P44 / Multiple Streams, National Settings, and Entrepreneurial Agency: Advancing Method and Theory

Topic : Policy Process Theories

Chair : Evangelia Petridou (NTNU Social Research and Mid Sweden University)

Second Chair : Nikolaos Zahariadis (Rhodes College)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Since Kingdon's 1984 Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) has become one of the most widely applied approaches to understanding policy change under ambiguity, with tens of thousands of citations spanning governance levels, policy sectors, and political systems. The framework is still relevant, especially when it comes to understanding wicked problems, because of its ability to incorporate ambiguity and extraordinary events in the policy process (Herweg et al., 2023). All frameworks develop over time to meet the needs of societal (and policy) grand challenges and the MSF is not an exception. Two trajectories are fruitful. First, MSF has undertheorized the specification of hypotheses that adapt policy making to various democratic, developing, and autocratic settings. Second, while policy entrepreneurs have become the central vehicle for theorizing agency in the policy process (Mintrom and Norman 2009; Petridou and Mintrom 2021), their relationship to institutional structure — the degree to which entrepreneurial strategy is enabled, constrained, or reshaped by institutional configuration — remains only partially specified. What is more the relationship between policy entrepreneurs and other types of agency remains underdeveloped.
This panel brings these threads together through the lens of method. Building on methodological pluralism within MSF scholarship (Zahariadis et al. 2023; DeLeo et al. 2024) and for more standardized measurement of core constructs, we invite work that tests, refines, or synthesizes MSF hypotheses using transparent, rigorous designs — quantitative, qualitative, comparative, or mixed. Papers addressing settings beyond Western democracies — including the Global South and autocracies — are particularly encouraged, as are papers placing MSF in dialogue with institutionalist theory more broadly.

References
DeLeo, Rob A., Reimut Zohlnhöfer, and Nikolaos Zahariadis. 2024. "Multiple Streams and Policy Ambiguity." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/FBA20248D4A359D38AF7083D00F5149E.
Herweg, N., Zahariadis, N., & Zohlnhöfer, R. (2023). The Multiple Streams Framework Foundations, Refinements, and Empirical Applications. In C.M. Weible (Ed.) Theories of the Policy Process (pp. 29-64). Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003308201-3
Mintrom, M., & Norman, P. (2009). Policy Entrepreneurship and Policy Change. Policy Studies Journal, 37(4), 649-667. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2009.00329.x
Petridou, E., & Mintrom, M. (2021). A Research Agenda for the Study of Policy Entrepreneurs. Policy Studies Journal, 49(4), 943-967. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12405
Zahariadis, N., Herweg, N., Zohlnhöfer, R., & Petridou, E. (Eds.). (2023). A modern guide to the multiple streams framework. Edward Elgar.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite paper proposals that advance the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) along three connected lines: method, national settings, and agency.
On method, we welcome papers offering methodologically transparent tests of MSF propositions, including in-depth qualitative process tracing, comparative case designs, quantitative approaches, or mixed-methods designs that triangulate across these. Papers engaging with measurement, operationalizing streams, windows, or policy entrepreneurship in ways that travel across cases, are especially welcome.
On national settings, we seek papers theorizing how institutional context (formal rules, venues, federalism, or regime type) structures the emergence, timing, and coupling of the three streams, and what the next steps of theory development should be. Researchers are encouraged to use hypotheses already proposed (see Herweg et al., 2023), but also formulate their own, based on the suitability of their data.
On agency, we invite papers examining policy entrepreneurs' attributes, skills, and strategies, and how

these interact with institutional constraints and opportunities. We are particularly interested in papers theorizing the institution–agency relationship: how structure enables or limits entrepreneurial emergence and action, and how entrepreneurs work to reshape institutions themselves through venue shopping, coalition-building, and framing. Of special interest are papers that move the state-of-the art on policy entrepreneurs forward, even beyond the Multiple Streams Framework. Such papers might engage theories from market entrepreneurship or policy sectors in which policy entrepreneurs are currently under studies. Papers may focus on the framework as a whole or on any of its components, and may apply MSF on its own or in conversation with other policy process theories (the Advocacy Coalition Framework, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, the Narrative Policy Framework, or institutionalist accounts). Comparative, single-case, and cross-national applications are all welcome. Early-career researchers and those applying MSF in new empirical or national settings are strongly encouraged to submit.

References

Herweg, N., Zahariadis, N., & Zohlnhöfer, R. (2023). The Multiple Streams Framework Foundations, Refinements, and Empirical Applications. In C.M. Weible (Ed.) Theories of the Policy Process (pp. 29-64). Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003308201-3