

## eMA Conference

*The implementation gap:*

*translating policy and strategy into practice*



### Overview

Students and alumni from Austria, Bhutan, Cayman Islands, Egypt, France, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Nigeria, Uganda, UK and USA joined the online Masters staff team and four invited speakers at the University of York for the 2011 annual eMA conference. This year's theme was The Implementation Gap: translating policy and strategy into practice.

During the conference the participants worked in 2 smaller groups to address the following related themes:

- Overcrowding of prisons and penal policy
- Overfishing and International Fisheries Policy

### The Conference Speakers

**Dr John Hudson** Theorising policy implementation in a non-linear world

**Enrico Reuter** Policy-making and social relations: Arguments for a sociological perspective on policy analysis

**Nick Clifford** Modernising Public Services: Metropolitan Local Government

**Delia Paul** The role of stakeholder participation in policy implementation: the Mekong River Commission

Further details of the speakers' presentations are given overleaf.

## The Conference Working Groups

### The relationship between policy development and implementation

The two groups considered the problems of Prison Overcrowding and Fisheries Policy.

The Prison group considered the problem of prison overcrowding, a problem common to many nation states of all political ideologies globally. The ensuing discussion revealed some strongly held views within the group, informed by a complex combination of tradition, a sense of individual and social justice, concern for victims and practicalities.

The fisheries group addressed the issue of overfishing and the depopulation of global fish stocks which provoked a healthy and robust debate as the group sought to define the policy problem and broad policy aims and key objectives'

The Prison group explored the problem through an analysis of why overcrowding is seen as being a potential problem, through the lenses of people, purpose and process. Possible solutions were therefore framed by this analysis. In exploring people, the Prison group conducted a stakeholder analysis using Iles and Sutherland's power/interest matrix, which indicated that prisoners and the public have least power and interest whilst professionals and media have most.

In the subsequent sessions the groups divided themselves into two sub-groups, policy makers and implementers, and it was as a result of this split that the dynamics of the process were clearly revealed. Half of the group focusing on the policy problem and what might be done about it. However, this was conducted in quite splendid isolation from the implementation group and little in the observed conversations indicated that taking a more rounded view of the process as a whole would result. As an interested onlooker, it was fascinating to witness many of those all too often seen traits found in policy maker/policy delivery scenarios emerge, despite there being just a wall between the sub-groups.



The Panel, receiving group work presentations on Saturday morning

The key difference in the Fisheries group was that the implementation group were both interested and concerned with how the problem was being redefined and solutions arrived at by the policy group. The implementation group nominated a go-between in order to seek clarity and to raise the practical issues of policy implementation in order to circumvent possible barriers and so seek to influence the process of policy formulation.

Implementation in the Prison group was focused upon: establish a sense of urgency; engaging the key stakeholders; creating a coalition; ensure senior people and those who hold vital resources are included. Success would be measured through: offenders feeling better supported within the community; re-offending rates reduced; cost reductions; reduced capacity in prisons; prisoners left in own homes/jobs; population continue to feel safe and secure; and overall reduction in crime rates.

The division into two camps didn't prevent the groups coming together again to work up really good presentations for the Saturday morning, but it clearly highlighted issues with the policy process which were not fully resolved. So despite being given guidance which highlighted close working between subgroups, such co-operation came about as a result of clear consideration of the practicalities of putting policy into action by those charged with this task and not by those seeking to draw up policy.

And our conclusion was that as ever, policy development and implementation is complex.

## The Conference Speakers



**Dr John Hudson,  
The University of York, Head of Social Policy  
Theorising policy implementation in a non-linear world**

Dr Hudson's presentation focussed on the limitations of the policy cycle as a model of how policy develops and presented an alternative view by suggesting that the policy process is a 'complex adaptive system'. A CAS is similar to a network in that it starts with the premise that we live within complex networked systems but moves beyond network theory in that it suggests that while we can understand the individual elements in a network it is much harder to study the interaction between those elements. The relationships between the elements in a complex system can create a lot of unpredictability and unintended consequences and complexity theorists suggest that in order to understand complex systems we should try to analyse the outcomes of these interactions – outcomes that are described as 'emergent properties'.

