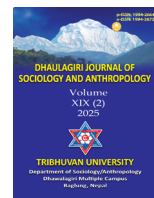


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Exploring Anthropological Approaches to Public Policy in Nepal: A Post-Qualitative Inquiry

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By and large, public policy is understood as an administrative construct, comprising institutional mechanisms, economic priorities, and political choices. In the spaces where it is duly enacted, policies face challenges and are reshaped by the sociocultural rhythms at large. In Nepal, policy research basically focuses on statistics, procedures, and formal rules, often neglecting the lived experiences of local people and their indigenous knowledge. Recognizing these processes revealed deep entanglement with people's experiences and cultural performances, echoing the relational knowledge of the policy researcher and the people being studied. Drawing on this excerpt, I employ anthropological approaches in Nepal and reimagine sociocultural constructs that shape policy. This study is guided by post-qualitative inquiry; my engagements with policymakers, anthropologists, public policy experts, and practitioners unfolded conversations in homes, teahouses, and cafés, where knowledge is co-constructed with my research companions. Employing Anthony Giddens' (1986) Structuration Theory, I explored how structures or systems and human actions constantly shape and reshape one another in everyday life. In Nepal's policy landscape, anthropology is sidelined, as technocratic approaches, bureaucratic frameworks, and rigid institutional mechanisms largely limit policies. These constraints are never absolute. Individual actors, including policymakers, scholars, public policy experts, and advocates, continue to introduce culturally sensitive and context-aware approaches into policy spaces. Anthropology thus becomes visible not only in policy documents but also in how policies are lived, interpreted, and negotiated across different contexts, as these entanglements imply that policy knowledge is largely relational, embodied, and evolving, not static. Anthropological insights not only complement policy research but also reshape how policy is enacted, making it more inclusive, culturally grounded to address people's pressing issues, and responsive to policy ecosystems in Nepal.

Keywords: anthropological approaches, co-creation, emergent, entanglements, relationality

Introduction

More often, public policy is a set of courses of action, institutional frameworks, economic priorities, and political choices. Anthropologically, it is entangled with the everyday worlds of people, enacted, made actionable, interpreted to create the outcomes, and reshaped to make it appropriate

through the lived experiences. A post-qualitative inquiry, likewise, embraces creative, flexible, and reflective ways of generating policy knowledge. The conventional approach in Nepal, even today, has dealt with economic, political, and administrative fields, while sociocultural premises remain a lower priority. The main public policy foundations are cultural performances, rituals, languages, and social



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practices, which are co-constituted through people's everyday lives. Anthropology, in this context, illuminates people-centered approaches in the policymaking process that capture the voices, interpretations, and contestations related to formal systems, and highlights how power is embedded in relationships, negotiated, and practiced rather than solely in institutions (Shore, 2012). Engaging cultural groups in policy research employs case studies, action research, ethnographic studies, and grounded methods to listen to people's voices (Yanow, 2007), thereby helping co-create people's knowledge. It is possible through intra-actions among policy researchers, policy experts, and policy practitioners, including the development of contextual sensibilities. Nevertheless, anthropological research is often overlooked by policymakers and policy practitioners aiming to produce lasting outcomes (Guillot-Wright & Oliver, 2023). In this connection, a mid-level policymaker and I arranged a meeting in Lalitpur around mid-2025 to talk about the policy processes of Nepal. In this meeting, we discussed and unfolded our reflections,

Policymakers merely use anthropological approaches in policy research to create qualitative evidence in the policymaking process, capturing the voices, needs, and issues of local people for informed decision-making. Due to this, we cannot create implementable, doable, and actionable policies to address the real problems faced by grassroots people. This has raised a question of policy integrity, which is a pressing issue in the policy ecosystem of Nepal. Now the time has come to think about the anthropological experiences that can embrace an idea of effective and implementable policies.

