Policy and Society

Transnational policy transfer: the circulation of ideas, power and development models

Diane Stone, Osmany Porto de Oliveira & Leslie A. Pal

Published online: 23 Sep 2019.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 494

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

ARTICLE

Transnational policy transfer: the circulation of ideas, power and development models

Diane Stone [ID][a], Osmany Porto de Oliveira [ID][b] and Leslie A. Pal [ID][c,d]

[a]School of Public Policy, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary; [b]International Relations Department, Federal University of São Paulo, Osasco - SP, Brazil; [c]Carlton University, Ottawa, Canada; [d]Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Doha, Qatar

ABSTRACT

The study of policy transfer initially focused on transfers and transmissions among developed countries or from developed countries to the developing world. Today the circulation of policy and knowledge has become more dense and complex. The articles in the special issue concentrate on the growing velocity of policy innovations spreading from the developing world to other parts of the developing as well as into developed countries and towards international organisations. The context of international development cooperation has been particularly fertile in the cross-pollination of ideas, models and policy experiments, and the articles in this Special Issue draw deeply on this insight. Using a 'development lens' enables the authors to view processes of knowledge diffusion and policy transfer not from the centre, in the ministries of national governments, but from policy perimeters, in cities and local government, among those outside political power in opposition groups and movements, and bottom-up from policy implementers.

Introduction

Knowledge diffusion fuels policy transfer. And in a recursive process, policy transfer lays down routes for the continuous circulation of knowledge. Our focus in these articles is the role of the "power" of ideas and knowledge in the transfer/diffusion process, and how that role changes or is modified in development contexts as opposed to the conventional advanced industrial policies that tend to preoccupy transfer and diffusion studies. We elaborate on this in the next section, but the logic of exploring this theme is three-fold. First, we consider in this Special Issue transfer/diffusion process at its basic level, which can be understood as the displacement of information, knowledge, ideas, paradigms, and so on (for simplicity from this point, we will use the term "knowledge"). Even policy models and instruments have a component which is abstract and conceptual, later elaborated in institutions and practices. Second, much of the literature to date has focused on western, or developed world, organisations and fairly conventional forms of knowledge (policy paradigms, technical policy models in terms of problem-objective-instruments). It is our aim to expand and complement this perspective by bringing new cases, in particular from the South, and

advanced dimensions of transfer/diffusion processes, that have been overlooked by the mainstream. Third, and most importantly, the development cooperation policy context has distinctive features from conventional, state-to-state, international relations context.

The articles in this issue of *Policy & Society* were selected from a wider pool of papers first presented at the International Conference on Policy Diffusion and Development Cooperation in São Paulo, Brazil, in May 2018. The conference was devoted to exploring how policy diffusion and transfer are entangled in processes and institutions of development cooperation and international aid. The conference's inspiration was that the two fields have distinct and rich research agendas but rarely connect with each other, despite the fact that a good deal of transfer and diffusion takes place through international development programming. In the view of the editors and contributors to this issue of *Policy & Society*, there is great potential for fresh insights about key issues in policy diffusion and transfer if we use a "development lens."

The development context has not been ignored in the literature (think of the studies on the World Bank, loan conditionalities, the spread of conditional cash transfers and so forth). Yet, it is fair to say that mainstream studies have been focused mostly on policy transfers and diffusion among the states of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as well as *from* states and international organisations (IOs) from the North *to* the global south. The depictions of the organisations and actors that predominate in these states and these IOs, and the species of knowledge and ideas that they produce, have converged around some shared assumptions, which we will term here the "conventional approaches" to policy transfer (see also Draude, 2017). Those assumptions are:

(1) The policies being transferred and diffused are characteristic of developed states. Notable examples are of health and pension schemes, environmental and tax regulations.
(2) The governmental actors are roughly equal in state capacity, sovereign authority, and formal status.
(3) Non-governmental actors are diverse, networked, reasonably resourced, capable and professional.
(4) Non-governmental actors have formalised access to decision-makers and can influence policy formation and the development of ideas. Indeed, they often help devise standards and participate in implementation.
(5) Knowledge tends to be technocratic – that is, generated by experts in recognised disciplines and/or professions, using sophisticated research tools, yielding theoretically and empirically robust results.
(6) The "directionality" of transfer is two-fold: first, the circulation among a restricted set (OECD-type countries, principally in the global north) of states, and second, from North to South, as the spread of "best practices," informed by research and modelled on the best of aspirational circumstances.

There are notable exceptions to these approaches, but we think it captures the core assumptions of a great deal of the classical and even contemporary research. However, the empirical scenario of policy transfers/diffusion has changed with the rise of Southern countries and their presence in the international arena, and the resulting

new forces driving the flow of policies across countries. Northern states have learned from the South, and practices of South-South knowledge exchange have become more frequent. In this context, the aforementioned assumptions need to be revisited. Even if there are certain"universal" elements in the transfer process, such as the transfer agents, translations and instruments – as described extensively by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), Stone (2017) and Evans (2010) – expanding the empirical context of analysis to the South implies bringing to these analytical tools consideration of other dynamics.

In shifting our focus from Northern countries to include the South, as well as the development cooperation context, we shift our attention away from OECD-type countries. That is, from relatively wealthy political and social systems, to a wider and heterogeneous group of countries, thus more representative of the current global environment of policy transfer and diffusion. These states have different needs, different capacities and patterns of interactions, let alone diverse political cultures. They have their own way of interacting among themselves and establishing relations with a heterogeneous constellation of leader and laggard states, and with discontinuities and dispersions of power. Not only are they often markedly unequal among themselves (for example, a Brazil versus a Mozambique), but they are on unequal footing when confronting the global North. Moreover, the balance of local and national, national and global, will be different. This leads us to a rich universe of transfer patterns, dynamics and mechanisms, that are rarely addressed in the current literature.

