P97 / The Everyday Politics of Policy Knowledge: Critical and Interpretive Inquiries into the Micro-Dynamics of Policy Practice

Topic : Knowledge, Science and Expertise in Policy Process

Chair : Noe John Sacramento (University of the Philippines Cebu)

Second Chair : Nick Turnbull (University of Manchester)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Policy studies has in recent years renewed its attention to policy knowledge: what counts as knowledge for policy, how it is produced, and how it comes to bear on decisions. This attention unfolds under conditions that unsettle the authority of knowledge itself. Post-truth politics contests the standing of expertise, overlapping crises outpace the capacity of established knowledge systems to frame problems, and the rise of populism, authoritarian rule, and illiberal democracy reconfigures who may speak for the public and on what grounds. These pressures are usually examined at the level of institutions, regimes, and the science-policy interface. Yet policy knowledge is made, contested, and unmade in the micro-dynamics of everyday policy work: in meetings and briefings, consultations and negotiations, field encounters and informal exchanges. It is in these settings that macro-level pressures become lived practice, and where the politics of policy knowledge is most visible.

The founding debates on knowledge and policy offer a productive point of departure for this inquiry. Lasswell (1970) distinguished knowledge of the policy process from knowledge in the policy process. Lindblom and Cohen (1979) contrasted professional social inquiry with the ordinary knowledge on which much social problem solving relies, cautioning against overestimating the decisiveness of the former. Radaelli (1995) reframed the role of knowledge in the policy process, moving beyond linear models of utilization. The argumentative, interpretive, and practice turns deepened these insights. Majone (1989) showed that the knowledge claims of policy analysis are argumentative, not demonstrative. Fischer (1990, 2000) exposed the politics of expertise within technocracy and defended the epistemic standing of local and citizen knowledge. Yanow (2000) placed local knowledge at the center of interpretive policy analysis. Tenbensel (2006) further pluralized the concept, treating policy knowledge as a mix of scientific, practical, and political knowledge drawn upon in policy work. However, even where this scholarship has turned to practice and policy work, it has tended to examine knowledge at the level of the policy process, its institutions, and its arguments. The finer moments in which knowledge gains or loses authority within policy work have received less sustained attention: who speaks and who is spoken for in a meeting, whose data enters a briefing and whose experience is set aside as anecdote, and how silence, deference, and tact shape what can be said and known. Extending this tradition toward the micro-dynamics of policy work opens a complementary line of inquiry that treats these everyday encounters as sites where the politics of policy knowledge is negotiated, performed, and made consequential.

Attending to these micro-dynamics also unsettles a premise that runs through much of the field. Influential accounts of problem structuring and policy deliberation tend to imagine the encounter between knowledges as an exchange among participants who can openly contest problems and weigh plural claims. Yet everyday policy work in many settings unfolds through relations of hierarchy, deference, patronage, informality, and translation across languages and knowledge systems, often within developmental, hybrid, or authoritarian states. What becomes of policy knowledge when the conditions for open contestation cannot be assumed? How are knowledge claims performed, authorized, and silenced in everyday interactions, and whose knowledges count in the process? How do practitioners translate between expert, bureaucratic, and local knowledges, and what is gained or lost in that translation? And how do these micro-practices reproduce, accommodate, or resist the broader pressures of post-truth politics, compounding crises, and democratic decline? This panel seeks to answer these questions by bringing together critical and interpretive inquiries into the politics of policy knowledge as it is practiced in diverse political settings. In doing so, it aims to theorize policy knowledge from the ground up, to test the deliberative assumptions that underpin much of the field, and to contribute to a more situated and epistemically just understanding of public policy.

Call for Paper:

This panel invites papers that examine the politics of policy knowledge as it unfolds in the micro-dynamics of

everyday policy work. We welcome contributions that attend closely to the encounters, practices, and relations through which knowledge is produced, claimed, contested, and made authoritative in policy settings, and that connect these micro-level dynamics to broader political conditions. We are particularly interested in papers that engage policy work in settings where the conditions for open contestation cannot be taken for granted, including developmental, hybrid, and authoritarian contexts, as well as in democracies under strain. We are also interested in how scientific knowledge and its use in policy become sidelined by political factors, including transactional exchanges, institutional weakness, research contracted out to the private sector, and political rhetoric. Contributions from Asia and the Global South are especially encouraged, alongside work from other regions that reflects critically on the situated character of policy knowledge.

Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

- Everyday interactions in policy work (meetings, briefings, consultations, negotiations, and informal exchanges) as sites where knowledge gains or loses authority

- Hierarchy, deference, patronage, and silence in shaping what can be said and known in policy settings

- Translation and brokerage between expert, bureaucratic, local, and indigenous knowledges, and what is gained or lost in the process

- Language, multilingualism, and the politics of knowledge in policy encounters

- Front-line and street-level knowledge practices and their relation to policy decisions

- The performance and staging of expertise, evidence, and credibility in policy work

- Citizen, community, and experiential knowledge in participatory and co-productive policy processes, including their limits

- Micro-practices of policy knowledge under post-truth politics, populism, authoritarian rule, and democratic backsliding

- Knowledge work in the face of compounding crises, uncertainty, and urgency

- Epistemic injustice, exclusion, and recognition in the everyday production of policy knowledge

- The applicability and limits of deliberative, argumentative, and problem-structuring frameworks in non-ideal political settings

- Reflexivity and positionality of researchers and practitioners in the study and practice of policy knowledge

We welcome theoretically informed empirical studies as well as conceptual and methodological contributions. Papers may draw on policy ethnography, interpretive and narrative analysis, discourse analysis, rhetoric, practice-based and action research approaches, or other critical and interpretive methods. Comparative and cross-regional papers that bring diverse settings into conversation are particularly welcome.

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