

# INTERPRETIVE POLICY ANALYSIS CONFERENCE 2021

**Panel Title:**

*P15 - New Paradigms in Urban Policy? Exploring Interpretive Approaches to Policy Change in Controversial Urban Policy Fields*

**Panel Convenors:**

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Controversies and conflicts around established policy rationales have led in recent years to significant redefinitions of policy rationales and agendas in many European cities. This appears to be the case in sensitive urban policy fields such as e.g. tourism, social infrastructure, public health, public goods and service provision, mobility, creative industries, and urban ecology. The ensuing dynamics appear as a promising subject for theoretically-informed inquiry into potentials for change in urban public.

The issue entails 'classic' questions concerning the role and interplay of exogenous 'shock' factors and endogenous 'strategic' and/or 'reflexive' capacities in bringing forward transformative policy responses. On the one hand, emergent anomalies in dominant/hegemonic policy orientations express contradictions which shake assumptions of a 'working consensus', highlighting their liability to controversy and conflict. On the other hand, policy contestations tie in with emergent instances of crisis, highlighting conditions of uncertainty and undecidability. Under such conditions, pressure for change is apparent, but avenues and outcomes of change anything but obvious. Classic institutionalist or structuralist approaches to the analysis of urban politics address important factors, but cannot provide an adequate *explanans* for policy change. In line with new-institutionalist and interpretivist approaches to policy analysis, we contend that ideas and – more generally – the ideational dimension of policy-making plays a crucial role in fostering change, and bears a significant heuristic value in inquiring into endogenous modes of change.

This panel explores tensions, potentials and resistances for change in a variety of fields of urban policy. This offers an opportunity not only to contribute rich empirical accounts to critical urban studies, but also to engage in theoretical debates on the nature, factors and mechanisms of *policy change*.

Moving from Hall's understanding of *policy paradigms* – intended as symbolic-cognitive and interpretive frameworks by which policy-makers act, involving ontological and normative assumptions that construct the nature of policy problems (Hall 1993: 279) – the panel engages in current debates on policy change (e.g.: Baumgartner 2013, 2014; Blyth 2013; Hogan and Howlett 2015) and to extend the exploration, more generally, to the potential contribution of interpretive policy analysis to exploring the ideational and constructivist dimensions of policy change in the urban context.

Rather than as a dogmatic reference – taken either as *explanans* or as *explanandum* – the concept of policy paradigms can thus serve as a theoretical device for structuring the analytical field of investigation and for exploring further possible explanatory contributions. This involves in particular

other conceptions of foundational or 'actionable' ideas brought forward by a range of interpretivist approaches in the social sciences that put the role of ideas, frames, narratives and discourses in constructing and in enacting meaning at the centre of analysis (e.g.: Blyth 2002; Hay 2002, 2008; Skogstad and Schmidt 2011). The panel welcomes papers that address the above debates and explore how far these approaches may contribute to enriching research designs and to defining research programmes on the relations between urban crises, urban conflicts, and potentials for policy change.

### References:

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