

Syllabus

This is a template for a syllabus integrating the P-CUBE game into existing courses or setting up new courses entirely based on the P-CUBE game. It covers a general course description, learning objectives, class format, course structure, required materials and evaluation.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Policymaking is how governments develop responses to societal problems. From climate change to governing AI, challenges to decision-makers are increasing in complexity. Solving policy problems requires not only leveraging knowledge and expertise from the natural and social sciences but develop a greater understanding of how policymaking works.

No matter how complex the problem is, in fact, policy change—reforming an existing policy or introducing new programs—is never easy. Even when alternative solutions exist, the road to the public agenda, policy formulation and implementation is full of twists and turns—many actors oppose innovations, others stay neutral, funding or consensus may be wanting. What to do then?

Successful policy innovation requires strategy; the ability to read contexts, understand the obstacles to innovation and design a successful way forward to non-incremental decisions.

The course will use P-CUBE, a digital educational game funded by the Erasmus+ program. In each game mission, students will be confronted with a societal problem, alternative solutions, and obstacles to decision-making.

Playing the part of the policy innovator, students will need to understand whether their innovation is feasible and steer it through the complexities of public policymaking. In this journey, they will meet a large number of actors—some fighting against the innovation, others supporting it, and still, others uninterested. Students will need to understand their preferences and choose between courses of action and decision-making strategies: building a successful coalition, neutralising opposers, increasing consensus, changing the initial proposal and so forth.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Increase their knowledge of the basic elements of policymaking dynamics (actors, goals, resources, interactions, stakes) and identify those elements and the role they play in new cases;
- Understand the constraints of policymaking in pluralistic contexts and have a realistic experience of how public decisions are taken beyond simplistic views;
- Devise strategies for overcoming obstacles to innovation by understanding which decisional strategies policy entrepreneurs can employ;
- Improve behavioural skills such as analytical thinking, critical judgment, problem-solving, relationship building and teamwork.

CLASS FORMAT

P-CUBE classes can be held online or in presence. If the latter, students will need to bring a computer to class; team members can use the same computer.

P-CUBE allows the integration of game sessions with lectures, seminars, and in-class debates. Games can also be coupled with preparatory or post-class readings. A typical class may be structured along this sequence, which was tested during the project:

- Introduction by the instructor presenting the mission, the substantive issue at stake, the policy alternatives or the strategic problem;
- Parallel game sessions by students (preferably in groups);
- Review by the instructor, who can replay the game herself and highlight the rationale of the main choices;
- Discussion with students on how the game unfolds, why actors behave in a certain way, alternative endings, real cases, and other issues for debate.

Notice that the P-CUBE interface includes a Log reserved for facilitators. The log registers all activities by students, their choices and mistakes. This can help organise the post-game discussion.

Further, the P-CUBE project developed Teachers' instructions for each mission. They contain a full description of the learning objectives for the mission, the common mistakes made by students, issues for debates and references to the literature and real cases. They are available to instructors upon request.

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

P-CUBE games can be integrated flexibly into a varied set of course organisations. Several course structures were tested during the project:

- Using one or two game sessions in larger courses, for instance, missions that tackle substantive issues (e.g., refugees) in courses where that topic is central (e.g., training social workers);
- Playing entire settings as part of larger courses, such as the urban set (15 missions) in courses on Planning and Design (taking 4-5 classes of 3 hours each);
- Using a selection of missions from different sets (urban, EU, science, social inclusion) in larger courses in public policy, political science and government;
- Organising courses in decision-making based entirely on the P-CUBE games (15 hours crash course in policymaking).

Two stand-alone modules (on the Urban and Science settings) are available on the P-CUBE website. They provide a possible structure for organising 5-6 classes using the settings' missions.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

P-CUBE is a free web-based educational game. Students will need a PC, internet connection and go to <https://pcube.next.gamelab-dev.tbm.tudelft.nl/> Please, refer to the Technical Handbook for details on how to play and facilitate missions.

P-CUBE has produced the following resources freely available for students and instructors on the P-CUBE website (<https://www.p-cube-project.eu/literature-reviews/>)

- Literature review on Decision-making
- Literature review on Urban policy

- Literature review on Social inclusion
- Literature review on Science and democracy
- Literature review on EU decision-making
- Both Literature reviews and Teachers' instructions include references that can serve as preparatory or post-class readings.

For further readings about policymaking, policy change and strategy, most concepts covered in P-CUBE are based on Bruno Dente (2014) *Understanding Policy Decisions*, Springer (Italian edition: Bruno Dente (2011) *Le decisioni di policy*, Il Mulino; Spanish edition: Bruno Dente & Joan Subirats, *Decisiones Publicas*, Ariel).

EVALUATION

P-CUBE sessions can be integrated into different course structures and contribute to a share of the overall evaluation of students. We propose two methods to evaluate the learning achieved in P-CUBE sessions: a) Learning diaries and b) Case study analysis. They are individual assignments and were both experimented with by students during the project. Traditional methods (such as final tests on the readings connected to the sessions) can also be used.

A) Learning Diary

For each class, students were required to answer the following questions. Other questions are possible, depending on the specific organisation and topics covered in class.

[1] What are the key takeaways of this class?

This question is meant to make students think of what was discussed and experienced in class. It is meant to evaluate how the students have reflected on the main learning objectives.

[2] What are the obstacles to policy innovation highlighted by today's missions? How were they addressed?

This question is more of a summary of the session, focusing on obstacles and strategies. It is helpful to evaluate individual attention and participation in teamwork.

[3] Concerning the mission's storyline: do you think there could have been a different outcome? How?

This question helps highlight that—although the game sessions present one possible course of action—things can go differently in different contexts. It helps develop students' analytical skills.

[4] Can you provide a real-world example similar to or different from this case? Describe it briefly.

This question tests research skills and the ability to recognise policymaking concepts across contexts.

B) Case study analysis

At the end of the course, students were asked to analyse a case of policymaking. Cases presented a narrative describing how a solution to a societal problem was advocated by a group or individual promoter and how—after several problems, obstacles, opposition, delays,

and failed attempts—a new policy was finally approved. One of the 30 P-CUBE cases not used in class may be adapted to serve as narratives for case analysis.

After reading the case, students were required to answer questions aimed at evaluating their ability to understand the case in terms of identifying policymaking elements and strategies, such as:

[1] Who are the promoters of the innovation?

[2] What are the main obstacles to success in changing policy?

[3] Concerning opposers and allies, why do they take a position in favour or against the innovation?

[4] How does the pro-innovation actor/coalition succeed in steering their proposal?