To serve the interests of anthropological approaches, I adopted a post-qualitative approach to create policy knowledge, which emerges relationally and is co-created in conversations with policymakers, anthropologists, public policy experts, and practitioners. Moreover, Structuration Theory explains structure and agency, showing how institutions, their rules, and social norms are shaped by human actions. Thus, anthropology is not merely applied, as it emerges in constellations of policy actors, people's practices, and meanings, which portray policy enactments and outcomes (Long, 2001; Wedel et al., 2005). To understand the scope of anthropological approaches in policy research, an anthropologist and I were engaged in a conversation in Lalitpur around mid-2025. The conversation helped us to reflect on this idea, "The relational approach focuses on the transformative potential of anthropology, which draws attention to culture, customary practices, ritual performances, and social behaviors as policy ingredients that co-produce policy uptakes in Nepal". Additionally, anthropology urges policymakers and policy practitioners to think about the situated, emergent, and relational dimensions of policy governance, fostering culturally responsive and context-sensitive policymaking processes in Nepal. In so

doing, policy is understood as a power in action, which is mobilized through relationships between human and non-human entities, interpretation, and collective engagement of policy stakeholders (Weiss, 2018).

Emmeshing Methodology: A Post-Qualitative Thinking

This study employed an interpretive paradigm, which focuses on the sociocultural constructions of Nepal. In this way, meanings largely emerge and are attributed to policymaking experiences and processes. According to the interpretive paradigm, knowledge is a context-specific construct, co-created and inseparable from interactions between the researcher and research companions in real-world practices (Barad, 2007; Christ & Varga, 2024). And, research is a relational process in which research companions, contextual realities, and the policy researcher intra-act together to produce policy knowledge. Aligning with anthropological sensibilities, I explored cultural values, social practices, and lived experiences of people that emphasize policy processes in Nepal, as these processes are socially and culturally entangled, rather than governed by universal laws and fixed models. As an anthropologist, I found myself engaged in a conversation. The idea of the entanglement of anthropological approaches and policy insights emerged, "Within the entanglements, anthropological approaches and policy processes co-produce policy insights and outcomes, shaping both policy understanding and practices for stakeholders."

In a post-qualitative inquiry, the research design was emergent and dialogic, drawing on Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action, where knowledge emerges from entanglements between human and non-human entities. In addition, my research companions and I collaboratively co-created relational insights and analyzed policy documents, journal articles, and reports. I am deeply resonated with cultural context, situated understanding, and interpretation over quantification. I knotted myself with Kathmandu and Lalitpur Districts, which serve as the research fields, as I chose these spaces where policy, practice, and culture intersect. Research companions were purposively selected to ensure representation from policymakers, anthropologists, public policy experts, and researchers (Creswell, 2013). I assigned 'pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and relational ethics of the research participants' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), and uncovered this research, following an interpretive-thematic approach, and engaging with Structuration Theory, and traced how structures and human agency co-constitute policy grounds. Research credibility was established through triangulation of information from the research companions, thick contextual descriptions, and a reflective journal. My engagement with research companions ensured relational ethics and maintained confidentiality. In accordance with post-qualitative

principles, I did not unfold statistical generalization. Still, I embraced a deeper understanding of policy in a socially and culturally situated context, and a relationally enacted policymaking process in Nepal.

Entangling Anthropology and Policy: My Reflection

My academic journey has been entangled with qualitative research approaches, echoing the interpretive paradigm. These experiences are pathfinders for my academic achievements, providing opportunities to engage with diverse ideas and to reflect on their relevance to scholarly, practical, and professional tenacity. Besides this, publishing journal articles, teaching “Research and Qualitative Methods for Public Policy” for students of public policy and management, and supervising students’ capstone projects allowed me to critically engage with the interpretive paradigm and deepen my knowledge about it, which reflects on my positionality, as it demonstrates how knowledge is entangled. My engagement with journals also gave me these insights, guiding me in understanding the approach to policy engagement.

My curiosity about public policy opened a space for me to engage with policymakers, policy researchers, public policy experts, and policy consumers. As a faculty member, I am also involved with the Department of Public Policy and Management, teaching the Master of Public Policy and Management (MPPM). Before this, I was engaged at the KUSOM Policy Lab as a Senior Research Fellow, focusing on creating policy knowledge on myriad issues in Nepal. Through policy research, reviewing policy reports, and editing policy documents, I gained insights into how ideas are generated by human and non-human entities, emphasizing that understanding public policy evolves from interactions with multiple policy stakeholders, sociocultural settings, and resources rather than standing alone. These lived experiences led me to integrate anthropological ideas into policy research.

