

# T08P02 / Postmodern Strategies for Enhanced Environmental Policymaking

**Topic :** T08 / Policy Discourse and Critical Policy Research

**Chair :** Scott Valentine (LKY School of Public Policy)

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Much of the existing literature on discursive politics centers on understanding the underlying ideologies, values and motives that impact worldviews and subsequently influence stakeholder behaviour. Far less research has extended this avenue of inquiry to the design of strategies to harness divergent views for enhanced policymaking. In environmental governance this is of applied exigence, as we collectively endeavour to realign resource usage for more sustainable results.

The objectives of this panel theme are to:

1. Encourage the extension of discursive insights to applied strategies for policymaking.
2. Encourage discussion of applied viability of discursive theory across contexts.
3. Explore the links between postmodern theory and network theory.
4. Share applied insights and consider how experiences can feed into theory development.

This type of research benefits greatly from broad thematic treatment as this panel theme represents because conflating theoretical perspectives and connecting cross-disciplinary researchers from the social sciences will help spur innovation in theory development.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

In environmental policy fields, we are witnessing the emergence of amplifying polarization between factions of stakeholders. Yet, given the complexities of most public policy challenges, discourse is essential for ensuring a policy process that is inclusive, comprehensive and holistic. Failure to achieve this engenders solutions that give rise to new problems and new ideological conflicts. Postmodern narratives within this thematic area center on the challenges of engendering shared understanding and negotiated compromise through discourse. Within this context, the aim within this panel theme is to enhance understanding of postmodern principles and explore strategies for creating sustainable policy informed by multi-stakeholder input. Papers centering on the nexus between policymaking and social constructivism, discourse analysis, policy narratives, advocacy coalitions or network collaboration are sought in areas related to energy policy, water policy, collaborative environmental projects, resource conservation policy etc.

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## Session 1 Shaping Minds and Public Perception

Wednesday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (Manasseh Meyer MM 2 - 3)

### Discussants

Frank Fischer (Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany)

### Challenging the Discourse of Magical Thinking and Individual Responsibility in Environmental Policymaking

Michael Maniates (Yale-NUS College)

Since the mid-1980s, a narrative of individual responsibility for environmental ills, propagated in large part by the ascendancy of green consumption, has deeply insinuated itself into popular and institutional understandings of sustainability. In this familiar, ubiquitous narrative, one demonstrates true commitment to progressive environmental policymaking by adopting important markers of a green lifestyle, and by encouraging others to do the same. This magical thinking – that deeply structural problems are easily rectified via the aggregation of spontaneous acts of environmental goodwill – abounds. The result, as this paper documents, is a deepening narrative of guilt coupled with a perverse sort of identity politics largely unfamiliar to dominant environmental discourses of the 1960s and 70s.

Theologian and environmentalist Martin Palmer gets it right when he notes that “environmentalists have stolen fear, guilt and sin from religion, but they have left behind celebration, hope and redemption.” This penumbra of guilt and personal culpability, accelerated and institutionalized within dominant forms of environmental policymaking described in the paper, fuels a micro-politics inimical to the varieties of multi-stakeholder engagement and conversation of concern to this panel. It produces and reinforces, especially in the domains of food production, mobility, waste disposal, and sustainable consumption, a deliberative frame that unproductively privileges an “ABC” approach (attitude-behavior-context) to multi-stakeholder engagement. This paper analyses these dynamics from historical and political-economic vantage points, and ends with an assessment of more promising narrative trajectories rooted in celebration, hope and redemption.

The paper builds on previously published work, including “Make Way for Hope: A Contrarian View,” Nicholson and Jinnah, eds., *New Earth Politics: Essays from the Anthropocene* (MIT Press 2016) and survey research around the narrative of guilt nearing completion.

### Shaping Perceptions, Winning Hearts: Japan’s Strategic Construction of Nuclear Power Support

Scott Valentine (LKY School of Public Policy)

This paper centers on a chronological study of the development of Japan’s nuclear power program. It documents how the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan systematically insulated the nuclear power regime from civic and political scrutiny before embarking on a campaign that eventually reversed public opinion – from 70% opposed to nuclear power to 70% in favor. Japan’s nuclear power development story speaks to the effectiveness of stakeholder management in designing public policy. It contributes to post-modern literature in tying stakeholder management to marketing theory. It is also a highly salient topic in today’s energy sector as there is evidence that this strategy is once again in play in Japan and might be effectively used in other nations to prepare citizens for energy mix transitions.

