P231 / Informality and the Analysis of Policy Processes in the Global North: Beyond the formal/informal dichotomy

Topic : Policy Process Theories

Chair : Federica Infantino (IRD, URMIS)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel seeks to investigate the role of informality in public policymaking in the Global North. It concerns all stages of the policy cycle and in different policy domains. Informality has had a prominent role in the study of international governance. Students of policy processes have well documented the long-term existence of informal processes involved in governing (Zittoun, Chailleux, 2021). In particular, this was developed in the study of the European Union decision-making processes, to consider the role of non-state actors and systematize forms of informality (Peters, 2006), to put forward the formalization of informal practices that underline the making of the EU (Farrell & Héritier, 2007), and to reveal the hidden influence of some Member States on supranational actors (Kleine, 2014). Other analyses have shed light on the informal role of private companies in policy-making from below (Infantino, 2023), beyond lobbying at the level of legislative policymaking and for agenda setting, a topic that has deservingly received much analytical attention, also in the context of the European Union (Beyers et al., 2008; Calvo Rufanges, 2016; Coen, 2007). These analyses have shown how informal processes underline organizational change and the decision processes of public organization in the Global North. This panel follows the lines of those scholars that juxtapose informal governance and formal institutions (Dittmer et al., 2000), dismiss the views of informality as pertaining to developing countries or a synonym of un-rule of law (Conrad, 2006) and consider informal governance unavoidable to understand the behavior of organizations in international governance (Stone, 2013). The “informal governance” approach has come to describe public and private actors’ regular though non-codified and not publicly sanctioned exchanges (Christiansen & Neuhold, 2012, p. 7) which lead to public decisions. In effect, informality rests on dynamics that tend to unfold behind the scenes, therefore posing fundamental methodological challenges.

This panel focuses on the role of informality in public policymaking at both the legislative/design and implementation stages by putting forward how non-codifed and not publicly sanctioned exchanges lead to public decisions. In doing so, this panel aims at adressing the continuities between formal and informal processes, an aspect that has been discussed for the works of diplomats performing “international practices” (Adler & Pouliot, 2011).

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites papers from multiple disciplines and research traditions such as political sociology, political anthropology, socio-legal studies, implementation studies, practice theory, international relations, organizational studies. We are interested in analyses that tackle theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects of informality in policymaking processes at national and international arenas. Papers can address multiple questions including:

Who are the actors and the organisations involved in informal processes?
What is the role of nonstate actors in informal processes of public decisionmaking?
To what extent do these processes of informalization (Vouters, 2007) represent a continuation of history or a departure from it?
How is informality defined and understood on the ground?
How do informal processes inform formal processes of public decision-making?
In what contexts can informality prove to be essential?
Who are the intermediaries in informal processes of public action?

This panel aims at putting forward definitions of informality that can also derive from the ways in which informality is understood on the ground and the kind of advantages or objectives that actors involved in policy processes attach to informality. This panel is also focusing on analyses that investigate the gap between the centrality of informality and the tendency at neglecting its role as if it was a tabooed topic. We

are interested in the ways in which informality allows policy actors to engage in processes and to achieve results that could not be possible otherwise. Analyses which focus on the interaction between state and nonstate actors are particularly welcomed just like those focusing on the social worlds of organizations most notably international, supranational organizations. We invite submissions that address informality and policy-making processes in different policy areas. Given the methodological challenges of studying informality, we particularly encourage those using ethnographic, qualitative methodologies that focus on dynamics behind the scenes. Contributions might focus on both the processes and the actors involved and the effects on policy decisions and policy change at both formulation/design and implementation stages.