W02 / Wicked Problems in Public Policy: Definitions, Methods, Ethics and Uncertainty in Decision-Making

Topic : Wicked & Wild Problem Agenda Setting

Chair : Raul Pacheco-Vega (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) Mexico)

Second Chair : Fausto Amador-Cid (FLACSO Mexico)

Third Chair : Camila Sanchez (FLACSO Mexico)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Call for Papers: Exploring Public Policy Issues as Wicked Problems: Methods, Ethics, Definitions, and Uncertainties

Over the past 50 years, the concept of "wicked problems" has gained prominence in various fields, encompassing complex, multifaceted issues that resist easy resolution. In this workshop we invite scholars, practitioners, and researchers in the areas of public policy and public administration to engage in a comprehensive exploration of wicked problems from multiple perspectives. We seek contributions that delve into four key dimensions of wicked problems: methods for their study, the ethical implications they pose, the challenges inherent in defining them, and the uncertainties that surround their understanding.

Our proposed workshop has four main tracks or avenues of research inquiry, as outlined below.

1. The Challenges of Defining Wicked Problems:

Defining wicked problems is an inherently complex task. This track seeks contributions that scrutinize the process of identifying and framing wicked problems, as well as the nuances that arise when attempting to establish clear boundaries and parameters. We encourage submissions that analyze the contextual, cultural, and epistemological factors that shape the definitions of wicked problems and influence the strategies employed to address them.

2. Methods to Study Wicked Problems:

This track invites submissions that elucidate innovative approaches, tools, and methodologies for effectively analyzing and tackling wicked problems. We welcome empirical studies, case analyses, and theoretical frameworks that demonstrate novel ways to dissect and address the intricate nature of these challenges. Submissions may encompass quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods approaches that shed light on the underlying structures, dynamics, and potential solutions of wicked problems.

3. The Ethics of Wicked Problems:

This track aims to foster discussions on the moral and ethical considerations associated with wicked problems. We invite papers that critically examine the ethical dimensions of decision-making, policy formulation, and implementation strategies in the context of wicked problems. Submissions may explore issues such as distributive justice, stakeholder engagement, and the ethical responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and societies in confronting these complex challenges.

4. The Uncertainties Associated with Wicked Problems:

Uncertainty is an inherent feature of wicked problems, encompassing a range of ambiguities, unpredictabilities, and unforeseeable consequences. This track welcomes papers that delve into the various dimensions of uncertainty in the context of wicked problems, including but not limited to modeling approaches, scenario planning, and decision-making under conditions of limited information.

Submission Guidelines:

Abstract submissions should be no more than 300 words and must clearly state the research questions, methodology, and key findings. If the paper is theoretical, then please state how your paper will advance the wicked problems scholarly literature. If your paper is methodological, please make clear which methods will be examined or tested. If the proposed paper is empirical, please state clearly the type of case study or policy area under analysis. Full papers should be no more than 8,000 words, including references and appendices. We will consider all formats for bibliography but prefer them formatted in APA style.

All submissions will be considered for one or more special issues on wicked problems in public policy and

as such, will undergo a double-blinded peer-review process.

Important Dates:

Abstract Submission Deadline: January 31st, 2024

Notification of Acceptance: February 16th, 2024

Full Paper Submission Deadline: May 30th, 2024

Conference Dates: June 26th-28th, 2024

We look forward to receiving your contributions and fostering a dynamic dialogue on wicked problems and their multifaceted dimensions.

For inquiries, please contact Dr. Raul Pacheco-Vega (raul.pacheco-vega@flacso.edu.mx)

ABSTRACT

Exploring Public Policy Issues as Wicked Problems: Definitions, Methods, Ethics, and Uncertainties in Decision-Making

Abstract

Public policy problems can be considered wicked problems if they are very complex, multifaceted, lacking a clear way of understanding of the phenomena and straightforward solutions (Head, 2022; Peters, 2017). Scholarship on wicked problems in public policy became quite popular in the early 2000s and has recently regained interest. In this workshop, we propose a fresh look on the value of wicked problems' theoretical underpinnings and their value in understanding complex public policy problems.

