

Call for panels, workshops and papers

GOVERNING BY LOOKING BACK: HOW HISTORY MATTERS IN SOCIETY, POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

**First Annual Interdisciplinary Social Sciences Conference
Hosted by the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University
Canberra, 12-14 December 2007**

Much of the rhetoric in politics and government is about shaping the future. Yet their day-to-day realities are pervaded by coping with the past. The past impinges on political life in many respects. Many political regimes are founded on historical compromises between rival social forces. Others are built on histories of conflict, conquest and oppression which have a way of resurfacing in the present in the form of unresolved traumas and 'forgotten pasts'. More generally, political agendas are often preoccupied with long-standing social problems rather than by novel ones. Incumbent office-holders are constrained by the commitments entered into by their predecessors. Much of their energy goes to dealing with the unintended outcomes and public controversies generated by past government policies. This is reinforced by the way in which ever-expanding accountability mechanisms surrounding public power critically scrutinize past performance. At the same time, some public institutions struggle to retain their collective memory as frequent reorganizations have become the norm, 'changing the culture' is axiomatic, entire cohorts of veterans retire in droves, managers' tenures shorten, and general staff turnover soars.

Governing proceeds by 'looking back' as much as by 'looking forward'. The importance of the former is often underappreciated. In the early postwar decades the policy sciences focused on planning, scenarios and strategies. As the limits of this approach to governance have become clearer, the past has made a comeback. Scholarly attention has now shifted to governing by looking back. There has been an explosion of studies on collective memory, public accountability, policy evaluation and social learning.

This conference organized by the Research School of Social Sciences of the Australian National University taps into that trend. It draws on the new Thematic structure around which the School itself is organized. It brings together scholars from across the social sciences who study how societies and organizations remember, forget, frame and cope with the past in their efforts to govern themselves. Its aim is to foster academic and policy dialogue about how to assess and improve institutional capacities for remembering and learning from the past, in and beyond Australia. Key note speakers will include professor Kathleen Thelen (Northwestern University) on path dependency and professor Jeffrey Olick (University of Virginia) on the politics of memory.

We invite proposals for workshops (full-day, invitation only intensive sessions aimed at fostering collaborative research), paper sessions (public presentations and discussions of thematically linked papers), panel discussions (on current issues and controversies related to the conference theme), and individual paper proposals. An indicative, non-exhaustive list of possible topics includes:

- The politics of memory and national identity
- Learning from history wars;
- Evolutionary theories of society, economics, and politics
- Lesson-drawing and institutional learning
- The use and abuse of historical analogies in public deliberation and policy design;
- Processing problematic pasts: Inquiries, blame management and political conflict resolution
- Administrative traditions in an era of public sector innovation and reform
- Organizational creation, evolution and termination in the public sector
- Organizational forgetfulness and institutional amnesia in the public sector;
- Economic history, economics training and economic policy paradigms
- Path dependencies, policy stability and policy change
- State formation and welfare state transformation
- The audit explosion and the accountability industry
- Theory and practice of policy evaluation

A word on formats:

During this conference *workshops* are groups of 6-12 people who meet for 1,5 days, driven by papers and preferably bringing together people working on, or planning to work on, collaborative projects aimed at tangible academic products. The workshops are meant for participants only (though if an individual non-participant expresses a strong interest to 'sit in' and listen we should oblige him/her); the other conference participants will be encouraged to attend panel sessions and plenary sessions. We aim to have 4-8 workshops of this kind in parallel, preferably (but not exclusively) on topics echoing the 4 research themes of the School: Public Reasoning, Comparative Public Policy and Government, Social Cohesion and Well Being, and Productive Australia. Workshop organizers are free to plan the workshop sessions as they see fit, but: a. no workshop activities should be scheduled during key note / plenary events; b. a 'hard core' of 2-3 participants should do a public panel (1.5 hrs) session to show the flag to the wider community of conference participants.

Paper sessions are 90-minute sessions where 2-3 thematically linked papers are presented in 15 mins each, and then commented on by one or two discussants, followed by Q/A session with the audience.

Panel discussions are interactive sessions driven by current debates and controversies, both academic and societal ones, where the organizer acts a moderator of the panel which is composed of representatives of significant positions and/or stakeholders in the debate.

In addition there will be 2 or 3 plenary sessions driven by key note speeches.

Please take this format information into account when submitting your ideas and proposals.

Deadline for proposals: 31 March 2007. Please address all conference program correspondence to:

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