In April 2025, the Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, announced a call for abstracts for an international conference to be held in Nepal, at which I presented a paper titled “Exploring Anthropological Approaches to Public Policy in Nepal: A Post-Qualitative Inquiry”. All these circumstances led me to reflect on the anthropological approaches in the policy landscapes of Nepal, employing a post-qualitative approach. I commit to continuing this journey.

Reimagining Structure and Agency: Engagement with Giddens’s Theory of Structuration

In this study, I have engaged with Anthony Giddens’ (1986) Structuration Theory, which provides an understanding of the entangled relationship between structure and individual agency as mutually constitutive forces that continuously shape social life. This theory deals

with structures consisting of rules, norms, institutions, and resources that do not merely constrain or enable; rather, they emerge through human interactions. In the policymaking and enforcement stages, the decisions, actions, and interpretations of policymakers, public policy experts, and policy consumers are entangled with the spectrum of structure, co-creating policy uptakes. Policies are not static arrangements; they are transformed through relational processes involving multiple policy stakeholders across different phases.

In Nepal, policy institutions emerge as both enabling and constraining in the design and implementation of policy. They are enacted through interactions with human actors in the policymaking process, whereas agents are entangled with these institutional frameworks, negotiating and interpreting the expectations of people. During our conversation, as a matter of concentration on co-creation of policy knowledge, the anthropologist and I echoed,

By and large, anthropological insights emerge not as external prescriptions for the policymaking process, but as they are brought into entangled space in the policy ecosystem. They, therefore, co-constitute policy knowledge arising from interactions among institutions, people, and cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, policymaking is not a top-down activity; rather, it is a dynamic and relational process where policy outcomes are continuously shaped and co-created across human and non-human actors, cultural meanings, and institutional frameworks, entangling them together.

Anthropological Approaches to Public Policy: Emergent Insights from Nepal

I echo the key insights derived from interactions with policymakers, anthropologists, public policy experts, and policy practitioners in Nepal. I am attuned to Structuration Theory, which highlights the interaction between structure (i.e., policy systems, bureaucrats, and institutional frameworks) and agency (i.e., policymakers, anthropologists, public policy experts, and policy practitioners). I attempted to echo how structure and agency play roles in the recognition of anthropological approaches in policy research and practices in Nepal.

Policy Research in Nepal: Becoming with Cultural Contexts

Culture is intertwined with policy, which shapes not only how policies are understood but also how they are enacted and lived by myriad policy actors. Invariably, policy appears as a cultural construct, entangled with local people’s meanings, values, rituals, norms, and practices (Pellissery, 2014). In view of a post-qualitative approach, formal objectives do not solely determine the success or failure of policy, as policy is co-constituted through interactions between policy frameworks and the everyday

practices (Douglas, 1986; Mosse, 2005). Thus, policy is an ongoing cultural process in which meaning-making work is distributed across multiple actors and different spaces (Mosse, 2005), which is entangled with local power relations (Li, 2007). Anthropological thinking illuminates sociocultural webs in which people bring their own knowledge, experiences, and interpretations to the policy process, as it underscores its inherently co-constituted in nature (Chilisa, 2012).

In Nepal, the fields of public policy research are economics, political science, and administrative studies, which privilege institutional performance, economic efficiency, and political priorities (Subedi, 2010; Sharma, 2018), as these approaches undermine sociocultural avenues, such as caste constructs, ethnicity, gender issues, and other identities. Conversely, Upreti (2017) mentions a recognition of the anthropological approaches in the study of federalism, education, and social inclusion in Nepal. In addition, some scholars (i.e., Acharya, 2024; Baral, 2022; Dahal, 2011) articulate that the anthropological approaches sought policies as lived experiences, negotiated agendas, and culturally positioned processes of local communities. During the conversational engagement between us, emphasizing the integration of anthropological knowledge into the policy formation process, the anthropologist and I resonated,

The integration of anthropological ideas into policy research of Nepal is emergent, as it is a field of study for policymakers and researchers, which reflects both the potential work of sociocultural dimensions, integrating into policy exercise to produce policy uptake at large.