Wicked problems are multifaceted, intractable and complex issues. Many public policy issues require intersectional, multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches to problem-solving. Framing these challenging issues as wicked problems enables scholars to seek a holistic approach to understanding root causes and potential solutions' spaces. This workshop explores research questions around 4 themes: approaches to defining wicked problems, the ethics of wicked problems research, quantitative and qualitative methods to study wicked problems, and the role of uncertainty in managing wicked problems.

We seek papers that answer research questions seeking to explain the emergence of wicked problems in public policy, the challenges of defining a wicked problem, the different methodological approaches that can be used to better understand wicked problems, and the ethics of tackling wicked problems using public policy theoretical and empirical tools. We welcome theoretical papers addressing any of the four avenues of research we indicate. We also welcome empirical case studies that can offer lessons learned from applying the analytical lenses of wicked problems.

Bibliography:

Head, B. W. (2022). Wicked Problems in Public Policy: Understanding and Responding to Complex Challenges. Palgrave Macmillan.

Peters, B. G. (2017). What is so wicked about wicked problems? A conceptual analysis and a research program. Policy and Society, 36(3), 385–396. https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2017.1361633

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Third Chair : Camila Sanchez (FLACSO Mexico)

Session 1Agenda and Policy Networks

Wednesday, June 26th 10:15 to 12:00 (AULA 3)

Discussants

Everardo Chiapa (Tecnológico de Monterrey / Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo)

Carolina Milhorance (CIRAD)

Agenda and Policy Networks in the Pánuco River Basin

Alex Caldera-Ortega (Universidad de Guanajuato)

LUZMA FABIOLA NAVA (Universidad de Guanajuato)

An exhaustive analysis of the public policy network in the Pánuco River Basin area of Mexico has been conducted. The objective is to identify the structural conditions within the policy subsystem that foster an agenda of integrated, adaptive, and participatory water management, particularly one that advances environmental water policies. The approach to this policy network analysis centers on the characteristics of the community of actors, encompassing both public and private entities, associated with the key public issues related to water management in the Pánuco River Basin from 2012 to 2022. Additionally, it examines the nature of interactions, whether cooperative or conflictual, among these actors. Methodologically, the analysis employs policy network analysis using secondary sources of information, primarily official documents and newspaper sources. The information obtained was processed using Gephi software. The results reveal a highly centralized policy network, dominated by federal authorities and state governments, with identified conflicts on various issues. This configuration shapes the network as a system of asymmetrical dominance and negotiation, presenting a significant impediment to a shift in orientation in the basin's water policy. The presence of conflicts and the centralization of decision-making that hinder greater actor participation in policy design and operational instruments are discussed. The discussion emphasizes the necessity to promote an inclusive and participatory structure that fosters collaboration to advance towards sustainable and equitable water management in the Pánuco River Basin.

Embedded Evidence Review: a methodology to understand the ‘wicked problem’ of digital, cultural and social policy

Susan Oman (University of Sheffield)

This paper presents findings from my two-year placement in the UK Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS 2022-24) as digital responsibility unexpectedly leaves DCMS (2023). UK cultural policy is managed as social policy (Gray 2009; Oman 2021). Digital policy-making has been conceptually linked to cultural policy since 1998 (DCMS 1998). However, policy documents and administrative changes (e.g. DCMS & BIS 2009; DCMS 2018) see digital being coupled and decoupled from cultural policy.

The placement investigated ‘digital’ across a portfolio of social and technical responsibilities for a department, with the (ostensibly competing) aims of “driving growth, enriching lives, promoting Britain to the world”. Digital innovations through COVID-19 adaptations formed the basis for commissioning my placement (DCMS 2021; DCMS 2023, p46). Digital was posed as a default solution to other crises, including the cost of living, fuel and sustainability crises, the slower impacts of Brexit (ibid) and central disinvestment,

without accommodating the social and technical crises of digital exclusion (House of Lords 2023).

