P123 / Democracy, Governance, and Commons-based Approaches

Topic : Citizens, Participation and Social Movements

Chair : URI KANDEL (Beit HaYaar)

Second Chair : Neta Sher-Hadar (Sapir Academic College and Mandel School for Educational Leadership)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Over the past decades, successive government reforms seeking to improve administrative processes and policy outcomes have emphasized the need to democratize both administrative practices and policymaking procedures (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Ansell & Torfing, 2021; Bryson et al., 2016). At the same time, however, democracies worldwide are struggling more than ever to sustain themselves, with governance crises becoming a routine feature of political life (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2022; Stoker, 2006). This points to a central tension in contemporary democratic governance: democratic vocabularies of participation, inclusion, responsiveness, and collaboration have become increasingly prominent in administrative reform and policy practice just as the institutional systems through which democracies deliberate, decide, and act appear increasingly strained.

This tension is especially visible in interconnected, fast-moving, mutually reinforcing wicked problems. Ecological degradation, public health emergencies, forced displacement, technological disruption, persistent inflation, and violent conflict increasingly exceed the boundaries of distinct policy domains. Democratic governments seemingly lost sovereignty over policy delivery to powerful actors and forces beyond their control: foreign countries, private equity funds and other large financial actors, transnational tech companies, well-organized right-wing movements, and social media. These interact within a polycrisis: not simply the simultaneous occurrence of multiple crises, but a condition in which crises become causally entangled and mutually reinforcing, with pressures in one domain intensifying vulnerabilities and disruptions in others (Rakowski et al., 2025).

Against this background, this panel invites contributors to explore whether and how commons-based approaches can offer new ways of thinking about public policy, democracy, and collective action. Commons refer to bottom-up citizen initiatives for managing finite, shared, and/or fragile resources, such as water, fish, energy, housing, or urban space (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019). They might also refer, as recent studies describe, to a political, social, legal, ecological, and knowledge-related category spanning material resources, cultural and knowledge goods, institutional arrangements, ethical commitments, and practices of shared life (Kandel, 2026; Moroni, 2025; Dardot & Laval, 2019; De Angelis, 2017).

This broader understanding shifts attention from the commons to commoning: the ongoing social practice through which commons are created, sustained, and governed. Derived from “commons,” commoning refers to creating peer-governed, context-specific systems for free, fair, and sustainable lives (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019, pp. 97–98). It highlights people’s capacity to self-organize around shared needs and problems, often irreducible to state or market (ibid., 2019, p. 15). The commoning worldview rests on shared responsibility, deep communion with the environment, horizontal governance, mutual care, and reciprocity.

The panel explores commons-based approaches’ ontological and ethical dimensions: how policy tools, institutions, and everyday practices may cultivate deliberation, mutual care, shared responsibility, and collective stewardship. Rather than proposing a single model, the panel seeks to open a conversation about how policy research and analysis might connect systematic inquiry with ethical practice, positive collective action, and deeper democracy. It also asks how these approaches may enrich policy systems’ deliberative and practice capacities, contribute to Deliberative Policy Analysis (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Wagenaar, 2022), and speak to wider debates on democracy, including participatory and associative democracy (Wagenaar, 2026).

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel welcomes theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practice-oriented contributions that

examine how commons-based approaches might transform the way we think about governance, collaboration, democracy, policy tools, and the role of the state. We are particularly interested in papers that bring commons-based approaches into conversation with care ethics, Indigenous thought, deliberative policy analysis, associative democracy, institutional design, public administration, and critical approaches to public policy. Contributions may develop conceptual arguments, analyze concrete cases, policy experiments, or address the methodological challenges involved in studying commons-based approaches.

For public policy, commons-based approaches are especially promising because they challenge political-economic assumptions that are often underrepresented in policy analysis, offer insights across diverse contexts, including the Global South, and raise important questions about the future role of the state and public institutions.

We invite both theoretical and empirical contributions that address six general questions:

1. What might a commons-based approach offer to public policy responses to polycrisis, particularly in relation to democratic governance, collaboration, and collective problem-solving?

2. What questions do commons-based approaches raise about the changing role of the state, public institutions, and public authority?

3. How might commoning make ethical reflection more central to public policy analysis, institutional design, and implementation?

4. How do commons-based approaches and commoning influence market- and state-centered assumptions about resources, ownership, expertise, and public value?

5. What empirical cases, methods, or conceptual frameworks can help us examine commoning as a democratic, ethical, and political practice?

6. What are the critical perspectives on commons-based approaches?

We welcome papers that engage critically, empirically, normatively, or through practice-based reflection with these questions.

The panel aims to encourage dialogue across disciplines, traditions, and contexts, bringing together diverse perspectives to explore the possibilities, limitations, and practical implications of commons-based approaches to contemporary governance and the conditions under which they can inform policy practice.