P34 / Postcolonial Global Governance: Power, Knowledge, and Policy-Making in the Global South

Topic : Discourses, Ideas, and Narratives

Chair : Youssouf DIALLO (Université de Franche-Comté)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Literature Review and Theoretical Positioning

Global governance and public policy research has examined how international institutions, transnational networks, policy ideas and multilevel arrangements shape the formulation and implementation of public policies. Work on policy transfer and lesson-drawing has shown how policy models, administrative arrangements and ideas travel across jurisdictions (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000), while research on transnational policy networks has highlighted the role of non-state actors and intermediaries in circulating policy knowledge (Stone, 2004; Stone and Porto de Oliveira, 2020). Geographical approaches to policy mobility further demonstrate that policies do not simply move intact: they are translated, adapted and transformed as they encounter particular political and institutional contexts (Peck, 2011).

Yet these accounts can leave insufficiently examined the historical and geopolitical inequalities that structure global policy circulation: who defines problems, whose expertise is treated as authoritative, which models are promoted as universal, and whose interests shape the terms of international cooperation. Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship offers resources for examining these asymmetries. Quijano's (2000) account of the coloniality of power explains how colonial hierarchies persist beyond formal empire, while Mignolo and Walsh (2018) examine the epistemic and political dimensions of decolonial thought. In international studies, Acharya's (2014) call for Global IR challenges the marginalisation of non-Western histories, agency and knowledge in accounts of world politics. Tucker (2018) similarly argues for closer attention to the racialised relations of power and knowledge through which coloniality operates across political and epistemic sites.

These perspectives are increasingly being brought directly into public policy and governance research. Jhagroe and Salazar-Morales (2025), for example, theorise policy coloniality to explain how racialised and colonial knowledge can shape policy formulation and the treatment of target populations. Strand's (2022) study of development cooperation with South Africa shows how aid discourse can reproduce hierarchies between former colonial powers and recipient societies. Recent work on policy evaluation in the Global South also highlights the interaction of colonial legacies, domestic institutions and transnational influences (Ben Brik, 2025). Together, these contributions suggest that global governance should be examined not only through its formal institutions and rules, but also through the historical power relations, narratives and knowledge practices that shape policy agendas and authority.

This panel brings these strands into dialogue. It treats postcolonialism not simply as a historical perspective or normative call, but as an analytical approach to contemporary global governance and policy-making. It is particularly interested in how power operates across international, regional, national and local levels; how global policy narratives define development priorities and legitimate interventions; and how actors in the Global South exercise agency by negotiating, translating, resisting or reshaping externally promoted frameworks.

Research Questions

The panel is guided by the following central question:

How do postcolonial power relations and unequal knowledge hierarchies shape global governance and policy-making across multilevel institutions in the Global South?

- How do international organisations, donors, transnational networks and national governments shape policy agendas and define legitimate development priorities?

- Through which narratives, expertise and policy instruments are particular models of governance presented as universal, necessary or transferable?

- How do national, subnational and community-level actors negotiate, translate, resist or appropriate

externally promoted policies?

- Under what conditions do South–South cooperation, regional institutions and locally grounded knowledge challenge or reproduce existing global hierarchies?

- How do colonial legacies interact with contemporary geopolitical, economic and institutional inequalities in shaping policy implementation and outcomes?

Methodological Approach

The panel welcomes methodological pluralism while encouraging submissions to make explicit how their research design connects power, knowledge and policy processes to observable institutional practices and outcomes. Contributions may employ qualitative, quantitative, historical, comparative or mixed-method approaches.

Relevant methods include comparative case studies across countries or policy sectors; process tracing of policy formulation, negotiation and implementation; qualitative analysis of policy documents, legislation, strategies and international agreements; discourse and narrative analysis of development frameworks and governance agendas; and semi-structured interviews with policymakers, civil society organisations, experts and affected communities. Network analysis and quantitative analysis of policy diffusion, aid flows or institutional participation are also welcome where appropriate.

Across these approaches, contributors are encouraged to identify the actors and levels of governance involved, trace how policy ideas and instruments circulate, examine how they are translated in particular contexts, and consider whose knowledge and interests are included or marginalised. Comparative work should avoid treating the Global South as a homogeneous category and should attend to differences in historical experience, institutional capacity, political context and regional position.

Scientific Relevance

The panel’s contribution is to connect postcolonial and decolonial analysis with research on global governance, multilevel policy-making and policy mobility. It shifts attention from the formal transfer of policy models alone to the power relations and narratives that shape their circulation, legitimacy and local effects. By foregrounding both structural inequalities and the agency of Global South actors, the panel seeks to advance comparative explanations of how global policy agendas are produced, negotiated and transformed.

CALL FOR PAPERS

How do colonial histories and contemporary global power relations shape the institutions, narratives and practices through which public policies are made and governed? How do actors across international, regional, national and local levels negotiate the circulation of policy ideas and development models? This panel invites theoretical, empirical, comparative and methodological contributions examining the intersections of postcolonial power, global governance and policy-making in the Global South.

We welcome contributions from public policy, political science, international relations, sociology, development studies, geography, history, law and related disciplines. Papers may focus on national, subnational, regional or transnational processes and should identify a clear research question, conceptual or theoretical framework, methodology and contribution to debates on public policy and global governance.

Theme 1 – Global Governance, Colonial Legacies and Institutional Power

- Colonial histories and the formation of contemporary global governance institutions;
- Power asymmetries in multilateral institutions and international cooperation;
- Postcolonial statehood, sovereignty and multilevel governance;
- International organisations, donors and the politics of development assistance;
- Global policy agendas, conditionality and the governance of development.

Theme 2 – Knowledge, Discourse and the Politics of Policy-Making

- Development narratives and the construction of policy problems;
- Expertise, evidence and epistemic hierarchies in global policy processes;
- Representation of Global South perspectives in international institutions;
- Discourse, framing and legitimation of policy interventions;
- Knowledge production, policy advice and transnational epistemic networks.

Theme 3 – Policy Circulation, Local Agency and Institutional Negotiation

- Policy transfer, diffusion, mobility and translation across unequal contexts;
- South–South cooperation and regional policy learning;
- Local adaptation, resistance and contestation of externally promoted models;
- National and subnational actors in multilevel governance;
- Community knowledge, participation and alternative governance practices.

Contributions may address development cooperation, education, health, climate and environmental governance, migration, trade, digital governance, public administration, social protection or other areas of global and transnational policy. The panel particularly encourages comparative research across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and other regions, including studies that examine differences within and between these contexts.

We especially welcome papers that connect historical analysis to contemporary policy processes, examine the interaction between global and local levels, and move beyond a simple opposition between external influence and domestic agency. Contributions may critically assess the possibilities and limits of postcolonial and decolonial approaches, including tensions within South–South cooperation and locally led policy initiatives.

Researchers at different career stages, including PhD candidates and early-career scholars, are encouraged to submit. Submissions should clearly state their empirical material or conceptual focus and explain how their methodology supports the analysis.

Expected Scientific Contribution

The panel aims to strengthen dialogue between postcolonial and decolonial scholarship and established research on global governance, policy transfer and multilevel policy processes. It conceptualises global policy-making as a field structured by historically produced inequalities, but also shaped by negotiation, translation and contestation among actors operating at different scales. By bringing together comparative and methodologically diverse contributions, it will clarify how policy narratives, institutional arrangements and knowledge hierarchies shape the circulation and implementation of global agendas, while identifying the conditions under which Global South actors exercise agency and develop alternative policy pathways.

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