Even this brief and stylised sketch suggests that ideas and knowledge will drive the policy transfer process in radically different ways. To begin with, there will be a struggle to characterise policy problems in ways more consistent with local circumstances. Health issues in sub-Saharan Africa or urban transport in Latin American cities need to be articulated and defined without the unconscious filters forged from a Western European or North American experience. Within that development context, who are the actors – whether they be policy entrepreneurs, epistemic communities or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – who can articulate these different models and successfully oppose them to ones imported from abroad? What type of expertise is validated and legitimate, when local knowledge becomes indispensable, and lived experience becomes the measuring stick? We can hypothesise as well that knowledge producers, knowledge brokers, and knowledge networks will be configured in different ways, through different types of networks. For example, an often-overlooked channel of policy transfer in the developed world is among former colonies, and within language groups (the two of course overlap to some extent). Moreover, new institutional innovations at global and regional levels provide greater scope for the circulation of policy.

A few examples of such dynamics are the fact that some of these governments from the South, such as Brazil, and others in Latin America have invested on 'policy transfer' as a local or national strategy, with the 'export' of cycling lanes (Bogotá), Participatory Budgeting (Porto Alegre), Conditional Cash Transfers (Brazil, Mexico and Chile), just to mention a few (Porto de Oliveira, Osorio, Monteiro, Leite, forthcoming). However, if in the past 20 years Latin American social policy diffusion and expertise was focused on fighting poverty and hunger, this scenario is taking shape via the 'conservative wave' or 'blue tide' in the region – in contrast to the previous progressive 'pink tide' – with the rise of right-wing populism. Keeping with the Brazilian example, Bolsonaro's new presidency is moving the country's policy transfers (international cooperation and foreign policy) pattern to an approximation with OECD countries (in contrast to

previous alliances made with the BRICS and other Global South nations). It is possible that in the future, countries like Italy, Hungary, Philippines and the United States – where there appears to be an ideological alignment – may draw lessons from each other.

In this special issue, we are not arguing for a completely separate and distinct world of policy transfer – our conventional tools and theories are still eminently useful. In fact, our proposal is inspired by classic studies and their contributions to the understanding the transnational movement of policies, such as Hugh Heclo on social learning, Peter Hall on policy paradigms, John Kingdon on policy entrepreneurs and Richard Rose on lesson-drawing. However, we believe that these classic concepts need revisiting in the development and South–South and South–North context, in order to be more sharp and precise to access, understand and explain contemporary policy transfer/diffusion dynamics.[1] This can be seen through the notion of policy entrepreneurs, that will be discussed later in this introduction. The role of policy entrepreneurs remains an analysis of the role of *élites*, but their characteristics, performance, skills and roles are no longer limited to national and local levels of policy change. To have an accurate and more comprehensive analysis of their agency (which includes the role of Southern agents), we need new concepts like "policy ambassadors' to take account of their transnational roles. Our intent in this Special Issue is to build on the work we have summarised under the rubric of the 'conventional model/ approaches,' to complement and address blindspots in the literature, providing empirical cases that show new or different policy transfer dynamics, and that invites the research to move forward. In this sense, the articles in this issue provide arresting examples of how these theories and tools need to be tweaked and calibrated – along the lines we itemise below – to better capture the dynamics of transfer outside the conventional cases that have dominated the literature.

(1) The growing cohort of 'policy ambassadors', and other specific types of transfer agents operating in complex transnational networks;
(2) Policy transfer is increasingly used as an instrument of 'foreign policy';
(3) Global re-ordering is driven by new norms and practices development cooperation;
(4) New global policy venues appear, such as the SDGs, G20 processes, the BRICs or other forms of summitry;
(5) Policy transfer shifts from being an expert or technocratic process to including manifestations of 'everyday' or subaltern exercises of power and resistance;
(6) Directionality of transfer as linear, bilateral or multilateral mobilities moves towards continuous, transnational, multi-scalar, and multi-stakeholder circulations.

We highlight this set of new dynamics as a complement to the earlier approaches.

---

[1]There is no need to do another literature review of the field; these have been outlined extensively by (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Elkins & Simmons, 2005; Evans, 2010; Graham et al., 2013; Hadjiisky, Pal, & Walker 2017; Porto & Pal, 2018).

Knowledge diffusion and policy transfer

Social scientists have long been puzzled by how, why and when policy advice and expertise are incorporated into government deliberations and bureaucratic activity. A contemporary version of this question concerns how policy knowledge is transferred and utilised between and among countries or for purposes of global governance. In the case of both questions, the causal nexus between the impact and influence of ideas is muddied by many other factors, events and interests which also impinge upon policymaking. The 'soft' transfer of ideas and policy knowledge is relatively straightforward, but the constant re-circulation of ideas through many contexts makes it a more difficult endeavour first to map such ideas and how they structure thinking and reform policy agendas of governments, and then secondly, whether the same recommendations become institutionalised and implemented.

The kaleidoscope of policy circulations points to a methodological problem in policy transfer studies. Establishing causality is fundamentally complicated not only by the many intermediaries in transfer processes among countries but also by the unique pathways of policy tinkering and adjustment, hybridisation and customisation that unfold within countries. Accordingly, the general stance adopted by the contributors to this special edition are social constructivist or interpretivist positions (Yannow, 2009). Rather than seeing 'regularities' in policy transfer or seeking to predict patterns, we identify unique ecologies of densely networked experts and decision-makers both inside government and international organisations, and outside in universities and policy labs or in thinks tanks, business associations and the professions.

