NR12 / Entanglements of STS and Public Policy in India

Topic : Research

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This panel aims to foreground how Science and Technology Studies (STS) enrich, complicate, and transform the analysis of public policy in India. It seeks to examine the mutually constitutive relationships between scientific expertise, technological infrastructures, state practices, and citizen experiences in contemporary governance. The objective is to move beyond linear models of policy rationality and instead highlight how sociotechnical systems shape policymaking, regulatory design, and public accountability. By convening scholars across disciplines, the panel intends to build an integrated conversation on how Indian public policy is co-produced through shifting arrangements of knowledge, power, and institutional practice.

This panel contributes to a growing body of scholarship that situates public policy within the broader sociotechnical landscape of contemporary India. While STS has been influential globally in revealing how knowledge and technology are politically charged, Indian policy studies have only recently begun to integrate these insights systematically. By examining Indian cases, the panel extends STS frameworks into contexts marked by scale, informality, uneven capacity, and democratic contestation.

Scientifically, the panel advances three contributions:

Theoretical enrichment: It reframes policy problems not merely as administrative or institutional issues but as outcomes of sociotechnical assemblages, offering new conceptual tools to analyse Indian governance.
Empirical grounding: It provides grounded analyses of how technology is embedded in everyday bureaucratic practices and citizen encounters, contributing to comparative STS perspectives from the Global South.
Methodological innovation: It highlights interdisciplinary approaches via ethnography, archival work, design studies, and policy analysis that capture the dynamic interdependencies between expertise, infrastructures, and state power.

Overall, the panel positions the entanglements of STS and public policy as essential for understanding contemporary governance challenges and for imagining more inclusive, reflexive, and accountable policy futures in India.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Science and Technology Studies (STS) has emerged as a critical lens for understanding the co-production of science, technology, and society. In India, questions of technological change, policy design, expertise, and democratic governance are deeply intertwined with historical trajectories, developmental priorities, social inequalities, and political contestations. As India undergoes rapid transformations—from digital identification systems and platform governance to genomic science, climate interventions, and AI regulation—the entanglements of STS and public policy have never been more pronounced. This call for papers invites scholars to explore these intersections, offering theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions that illuminate how science and technology shape, and are shaped by, public policy processes in India.

We welcome submissions that examine how experts, bureaucrats, scientists, civil society actors, and citizens negotiate technological futures; how state capacity, regulatory institutions, and political culture mediate the uptake of scientific knowledge; and how technologies themselves reconfigure governance arrangements, social relations, and normative orders. STS in India has long emphasized the sociotechnical dynamics of development, but current transformations—ranging from datafication and AI deployment to climate infrastructures, public health surveillance, and agricultural technologies—demand renewed attention through interdisciplinary scholarship.

Possible themes include, but are not limited to:

Co-production of technology and policy: How policies shape sociotechnical systems and how technological infrastructures in turn reconfigure state practices, authority, and citizenship.
Digital governance and the Indian state: Aadhaar, DPDP Act, platform regulation, algorithmic

decision-making in welfare, predictive policing, and data infrastructures.
STS of expertise, evidence, and regulatory science: How scientific expertise circulates in Indian policymaking; the role of standards, protocols, and risk assessment; controversies and public deliberation.
Health, genetics, and bio-governance: DNA technologies, genomic data governance, vaccine policy, pandemic infrastructures, and public health surveillance.
Agriculture, environment, and climate policy: Technological interventions in climate adaptation/mitigation, GM crops, environmental regulation, and socio-ecological transformations.
Innovation, development, and political economy: National innovation systems, start-up ecosystems, techno-economic imaginaries, and their policy implications.
Citizenship, democracy, and sociotechnical justice: Technology-mediated rights, exclusions, and inequalities; grassroots technological politics; public accountability and transparency.
Methodological and conceptual interventions: Rethinking STS concepts through Indian contexts; decolonial or postcolonial STS and implications for policy analysis.
We invite abstract submissions from scholars in STS, sociology, anthropology, political science, law, public policy, history of science, development studies, media studies, and allied fields. Interdisciplinary, collaborative, and early-career contributions are strongly encouraged. We look forward to receiving contributions that deepen our understanding of how STS perspectives can illuminate, critique, and enrich public policy debates in contemporary India.