



Articles for a Special Issue of *Public Organization Review* (POR) on the Scientization of Public Decision-Making Processes – the Relevance for the Handling of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ali Farazmand¹ · Tom Christensen² · Per Lærgeid³

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Background

The scientization of public decision-making processes are nothing new, but seems to have intensified during the last decade. Actors that convey scientifically based knowledge are emerging. Higher education institutions have changed because professions and semi-professions would like to be made more academic through longer educations, new degrees and higher prestige. Public organizations may develop their own research units, like in central banks. Policy advice in diverse decision-making processes has also become more scientifically oriented, for example through more scientists represented in public committees or as close advisors to political executives. And, there are more and more talks about ‘evidence-based’ policies and decisions, for example in education policy, health and social policy, environmental policy, etc.

First, scientization as a concept sounds definitely as connected to scientific objectivity and rationality, meaning that we can use different types of rational-instrumental theories to understand it. The underlying argument is often that more scientific basis for public policies and organizations is good and will improve their activities and quality of outputs and outcomes. Given an instrumental approach, scientization may either mean hierarchical control and use of academic results, because science is

✉ Ali Farazmand
afarazma@fau.edu

Tom Christensen
tom.christensen@stv.uio.no

Per Lærgeid
Per.Lag Reid@uib.no

¹ Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, USA

² University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

³ University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

hierarchically organized, or imply a negotiation and dialogue among scientists with different perspectives and results. Second, based on a more culturally oriented perspective, scientization may imply focusing on the gradual and long-term development of professions and research communities. It may be seen as gradually changing what is seen as appropriate professional norms or research in different fields develop over time regarding what the best knowledge to provide based in diverse research. Third, based in neo-institutionalism, scientization will deal with ‘social construction of reality’ or myths/symbols, meaning that different actors actively will use scientization as a tool for increasing their legitimacy and resources, while it often will be received by the media, the public or other actors as if knowledge in fact is objective and scientifically based, while in reality it’s not.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been interesting in the way that scientization again is extremely relevant. The world has been searching for the real origin of the pandemic, the international scientific communities has continuously discussed its spreading and main characteristics, international organizations have discussed how to handle it, pharmaceutical firms competing for finding the best vaccines, national authorities and their expert bodies have searched for answers, etc. But, it’s also been a year of challenges, conflicts, disagreement, uncertainty and some victories in the scientific community, spilling over into the public debates and decisions. Some leaders say that their handling is purely scientific, some that they don’t really know and decide under uncertainty, while others say that they must balance scientific knowledge with other concerns when making political-administrative decisions and regulations. Vaccines have been produced faster than ever before, but their distribution is often disputed. Overall, countries seems to both converge and diverge concerning how they have handled the pandemic and used scientific knowledge.

So, this symposium is looking for works on the pandemic that includes analyses of the role of scientization in various aspects, based in instrumental and institutional theories.

Papers can be theoretical or empirical, explanatory or descriptive, but they should have a clear conceptual and theoretical basis and meet appropriate methodological standards. The broad theories listed could work as a basis. Comparative papers (across time, countries, government levels or policy sectors) are particularly appreciated. The symposium welcomes researchers from different disciplines, from public administration to management research, organization studies, public policy, crises management and beyond.

Examples of Suitable Topics for the Special Issue

- The role of WHO in the handling of the pandemic – its scientific advises and how the interaction with the different countries and international organizations has been.
- The role of international organizations during the pandemic – their overall policy and use if scientific advice from their own experts.
- The role of the vaccine producers and their interaction with countries and international organizations.

- How is scientization playing into national processes? What is the role of expert bodies overall in the decision-making process?
- Are there disagreement among the experts concerning the scientific basis for giving advice to the politicians? What is the disagreement about and what is the relevance of this for decisions?
- To what degree are politicians taking the difficult tradeoffs between public health, individual rights, and economy, and to what degree are they informed by expert advices?
- To what degree is there a mixed decision-making regime going beyond the narrow epidemiology expertise and also bringing in experts from political/social sciences, economics, law, psychology, pedagogics and others?
- How is the crises communication? How are scientific knowledge about the virus presented in the media and how is that influencing the decision-making and public opinion? Are media exaggerating the dangers based on their interpretation of the science?
- Are there tensions in using or interpreting the scientific advises between supra-national, national, regional, and local level in the handling of the pandemic?
- To what degree are there learning from previous pandemics? What kind of learning are there within the crises between the different phases of crises and between countries?
- What is the role of inquiry commissions? What experts are involved and what are their evaluations and policy advices?

Literature

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Proposals and Manuscripts

Proposals should clearly present: (1) a descriptive title; (2) a statement of theme and purpose that includes a problem statement; (3) research questions, including descriptive and explanatory parts; (4) a theoretical/literature basic, briefly outlining central theories and concepts; (5) the ‘originality’ and significance of the paper; (6) a brief methodology statement that includes, for example, sources of data and tools and methods; and (7) the paper’s added value including potential contributions to knowledge (generalizability). Proposals should not exceed the 2-page limit.

Completed manuscripts should not exceed 30 pages double spaced (or 8000 words), inclusive of all tables, figures, and charts. APA style with third person writing is required. Style guidelines are on the POR website.

Timetable to Publication

Interested scholars are invited to *submit proposals* of approximately 800 to 1000 words *POR by May 31, 2021*. Proposing authors will be notified by June 15-20, 2021.

Draft manuscripts of accepted proposals *are due by September 31, 2021*.

Authors of draft manuscripts *will receive a preliminary review by November 30, 2021* from the Guest Editors; they will include:

- (1) a recommendation to complete the manuscript likely with some suggested revisions;
- (2) a recommendation to revise and resubmit with more substantive revisions; or
- (3) a decision that the manuscript will not be accepted – consider submitting it to a different journal. A review with a (1) or (2) recommendation does not guarantee acceptance of the final manuscript.

Final manuscripts are due January 31, 2022. Final manuscripts will be double-blind reviewed during February and March 2022.

Final reviews and decisions will be posted on POR’s Editorial Manager’s Site between by March 31, 2022.

The Special Issue will be published in POR: Online by April 30, 2022 and in print, in May 2022.

Proposals and manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief of POR, or any of the Guest editors—see below.

Questions about the substance or process for proposals, manuscripts, or the Special Issue should be submitted to a Guest Editor.

Editor-In-Chief of *Public Organization Review* (POR): Professor Ali Farazmand, Florida Atlantic University. afarazma@fau.edu

Special Issue Guest Editors:

Professor Emeritus Tom Christensen, University of Oslo, tom.christensen@stv.uio.no

Professor Emeritus Per Lægreid, Per.Lagreid@uib.no

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