

**“Learning Lessons, Policy Transfer and the
International Diffusion of Policy Ideas”**

Diane Stone

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Abstract

The literature on policy transfer, diffusion and convergence as well as lesson drawing is burgeoning. The common theme among studies in this field is the concern with ‘*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’ (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000: 5 my emphasis). With the specific focus on knowledge actors, this paper highlights the roles played by non-state actors who act as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ and interact with officials in government and international organisation in the international spread of ideas and information. Second, it suggests that transfer is a process that is often facilitated within networks. Third, incorporating concepts about social learning helps account for when transfer is effective or not. Finally, the discussion advocates a more global focus – rather than the focus on transfer within or between OECD countries – to draw greater attention to the coercive character of transfer.

Keywords: policy transfer, lesson-drawing, convergence, diffusion of ideas, knowledge institutions/actors, policy networks and social learning

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Introduction

Cross-national experience is having an increasingly powerful impact upon decision-makers within the private, public and third sectors of nation-states. In particular, 'policy transfer' and 'lesson-drawing' is a dynamic whereby knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements or institutions is used across time or space in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions elsewhere.¹ This paper focuses primarily on policy transfer but also seeks a synthesis with two other cognate fields of inquiry. It proceeds on the assumption that the concept of policy transfer can be effectively linked with the concepts of policy learning and policy networks (Börzel, 1998; Knoepfel & Kissling-Näf, 1998). In doing so, there is an implicit recognition that policy transfer is not an independent process but is part of the wider policy process and shaped by such a process (Wolman, 1992: 44). Whilst policy transfer involves primarily the state, as well as international organisations, with key actors being bureaucrats and politicians, this paper also addresses non-state entities and in particular, knowledge-based actors involved in the export of ideas.

The main body of the paper is structured into two sections. The first section provides a general overview of the literature and the connections to the conceptual literature on diffusion, convergence, social learning and policy networks. The second section addresses the ideational and primarily non-governmental domain to policy transfer. It discusses 'soft' forms of transfer and policy entrepreneurship undertaken by think tanks, consultancy firms, foundations and the university sector. To facilitate policy transfer, these organisations are dependent on other actors and cannot be viewed as independent or isolated agents of transfer. Accordingly, this paper stresses the role of agency in transfer processes and emphasises the logic of choice in selection of policy ideas, the cognition and interpretation of circumstances or environment and (bounded) rationality in imitation, copying and modification by decision makers.

¹ Policy transfer and learning can occur at the sub-national level. However, this paper will be concerned primarily with cross-national modes of transfer and also neglects transfer across time.

An important issue concerns structure and agency. As it has developed, the policy transfer literature has tended to assume that transfer results from a rational process by decision-makers of imitation, copying and modification. This paper is primarily amongst the majority of transfer studies that emphasises the logic of choice in selection of policy ideas, the interpretation of circumstances or environment and (bounded) rationality in adaptation. However, the perspective of diffusion approaches should not be lost. Those working on policy diffusion (for example, Radaelli 2000; Freeman & Tester, 1996) challenge the logic of choice and "have adopted a processual perspective which goes beyond the mechanical transfer model". The 'new institutionalism' offers additional insights to view behaviour as being led by organisations and institutions through processes of institutional iso-morphism. This approach emphasises the taken-for-granted aspects of political life where actors follow rules, shared interpretations, schema and meanings. This is not suggest that agency is nullified (see Radaelli, 2000 for a full discussion). Instead, the concept of policy transfer is neutral with regard to structure and agency. There is complementarity rather than mutual exclusion. It is necessary to look at role of agency when trying to demonstrate transfer has occurred. However, when the focus is on structure then it is necessary to look at the opportunities or constraints to transfer determined by structural forces such as might be represented by time, institutions, culture, state structure, and so forth (Stone, 1999). In particular, research remains weak in the consideration of global, international and transnational structures, and whether policy transfer has become more widespread in recent decades (Evans & Davies 1999).

