NR13 / Southern Praxis in Public Policy

Topic : Research

Chair : Ali Adil (Independent)

Second Chair : Ashima Sood (Anant National University)

Third Chair : Aaqib Ali (Anant National University, Ahmedabad)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Significance of the panel topic

In line with the conference theme on building coherence and capacity of Southern public policy praxis, this panel invites reflections on what it means to decolonise prevailing approaches to public policy. With formal top-down approaches to planning and development recognised as inadequate (Winkler, 2024), the task of translating local, situated, and context-specific ways of thinking-knowing-doing to inform systematic policy interventions acquires renewed urgency. In valorising approaches that are "de-linked and distinct from Western praxes" (Ibid, p. 4), recent scholarship suggests broadening the epistemic foundations of policy practice towards context-appropriate and impactful interventions by grounding knowledge claims in communities and their everyday worlds (Ali et al., 2025; Santos, 2016). Such efforts, however, must contend with formal public policy architectures across the Global South that remain deeply shaped by Western ideas, infrastructures, and institutional arrangements (Sundaresan, 2020).

Against this backdrop, this panel seeks contributions that spark a dialogue on expanding the capacity of formal public policy architectures to meaningfully engage grounded, practice-based knowledges from the communities they aim to serve.

Research Questions

We invite contributions exploring questions along the following or similar lines.

1.How can Southern epistemologies reshape what counts as evidence, impact, or expertise in public policy practice?
2.How can public institutions in the Global South cultivate capacity to engage with grounded, non-formal, and tacit forms of knowledge?
3.What institutional reforms might be required to ensure policymaking in the Global South remains attuned to everyday realities of communities it is meant to serve?
4.What methodologies effectively surface grounded, practiced-based knowledges and how might they be rendered meaningful within formal policy cycles?
5.In what ways can Southern knowledge escape contextual parochialism to generate and apply universalizing conceptual categories? Examples include ideas of informality, indigeneity and even decoloniality itself.
6.How can we acknowledge and build bridges with decolonial thought and practice among indigenous, immigrant and marginalized communities—'the excluded north' (Openjuru et al., 2015)—within the Global North?

Context

The questions proposed for this panel are pitched at a meta-theoretical level, seeking to explore the capacity of Southern policy praxis to expand its purview beyond formal mechanisms of policy design modeled on Western systems of governance (Sundaresan, 2020). These questions bring into focus the often unacknowledged, non-formal, practice-rooted and deeply tacit forms of thinking-knowing-doing and relating upon which the more visible, formal, and relatively more organised systems of governance are built (Simone, 2004). Examples of such local, if not indigenous, knowledge networks include waste-picker organisations (Gutberlet et al., 2017), public health nurses (Yoshioka-Maeda et al., 2006), local farmer networks sustaining traditional agricultural norms (Waldmueller, 2015) and even online communities of practice (Preece, 2003).

Papers expected

We expect conceptually grounded contributions that draw on **empirical engagements** with non-formal knowledge networks that remain outside the purview of formal policy concerns, and/or advance **methodological approaches** that center local practices for policy impact, and/or offer **theoretical reflections** on bridging dominant policy paradigms with alternative imaginaries of governance emerging from everyday practices.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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Submission Guidelines

Prospective authors should submit an abstract of 300-400 words that clearly outlines (1) the core argument or research question(s), (2) the empirical, conceptual, or practical context, (3) the methodology or approach, and (4) the contribution to debates on decolonising public policy, Southern epistemologies, or grounded knowledge in policy practice

We invite early-career scholars, practitioners, and community-engaged researchers to submit proposals for contributions to this panel. Submissions should engage critically and constructively with questions of decolonising public policy theory, practice, and institutions, with particular attention to the Global South and/or marginalised communities in the Global North.

References

Ali, S. F., Waheed, A. W., & Hashmi, M. U. (2025). Exploring coloniality of knowledge in Pakistani public policy. Third World Quarterly, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2025.2581844

Openjuru, G. L., Jaitli, N., Tandon, R., & Hall, B. (2015). Despite knowledge democracy and community-based participatory action research: Voices from the global south and excluded north still missing. Action Research, 13(3), 219–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750315583316

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