

T08P08 / Climate Change and Democratic Policymaking: A Critical Policy Studies Roundtable

Topic : T08 / Policy Discourse and Critical Policy Research

Chair : Frank Fischer (Humboldt University in Berlin)

Second Chair : Leong Ching (Institute of Water Policy, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Can contemporary democratic governments tackle climate crisis? Some say that democracy has to be a central part of a policy strategy to deal with climate change. Others say that it is not up to the challenge in the time frame available—that it will require a stronger hand, even a form of eco-authoritarianism. A question that does not lend itself to easy answers, it is the issue we seek to sort out and assess in these pages. While most of us come down on the side of an environmentally-oriented democracy, establishing and sustaining its practices will not take place under the existing arrangements of a capitalist dominated democratic state and its politics, described as the politics of unsustainability. Democratic governance during climate crisis, it can be argued, will have to invent a new way forward.

The situation we find ourselves in—“the start of a global climate emergency”—presses for serious attention . At the same time that we carry on with our regular activities, in particular those of uncontrolled consumerism, climate change and its worrisome impacts are regularly reported to be getting worse and faster than was expected. We are, in short, running out of time left to make the kinds of changes needed to avert a very serious climate crisis, even potential catastrophe. Even if talk of catastrophe turn out to be exaggerated, climate change can still result in serious upheavals leading to various state of emergencies. Without doubt, measures will be introduced to deal with pressing emergencies— heat, flooding, hunger, migration, civil violence and more. Still, under such circumstances, it is far from certain that contemporary political systems, including democratic political systems, will be able to adequately cope with these pressures.

We are thus approaching a stage of climate change in which the democratic prospects for the future look increasingly troublesome. Given the failures of governments to rise to the challenge so far, Lester Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute, has suggested that we need a “Plan B.” What that might look like poses a powerful challenge for the policy perspective. A question that presses for attention, this roundtable discussion seeks to assess the democratic policy prospects under the conditions of the climate crisis ahead.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This roundtable discussion seeks to address the implications of the climate change crisis for the future of democratic governance, the democratic policymaking process in particular. It does this in the context of an increasing eco-authoritarian challenge often advance through a state of war analogy and the need for swift and dramatic action. Others say that democracy has already failed to adequately confront this ominous threat. The panel includes questions such as ‘what does democracy mean in this context’, ‘what is its relationship to sustainability’, what sorts of ‘participatory alternatives do we have to explore?’, ‘what sorts of experimentation might be helpful?’ among others.

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Session 1

Thursday, June 29th 10:30 to 12:30 (Li Ka Shing LKS 1 - 1)

Discussants

Leong Ching (Institute of Water Policy, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore)

Democracy, Expertise, and Climate Change

Makoto Usami (Kyoto University)

Climate change presents an enormous challenge to democratic policymaking in economically advanced societies, which are large emitters of greenhouse gases (GHGs), in two ways. On one hand, its adverse impacts on humanity will be particularly serious in the South, while many citizens in the North pay scant moral attention to the well-being of populations in the South. On the other hand, because of the time gap between GHG emissions and negative impact occurrences, these impacts will predictably become intensified to distant future generations, whereas most citizens do not concern about the remote future. Taking the spatial and temporal myopia of the general public as a point of departure, this paper explores two issues surrounding the process of democratic policymaking in a developed country.

The first concerns models of the democratic policy process. In the orthodox model, great varieties of interests and values among citizens are collected and added through the processes of election and legislation and are eventually transformed into a set of public policies. Call this the aggregate model. I seek to illustrate how the aggregate model occasionally fails in the context of climate change policy, with reference to recent cases. Then, I propose the dialogical model, in which the government and citizens carry on a critical dialogue through the processes of policymaking, election and other forms of political participation, and even constitutional litigation.

The second issue is what role experts can play in policy processes. In many industrialized societies, natural and social scientists get involved in the enactment process of mitigation and adaptation policies, providing legislators and administrators with specialized knowledge on the impact and influence of climate change and on the cost and effectiveness of climate policy. However, it has been an unexplored question how experts, including psychologists and educators, can help policymakers to develop policy tools which broaden citizens' vision. I examine this question in the contexts of school education and ordinary public services.

Scott Valentine

Scott Valentine (LKY School of Public Policy)

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Maarten Hajer

Maarten HAJER (Utrecht University)

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Jennifer Curtin

Jennifer Curtin (University of Auckland)

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