Part 1: Policy Transfer, Lesson-drawing and Diffusion

An area of renewed interest in the International Relations and Comparative Public Policy literatures concerns 'policy transfer' and 'lesson-drawing' and which reinvigorates a more established social policy and political science literature on 'diffusion'. Studies of this kind were originally developed in the US as a means to explain the adoption of policy and spread of diffusion throughout this federal system. The social policy field has long tracked the movement of policy and practice from one context to another. Diffusion has been defined as 'any pattern of successive adoptions of a policy innovation' (Eyestone quoted in Freeman & Tester, 1996: 9). In other words, diffusion describes a trend of successive or sequential adoption of a practice, policy

or programme. However, the concept also seeks to identify 'the patterns according to which policies spread and the geographic and structural characteristics of countries which might explain them' (Freeman & Tester, 1996). It evokes the idea of 'contagion' (Walt, 2000). While national decision-making can be influenced by diffusion, policy innovations elsewhere are not sufficient condition for another jurisdiction to adopt the same policy. The determinants of policy arrangements can include factors that are internal to a system more so than external such as the changing dynamics of political interests and the socio-historical make-up of a polity.

The 'diffusion' literature suggests that policy percolates or diffuses gradually over an extended period of time.² It connotes spreading, dispersion and dissemination of ideas or practices from a common source or point of origin. This perspective posits incremental changes in policy with the advancement of knowledge and awareness as well as interdependence. Diffusion approaches exhibit a fascination with the process and the conditions for transfer rather than the content of new policies (Freeman, 1999). Diffusion also has an apolitical and neutral character (Peters, 1997: 76). Its focus is often limited on broad historical, spatial and socio-economic reasons for a *pattern* of policy adoption (Freeman & Tester, 1996: 9) neglecting political dynamics involved.

The resurgence of interest in this field in the 1990s has brought with it a proliferation of labels. Lesson-drawing (Rose, 1993), 'policy band-wagoning' (Ikenberry, 1990), 'policy borrowing' (Cox, 1999) or 'policy shopping' (Freeman, 1999) and 'systematically pinching ideas' (Schneider & Ingram, 1988) are terms that convey a sense of transfer being a voluntaristic activity. Penetration – or what is also known as 'external inducement' (Ikenberry, 1990) and 'direct coercive transfer' (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996: 347) – are terms that convey a compulsion to conform. Phrases such as 'exporting ideas' or 'policy pusher' (Nedley, 1999) are also used in this context. All are action-oriented concepts, giving precedence to the actor and intention where the transfer process results from some rational judgement on part of policy makers. Indeed, many

² This approach has both a macro and micro variations. In the former, the object of research lies in identifying the patterns according to which policies spread and the geographic and structural characteristics of countries which might explain them. Micro versions are less concerned with public policy and more focused on local patterns in the adoption of new ideas, technologies and social practices. The majority of this literature is sub-national in its scope (Freeman 1999: 5).

agents of transfer are proactive in promoting ideas and ideologically motivated in spreading policy practice.

By contrast, the term 'policy convergence' gives an impression that transfer arises as a consequence of structural forces. It is a more general macro-level idea to describe a pattern of increasing similarity in economic, social and political organisation between countries that may be driven by industrialisation, globalisation or regionalisation. 'Standardisation of standard-setting' is a good example (Egan, 1998). Where diffusion attends to the spread of policies and ideas between countries, convergence represents an important counter-factual proposition which allows for the possibility of similar developments taking place in different countries with or without any direct link between them. Countries with comparable economic, social, cultural and political formations develop broadly comparable policy arrangements. When social structures, patterns of economic organisation and constellations of political interest change, then policy also changes. These conditions help explain why there are pressures for reform, but not whether or not it will occur or the form it should take. The convergence approach helps in explaining why adaptive change might take place, although it is less informative on the form it takes or 'why one solution to a common problem should be preferred over others' (Freeman, 1999).

