Policy Studies

Transfer and translation of policy

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Transfer and translation of policy

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The past two decades have seen a wealth of papers on policy diffusion and policy transfer. In the first half, this paper reviews some of the trends in the literature by looking backwards to the political science diffusion literature, and forwards to the expanding multi-disciplinary social science literatures on policy 'learning', 'mobilities' and 'translation' which qualify many of the rationalist assumptions of the early diffusion/transfer literatures. These studies stress the complexity of context that modifies exports of policy and the need for interpretation or experimentalism in the *assemblage* of policy. The second half of the paper focuses on role of international organisations and non-state actors in transnational transfer in the spread of norms, standard setting and development of professional communities or networks that promote harmonisation and policy coordination. The 'soft' transfer of ideas and information via networks whether they be personal, professional or electronic is rapid and frequent. It is rather more infrequent to see such ideas structure governance and become institutionalised. *Knowledge* transfer is more extensive than *policy* transfer.

Keywords: diffusion; networks; transnational governance

1. Introduction

The starting point of this paper is in the field of policy studies. This is to launch a discussion of 'policy transfer' and survey the literature looking backwards to the political science diffusion literature, and forwards to the expanding multi-disciplinary literatures on 'learning', 'mobilities' and 'translation'.

Many studies cite Dolowitz and Marsh definition of policy transfer as a process by which 'knowledge about how policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting' (quoted in Marsh and Sharman 2009, p. 270). For example, AusAid's (n.d.) Public Sector Linkage Program seeks to 'transfer capacity building skills and expertise to their public sector counterpart institutions in partner countries'. Transfer can take place across time, within countries and across countries although it is unusual to observe straight-forward copying of legislation or direct pinching of techniques. Instead intermediaries 'mutate' policy ideas in a process of policy translation.

The paper is structured into two parts. The next section provides a general overview of the varied literatures on 'diffusion', 'transfer', 'convergence' and

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'translation' in the political science and international relations (IR) literature. Despite the different terminology, each tradition points to circumstances of 'policy interdependence' (Gilardi 2012). The second half of the paper focuses on the international domain of policy/knowledge transfer processes. This brings to the fore the role of international organisations and non-state actors in transnational transfer. Attention is drawn to 'soft' forms of transfer – such as the spread of norms, standard setting and development of professional communities or networks (Ladi 2011) – as a complement to the hard transfer of policy tools, structures and practices.

2. Translating the field

'Over the past half century, political science journals have published nearly 800 articles about the politics of public policies spreading from one government to another' (Graham *et al.* 2008, p. 1). Across the sub-fields of political science, the terms policy diffusion, policy transfer and policy convergence are often conflated. However, these terms point to important differences in how change results in a policy interdependent world (Gilardi 2012).

2.1. Diffusion

Originally developed in the USA as a means to explain the adoption of policy and spread of diffusion throughout this federal system, 'diffusion' has been defined as 'the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system' (Berry and Berry 1999, p. 171). Diffusion describes a trend of successive or sequential adoption of a practice, policy or programme.

The 'diffusion' literature suggests that policy change occurs by osmosis; something that is contagious rather than chosen. It connotes spreading or dispersion of models or practices from a common source or point of origin. According to Berry and Berry (2000, pp. 172–178) diffusion patterns emerge from the following dynamics:

(1) National networks of communication between state officials;
(2) Geographical proximity of neighbour states that facilitates sharing of innovations;
(3) 'Pioneer' states that lead the adoption of a policy 'laggard' states eventually adopt;
(4) National government exerting top-down influence by advocating that states adopt policy innovation.

This perspective posits incremental changes in policy as knowledge and pressure for it spreads. Yet, diffusion is not inevitable. Some state architectures can be more porous to diffusion than others (Berry and Berry 1999, p. 179). This may result from numerous factors: the presence or not of a professional network; resourcing issues and time constraints in policy development; political sensitivities as well as an individual or organisational disinclination to look elsewhere. Thus, many examples of 'best practice' may exist and may be advocated inside and outside a social system, but ignored.

In IR approaches, diffusion occurs when government policy decisions in a given country are systematically conditioned by prior policy choices made in other countries. The 'power of global models' – liberalism or democracy – is increasingly

taken-for-granted (Dobbin *et al.* 2007, p. 450). As Cao and Prakash (2010, p. 113) note, 'given policy interdependence, countries carefully watch policies of their competitors to ensure that they are not disadvantaged due to ''bad'' policies'. Trade competition, for instance, generates incentives to conform to voluntary standards such as ISO 900 detailed below.

