P76 / Frugal and Robust Policy Innovations and Their Global Diffusion

Topic : Policy Change/Continuity/Dynamics

Chair : Achim Kemmerling (Willy Brandt School of Public Policy - University of Erfurt)

Second Chair : Nihit Goyal (Delft University of Technology)

Third Chair : Mauricio Dussauge (CIDE)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

We face numerous grand challenges that call for innovative policy solutions, such as affordable housing, climate change, economic inequality, energy transition, and technological disruption. Increasingly, these solutions must also work amid eroding credibility, contested legitimacy, and persistent resource scarcity. Governments worldwide have responded with a wide range of innovations, such as new problem framings (e.g., modifying the social contract), novel policy instruments (e.g., carbon pricing or nudges), or changes in policy processes and practices (e.g., behavioral insights teams, cocreation, or digital governance).

Much research on policy innovation has focused on innovations in the Global North and their diffusion to other countries around the world. Recent research has, however, documented many innovations from the Global South that may be appropriate for other countries in the South and in the North. Even as some innovations—such as conditional cash transfers and participatory budgeting—have diffused widely, many others do not receive the recognition they deserve. Policy learning, transfer, and diffusion from the South to the North face persistent barriers.

This panel asserts that innovations developed under scarcity may have characteristics that make them effective elsewhere. Specifically, we focus on robust and frugal policy innovations. We define robust policy innovations as those that perform well despite context variation and resource scarcity. Meanwhile, we conceive frugal policy innovations are those that build governing capacity under persistent resource constraints, rather than merely cutting costs or substituting for missing capacity. They prioritize sufficiency over optimality and are adapted to local institutional and social contexts.

The key questions addressed by this panel are:

(i) Which characteristics make policy innovations robust and/ or frugal?

(ii) Which governing capacities do frugal policy innovations create, and through which policy designs?

(iii) Under which conditions do policy innovations travel between world regions? When does cross-border learning happen, and when does it fail?

The panel puts forth several propositions:

- Innovations designed under persistent resource constraints are more robust to contextual variation than those designed under abundance.

- Frugal innovations build governing capacity primarily by drawing on societal capacities rather than by expanding state resources.

- Cross border learning, diffusion and transfer (including from South to North) is impeded less by the technical fit than by asymmetries of status, power and epistemic authority.

- As fiscal pressure and crises intensify in the Global North, demand for robust and frugal solutions will grow, increasing the likelihood of adopting frugal and robust solutions.

The panel advances research on policy innovation theoretically by deepening its synthesis with research on policy capacity, policy design, and policy learning; and empirically by focusing on policy innovations in understudied contexts (such as those in the Global South). Further, it also strengthens the practical relevance of research on policy innovation by identifying robust and frugal policy innovations as well as characteristics that can facilitate their diffusion.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite contributions that address one or more of the panel's key questions.

First, studies may examine which characteristics enable policy innovations to perform despite contextual variation and resource scarcity. Manuscripts addressing this theme may be conceptual or empirical. Further, they may present a single case, compare a policy innovation across multiple jurisdictions, or compare multiple policy innovations in a single jurisdiction.

Second, papers may analyze what makes specific policy innovations frugal, identify which governing capacities frugal innovations create, or explain the underlying designs and mechanisms through which they do so. Studies may also examine whether and how frugal policy innovations draw on societal capacities to create governing capacities.

Third, submissions that study whether, how, and under which conditions policy innovations travel from between different contexts (including from the Global South to the Global North). Analyses may include the actors, motivations, channels, and mechanisms involved, as well as reflections on the robustness of policy transfer. What makes those policy transfers, adoptions robust to different contexts? Empirical manuscripts addressing this theme may be based on case studies or quantitative analysis.

Fourth, we are interested in methodological contributions that study how such forms of policy innovations spread. The recent literature has shown that different forms of cross-border policy learning, transfer and diffusion follow different patterns and mechanisms and require different methodological approaches. Some forms, for instance, are easier to observe, some are hidden. Which methods, which types of data would help address those challenges?

Papers may test, refine, or challenge the panel's propositions. Further, we are as interested in failures as in successes, such as innovations that were ignored, rejected, or did not perform when transferred.

We welcome studies examining any policy domain and any setting. We particularly encourage submissions from scholars based in the Global South and from early career researchers.