# P83 / Policy Capacity and Capacity Building: Drawing Boundaries, Bridging Gaps for a Transforming State. Fostering Global North–South Dialogues.

**Topic :** State and Policy Capacity

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## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Policy capacity is widely recognized as a determinant of policy success, yet its conceptualization remains highly diverse. A recent review by Cameron and Evans (2024) illustrates this ambiguity, noting that a simple Google Scholar search for “policy capacity” yields more than 17,000 results. Definitions range from functional assets for decision-making (Painter & Pierre, 2005) to disaggregated frameworks emphasizing competences, institutional arrangements, and governance legitimacy (Wu, Ramesh & Howlett, 2015). Wu, Ramesh and Howlett (2015, p. 166) themselves observed that most definitions “focus on what can be done with it … but fall short of specifying not only what constitutes policy capacity but how existing and potential resources and skills can be combined to augment and deploy it”. How capacities combine, reinforcing or blocking one another, thus remains largely open.

A second gap concerns capacity building. Brenton, Baekkeskov and Hannah (2023) identified “missing links” between the theory of policy capacity and the initiatives through which capacities are actually built. Training, education and institutional development for state and non-state actors are rarely analysed in terms of the capacities they are meant to produce, and capacities that are never specified cannot be deliberately built, only assumed.

Recent work offers a starting point for rethinking how we conceive capacities. Its central argument is that a value is not a capacity; the ability to mobilize values in judgment and in public action is (Muñoz-del-Campo, 2026). From this claim, the framework is expanded beyond its analytical, operational and political dimensions to incorporate the deontological and human dimensions of policy work, understood as transversal capacities that enable or limit the others. The proposal is testable, and it reopens three questions: what counts as capacity, how capacities combine, and how they are built.

These questions are sharpened by neighbouring notions. State, institutional and administrative capacity are often used interchangeably with policy capacity in scholarship, indices and reform agendas, shaping what is measured, which actors are considered and what capacity building is expected to achieve.

This panel is a joint initiative of the Study Group on Policy Capacity and Capacity Building (RELAPP–IPPA). It brings Global North and Global South perspectives into dialogue, so that concepts and evidence are shaped through interaction rather than transfer.

Its objectives are to: (1) delimit policy capacity, the central concept, from its neighbours; (2) examine how capacities combine, including ethical and human dimensions; (3) bridge policy capacity and capacity building, for public officials and other actors; and (4) identify the capacities a transforming state requires in the face of artificial intelligence, cultural diversity, changing public values and collaborative governance.

The panel offers comparative, theoretically oriented contributions that move policy capacity from invocation to specification. Selected papers will contribute to a special issue.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite theoretical, empirical, comparative and methodological papers on policy capacity and capacity building. Contributions from both the Global North and the Global South are welcome, and we particularly encourage work that fosters North–South dialogue through cross-regional comparison

Contributions may address, but are not limited to:

Concepts and boundaries. Policy capacity and its neighbours (state, institutional and administrative capacity); tests, extensions or critiques of the Policy Capacity Framework and its expanded version; measurement.

Combining capacities. How capacities reinforce, condition or block one another; thresholds, sequences and capacity traps; the role of ethical and relational/human capacities.

Capacity building. MPP/MPA programmes, civil service training, professional standards and job profiles, and non-state initiatives.

Artificial intelligence and digital transformation. Which competences are required, displaced or procured,

and what this implies for accountability.
Multiculturalism and diversity. Representation in public employment, intercultural competences and service delivery in plural societies.
New public values and integrity. Codes of conduct, integrity systems and shared civic principles; when values become effective capacities.
New governance and the transformation of the state. Collaboration, networks, multilevel coordination and co-production; what administrative model the emerging state requires.
Territories. How capacities are produced, combined and constrained in concrete places.
The panel is open to emerging proposals beyond these lines. Depending on the number and orientation of accepted papers, it will be organized into thematic sessions. Selected papers will be invited to contribute to a special issue.

Brenton, S., Baekkeskov, E., & Hannah, A. (2023). Policy capacity: Evolving theory and missing links. Policy Studies, 44(3), 297–315. https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2022.2043266
Cameron, B. T., & Evans, B. (2024). Policy capacity research: An overview and bibliography of the international literature, 1978 to 2023. International Review of Public Policy. https://doi.org/10.4000/11whl
Munoz-del-Campo, N. (2026). Rethinking policy capacity: Integrating deontological and human dimensions. Policy Sciences. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-026-09626-8
Painter, M., & Pierre, J. (2005). Challenges to state policy capacity: Global trends and comparative perspectives. Palgrave Macmillan.
Wu, X., Ramesh, M., & Howlett, M. (2015). Policy capacity: A conceptual framework for understanding policy competences and capabilities. Policy and Society, 34(3–4), 165–171.