NR09 / From Multi to Inter-disciplinary: Studies of Public Policy in India

Topic : Research

Chair : Advaita Rajendra (Indian Institute of Management, Sirmaur)

Second Chair : Ankur Sarin (Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

From Multi to Inter-disciplinary: Studies of Public Policy in India

1) Significance of the Panel Topic

Historically, the study of public policy in South Asia and India has often been conducted in different disciplines, many of which view policy as an additional arena in which disciplinary knowledge is applied or put to work. Rather than simply accepting or rejecting this practice, the panel's objective is to create a shared space allowing researchers working within different disciplinary silos to come to conversation with each other while simultaneously engaging with questions of motivation (why) and methodology (how) of coming together. The hope is that an understanding of India's 'multi-disciplinary' engagement with public policy will help lay foundations and point to new directions for the study of public policy in India.

2) Research Questions

How have foundational insights from anthropology (e.g. policy as practice), law (e.g. rights and contestation), economics (e.g. incentives and evidence), political science (e.g. power and interests), geography (e.g. spatial governance), and development studies (e.g. marginalization) been brought together in studying Indian public policy?
How can the Indian policy experience contribute to interdisciplinary theory-building?
Taking specific policy domains (welfare, urban governance, climate adaptation, digital governance), how do different disciplinary lenses reveal complementary or contradictory understandings in terms of problem identification, design, implementation, evaluation and more broadly the policy process itself?
Where do disciplines productively challenge each other? How do design assumptions (economic modeling), legal frameworks (rights architecture), implementation realities (bureaucratic practice), and lived experiences (anthropological accounts) interact?
What research methods enable genuine interdisciplinarity, not just disciplinary juxtaposition? How can scholars trained in one discipline engage others productively? What does collaborative interdisciplinary research look like in practice?

3) Context

India's policy landscape offers a fertile ground for interdisciplinary work. Landmark policies like NREGA, RTI, RTE, FRA and the recent upsurge of direct cash transfers have generated rich scholarship across disciplines, but fragmented insights. Further, contemporary challenges, climate adaptation requiring coordination across sectors, digital governance raising privacy and exclusion concerns, urbanization demanding spatial justice, are inherently interdisciplinary. India's policy schools are maturing beyond importing frameworks; this panel contributes conceptual tools for studying policy praxis adequate to Global South's experience.

4) Papers Expected

We seek papers working at disciplinary boundaries. Some possibilities could include:

Cross-disciplinary case studies: Deep analyses of single policies engaging multiple disciplinary literatures and methods
Papers developing integrated research approaches
Papers proposing frameworks that bridge disciplines
Papers reviewing interdisciplinary efforts to study public policy in the Indian context

We invite both early and advanced stage papers for this conversation. Depending on the enthusiasm the panel generates, we hope to carry the conversations forward in the form of an edited volume.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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