PR07 / Frugal policy innovation in India

Topic : Practice

Chair : Nihit Goyal (Delft University of Technology)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Policymaking in India and much of the Global South occurs under persistent fiscal constraint, uneven administrative capacity, and substantial social heterogeneity. At the same time, governments are expected to pursue sustainable development in a carbon-constrained environment shaped by geopolitical uncertainty and rapid technological change. These conditions place sustained on governments to deliver on promises while maintaining political legitimacy.

One response to these challenges is frugal policy innovation. Rather than treating constraint as a temporary limitation, frugal policy innovation takes it as a starting point for policy practice. It refers to a deliberate approach of policymaking and implementation that is scalable under limited capacity and high contextual variation. In practice, this is reflected in different forms of innovation, such as change in institutional structures, policy processes, governance arrangements, or administrative practices.

Frugal policy innovation involves the following characteristics: (i) persistent resource constraint; (ii) reconfiguration of capacity rather than simple cost reduction; (iii) prioritization of sufficiency over optimality; (iv) adaptation to local institutional and social context; and (v) scaling through simplicity and modularity. Such innovation may occur at any stage of the policy cycle, including agenda setting, formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation.

By bringing together empirical and practice-oriented work, the panel aims to clarify how frugal policy innovation shapes policy practice in India and what this implies for governing under constraint in the Global South.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel welcomes contributions examining frugal policy innovation in India across policy domains, levels of government, and geographic settings. Submissions may focus on specific characteristics of frugality, analyse different forms of policy innovation, or examine why and how such innovations emerge and operate at particular stages of the policy cycle.