P292 / Developments in the Science of Policy Success: Dimensions, Dangers and Diversity

Topic : Policy Process Theories

Chair : B. Guy Peters (University of Pittsburgh)

Second Chair : Matthew Flinders (University of Sheffield)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

In recent years a seam of scholarship has emerged with an explicit focus on the identification and investigation of dimensions of policy success. Variously termed either ‘positive public administration’ or ‘positive public policy’ this approach seeks to challenge the dominance of the pathology model within the policy sciences (i.e. an emphasis on the analysis of crises, catastrophes, failures, and fiascos) and seeks to focus attention on ‘the bright side of public governance’ (policy successes, effective leadership, public value, etc.). This approach can be traced to Bovens, Peters and ‘t Hart’s Success and Failure in Public Governance (2001), through McConnell’s Understanding Policy Success (2010) and to ‘t Hart and Compton’s Great Policy Successes (2019). Since then, a series of international volumes have explored policy success in different parts of the world including Australia and New Zealand (Luetjens, et al., 2019), the Nordic Countries (de la Porta et al., 2022), Canada (Lindquist et al., 2022), South America and Africa (Lucas t al., 2024), and Central Asia and the Caucasus (Janenova and Mussagulova, 2027). This panel seeks a stress test of the intellectual and practical value of positive public policy through a focus on dimensions, dangers, and diversity.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Papers are invited that seek to reflect upon, critique, revise, and develop the emergent science of policy success. Intellectual scaffolding is provided through a focus on dimensions, dangers, and diversity. These are loose constructs and the panel will adopt an inclusive and flexible approach particularly in relation to critical perspectives and methodological range.

Dimensions

• Positive public policy has evolved around a four-dimensional model (programmatic, process, political, temporal) but what success dimensions does this overlook?

• Positive public policy has largely been investigated in WEIRD countries (i.e., Western, educated, industrialised, rich, developed) but is it relevant developing countries?

• Among the WEIRD countries there has been a notable lack of investigation in the United States.

Why? What positive examples are there in the US?

• Are there variations across policy areas as well as countries?

• How can positive public policy capture the role of culture's leadership, symbolic value, hope, and emotions and move way beyond the "what works" approach?

Dangers

• Does the study of success risk becoming a form of advocacy rather than scholarship?

• How should positive public policy engage with policies that achieve their stated objectives but are pursued by authoritarian, populist, or illiberal governments?

• Should scholars be concerned that ‘successful’ policies in one context may generate exclusion, inequality, or failure for particular communities or groups?

Diversity

• How does positive public policy build bridges into cognate approaches, theories, and methods?

• Is positive public policy merely correcting a pathology bias, or is it in danger of creating a success bias of its own?

• How does policy success travel across levels of government? Under what conditions can successful

policies developed at local, regional, national, or international levels be transferred, adapted, and sustained elsewhere?