

## APPLICATION FORM FOR PROSPECTIVE WORKSHOP DIRECTORS

**Title of proposed workshop:**

Expecting the unpredictable? The strategic governance of long-term risks

**Subject area:**

Governance, political anticipation, policy networks

**Abstract**

The purpose of this workshop is to examine the theoretical and comparative perspectives of strategic governance in the context of long-term risks, such as the effects of climate change on various policy subsystems. A long-term perspective of risks relates to causal chains that stretch over decades and centuries so that these risks become normal and often go unnoticed until they lead to catastrophes. Most consequences of climate change, such as earlier spring planting of crops, higher prevalence of infectious diseases and enhanced risk of natural disasters, are already unavoidable or become unavoidable in the future. In this sense, the strategic dimension of governance relates to introducing mechanisms in order to expect and react to the unexpected inherent in long-term risks. Such mechanisms include anticipation and surveillance of potential risks as well as responding and adapting to identified risk scenarios.

This workshop intends to examine these issues through both theoretical and empirical papers. We are specifically interested in papers that pay attention to triggering events that open windows of opportunities for strategic planning as well as induce sequences in which adaptive measures are implemented. We would also like to invite scholars that focus on the role of science played in the policy networks and that explore the impact of scientific knowledge on realized strategies.

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## **Expecting the Unpredictable? The Strategic Governance of Long-term Risks**

### **Outline of the topic**

In the last two decades we are witnessing an accumulation of environmental changes that have the potential to lead to profound transformations of European societies. Climate changes and climate variations are said to strongly affect many natural and human systems. Global warming forecasts predict earlier spring planting of crops which affects agricultural management, higher heat-related mortality in Europe, higher prevalence of infectious diseases in some areas, and enhanced risk of natural disasters to mention just a few (IPCC 2007).

These phenomena have been summarized under notions such “creeping normalcy” (Diamond 2005), “slow-moving causal processes” (Pierson 2004) and “de-bounding of uncontrollable risks” (Beck 2002) pointing to the long-term perspective of risks in which causal chains stretch over decades and centuries so that these risks become normal and often go unnoticed until they lead to catastrophes.

In the previously mentioned cases, far-reaching consequences for the environment, economy and society have already been anticipated. These consequences of climate are already unavoidable or become unavoidable in the future. In this sense, strategic governance aims at the anticipation and surveillance of potential risks as well as responding and adapting to identified risk scenarios. Unlike German sociologist Ulrich Beck who considers any attempt to control or even anticipate future risks as fruitless and as in a way increasingly damaging side-products, we consider it necessary for societies and political systems to develop coordinated efforts to cope with uncertainties inherent in long-term risks. However, solutions to the underlying causes of long-term risks and creeping catastrophes are primarily confined to the global political sphere, while their consequences must also be tackled at the national and sub-national level as well. At this point the proposed workshop sets in. It aims at examining governance modi and adaptive measures that have been implemented to cope with anticipated consequences of climate change at the national and sub-national territorial level.

So far, very little has been done to draw scholarly attention to the key political science questions involved in the strategic governance of long-term risks. Strategic dimensions of governance arrangements have often gone unnoticed or have remained at a very abstract level.<sup>1</sup> We propose a very broad definition of “strategy”. For the purposes of this workshop, this broad aim can be translated into different dimensions and perspectives (Mintzberg 1987).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Meta-governance” provides a very abstract concept of strategic governance.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the absence of a genuine strategic perspective in governance theory we resort to concepts derived from strategic management literature.

The first dimension distinguishes between deliberate and emergent strategies. A **planned** strategy is “some sort of *consciously intended* course of action, a guideline (or a set of guidelines) to deal with a situation” (1987: 11). The planned strategy is set up purposefully and consciously before actions and measures are implemented. In contrast, a **pattern** may be called a strategy when there is “*consistency* in behaviour, *whether or not* intended” (Mintzberg 1987: 12). The realization of an intended course of action may depart from the original plan. However, it may also be called a strategy if the course of action is internally consistent. In our case, the pattern type of strategy often follows a particular sequence of actions set up by scandals or catastrophes involving high media coverage. We are specifically interested in triggering events that open windows of opportunities for strategic planning as well as induce sequences in which adaptive measures are implemented.

The second dimension distinguishes between different forms of coordination. A **positional** strategy denotes the embeddedness of an organization in its social environment. Mintzberg views the positional approach as a collective strategy, that is a “strategy pursued to promote cooperation between organizations” (Mintzberg 1987: 15). In line with the policy network approach these considerations point to the openness of policy-agendas and the importance of access of civil society actors to the core network. This perspective points to the coordination mechanisms and power aspect inherent in policy networks (Adam/Kriesi 2007). We are particularly interested in papers that pay attention to power asymmetries in networks. Of particular interest is the role of science played in the networks and impact of scientific knowledge on the realized strategies.

A strategy may also be a **perspective** defined as “an ingrained way of perceiving the world” (Mintzberg 1987: 16). The key aspect is that a perspective emerges out of the collectivity of participating organizations and thus is a shared understanding. Coping with the future requires concerted collective action, frequently without visible benefits, and in certain cases with immediate losses for some. Such an action is not manageable without a sufficient level of mutual trust and a shared understanding among all the relevant social actors. Here, we would like to invite scholars to pay attention to the communicative strategies employed by actors to dominate the discourse on risk (Beck 2002).

Strategic governance thus departs from conventional governance approaches that are primarily concerned with the coordination of interdependent actors regarding the production of present collective and public goods. The strategic dimension however relates to future action: the main topic is not controlling the uncontrollable, but to introduce mechanisms to expect and react to the unexpected. Related research questions are: How are risk scenarios communicated and by whom? Who participates in anticipation, surveillance and adaptation? Are there cross-national differences in anticipation and implemented instruments? What role does science play in anticipating future risks?

In short, the proposed panel examines theoretical and empirical perspectives on strategic governance. The panel aims at conceptualizing the strategic dimensions of governance and at placing them within the context of the current governance debate. Furthermore, empirical evidence of long-term risks – such as the effects of climate change – are examined to

provide examples of the implementation of strategic governance in various countries and policy subsystems.

### **Participants and type of paper**

This workshop will have a combination of theoretical and empirical papers. The aim is to collectively develop a framework for the analysis of strategic governance and its application to different policy subsystems. Prospective participants are likely to be working within governance and public policy analysis as well as specialists in the above mentioned policy subsystems. The workshop will welcome the input of established scholars as well as newer members of the research community, including doctoral students.

Papers are invited to approach the workshop themes from a wide range of theoretical perspectives including not only governance approaches but also path-dependency, policy networks, neo-institutionalism and social capital. Particularly welcome are case-studies, cross-national comparisons and cross-sectoral comparative studies.

### **Biographical note**

**Martin Potůček**, PhD, is Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic). He is Director of the Center for Social and Economic Strategies in Prague. He authored and edited several books. Among them are *Public Policy in CEE: Theories, Methods, Practices* (2003, with L. T. LeLoup, G. Jenei, L. Váradi, Bratislava: NISPAcee), *The Capacity to Govern in Central and Eastern Europe* (2004, Bratislava: NISPAcee), and *Capacities of Governance in the Czech Republic* (2008, Prague: Matfyzpress). He is currently working on Civil Society and New Forms of Governance in Europe, Social and Cultural Cohesion in Differentiated Societies, and Vision and Strategy of Development of Czech Society within the EU.

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