Convergence is not the same as policy transfer. Instead, policy transfer can be a causal factor in convergence, although convergence can result from other factors. Four causes of convergence have been identified by Colin Bennett (1991). These are useful in drawing out the different political modalities of transfer. They are:

1. emulation;
2. harmonisation;
3. elite networking and policy communities;
4. penetration.

Before outlining these categories, it must also be remembered that policy transfer can also lead to divergence for 'if negative or partial lessons are drawn, then non-transfers may conceivably result in policy divergence' (Ladi 2000: 205)

Penetration involves the clear use of power and is coercive entailing a compulsion to conform. For example, Joshua Muravchik tracks the imposition of democracy in Japan and Germany through US military occupation (1991). Penetration can also arise from the actions of international organisations (Biersteker, 1992: 110). ‘Much of the diffusion to the poorer countries of the world is done through donor agencies, so that the adoptions could hardly be seen as autonomous choices by governments; simply stated the position of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been: ‘no reform, no money’ (Peters, 1997: 73, see also Larmour 2001).

Emulation, by contrast, involves borrowing ideas and adapting policy approaches, tools or structures to local conditions. Another nation or jurisdiction can be viewed as a policy innovator and an exemplar where policy practice can be monitored by policy elites and analysts elsewhere for lessons and insights to shape policies at home. Ideas or policies are imported. For example, Britain is often portrayed as a ‘pioneer country’ with regard to privatisation.

Harmonisation promotes convergence as a consequence of political recognition of interdependence and awareness of the costs of divergence. It is promoted and sustained by supranational institutions like the European Union (EU) and involves some sacrifice of national autonomy and sovereignty. Likewise, international regimes – a set of similar norms and principles, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge – can also lead to harmonisation. Regimes can be a means to avoid discrepancies in policies or to duplicate effort while institutions like the EU, the OECD or United Nations are means to help develop common policy responses in some fields.

Transnational policy communities of experts and professionals that share their expertise and information and form common patterns of understanding regarding policy through regular interaction (international conferences, government delegations and sustained communication) are another force for convergence (Bennett, 1991: 224-25). It is different to emulation (but can also result in mimicry and copying), as it involves a shared experience of learning about problems and the development of a common perspective or ‘international policy culture’ (Ikenberry, 1990: 89). In particular, experts and professionals potentially become a stronger causal factor in

convergence when they act as ‘policy entrepreneurs’, that is, ‘people who seek to initiate dynamic policy change’ (Mintrom, 1997: 739).

The second half of this paper concentrates on elite networking as the most appropriate mode to consider the manner in which policy ideas are spread and sometimes take root. The notion of ‘common patterns of understanding’ among these communities connects well with the literature on social learning in discerning the particular role of knowledge actors in policy transfer. Rather than simply considering the *actions* of ‘policy entrepreneurs’, the concern is to address the learning processes that lead to the creation of common identity and consensual knowledge that helps bind together policy networks that spread ideas. Individual experts and knowledge organisations are not simply policy entrepreneurs but also a central force promoting collective policy learning. In this regard, networks are the location and structural framework for learning (see Knoepfel & Kissling-Näf, 1998: 345).

The policy transfer literature has many similarities with the lesson-drawing literature. The emphasis of the policy transfer literature is on understanding the process by which policies and practices move from exporter to importer jurisdictions, especially the agents of policy transfer and the processes of decision making in the importer jurisdictions. With the lesson-drawing literature (Rose 1993) the emphasis is to understand ‘the conditions under which policies or practices operate in exporter jurisdictions and whether and how the conditions which might make them work in a similar way can be created in importer jurisdictions’. In the lesson-drawing perspective, ‘the prime object is to engage in policy transfer – to use cross-national experience as a source of policy advice’ (Page 2000).³

³ There appears to be some scholarly competition and marking out of academic ‘turf’ as to the scientific prominence of the different frameworks. Richard Freeman – convenor of the European Science Foundation diffusion of health innovations programme – regards both lesson-drawing and policy transfer as subsidiary to or as outcomes of diffusion. That is, the technique of diffusion. Ed Page – Director of the ESRC ‘Future Governance’ programme – presents policy transfer as having less explanatory power and conflates it with diffusion, both being subordinate to the over-arching lesson-drawing dynamic. By contrast, David Dolowitz and David Marsh – two key figures in the ESRC policy transfer seminar series – present lesson-drawing as just one component of transfer; that is, voluntary transfer.

