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Growth for Society: Collaborative
Governance, Social Innovation, and Public Value



iias-iisa.org/iias-2026-conference/

Plural Knowledge Systems and Collaborative Governance: Reimagining Policy Studies Beyond Western-Centric Frameworks

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Aim

To explore how plural knowledge systems, indigenous governance traditions, and Global South policy experiences can reimagine public administration and policy governance by strengthening collaborative governance, fostering social innovation, and enhancing public value creation in response to contemporary developmental, technological, and geopolitical challenges.

In particular, we will focus on the following:

- Explore epistemic biases that have marginalised non-Western policy experiences and governance perspectives.
- Recognise and advance indigenous governance traditions, customary institutional arrangements, community-based decision-making systems, informal governance practices, and policy innovations emerging from Global South contexts.
- Critically examine how colonial legacies and enduring power asymmetries continue to shape institutions, governance, and policy practice.
- Explore how plural knowledge systems can strengthen collaborative governance, social innovation, and public value creation.



Relevance to the conference theme

The panel directly responds to the conference's focus on collaborative governance, social innovation, and public value by interrogating whether dominant Western policy paradigms adequately explain governance challenges in diverse development contexts. Global South governance systems frequently operate through hybrid institutional arrangements combining formal state structures, indigenous governance logics, civic collaboration, and informal policy adaptation. Engagement with these plural governance forms is essential for designing inclusive public institutions capable of addressing inequality, resilience challenges, digital disruption, and developmental transformation.

Rationale

Western-centric paradigms have long shaped public policy and policy studies, often producing universalised models grounded in Global North assumptions, institutional histories, and governance traditions (Howlett, 2009; Shore & Wright, 1997). While these frameworks have contributed significantly to policy scholarship, their application in Global South contexts has frequently occurred without sufficient engagement with indigenous governance systems, lived realities, contextual institutional arrangements, and the historical conditions that shape policy environments (Mukhtarov, 2014; Zhang, 2023).

As such, this has contributed to an enduring epistemic imbalance in which policy experiences and knowledge systems from the Global South are too often treated as peripheral, rather than recognised as legitimate sources of theoretical insight, governance learning, and policy innovation (Mbembe, 2016; Eiró & Lotta, 2023). The growing conversation around decolonising policy studies reflects an important effort to confront epistemic injustice and to create space for more plural and contextually grounded ways of understanding governance, institutions, and policy action (Escobar, 2020). Within this broader shift, decolonial thinking in policy studies is not simply about critique. The thought is equally about recognising that policy itself shapes access to governance, resources, participation, and public value. In this regard, indigenous, community-based, and experiential knowledge systems remain essential to understanding how policy is imagined, negotiated, and implemented in many contexts (Chilisa, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

These questions have become even more pressing amid widening inequality, complex governance, technological transformation, and shifting geopolitical relations.



Contemporary public administration increasingly requires governance approaches that are collaborative, socially responsive, and grounded in the realities of the societies they seek to serve. In many Global South settings, governance already operates through hybrid institutional arrangements that combine formal administrative systems with local governance traditions, civic participation, and adaptive forms of policy practice. Nonetheless, mainstream policy scholarship continues to underrepresent these governance realities.

The panel, therefore, seeks to create a space for critical but constructive engagement on how plural knowledge systems can broaden contemporary policy studies and public administration scholarship. The panel invites reflection on how indigenous and contextually grounded perspectives can contribute to collaborative governance, social innovation, and more inclusive forms of public value creation.

Proposed panel contributions

- Decolonising policy studies and public administration scholarship: critical contributions examining how dominant Western policy paradigms have shaped governance analysis, administrative practice, and policy design, including efforts to develop theory, concepts, or analytical frameworks grounded in non-Western contexts.
- Indigenous, local, and plural knowledge systems in governance: empirical or theoretical contributions exploring indigenous governance traditions, customary institutional arrangements, informal governance practices, community-based decision-making systems, and locally grounded policy innovations as sources of governance learning and public value creation.
- Governance practice, institutional hybridity, and policy implementation in the Global South: critical contributions examining how hybrid governance arrangements combining formal institutions, civic actors, informal systems, and historical institutional legacies shape policy implementation, reform, and collaborative governance outcomes.
- Methodological and conceptual innovation in plural policy analysis: critical Contributions on appropriate methodological approaches for analysing plural knowledge systems, decolonial governance processes, and contextually grounded policy practice.



Format

Presentation of research papers pertaining to the topic, followed by discussions.

References

- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. SAGE.
- Eiró, F., & Lotta, G. (2023). On the Frontline of Global Inequalities: A Decolonial Approach to the Study of Street-Level Bureaucracies. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 34(1), 67-79. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muad019>
- Escobar, A. (2020). *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*. Duke University Press.
- Howlett, M. (2009). Governance Modes, Policy Regimes and Operational Plans: A Multi-level Nested Model of Policy Instrument Choice and Policy Design. *Policy Sciences*, 42(1).1-13.
- Mbembe, A. (2016). Decolonizing the University: New Directions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1).1-16.
- Mukhtarov, F. (2014). Rethinking the Travel of Ideas: Policy Translation in the Water Sector. *Policy and Politics*, 42(1).1-11.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonisation*. Routledge.
- Shore, C., & Wright, S. (1997). *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*. Routledge.
- Zhang, J. Y. (2023). Decolonising the temporal and relational assumptions in contemporary science and science policies. *Critical Policy Studies*, 17(1), 162–174.



Practicalities

Key Links

- Conference website: <https://www.ias-iisa.org/ias-2026-conference/>
- Submission system: <https://www.conftool.org/ias2026/>
- Contact: ias-conference@ias-iisa.org

Important Dates

- Abstract / Panel submission deadline: **30 August 2026**
- Notification of acceptance and opening of registration: **30 August 2026**
- Full paper submission and registration deadline: **4 October 2026**

Submission Guidelines

- Unless otherwise specified in the track call, abstracts are limited to **500 words**. They should clearly outline the research question, theoretical framework, methodology, main findings (or expected findings), and implications.
- Accepted abstracts are expected to be developed into full papers.
- **Panels** are session proposals submitted under the main conference theme. A panel proposal includes a title, abstract, proposed chairperson(s), and a list of expected presentations. Panels are not required to produce full papers.

Evaluation

Proposals (papers and panels) are evaluated by the chair(s) (or co-chairs) of the track to which they are submitted. Evaluation criteria include:

- Academic quality and rigour
- Relevance to the track theme and overall conference theme
- Thematic fit and originality
- Clarity and quality of presentation

Paper Requirements

- Maximum length: **6,000 words** (all inclusive, including references).
- Structure: abstract, introduction, main body (developing the research question, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, and implications), conclusion, and references.

