

INTERPRETIVE POLICY ANALYSIS CONFERENCE 2021

Panel Title:

P5 - How policy conflicts develop: interpretation and action in policymaking

Panel Convenors:

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Panel theme

Policy studies mostly treat conflict as something to be avoided or resolved. Conflict is studied indirectly either as a driver of protest mobilization, competing values, or other political activities, or treated as a context for other phenomena. The inner workings of conflict in policymaking receive less attention

The panel wants to make two contributions. First, we analyze policy conflict as it develops in interactions among participants in the conflict. A focus on interactions entails a focus on language as a communicative practice. Language is used to contest values, perceptions, beliefs and interests of participants. Positions are shaped and reshaped through framing, story telling, and categorization. During a conflict, expectations of consequences are brought into focus. Participants are prompted to reflect on their interests and on what they view as appropriate goals. In this process they continuously evaluate what range of action is possible and desirable. In order to analyze conflict, we need to understand these processes of sensemaking and strategic action that play out in contentious interactions.

Our second contribution is the focus on the practices of policy conflict in which policies are felt, needs and interests are articulated, and possibilities are explored. Perceptions become historical features as participants in conflicts act on them. As actions become history, potential traps for escalation are created, but so too are opportunities for learning and change via reflection and improvisation.

Relevance to the field of IPA

We need to understand the deeply political nature of policy conflicts better. Policy conflicts are driven by difference and ambiguity. In a conflict, everyone is reading the situation (including the motives and likely actions of others) and making projections about what is about to happen. Politics is not a factor influencing a conflict from outside. Political preferences of policies are constitutive of and constituted through struggles between proponents and opponents of policies. Conflict is a core practice in

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contemporary governance which needs to be studied in the domain of action through an interpretive approach.

Call for papers

In this panel we want to address some overarching questions such as: How can we conceive of policy conflicts from an interpretive perspective? What are the dynamics of policy conflicts? How can we normatively assess if and how policy conflicts contribute to democracy? We envisage a broad range of topics such as: agentic and interpretive perspectives on the dynamics of policy conflicts, how actors draw on institutions, 'knowledge wars' between actors, the role of procedural justice claims, the role of emotions, and relations between policy conflicts, democracy and governance.

We invite empirical papers as well as more conceptual papers that help us to explore and reinterpret the inner workings of policy conflicts in new and fruitful ways. We strive for inclusion of papers from as many countries as possible and from scholars in different stages of their career.