P252 / Governing for Future Generations: Institutional Designs from the Global to the Indigenous Level

Topic : Policy Design, Formulation & Instruments

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Democratic policymaking is widely criticised for its "presentism." Electoral cycles, organised interests and the discounting of distant costs systematically disadvantage people who cannot yet vote or speak. Climate change, biodiversity loss, pension sustainability and technological risk all show how policies made today shift burdens onto future generations. In September 2024, UN Member States adopted the Pact for the Future and its annexed Declaration on Future Generations, committing them to take the interests of future generations into account in decision-making. Implementation, however, now depends on national, regional and local institutions whose designs vary greatly.

A growing literature examines these institutions: commissioners and ombudspersons for future generations, parliamentary committees for the future, statutory well-being frameworks, government foresight units, and deliberative or "future design" mechanisms (e.g., Jacobs 2011; González-Ricoy and Gosseries 2016; Boston 2017; MacKenzie 2021; Hale 2024). This scholarship has three main limitations. First, it concentrates on state institutions in the Global North, especially Wales, Finland and Hungary. Second, it focuses on institutional design more than on diffusion and implementation, so we know little about whether these bodies actually change policy decisions. Third, it largely overlooks customary and indigenous authorities. Yet in much of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, these authorities govern land, natural resources, public health and cultural practices, often under explicit intergenerational norms. Polycentric governance and legal pluralism suggest that such actors may be important, and sometimes more legitimate, venues for long-term governance than the state.

The panel therefore asks: how are institutions for future generations designed, diffused and implemented across governance levels, from global commitments to national, local, customary and indigenous institutions, and under what conditions do they shape actual policy decisions?

The panel will explore several hypotheses. First, institutions with formal mandates, resources and review or veto powers influence policy more than purely advisory or symbolic bodies. Second, global commitments such as the Pact for the Future spread mainly through transnational networks, policy entrepreneurs and epistemic communities rather than through formal intergovernmental mechanisms. Third, customary and indigenous authorities can be effective venues for long-term governance where state capacity is limited or state legitimacy is contested, because they draw on established intergenerational norms and social legitimacy. Fourth, participatory foresight affects policy mainly when it is connected to identifiable decision points. Finally, whether state and customary institutions complement or compete with each other shapes the outcomes of long-term policies.

By combining comparative public policy, foresight studies and research on customary governance, the panel aims to expand both the empirical scope and the theoretical tools of research on long-term policymaking.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites papers that examine how societies institutionalize concern for future generations in public policy, across levels from the global to the local. We welcome theoretical, methodological, empirical and comparative contributions using qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. We particularly encourage case studies from the Global South and research on non-state, customary and indigenous institutions.

Relevant topics include, but are not limited to: the design, mandates and effectiveness of future generations commissioners, ombudspersons and parliamentary committees; the implementation and domestic uptake of the UN Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations; the diffusion of long-term governance models across countries and regions, and the role of policy entrepreneurs and transnational networks; government foresight units and strategic foresight in policy cycles; participatory and deliberative foresight, including citizens’ assemblies, youth participation and “future design” experiments; customary, traditional and indigenous authorities as policy actors, and their relationship with state institutions; intergenerational norms in natural resource, environmental, health and cultural policy; legal pluralism and

polycentric approaches to long-term governance; and methods for measuring the policy impact of long-term governance institutions.

Papers may address questions such as: Which design features give these institutions real influence over budgets, legislation and regulation? How do global norms on future generations travel into national and local policymaking, and who carries them? When do customary and indigenous authorities complement state policy, and when do they compete with it? How can foresight methods be linked to concrete decision points rather than remaining advisory exercises? What evidence shows that such institutions change outcomes rather than only discourse?

We welcome papers that are critical as well as constructive, including studies that show the limits, symbolic uses or unintended effects of these institutions. Reflexive contributions from scholar-practitioners who have designed or worked within such institutions are also welcome, provided they include analytical rigour and engage with the policy literature. Comparative papers and work by early-career researchers are especially encouraged. Papers should clearly address the panel’s central question: under what conditions do institutions for future generations shape actual policy decisions?