A criticism of diffusion studies has been the lack of attention to how policies or practices are altered during processes of adoption. By identifying *patterns* of policy adoption, the approach has overlooked the political interests involved in transfer. Policy is presumed to be contagious rather than the end result of political interactions. Diffusion approaches exhibit a fascination with the conditions for transfer rather than the content of new policies. While national decision-making can be influenced by diffusion, policy innovations elsewhere are not sufficient condition for another jurisdiction to adopt the same policy. Factors that are *internal* to a system such as the power dynamics of political interests and the socio-historical make-up of a polity can be a more powerful determinant of what is adopted more so than external factors.

The reader foraying into this field is more likely to encounter an American trained scholar using the term and framework of 'diffusion' whereas Europeans often work with the term 'transfer' (see, respectively, the reviews of the literature by Graham *et al.* 2008, and in Europe, Benson and Jordan 2011). While the approaches share many similarities, transfer studies tend to prioritise proactive knowledge utilisation or 'lesson-drawing' from policy developed elsewhere.

2.2. *Transfer*

Early policy transfer studies targeted the role of *agency* in transfer processes and decision-making dynamics internal to political systems. The logic of choice in selection of policy ideas, the interpretation of circumstances or environment and (bounded) rationality in imitation, copying and modification by decision-makers were central to many analyses. Titles of books and articles such as 'lesson-drawing' (Rose 1993) and 'systematically pinching ideas' (Schneider and Ingram 1988) convey the notion that transfer is a voluntary process undertaken by civil servants and politicians seeking to emulate 'best practice'. This benign view emerged from a bias in the early literature to look at transfers primarily between advanced liberal democracies. Nevertheless, there was relatively quick recognition that transfers can be more or less coercive.

Agent centred approaches do not dismiss structural forces but suggest that in varying degree, states and organisations can mediate these dynamics. Thus, path dependencies may be overcome. Convergence is not necessarily an outcome of policy transfer, especially when negative lessons are drawn from experience elsewhere and contribute to divergence. What the policy transfer literature also allows us to see is the possibilities for convergence around broad policy objectives and principles but scope for divergence with regard to the instruments adopted, type of legislation or institutional modes of policy control/delivery. In short, there are different (but overlapping) modalities of transfer:

First, transfer can occur at the broad level of transferring policy ideals or goals. Here the focus is on achieving a common outcome such as the targets of the Millennium Development Goals or public health objectives to reduce the number of smokers (Cairney 2009). The route by which polities seek such objectives can differ dramatically.

Second, there can be the transfer of institutions. This is the most familiar understanding of policy transfer. It involves the creation of similar structures such as the adoption of similar constitutional apparatus or the transfer of pensions or higher education systems.

Third, regulatory, administrative or judicial tools can be transferred. The classic examples are the spread and adoption of Freedom of Information Law and the Ombudsman's office (Ladi 2011). Likewise, Australian urban transport policies have been spread primarily by policy professionals communicating cross-federally and international consultants mostly from the USA (Bray *et al.* 2011, p. 53). Australia was the first country in the world to institute a broadly based income-contingent charging system for higher education; a system much studied by other countries (Chapman and Greenaway 2006, p. 1066).

The fourth dimension is the 'transfer of ideas and ideologies'. A broad category, such transfers are difficult to map but are intuitively known. It is distinguishable from the first modality because ideas and ideologies are *inputs* to policy development rather than outcomes. For example, the spread of the New Right agenda during the 1980s and 1990s; the movement of NPM ideas around the world (Pal and Ireland 2009); the economic reform precepts of the (post) Washington Consensus or the 'Open Society' values.

Fifth, the 'transfer of personnel' is apparent with short-term staff exchange and longer term movements of foreign students. Transfers of ideas and practices also occurs via international task-forces and commissions; fact finding missions and 'eminent persons' groups. Consultants, 'parachute professors' and international (visiting) experts provide opportunity to see and hear about overseas experiences.

It is also possible to learn from more than one jurisdiction at a time, and to take away a multiplicity of lessons. It results in selective borrowing that leads to hybrids and adaptive innovation to make policy development better fit local conditions (see translation below). A further dynamic of interpretation occurs when shifting analytical gaze from the official domain of policy-making that puts politicians and civil servants as the central transmitters and key determinants of transfer to address the wider universe of translators. The state-centric view is reflected in the notion of 'peer-to-peer review':

> . . . the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a State by other States with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed State improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. (Pal and Ireland 2009, p. 650)

This state-centric view de-emphasises the transfer advocacy roles of interest groups and NGOS, think tanks, consultant firms, law firms and banks and other non-state actors. Likewise, international organisations and transnational policy partnerships muddy policy transfer processes beyond that of simple bilateral relationships between importing and exporting jurisdictions to a more complex multilateral environment.