Despite ongoing debates about the degree and depth of ideational impact, knowledge agents have some intrinsic governance capacities in their propensity to define problems, shape the climate of debate or engage in standard-setting, rule-making or other advisory activity. However, the knowledge utilisation literature has been criticised for assumptions that paradigmatic shifts or policy learning occur as ideas are 'diffused' into the policy atmosphere. There has been an insufficient explanation of the mechanisms and agents through which change occurs (Campbell & Pedersen, 2011). The agency of (teams of) individuals, organisations and networks is central to understanding the speed and direction of the circulation of policy ideas. Knowledge is not simply neutral 'evidence' or data functioning as a technical input to governance in the global order but also represents a form of (technocratic) power working to shape 'who gets what' policy design and outcome, that is, those communities and countries that receive certain, and often times 'imposed' policy reforms.

It is a complex ecology. Expert actors and government agencies create 'codified knowledge', that is, a concrete intellectual and scientific product found in publications, conferences, websites and declarations of advisory groups. However, knowledge agencies also produce 'tacit knowledge' – shared understandings, on-the-ground knowledge and common identities that take shape and sustenance in 'epistemic communities' or 'interpretative communities' (Yanow, 2009).

To help navigate the ecologies of knowledge diffusion, a three-part order of knowledge actors (individuals), knowledge institutions (in their organisational format) and knowledge networks are outlined. The contributors to this issue discuss in various ways, how individuals, organisations and networks are not simple technocratic 'transmitters' of foreign models: They are also interpreters, resisters and transformers of policy

transfer who develop new circuits of 'revised' policy transfer (Porto de Oliveira & Pal, 2018; Stone, 2017).

Individuals

The renowned economist John Maynard Keynes was one person who traversed the international scholarly and policy worlds alike. His statement on ideational influence is famous and incanted regularly: 'The ideas of economists and political philosophers ... are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else' (Keynes, 1936, p. 383). Other notable examples of scholars who have spread policy ideas to other countries and communities include the sociologist and former President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Nobel laureates such as economists Muhammed Yunus (spreading micro-credit practices) and Joseph Stiglitz (in his capacity as Chief Economist of the World Bank). They might also be thought of as 'policy ambassadors', a notion developed by Osmany Porto de Oliveira in his article and discussed below.

At an 'everyday' level of bureaucratic lesson-drawing, public servants such as statisticians, lawyers or parliamentary researchers facilitate the exchange of policy lessons. Political advisors have an impact on the direction of policy even if it only means 'screening' or 'editing' the types of international evidence that is promoted. Other 'policy entrepreneurs' advocate policy lessons and target decision-making elites in political parties, government, development assistance agencies or in (transnational) policy communities with their solutions in the form of international standards or 'best practice'. 'Academic-administrator entrepreneurs' importing foreign policy ideas has been highlighted in the Indonesian case (Wicaksono, 2018). Policy entrepreneurs hold significant personal resources in their powers of persuasion. Such resources can be a mix of epistemic authority (such as that held by economists), former government service or policy experience in the field combined with personal passion and perseverance and the political skills to push global knowledge into policy debate (Maxwell, 2005; Nay, 2012). Identifying policy entrepreneurs who work internationally, the 'policy ambassador' idea also draws attention to charismatic individuals who are cosmopolitan and can traverse different cultures, operating as brokers building bridges among different countries, and they often speak more than their native language.

The influence of individuals as policy ambassadors, entrepreneurs, or advisors depends on many factors, not least their organisational and network affiliations (see below). However, from the narrow perspective of their roles as knowledge brokers, the emphasis has typically been on technocratic expertise (part of the conventional approaches described above). If for the moment we abstract this expertise from all other factors, technocratic expertise relies on some recognised mastery of a field of science and evidence. One is an expert 'in something' – and one would naturally look to economists for advice on economic issues, or agronomists for advice on food production and security.

In the development cooperation context, we would argue that there are some unacknowledged but powerful 'markers' of expertise that shade off from the purely technocratic into what we might term 'representational knowledge.' One example is location or rootedness. Eyebrows today will often arch when 'experts' from the global North lecture their colleagues from developing countries on their best interests and preferred policy options. Technocratic expertise might still trump the lack of

representational qualifications, but there is often a tussle. The presumption is that a 'true' expert will have a rich grounding in the experiences and realities of development in a given country or even more specifically a given region. This extends to another example of representational knowledge – solidarity with the oppressed, a solidarity that may come from evident moral conviction, life experiences that would have educated the expert to the reality, or an expertise filtered through an emancipatory ideology like Marxism. An example of 'representational knowledge' can be observed in the power of ideas from individuals like Paulo Freire, priests who have championed liberation theology, or radical economists highlighting inequities and advocating social progress through redistribution. Their ideas have sometimes gained traction in well-established democracies seeking renewal in their traditional ways of policymaking.

Nevertheless, it is also the case that the organisational affiliations of individuals contribute to the value acceptability of their ideas for policy reform. Notwithstanding some exceptional cases, most development experts, scientists and consultants do not operate alone. Instead, they have built 'communities of practice' and transnational knowledge networks to circulate policy models and speed ideational diffusion. These are diverse sets of engagements that are often bankrolled by international foundations, universities, international organisations and other development agencies.

Organisations

The European Union (EU), the World Bank, the OECD and the United Nations (UN) agencies are just some of the international organisations that are forceful agents of policy transfer. The rise of the BRICs, the G20 and other informal international organisations alongside a growing gaggle of issue-specific global and regional public–private partnerships (like GAVI in the field of vaccines and immunisation) ramps up the circulation of policy models globally. And regionally, there is fertile cross-communication within regional arrangements like the Association of Southeast East Asian Nations (ASEAN) including attempts of the diffusion of regionalisation (Beeson & Stone, 2013).

