P46 / Knowledge in (Public) Organizations: Evidence, Expertise, and the Changing Politics of Policy Advice

Topic : Knowledge, Science and Expertise in Policy Process

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Public policy research has long examined the influence of knowledge in policymaking (Boaz et al. 2009), but often through separate literatures. Research on evidence-based policymaking has explored how research and other forms of evidence enter policy processes (Stoker & Evans 2016); scholarship on policy advisory systems has examined the organization of expertise and advice (Howlett & Mukherjee 2025); work on policy evaluation has focused on the production and use of evaluations (Contandriopoulos & Brousselle 2012); and research on policy learning, transfer, and policy diffusion has investigated how policymakers draw lessons from abroad (Porto de Oliveira, 2021). Despite their shared concern with how knowledge matters for policy, these literatures have only rarely been brought together.

This panel starts from the premise that an important research frontier lies at this intersection. Rather than asking whether policymakers use evidence, **we ask how (public) organizations produce, select, evaluate, authorize, and use different forms of knowledge in policy processes**. Recent scholarship stresses that knowledge does not enter policymaking through a one-way evidence-to-policy pipeline (Cairney et al. 2026). Evidence use is often indirect and relational, shaped by political values, professional expertise, organizational capacities, and context. Evaluation and policy learning research further shows that the relationship between producing knowledge and learning from it is contingent, non-linear, and embedded in wider political processes (Dunlop & Radaelli 2023).

The panel therefore focuses on the organizational and institutional processes through which some knowledge becomes relevant to policy design while other knowledge is ignored, displaced, forgotten, contested, or rendered unusable. This perspective also opens the analysis beyond knowledge. Recent work on ‘non-knowledge’ highlights how ignorance, amnesia, mis/ and disinformation can shape policy processes (Hannah et al. 2023), while emerging forms of knowledge production, including the growing use of AI in policy advisory (Koenig & Wurzelberger 2025), raise new questions about how evidence is generated, assessed, and authorized within (public) organizations.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Knowledge plays a central role in political decision-making processes. However, the ways in which knowledge is produced, selected, and utilized have so far been examined in largely separate strands of research. Research on evidence-based policy focuses on the use of scientific evidence; research on policy advisory systems focuses on the organization of expertise and advice; evaluation research focuses on the production and use of evaluations; and research on policy learning, transfer and diffusion focuses on how policy-makers learn from experience and knowledge.

This panel focuses on the intersections of these research fields. Rather than simply asking whether policy-makers use evidence, we ask how (public) organisations produce, select, evaluate, authorize and make different forms of knowledge usable for policy decisions. In doing so, we do not view the relationship between knowledge and policy as a linear process. Which evidence is considered relevant or credible depends, amongst other things, on organizational capacities and routines, professional expertise, political interests and values, as well as institutional contexts.

We are particularly interested in the organizational and institutional processes through which certain forms of knowledge gain authority, whilst others are ignored, suppressed, forgotten, contested or rendered unusable for political decision-making. This also draws attention to forms of ‘non-knowledge’, such as ignorance, institutional forgetting, and misinformation and disinformation. At the same time, new forms of knowledge production – including the increasing use of artificial intelligence – are transforming the production and organization of policy advice.

We invite empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions that address, amongst other things, the following questions:

- How do (public) organizations produce, select, evaluate and authorize knowledge?
- Which organizational structures, routines and advisory systems determine what is regarded as relevant or credible evidence?
- How do evidence and expertise interact with political values, interests and institutional contexts?
- Under what conditions do evaluation and expertise lead to policy learning – and when is knowledge ignored, suppressed or used strategically?
- How do crises, uncertainty, political conflicts and pluralized sources of knowledge alter these processes?
- What role do ignorance, institutional forgetting, and misinformation and disinformation play?
- How are new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, changing the production and organization of knowledge and policy advice?

The panel is open to PhD students and early-career researchers as well as experienced academics. Contributions that bridge previously separate strands of research and develop comparative, transnational and mixed-methods perspectives are particularly welcome. Our aim is to foster a constructive dialogue between different research communities and to develop a joint research agenda. Where possible, the panel will result in a special issue.