Narratives for or against change: a Narrative Policy Framework perspective on policy debates in Moscow

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Introduction

• Actors use stories – or narratives – to communicate and decide about public policy

• Policy narratives have become increasingly important in public policy research because:
  – Policy debates are full of narratives
  – Narratives can influence policy decisions

• Development of the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) in recent years
Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)

- The NPF is a *theoretical* framework to explain the role of narratives in the policy process
- It provides guidance of how to *empirically* study narratives
- The NPF is a positivist, deductive, mostly quantitative approach.

Jones, Shanahan, McBeth, 2014; Shanahan, Jones, McBeth, Radaelli, 2018
Purpose and research questions

Purpose: Apply the NPF to salient policy debates in Moscow
• Waste management policy
• Housing renovation policy
• Transport policy

Research questions:
1. What policy narratives and narrative strategies are used?
2. How do narratives change over time?
3. Through what channels are policy narratives communicated?
The NPF as a theory

• Policy narratives have structural elements that may be generalizable across time and space: setting, characters (villains, heroes, victims), a plot, a moral of the story

• A policy narrative must feature at least one character and contain a reference to the public policy.
Policy Actors A have Policy Preference A

Policy Narratives Developed using some combination of narrative components to advocate for policy actors’ policy preference

Policy Actors B have Policy Preference B

Narrative Elements

Narrative Strategies

Policy Beliefs
Hypotheses of our project

Actors in favor of the official position will:
1. Focus narratives on solutions and heroes
2. Strategically use the angel shift
3. Contain the policy issue (diffuse benefits / concentrate costs)

Actors resisting the official position will
7. Focus their narrative on problems and victims
8. Strategically use the devil shift
9. Expand issues (concentrating benefits / diffusing costs)
Our empirical approach

• 3 single cases and comparative analysis across cases

• Methods: quantitative and qualitative content analysis of text

• Data:
  – Text on websites and social media
  – Speeches
  – Interviews
Our empirical approach

• Up to now, we have collected 3298 texts from websites and social media
• We now randomly select 600 to systematically code them
• We have developed a coding scheme that includes
  – Characters
  – Policy problems and solutions
  – Plots
  – Causal mechanisms
In a next step,

• we code the texts
• Analyze them quantitatively with descriptive statistics
• Will add a qualitative analysis