(Virtual) P168 / Public Administration in Policy Implementation: Structures, Instruments, and Practices

Topic : Bureaucracy, Administration and Policy Process

Chair : Maria Proestou (Humboldt Universität Berlin)

Second Chair : Helge Jörgens (ISCTE - University Institute of Lisbon)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Policy implementation is a central yet often challenging stage of the policy process, during which political objectives are translated into administrative practices and concrete outcomes. Public administrations play a crucial role in this process, not merely as executors of political decisions but as organizations that interpret, operationalize, coordinate, and sometimes reshape public policies. Ministries, national and international public agencies, supranational administrations, ministry-affiliated organizations, and other implementing bodies exercise varying degrees of discretion and operate within institutional and organizational arrangements that influence how policies are implemented.

Over recent decades, public administration has undergone significant transformations. Traditional bureaucratic structures, characterized by hierarchical authority, formal rules, standardized procedures, and legally defined responsibilities, have increasingly coexisted with managerial approaches associated with New Public Management (NPM), including performance measurement, managerial autonomy, outsourcing, contractual arrangements, and results-oriented management. More recently, digitalization has introduced additional changes through digital administrative services, data-driven decision-making, automated procedures, and artificial intelligence. However, these developments do not necessarily represent successive or mutually exclusive administrative models. Instead, bureaucratic, managerial, and digital arrangements frequently coexist and interact within implementing organizations.

Although policy implementation research has long emphasized the importance of administrative structures, organizational capacities, and bureaucratic discretion, and public administration scholarship has extensively examined administrative reforms, further research is needed on how these different administrative arrangements interact and shape implementation practices. In particular, questions remain about their implications for administrative autonomy, coordination, accountability, discretion, organizational capacity, and the effectiveness of policy implementation.

This panel seeks to advance understanding of the role of public administration in policy implementation by examining how **administrative arrangements, encompassing bureaucratic structures, managerial instruments associated with NPM, and digital technologies** , shape the activities and capacities of implementing organizations across national, supranational, and international governance contexts. Against this background, the panel asks **how do these administrative arrangements shape the practices and capacities of public policy implementers**.

The panel invites contributions exploring several propositions:

- Traditional bureaucratic structures may provide stability, legal accountability, and procedural consistency while potentially constraining flexibility and cross-organizational coordination. In addition, multilevel administrative structures may strengthen policy implementation in times of crisis and turbulence or act as obstacles to effective implementation.
- NPM instruments may enhance managerial autonomy, specialization, and performance orientation while potentially generating fragmentation, coordination challenges, and accountability tensions.
- Digitalization may strengthen administrative information processing, coordination, and operational efficiency while simultaneously transforming bureaucratic discretion, organizational dependencies, and accountability.
- The interaction between bureaucratic, managerial, and digital arrangements may generate hybrid administrative configurations with context-dependent implications for policy implementation.

By bringing together theoretical, comparative, and empirical contributions across policy sectors and administrative systems, the panel aims to develop a more nuanced understanding of how administrative organization and transformation shape implementation processes and outcomes.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions examining the role of public

administration in policy implementation, with particular attention to the organizational structures, management instruments, and digital technologies that shape the activities of implementing organizations.

We welcome papers investigating how ministries, national and international public agencies, supranational administrations, ministry-affiliated organizations, semi-autonomous bodies, and other public or publicly mandated organizations interpret, coordinate, operationalize, and implement public policies across national, supranational, and international governance contexts.

Contributions may address one or several of the following themes:

- **Bureaucratic structures and implementation** : How do administrative hierarchies, formal rules, organizational mandates, procedural requirements, and bureaucratic discretion influence implementation processes?
- **New Public Management and implementation** : How do performance management, outsourcing, contractual arrangements, managerial autonomy, and organizational specialization affect implementation capacities, coordination, and accountability?
- **Digitalization and implementation**: How do digital administrative tools, information systems, data-driven decision-making, automation, and artificial intelligence transform administrative practices and the roles of implementers?
- **Hybrid administrative arrangements** : How do traditional bureaucratic structures, managerial instruments, and digital technologies coexist, reinforce, or contradict one another within implementing organizations?
- **Administrative actors and organizational relationships** : How do ministries, agencies, intermediary organizations, and other implementing bodies negotiate responsibilities, exercise discretion, and coordinate implementation across organizational boundaries?
- **Implementation processes and outcomes**: Under what institutional, organizational, and policy conditions do different administrative arrangements facilitate or constrain effective, accountable, and responsive implementation?The panel particularly encourages research that moves beyond describing administrative reforms to investigate their concrete implications for the everyday activities, organizational capacities, and implementation practices of public administrators.

We welcome qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research, including single-case studies, comparative analyses, longitudinal investigations, and theoretically oriented contributions. Papers examining different policy sectors, administrative traditions, governance levels, and national and international institutional contexts are encouraged.

The panel aims to foster dialogue between public policy implementation research, public administration scholarship, and studies of administrative reform and digital governance, contributing to a better understanding of how contemporary administrative arrangements shape the translation of public policies into practice.