These contradictions and crises were ideal to observe ‘the terms of policy debate’ in the context of wicked problems (Head 2022, pp. 61-62). Embedded research (ER) strengthens the relations between evidence and policy (Cheetham 2018). I undertook an ‘embedded evidence review’ (ERR) of digital policy whilst embedded in (DCMS) and its sectors (arts and culture), with access to evidence in the following categories: in the public domain; government sensitive; evidence in production; unpublished stakeholder evidence; perceptions of evidence and what had worked.

This paper presents findings from a UK ERR case, as an ‘in-the-round’ approach to evidence, improving knowledge of the wicked problems of digital policy, and of policy evidence in and of itself. It argues that were wicked problems better recognised in UK policy practice, digital policy-making and the role of evidence could be more impactful.

References

Cheetham, M. et. al. (2018). Embedded research: a promising way to create evidence-informed impact in public health? Journal of Public Health, 40(1). pp.64-70.

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DCMS (2018) Culture is Digital https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital

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Problem definition in the agenda setting process for the decriminalization of abortion in Central America: a very wicked problem

Jeraldine del Cid Castro (FLACSO México)

Gloria Del Castillo (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Sede México)

This article is set in the perspective of public policy studies and is based on the importance of defining the public problem, considering it a crucial process for finding effective solutions. The proper definition of a public problem is fundamental for the formulation of policies that address issues competing for the attention of decision-makers in the public sphere.

Some problems are so complex (wicked problems) that there is no consensus on their definition among the actors involved in the process. One prominent issue is the issue of abortion, which has been addressed in different ways in different States. Legislation varies, ranging from legalization, to decriminalization in certain circumstances, to total prohibition in some contexts.

This article focuses on a few Central American countries where there is a significant lag in decriminalization. It examines how the definition of the public problem of abortion by those who promote policies or reforms can determine whether the demand for decriminalization is successful or not. It analyzes the various definitions of abortion in these countries, both in the policy structure (polity) and in the actors involved in the construction of the agenda (politics).

A content analysis is applied to identify key discursive codes in the definition of the public problem of abortion. This technical and political approach to the definition of the problem offers a comprehensive view of how the abortion issue is addressed in the Central American context and how it influences public policy.

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Session 2Environment and Climate Change

Wednesday, June 26th 14:00 to 17:15 (AULA 3)

Discussants

Alex Caldera-Ortega (Universidad de Guanajuato)

Joan Munoz (Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po))

The challenge of policy action for wicked problems: Unraveling the conditions of backlash to climate policy in OECD countries

Ksenia Anisimova (Utrecht University)

Climate change presents a quintessential example of a wicked problem, necessitating ambitious and accelerated climate policy. However, the implementation of such policies, particularly 'hard' policies imposing costs and sanctions, pose the risk of triggering policy backlash. From the perspective of wicked problems, these policies are “subject to real-world constraints” (Rittel and Weber, 1973) which in turn, might condition policy backlash. But despite growing concern about backlash, there remains limited understanding of when it does or does not occur. Therefore, this paper seeks to unravel the conditions under which policy backlash occurs.

We adopt an innovative methodological design bringing together the richness of qualitative data with medium-N comparative analysis by conducting a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) of a systematic sample of 30 national-scale hard climate policies in OECD countries from 2009-2022. Building on recent calls to re-embrace the qualitative essence of fsQCA, we interpretively draw on multiple in-depth data sources including over 50 structured interviews with national policymakers in the cases, policy documents, media analysis, and existing quantitative data. We systematically analyze a comprehensive deductively-derived set of possible explanatory conditions spanning both policy design and policy context. Findings suggest that policy stringency, implementation approach, and equity within policy design, along with political polarization, economic vulnerability, and societal inequality in the broader policy context, seem to be associated with backlash.

