NR27 / Contests Over Power and Agency: Decolonisation Efforts and the Reconfiguration of Hierarchies in India

Topic : Research

Chair : Aashish Xaxa (Aashish Xaxa)

Second Chair : Dipika Adhikari (The Australian National University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel sits at the intersection of public policy praxis and decolonial transformation, examining a critical question that defines governance futures in the Global South: Are current decolonisation efforts genuinely redistributing power—or merely reconfiguring colonial hierarchies under new guises? As developing economies emerge as key laboratories for governance innovation, contests over power and agency are intensifying across digital, ecological, and sovereign domains. Public policy praxis offers crucial insights into how these contestations unfold and can be redirected toward genuine transformation. Yet the expansion of policy capacity in the Global South must be interrogated: Does institutional growth serve emancipatory aims, or does it entrench existing asymmetries through new mechanisms of control?

Secondly, we seek to interrogate whether development can move beyond extraction—of resources, knowledge, labor, and land—to embrace regenerative alternatives. Current governance models in developing economies often replicate extractive logics under new technological and institutional guises. This panel asks: How can public policy praxis support transitions toward reciprocity, ecological repair, and social renewal? Case studies across sectors, but not restricted to—urban development, social sectors, education, health, environmental governance—illuminate spaces where such alternatives are emerging and where they face systemic resistance.

Third, we challenge epistemological dominance through alternative knowledge systems and lived experiences of marginalised communities. Whose knowledge counts in policy formation? How do grassroots solidarity movements reshape development from below? This panel centers climate justice, not merely as an urgent imperative, but as a contested terrain where power struggles over who defines "progress" and planetary futures become clear. We examine how authority can shift from state-centric to community-led paradigms, and what institutional coherence means in decolonial contexts in India.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel emerges from recognition that India’s vast ecosystem of policy education, research and practice—spanning government, consulting, and civil society—operates within global power structures that remain fundamentally asymmetrical. Building genuine capacity and coherence in the Global South requires not merely importing policy frameworks, but interrogating whose interests they serve and whether they advance authentic agency or reconfigure subordination.

By bringing together diverse voices and epistemologies, this panel aims to illuminate pathways toward decolonial public policy praxis—one that genuinely contests power hierarchies rather than reproducing them, that embraces regeneration over extraction, and that positions marginalised communities as architects of their own futures. The goal is to have a dialogue that translates critical reflection into transformative governance action.

This panel invites scholars, law and policy practitioners, and activists, among others, to probe three interconnected dimensions. We examine divergent visions and productive tensions within decolonial praxis. Instead of seeking easy consensus, we explore how competing epistemologies, conflicting priorities between state and community actors, and generative frictions among different stakeholders can catalyze genuine transformation. The tensions between adaptation frameworks and structural change, between top-down policy reform and grassroots agency, become sites where power dynamics become visible and negotiable.

Selected contributions will be curated into an edited volume with a leading international publisher or as a special issue in a top-tier journal.