

INTERPRETIVE POLICY ANALYSIS CONFERENCE 2021

Panel Title:

P10 - Transformative Space: action research, innovative practice and system change

Panel Conveners:

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This panel builds on ongoing discussions in Interpretive Policy Analysis about its transformative ambitions. At the heart of the field are philosophical foundations that challenge mainstream policy analysis and a normative and interventionist programme to criticise and change situations of social injustice and inequality towards greater democracy and sustainability. In need for sustainable responses to the complex policy problems, IPA had to face criticisms of its limited transformative impact.

This panel seeks to contribute to the (conceptual and practical) work done by many IPA scholars that capitalizes on action research, coproduction and related approaches for collaborating with policy actors in co-producing knowledge and change to further the discussion on fundamental societal transformation. Scholars seeking to develop action research designs from within the IPA tradition can draw from a rich collection of approaches and experiences. Action research, for instance, enables IPA to explicate habitual practices, create space outside the status quo, generate evidence to support change, fuel shared imaginaries, and mobilise critical reflexivity. However, a fundamental question raised by this body of work, and associated conceptual and heuristic frameworks, is how research that is inherently limited in terms of time and place – that is, action research that plays out in concrete, local setting which involve a dedicated set of stakeholders – can contribute to generating transformative change on a systems level.

Transformations require attention to the spaces in which the purpose, relationships and boundaries of hegemonic systems are determined and governed. Transitions toward democratic and sustainable systems require both practical and institutional innovation, new kinds of social interaction, and social spaces in which meaningful and purposeful relationships can develop. In other words, it is both a matter of creating space *for* transformation as of sustaining spaces *of* transformation in

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interaction with actors and institutions. This panel invites papers on the design of emergent transformative spaces and on how these relate to the 'system writ large' to which transformative dynamics it seeks to contribute, by explicating:

- How should we conceptualise and inspire transformative space: how can alternative space be created, who is in- and excluded and how is its governance performed?
- How is the relation between the transformative space and the wider system conceptualised and acted upon?
- What roles does the IPA researcher adopt in 'linking' the dedicated transformative space and wider system dynamics?
- How can interpretation reveal ways in which hegemonic spaces of business-as-usual are sustained? How can 'critical' approaches to policy go beyond critical reconstruction and address 'meta-changes'?
- What conceptual synergies could be created between a practice perspective and a systems perspective? How do transition studies envisage space for transformative change?
- How can the relational turn (especially the way in which it re-imagines the binary categories between human and non-human) be incorporated into action research practices, and what implications does this have for transformative spaces?