There are also unofficial global dialogues and elite meetings such as the World Economic Forum in Davos that broadcast policy ideas alongside global taskforces from the *Club di Roma* in the 1970s to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change today. The organisation of both regular global conferences and ad hoc global taskforces convening multiple actors from business, the NGO world, businesses, trade unions and academia has become commonplace since the UN first embarked on 'conference diplomacy' in the 1970s. Prominent examples include the Millennium Summit, the Rio Conferences on the Environment, and G20 Engagement Groups, all of which are increasingly important venues for the circulation and development of new policy ideas, building networks and constituencies of (donor) support, and constructing consensus around 'ways of doing things' in 'global policymaking' (Cooper, 2019; Pouliot & Thérien, 2018, p. 9).

At the subnational level, local governments have also created and developed their own international institutions, summits and networks to advocate their interests in a global scale. Regular meetings like the World Mayors Assembly, as well as structures such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments are spaces where local actors,

sometimes in cooperation, others in resistance with traditional international organisations, pledge their participation in the discussion of global issues. These arenas and organisations have constituted important platforms for policy transfer among subnational units, with a strong capillarity across cities in the world. With funding for urban management transfer coming often from development cooperation or international organisations, these arenas and institutions have not only become the locus where 'best practices' are established, but also serve as showcases for urban policies.

The multi-level architecture of governance is paralleled in some degree by the transnationalisation of socio-economic organisations. Universities, for instance, share and spread governance knowledge, and university social scientists were directly involved in the world-wide spread of 'new public management' ideas in the 1980s. The international exchange through scholarship schemes, secondment of staff to international organisations or their participation in government delegations further imbricates universities and colleges in policy transfer. Likewise, a range of other organisations in business and civil society have been proactive agents of policy transfer. The World Social Forum, first held in Porto Alegre in 2001 (as a counter-event to Davos-based World Economic Forum), has performed as a global platform for civil society to create, legitimate and diffuse ideas, techniques and solutions for public action to deal with social problems, show-casing Participatory Budgeting (Porto de Oliveira, 2017).

Notable are the large international philanthropic foundations such as Ford, Nuffield, Aga Khan, McArthur and Sasakawa in spreading policy paradigms through funding instruments. The Gates Foundation is a significant player in global health policy (and was the key instigator of GAVI), while Open Society Foundations promotes 'open society' liberal values through the advocacy and transfer of policy recommendations on civil liberties, freedom of law, budget transparency or early childhood programs amongst many other initiatives.

Part of the *modus operandi* of think tanks is to spread international policy lessons. International consortia of think tanks such as Think20 (which revolves around the G20 – see Cooper, 2019) or the BRICs Think Tank Summit has emerged. The think tank theme is developed by Diego Silva Ardila in his article discussing how two think tanks became key policy transfer brokers of the Columbian model of bus rapid transport (BRT). Surprisingly overlooked in the increasingly vast literature on policy diffusion and transfer is the role of the large management consultancy firms, such as McKinsey, PWC and Accenture, most of which are headquartered in the US and the UK with networks of offices spread across the most important economic centres of the world. Many have been instrumental in the international spread and application of ideas concerning the 'new public management' or other kinds of global programmes such as the REDD Initiative sponsored by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (Morgan, Sturdy, & Frenkel, 2019).

The non-governmental status of these types of 'soft actors' is a major structural constraint to their role in policy transfer. They cannot bring about policy transfer alone but are dependent on governments and international organisations to see policy transfer instituted. But by the same token, while government organisations – ranging from line departments to quangos or a specialised office within a ministry – are central to the 'hard' transfer of policy tools, legislation or structural adjustment programmes

through formal decision-making procedures – the 'soft' transfer actors are often essential to legitimising and normalising policy practices with foreign origins.

This tangled relationship between official bureaux and 'soft actors' is further complicated in a development context. For the sake of brevity, we highlight only three aspects. First, the ecology of think tanks, universities and other soft actors varies by country but generally is less extensively institutionalised in developing contexts – the range of organisations is more limited, as are the pools of expertise. This can lead to paradoxical outcomes: (1) weak knowledge resources may mean that receiving countries lack the capacity to modify transfer or critique it, raising the chances of inappropriate transfer or outright failure; (2) the scarcity of expertise makes the existing resources – a single, leading think tank, for example – *more* influential since there is no other game in town. International organisations will target the 'soft actors' as 'partners' because they need them for credibility with both northern donors and client governments.

Second, the influence of 'soft actors' is misconstrued if it is calibrated entirely in terms of 'outcomes'. Think tanks, global summits, the endless rounds of conferences of the great and the good earnestly seeking solutions to the world's problems all contribute to a global 'ideational space' that reinforces a common-sense of the right 'ways of doing things.' It is very difficult for actors from the developing world to substantially contribute to this ideational space unless explicitly invited to do so. Unlike conventional approaches that focus on the horizontal country-to-country exchange of policy, the global 'ideational spaces' – international summits, dialogues in locations like Porte Alegre and Davos, or deliberations in transnational public–private partnerships – have become important venues for multi-scalar circulation of policy ideas and instruments and the generation of consensus.

Third, the configuration of organisations generating policy knowledge (and hence facilitating or impeding transfer) differs substantially in the development context. Think tanks and foundations are routine features of advanced states and economies that have the resources to support them. In developing country contexts, 'soft actors' like trade unions, community associations, agrarian co-ops, and the not-for-profit sector can have higher profiles than they do in developed countries. Once again, conventional approaches to policy transfer may underplay the importance of these subaltern actors in the circulation of alternative policy lessons (Draude, 2017).

Networks

Network forms are complex. Knowledge networks are distinct from but often overlap with policy networks. Knowledge networks are epitomised by a shared scientific interest and set of norms that consolidate around intellectual exchange and coordinated research, systematic dissemination and publication of results, as well as pooling of resources and financing across national boundaries. Many are temporary arrangements that last as long as the funding flows. Some are loose relationships to exchange information with like-minded policy institutes, university centres and government agencies, in a given issue area. At other times, expert advisors and their institutes act as policy entrepreneurs within tighter networks such as an epistemic community.