Like the use of anthropological approaches in the policy design processes, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) also ensures inclusion and participation of all groups of people in the policymaking process (Government of Nepal, 2015). Such inclusion unfolds in everyday social, cultural, and political practices.

Entangling Structural and Epistemic Conditions

Structural constraints shape how anthropology circulates or fails to circulate in the policy research landscape of Nepal. In practice, policymakers usually operate within their institutional procedures, which overlook qualitative approaches, as connections among erratic academic institutions, policy researchers, and government entities. The insufficiency of funding for interdisciplinary policy research has marginalized it, which reproduces a stronghold of bureaucratic culture, as it focuses on technical knowledge rather than sociocultural constructs. To discuss anthropological approaches in the policymaking process, I engaged with a public policy expert in Kathmandu around mid-2025, as we reflected on our common voices,

In Nepal, some bureaucratic hurdles appear to

incorporate the voices of people at the grassroots level, as they merely entangle with them. However, some efforts are put into practice to capture the voices of people. To address this issue, anthropologists are also not appointed as experts in the government institutions. In recent years, policymakers have begun to recognize the importance of anthropological ideas in the policymaking process, but it may still take time to enforce it in real-life practice of the policy ecosystem.”

Alongside these structurally constructed barriers in Nepal, policymakers and policy researchers have begun to recognize the potential of anthropology to expose how local meanings shape people’s governance practices. In such a condition, anthropological knowledge does not appear as a static discipline but as a relational practice. And, insights are co-created through interactions among people, negotiations of the issues, and the entanglement of structure, individual agency, and sociocultural knowledge of the local communities.

In the policy landscape of Nepal, both institutional and epistemic barriers are retained mainly by structural legacies. After the decade of the 1950s, economics, political science, and public administration dominated the policy premises, which limited the room for anthropological approaches. This facet reflects what Structuration Theory reveals on the duality of structure, embracing the constraining and enabling of both structure and agency. A moment of resonance emerged with the policy practitioner in Lalitpur around mid-2025. During the flow of conversation between us, the following idea emerged,

Even at local bodies of Nepal, structural rigidity of government institutions has created barriers to engaging local communities and understanding their cultural practices, grasping local values, traditions, and systems, as it is a time-consuming process for policymakers and practitioners. At the time of program planning and budgeting, they attempt to incorporate the voices of the locals, but still, there are challenges to doing so.

So far, incremental change has been felt today, as policymakers have begun to integrate sociocultural insights into policy processes in Nepal. Anthropology, in turn, has been extending its application in the policymaking process by accounting for the significance of how ethnographic inquiry can provide inclusive and culturally rooted policy uptake. These potential demands build relational capabilities as anthropologists learn to navigate policy systems, and policymakers cultivate an appreciation for cultural knowledge, which allows anthropology to evolve as a generative force within the policy landscape of Nepal.

Moving Beyond Technical Rationality: Becoming in the Anthropological Age

In Nepal, policies are mostly embedded in technocratic

frameworks that focus on quantitative data policy research and the design process to address existing social problems. With the intent of discussing technical rationality in the policy landscape, I engaged with a mid-level policymaker. As our conversation continued, we reflected our view on this issue, “The government institutions follow prescribed or standardized formats to create evidence for the policymaking process, thinking of them as standard formats, which merely allow a little room for exploring the cultural side of issues.” According to Fischer (2003), an orientation of a “*technical turn*” demands expert-driven models, often ignoring participatory approaches in policy research. As a point of inclusion of people’s voices in the policy process, the anthropologist and I echoed,

In my understanding, anthropologists are merely consulted or involved in the policy ecosystem. This raises a question of whether people’s voices are heard and cultural practices are considered or not in the policymaking process. Here is a question: how effective are policies designed, and are they people-friendly policies?

