

INTERPRETIVE POLICY ANALYSIS CONFERENCE 2021

Panel Title:

P21 - The informal practices of making policy (work)

Panel Convenors:

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Abstract

Public policy actors spend considerable time writing policy, advising politicians, eliciting stakeholder views on policy concerns, commissioning evaluations, and implementing various initiatives. Yet, they also spend their working days enmeshed in informal practices that unfold through informal spaces. They 'hang out' chatting at the coffee machine, discuss developments in the hallway walking from one meeting to another. They have informal discussions before formal meetings, or share a drink afterwards to make sense of what has happened in formal negotiations (Stubbs 2015). Even during formal policymaking practices, policymaker's engage in tacit, unnoticed or unspoken work entailed in the sensory and aesthetic, through materials, bodily movements or voice (Gherardi 2019). Although important work has drawn our attention to the informal in policy work (Bevir and Rhodes 2003; Colebatch 2014; Lindblom 1959; Metze 2010; Yanow 1996), there have been limited empirical studies exploring how and why the informal actually matters in policy.

Phenomena like informality, in its complexity and ambiguity, is rarely addressed in mainstream, objectivist or legal-rationalist accounts (Sedlačko 2017). More recent work has brought human and non-human agency back in, thinking that breaks from the hegemony of discourse, problematises notions of agency as more-than-human, and embraces the materiality of practices; suggesting that the work of policy is actively made or assembled and remade by reflexive subjects, hence the informal matters (Law and Singleton 2014). Given this we are interested in exploring the possibilities of process, practice or sociomaterial approaches, and how they might be applied to this phenomena (Cappellaro 2016; Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Gherardi 2016; Nicolini 2012; Sedlačko 2018; Wagenaar 2004).

Through the phenomena of the informal this panel tempts researchers to re-imagine, re-think and re-shape knowledge about the doings of policy actors, with papers that explore the importance of this obscured dimension in policy work.

Papers might explore the following (but are not restricted to) areas:

- Creative discretion (formal authority and decision making versus informal discretion)
- Cultures/traditions/conventions and their influence on policy work

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- Alternative narratives to authoritative choice models of policy making, looking instead at more dynamic processes such as argumentation, deliberative policy analysis, structured interaction and the social construction of policy making
- Informal mechanisms of policy input (e.g. deliberative governance, elements of collaborative leadership)
- The interplay between formal/informal knowledge in policy (e.g. scientific/professional knowledge versus lay/common knowledge)