Overall, this paper makes three significant contributions to understanding the politics of climate policy action. First, it provides insights into the drivers of volatile reactions in wicked climate policymaking extending beyond design-focused considerations to encompass the broader policy context, which is lacking to date. Second, an original data-rich fsQCA provides a novel comparative perspective on policy backlash beyond existing small-N case studies. Third, it helps improve policymaking practices by accounting for critical drivers of contestation in climate policy.

(Virtual) Exploring the Wicked Problems in a Multilevel Context: The Case of Green Transition in Italy

PAOLA COLETTI (Università degli Studi di Bergamo)

Policy issues are characterized by a composite character of the problem. The concept of “Wicked Problems” has gained significance across various fields (Head, 2022; Peters, 2017; Peters and Hoornbeek , 2005). Public decision-makers cope with "wicked or intractable" problems, often tied to historical periods, contexts

and available knowledge. These reflections are articulated in the works of Rittel and Weber [1973] who emphasize the need to address "wicked problems", those that are difficult or impossible to solve due to being indefinable or insoluble or lacking a single solution.

One of the sectors that can present emerging problems is the environmental policy, marked by complexity, uncertainty, and novelty.

The paper aims to address the following questions: How can we define a “wicked problem” in a multilevel context? Does the multilevel context and the competing competences of authorities- influence the definition and resolution of wicked problems?

The paper will investigate an empirical case study providing lessons learned from applying the analytical lenses of wicked problems. Considering the European Green, designed to tackle the green transition through strategic leverage at the EU level, the paper will examine the Italian case by analysing the National Plan for the Green Transition in order to explain the contextual factors and the different implementation patterns. Particularly, the paper will focus on improving air quality as the “wicked problem” to be inquired, detecting the strategies employed to address them. The paper will trace the case by means of semi-structured interviews, media and document analysis.

Governance puzzle: struggles to fit the disaster risk reduction and climate change frameworks at the local level

Jesús Robles Chávez (Universidad Panamericana)

Wicked problems have been studied from different public policy perspectives (Rittel and Webber, 1973) during the last 50 years. Their study has been fundamental to the understanding of how policy regimes have overlapping topics. Two policy regimes have been promoted in the past 8 years in a parallel way, without enough interaction of their practices and study. Disaster Risk Reduction policies and Climate Change policies, which in practice involve similar actions, have their framework, language, and treaties in the international and academic community. This research asks: **how can local governments adapt their policies to the international framework of risk reduction and climate change?** The research argues that **the lack of dialogue between the international guidelines increases the wickedness behind climate change and disaster policies at the local level.** Through legal and policy analysis of the international, national, and local policies in Mexico, it is shown that the deep disconnection between them makes it difficult to address concrete solutions and responses to hydrometeorological hazards. As theoretical research, the droughts in Zacatecas, México, are used as **an example of how the miscommunication between frameworks contributes to increasing the wickedness of isolated policies**. It was found how droughts, which have been a constant hazard with 1967 municipal declarations during 2000 and 2023, from which 108 were from Zacatecas, are addressed as isolated and random phenomena instead of being understood as a result of socio-environmental processes. Framed in the literature as both disasters and a consequence of climate change, droughts are partially treated from both types of policies in Zacatecas, without a holistic approach considering the local capabilities and vulnerabilities of the community. This case provides evidence of how the wickedness of public problems could lead to disarticulated frameworks that just perpetuate their causes**.**

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Session 3Social Policies and Human Rights

Thursday, June 27th 09:00 to 12:15 (AULA 3)

Discussants

Jeraldine del Cid Castro (FLACSO México)

Nikita Pandey (Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay)

The human rights-based approach in public policy: A supporting tool for addressing wicked problems

María Guadalupe Imormino De Haro (Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila)

The human rights-based approach in public policy: A supporting tool for addressing wicked problems

Research question: Can the human rights approach be used as a public policy tool to understand better and address wicked problems?

