

New Directions for Policy Studies

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Policy Studies is a long-standing journal concerned with public policy and governance. Like the real world that it studies, the journal itself has undergone many changes since it was launched. This short editorial traces these footsteps and those to come under the new editorial team.

The Evolution of Policy Studies

Bringing the power of academic thought to improve real world problem was part of the founding focus of Policy Studies. The journal was launched in 1980 at the Policy Studies Institute at the University of Westminster under the editorship of Sir Charles Carter. The journal was started to 'make a serious contribution to the formation of policy in social, economic and political fields' (Carter 1988). The editorial board team consisted of W.W. Daniel, Robert Hutchison, Robert Morgan and Eileen Reid (Carter 1988). The journal would include papers from prominent British politicians from the time including Sir Geoffrey Howe and Shirley Williams. From the start, the journal was therefore closely linked to practice and attempts to improve real-world policy.

The journal became internationalised. Peter Willmott took over as editor in 1988. He was followed by Tim Newburn of the Policy Studies Institute, alongside Susan McRae of Oxford Brooks University, and the journal covered topics including foreign media ownership, multilateral trade agreements, judicial reform in Latin America and transatlantic urban policy. The process of internationalisation was vastly accelerated by Professor Mark Evans. In his editorial as incoming editor in 2004, he argued that the 'world of public policy has become an increasingly small one as a consequence of dramatic changes to global political and economic institutional structures and to nation-states themselves' (Evans 2004). He sought to highlight new themes which will inform the development of the journal over the next three years, which would be his editorship. These included:

- the external 'hollowing out' of state organisations in response to globalisation
- internal 'hollowing out' in forms of privatisation
- the role of new technology in changing the nature of work and providing new ways to deliver public services.
- The 'multi-cultural' character of liberal democracies posing challenges for public administrators
- The policy agenda becoming internationalised

Professor Evans served as editor for seventeen years not three. During this time, the journal's reputation also became global, as it published peer-reviewed journal articles from authors around the world. It has set the agenda with special issues on topics such as policy transfer (Evans 2009), new forms of political participation (Marsh and Akram 2015), presidential politics (Fenwick, Burges, and Power 2017), populism (Bang and Marsh 2018), deliberative policy analysis 2.0 (Bartels, Wagenaar, and Li 2020), policy advisory systems (Howlett 2019), voting practices (James and Garnett 2020) and the political economy of data (Prainsack 2020). The study of policy therefore owes much gratitude to Mark, his colleagues such as David Marsh and Brendan McCaffrie, the editorial board and Lorna Evans who have led the journal during this time.

Policy Studies Going Forward:

Where next? All of the themes identified by Professor Evans in 2004 remain ever present transformations that the journal will consider, as they mutate and take different forms. The journal will focus on three broad questions:

Emerging and wicked policy problems

The world has no less policy problems today, than it did in 1980 when the journal was first launched. The 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals were set out by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. These set out goals which were described as being of critical importance for humanity and the planet. The goals flagged problems including poverty and hunger, environmental degradation, the threat of war and violence, gender inequality, disempowerment, the absence of water and sanitation, disease and more (United Nations 2015).

Global, national and local policy problems have mutated and reshaped even in the short time since those goals were set. The year 2020 alone saw the covid-19 pandemic, global protests against institutional racism following the death of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, wildfires in Australia illustrating the pressing nature of climate change, devastating floods in Indonesia, communal riots in Delhi and concerns about democratic backsliding in both established and consolidating democracies.

These problems have knock-on social, political and economic effects. A key role for the journal is to therefore identify new policy problems, transformations in the nature of existing problems, as well as their knock-on consequences and solutions.

Designing policy implementation

Identifying 'what works' to solve policy problems are not just tasks for pharmaceutical scientists, environmental scientists and computer scientists. There is a role for social scientists, often through inter-disciplinary work to identify ways to design and deliver policy solutions. Policies from above are not automatically implemented on the ground – they require mechanisms to bring about their delivery, which can involve negotiation, and changes to those policies. The hollowing out of states and focus on privatisation and state-retrenchment have been in vogue for several decades. But alternative mechanisms for designing and delivering policy now include collaborative governance, digital era governance, deliberative systems, localism and more. Identifying effective policy delivery instruments and 'what works' is therefore a key role for the journal.

Power and governance

Who gets to say what is a 'problem' and what is not? Policy making and implementation strategies take place within governance structures. These structures can make policy problems difficult to be detected, they can act as veto points, meaning that some issues never reach formal political agendas. These power structures can be institutional, material or ideational. They are commonly gendered in nature, may privilege different groups, social classes or ethnic groups – or issues.

One major transformation since 2004 has been democratic backsliding, which means that democratic governance can no longer be taken for granted. Depoliticised governance took hold in many countries – but there have now been many cases of national retrenchment to 'take back control' in response to populist forces. There have been new transformations to governance from technology, with the rise of social media providing opportunities to spread fake news. Studying power, political institutions, leaders, civil society groups and the power relations between them are therefore a central concern for the journal.

Methodological rigour, pluralism and diversity

Policy problems can also be found in academia. One concern that is often raised is the privileging of some kinds of knowledge and research methods over others (Goertz and Mahoney 2012; Monroe 2005; Sultana 2020). There is no single methodological approach that can address the questions set out above and so a pluralism of approaches are encouraged. Policy studies need articles that provide qualitative evidence, quantitative evidence, mixed methods, philosophical argumentation, conceptual development and more. What articles will have in common is they will advance the existing knowledge and are assessed through peer review.

There are also commonly concerns raised about opportunity, gender imbalances and other inequalities within the academy (Briscoe-Palmer and Mattocks 2020; Norris 2020). A key goal for the journal is therefore to contribute towards building of opportunities for early career scholars and the tackling of these inequalities.

Thank you to colleagues who have become members of the new editorial team who will help to take the journal forward to meet these challenges. Thank you to the reader for the article and special issue proposals, and importantly, the reviewers, for helping address these challenges too.

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