

Panel 4: Citizens and the governance of local safety

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Traditionally providing public safety is one of the core governmental tasks. In modern society providing safety has been a herculean task for many governments, and even more so for local governments. However, public safety as a challenge to the public domain is constantly redefined. Also the policy reactions of governments change. Sometimes minor adjustments of the policy suffice, while sometimes more fundamental or even paradigmatic changes occur.

Local government is often the first actor within the public domain to be confronted with safety problems. The possible responses of the local governments to (perceived) threats are faced with serious difficulties. On the one hand, they have to deal with complex and varied problems, together with actors they have no say over. On the other hand governments in general are no longer to be considered the central steering agencies in society, like they used to be. Local governments are under pressure to do a better job while at the same time having fewer capabilities and less authority. In general, governments respond to an increase in pressures by an increase in policy. However, this approach doesn't work anymore. In a quest for more effective solutions for wicked safety problems and to regain lost public confidence, new strategies are being developed and new practices are being implemented, as part of a new paradigm. In response to this classical government paradigm a new steering paradigm emerged which is the so-called governance paradigm.

The shift from government towards governance implies that government is not an entity but a conglomerate of actors, that government is not the sole actor that attempts to influence societal developments, and that government interventions are interventions in policy networks, in which power, resource dependency, and strategic behavior are vital elements. Central governments rely upon other actors, sectors and other governmental layers. Organizations are supposed to self-organize and self-regulate along with other organizations, sectors and levels of government, out of which new forms of coordinated or collective action may arise. Safety is seen as coproduction, in which also citizens play an important role of their own, as co producers. But their participation does not come spontaneously, but has to be mobilized and organized. This panel focuses on the evolution of local safety policy as a collective effort to stand up to new challenges in tackling crime and safety issues, restoring public confidence in the process. Particularly we are interested in comparative analyses of local safety policy.

Type of papers

This panel invited all sorts of papers, from all disciplinary backgrounds, that take (local) public safety policy, no matter how it is conceived, as their focus. Papers were also invited about safety related issues, such as the relation between (supra)national safety policy and local safety policy, police strategies, police innovations (like community policing and nodal policing), evaluations of safety instruments, crime prevention, citizens mobilization, governance in the network of local safety partners, etc. In particular we welcomed comparative papers. The papers may have had a normative or empirical character, they may have been theoretical, critically discussing safety concepts and steering concepts and idea-oriented or presented a case study.

Link between the panel and a sub-theme of the NIG research program

According to the schools research program, the theme of this panel is linked to the NIG research program, in particular to the research theme 'citizens and governance', because of the interrelatedness of citizen demands and public policy, and the changing relationships of citizens with those organizations that govern the public sphere.