If humans systems are that complex and unpredictable, what then are policy makers to do? If a CAS changes constantly in response to itself, what is the point of government? The complexity theorists don't have an answer and don't offer toolkits, but suggest that good policy making is about learning and one means of achieving this learning is a method originally borrowed from cybernetics called 'soft systems methodology'.

SSM starts out by mapping out who is involved in the CAS, explores the connections between the elements and thinks through the impacts if a change is introduced – what might the unintended consequences be? So one response is to suggest that the starting point is talking to stakeholders and treating them all with the same regard because CAS theory recognises that understanding the subjectivity of the stakeholders is important and what ultimately affects a CAS.

**Enrico Reuter  
Teaching Fellow, Department of Social Policy and Social Work,  
University of York**

### 'Policy-making and social relations: Arguments for a sociological perspective on policy analysis'

Enrico Reuter provided an overview on how social relations affect policy-making, arguing for the benefits of a sociological perspective on policy analysis, which could complement and enrich more traditional theories and concepts of the policy process.



To support this argument, he focused on three examples:

First, the presentation covered the question to what extent the policy process is open to all social groups by revisiting pluralist and elitist conceptions of policy-making, looking at the representativeness of elected governments and the impact of lobbying. Enrico concluded this part by introducing the often-used concept of 'post-democracy' and by stressing how strongly politics shape and determine policies.

In the second part, the topic of socio-economic change was discussed. Enrico summarised how the subjectivation and precarisation of wage-labour has changed the basis for social protection through the welfare state. He also questioned how these socio-economic transformations have been related to the emergence of activating labour market policies.

Finally, attention was drawn to the influence of perceptions, beliefs and values on policy-making. Using the example of social policy, Enrico underlined the relevance of social attitudes for the allocation of benefits and burdens.

To conclude his presentation, Enrico stressed again the benefits that can be gained for the understanding of public policy by not only analysing the political-administrative system or wider networks of governance, but by also acknowledging the relevance of 'external' social and economic factors.



**Nick Clifford**

**Senior Fellow, Manchester Business School**

**Modernising Public Services: Metropolitan Local Government**

Nick's talk drew on organisational change theory to explore the challenges of implementing transformational change within a large public sector organisation: an inner city local government authority in the UK. The programme was intended to achieve radical change in the way that the organisation worked, in response to substantial reductions in government funding, the socio-economic challenges of the area and a desire to be more responsive to citizens' needs. The changes were intended to produce a clearer focus on strategic issues, greater opportunities for 'talent' within the organisation to be put to work and a mechanism through which improvements could be taken forward. Nick spoke of the organisation moving from

'Model 1' change (doing things better and more efficiently within the existing paradigm) to 'Model 2' (transforming the way things were done through a paradigm shift).

The Council's approach was to develop learning 'trios', grouped into 'clusters' throughout the organisation. The thinking was that these clusters would constitute a 'learning zone' enable cross-cutting themes across the organisation to be addressed more easily, and making links between learning on the ground and across the whole council. They were to be small enough to allow space to learn, but large enough that their work couldn't be ignored. These plans emphasised the role of operational staff in generating ideas, the importance of allowing space for those ideas to flourish and the role of senior managers as sponsors.

Kotter and Schlesinger's eight-step framework for diagnosing change had proved helpful in diagnosing where this change process had got to, and helped identify that although there were many positives arising out of this programme of change, it had got 'stuck'. Some of the problems arising included the difficulty of persuading senior managers to shift to a 'Model 2' way of seeing things, the energy needed to sustain a transformational spirit, and the difficulty of generating a powerful enough coalition for change.

Alongside these difficulties useful lessons also emerged: the importance of sustaining a sense of urgency, the value of the learning zones as places for generating ideas and the role of intrapreneurs as people who understood the strategic context and could make things happen within the organisation. This work has also thrown light on the nature of transformational change and the need to 'crank' this process, using protected

**Delia Paul,  
Associate Tutor at York**

Delia presented experiences of stakeholder participation in policy implementation at the Mekong River Commission (MRC), a multilateral organisation of four Lower Mekong states: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam.