## **Is Renewable energy still a green issue? Renewable energy visions in an ecological modernisation age**

Giorel Curran (Griffith University)

Greens have long cherished a renewable energy future. Addressing climate change was a key motivation. But for many Greens, the renewables' vision was also about more than this. It was driven by a set of values and goals that motivated them as much as climate mitigation. These included visions of decentralisation, stronger communities, anti-hierarchical arrangements and enhanced autonomy. But, over the ensuing decades, the effort to expand the appeal of a renewable energy future beyond a small green cohort, saw – especially in the context of an emergent neo-liberalism – the adoption of an ecological modernisation frame by many greens, even if reluctantly at times. While this proved successful, it risked compromising the scope and character of the renewables' vision. Today, renewable energy is championed as much by business as it is by environmentalists, and has become a pragmatic and commercial option attractive to a much broader range of actors. This includes large scale, highly centralised and corporatised renewable energy projects, often funded by large energy corporations, and mirroring the commercial character of their fossil fuel counterparts. These forms are increasingly driving the contemporary renewables' enterprise. But there is also considerable grassroots activity – often overshadowed by these larger enterprises – in the form of smaller scale projects generated by environmental and community actors driven by different sets of values. At a broad public level, renewable energy is usually viewed as a homogeneous project with shared objectives – particularly climate change mitigation. However, the range of projects and actors emerging in this new energy space suggests otherwise. This paper seeks to shed light on what is in reality a diverse and multifaceted renewable energy terrain that conceptualises the 'green' character of renewable energy very differently. It does so by first examining how mainstream ecological modernisation has (re)shaped the renewable energy project today, and the kinds of renewables' enterprises that have emerged in its wake. Second, it considers the efforts by grassroots actors to create projects that incorporate goals and values beyond a narrower ecological modernisation remit.

## **Climate (in)action: public attitudes and problems of persuasion in New Zealand**

Skilling Peter (Auckland University of Technology)

Despite New Zealand's active participation in multilateral climate change negotiations, and despite the economic benefit the country derives from its clean-green brand, domestic policy action has been muted and minimal. Between 1990 and 2010, New Zealand's net emissions increased by sixty percent, the second largest increase amongst developed countries (UNFCCC, 2012). This relative inaction has been supported by ambivalence in public opinion: a 2014 survey (Leining & White, 2015) showed that less than half of New Zealanders are 'certain that climate change is really happening', and only 41% believe that climate change is likely to negatively affect New Zealand.

The looming crises associated with climate change and a robust scientific consensus have thus been met with an inadequate policy response and public scepticism. Policy inaction has been publicly justified with reference to the collective action problem: it is said that New Zealand should not take steps that would place the country at a disadvantage relative to its economic competitors (Boston, 2011). Given the political economy barriers that have limited policy responses to those consistent with the over-arching goal of state-level economic competitiveness, it may seem tempting to eschew democratic politics in favour of a technocratic response. Assuming that a legitimate and stable response requires democratic and deliberative engagement, this paper begins with an analysis of the psychological barriers that stop the public from accepting the need for meaningful action (Gifford, 2011; Bandura, 2007; Jost & Major, 2001). These barriers mean that climate change argumentation takes place on a discursive playing field that is far from level.

This paper asks how civil society groups in New Zealand seek to overcome these psychological barriers as they seek to persuade people to accept and support a robust response to climate change. To analyse and evaluate the strategies of groups committed to meaningful climate action, it conducts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of their public statements (including parliamentary speeches, press releases and media interviews.) The focus of the analysis is on how these acts of persuasion are designed to overcome well-established psychological barriers, in a discursive context dominated by the neoliberal emphasis on promoting the economic competitiveness of individuals, firms and the national economy (Brown, 2015).

Having analysed the argumentative strategies of key advocacy groups, and their capacity to function effectively as acts of persuasion, the paper considers the limitations inherent in most public arguments for a more robust response. It shows how these groups typically call – at least initially – for a domestic policy response, thus reinforcing the zero-sum 'competition-state' (Cerny, 1997) mentality that has been a major impediment to global emissions reduction. The paper concludes by outlining an agenda for effective and collaborative climate change communication that is designed to engage with structural and psychological barriers.

## References

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