W02 / Managing Uncertainty in Policy Design: Policy Tools and Capacities

Topic : Policy Design, Evaluation, Policy Analysis

Chair : Azad Singh Bali (University of Melbourne)

Second Chair : Brian Head (University of Queensland, Australia)

Third Chair : Jenny Lewis (University of Melbourne)

Fourth Chair : M Ramesh (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Dealing with uncertainty is a central challenge for policy designers and in design studies. Recent events, including polycrises, public health emergencies, and the rapid proliferation of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, have underscored the critical importance of addressing uncertainty in policy design. The central question this workshop engages with is how to address and manage uncertainty in policy design.

We explore two inter-connected issues: a) specific tools used to deal with uncertainty in policy designs, and b) the role of policy capacity.

We welcome submissions that advance conceptual understanding or case studies on addressing uncertainty in policy designs. We encourage authors to engage with some aspects of the questions outlined below. All papers will include a discussion that develops strategies or offers insights for policy designers in dealing with uncertainty.

1) How designers deal with problems or challenges in the context of uncertainty (in the understanding of the issue or lack of an appropriate knowledge base such)? (see for e.g. Head, 2019; 2023; Cairney 2016;
2) How designers set policy goals and objectives in an environment characterised by uncertainty?
3) How designers use policy tools and mixes to address uncertainty in policy designs (Howlett and Ramesh, 2023; Fowler, 2021;)?
4) How designers adjust policy settings in the context of uncertainty in targets (Capano and Woo, 2018)?
5) The role policy capacity plays in managing uncertainty during the design process? Are certain types of capacities more critical in dealing with uncertainty? (Wu, Ramesh and Howlett, 2015; Mukherjee and Bali, 2018)
6) How lessons/best practices in dealing with uncertainty are institutionalised (Stark and van der Erend, 2023; Nair and Howlett, 2017; Dunlop and Radaelli 2017)?

ABSTRACT

A lot of the discussion around uncertainty in the context of policy design has focussed on what are described as 'ill-structured' problems, marked by a lack of clarity about the issue's nature and limited knowledge about solutions. An extensive literature describes and categorizes types of uncertainty and the challenges they present in policymaking (see Peters, 2018, Head 2022; Janicke and Jorgens 1999; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Nair and Howlett, 2017).

Policymakers often deal with limited information, asymmetric knowledge, or an inability to grasp a problem's root causes within time constraints (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Howlett, 2024). This differs from debates involving contested problem definitions, as seen in climate change or health reform discussions (Sovacool, Brown and Valentine, 2016; Ramesh and Bali, 2021). Uncertainties in goals, objectives, and policy tools can stem from decision-makers' awareness and the nature of the issue (Howlett, 2024). Uncertainty also surrounds the effectiveness of policy tools and their combinations, particularly over time. That is, are interventions made at time t likely to be effective at time t + 1 (Howlett and Leong, 2021). There are also uncertainties associated with the accuracy of specific settings of policy tools, such as tax rates or subsidy levels, which tend to resist change despite calls for flexibility. Further, policymakers also grapple with overarching uncertainties in the political environment and resource availability (Howlett, 2024), which are

interconnected in unfathomable ways which make policymaking difficult.

To understand how policy designers deal with these different types of uncertainty and manage them, this workshop looks at two interconnected issues: a) specific tools used to deal with uncertainty in policy designs, and b) the role of policy capacity.

Recent design studies reiterate the need for multiple tools (with substantive and procedural components, primary and secondary elements) to manage uncertainties and create ‘agile’ or ‘resilient’ designs to deal with uncertainties (Capano and Woo, 2018; Bali et al 2021). The choice of tools and their effective deployment is equally a function of the capacities of policymakers and implementing agencies (Wu et al 2015). That is, the skills and competencies of public actors to be able to understand the spectrum of uncertainties, develop processes, and choose tools to manage them.

The twin foci on tools, and the capacities of policymakers to effectively deploy are central to the new design orientation in the policy sciences (Howlett and Lejano, 2013; Mukherjee and Bali, 2018).This workshop thus aims to advance scholarly debate and discussion within the policy sciences around the efficacy of policy designs, as well as contribute to policy practice by developing strategies/best practices for the effective management of uncertainty

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Session 1Introductions: Uncertainty & Problem Framing

Wednesday, June 26th 10:15 to 12:00 (AULA 23)

Discussants

Kris Hartley (Arizona State University)

From decision to deliberation support: Modeling for water quality problem-structuring and intervention

Schuyler Houser (TU Delft)

Designing goals under uncertainty

Kidjie Saguin (University of Melbourne)

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Session 2Managing Uncertainty: Implementation, Tools, and Capacity

Wednesday, June 26th 14:00 to 17:15 (AULA 23)

Discussants

Kidjie Saguin (University of Melbourne)

Júlia Gabriele da Rosa (Universidade Estadual Paulista)

Assessing policy capacity for disaster risk reduction policies implementation

Guiselle Romero Lora (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú)

Mitigating Uncertainty in Policy Design during Implementation: Organizational Responses from a Carnegie Perspective

Wai-Hang Yee (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen)

Naikang Feng

Policy design for SDG localization: innovations and challenges in uncertain contexts

Kris Hartley (Arizona State University)

Glen D. Kuecker (DePauw University)

Designing and uncertainty: Can policy labs be the right tool to provide lessons?

Jenny Lewis (University of Melbourne)

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Session 3Managing Uncertainty: The Complexity of Environmental Policy

Thursday, June 27th 09:00 to 12:15 (AULA 23)

Discussants

Schuyler Houser (TU Delft)

Federico Toth (Università di Bologna)

Mapping the Uncertainty of Climate Resilience in Mumbai: Measurement, Governance Issues and Policy Implications

Piyush Kumar (Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay)

HOW (NOT) TO DEAL WITH CLIMATE CHANGE CONSEQUENCES: ADAPTING, MITIGATING AND RESILIENCE IN THE SOUTH OF BRAZIL

Júlia Gabriele da Rosa (Universidade Estadual Paulista)

Water Policy Design Under Uncertainty: Policy Capacities Under Weak Institutions in Latin American Cities

Jaime Sainz-Santamaría (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM))

(Virtual) Co-creative Processes in the Face of Wicked Problems: Ownership as a Catalyst for Integration into Public Policies

Fanny Sbaraglia (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

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Session 4Managing Uncertainty: Hierarchical Tools & Instrument Mixes

Thursday, June 27th 14:00 to 17:15 (AULA 23)

Discussants

Piyush Kumar (Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay)

Guiselle Romero Lora (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú)

Tackling uncertain targets' behavior. Instrument mixes and policy design for highly collaborative policies.

Federico Toth (Università di Bologna)

Designing policy strategies for complex environmental issues

Brian Head (University of Queensland, Australia)