By contrast, (transnational) policy networks are multi-actor entities that oscillate around a common or shared policy problem. These networks are comprised of various

actors from civil society, governments, government agencies, industry, industry groups, and the professions. Their activities cover the gamut of the policy process – agenda setting, policy formulation, negotiation, rule-making, coordination, implementation, and evaluation – and are now seen to operate at global and regional levels often with the participation of an international organisation or multilateral body.

Networks are a vehicle for knowledge diffusion and policy transfer, a social technology to broadcast and accelerate global norms, best practice and policy models – which some call 'fast policy' (Peck & Theodore, 2015). But networks have also become a locus for policy transfer (Nay, 2012). When observed as a transnational structure, policy networks can unite transfer agents sharing a similar cause and connecting a vast number of heterogeneous people, with different political culture backgrounds and policy interests, enabling the translation and legitimation of policies. Where conventional approaches treated policy models spreading geographically, a transnational network approach is multi-scalar (local to global) and multi-stakeholder (soft and hard actors). The network itself becomes a site for policy design and innovation rather than simply a mechanism for 'sending' pre-formed policy ideals and instruments.

Transferring power

Individuals, organisations and networks transfer the intellectual matter that underpins policies. They leverage their intellectual authority or professional expertise to reinforce certain policy paradigms or to legitimate some normative standards as 'best practice', as well as to establish those examples that the government should not follow. The politics of knowledge is never far away.

Advocates of policy transfer may be ignored or patronised at will by governments. Some bureaucracies lack the capacity to absorb effectively either global or local knowledge (Maxwell, 2005). Moreover, experts disagree. Rarely is there a single body of thinking, data or literature that is consensually recognised and accepted without demur as the rationale for policy change. To the contrary, there are struggles between different modes of 'knowledge' or what are often described as 'discourses', 'worldviews' and 'regimes of truth' (Jacobsen, 2007). Finally, while summits and transnational public–private partnerships may have a multi-stakeholder character and often appear 'inclusionary', many of these new institutional developments for the spread of ideas and policy models 'also encourage cooptation, non-transparency and normative homogeneity' (Pouliot & Thérien, 2018, p. 9) and the exclusion of dissenting perspectives or radical positions.

Technical cooperation, overseas training and the role of international consultants in institutional development can be a 'one-way transaction' from aid organisations or developed countries to recipient countries. Advocacy of 'best practice' does not confront deep-rooted asymmetries of power that may undermine policy transfer in developing and transition countries. Such 'lessons' and 'best practice' represent codified, formal and technical knowledge to be found in the reports, evaluations and websites of governments and international organisations. This codified knowledge can over-ride tacit and practical knowledge that is generated in local settings. Traditional, 'grass-roots' and practitioner knowledge rooted in communal understandings or local practices does not always dovetail with the technocratic order of governance emanating from

development agencies of donor governments or international organisations, as the next section elaborates.

In our view, what all this points to is a more serious analysis of the nature of networks, and not just the key organisations that comprise them. Within the conventional approaches, it is the large and prominent international organisations such as the World Bank and the OECD that dominate the discussion and which has possibly encouraged the study of single organisations (even while framing them as networked organisations). Much less work has been done at the network level (though that is beginning, see Paterson, Hoffman, Betsill, & Bernstein, 2014). As noted above, networks have different topographical characteristics (some are flatter, some are more hierarchical with key nodes); they have different types of members; they may be formed and evolve in contrast to and in conflict with other networks; their transfer and diffusion mechanisms and practices will differ. And again, we need to be aware of how network dynamics differ in developing contexts. We would expect, for example, distinct networks around policy issues that are relevant to developing countries to be active and vibrant channels of diffusion, but possibly unconnected to similar networks in the global North (for example, bus transportation policy networks versus mass transit). On the other hand, in some cases, we might see networks organised around shared but often latent or unarticulated interests – such as 'mountain communities' or other kinds of subaltern groups such as those involved in the spread of harm reduction approaches that Tom Baker et al. discuss in this Special Issue.

The development context: a fresh lens on transfer

Flows and dynamics of policy exchange among Northern states have been a fertile ground for advancing hypotheses, concepts and theories for understanding the circulation of knowledge among countries with a degree of homogeneity. Development cooperation is also an important site for policy transfer/diffusion, but it deals with heterogeneous countries, with different power relations, resources and social capital. If 'Aid Policy' is often about sending funds or supplies to developing countries, there is also a significant part that is about sharing policy knowledge, as well as inducing the adoption of models and best-practices.

Until recently it was common that international organisations, such as the World Bank, and donors insisted on the adoption of Northern models in Southern countries. It was believed that these models that were self-evidently successful in overcoming social problems in the North would have the same result in the South. Modernisation theory and 'transition-ology' both implied a linear directionality to development. However, the differences of political culture, institutional design, state capacity, economy and social environment between these countries often led to inappropriate, incomplete and inadequate transfers. In the past few years, especially after the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid and Effectiveness promoted by the Committee of Cooperation and Development of the OECD in Busan in 2011 (Mawdsley, 2017), there was a turn towards the South in development cooperation. The way these countries provide development cooperation is often through offering technical assistance, rather than direct funding, owing to their limited resources available for foreign aid. The idea of 'mutual learning' in development cooperation is also an important

component for countries like China (Constantine & Shankland, 2017). Moreover, practices of triangular cooperation, which can involve development cooperation among countries from the South, with mediation and part funding from an international organisation, have gained relevance as well. The changing nature of development cooperation continues to be an important driver of South–South and South–North policy transfers.