Those who adopt the policy transfer framework tend to focus on meso-level processes that lead to policy transfer. Much of the impetus in this strand of thinking has come from David Dolowitz and David Marsh (2000) who draw on the work by Rose and Bennett and have sought to categorise and evaluate the process. They treat transfer as the dependent variable, that is, as something to be explained. Policy transfer can involve a number of processes. The objects of transfer can include (i) policies, (ii) institutions, (iii) ideologies or justifications, (iv) attitudes and ideas, and (v) negative lessons (Dolowitz, 1997a). Transfer can take place across time, within countries and across countries. It must be added that transfers can also take place across policy fields. The logic of privatisation, for example, has been applied from public industries (steel or automobile production) to public services (user-pays in health and education). Similarly, transfer occurs between the private and public sectors.

Additionally, there are different degrees of transfer: this can involve straight-forward copying of policy, legislation or techniques as well as various forms of emulation, synthesis and hybridisation, and inspiration (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996: 351). As noted above, transfers can be voluntary or coercive or combinations thereof. Dolowitz and Marsh suggest a policy transfer continuum in this regard (2000: 13-17). Moreover, they make a distinction between successful transfers and inappropriate, uninformed or incomplete transfer or what anthropologists have sometimes called 'maladaptation'. On the latter point, the constraints and forms of resistance to transfer are numerous and complex, and can lead to policy failure.

Social Learning

'Learning' is also connected with policy transfer, but again, this concept is analytically distinct (although very likely to take place in transnational policy communities). Here, the emphasis is on cognition and the redefinition of interests on the basis of new knowledge which affects the fundamental beliefs and ideas behind policy approaches (Hall, 1993). Consequently, learning could just as likely lead to policy innovation or termination as well as policy transfer. In other words, lesson-drawing and transfer can be an outcome of learning. Transfers of ideas or programmes are underpinned by deeper and prior processes of learning. This entails that policy transfer is a social and collective process founded on exchange between groups (Knoepfel & Kissling-Näf, 1998: 346).

However, the concept of learning has been subject to a number of interpretations (Bennett & Howlett, 1992: 277; May 1992). Richard Rose in his analysis of lesson-drawing argues that learning occurs via transnational 'epistemic communities'. For Sabatier (1991), policy oriented learning occurs within advocacy coalitions. Advocacy coalitions operate in policy sub-systems with other key actors – policy brokers and decision makers. An advocacy coalition can include journalists, researchers and policy analysts as well as elected officials and bureaucratic leaders, that is, people “who share ... a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions – and who show a non trivial degree of co-ordinated activity over time” (Sabatier, 1987: 660). The glue that holds advocacy coalitions together are 'deep-core beliefs'; the normative and ontological axioms which form an individual's basic personal philosophy and which are relatively impermeable to change (Bennett & Howlett, 1992: 284).⁴ With the stress on core beliefs and learning within coalitions, the approach (in common with Hall's concept of learning as well as epistemic communities) “neglects” (but does not deny) actor interests (Sabatier, 1991: 153).