Anthropology encounters such a rationality, which offers interpretative frameworks for policymaking, emphasizing people’s meanings, cultural practices, and lived experiences. In the words of Blaxter (2010) and Lincoln (2010), post-qualitative approaches accept knowledge, which is co-created or co-constituted through *intra-action*. And, it embraces open-ended engagement among policy researchers, research companions, and contextual premises. From this approach, ethnographic study co-creates how policies are livable and can be negotiated by communities themselves, revealing experiences that statistical tools alone cannot capture (Le Grange, 2018). Sitting in a place in Kathmandu around mid-2025, a senior-level policymaker and I reflected in that conversation, “In most policy studies in Nepal, statistical efficiencies are the prime focus, but the cultural premises of public policy are undermined, thinking them not as evidence.”

Likewise, anthropological reasoning embedded within the policymaking process in Nepal opens an avenue of interpretative pathways to explain why policies such as health, natural resource management, education, or agriculture frequently encounter local challenges despite their technical soundness and rational thinking. As the meeting continued, the public policy expert and I reflected on our ideas,

Most of the policymaking process is driven by technocentric mindsets of bureaucrats. Although certain mechanisms exist to engage local people, they are largely symbolic; structural barriers prevent the genuine concerns and voices of the people from being reflected in the policymaking process. For a better policy contour, it is necessary to think about the local policy ingredients.

Within post-qualitative frameworks, anthropology also

seeks evidence beyond numbers and metrics, ensuring social meanings, emotions, and everyday practices of communities that are policy stakeholders and consumers. By positing lived realities, anthropology shifts from a technical pursuit to a culturally attuned one grounded in human experiences and practices.

Conventionally, public policy is viewed as a technical endeavor guided by those in power, with economic priorities, and using the state’s institutional frameworks. Such views, as Dunn (2018) and Anderson (2015) articulate, emphasize technocratic rationality, envisaging policymakers, recipients, and advocates as policy actors. This imagery challenges the entangled realisms of policy, the interplay of social dynamics, power relations among different policy actors, and cultural sensibilities that shape policies and how these policies unfold (Fischer, 2003; Yanow, 2000).

A post-qualitative orientation emphasizes policy not as a static tool but as a cultural practice that is enacted and experienced in situated contexts. Shore and Wright (1997) articulate that policies uncover problems, produce social identities, and are inseparable from the lives and interpretations of those they touch upon. As the conversation continued between the senior-level policymaker and me, we expanded our discussion further on the following issue, “Policy is not linear, not objective, not fixed; it emerges through relational processes, enacted, contested, and reconfigured in everyday life.” Barad (2007) echoes a view, emphasizing that knowledge itself is situated, co-created across contexts and relationships between human and non-human entities, as it reminds us that understanding policy requires attending to its ongoing intra-actions, rather than merely mapping its formal structures of the state.

Reworking the Anthropological Turn in Policy Studies

The idea emerged that policymakers feel the relevance of anthropology. During the meeting between the mid-level policymaker and me, an idea emerged,

The policymaking process in Nepal is informed by anthropological knowledge, as an understanding of cultural practices and human behavior contributes to producing better policy outcomes, as it has become a mouthpiece for policy stakeholders because it is not practiced in real policy discourses.

Globally, anthropology has increasingly intersected with public policy. Scholars such as Shore and Wright (2011) and Wright and Wedel (2011) note that policies circulate, are negotiated, and are interpreted across diverse sociocultural contexts. As the conversation unfolded between us, the senior-level policymaker and I equivocated, “From a post-qualitative approach, policies are not merely top-down approaches; they are lived, felt, and enacted by multiple actors, including policymakers, researchers, policy consumers, and communities.” In this view, policy becomes a practice inseparable from cultural

practices, networks with policy stakeholders, and situated understandings, as anthropology draws attention to hidden assumptions, power relations, and social negotiations that shape enactments (Wedel et al., 2005). This approach uncovers people's voices, treating local concerns and cultural interpretations as central components of the policy-making schema and societal transformation.

