(Virtual) P265 / Towards a Decolonial Perspective on Policy Learning and Transfer

Topic : Policy Transfer/Diffusion/Learning

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Much of the mainstream scholarly literature on policy learning, transfer, and diffusion has privileged formal state actors and North–South transmission, often treating the Global South as a recipient of models developed elsewhere. More recent scholarship on policy mobilities, policy assemblages, and South–South cooperation has however challenged this view by emphasising movement, translation, adaptation, contestation, and mutation that policies undergo as they travel and are reassembled in new locations (Clarke et.al, 2015; Peck & Theodore, 2015; Shore, Wright, & Pero, 2011; Temenos & McCann, 2013; Ureta, 2015; McCann & Ward, 2013). This strand of scholarship has drawn attention to how policies do not simply travel intact; they are reframed by local institutions, political coalitions, bureaucratic practices, and social struggles.

A decolonial perspective pushes this critique further. It asks how colonial histories continue to organise what counts as expertise, evidence, innovation, and good governance. The coloniality of knowledge privileges Western, technocratic forms of knowing while marginalising and devaluing indigenous, subaltern, community-based, and Southern epistemologies. Mainstream frameworks thus suffer from what has been called as ‘epistemicide’ (de Souza Santos, 2015) in systematically suppressing or excluding indigenous, localized, and non-Western forms of knowledge and instead positioning Western, Global North, or eurocentric policy models as universal solutions. In policymaking, this has produced a global division of intellectual labour in which the Global North is positioned as a source of theory and policy models, while the Global South is treated as a site for data collection, experimentation, or implementation. It is in this context that calls for ‘provincialization’ (Chakrabarty, 2000) so as to ‘decenter’ policy knowledge and “desuperiorization” (Freter, 2020) are made. Scholars have thus drawn attention to the “epistemological diversity of the world” which requires replacing the ‘monoculture of scientific knowledge’ by an ‘ecology of knowledges’ (De Sousa Santos et al., 2008).

This panel thus seeks to advance a decolonial perspective on policy transfer, diffusion and learning by interrogating the epistemic, institutional and political hierarchies embedded in these processes. It invites critical engagement with how colonial histories continue to shape the circulation of policy ideas, the authority accorded to particular forms of expertise, and the recognition or marginalisation of situated, embodied and community-based knowledge. It also foregrounds the possibility that knowledge and innovation generated in the Global South can reshape policy theory and practice, rather than merely serving as context-specific adaptations of supposedly universal models.

The panel will explore the following central research question: How can policy transfer, diffusion and learning be reconceptualised to challenge colonial hierarchies of knowledge and recognise plural, situated and historically grounded practices of policymaking? It will examine several related hypotheses: first, that decolonial policy learning requires reciprocal knowledge exchange rather than one-directional transfer from the Global North to the Global South; second, that informal institutions, indigenous knowledge systems and community practices can generate policy innovations that challenge established models of governance; and third, that meaningful decolonisation requires changes in the institutions, methodologies and evaluative criteria through which policy knowledge is produced and circulated.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel invites paper proposals that critically examine the politics, practices and possibilities of decolonising policy transfer, diffusion and learning. It welcomes conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirically grounded contributions that question dominant assumptions about where policy knowledge originates, how it travels, whose expertise is recognised, and how policy success is defined. The panel ths moves beyond a narrow focus on whether policies “succeed” or “fail” after transfer, asking instead how power operates through the very categories used to evaluate success.

The panel welcomes comparative studies, single-country case studies, historical analyses, ethnographic

research, theoretical interventions and methodological reflections. Contributions engaging with India and other postcolonial contexts, as well as comparative experiences across the Global South, are particularly encouraged. We are especially interested in contributions that examine South–South and South–North circulation, indigenous and community-led policy knowledge, and cases where marginalised actors challenge dominant models or create alternative policy vocabularies. We would welcome studies of policy translation, adaptation, resistance, failure, hybridisation, and reversal; the politics of evidence and measurement; language and translation in policymaking; colonial legacies in administrative institutions; and the racialised, gendered, and classed dimensions of expertise.

By bringing comparative, theoretical and empirically grounded research into conversation, the panel aims to contribute to a more plural, reflexive and politically attentive understanding of policy mobility. The panel is interested in connecting policy process scholarship with decolonial theory, postcolonial state studies and Global South perspectives, while opening new avenues for understanding how policy learning can become more equitable, context-sensitive and democratically accountable.

Ultimately, the panel seeks to build a conversation on how policy transfer, diffusion and learning can be reimagined beyond universalising assumptions and epistemic hierarchies, towards more reciprocal, context-sensitive and inclusive approaches to policymaking. By foregrounding epistemic justice, translation, and political agency, the panel seeks to contribute to debates on global governance, international development, comparative public policy, and the democratisation of knowledge production.

Abstracts should clearly articulate their research question, theoretical contribution, methodological approach and relevance to the panel's central concerns.