

Abstract 500 words

Policy instruments in a changing world: how and why do people select and combine policy tools?

Studies on policy instruments recently moved from a theoretical debate when definitions and classifications were prominently discussed to an emerging phase where tools are observed in action. In this perspective, recent publications focused on the problem of selection and combination of instruments across policy sectors, often privileging their connection to policy designs or focusing on the governance modes behind them.

Looking at empirical evidence, the nature and the role of policy instruments has been increasingly problematized by scholars focusing on the 'contexts of use' and the ideational background that policy makers attribute to the selection and the combination of instruments. Empirical research in turn displayed the changing nature of policy instruments. The analysis of 'innovative' combinations in a limited number of policy sectors (i.e. particularly in environmental policies, as well as urban policies, education, public sector reforms and/or economic development) showed how policy instruments loosed their original ideological and predetermined nature (e.g. State vs. market) and turned into hybrids. As a consequence, decision makers are increasingly used to pick up and assemble different tools, or set of tools, combining them into heterogeneous policy mixes. These tool-kits are often induced from innovative external forces and institutional frames.

Some reasons for a similar reshuffling can be detected at institutional, political, economic and technological realm. For instance, the EU directives and supra national standards encouraged policy transfer and the importation of innovative tools to be adjusted to domestic needs. At the same time, the economic globalization pressurized national decision makers to comply with specific standards through the adoption of specific patterns or set of tools to be selected and combined according to aims and capacities. Also the political climate usually endorsed some fashionable instruments and influenced decision makers to adopt certain instruments in place of others encouraging diversification and hybrid mixes. Finally, technological innovation provided decision makers with new challenging instruments to be adopted in order to look modern and adequate. All in all, contemporary times increasingly stressed decision makers to invent or readjust mixes of instruments to solve problems in search of legitimacy and consensus.

The panel aims at collecting experiences and researches in instruments' selection and their combination in a changing world. Contributions aimed at describing innovative, heterogeneous or hybrid combinations of policy tools in different policy sectors. In particular, the panel addresses those papers displaying transformations and reshuffling of policy instruments when decision makers have been pressurized from economic environment (e.g. austerity) or institutional design or Europeanization framework. At the same time, papers on the role of ideational background in policy making as well as on policy innovation and technological change involving a paradigm shift in instrument or instrument selection are welcome. All these aspects can be displayed at international, national or subnational level or may concern specific policy sectors or a comparison among sectors or countries.