The research is based on the premise that one factor that influences the correspondence of public policies with the requirements of contemporary society is their development in a polycontextual and polycentric environment. That is to say, in scenarios that favour their openness to different social contexts and the intervention of diverse actors.

Given the above, an analytical-synthetic study was carried out involving the human rights approach variable—related to the polycontextualism and polycentrism of public action— and the public policy variable—related to the technique according to which public action is systematically developed—. The analytical part of the research was carried out by examining the leading academic, legal and political documents linked to the origin, concept, development and practice of the human rights and public policy approach variables. Subsequently, the synthetic part of the research was carried *out* by articulating both variables in a structure related to the incidence of the human rights approach in the public policy cycle.

Based on the above, a methodology was designed to calculate the human rights approach of the entire public policy cycle or some of its phase(s) by selecting a set of elements of the indicator system and applying a mathematical algorithm created for this purpose.

*If my proposal is accepted, my participation will be in person.

Methods for Studying Wicked Public Policy Problems in the Context of Homelessness: A Case Study in Mexico

Fausto Amador-Cid (FLACSO Mexico)

Recognizing the growing significance of wicked problems in public policy, I delve into the intricate ways homelessness is socially constructed and framed within Mexico's specific public policy context. Homelessness is widely acknowledged as a wicked problem due to its multifaceted nature and the absence

of straightforward solutions. This study focuses on Mexico, where homelessness presents a complex societal challenge. One significant knowledge gap lies in understanding the social construction of target populations, especially individuals experiencing homelessness, within the broader context of wicked public policy problems. To address this gap, this paper presents innovative methodological approaches and interdisciplinary strategies. I explore the inherent challenges of defining wicked problems, emphasizing the characteristics that distinguish them within public policy. This discussion clarifies what makes a problem "wicked" in this context. Furthermore, I discuss the methodological approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, as well as the use of mixed-method designs, applied to analyze the complexity and dynamics of wicked problems. Through this research, I highlight the pivotal role of social narratives in shaping the identities and experiences of homeless populations within public policy. By studying homelessness as a wicked problem through the lens of social construction, I contribute valuable insights to inform more effective and empathetic policy responses in Mexico.

Assessing Learning Outcomes and improving the Quality of Basic Education: the Mexican case

Cesar Guerrero-Arellano (FLACSO Mexico)

Throughout most of Mexico’s participation in the OECD’s PISA test (every three years between 2000 and 2018), mean performance remained stable in reading, mathematics and science. Nevertheless, the OECD acknowledged that there were hidden positive trends: at the same time the matriculation improved significantly, the lowest-achieving students shrank their gap in mathematics and science with the highest-achieving students.

Even though the learning outcomes of basic education students is a strong indicator of the quality of an educational system, assessing them through national and international surveys is no guarantee that educational authorities will use its results to enhance public policies or that, if they do, they can claim a clear link between the evidence of an improvement and previous policy decisions. Why is this so?

In this paper I argue that addressing the quality of education is a typical wicked problem that additionally poses specific dimensions of uncertainty for decision-makers. My case will be based on the examination of the Mexican policy process on the use of foreign and domestic assessments to inform policy decisions to improve the quality of basic education. I will make use of secondary sources and of semi-structured interviews to former authorities and high level bureaucrats to document these difficulties.

My research will comprise three presidential terms (2000-2006, 2006-2012 and 2012-2018) from two different political parties (PAN, 2000-2012 and PRI, 2012-2008). These three governments implemented policies to improve the quality of basic education, but they did so through different approaches, varying from an inherited Program, a political agreement with the teacher’s union, new laws and programs, and a Constitutional reform.

The main contribution of this paper is to demonstrate that there is no clear causal link between today’s policy-decisions, its implementation tomorrow and the evidence of an improvement (or not) on learning outcomes to be measured later by learning assessments. The political context as well as the students implied by previous decisions on policy will have changed by then.