While there are some notable examples of policies developed in the South that circulated internationally – such as the transport system of Curitiba (Brazil), developed in 1974 (Mejía-Dugand, Hjelm, Baas, & Ríos, 2013) and the different actions for state reforms, especially in the pension sector, conducted by Chile during the Pinochet Regime in the 1980s (Dezalay & Garth, 2002; Weyland, 2006) – this cannot be compared in terms of quantity, intensity and legitimacy to Global North policy transfers to the rest of the world. The case of Chile is particularly illustrative of a dynamic where the role of individuals in the diffusion of the model has been an important feature. The circulation of national elites to the United States – where they undertook PhDs at the University of Chicago, with Milton Friedman – and back to their home country – where they achieved high-level state positions – was crucial to 'import' ideas and implement them in the State (Dezalay & Garth, 2002). Chile became a laboratory of neo-liberal reforms, not only throughout Latin America but to the world. These Chilean policy ambassadors – the so-called 'Chicago-Boys' – were the 'prime movers in the diffusion of pension privatisation in Latin America' in the late 1980s and early 1990s, being hired as consultants in several countries and evincing a sort of 'missionary zeal' (Weyland, 2006, p. 86). Even the United States during Bush's administration 'proposed using the Chilean model as the basis for a reshaping of Social Security, calling the system here "a great example" and saying the United States could "take some lessons from Chile"' (Rohter, 2006). However, as arresting an example that this is of policies circulating in the South and to a certain extent to the North, this particular type of circulation and mutual emulation was rare. Indeed, some suggest that it was actually the World Bank that propelled the worldwide dissemination of the Chilean experience (Orenstein, 2005).

In the past 20 years, not only did 'best practices' developed in the South start to flow internationally but policy transfer also became a foreign policy instrument to strengthen relations among countries. This is the case with multiple projects that Brazil launched with Latin American and sub-Saharan African countries (Porto de Oliveira, Osorio, Montero, Leite, forthcoming). Brazil established an arrangement for development cooperation, involving different national agencies (sectorial Ministries, public banks, national funds, public research institutes) and international organisations (Pomeroy, Suyama, & Waisbich, Forthcoming). From the perspective of international organisations, the practice of scanning and copying successful models in the South and adapting them to be implemented on a larger scale also increased. Moreover, the so-called 'aidland', by Mosse (2011) has its own way of operation, as well as actors. Individual advocates, or 'policy ambassadors' from the South, increased their access to this world, both inside international organisations and via their own national governmental agencies of bilateral development cooperation promoting similar models across regions, as in Latin America, Africa and Asia. For example, Cecilia Osorio Gonnet (2018, p. 172) traced the different experts and bureaucrats who worked with the design and implementation of Conditional Cash Transfers programs in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and

Mexico, and who began to work – in a later stage – at the World Bank, United Nations Development Fund, Inter-American Development Bank and other agencies of the UN system. Not only were these agents incorporated in the staff of international organisations but also a dense constellation of consultants from the South with a similar profile were hired periodically by these institutions.

In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals created an important 'market' for the development cooperation 'industry', creating opportunities for the advocacy of policy designs from the South (Constantine & Shankland, 2017). Here again, the role of the South and development cooperation is important, considering that, for example, SDG #1 is No Poverty, and SDG #2 is Zero Hunger. The second goal, in particular, carries the same name as the Brazilian policy to fight against hunger launched in 2003, during Lula's administration (see Osmany Porto de Oliveira in this issue) and is a clear instance of transfer into global policy venues.

By analysing development cooperation and policy transfer together, new mechanisms operating within these processes can be seen. Policies need inevitably to be translated to adapt to such contexts, informal cooperation is often displayed among countries, and there can be different forms of resistance such as peasants fighting against agricultural technology transfers. Power relations between countries and international organisations also influenced the adoption of models, producing unexpected results. The role of the political will of the adopter is also crucial for a transfer to take place, and changes in the executive can undermine a transfer project and its continuity. Moreover, communities of 'policy ambassadors' can trigger diffusion of similar models across regions.

These are just hints of what can be different in the development context with respect to policy transfer: government structures will be different, donors and international organisations often have the whip hand; and 'aid' is itself a specific type of policy transfer with its own agencies, networks, and professional knowledge. There are also unique circumstances around the credibility of knowledge in a development context, credibility that goes beyond mere technical expertise. The articles in this Special Issue (briefly described below) provide rich insights on these and other features of transfer and development cooperation.

Cross-cutting themes and concepts

Power – in different guises – is a common theme among the articles of this issue. That is (i) the power of individuals, (ii) the power of networks, (iii) ideational power having a structuring effect upon policy agendas and practices or (iv) whether or not, these modes of power are subsidiary to, or tools in the hands of, material interests. With a mini-set of three papers on Brazil in this special issue, geo-strategic power shifts shape policy transfer circuits. As a member of the BRICs, Brazil is a rapidly rising power in the world. One that now has the power, capacity and authority to spread its policy experiences not only to other parts of the so-called developing world, but also with advocacy towards the multilateral institutions in order to shape and reconfigure the policy paradigms that bodies like the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Bank and UN work with. This was both true of the Lula period and the Bolsonaro one.

The power of individuals as persuaders through advocacy or their consultant roles or through official appointment is a crucial albeit quixotic feature in the circulation of certain policy models. Diego Silva Ardila identifies the 'policy mobiliser' Enrique Peñalosa in his study of the global spread of the Columbian model of Bus Rapid Transit; Osmany Porto de Oliveira identifies 'policy ambassadors' while Tom Baker and his co-authors provide an important corrective by looking at 'non-elites' who also wield some power in their ability to create and broadcast alternative visions and 'ways of doing things'.

A further cross-cutting theme is the hybridity of global discourses, both in terms of the actors and networks that contribute to them, and the content of the ideas themselves. The role of translation in policy transfer and 'customisation' of policy tools in order to improve 'fit' with local conditions has been recognised for many years (see *inter alia*, Graham, Shipan and Voldern, 2013; Stone, 2017). The articles in this Special Issue remind us that we need to extend this concept of translation in several directions. First, almost every article shows how different actors will bring different interpretations (translations) into the process, well before anything has been transferred. Consequently, an idea consists of hybrid mixes, amalgams, and alloys, or possibly even the unacknowledged co-existence of contradictory principles. Second, translation happens as policies move, before they have even 'landed'. The transfer scholarly community has possibly placed too much emphasis on the consummated act of transfer, without paying sufficient attention to the ideational foreplay that takes place in the venues discussed above – summits, conferences, meetings, forums – as ideas circulate and move.