Additionally, anthropological approaches are pathways through which policy research can attune to people's cultural practices and contextual realities. In a point of conversation about plural cultures of Nepal, the anthropologist and I enunciated, "In Nepal, where cultural plurality and social inequalities converge to shape policy challenges, but this dimension is merely considered." In policy research and discourses, anthropology can be used as a relational tool to co-constitute a kind of understanding between policy frameworks and the people whose lives they touch (Dahal, 2021). In addition, Chatzichristos (2025) foregrounds qualitative analysis of policy research, which is an emergent and interpretive process co-shaped through people's engagement with available materials, meanings, and contexts. Hence, Geertz (1973) highlights the webs of meaning through which human actions are co-constituted by shared beliefs, practices, and people's interactions, whose lives are influenced by the policy.

From a post-qualitative approach, policy is not simply enacted by government institutions and interpreted by citizens, as it unfolds in the entanglement of policy actors, cultural performances, ritual practices, and social norms, who directly or indirectly engage in multiple phases of the making process. This idea underlines how both government institutions and individuals include anthropological insights into the policymaking process. Nevertheless, anthropological approaches cater to contextually grounded realities of people who enact, experience, and interpret policy in their everyday lives.

Entangled Relations in Policymaking and Implementation

In recent years, a policy paradigm has emerged in Nepal that integrates sociocultural veracities into the policy design phase, aligning with a post-positivist orientation that weaves quantitative, qualitative, and indigenous knowledge together, as this adopts an anthropological position in the policy landscape. As the conversation continued in the meeting, the senior-level policymaker and I reflected on our views,

Recognition is given to quantitative evidence and such evidence is widely utilized within Nepal's policy ecosystems, whereas qualitative insights, not thinking of it as evidence, and indigenous knowledge have less emphasis in policy design and the policymaking processes.

In this context, cementing the interpretive policy analysis of Yanow (2000) and the critical policy

ethnography of Shore and Wright (2011), these notions illuminate enacted policies that rebound cultural diversity for an inclusive policy process. Thus, anthropology echoes culturally comprehensive policy and is socially pressing for sustainable outcomes. The policy field of Nepal is shaped largely by bureaucratic edifices, as individual policy actors also engage in reshaping it through a collaborative approach at times. A policy practitioner and I were in a place in Lalitpur around mid-2025 to reflect our views,

Bureaucrats have a strong influence in the policy field. I experienced this during my tenure, as policy practitioners who come from a political background face challenges to understand policy ecosystems along with policy processes. It takes time for them to understand the policy ecosystems as a whole. In such a situation, bureaucrats remain at the center. Having a deeper understanding of the policy spectrum, policymakers at all levels can proactively think of engaging locals, as their issues are addressed through the policy uptake.

At this juncture, the interplay of structure and individual agency can be an avenue in the policy field, making anthropology a methodological tool and a transformative practice. In this way, cultural meanings can be embedded in policy, as anthropological engagement empowers policy actors in the course of co-constructing and reinterpreting policies in such ways that reveal local realities, and they emphasize the interactive and co-constitutive policymaking processes in Nepal.

This anthropological study of policy unfolds a disconnection between policy design and the lived cultural realities of pluralities of Nepal. Policies, which are formulated at the central level, are passed down in the form of abstract texts that are detached from people's rhythms, meanings, and cultural practices. The context of the emergence of policy implementation, the anthropologist and I reflected,

Policy implementation becomes problematic when it ignores cultural practices, indigenous systems of knowledge, and governance. In such a situation, anthropology can work as a catalyst for policymakers to understand why people practice the way they do.

This study reveals that many policy interventions in Nepal fail not because of bureaucrats' technical deficits but because they overlook local knowledge and indigenous systems of local people. At the time of a conversation with me to talk about entangling the local values, we uttered,

To my understanding, policies of Nepal mostly fail not because of technical deficiencies, but because they do not align with local values, traditions, and belief systems of the people. In such a case, anthropology helps reveal these mismatches entangled with diverse policy ingredients.

In doing so, an intra-action can embrace an interplay among policies, communities, and cultural practices that continuously shape one another to produce the policy

outcomes. In the words of [Shore and Wright \(1997\)](#), ethnographic engagement involves lived and interpreted policy ecosystems within specific sociocultural contexts and practices.

