P162 / Rethinking Policy Design: Innovation, Expertise, and Emerging Approaches

Topic : Policy Design, Formulation & Instruments

Chair : Esti Hoss Golan (Reichman University)

Second Chair : Moshe Maor (Reichman University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Policy design is undergoing significant changes as public sector innovation introduces new actors, forms of expertise, organizational arrangements, and methods into policymaking. Policy innovation labs, behavioral insights teams, design and technology units, participatory approaches, experimentation, and data- and AI-enabled methods increasingly influence how policy problems are framed, alternatives are developed, and evidence is mobilized. Yet these developments are often examined separately, leaving important questions about their collective implications for policy design insufficiently explored.

This panel addresses a central question: How and under what conditions do emerging forms of innovation, expertise, and organization substantively reshape policy design rather than merely introduce new tools or actors into established processes? Substantive change is understood as a consequential alteration in problem framing, alternative generation and evaluation, knowledge mobilization, or the distribution of authority over design decisions. The panel brings together scholarship on policy design, public sector innovation, institutional change, and the politics of expertise to examine the mechanisms and conditions underlying such transformations.

Three interrelated analytical dimensions structure the discussion. First, the panel examines the redistribution of expertise and authority. Emerging approaches may broaden participation, incorporate experiential and technical knowledge, and challenge established professional hierarchies. However, they may also privilege particular forms of expertise, reinforce existing power relations, or create new exclusions. Second, it investigates institutional mediation. The consequences of innovation depend on administrative capacities, organizational routines, political authority, and institutional constraints. Accordingly, similar innovations may produce substantive transformation, incremental adaptation, symbolic change, or additional coordination burdens across different contexts. Third, the panel explores the relationship between innovation in design processes and innovation in policy content and outcomes. Novel design practices do not necessarily generate innovative policy solutions, while substantively innovative policies may emerge through conventional design arrangements.

The panel's scientific relevance lies in addressing fragmented scholarship, distinguishing procedural novelty from substantive institutional change, and clarifying how political and institutional conditions shape innovation in policy design. It advances an understanding of innovation as a politically mediated and institutionally embedded process, encouraging theoretical and empirical contributions that identify underlying mechanisms and explain variation across political systems, administrative contexts, and policy sectors.

The panel welcomes comparative, cross-national, multilevel, and single-case research employing qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, or conceptual approaches.

References

Hoss-Golan, et al. (2026). The role of institutional logic: a new dynamic typology for policy innovation labs. Policy Design and Practice, 9(2), 135-146.

Lewis, J. M., et al. (2020). When design meets power. Policy & Politics, 48(1), 111-130.

Maor, M. (2026). Towards a minimal definition of policy innovation labs. Policy Sciences, 59(1), 225-244.

Zambrano-Gutiérrez, J. C., & Puppim de Oliveira, J. A. (2022). The dynamics of sources of knowledge on the nature of innovation in the public sector. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 32(4), 656-670.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel Rethinking Policy Design: Innovation, Expertise, and Emerging Approaches invites theoretical,

conceptual, methodological, and empirical contributions examining how emerging forms of public sector innovation are reshaping contemporary policy design. Its central concern is not simply whether new actors, methods, and forms of expertise enter policymaking, but how and under what conditions they substantively alter established processes of problem framing, alternative generation, knowledge mobilization, and policy instrument development.

The panel particularly welcomes contributions addressing the following themes:

Innovation in policy design processes: How do policy innovation labs, experimentation, prototyping, behavioral insights, participatory approaches, strategic foresight, and digital and AI-enabled methods influence policy formulation and design practices?
Expertise, knowledge, and power: How do emerging approaches reshape the roles of bureaucratic, professional, technical, academic, and experiential knowledge? Under what conditions do they redistribute authority and influence, challenge established hierarchies, or reinforce existing power relations?
Institutional and organizational arrangements: How do administrative capacities, organizational routines, institutional logics, and political constraints shape the adoption, institutionalization, and consequences of innovative design approaches?
Process innovation and substantive policy change: When does innovation in policy design processes translate into innovative policy content or outcomes? Under what conditions do novel approaches generate substantive transformation, incremental adaptation, symbolic innovation, or additional coordination burdens?
The panel encourages contributions that move beyond describing innovative practices to explain their underlying mechanisms, institutional conditions, and political consequences. Particular interest lies in comparative perspectives that illuminate why similar approaches produce different effects across political systems, administrative contexts, and policy sectors.

We welcome single-case, comparative, cross-national, and multilevel studies employing qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, or conceptual approaches. Its overarching objective is to strengthen dialogue between policy design and public sector innovation scholarship and develop an integrated research agenda explaining when innovation changes the practice, organization, and politics of policy design, when it leaves established arrangements largely intact, and why these differences arise.