



## Editorial: Special Issue on Decision Processes in Policy Design

Policy Design is an activity undertaken by groups of public policy actors aiming to support better societal development outcomes through the development of a policy plan for action. Policy design links policy problem framing and policy response. It is "a ubiquitous, necessary but difficult step in any policy [development] cycle" (Bobrow, 2006). Policy design influences the eventual allocation of public and private resources. The process of policy design is also a process of decisions that involves elicitation and consideration of objectives, options, and preferences, eventually favouring the realization of some future outcomes over others. Yet despite this entangled nature of Policy Design and its decision processes, their study lacks integrative treatment.

This special issue is a reaction to several limitations that we as editors perceived to characterise contemporary engagement with Decision Processes in Policy Design. We observed that their study is typically fragmented and often only loosely connected. Their theorization lags recent developments in practice. The cumulative contribution of empirical studies towards a cross-disciplinary understanding of Policy Design remains modest. The majority of formal methodologies used to support the decision processes in Policy Design were not originally conceived for it (Pluchinotta et al., 2019), yet the implications of this little explored. Few of the frameworks and methodologies used by researchers and practitioners adequately reflect the complexities navigated in practice, as too often still, they rely on linear, retrospective and dehumanized representations of policy design decisions – when in practice policy design and decisions comprise messy, non-linear, political, value-driven, anticipatory and innovative experiences.

Contemporary Policy Design makes increasing use of new types of contribution by experts, non-governmental actors, and the public. Its practices necessitate reconciliation of differing viewpoints and rationales with conflicting objectives and values within a collaborative decision-making process. Situated within contexts often characterised by constrained resources, imperfect knowledge, distributed and unequal control, and the impossibility of certainty, 21st Century Policy Design is therefore a complex domain of messy decision practices (Tsoukiàs et al., 2013).

As two Operational Researchers working at the interface of policy design research and practice, we felt that better understanding Policy Design needs more explicit exchange with progress in decision processes scholarship. We believe that without more access to intentional fora for cross-disciplinary exchange, it will remain very challenging to see what contributions are made, where and by whom. To complicate this agenda of greater cross-disciplinary exchange even further, we also recognise that for each of policy design and decision processes domains, constitutive work is distributed across even more disciplinary siloes again often only loosely connected. For example, the disciplinary fields of

political sciences, economics, environmental disciplines, decision analysis and operational research, design sciences, and public administration each have own history of studying decision processes, with distinct epistemologies and knowledge contributions. Each field has developed frameworks and methodologies that could be used to explore decision processes in Policy Design. At risk of labouring our agenda, these contributions need to be brought together more explicitly to foster interdisciplinary learning and advancement.

Considering the Operational Research (OR) community's founding ethos for bridging research and practice and given its strong historical roots in public policy design, we considered the European Journal of Decision Processes as a fitting space to showcase current work across some of these disciplinary fields. The objective of this special issue was to bring together typically disconnected researcher communities. The featured papers demonstrate the richness and diversity of approaches that result from this, hopefully stimulating curiosity and new ideas to eventually lead to, new and transformative policy design research and practices.

From the political sciences, Cairney (2021) examines how the discipline frames and treats policy design. He argues that the meaning of policy design in political sciences is typically translated using either terms of functional requirements, or those of techniques of policy design. He suggests that political and policy theories can in turn be used to either inform theories of design at the service of policy analysis, or as sources of cautionary tales.

Leong and Howlett (2022) contribute new concepts from the field of policy studies. They propose a conceptualisation of "inherent vices" of policy design – design attributes that increase policy volatility and risks of failure. They make an exciting connection with OR by arguing that more widespread use of Soft OR techniques to mitigate these inherent vices is likely to result in policy designs more likely to succeed in the real world.

Similarly, Zhou et al. (2022) advance the integration of policy design and OR. They draw on applied research within built environment policy. Their analysis uses Systems Thinking to not only inform the substantive content of a London housing policy, but uniquely also to elucidate the ways that different temporalities generate decision-making tensions within a policy design process.

Braiki et al. (2022) similarly contribute applied research, focusing on the participatory nature of policy design processes. Within a complex rural water management context in Tunisia, they evaluate how large-scale participation in policy design leads to proposals that align diverse priorities and results in more innovative and collective policy design.

Finally, authors with previous contributions to OR scholarship on

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policy design, propose a new optimisation technique to navigate tensions between policy objectives and aid decisions in policy design. Fayard et al. (2022) propose a multi-objective mathematical framework measuring individual's welfare, clustering citizens into groups with similar capabilities. They argue this optimisation technique could be used to define targets for policies aiming to improve the welfare on different, well-identified social groups.

Working on this Special Issue leaves us excited about future policy design and decision processes research. We hope that further interaction and debate will emerge from the cross-connections between the authors in this Special Issue, as well as more widely the various disciplinary communities that they participate in.

To conclude, we sincerely thank the authors for their valuable contributions, and their willingness to participate in this Special Issue project. We also warmly thank the many anonymous reviewers for their careful, timely and constructive feedback. We thank the editors Vincent Mousseau and Jutta Geldermann for their friendly support throughout. We also thank EURO for their support for ensuring gold open access to the papers in this issue. We are highly mindful that much innovation in policy design practice is driven by those with little access to peer-reviewed research. Finally, we encourage the readers of EJDP to engage in activities that support more sustainable and inclusive approaches to the study and practice of policy design.

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