In sum, the transfer framework has been depicted as 'second generation' development of study after the work on the US federal system. The work in the period 1980–2000 'identified many of the basic mechanisms through which diffusion occurs – policy emulation, harmonization, lesson drawing' where the first generation

diffusion studies grappled with the pattern of the phenomenon. In both, a criticism is that 'what' is being diffused is sometimes lost in the concern for 'how' diffusion takes place (Howlett and Rayner 2008, p. 386).

2.3. Convergence

In political economy, particularly in the new-institutionalism framework, there has been stronger interest in explaining why there has been convergence. Scholarly thinking on 'policy convergence' suggests that transfer is less the consequence of agency and more the outcome of structural forces. That is, driven by industrialisation, globalisation or regionalisation forcing a pattern of increasing similarity in economic, social and political organisation between countries. Where diffusion/transfer attends to the conscious spread of policies and ideas between countries, convergence represents an important counter-factual proposition that challenges the logic of choice. The mimetic institutional iso-morphism of organisations is explained as resulting from entrenched 'path dependencies' and the taken-for-granted aspects of political life where actors follow rules, shared interpretations, schema and meanings (Ladi 2011).

Many studies are drawn to the European Union (EU). Member and candidate states converge around harmonising policies: structural funds, cohesion funds and the *acquis communautaire*. The European Commission is a vertical influence for compliance through directives and regulations as well as joint progress on policy through the open method of coordination.[1] Candidate countries over the past decade emulated many EU standards prior to accession, passing new laws, even when implementation was beyond state capacity (Tews 2009).

Analyses of convergence 'diverge on whether the structural driving force is economic or ideational, and whether states retain agency in the face of globalization or are dominated by structural determinants' (Drezner 2001, p. 55; (likewise, there are debates among policy transfer scholars over structural or agency explanations). Studies of convergence are more focused on policy and institutional outcomes. Consequently, the approach can be considered a different genus from diffusion/ transfer studies that start with inputs and processes of dispersion (see Gilardi 2012).

2.4. Translation

Divergence and hybridisation, adaption and mutation have increasingly been used in conjunction with the above concepts. Consequently, the idea of policy 'translation' (Prince 2009, p. 173) and 'variation' (Newburn 2010) has gained traction. This analytic theme reflects a 'move away from thinking of knowledge transfer as a form of technology transfer or dissemination, rejecting if only by implication its mechanistic assumptions and its model of linear messaging from A to B' (Freeman 2009, p. 429). Translation is 'a series of interesting, and sometimes even surprising, disturbances can occur in the spaces between the "creation", the "transmission" and the "interpreta-tion" or "reception" of policy meanings' (Lendvai and Stubbs 2007, p. 175).

Various studies in a nascent third generation of literature have criticised the rationalist underpinnings of early transfer approaches and instead stress the complex-ity of context (*inter alia*, Dwyer and Ellison 2009; Newburn 2010) and the need for interpretation or experimentalism (Sabel and Zeitlan 2012) in the *assemblage* of policy (Prince 2009). Burgeoning studies of transfer or diffusion to developing states or

transition countries are notable for the way in which they query and contest assumptions of undiluted dichotomous diffusion or unmediated 'import' of transferred ideas (*inter alia*, Lendvai and Stubbs 2007; Ngoasong 2011; Sissenich 2008; Tews 2009). Even AusAid (n.d.) in 'lessons learnt' from its Public Sector Linkage program stresses "empathy", "local context", "ownership" at all levels of governance, "sustainable learning", and "relationships" rather than solely the content of technical knowledge.

One key explanation behind the translation of ideas, standards or programmes is that mutation can result from prior processes of learning. However, the notion of policy learning has been subject to numerous interpretations (Chapman and Greenaway 2006, p. 1061). A useful categorisation has been developed by Dupont and Radaelli (forthcoming) where translation best accords with 1 and 3:

(1) Reflexive learning. New knowledge from elsewhere is presumed to influence the cognition of policy problems and their solutions, potentially informing/ de-stabilising the fundamental beliefs of decision-makers who thus become more attuned to opportunities for transfer.
(2) Epistemic communities: Networks of experts characterised by consensual (usually scientific) knowledge. The expert is authoritative in this 'deficit model' of learning where the expert has 'the ability to transfer policy by assuming control over knowledge production and in doing so guiding decision-maker learning' (Dunlop 2009, p. 290) filling the gap in their understanding.
(3) Bargaining and social interaction: A positive externality resulting from on-going interactions, political competition and competition that mean that participants come to better appreciate and understand alternative policy routes. In transnational networks, learning (even if uneven or imperfect) helps promote an 'international policy culture' or commonly accepted norms.
(4) Shadow of hierarchy: When reflexivity is constrained and bargaining limited by strong hierarchical mechanisms, institutions exert strong pressures to learn. That is, they provide the 'rules of the game' (of rational choice institutionalism) but also the codes, identities and norms that generate logics of appropriateness asserted by sociological institutionalism.

