P144 / Education Policy in Action: Actors, Institutions, and Policy Processes

Topic : Bureaucracy, Administration and Policy Process

Chair : Anna Malandrino (Università di Torino)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Education services are the backbone of democratic societies, shaping critical thinking skills and citizens able to make informed decisions. Governing these services, education policy offers a particularly valuable setting for investigating how public policies are formulated, administered, implemented, and transformed. Reforms, in education as well as in other sectors, rarely unfold through a linear process in which political decisions are simply translated into organizational practices. Rather, their content and consequences emerge from interactions among political leaders, administrative institutions, educational organizations, professionals, and other public and private actors. These actors operate under different institutional constraints, mobilize distinct forms of knowledge and authority, and exercise varying degrees of discretion.

Research on education policymaking highlights the influence of political narratives, competing interests, policy instruments, and reform design on policy choices and subsequent implementation (Capano & Lippi, 2018; Durazzi et al., 2023; Malandrino et al., 2025; Malandrino, 2025). Work on educational administration emphasizes how professional discretion, school autonomy, and managerial practices shape the translation of formal mandates into organizational outcomes (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977; Landri, 2009; Malandrino & Sager, 2021; Mergoni et al., 2026). Research on advisory bodies further reveals how epistemic, bureaucratic, and political legitimacy interact in school reforms (Galanti, 2023). Comparative studies of higher education demonstrate the diversity of governance arrangements and policy instrument mixes (Capano & Pritoni, 2020). Policy evaluation provides evidence about the effects of educational interventions and raises questions about how such evidence feeds back into policy design and implementation (Argentin et al., 2014). At the transnational level, international organizations, indicators, and expert networks contribute to the construction of policy agendas and models (Grek, 2022; Fontdevila & Verger, 2025). Digital technologies and growing salience of scientific expertise further challenge established relationships among knowledge, professional autonomy, and administrative authority (Capano et al., 2025; Mattei et al., 2026). Yet these perspectives are often studied separately, making space to explore how their mechanisms interact across stages and levels of the policy process.

Against this background, the panel asks: how do bureaucratic institutions, political and administrative actors, professional discretion, evaluation, and evolving forms of expertise interact to shape education policy design, implementation, and change? It seeks to link macro-level policy paradigms and governance structures, meso-level administrative and organizational arrangements, and micro-level practices, across school and higher education. Particular attention is paid to mechanisms connecting formal policy design, administrative behaviour, and observable policy outcomes.

The panel aims to advance explanations of when educational bureaucracies and professionals sustain, reinterpret, resist, or reshape policy, and with what consequences for effectiveness, equity, and democratic legitimacy.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions examining education policymaking through the lenses of public policy and public administration. Contributions may investigate how political decisions, administrative institutions, professional actors, organizational practices, and different forms of expertise interact across the stages of the policy process, from formulation and design to implementation, evaluation, and change.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Policy formulation and design: political narratives, competing interests, policy instruments, reform design, and the political and institutional conditions shaping education policy choices.
- Bureaucracy, discretion, and implementation: the roles of public officials, teachers, school and university leaders, and other professionals in interpreting, negotiating, adapting, or resisting policy mandates.
- Educational governance and administrative capacity: centralization and decentralization, school and

university autonomy, organizational leadership, managerial practices, multi-level coordination, and administrative capacity.
- Policy evaluation and accountability: evaluation of educational interventions and reforms, performance measurement, accountability arrangements, policy learning, and the use of evidence in policymaking.
- Expertise and transnational governance: policy advisory bodies, scientific expertise, international organizations, policy transfer, benchmarking, and the circulation of educational policy models.
- Technological and institutional transformations: digitalization, artificial intelligence, data-driven governance, emerging scientific paradigms, and their implications for professional autonomy, administrative authority, and equity.
- Crisis governance and policy change: educational responses to crises, rapid reforms, institutional adaptation, and the relationships between political decisions, administrative arrangements, and policy outcomes.

The panel welcomes contributions addressing primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education, including comparative analyses across educational levels, policy sectors, countries, and governance systems.

Interdisciplinary contributions are encouraged, bringing together perspectives from political science, public policy, public administration, education studies, sociology, economics, and organizational studies.

Methodological pluralism is encouraged, as well. Submissions may employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches, including comparative case studies, interviews, surveys, administrative data analysis, experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation, process tracing, and other appropriate research designs. Theoretical and conceptual contributions are equally welcome.

Papers should clearly articulate their research questions and expectations, their relevance to public policy and governance debates, and contribute to a better understanding of how education policies are shaped, implemented, evaluated, and transformed, and with what consequences for effectiveness, equity, and democratic legitimacy.