P185 / Towards a Public Policy of the Global South

Topic : Politics, Institutions and Political Regimes

Chair : Elise Klein (Australian National University)

Second Chair : Yonique Campbell (University of the West Indies)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

A significant body of scholarship suggests that public policy scholarship, as conventionally taught and practised, may not be well equipped to address the critical public policy challenges faced by Global South populations such as the climate crisis, inequality, poverty and genocide. Several interlocking concerns animate this debate. First, questions have been raised about the extent to which public policy as a discipline, accounts for its own history, and specifically how its foundational commitment to liberal democracy, developed through and within broader circuits of colonial and imperial domination, contributes to what Mignolo (2011) calls “the darker side of modernity” (see also Klein and Campbell, forthcoming, Ahmed 2024; Alkadry, 2004). Second, critical scholars have challenged the field’s tendency to treat policy as a set of universal and portable tools applicable across contexts regardless of ontology, history or power (Jhagroe & Salazar-Morales 2026; Eiró, and Lotta 2024). Third, imperialism, white supremacy, and colonisation are often reduced to mere policy context rather than treated as shaping policy formation, tools and knowledge, having material, epistemological, and ontological consequences for public policy (Haque 1996; Phiri, 2021; Klein 2024). Fourth, longstanding debates persist over the field’s state-centrism, with scholars of civic engagement and non-state actors continuing to press for broader conceptions of who counts as a policy actor, and the role of informality and resistance in policymaking (Chatterjee, 2006; Klein and Campbell, forthcoming).

These debates raise pressing questions for how public policy is researched, taught, and practised, where Northern policy frameworks are universalised globally, rather developing scholarship and practice based on local histories, governance traditions, diverse ontologies and struggles from the South (Nisar, 2023). Recognising that the terms ‘global North’ and ‘South’ depict an imprecise distinction between populations that have benefited from dispossession, colonisation and slavery and postcolonial, subaltern and Indigenous populations who live daily with the implications of these process every day, albeit in differing ways (Müller, 2020), we understand these North/South as metaphors and an analytical approach for understanding politics, histories and economics of public policy (Sud and Sanchez-Ancechea, 2022; de Sousa Santos, 2014).

This panel provides a space for scholars to engage critically with these questions, and asks:

1. How might public policy scholarship reckon with its colonial and imperial histories?

2. How are Global South governments, movements, and scholars already reworking dominant policy framings, and what can be learned from these efforts?

3. How are diverse ontologies informing public policy theory and practice?

The panel welcomes diverse theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical perspectives on these questions, offering a forum for rigorous debate rather than advancing a single, settled position.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite paper proposals (in person or online) that critically interrogate the foundations of public policy scholarship and teaching, and that contribute to reimagining public policy from Global South perspectives. We welcome papers addressing, among other topics:

1. analysis of the historical formation of public policy concepts and methods within circuits of imperial and colonial domination;

2. critiques of the presumed neutrality of policy tools and frameworks;

3. challenges to state-centric conceptions of policy actors, including contributions on civic, community, and non-state policy practice; and case studies of Global South governments, movements, or communities already practising or theorising alternative approaches to public policy.

4. Analysis of ontological and epistemological diversity seriously in public policy

5. Innovative ways to teach public policy to include decolonial, anticolonial and Indigenous framings.

We welcome theoretical, empirical, and pedagogically-oriented submissions, and are especially interested in papers that move from diagnosing the problems with public policy towards constructive alternatives grounded in Global South knowledge and experience.

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