Policy learning may result in a more coherent transfer of ideas, policies and practices. Yet, as Dunlop (2009, p. 307) notes, 'policy learning is not synonymous with policy adoption; decision-makers can learn "negative lessons" where learning from the ideas that are diffused help crystallize what ideas and policy paths they do not wish to follow'.

Poor, incomplete or partial transplantation is not as well documented as the 'success stories' of transfer. 'Indiscriminate transfer can mean copying mistakes when over-committed policymakers have responded to complexity and crisis by unreflectively cutting and pasting from foreign models' in a form of 'policy plagiarism' (Sharman 2010, pp. 623–625). Transfer failure also points to dynamics of difference and divergence (Newburn 2010, p. 350). Often policies and practices are simply not 'transferable' since they have grown out of the legal, educational and social systems of their 'host state' (Hulme 2005, p. 423) and are neither ideologically nor culturally proximate.

The 'indigenization' of policy occurs over the long term as well as from the point of adoption. Even if there are cases of linear transmission of a policy from one jurisdiction to another, the transfer does not create a cryogenically preserved policy forever more. At some point, the policy transfer process ends and endogenous forces of mutation take over. Local ownership becomes more pronounced. Logics of appropriateness entail a gradual adjustment and modifications that lead to different outcomes than may have originally been envisaged. Existing policy processes and sociocultural conditions alter imported ideas. This can be seen in receptivity to, and application of the public health thinking behind controlling 'smoking':

> Tobacco control is not an 'irresistible movement'. While tobacco control was an 'idea whose time has come' there were important variations in the extent to which it affected different locales. Indeterminacy also existed in member states and, in the case of the UK, within the member state. This is demonstrated by the variable adoption of smoking in public places bans in the UK since devolution. (Cairney 2009, p. 472)

The process of adopting simple ideas is remarkably complex and requires considered analysis of the political context in which the idea was articulated, injected and accepted. Rather than states acting rationally in the adoption of tobacco control solutions, the mosaic of approaches is reflective more so of an indeterminate and chaotic set of policy processes where proponents of 'solutions' need to wait for a 'window of opportunity' and politically conducive circumstances to introduce and implement such solutions. Empirical questions such as why and how a certain type of transfer occurs in one context and not elsewhere have not, as yet, been fully addressed in the policy transfer literatures (see Benson and Jordan 2011, p. 370).

This stance towards the transfer of ideas moves the analytical focus from an 'idea whose time has come' to consideration of the conditions that need to be generated before policy change occurs. That is, a shift from the idea as the main source of explanation, one inevitably propelling change, to an explanatory position that highlights uncertainty, where the *acceptance* of the idea is more politically relevant than the idea itself. It is the 'garbage can' idea of the policy process. In other words, for 'norm brokers' to be effective there must also be 'norm takers' (Acharya 2004). A similar point is made that 'law taking' (such as under EU conditionality) is inevitably circumscribed by local processes of 'policy making' (Tews 2009). Of late, this theme has been picked up by political geographers stressing mutation during idea mobility (Peck 2011). Likewise, 'experimentalist governance architectures' have emerged as a response to turbulent, polyarchic environments, where strategic uncertainty means that effective solutions to problems can only be defined in the course of pursuing them, while a multi-polar distribution of power means that no single actor can impose their own preferred solution without taking into account the views of others' (Sabel and Zeitlan 2012, p. 170).

2.5. *Reprise*

The literature has diversified. Once primarily the focus of public policy/administration scholars and comparative political scientists, today it is a multi-disciplinary field: One that is replete with conflicting jargon and competing conceptual categories. The American dominated IR literature tends towards 'diffusion'

approaches whereas (international) political economy approaches show a fascination with convergence and path dependencies under the different varieties of capitalism. Business studies (with its interest in the diffusion of innovations), sociology and law have all taken distinct trajectories. As would be expected, political geographers focus on policy *spaces*, where transference of policies, or *flows*, 'dynamically reconstitute the terrains across which they travel, at the same time as being embedded in, if not products of, extralocal regimes and circuits' (Peck 2011, p. 21; also Prince 2009).