Drawing on previous work in corporate communications management at the MRC secretariat, as well as academic study undertaken as part of her Independent Study Project at York in 2007-08, she outlined competing and overlapping meanings of "participation", then going on to analyse the ways in which stakeholder participation posed certain conceptual and practical problems for the MRC.

Among the challenges discussed were: conflicting beliefs among stakeholders about the nature and purpose of development, mistrust and differing interpretations of the MRC's efforts at greater openness, and disproportionate influence of business interests in promoting particular development pathways, such as hydropower development.

Added to these were the classic environmental dilemmas of NIMBY ("not in my backyard") thinking, and the potential for tragedy-of-the-commons scenarios to degrade the Mekong fishery and its associated habitat.

She concluded with suggestions for how public managers might want to define and facilitate "good" participation in environmental decision making, suggesting that quality is found in the ways in which stakeholders use and modify institutional structures.

Her presentation was illustrated with photography from her recent picture book project, *The Living Mekong*, published by Silkworm Books and the University of Washington press in 2009.

## So....what do you think?

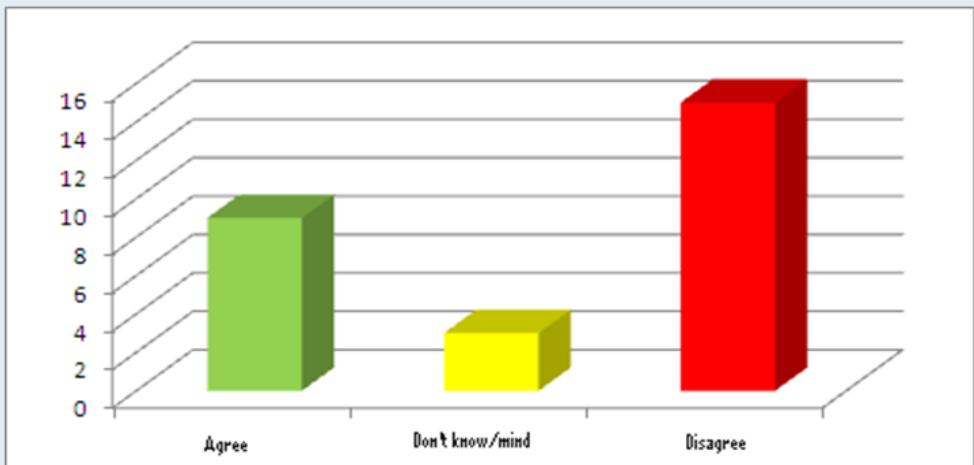
This year at conference we tried a new approach to getting your views on the programmes and asked you to come up with some statements about the programmes that others could either agree or disagree with. We were pleased to receive 11 statements in total!

We then arranged for the conference delegates to 'vote' on whether they agreed, disagreed or didn't know/had no opinion either way. We then entered the responses into a bar chart on the big screen so that delegates could see the results immediately.

We will be repeating the statements on Moodle soon so that ALL students can agree/disagree and then we will report back on the results!

Just to give you a taster, here is a screen shot from the vote on the statement:

**"I find it difficult to know whether the scope of my assignment is too narrow or too wide"**



### Time Out

As well as the formal proceedings the conference also included a brief tour of the campus, a visit to the local pub in Heslington Village and a meal in a restaurant in York where some Yorkshire produce was sampled and enjoyed.

The staff at York all look forward to next year's conference and to meeting our students there.

## In 2012...

### ...Social Policy in an Unequal World

**16th to 18th July**

In 2012 the eMA conference will be held in tandem with the Joint Annual Conference of the East Asian Social Policy Research Network (EASP) and the United Kingdom Social Policy Association (SPA).



Further details of the programme and speakers will be updated on the website: [www.social-policy.com/](http://www.social-policy.com/) and will be circulated to both students and alumni over the coming months.

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