In the case of transportation policy, Diego Ardilla argues that the evolution of an epistemic community paralleled first experimentation with a specific model in Bogotá (Colombia) known as TRANSMILENIO spreading to a few key Latin American cities and later to the rest of the world. The BRT epistemic community becomes more networked internationally once the BRT idea was popularised through the complex global interactions among renowned consultants, knowledge experts, think-tanks and multilateral banks.

Rather than a tight issue-specific epistemic community, Carolina Milhorance notes the role of a regional civil society network for food and nutrition security. With patronage from the Brazilian government, this network helped broadcast Brazilian experience throughout a range of NGOs and civil society bodies. Milhorance also recasts policy transfer not only as a policy process but also as having a diplomatic orientation. That is, Brazil was able to promote not only its experience with certain policy tools and instruments into multilateral arenas but also its national standing and foreign policy ambition to become an exemplar nation. For instance, in her article, Beatriz Cordeiro examines the policy mobility of microcredit (or more broadly, microfinance), where Brazil was a pioneer in the field, actually pre-dating the Grameen Bank, and carving a policy pathway that diverged from the putative international consensus that subsequently developed on microcredit.

The diplomacy theme develops into a key conceptual category of 'policy ambassadors' in the article by Osmany Porto de Oliveira focusing on the critical role of elite individuals, who hold different forms of power, varying from a formalised political authority, technical knowledge and practical experience. Through these policy ambassadors, he discusses how Brazil moved from developing local policy innovations to

becoming an international reference point on social policies, recognised by the World Bank and UN specialised agencies. The role of 'policy ambassadors' is a key element to understanding the individual agency on the transnationalisation of public policies.

Using a historical institutionalist approach, Fabrizio De Francesco and Edoardo Guaschino compare the public governance discourses of the World Bank and the OECD, showing the evolution of those discourses, their differences and their similarities. The patterns and adjustments over time in the two organisations represent important paradigm shifts in global discourses on public governance, given their prominence and influence. The OECD has had more flexibility as an international knowledge institution, and more consistency over time, than the World Bank, which has had to 'prove' the connection between institutions and growth in a way that the OECD has not. While the World Bank would naturally be assumed to be the leader on this issue in the global South, given its mandate for development and poverty reduction, the OECD has made important inroads through its own networks and data generation efforts. Not all Northern international organisations diffuse the same way, even when they labour in the same vineyard – in this case, public governance.

Leslie A. Pal and Jennifer Spence trace the networking of anti-corruption norms and the role of the OECD to illustrate a new method of studying global policy networks, what they call 'event-focused network analysis'. Networks are hard to 'see', though they can be sketched in various ways. This method takes an organisation that is globally prominent in the network around a policy issue, builds a database of 'events' (meetings, conferences, etc.) and their participants over time, and then uses the tools of social network analysis to trace the contours and characteristics of the network. This article focuses on anti-corruption networks, something of interest to the global North (donors) and the global South (usually afflicted most deeply), and for which the OECD has been a leader since the 1970s and particularly since the 1997 OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions.

Tom Baker, Eugene McCann and Cristina Temenos do not focus on the Global South and development context but do take a non-elite perspective. They address 'every-day' or ordinary actors involved in circulating policy knowledge concerning 'harm reduction' and drug policy. This is a 'bottom-up' view of transfer and circulation from local government and NGOs at the 'front-line' of policy delivery and implementation with 'on-the-ground' knowledge from where they are circulated and experimented with before ideas are moved 'up' to contest orthodox approaches in national government and international organisations. This is a paper that reminds us that power disparities are hard-wired not only into which policy ideas or models move but also in the avenues and forums through which they circulate.

To conclude, this collection of articles extends and deepens the policy transfer literature by seriously considering transfer dynamics through the lens of development cooperation and international aid. Most of our intellectual tools in the field – acquired from conventional approaches – continue to serve us well. Nevertheless, we also see a 'normative bias towards global norms and Western institutions', and a tendency to see developing countries or the 'local' as disruptive and non-compliant (Draude, 2017, p. 579). This tendency has in many instances clouded analytical sight of the policy innovations initiated within developing countries, and which have been successfully injected into international institutions and the policy arenas of the Global North by Southern policy ambassadors and

other political actors. The fast-changing world of development cooperation accelerates the scope for policy transfer entrepreneurialism. These entrepreneurs and ambassadors are more engaged and innovative than simply 'translating' global norms to their own context. Instead, changing dynamics in 'aid land' and development cooperation places prospects for agency, leadership and policy initiative as much in the circuitry of the Global South as in the ideational spaces of the Global North.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Diane Stone is Dean School of Public Policy at the Central European University in Budapest and Vienna. She is a Vice President of the International Public Policy Association and consultant editor of the journal, 'Policy and Politics'. Her most recent book is The Oxford Handbook of Global Policy and Transnational Administration (with Kim Moloney, Oxford University Press 2019).

Osmany Porto de Oliveira is Assistant Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo, in Brazil. He coordinates the Global Platform of International Public Policies. His most recent book is *International Policy Diffusion and Participatory Budgeting: Ambassadors of Participation, International Institutions and Transnational Networks*, Palgrave McMillan (2017).

Leslie A. Pal is Dean, College of Public Policy at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Doha, Qatar. His most recent book is *Beyond Policy Analysis* (with Graeme Auld and Alexandra Mallet, Nelson, 2020).