Peter Hall's (1993) model of different orders of 'social learning' and paradigm shift is also influential. Departing from a state-centred institutional focus, Peter Hall's idea of 'social learning' becomes even more attractive as it is possible to take into account the manner in which societal developments outside the state have bearing on policy and how ideas can link the state, civil society and by extension, international organisations. Hall borrowed from Hugh Heclo the idea of policy learning and the view that policy actors are involved in the 'puzzling' or 'powering' of knowledge whereby "Much political interaction has constituted a process of social learning expressed through policy" (Heclo, 1974: 305-06). Learning occurs when policy-makers adjust their cognitive understanding of policy development and modify policy in the light of knowledge

⁴ Advocacy coalitions can be distinguished from one another by their beliefs and resources. In most policy sub-systems the number of politically significant coalitions is quite small. Policy learning may occur within an advocacy coalition as new arguments and strategies are developed. Yet, a dominant advocacy coalition is unlikely to be unseated merely by analytic debates. It is external events that significantly change the terms of debate or create uncertainty. External stimuli include changes in socio-economic conditions and technology, electoral changes with new governments adopting different agendas, priorities and leaders as well as policy changes in other systems affecting another policy sub-system. In periods of relative stability, routine and incremental decision patterns, advocacy coalitions are unlikely to have significant impact. Policy makers prefer information that does not question the underlying consensus of a policy programme. If consensus is decaying, the opportunity for influence is increased.

gained from past policy experience. The idea of policy learning is informed by an understanding of policy failure providing impetus to place new ideas on the policy and political agendas. With increasing policy failures greater interest is shown in alternative ideas and "politicians will have particularly strong incentives to seek out and embrace ideas that challenge the policies of their opponents" (Hall, 1990: 73).

There are three orders of learning. 'First order' change involves 'satisficing' and minor adjustments in the precise settings of policy instruments. Second order learning is characterised by re-tooling, limited experimentation and introduction of new policy techniques. This involves more obviously political and strategic factors. Changes at these two levels is characteristic of normal politics. "Normal policy making" is characterised by "incrementalism" and "bounded rationality". 'Third order' change involves a radical shift in "the hierarchy of goals and set of instruments employed to guide policy" (Hall, 1993: 284). Theoretically, policy transfer and lesson-drawing can occur across all three orders of change. That is, first order policy transfer, if it happens at all, would include the adoption of technical procedures first introduced in another context – the kind of fine-tuning that comes with "instrumental adjustments". It is with second order change that possibilities for policy transfer are greater. The accumulation of anomalies and policy failures, rising doubts about the adequacy of existing institutional arrangements and increasing uncertainty can prompt decision makers reassess and to look to developments in other jurisdictions for inspiration. It can lead to more substantive institutional reform than 'fine-tuning', although the distinctions between the two are not clear-cut (for an application see: Hemerijck & Kersbergen, 2000). Third order change involves significant departures in policy on the basis of a completely different conceptualisation of policy problems.⁵ Furthermore, such

⁵ Hall exemplifies his argument through an analysis of the shift from Keynesianism to monetarist macro-economic policy in Britain. Keynesian economics in the post World War Two era was the "prism" through which political actors saw the economy as well as their own role in the economic sphere. However, unanticipated developments such as stagflation could not be fully explained within the prevailing paradigm or curtailed with the usual policy devices. By the mid 1970s, the theoretical framework and its chief exponents were increasingly discredited by the seemingly intractable nature of problems. A new range of actors entered the policy fray as conflict over the appropriate course of action widened. In the absence of consensus and in a highly competitive context expertise acquired a politicised character (Hall, 1990: 68). The decay of the Keynesian framework led to a multiplication of economic commentary or what Hall refers to as an expansion in the "marketplace in economic ideas" with contributions from the media, polling companies, popular publishers as well as more specialised groups such as consultancies and research institutes. In the confrontation between Keynesian and monetarist

change is not confined to established policy communities but draws inspiration from wider societal forces. The role of organised interests such as business associations, trade unions and promotional groups should be considered, particularly the manner in which they have a capacity to perceive policy failure and redefine their interests. Such groups have significant capacities to 'puzzle' in their own right and recognition of this capacity is all the more important in policy settings where such groups may be incorporated into policy formulation and/or implementation.