Likewise, I have engaged with [Escobar's \(1995\)](#) critique, which highlights externally imposed development models that overlook indigenous knowledge, community-based systems, and people's everyday practices. Nonetheless, Nepal's ethnically plural and culturally diverse landscape has weakened the effectiveness of policies in real-world practice. In a point of conversation about the cultural dimension of the policymaking process, the anthropologist and I repeatedly highlighted, "Nepal is a country with plural cultural practices and ethnic diversity is also there, but the cultural dimension of the policymaking process is often ignored. This is a serious point to think of." From a post-qualitative anthropological orientation, policies are largely negotiated and reinterpreted by those policy actors who own them. Thus, anthropology is there to make visible the "*hidden life*" of policies to embrace how people's interpretations and adaptations ensure the success or failure of policy interventions. These policy insights encourage policymakers to embrace sociocultural responses and ensure policy designs that resonate with local realities and sustainability.

With this dynamic idea, anthropology appears as a bridge between institutional frameworks, community experiences, and everyday practices, offering policy pathways toward culturally responsive governance practice. In the unfolding flow of our conversations, the senior-level policymaker supported the view of the anthropologist, and they shared their reflections, "Nepal is a pluralistic society with diverse cultural practices; therefore, it is essential to take community experiences and everyday practices of people into account in the policymaking process." Thus far, reducing the dominance of positivist and technocratic paradigms and paying considerable attention to sociocultural understanding of the policy field are matters of concern. Emphasizing the policy research, the public policy expert and I shared our reflections, "In Nepal, policy research has mostly been undertaken from the positivist paradigm. And, it has mostly focused on the technical aspects of policies, paying comparatively less attention to sociocultural foundations." Tracing the idea from Structuration Theory, this study largely uncovers the strain between structural limitations, bureaucratic values, and centralized systems, and the individual agency of policymakers who seek to integrate qualitative and cultural insights in the policymaking ecosystem. As a point of conversation about the engagement of anthropologists in the policymaking process, the anthropologist and I engaged and unfolded the following idea,

Policymakers may adopt qualitative methods in public policy research and engage with anthropologists to gain deeper insights into local people's responses and expressions of individual agency. This process helps

to formulate realistic policies that could address the issues of people.

In recent years, interdisciplinary efforts have emerged to reconceptualize policies as co-creative, an evolving relational process in which the lived experiences of people, institutional practices, and sociocultural understandings are entangled ([Mason, 2022](#)).

Conclusion

This study foregrounds the relational interplay between social structures, cultural practices, and individual agency within policy processes. I resonated with an interpretive and post-qualitative framework, and drawing on [Giddens' \(1986\)](#) Structuration Theory, as it emphasizes how institutional systems and human actors co-constitute policy design and implementation, highlighting the position of local knowledge, cultural practices, and lived experiences ([Shore, 2012](#); [Okongwu & Mencher, 2000](#)). By engaging with policymakers, anthropologists, public policy experts, and practitioners, the emerging idea highlighted the crucial role of sociocultural insights in understanding policy enactment, adaptation, and effectiveness for desirable outcomes. This study has opened an avenue for thinking about human-centered policymaking, demonstrating that policies grounded in cultural roots are more likely to be inclusive, enacted, and sustained. They also offer a pathway for co-created governance responsive to plural sociocultural constructs of Nepal. By weaving public policy, anthropological sensibilities, and Structuration Theory, the final reflection is that collaborative engagements among policymakers, anthropologists, and communities can open relational policy spaces where structure and human practices co-create context-sensitive policies for the lasting outcomes. This study poses a generative question: how can we go beyond the existing policy silo and rethink what policies can become?

Declarations

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Ethical Attunement

Ethically, I am accountable to all research companions and to ensure their anonymity to maintain their confidentiality. This study was conducted independently as part of preparing and presenting a paper for the conference.

Accountability for Publication

Not applicable.

Availability of Materials

The materials of this paper can be shared with others upon request, if necessary.

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Authors' Contributions


All work was carried out solely by the author himself.

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