P108 / Configurational and Mechanistic Public Policy Analysis

Topic : Methods & Research Design

Chair : Eva Thomann (Universität Konstanz)

Second Chair : Giulia Bazzan (Tilburg University)

Third Chair : Guillaume Fontaine (FLACSO Ecuador)

Fourth Chair : Johanna Hornung (University of Lausanne)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Public policy problems are complex, involving multiple interacting conditions, context-dependent causal relationships, and processes that unfold through different pathways. Theories of the policy process mirror this complexity, modelling both the causal processes and the complex, context-dependent combinations of factor that bring about policy outcomes. Understanding how policies emerge, are implemented, and produce their effects therefore requires analytical approaches that move beyond assumptions of simple, uniform causal relationships.

Set-theoretic approaches offer one way of doing so. They conceive of causal relationships in terms of necessity and sufficiency and are designed to capture causal complexity in its main forms: conjunctural causation, where conditions produce an outcome only in combination; equifinality, where different combinations lead to the same outcome; and causal asymmetry, where the explanation of an outcome does not simply mirror the explanation of its absence. Set relations, however, tell us which conditions and combinations are linked to an outcome, not how they bring it about. Connecting cross-case configurational findings with within-case analysis of causal mechanisms, for instance through process tracing in cases selected on the basis of set-theoretic results, is one way to address this gap.

This panel invites contributions that apply, advance, or consolidate configurational and mechanistic approaches to public policy analysis. We welcome papers theorizing complex and mechanistic causation in public policy, papers applying or innovating methods such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and related configurational approaches, contributions that develop or refine methods for investigating causal mechanisms and the processes through which policy outcomes come about, as well as work that combines the two.

The panel aims to bring together scholars working on methodological innovation, consolidation, and empirical application. We are particularly interested in contributions that explore how configurational and mechanistic perspectives can capture causal complexity, account for contextual variation, and advance our understanding of public policy processes and outcomes. By putting these perspectives into dialogue, the panel seeks to strengthen methodological approaches to studying causal complexity in public policy research.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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Abstracts of no more than 400 words should include:
- Paper title and all contributing authors with email addresses
- Puzzle addressed and relevance of the paper
- Main theoretical or methodological arguments and core contribution(s)
- Where applicable, data and methods
- How it moves configurational or mechanistic public policy analysis forward