project strategies while pursuing long-term policy objectives?

The panel particularly welcomes contributions drawing on policy process theories (e.g., Multiple Streams Framework, Advocacy Coalition Framework, Narrative Policy Framework, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, and Institutional Analysis and Development Framework), policy design, and project management research to explain the political, institutional, and organizational mechanisms shaping major public projects.

We welcome qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research, including longitudinal and comparative analyses, as well as innovative conceptual and methodological approaches. Empirical studies may examine major public projects across different sectors, geographical contexts, and governance levels.

The panel particularly encourages papers that move beyond treating major public projects as technical delivery systems and instead examine them as politically embedded, strategically designed and organized policy interventions. Its ambition is to foster interdisciplinary exchange and develop new theoretical and empirical insights into the governance of complex public projects. K

Keywords Major public projects; Policy process; Strategic organization