INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP – CALL FOR PAPERS

Theoretical cross-fertilization of the Advocacy Coalition Framework

The Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain-Europe of the Université catholique de Louvain organizes an international workshop on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The aim of this workshop is to contribute to the theoretical cross-fertilization and development of the ACF through the presentation and discussion of high-quality research papers, as well as their consideration for a publication project.

THE NEED FOR THEORETICAL CROSS-FERTILIZATION IN THE ACF

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) conceptualizes the policy process as a political struggle among coalitions of policy actors involved in a given policy subsystem. Within coalitions, policy actors use their resources and coordinate their political activity in order to impose a shared system of policy beliefs to other advocacy coalitions. Their opportunities to do so depend on relatively stable parameters and external shocks at the level of the political system (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014).

The ACF is a conceptual and analytical platform for three main theories: a theory of policy learning, a theory of advocacy coalitions, and a theory of policy change (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014; Weible et al., 2011). At its most general level, policy learning may be defined as adjusting understandings and beliefs related to public policy (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). Policy learning theorists aim at analyzing why and how policy actors learn. ACF researchers are interested in the impacts of policy learning on policy change, but also in its intermediate outcomes, such as developing shared understandings and mutual agreements or transforming relationships among parties to a conflict (Leach et al., 2014).

Advocacy coalitions are composed of actors from various public and private organizations who share a set of normative and causal policy beliefs and who show a nontrivial degree of coordination to implement their common policy objectives over time (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Coalition theorists address questions such as: how do coalitions emerge? How do coalition members coordinate their activity? How do they learn from each other? How do coalitions interact with each other? What is the nature and efficacy of their strategies to change policies according to their beliefs? Etc.

Policy change can be defined as “fluctuations in the dominant belief systems (i.e., those incorporated into public policy)”, within a policy subsystem (Sabatier, 1988, p. 158). ACF researchers look at a diversity of theoretical mechanisms in order to explain policy change, including coalition activity, policy learning, the effects of external/internal shocks, the turnover in policy personnel, etc (e.g., Fischer, 2014).
Over the years, the need of theoretical cross-fertilization to develop ACF theories of learning, coalitions, and change has become more evident. For example, psychological insights seem obvious to our understanding of policy learning and policy change. Despite the importance of these insights in the assumptions of the initial versions of the ACF, their actual mobilization in the development of this theory has become popular only recently. Psychological heuristics help understand why policy learning and its consistency are rather limited (e.g., Moyson, 2017). The study of network dynamics, in turn, help understand why, despite limitations in learning, policies do change after all, as a result of social relations (Henry, 2011; Riche et al., 2017). Recent calls for considering the role of emotions, in policymaking, have also emerged (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2017). Finally, the logic of psychological biases is helpful to further our understanding of cross-coalitions relations (e.g., Fisher et al. 2016; Leach & Sabatier, 2005). Until now, ACF researchers have traditionally focused their attention on explaining why policies change: Metz et al. (2017) use the literature on policy designs, diffusion, and outcomes to assess the desirability of such policy changes. According to the ACF, the most useful unit of analysis to look at policy processes is the policy subsystem. This argument was one of the most remarkable innovations of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993). However, a result is that the rich knowledge from organization sciences, including public management, has been underexploited, whereas they have much to say about learning, collective action, and change (e.g., how individuals and organizations and related to each other). Cross-fertilization of the ACF with other policy process theories, such as the narrative policy framework (e.g., Shanahan et al., 2011), is also a promising avenue for future research. Overall, the theoretical cross-fertilization of the ACF is a promising avenue for future ACF research: it should be encouraged.

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

We call for papers contributing to the development of an ACF theory – policy learning, advocacy coalitions, or policy change – through theoretical cross-fertilization. Cross-fertilization may involve original insights from other policy process theories, but also from other human, social or natural sciences. The choice of methods is free, as long as they are strong and very transparently reported. The papers may be conceptual or empirical, as long as they contribute the theoretical cross-fertilization of the ACF. **Paper proposals of maximum 500 words are expected by November 2017, 20th and should be sent to stephane.moyson@uclouvain.be.** Proposals will be selected by the scientific committee by November 2017, 30th.

We offer an exceptional opportunity, in Europe, to present and discuss ACF papers. This workshop will lead to a publication project if the quality of the papers allows it.

1 Calls for theoretical cross-fertilization are not specific to the ACF but, rather, common to all policy process theories. Similar calls have been made in the leading volumes on policy process research (e.g., Cairney, 2012; Weible & Sabatier, 2014). In the same vein, see also the recent panel on ‘Theory and Evidence for Cross-Fertilization of Policy Process Theories’, held at the last General Conference 2017 of the European Consortium for Political Research (Oslo, Norway).
**PRACTICALITIES**

Where?

Ateliers des Fucam  
2 Rue des Soeurs Noires  
7000 Mons, Belgium

When?

Two half-days:  
February 26th 2.00-6.30pm  
February 27th 9.30am-2.00pm

How?

Participation is free and includes the dinner on February 26th. We do not cover the other costs.

Key contact

For any question: stephane.moyson@uclouvain.be

**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE**

Local co-organizer – Dr. Stéphane Moyson is an Assistant Professor of public policy & public administration at the Université catholique de Louvain. His publications focusing on policy cognition, learning, and change centrally rely on the advocacy coalition framework.  
http://www.uclouvain.be/stephane.moyson

Local co-organizer – Dr. David Aubin is an Associate Professor of political science at the Université catholique de Louvain where he teaches policy analysis and evaluation. His research activities concern the comparative analysis of environmental policies, multi-level regulation of network industries, and the policy work of public officials.  
http://www.uclouvain.be/david.aubin

Dr. Manuel Fischer is a Group Leader at the Department of Environmental Social Sciences at Eawag (Swiss Aquatic Science) and a Lecturer at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Bern, Switzerland. He works on innovative ways to understand governance networks, institutions and processes in environmental policy.  
http://www.eawag.ch/en/aboutus/portrait/organisation/staff/profile/manuel-fischer

Dr. Tanya Heikkila is a Professor and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and the School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado Denver. She also co-directs the Workshop on Policy Process Research and does research on conflict and collaboration around natural resources.  
http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/SPA/FacultyStaff/Faculty/pages/TanyaHeikkila.aspx

Dr. Christopher Weible is a Professor at the School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado Denver. His research focuses on advancing theories of policy processes.  
http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/SPA/FacultyStaff/Faculty/pages/ChristopherWeible.aspx
REFERENCES