Another route of diversification in the literature is the manner in which transfer studies have become better embedded in the wider conceptual literature. Policy transfer analysis cannot provide a general explanatory theory of policy change but when combined with other approaches an empirically grounded account of policy change can be developed. For instance, there are now a couple of studies that connect the policy transfer idea with the organised anarchies literature of 'garbage cans' (Cairney 2009). Some link transfer to the literature on policy networks (Stone 2004). Others suggest that transfer is a more incremental and indiscriminate process where policy makers 'nicked stuff from all over the place' (Dwyer and Ellison 2009). Epistemic communities have long been regarded as transfer mechanisms (Hulme 2005, Dunlop 2009). Emerging studies on compliance go to the final stage of implementation to address citizen non-compliance, policy deviation and violations (Weaver 2009). Rather than transfer studies or diffusion approaches being regarded as a distinct approach, it becomes just one mode of 'evidence based policy' or symptomatic of wider 'policy interdependencies'.

Neo-Gramscians are likely to see policy transfer as bound by power, symptomatic of the spread of neo-liberal hegemonic practices via knowledge networks (Parmar 2002). Constructivist approaches emphasise need for 'socialisation' and development of 'inter-subjective understandings' (Acharya 2004; Greenhill 2010). Post-modernist renditions of policy translation go further to emphasise meaning-making in contextually bound conditions of uncertainty and chaos (Peck 2011).

A limitation of this paper is that it cannot address with due justice issues of method (but see Howlett and Rayner 2008, Gilardi 2012). The diffusion approach has tended to do large 'n' analyses whereas the transfer literature more often undertakes qualitative case studies (Marsh and Sharman 2009) and translation approaches advocate ethnographic accounts of policy change (Lendvai and Stubbs 2007). The causal nexus between transferred policy ideas and their adoption is not clear and transparent. There are many intervening variables. Notwithstanding considerable methodological problems, social network analysis (SNA) has also made great strides in mapping the diffusion of innovations (for applications to policy see Sissenich 2008, Gilardi 2012). Also emerging from sociology (specifically the work of Bruno Latour and Michel Callon), albeit with significantly different epistemological foundations, actor network theory (ANT) has been concerned with scientific and technological (ex)change. In both ANT and SNA: 'Translation is "n-way", not one-way' where multiple iterations by multiple actors erode the distinction between source and target (Freeman 2009, p. 441).

Most studies have concentrated on policy transfers between nation-states. Such approaches suffer from 'methodological nationalism' – a focus on dynamics within the nation-state and comparison of sovereign units. The very words: 'policy transfer' implies a direct exchange process between exporting and importing countries with an implicit tendency to assume a bilateral relationship. Importantly, transfer can also be

facilitated by organisations outside and between states. Policy transfer and translation is just as likely to be achieved by mechanisms embedded in markets and networks as in the hierarchies of the state.

3. International policy intermediaries

This section is structured into two parts. The first will address will focus on the official domain looking at the role of international organisations in transfer processes between states. As noted by Dunlop and Radaelli (forthcoming), many 'international organisations reveal strong normative assumptions about how governments *should* learn' (also Pal and Ireland 2009). They have launched different instruments for cross-national and trans-national learning, such as benchmarking, peer review, checklists and 'facilitated coordination'. The second section will look into the plethora of non-state actors on the global landscapes seeking to spread best practice or institute standard setting initiatives. For instance, the role of business in standards setting is well established. In the field of environmental governance, especially Europe, both green and business interest groups have played prominent roles in the advocacy and dissemination of voluntary agreements, ecolabels or certification.

The policy translation approach is particularly amenable to addressing the universe of international actors. First, whatever the assumptions of command and control presumed to rest with inter-governmental organisations, they remain dependent on 'client' states for implementation. In the main, their powers and capacity to impose sanctions are limited. Persuasion is in many instances the main tool of transfer. Second, inter-governmental organisations operate between states, sometimes above states. This intermediary status is also a locus for percolation, recombination and reinvention of ideas as well as gestation and rejuvenation of 'international policy cultures'. In the dialogues, conferences and negotiations that occur within and among international organisations further sets of translations take place where policy meanings are distorted, transformed and modified (Lendvai and Stubbs 2007, p. 176). Third, as will become apparent, there is considerable overlap and joint enterprise between states, international organisations and relevant non-state bodies. Translation occurs in a complex web. Not only do these collective processes of policy transfer or diffusion create new cycles and circuits of interpretation, it also contributes to new architectures of transnational governance. Translation and meaning-making becomes the very workings of power.

3.1. International organisation

The structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have long been criticised as coercive form of economic reform measures. Conditionality and economic sanctions are a blunt instrument often regarded as ineffective and/or having perverse outcomes (Tews 2009). Coercion is not the only (or even favoured) approach of international organisations to promote 'best practice' or adherence to international standards. Institutions such as the World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO) and IMF have set up research departments or hold conferences and consultations to advocate the 'scientific' validity of their objectives, and have engaged in various outreach activities, data gathering and monitoring to promote compliance.