Religious Freedom Expansion as a Wicked Problem: A Comparative Public Policy Approach

Camila Sanchez (FLACSO Mexico)

The main objective of this article is to explore the expansion of religious freedom as a "wicked problem" through a public policy approach. To achieve this, I employ a qualitative methodology that integrates elements of grounded theory by conducting an analysis of public policy documents on religious freedom in Mexico and Colombia from 1990 to 2023. A key insight I have discovered is the intricate nature of the expansion of religious freedom, that, since its inception as a public issue, there is no well-defined public problem. In addition, I have observed that programs and interventions aimed at addressing this issue are inherently diffuse in both countries. Moreover, I have identified moments of policy change and counter-transfer within the process of expanding religious freedom, highlighting the interplay between social demands originating in the religious sector and the politicization of this right in the context of electoral processes. In sum, my research sheds light on the complexity of the expansion of religious freedom, while underscoring the importance of considering its political and social dimensions in the public policy arena in Mexico and Colombia.

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Session 4Public Health

Thursday, June 27th 14:00 to 17:15 (AULA 3)

Discussants

María Guadalupe Imormino De Haro (Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila)

Cesar Guerrero-Arellano (FLACSO Mexico)

“Elder Care Policy as a Wicked Problem: An Intersectional Approach to Understanding Policies for Older Persons

Raul Pacheco-Vega (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) Mexico)

As populations age, the design and implementation of public policies aimed at tackling challenges faced by older persons become even more relevant and acutely necessary. However, there is still a gap in our understanding of the multiple intersecting difficulties that people face as they age. In this paper I use an intersectional lens to examine contemporary eldercare policies. I undertake a comparative analysis of policy instruments for older persons’ care in two Mexican cities. Using a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, I examine how different subnational governments frame the care of older persons and whether the policy instruments they have implemented can be considered truly intersectional. I argue that a wicked problems lens combined with an intersectional approach can shed light on the potential solutions to this policy issue.

Unveiling the Invisible Pandemic: Adolescent Depression in Mexico as a Wicked Problem in Public Health

Everardo Chiapa (Tecnológico de Monterrey / Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo)

Alma Reyes (Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla)

Depression in Mexico represents a complex public health challenge, characterized by its elusive nature and far-reaching consequences. This paper explores the prevalence, risk factors, and implications of adolescent depression, emphasizing its classification as a wicked problem in public health, for which there is no consensus on their nature, their possible solutions, or the values and principles that should guide their improvement (Head, 2022). Despite being a leading cause of disability globally (Moreno-Gordillo et al., 2019), the intangibility of its root causes and the societal stigma surrounding mental health have contributed to its invisibility within public policy and healthcare systems.

The study highlights the interaction between sociostructural factors and adolescent depression, revealing how limited resources and educational opportunities render individuals more susceptible to experiencing episodes of sadness or depression. In this sense, the paper aims to answer the question of how the interrelation of various societal factors impacts Mexican adolescents' mental health. For this purpose, some data from the National Health and Nutrition Survey and a Correspondence Analysis are used, emphasizing the need for a deep understanding of the underlying causes of depression to develop effective interventions and policies.

The paper points out the urgency of addressing adolescent depression as a wicked problem, transcending traditional linear theoretical approaches to public health challenges. It becomes apparent that simply addressing the symptoms or consequences of depression is insufficient. Instead, a holistic and

multidimensional approach is essential for developing comprehensive and sustainable interventions that prioritize the well-being of the younger generation.

By analyzing data on mortality from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, the study also draws attention to the alarming increase in suicide rates among adolescents in Mexico over the past decade, as a response to hopelessness and meaninglessness in life (Case & Deaton, 2020). It also highlights the critical need for a paradigm shift in addressing mental health issues. By reframing the discourse around mental health as a public problem and acknowledging the dense web of factors contributing to adolescent depression, policymakers and healthcare professionals can work towards developing innovative and collaborative solutions that emphasize the importance of primary care policies.

References

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(Virtual) Is attaining Universal Health Coverage a wicked problem in India?

