P155 / From Rights on Paper to Rights in Practice: Human Rights Implementation through Public Policy and Administration.

Topic : Implementation/Street-Level Bureaucracy

Chair : Arman Gasparyan (Lund University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Human rights are formally recognised through international conventions, constitutions and national legislation, yet their practical realisation depends on public policies and the administrative institutions responsible for implementing them. Access to education, healthcare, housing, social protection, justice and other fundamental rights is shaped by policy design, resource allocation, administrative capacity, organisational routines and the discretion exercised by public officials. Consequently, the existence of formal rights does not necessarily guarantee their effective implementation or equitable enjoyment.

Despite the centrality of public policy to human rights realisation, scholarship on these subjects has developed along relatively separate trajectories. Human rights research has traditionally emphasised legal obligations, normative frameworks, compliance and accountability, while public policy and administration scholarship has focused on policy processes, implementation, performance, public values and social equity. Recent contributions to the emerging field of Administration and Human Rights have highlighted the importance of connecting these perspectives. Nevertheless, further theoretical and empirical research is needed to explain how policy processes and administrative arrangements influence the translation of human rights commitments into substantive outcomes.

This panel seeks to advance this research agenda by examining human rights implementation as a public policy problem. Its overarching research question is: How do policy design, implementation arrangements and administrative institutions shape the realisation of human rights across different governance contexts?

The panel invites contributions exploring several complementary propositions. First, rights-sensitive policy design, incorporating participation, equity, transparency and accountability, may improve the responsiveness and inclusiveness of public programmes. Second, administrative capacity, institutional coordination and resource availability may mediate the relationship between formal rights commitments and implementation outcomes. Third, frontline discretion and administrative burdens may generate inequalities in rights enjoyment, even where legal entitlements are formally universal. Fourth, decentralisation and multilevel governance may facilitate context-sensitive implementation while simultaneously producing territorial disparities in access to rights. Finally, political institutions, democratic accountability and civil society participation may influence the resilience of rights-based policies under conditions of political and institutional change.

Rather than assuming these relationships, the panel encourages research that critically examines their underlying mechanisms, contextual conditions and potential contradictions. It welcomes perspectives from policy process theories, implementation studies, institutionalism, public management, comparative public policy and human rights scholarship.

The panel aims to contribute to public policy research by establishing human rights realisation as an analytically distinct dimension of policy outcomes, identifying the mechanisms through which public institutions enable or constrain rights implementation, and fostering comparative dialogue across policy sectors, administrative systems and political contexts. Ultimately, it seeks to move beyond the recognition of rights towards a more systematic understanding of how public policies make rights effective in practice.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites theoretical, conceptual and empirical papers examining how public policies and administrative institutions contribute to, shape or constrain the implementation of human rights. We particularly welcome contributions that move beyond the formal recognition of rights to investigate the policy processes, institutional arrangements and administrative practices through which rights are realised, negotiated or undermined.

The panel seeks papers addressing the relationship between human rights and public policy across different

sectors, levels of government and political contexts. Relevant topics include:

1. Rights-based policy design: The integration of human rights principles into policy formulation, policy instruments, regulatory frameworks and public programmes.
2. Policy implementation and administrative capacity: The influence of organisational resources, institutional coordination, managerial practices and implementation arrangements on rights realisation.
3. Street-level bureaucracy and administrative discretion: How frontline officials interpret rights obligations and how administrative burdens affect equitable access to public services.
4. Multilevel governance and decentralisation: The roles of central, regional and local governments in implementing universal rights and addressing territorial inequalities.
5. Accountability, participation and democratic governance: The contribution of citizen engagement, civil society, transparency and oversight mechanisms to rights-based policymaking.
6. Public management and service delivery: Tensions between efficiency, performance objectives, resource constraints, social equity and human rights obligations.
7. Contemporary policy challenges: Human rights implications of digital government, artificial intelligence, migration, displacement, climate change, democratic backsliding and crisis governance.

We encourage contributions employing qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods and comparative research designs, including case studies, cross-national comparisons, policy evaluations and institutional analyses. Papers examining underrepresented geographical contexts, including Central and Eastern Europe, the Global South and countries undergoing political or administrative transformation, are particularly welcome.

Submissions should clearly identify their research question, theoretical or conceptual framework, methodological approach where applicable, and expected contribution to public policy scholarship. Particular attention will be given to papers that identify causal mechanisms, examine competing explanations or generate transferable insights into the conditions under which public policies facilitate or obstruct human rights realisation.

By bringing together scholars of public policy, public administration, political science and human rights, the panel seeks to develop a comparative and interdisciplinary research agenda connecting formal rights commitments with policy implementation and substantive outcomes.