Such long-term persuasion exercises can be depicted as 'indirect coercion' inducting client state elites into neo-liberal values of the post Washington consensus. The Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank were closely entangled in the development of conditional cash transfer programs through closed transnational policy networks with 'borrower governments' (Teichman 2007). Similarly, the IMF training institutes provide courses for developing country policy elites, mostly economists. For example, the 'Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML)' courses were delivered in four countries over a nine month period in 2011–2012. Other courses are 'recycled' around regional training centres. Even so, the 'invited participants' are not empty cyphers. They will imbibe the ideas and technical information differentially on spectrum from resistance/rejection through to acceptance and adaption.

Other international organisations like the OECD seek to develop common policy responses in specific fields. Collectively, policy transfers of this nature represent a mode of transnational regulation. For instance, the OECD has carved out a growing niche for itself as a resource bank for comparative data, analysis and forecasts so that governments can: (1) compare policy experiences; (2) seek answers to common problems; (3) identify good practice; (4) co-ordinate policies. More generally, the OECD has been depicted as a 'Conduit of public management thinking' and practice. Amongst many dozens of standards, the OECD has instituted:

- OECD best practices for budget transparency.
- OECD Best Practice Guidelines for Biological Resource Centres.
- OECD Principles of Corporate Governance.
- OECD Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Genetic Testing.

These dialogues and 'guidelines' create explicit standards of regulatory quality and become a mechanism of 'multilateral surveillance'. More generally, international organisations operate as venues for socialisation of policy elites (Greenhill 2010).

3.2. Global policy partnerships

International regimes – a set of similar norms and principles, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge – can also lead to harmonisation. Global health partnerships such as Roll Back Malaria and the Global Fund HIV-AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, for example, are multilateral initiatives to co-ordinate responses to pandemics. These partnerships align health policy with development policy to create national disease programmes in which non-state actors have become key players in collective decision-making. An area rich in application of policy transfer ideas, much literature increasingly points to both the successes of international coordination and consensus building but also to the governance challenges of implementation at national and local levels (*inter alia*, Moran 2010, Ngoasong 2011).

Global policy partnerships are proliferating. The World Bank via its Development Grant Facility convenes a variety of what it calls 'global programs':

- Global Animal Health Initiative;
- Global Donor Platform for Rural Development;

- Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery;
- Global Financial Management Initiative;
- Global Forum for Health Research;
- Global Program on Fisheries (PROFISH).

These half dozen global programs are among 50-odd other initiatives of international standard setting at the Bank (such as Profish's aim to implement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries). These initiatives can be ranged alongside the many partnerships sponsored by the United Nations or by other international organisations.

Whether it be individual organisations like the development banks or the more complex policy partnerships and multinational initiatives, policy ideas are mutated and transformed in these organisations and network venues. A process of translation has taken place in these intermediary policy spaces even before policy is 'imposed' on, or then interpreted by, client countries:

> Policies are not … merely being transferred over space; their form and their effects are transformed by these journeys, which also serve to remake relational connections across an intensely variegated and dynamic social-institutional landscape. (Peck 2011, p. 21)

This performative and constantly interpretative and experimental process creates new policy spaces of soft law and governance networks in the transnational domain.

3.3. Soft law and private regulatory standards

For instance, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a validation process for transparency of revenues from the oil, gas and mining industries. Likewise, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) arose from debates over corporate social responsibility to become a set of guidelines for companies producing voluntarily sustainability reports. ISO 9000 is a quality certification standard that has been sponsored by the International Organization for Standardization, a non-governmental organisation. It is the most widely adopted quality standard worldwide. Launched in 1987, over 700,000 facilities in 164 countries have received ISO 9000 certification (Cao and Prakash 2010, p. 111). It is one of many voluntary certification standards designed to ameliorate information asymmetries for consumers concerned about labour practices, organic content in food items or the use of child labour in goods they purchase. Such standards have become an important mechanism of private or voluntary regulation requiring signatory organisations to adopt specific management strategies. While they lack the 'de jure' authority of states and international organisations, there are indications in many cases of compliance even though it may be partial and patchy among candidates.

3.4. Non-state actors and evidence transmission

The transmission of policy ideas, experts and programmes from non-state bodies is extensive. As noted earlier, 'a problem of terminology arises: "Policy transfer" directs analytical gaze towards the state when it may be that ideas, behaviours, perceptions

and discourses which are transported and adapted irrespective of state structures' (Stone 2004, p. 556). Think tanks, business coalitions, universities, philanthropic foundations and NGOS are 'policy transfer entrepreneurs' facilitating exchanges between actors in several countries, often operating via transnational networks. They are better at the 'soft transfer' of broad policy ideas; the intellectual matter that underpins policies. They use their intellectual authority or market expertise to reinforce and legitimate certain forms of policy or normative standards as 'best practice'. Conversely, officials are more involved in 'hard' transfer of policy practices and instruments involving executive decisions, legislation and regulation.