Nikita Pandey (Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay)

The discussion on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and health financing to achieve UHC took pace with the 64th World Health Assembly (WHA) held in 2011, which had health financing as an effective plan. Anchoring the resolution of access to healthcare services without financial hardships of previous WHA resolutions and Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,24 the 64th Assembly appealed to all the signatories to provide universal coverage and access to health on the principles of equity and solidarity. Invoking these principles of equity and solidarity helps recognize the wicked nature of the problem to be addressed by UHC. Equitable access to healthcare services without getting pushed into poverty is not simply dependent on the availability of services. Thereby unleashing the various levels of factors influencing health inequities like socio-economic differences, gender biases, and complex epidemiological and demographic patterns, making it impossible for the health systems to come up with a 'one size fits all' solution in eradicating inequities and achieving UHC.

The concept of Universal Health Coverage, as defined by the High-Level Expert Group in India, entails both protection from financial hardship and addressing social inequities in access to health. Given the vast diversity in the demographics of India and various healthcare needs, we attempt to view Universal Health Coverage as a wicked problem. A wicked problem occurs due to the existence of an underlying problem and discrepancies in its representation. The path of Universal Health Coverage in India entails ten central pillars under which policymakers must address the web of problems. We argue that the characteristics defining a wicked problem make Universal Health Coverage arduous for policymakers. And that the path to achieving Universal Health Coverage cannot be a straight one with a government-funded health insurance scheme. In this article, we argue that attaining Universal Health Coverage due to its multifaceted aspects is a wicked problem for the government. We specifically discuss whether the health financing and infrastructure attempts by the Indian government are the solution to the wicked problem of attaining Universal Health Coverage. We begin by briefly describing the path followed by India after independence towards Universal Health Coverage. We then discuss the distinctive features that make any problem wicked vis-à-vis the pillars of Universal Health Coverage as described by the High-Level Expert Group in India and discuss their wickedness aspects. This perspective article intends to draw the attention of the policymakers and relevant stakeholders to view achieving Universal Health Coverage beyond the scope of offering means-tested financial protection.

This article fits in with the first research question of the workshop, focusing on the challenges to define a wicked problem. Universal Health Coverage is viewed significantly differently across health systems, from being a guiding principle to being treated like a goal to achieve. However, in a health system like India, with vast geographic and demographic variations, achieving Universal Health Coverage uncovers a web of underlying problems. The lack of literature that views UHC as a wicked problem has encouraged us to explore the possibility of it being wicked to solve.

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Session 5Natural Resource Management

Friday, June 28th 09:00 to 12:15 (AULA 3)

Discussants

Jesús Robles Chávez (Universidad Panamericana)

PAOLA COLETTI (Università degli Studi di Bergamo)

(Virtual) Wicked problems in sustainable management of marine and coastal zone resources

Harini Santhanam (Manipal University)

Pranab Patar (Global Foundation for Advancement of Environment & Human Wellness)

Wicked problems in the sustainable management of marine and coastal zone resources are intricately related to societal processes. They are produced largely by a combination of three major factors - 1. lack of data, poor or misrepresented data on the statuses of marine natural resources management, 2. the complexity of public responses to governance, and 3. absence of practically useful frameworks for local versus national governance of the sensitive zones. Wicked problems are largely associated with mismanagement of fisheries, unsustainable practices associated with eco-sensitive areas like mangroves, seagrass systems reefs or atolls, etc., and local misgovernance without identifying with the community-level socio-technical constraints. In a sea of wicked problems, the challenging endeavors of policymaking rely on avoiding the impacts on both the shores and the deep seas.

