

URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

UNITO/CPS - The Politics of Wildfires: A Comparative Study of Norms, Power and Conflict in the Global South

Funded By	UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO [P.iva/CF:02099550010]
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Context of the research activity	<p>Wildfires are worldwide phenomena that have been shaping the environment and life on Earth for millions of years. The global increase in the magnitude and spread of wildfires has inaugurated what experts call a 'new era of fire.' In this framework, fires have been couched almost exclusively as 'natural disasters' to be mitigated or suppressed. Yet wildfires are much more than that. The ERC-funded FIREPOL project will study fire as a political phenomenon: it will conduct a comprehensive cross-continental investigation into the political triggers of wildfires with a focus on the Global South. FIREPOL will integrate fire policy data, remote sensing, qualitative case studies, and ethnographic research. The aim is to explore the complex interplay of political factors, institutions, power dynamics, and social struggles influencing wildfire distribution, societal impacts, and public narratives.</p>
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Objectives	<p>This PhD project will contribute to deliver a new empirically grounded and theoretically sound framework on the linkages between politics and wildfires, at a timely moment when wildfires have been identified as crucial socio-ecological challenges within the global climate change agenda. It will do so by contributing to the following key objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify different combinations of policy and institutional mechanisms that, alongside other institutional and governance arrangements (e.g. decentralization, colonial legacy, deregulation), can explain variation in wildfire patterns (or geographical distribution). • Document how 'para-political factors' (beyond formal norms and institutions), such as corruption, social activism, elite configurations and other actor-driven power dynamics, interfere in the political process and shape wildfire patterns and narratives. • Provide insight into poorly understood connections between wildfires and identities, values and inequalities among local stakeholders – mostly poor rural communities. • Develop a new theoretical framework to understand variation and trends in wildfire politics. The new framework will be useful to engage policy and media stakeholders in crafting alternative pathways for the sustainable and equitable management of wildfires, notably within the global climate debate and action plans.
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The project will be underpinned by an open and innovative attitude towards interdisciplinary and inter-methodological dialogue, which will overcome traditional epistemological barriers in order to build bridges between different traditions and offer novel answers to a broad range of interconnected questions.

Skills and competencies for the development of the activity

The PhD student should be ready, or willing to learn, a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative, ethnographic and quantitative methods (data and digital analysis and elaboration, geographic information systems and mapping, interviews, focus group, participant observation). They should be willing to engage in extensive fieldwork periods in countries of the Global South. They should have an excellent level of English; knowledge of other languages useful for field research will be an asset. They should be willing to work in a collaborative fashion as part of a team, be organized and able to conduct independent work with the support of the supervisor and other team members. Candidates are welcome to propose a project that fits the FIREPOL general aims and goals through a narrower angle and methodological approach.