Three examples below detail some of the essential support services for decision-makers undertaken by non-state bodies (1) acting as financiers for the spread and articulation of policy ideas; (2) as resource banks, researchers and advocates of policy ideas and (3) as coalition builders and network conveners. While not traditionally understood as 'international organisations', nevertheless, these actors have become embedded in the evolving structures of transnational governance and have been variously labelled as 'norm entrepreneurs' or 'idea brokers'.

Philanthropic foundations are usually regarded as civil society organisations of which relatively few operate across borders in their funding activities. Nevertheless, the international programmes of the American foundations have been especially important in the diffusion of American style norms and procedures to other countries in the guise of 'liberal internationalism' (Parmar 2002). For instance, during the 1970s the Ford Foundation was a catalyst for the dissemination of human rights norms (via support to activist groups, research grants to local academics and other forms of dissident support) to Latin America (Moran 2010, p. 32). Likewise, the Soros funded Open Societies Foundations (OSF) network promotes human rights and civil liberties by introducing programmes developed in the West into countries of the former Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe.

Foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Aga Khan Foundation provide funding and resources for many of the multilateral initiatives mentioned above. Rockefeller and Gates have been key instigators of various 'global health partnerships'. For instance, Gates played a key agenda-setting and donor role in the launch of GAVI – a global health partnership (Moran 2010, ch. 4). Not only is there alignment on child immunisation targets and implementation procedures from country to developing country via GAVI, the partnership model itself represents a form of convergence with current consensus in the development community on one of the most effective and appropriate institutional mechanisms of development assistance.

Think Tanks first emerged in Anglo-American liberal democracies as independent policy analytic bodies outside government. They become organisational template for transfer to developing and transition countries as part of overseas development assistance to support civil society. Yet, developing countries with weak bureaucracies or experiencing state failure, or (semi-) authoritarian systems distort the manner in which such transplanted organisations operate. Launched by the Canadian Government's International Development Research Center, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2008, the Think Tank Initiative[2] is symptomatic not only of the transfer of management protocols for think tanks and the transfer of principles of evidence based policy research, but implicitly, a vehicle for the promotion of western democratic values. This initiative now exists

alongside other think tank schemes such as the Global Development Network (GDN) launched by the World Bank and various regional initiatives such as the OSF supported PASOS. Collectively, they help sustain nationally based institutes but induct their fellows in 'international standards' of research, and provide opportunity for their incorporation into transnational policy forums and networks.

The think tank model has been an object of transfer. It is also a well-known mechanism of transfer. There are too many think tank studies to recount that have looked at experience elsewhere and sought to adapt ideas to local context. Lesson-drawing is part of the modus operandi of a think tank (see Stone 2004, Newburn 2010). Similarly, some think tanks have 'exported' their analysis sometimes operating in a fashion not dissimilar to consultancy firms. Indeed, if a business studies scholar were to be writing this paper they are more likely to focus on the role of consultancy firms in knowledge transfer (Sturdy *et al.* 2008). However, rather than simply looking at organisational mechanisms for transfer, the interactions of professionals from various backgrounds constitutes another mode of transfer in transnational domains.

Professional and policy networks also facilitate the negotiation and settlement of global standards through regular interaction of experts and professionals via international conferences and sustained e-communication. An 'international policy culture' develops as policy communities share their expertise, information and form common patterns of understanding regarding policy (Teichman 2007, p. 558). It is an intangible or 'soft' form of policy transfer of knowledge and norms to create a 'new common-sense' (Newburn 2010). Prior to the establishment of both the EITI and GRI was the involvement of advocacy networks raising awareness of problems and softening public opinion. Networks are portrayed somewhat stereotypically as fluid entities that allow actors to interact freely. Yet, governments (and international organisations) have an interest in controlling them (Sissenich 2008).

The World Economic Forum calls itself an 'independent international organiza-tion' and it is one that is networked extensively through its 'communities' and 'partners'. By creating high status forums for sustained communication among policy elites, corporate leaders and entrepreneurial academics (such as through specific initiatives likes its Risk Response Network or Global University Leaders Forum), *potentially* a similarity of perspectives on the shape of 'responsible capitalism' develops. It is, however, a long term strategy and one muddied with many other agendas than simply seeking a convergence of global elite views. Such an ambition (and one by no means limited to WEF) testifies to faith in the transformative power of ideas when they are spread. Ideas can also be counter-hegemonic. For instance, the Rose and Orange Revolutions of Georgia and Ukraine were denounced by Putin as instigated by foreign pro-democracy groups bank-rolled by western foundations.

