

Urban Policy and Governance

1. Policy as Practical Concept in the Urban Terrain

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Co-Convenor(s)	Harsh Mittal, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani Hyderabad Campus
Keywords	Anthropology of Policy, Urban Policy and Governance. Policy as Practical Concept, Urban Infrastructure

Call for Abstracts

We propose this panel to specifically focus on the use of policy as a “practical concept” (Colebatch 2009) in the urban terrain. Such a focus aims to challenge the binary of policy formulation and policy implementation as policies get reconfigured and reworked in different political spaces, influenced by various issue-based and land-based urban dynamics (Raman, 2016). Furthermore, recent studies highlight that such use of policy, usually responds to various abstract (and global) considerations of economy, employment, energy, and environment but is also entangled in the community-based agendas active in city-specific political spaces that are connected to higher state spaces in a fuzzy way (Patil, 2024). These entanglements pose significant conceptual challenges to North American theories on policy process and invite us to attend to field-work oriented sensibilities cultivated in anthropological and interpretive policy scholarship to theorize how policy processes unfold on the urban terrain. Engagement with the field will help us unravel the entanglements of policy agendas with the varieties of urban built environments and understand how they co-evolve in the political spaces attached with municipalities and corporators.

We thus ask: How do policy processes unfold differently in the urban terrain (in the Global South)? How are policy agendas shaped and influenced by activity in varied political spaces attached to the city defying well-defined logics, interests, and ideologies? How is policy employed as a practical concept by various political configurations in relation to various urban issues such as waste, sanitation, housing, infrastructure, and possibly many others?

We are primarily interested in field-based exploration of various socio-political configurations, working with policy as a practical concept to shape the urban built environments, while also negotiating with different institutions, and various local forces. Submissions could be from any context. While our experience with urban terrain in the Global South acts as an inspiration (Raman, 2016; Mittal et al., 2023), we share the theoretical ambition to work across the North-South divide.

2. Who Plans? Knowledge Paradigms in Urban Planning and Policy Processes

Convenor	Ashima Sood, Associate Professor and Director, Centre for Urbanism and Cultural Economics, Anant National University, Ahmedabad
Co-Convenor(s)	Keshab Das, Professor and Dean, School of Social, Financial & Human Sciences, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar and Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi

Keywords	Urban Policy and Governance, Digital Societies and Governance, Data Regimes in Contemporary Digital Societies
<p>Call for Abstracts</p> <p>Planned and unintended solutions to “wicked” urban problems often generate new problems in their wake. The demands of a fast-urbanizing global population, with vast numbers in small and medium settlements, therefore require interdisciplinary expertise to address the complex and ever-changing fields that intersect in sites of economic and social agglomeration. A diverse array of academic disciplines and fields of expert practice speak to the urban conundrum. Even so, processes of urban planning and policy in many contexts continue to be shaped by far narrower disciplinary knowledge bases. The interdisciplinary field of urban studies itself draws from variegated bodies of knowledge in disciplines such as geography, economics, political science, sociology, anthropology and history. Scholarly work in architecture and urban planning also brings grounded insight of use to planners and policy-makers. Even so, certain kinds of expert positions and technocratic bodies of knowledge have tended to dominate urban policy processes. Moreover, discrepancies sometimes arise between policy agendas with spatial implications. Yet new horizons of risk to urban populations emerging through pandemics, climate change, and/ or geopolitics necessitate more diverse forms of local and specialized expertise to create more resilient and faster-responding collective urban imaginaries. This panel invites contributions that examine questions along the following and similar lines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of data and knowledge are privileged in urban policy processes at central, state, and local levels? Which actors or groups – academics, private consultants, interest groups – can influence urban planning and policy across regional and governmental entities? Are there differences across scales? • How is expert knowledge conceived and deployed in policy processes? What forms of local or located expertise can enter into policy-level and urban-scale decision-making? • What spaces exist for democratic consultation and participation in city-level planning? How are diverse imaginaries of Southern cities nurtured and incorporated? • How and to what extent can best practices on diversifying and democratizing participation in policy processes be identified and tailored to conditions in specific geographies of the Global South? What challenges and facilitators may these efforts encounter? 	

3. Gendering Urban Governance, Social Policies and Participatory Processes in Indian Cities

Convenor	Kasturi Datta, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Hindu College, University of Delhi
Co-Convenor(s)	Rashmi Gopi, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Miranda House, University of Delhi; Smita Agarwal, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi
Keywords	Urban Policy and Governance, Social Policies, Gender and Diversity
<p>Call for Abstracts</p> <p>This panel aims to critically engage with the existing failures or inadequacies in policy design, political processes in areas of urban governance and social policies through a gendered perspective. The central</p>	

objective is to discuss and deliberate on the questions of the invisibility of gender in the policy processes and structures of governance in urban spaces and how it impacts decision-making and policy implementation.

Women encounter and use the urban environment in different ways from men, they have their unique experiences and priorities in terms of services and infrastructure. Gender budgeting is also proposed as a solution to include gender perspective in urban governance from policy formulation to policy implementation (Singh 2016). A gendered approach to planning and policy-making can foster inclusive partnerships in urban governance. This exercise is significant in terms of engaging with a plurality of voices within larger categories of gender and governance. In the global south, diversity is a reality of urban development and policy processes must address these pertinent challenges.

This panel will also provide an opportunity to critically engage with methodological questions, about public policy research in the context of India and the challenges that researchers encounter in collecting data and innovating with tools and techniques in the application of feminist research methods in their respective fields. The Convenors of this panel invite both conceptual and empirically rich research papers from researcher scholars, faculty members across disciplines as well as policy practioners, gender evaluators and fieldworkers from the civil society, so as to make this panel a diverse and comprehensive one.

4. Charting the Margins: Reimagining Urban Development

Convenor

Saleha Sapra, Co-Founder / Urban Practitioner, City Sabha, New Delhi

Keywords

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Urban policy and governance in India is riddled with the systemic challenge of top-down planning. Several schemes and programmes at different governance levels have cropped up, diluting the mechanisms of accountability. At the same time, without adequate public participation, counter tactics have cropped up through the efforts of multiple Civil Society Organisations, social impact initiatives, and creative practitioners engaging with vulnerable groups. Many do impactful work but operate in silos. And so, questions around realising collective action for people-centred urban change remain unaddressed.

There is no singular way to address people’s relationship with their public spaces. In this context, how do centring people’s vulnerabilities and everyday realities shape their relationship with the state for accessing basic services? What are the processes for visibilising these realities in ethical, non-compromising ways? How can these processes address planning priorities in the context of limited state capacity without diluting the nuances of these realities? In doing so, what challenges are imposed bridging the gap in ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ for effective implementation of urban policies that aim to enable accessibility and usability of public spaces?

We want to explore alternative and ethical methods, processes, and approaches for examining urban governance and planning complexities. We invite proposals from scholars, researchers, practitioners, geographers, and activists to share innovative reimaginings of urban marginalities from a people-centric lens and their right to access public spaces.