ORCID

Diane Stone http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3783-3789
Osmany Porto de Oliveira http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7930-5784
Leslie A. Pal http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3906-6846

References

Beeson, M., & Stone, D. (2013). The European Union model's influence in Asia after the global financial crisis. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, *12*(2), 167–190.

Campbell, J. L., & Pedersen, O. K. (2011). Knowledge regimes and comparative political economy. *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research*, *167*, 172–190.

Constantine, J., & Shankland, A. (2017). From policy transfer to mutual learning? *Novos Estudos-CEBRAP*, *36*(1), 99–124.

Cooper, A. F. (2019). Global summitry as sites of transnational technocratic management and policy contestation. In K. Moloney & D. Stone (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of global policy and transnational administration* (pp. 638–654). Oxford: Oxford University.

Dezalay, Y., & Garth, B. G. (2002). *La mondialisation des guerres de palais: La restructuration du pouvoir d'État en Amérique Latine, entre noblesse du droit et "chicago boys"*. Saint-Amand-Montrond: Éditions du Seuil.

Dolowitz, D. P., & Marsh, D. (2000). Learning from abroad: The role of policy transfer in contemporary policy making. *Governance*, *13*(1), 5–25.

Draude, A. (2017). The agency of the governed in transfer and diffusion studies. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 2(5), 577–587.

Elkins, Z., & Simmons, B. (2005). On waves, clusters, and diffusion: A conceptual framework. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (598), 33–51.

Evans, M. (Ed.). (2010). *New directions in the study of policy transfer*. Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Graham, E. R., Shipan, C. R., & Volden, C. (2013). The diffusion of policy diffusion research in political science. *British Journal of Political Science*, 43(3), 673–701.

Hadjiisky, M., Pal, L. A., & Christopher, W. (Eds.). (2017). *Public policy transfer: Micro-dynamics and macro-effects*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Jacobson, N. (2007). Social epistemology: Theory for the "Fourth Wave" of knowledge transfer and exchange research. *Science Communication*, 29, 116–127.

Keynes, J. M. (1936). *The general theory of employment, interest, and money*. New York, Harcourt: Brace & World.

Mawdsley, E. (2017). Development geography 1: Cooperation, competition and convergence between 'North' and 'South'. *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(1), 108–117.

Maxwell, S. (2005). Policy entrepreneurship for poverty reduction: Bridging research and policy in international development. *Journal of International Development*, 17(6), 713–725.

Mejía-Dugand, S., Hjelm, O., Baas, L., & Ríos, R. A. (2013). Lessons from the spread of bus rapid transit in Latin America. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 50(julho), 82–90.

Morgan, G., Sturdy, A., & Frenkel, M. (2019). The role of large management consultancy firms in global public policy. In D. Stone & K. Moloney (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of global policy and transnational administration* (pp. 583–598). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mosse, D. (2011). *Adventures in Aidland: The anthropology of professionals in international development*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Nay, O. (2012). How do policy ideas spread among international administrations? Policy entrepreneurs and bureaucratic influence in the UN response to AIDS. *Journal of Public Policy*, 32(1), 53–76.

Orenstein, M. A. (2005). The new pension reform as global policy. *Global Social Policy*, 5(2), 175–202.

Osorio Gonnet, C. (2018). *Aprendiendo o emulando? Cómo se difunden las políticas sociales en América Latina*. Santiago: LOM ediciones.

Paterson, M., Hoffman, M., Betsill, M., & Bernstein, S. (2014). The micro foundations of policy diffusion toward complex global governance: An analysis of the transnational carbon emission trading network. *Comparative Political Studies*, 47(3), 420–449.

Peck, J., & Theodore, N. (2015). *Fast policy: Experimental statecraft at the thresholds of neoliberalism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Pomeroy, M., Suyama, B., & Waisbich, L. T. (Forthcoming). The diffusion of social protection and food security policies: Emerging issues in Brazilian South-South cooperation for development. In O. Porto de Oliveira, C. Osorio Gonnet, S. Montero, C. Leite, & D. S. Kerches (Eds.), *Latin America and policy diffusion: From import to export*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Latin-America-and-Policy-Diffusion-From-Import-and-Export/Oliveira-Gonnet-Montero-Leite/p/book/9781138333161

Porto de Oliveira, O. (2017). *International policy diffusion and participatory budgeting: Ambassadors of participation, international organizations and transnational networks*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Mcmillan.

Porto de Oliveira, O., Osorio Gonnet, C., Montero, S., & Leite, Da. Silva Leite. C. K. (Forthcoming). *Latin America and policy diffusion: From import to export*. Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Latin-America-and-Policy-Diffusion-From-Import-and-Export/Oliveira-Gonnet-Montero-Leite/p/book/9781138333161

Porto de Oliveira, O., & Pal, L. A. (2018). New frontiers and directions in policy transfer, diffusion and circulation research: Agents, spaces, resistance, and translation. *Revista De Administração Pública*, 52(2), 199–220.

Pouliot, V., & Thérien, J. P. (2018). Global governance in practice. *Global Policy*, 9(2), 163–172.

Rohter, L. (2006, dezembro 26). Chile proposes to reform pension system. *The New York Times*. seç. Americas. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/26/world/americas/26chile.html

Stone, D. (2017). Understanding the transfer of policy failure: Bricolage, experimentalism and translation. *Policy & Politics*, *45*(1), 55–70.

Weyland, K. (2006). *Bounded rationality and policy diffusion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wicaksono, A. (2018). The role of policy transfer in Indonesian governance: The case of academic administrative entrepreneurs. *Policy Studies*, *39*(6), 622–637.

Yanow, D. (2009). Dear author, dear reader: The third hermeneutic in writing and reviewing ethnography. In E. Schatz (Ed.), *Political ethnography: What Immersion contributes to the study of power* (pp. 275–302). University of Chicago Press.