With dense population concentrated in coastal areas, growing human dependency on coastal ecosystem services, issues related to climate change, habitat alteration, urbanization and disasters in coastal zones around the world have put the spotlight on identifying and resolving wicked problems. These are critical assessments at the frontier of debates involving human development versus sustainable development. The first pre-requisite to positive capacity building towards resilience and adaptation is the resolution of the wicked problems to some extent, that may otherwise complicate key functionalities of governance - strategy making, organizational design, people management, and performance measurement (e.g. Head and Alford, 2015; Administration and Society) in non-traditional and nature-based sectors. The major objective of the present investigation is to understand the existence, type, and nature of wicked problems in the marine and coastal environmental sector from the perspective of the Global North and the Global South countries. The general objectives with special relevance to the marine and coastal zones are:

1. To explore the existence of unique wicked problems in the sector

2. To describe the nature, intensity, and magnitudes of those wicked problems

3. To determine framework setting goals that will alleviate the impacts of wicked problems exclusive to the sector.

(Virtual) Powerless local government ? Discussing local food governance’s challenges in the face of climate change in the Breede valley (Western Cape province, South Africa)

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The Breede Valley within the Cape Winelands district municipality (Western Cape province, South Africa) is renowned for its fast specialization in export-oriented fruit production since South the country's transition to democracy in 1994. Over a couple of decades, the region has transformed into a booming agricultural place (for table grape production and deciduous fruits), tightly integrated to global value chains, with a high water footprint, while attracting a massive influx of workers seeking jobs in the industry.
South Africa however is a water-scarce country, periodically dealing with prolonged episodes of drought. Climate change is predicted to worsen these semi-arid conditions. At the same time, the Breede Valley exhibits alarming levels of poverty which prompted the municipality to roll out programs of food security and climate change adaptation. Against such backdrop, this paper questions how local government might be able to deal with such challenges in order to promote sustainable local food systems. Indeed, there has been a dense literature advocating food re-localization going all the way back to the 1990-2000s, amidst criticisms against agricultural industrialization (Kloppenburg et al., 2000), up until today where a territorial approach in food planning and policy is supported in the academic literature as a way to foster food systems' resilience and adaptation to changes and effective risk management (Losch & May, 2023). In addition, literature on climate change governance tends to designate the local level as the most suitable one for the sake of adaptation (Henstra, 2019).

We would like to discuss local level's capabilities in governing food systems, particularly in a context of increasing climate variability. In particular, we raise the question of the local governments' capabilities in terms of means of action (either human, financial, legal mandate, expertise etc) as well as in terms of political influence more generally. Indeed, despite a general call for local governments to step in and contribute to managing upcoming crises through various policy initiatives (community gardens amongst others), we will emphasize both the local agency but also the many limitations faced by local public actors in promoting just and sustainable food transitions owing to adverse global dynamics and national level policy side-effects. Using neo-institutionalism as well as a multi-scale politics' theoretical framework, we will mention in particular path dependence explanations in the case of water management policy, the influence of global market price and standards dictating crop selection and production (instead of natural resources availability) as well as the paradoxical effects of a series of regulatory changes intended to protect labor rights, that actually prompted a movement of resorting to seasonal workers with more precarious living conditions. Overall, indeed, there seems to be a growing mismatch between local food regimes and broader scales' directives. From a methodological viewpoint, we will rely on data collected during a field work conducted in the Breede Valley Municipality in April 2023 where we interviewed over 30 key informants.

The Social Impact of Water Resource Preservation Policies: Limitations and Prospects of Eco-Solidarity Water Policies

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The current and projected increase in water rates in a framework promoting water sobriety necessitates the establishment of compensatory measures by suppliers to ensure the availability of service for low-income households connected to water networks. In this perspective, a social water policy is implemented in France through direct aid systems - such as the water check, aid to manage debts, etc. - or preferential, even free, pricing systems for volumes of water considered essential. In this communication, we will revisit the genesis of this social water policy to examine the effectiveness of these systems in light of the real problems of access to drinking water and sanitation services for low-income households. The thesis defended in this work is that the social water policy in France was designed as a policy serving water operators - to avoid unpaid bills - rather than as a policy based on the real problems of precarious households in their access to water. This eco-solidarity policy needs to be reviewed in order to be a real lever of socio-environmental justice.