P32 / Knowledge under Pressure: Epistemic Accessibility and Crisis Governance

Topic : Knowledge, Science and Expertise in Policy Process

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Governments confronted with crises must make consequential decisions under conditions of uncertainty, time pressure and incomplete information. Research on crisis governance has therefore paid increasing attention to expertise, policy advice, policy entrepreneurship and the institutional organization of knowledge. Work on policy advisory systems has shown that governments draw on increasingly plural and differentiated constellations of civil servants, scientific experts, advisory bodies, consultants and other knowledge providers. At the same time, research on crisis governance demonstrates that crises can alter advisory structures, centralize decision-making, politicize expertise and create strong temporal pressures.Yet we still know comparatively little about a prior condition of evidence use and policy learning: who produces the knowledge available, whether relevant knowledge is actually accessible to the actors who need it, when they need it, and whether it remains accessible over time. These questions matter not only for immediate crisis response, but also for prevention and preparedness, for the resilience of governance arrangements under stress, and for learning, adaptation and institutional change after a crisis has receded.
This panel uses epistemic accessibility as an umbrella concept for examining these conditions. It asks how policy-relevant knowledge is generated, selected, transmitted, interpreted, stored and retrieved across organizational, sectoral and territorial boundaries, especially before, during and after crises. The concept directs attention not only to scientific evidence but also to administrative experience, implementation knowledge, institutional memory, evaluations, anticipatory knowledge and other forms of expertise. It also raises questions about who is recognized as a legitimate knowledge provider, which types of knowledge enter advisory processes, and which remain excluded or difficult to access.
The central research question is: How do institutions and actor constellations shape the accessibility of policy-relevant knowledge before, during and after crises, and with what consequences for preparedness, crisis response, resilience and longer-term policy development?The panel invites work on several related mechanisms. First, crisis-driven centralization may accelerate the transmission of selected knowledge while narrowing the range of accessible perspectives. Second, reliance on person-bound expertise may improve rapid access in the short term but weaken institutional memory and longer-term accessibility. Third, formalized advisory structures, documentation practices, repositories and cross-organizational routines may increase the reach and durability of knowledge, but do not necessarily ensure its political uptake. Fourth, politicization and conflict may affect not only whether advice is followed, but which actors and knowledge claims become accessible and authoritative in the first place. Fifth, the capacity to preserve, recombine, update and reactivate knowledge across crises may be an important component of institutional resilience, while crises themselves can leave durable effects on advisory structures and knowledge infrastructures.
By bringing together research on policy advice, crisis governance, policy learning, policy capacity, expertise and knowledge management, the panel seeks to develop a more systematic account of the institutional conditions linking knowledge production to actual policy use across prevention, immediate response, recovery and longer-term adaptation.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirical papers examining how policy-relevant knowledge becomes accessible, or fails to become accessible, in crisis governance. Papers do not need to use a specific framework. The aim is to bring different research traditions into dialogue around a common problem: how governments and other public actors obtain, transmit, preserve and mobilize knowledge in preparing for crises, responding under conditions of uncertainty and urgency, and learning and adapting in their aftermath.
Relevant contributions may study policy advisory systems and advisory bodies. For example:
· The role of civil servants, scientists, consultants, think tanks and other experts,
· selection and composition of expert advice,
· interaction between political and scientific expertise,
· institutional memory and knowledge retention,

· documentation and knowledge infrastructures,
· policy learning, adaptation and institutional change before and after crises,
· anticipatory knowledge, foresight, preparedness and resilience,
· the circulation of knowledge across organizations, sectors, jurisdictions and levels of governance,
· forms of knowledge and their use in crisis prevention, response and recovery,
· access to knowledge under different conditions like national, supranational or international political systems, administrative systems, politicization.

Empirical papers may address acute, creeping or recurring crises and may focus on any policy sector or political system. Papers are not expected to concentrate on the immediate crisis phase: studies of prevention and preparedness, recovery and longer-term adaptation are equally welcome, including research on the durable institutional and policy effects of past crises. Comparative work across countries, crises, organizations, policy sectors or phases of crisis governance is particularly welcome. We also encourage longitudinal research connecting preparedness, crisis response, recovery and post-crisis learning, as well as studies that distinguish between short-term access to expertise and the longer-term preservation and retrievability of knowledge.

The panel is explicitly open to different theoretical approaches, including research on policy advisory systems,crisis governance, resilience and adaptive governance, policy capacity, policy learning, policy entrepreneurship, evidence use, knowledge management and institutional design. Contributions should make clear what aspect of knowledge accessibility they seek to explain, which actors or institutions are involved, and what consequences follow for policymaking or crisis governance. The broader objective is to identify generalizable mechanisms explaining variation in who can access what knowledge, at what point in time, through which institutional arrangements, and with what effects.

The panel is planned as an in-person panel in Rennes, and authors submitting papers should expect to participate on site.