P264 / Conceptual and methodological challenges in Policy Analysis

Topic : Knowledge, Science and Expertise in Policy Process

Chair : Tamara Metze (Delft University of Technology)

Second Chair : Saba Hinrichs-Krapels (Delft University of Technology)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

In 1951 Laswells (1951) famously called for a problem-oriented policy sciences. After introducing systems' analysis in the USA defense department in 1966; its application spread out to other USA departments (Fischer et al Handbook (2019). This analytical orientation was adapted by several consultancy groups. A-political or technocratic policy research over the years found a home in bureaucratic government organizations (see for example, Radin 2000 and Fischer et al 2007).

From the 1980s onward, scholars began to question the assumption that policy decisions could be optimized solely through rational analysis. Wildawsky in Speaking Truth to Powers (1979) argues that policy analysis cannot be reduced to technical problem solving but must engage with political choices, competing values and social interactions. Alternative perspectives, also developed in systems thinking, emphasize the roles of political institutions, stakeholder interests, ideas, discourse, and bounded rationality in shaping policy outcomes. As a result, contemporary policy analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods and recognizes that policymaking is both an analytical and a political process.

Contemporary policy analysis can have at least three faces, as distinguished by Douglas Torgerson (1986): (1) Technical-Rational Face in which policy analysis is seen as a scientific, objective activity and experts use data, models, and evidence to identify the "best" solutions. Politics is treated as a problem that can be overcome through rational analysis. The key idea: Better knowledge leads to better decisions.

(2) The Critical Face considers politics masquerades as knowledge and for that reasons, policy analysis is never neutral. Expert advice often reflects underlying political values, interests, and power relations. Claims of objectivity can hide ideological assumptions.

(3) Post-Positivist (Interpretive) Face in which knowledge and politics are reconciled. Policy analysis should acknowledge both evidence and values. Analysts can be facilitators of dialogue rather than detached experts. Public deliberation, participation, and interpretation are central and different forms of knowledge are relevant. In this face, good policy emerges through informed democratic deliberation, not purely technical expertise.

In this panel we set out to advance the field and explore if there is a fourth face of policy analysis taking shape. In current geopolitical times, the questions of dual use and politics of policy analysis (Cairney 2021) is ever more urgent. How can different strands in policy analysis combine efforts in contributing to positive (democratic and sustainable) societal transformations?

Cairney, P. (2021). The politics of policy analysis. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66122-9

Fischer, F., Miller, G. J., & Sidney, M. S. (Eds.). (2007). Handbook of public policy analysis: Theory, politics, and methods. CRC/Taylor & Francis

Lasswell, H. D. (1951). The policy orientation. In D. Lerner & H. D. Lasswell (Eds.), The policy sciences: Recent developments in scope and method (pp. 3–15). Stanford University Press.

Mayer, I. S., van Daalen, C. E., & Bots, P. W. G. (2004). Perspectives on policy analyses: A framework for understanding and design. International Journal of Technology, Policy and Management, 4(2), 169–191. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTPM.2004.004819

Radin, B. A. (2000). Beyond Machiavelli: Policy analysis comes of age. Georgetown University Press.

Torgerson, D. (1986). Between knowledge and politics: Three faces of policy analysis. Policy Sciences, 19(1), 33–59. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02124483

Wildavsky, A. B. (1979). Speaking truth to power: The art and craft of policy analysis. Little, Brown

CALL FOR PAPERS

For this panel, we invite conceptual, methodological and empirical papers that explicitly start from one or more different strands in policy analysis and aim to engage in fruitful exchange with other strands about empirical puzzles, ontological, epistemological assumptions, and related methodological choices.

We seek to address questions about policy analysis as a powerful discipline and what normative concerns this raises about for example dual use, biases in our assumptions, and how to cope with those. We seek papers that reflect on internal struggles within the field between different ontological and epistemological traditions, and that contribute to constructively advancing these debates. The panels also seeks papers that innovatively develop new problem definitions for the analysis. We encourage the inclusion of art-based methods, social design methods and so - and how these can also contribute to the advancement of our field: the frameworks, methodological approaches. We encourage empirical papers that combine and reflect on contradictions and compatibility of different aims of policy analysis, such as (based on Mayer et al 2004) (1) researching and analyzing for better insights and understanding of policy problems, policy options (2) designing and advising for decision makers; (3) mediating and democratizing our knowledge production and decision making; and (4) clarifying the values and arguments of all sorts of actors, stakeholders including the non-human or more than human.

We encourage papers to address the question such as: who should we provide insights to: current decision makers, future generations, or others. Whose insights matter in our analyses? What counts as relevant and rigorous knowledge and why? In what ways is policy analysis contributing to the problems we also aim to solve or aim to contribute to the path finding? Can there be a fourth face of policy analysis, and what would that look like? How can we develop new frameworks for thinking about the problem oriented-ness, or other relevant conceptual, methodological and empirical questions in various strands of policy analysis?