It is intuitively easy to understand the 'soft' transfer of ideas and information via networks whether they be personal, professional or electronic. It is rather more infrequent to see such ideas structure governance and become institutionalised. Few policy ideas capture the political imagination; most fall fallow. *Knowledge* transfer may be more extensive than *policy* transfer. The non-governmental status of non-state actors and their networks is a major structural constraint to policy transfer. Accordingly, these organisations are often to be found in partnership or (temporary) coalition with governments and international organisations. Such partnerships or networks can be thought of as 'interpretative communities' (Acharya 2004) engaged

in a continuous process of translation and modification (Freeman 2009) resulting in various forms of 'experimentalist governance' (Sabel and Zeitlan 2012). Thus, foundations, or networks or international organisations are not independent and autonomous actors transmitting policy knowledge or 'evidence' into a vacuum. Instead, their collective interactions constitute structures of policy translation (Lendvai and Stubbs 2007).

In taking this approach, this paper is guilty of the problem identified earlier that the 'what' is being diffused is lost in the concern for 'how' diffusion takes place. The processes of assemblage, the mix of ideas and interplay of interests becomes more interesting. Assemblage in the translation work undertaken by international organisations does not simply lead to multiple translations of possible policy approaches. In focusing on how it is done in these venues, and who or what creates and convenes these venues, new architectures (even if somewhat shaky or impermanent) are constructed. In conjunction with other dynamics, policy transfer/translation has the unintended consequence of fuelling transnational governance and giving shape and substance to new policy spaces.

4. Conclusion: transferring tansnational governance or 'Lost in Translation'

Policy transfer not only takes place in international domains but can also be considered one constitutive element of transnational governance. This is not to deny the continuing power of nation-states. The domestic politics of nation states will continue to ensure difference and diversity. Yet, if it is the case that international policy transfer is an extensive phenomenon, then it can be said that important forces behind policy change, innovation and reform originate from outside the state. This is a significant challenge to traditional understanding of sovereignty whereby policy transfer and translation becomes a transnational steering process. The policy transfer framework undermines the temptation to view the forces behind policy change arising only in a domestic context and instead posits transfer and translation as another substratum of governmentality.

Even so, domestically based translators choose between alternatives. It is a collaborative performance in the co-evolution of policy. This approach has a strong acknowledgement of uncertainty, puts 'practice' at centre and recognises complexity that undermines simple linear, evidence-based notions of transferred policy. 'It follows that the translator's first task maybe to identify not (or not only) the knowledge that is to be *transferred* (authors amendment), but the uncertainty that surrounds it' (Freeman 2009, p. 440).

In what has been a very broad brush survey of the policy convergence, diffusion, transfer and translation schools of analysis, it has been very much the case 'divided we write' in the subfields of political science (Graham *et al.* 2008). By and large, the 'diffusion of policy diffusion research' is more prevalent than the adoption of the language of 'transfer'. Both, however, have been caricatured as 'rational-formalist' not only 'rooted in orthodox political science' (Peck 2011, p. 1) but applied to policy practice as a problem solving approach. This is apparent with the development for civil servants of guidelines, tools and manuals on how to do transfer (see for example, the previous UK Labour Government's *Beyond the Horizon* toolkit distributed by the now defunct National School of Government to encourage civil servants to look beyond national horizons for policy innovation). A 'translation approach' would see such

'essentialising' exercises as futile, attempting to nail down deep-seated uncertainties and displacements into an order that cannot be achieved. Nevertheless, the pressures on public servants to conduct activities on an 'evidence-base' are likely to persist:

> In a world where the parameters of policy learning and transfer are becoming ever-more widely drawn – and pressures are mounting on policy makers to produce more individualised and customised policy alternatives to suit 'consumer demand' for high-quality public services – we can expect to see an ongoing shift from path-dependent policy making towards more pluralised – possibly chaotic – processes of emulation and lesson-drawing. (Dwyer and Ellison 2009, p. 402)

Social-constructivist work on translation and interpretative communities tends to be overlooked for applications to real-world policy development as such thinking stresses fluidity, inconstancy and if not irrationality in policy processes, then perversity and unintended consequences.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The method to help Member States progress jointly in the reforms they needed to undertake in order to reach the Lisbon goals included the following elements:

   ● Fixing guidelines and timetables for achieving short, medium and long-term goals;
   ● Establishing quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks, tailored to the needs of Member States and sectors involved, as a means of comparing best practices;
   ● Translating European guidelines into national and regional policies, by setting specific measures and targets;
   ● Periodic monitoring of the progress achieved in order to put in place mutual learning processes between Member States.

2. Think Tank Initiative: http://www.idrc.ca/thinktank

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