NR06 / Rethinking Policy Learning and Transfer: Global South as 'Reference'

Topic : Research

Chair : Ekta Singh (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi)

Second Chair : Vaishali Singh (XIM University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The dominant narrative in policy transfer literature has for decades centred on a unidirectional flow of concepts and designs from the developed North to the developing South. Having received a tacit acceptance, this narrative has been reinforcing the epistemic hierarchies by highlighting the nations in the North as the ‘policy innovators’ and Global South as passive ‘policy takers’. However, current research and experience provide strong evidence that the Global South is an active, prolific provider of knowledge, innovation, and adaptive governance alternatives rather than just a consumer of policy models (Nair et.al. 2016; Blanc 2023). Brazil's participatory budgeting, India's digital public infrastructure, Rwanda's community health model, Colombia's conditional cash transfers, and Bangladesh's microfinance revolution are just a few examples of how Southern innovations have spread throughout the world, changing public service delivery, welfare systems, financial inclusion, and democratic participation well beyond their home regions. The Global South increasingly operates as both a policy incubator and a laboratory of governance innovation, generating ideas that circulate across North and South (Nair & Mellahi, 2016).

Recent studies have highlighted how policy diffusion and transfer is happening both within developing countries and also from Global South to Global North. This has found resonance in South-South Cooperation (SSN) and South-North policy transfer (SNPT) strand of scholarship. Scholars have highlighted how policy learning from Global South is often ‘concealed, underreported and overlooked’ because of asymmetries in power, resources and authority that privilege. Northern countries as the legitimate sources of innovative policies (Kemmerling, 2023).This brings us to the larger question of how ‘reference societies’ or “a nation from which to borrow elements” are created (Waldow 2019). In this regard, the Global South as a ‘reference’ has lot more to offer given the challenges of resource constraint, weak state capacity and the complexity that characterizes the social fabric in the South.

Repositioning the Global South in policy learning and transfer, therefore, raises critical questions: How do Southern innovations circulate, adapt, and gain legitimacy? What roles do epistemic communities, policy entrepreneurs, social movements, international organisations, and South–South cooperation networks play in amplifying these models? Why do some Southern innovations travel globally while others remain locally embedded? And how does recognising Southern agency transform the broader field of public policy?

More specifically, the panel is interested in investigating-

· How and in what ways the context of complexity and uncertainty that characterizes the Global South challenges the conventional understanding of Policy Transfer?

· In what ways re-positioning Global South as ‘reference’ contests power asymmetries between Global North and South?

This panel seeks to draw research that highlights, evaluates, and theorizes the Global South's function as a creator, distributor, and transformer of innovative public policies. We are looking for papers that showcase successful models that have been adopted by other jurisdictions as well as those that aim to shed light on the institutional, political, and ideational factors that influence both the giving and receiving of Southern ideas within and across the developed and the developing nations.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The dominant narrative in policy transfer literature has for decades centred on a unidirectional flow of concepts and designs from the developed North to the developing South. Having received a tacit acceptance, this narrative has been reinforcing the epistemic hierarchies by highlighting the nations in the North as the ‘policy innovators’ and Global South as passive ‘policy takers’. However, current research and

experience provide strong evidence that the Global South is an active, prolific provider of knowledge, innovation, and adaptive governance alternatives rather than just a consumer of policy models (Nair et.al. 2016; Blanc 2023). Brazil's participatory budgeting, India's digital public infrastructure, Rwanda's community health model, Colombia's conditional cash transfers, and Bangladesh's microfinance revolution are just a few examples of how Southern innovations have spread throughout the world, changing public service delivery, welfare systems, financial inclusion, and democratic participation well beyond their home regions. The Global South increasingly operates as both a policy incubator and a laboratory of governance innovation, generating ideas that circulate across North and South (Nair & Mellahi, 2016).

Recent studies have highlighted how policy diffusion and transfer is happening both within developing countries and also from Global South to Global North. This has found resonance in South-South Cooperation (SSN) and South-North policy transfer (SNPT) strand of scholarship. Scholars have highlighted how policy learning from Global South is often ‘concealed, underreported and overlooked’ because of asymmetries in power, resources and authority that privilege. Northern countries as the legitimate sources of innovative policies (Kemmerling, 2023). This brings us to the larger question of how ‘reference societies’ or “a nation from which to borrow elements” are created (Waldow 2019). In this regard, the Global South as a ‘reference’ has lot more to offer given the challenges of resource constraint, weak state capacity and the complexity that characterizes the social fabric in the South.

Repositioning the Global South in policy learning and transfer, therefore, raises critical questions: How do Southern innovations circulate, adapt, and gain legitimacy? What roles do epistemic communities, policy entrepreneurs, social movements, international organisations, and South–South cooperation networks play in amplifying these models? Why do some Southern innovations travel globally while others remain locally embedded? And how does recognising Southern agency transform the broader field of public policy?

More specifically, the panel is interested in investigating-

· How and in what ways the context of complexity and uncertainty that characterizes the Global South challenges the conventional understanding of Policy Transfer?

· In what ways re-positioning Global South as ‘reference’ contests power asymmetries between Global North and South?

This panel seeks to draw research that highlights, evaluates, and theorizes the Global South's function as a creator, distributor, and transformer of innovative public policies. We are looking for papers that showcase successful models that have been adopted by other jurisdictions as well as those that aim to shed light on the institutional, political, and ideational factors that influence both the giving and receiving of Southern ideas within and across the developed and the developing nations.