Global Urban Studies Program
Brownbag Series

Up in the air: Anti-Air pollution campaigns in Beijing and Delhi
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Berkey Hall Room 457
April 15th at 11am-12:30
Light refreshments will be provided

Abstract:
This article comparatively examines the evolution of air pollution control policies in Beijing and Delhi. In May 2014, the World Health Organization released air quality data for 90 large cities around the world, and Beijing and Delhi ranked among the most polluted cities on the list. The report came as little surprise for Beijing, as the city's air quality has deteriorated rapidly after the Olympics. However, the WHO report triggered intense responses in India. Indian officials and media questioned the validity of Beijing's air quality data, while environmental NGOs criticized both the government and the media for using Beijing as a benchmark. One prominent Delhi-based NGO told the press that if Delhi wants to be compared to Beijing, then the Delhi government should also learn from Beijing's draconian air pollution prevention measures. Based on published accounts and fieldwork interviews conducted in 2014, the article shows that the clean air campaign in Beijing and Delhi exemplifies urban environmental politics in China and India at large. Beijing's clean air campaign is government-led and heavily relies on comprehensive and often overly ambitious action plans, and by comparison, Delhi's clean air campaign has been spearheaded by NGOs working on single issues, and its success is largely contingent upon the intervention of the Court. In the long run, whether blue sky can return to Beijing and Delhi is still up in the air, as in both contexts, the power of environmental regulatory agencies is fragmented and large gaps exist between plans, legislations, and implementation. This article is one of the three case studies that are part of a larger book project comparing urban governance in China and India.