P53 / Governance in the Anthropocene: What are the Prospects for Planetary Public Policy?

Topic : Policy Change/Continuity/Dynamics

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Concepts surrounding ‘Planetary Thinking’ have entered the social sciences and humanities – notably History, Law and International Relations (IR). By contrast, the fields of Policy Studies and Public Administration have had limited engagement with Earth Systems Science, ecological or multi-species ontologies, concepts of the ‘global commons’ that present different imaginaries of policy making to that of the nation-state cartographies of administrative sovereignty.

Anthropocentric policy making is not inevitable. Other ways of composing the Earth exist and can provide additional ways of creating and conducting policy and administration. The challenge is not simply to add in the non-human or other-than-human agency or structures to policy comprehension of existing legal-administrative frameworks. Instead, a planetary approach to administrative and policy studies posits that the scale and composition of the world transforms when humans are no longer presumed to be its sole authors and governing agents.

With the intensification of climate crisis, the language of the planetary has emerged as an important conceptual alternative to the ‘global’ -- a term which had already emerged as challenge to the conceptual limitations of the term ‘international’. Accordingly, the idea of ‘Planetary Public Policy’ goes far beyond the methodological nationalism of existing policy scholarship that has been built within and evolved from the governance contexts of national systems of decision making and implementation.

The body of scholarly work on The Planetary has grown significantly. Landmark publications have been generated inter alia, by Spivak (2015), Chakrabarty (2021), and Blake & Gilman (2024). Environmental studies has been at the forefront of this endeavour (Dalby 2024). International Relations as a field has engaged with the planetary as disruptions of ‘the international’ and ‘the global’ (Ramel, 2025) or raising new questions about democracy (Nikolaidis 2024). The idea of ‘Planetary Health’ has made significant strides challenging the human centric understandings of traditional public health paradigms and of OneHealth paradigm of the WHO and other international actors. Clearly, the planetary idea is shaping our understandings of ‘politics’ (Or, 2025; Lind & Friis, 2025). But what does Policy Studies have to say?

This panel seeks to address what ‘the planetary’ may mean in policy scholarship and administrative praxis, including examining the limitations of this approach. How have Public Policy and Administration, in conjunction with related disciplines, understood and imagined the category of the planet as a subject and space of governance. That is, the vocabularies, assumptions, and imaginaries through which planetary problems are framed with the legacy of inherited legal and political languages of world-ordering. That is, dominant ideational and institutional constructions of the nation-state where public authority has been stabilised.

An Earth-centred conception of Public Policy & Administration potentially shifts policy care and responsibilities alongside regulatory and administrative action to a new conceptual locus. This can occur even if power and authority remain tightly hinged to existing state-based institutional structures.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel on Planetary Public Policy calls for papers that are either conceptual and theoretical or those that are empirical and addressing governance arrangements, policy experiments or other regulatory practices that might be considered or evaluated as forms of ‘planetary public policy’ or resistances to it. To be accepted onto the panel, paper proposals must substantively connect to current debates regarding inter alia, themes like the Global Commons, Planetary Thinking, or Governance of the Anthropocene.

Across all papers accepted onto the panel would be fulsome engagement with the (social) science literature that has emerged on Planetary Thinking and cognate concepts. In other words, this is not a panel where it is

possible to transpose the word ‘planetary’ with ‘global’ or ‘international’.

Questions to consider on this panel are broken into three categories (i) theoretical; (ii) empirical; and (iii) professional / practical.

Theories and concepts:
· How can we distinguish between the international, global and planetary and how might these distinctions matter for understanding policy processes?
· How does the ‘planetary’ reshape ‘jurisdictions’ and ‘policy space’?
· How do ‘planetary concepts’ reconfigure understanding of the locus of policy authority and responsibility or challenge existing constellations of power?

Empirical Cases and Dynamics:
· In an era of heightened geopolitics, is ‘planetary public policy’ simply a non sequitur inevitably resulting in a ‘Westphalian clash’? That is, with receding multilateralism, populist pressures and reassertions of state sovereignty, is ‘planetary thinking’ of limited viability in contemporary governance?
· How and why is planetary governance shaped by legal, scientific, and technical forms of policy making and regulation?
· How does planetary thinking differentially impinge on understanding of the dynamics of specific policy sectors: eg. energy policy, education policy, health policy. For instance, what innovations have taken place in relation to the legal identities of rivers, forests and oceans; policy in relation to ‘planetary health’; the development of ‘space policy’ or planetary defense; how the ‘global commons’ is made administratively visible or apparent; etc?

Planetary policy and professional praxis:
· In what ways can planetary knowledge become a form of authority and framework of administrative praxis and/or a modality of leadership and policy entrepreneurship?
· What are the administrative requirements, regulatory components of, and feasibility for, an infrastructure of ‘Planet-first stewardship’ that recognises the Earth’s biophysical boundaries and operational limits?
· What transitions in core competencies and skills are needed from local and city levels of governance through national, regional and global realms not only for administrators and regulators as individuals but also the government offices and organisations they work with?

This hybrid panel is open to PhD students and early career researchers, as well as more experienced and established academics. The objective of the panel is to create constructive and engaging dialogues, which can lead to a Special Issue. As noted in the questions above, the panel welcomes empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions, including comparative and transnational research and mixed-methods approaches. Contributions that connect traditionally separate strands of research are encouraged.