These perspectives assume that 'learning processes are reflected in both the behavioural and cognitive worlds of the policy actors' (Knoepfel & Kissling-Näf, 1998: 345). Learning leads to the development of 'consensual knowledge' by specialists about the functioning of state and society but which is also accepted as valid by decision-making elites.⁶ These approaches have in common the view that learning takes place 'in complex arrangements of state and societal actors in various types of domestic and transnational policy networks and policy communities' (Bennett & Howlett, 1992: 282). When consensual knowledge is developed at a transnational level, the potential exists for the exchange of ideas providing impetus for policy transfer (for an overview of international relations concepts of 'learning' see Jacobsen, 1995).

While learning via regional or global networks helps promote an 'international policy culture', or what has also been called 'global discourses' (Deacon, 1999), it is not automatically the case that learning will institutionalise in the programmes and policies of international organisations or governments. Moreover, there is a convergence in the ideational literature that ideas matter more (or at least their impact is more observable) in circumstances of uncertainty where interests are unformed or some kind of crisis (war, environmental catastrophe, election swings) disrupts established policy patterns and provokes paradigmatic revision (Gofas, 2001). Ideational forces

ideas in Britain, social scientists were divided regarding the validity or superiority of either of the paradigms. Consequently, the paradigms were judged in political rather than purely scientific terms.

⁶ Consensual knowledge is structured information about causes and effects among physical and social phenomena that enjoys general acceptance as true and accurate among the members of the relevant professional community. To become consensual, information must be analysed, arranged and structured in accordance with epistemological principles that command wide acceptance in society. In our day and age, this has meant the various strands of positivism still enjoy a preferential position (Haas & Haas, 1995: 259).

or knowledge actors are presented with a 'window of opportunity' to compete to redefine the policy context (Kingdon 1984).

Nevertheless, processes of learning can have implications for the character or degree of transfer. Policy learning may result in a more coherent transfer of ideas, policies and practices whereas mere copying may well be *ad hoc* and piece-meal. Improved policy is more likely to result when there is a reasonably wide consensus of the desirability of introducing policy lessons among actors inside and outside government. Additionally, certain actors may have a greater capacity for learning whereas others may adopt lessons for symbolic purposes or as a strategic device to secure political support (Robertson, 1991) rather than as a result of improved understanding. This is the distinction between tactical or instrumental learning on the one hand, as opposed to social learning on the other.

Learning is usually uneven or partial within a policy community. Some share 'consensual knowledge' and seek the adoption of policy for principled reasons, but in other cases policy may be adopted for more varied and pragmatic reasons. Proponents of this perspective tend to underestimate the impact of economic and bureaucratic interests and role of political opportunism in policy change (Hann, 1995). For example, and of relevance here, Hall does not distinguish between the political impact of paradigms '... in the hands of officials and the same paradigms brandished by politicians, ideologues and opinion leaders' (Greenaway, 1998: 914). The learning by bureaucrats may be much more instrumental in response to exogenous pressures or influences. Moreover, an international consensus may not be found at the local level. For example, the leaders of a developing country may follow 'best global practice' not because they are convinced of the wisdom of a such a course but because conditions on loans and structural adjustment packages requires them to do so. Lessons are imposed on client countries but learning may not be the outcome.⁷

⁷ A more detailed categorisation is provided by Peter Knoepfel & Ingrid Kissling-Näf, (1998: 352). They identify (i) enforced learning; (ii) instrumental learning; (iii) trial and error processes of learning; (iv) model-based learning and (v) learning in laboratory such as might result with 'pilot tests'. Model-based learning is of direct relevance here in that it 'represents the adoption of solutions and perceptions of problems (positions) which have previously been successfully applied outside the relevant network'.

Accordingly, these terms – diffusion, convergence, lesson-drawing, learning and transfer – are not interchangeable even though there is considerable overlap. Policy transfer can encompass coercion as well as lesson-drawing. Lesson-drawing is a voluntary process. Learning may lead to policy transfer but it may also produce other policy outcomes or no apparent outcome. Any of these processes may take place between individuals, between and within organisations and through networks. The remainder of the discussion focuses on networks as an increasingly important mechanism for the spread of policy ideas and transfer of practice.

Policy Networks

As is apparent, policy transfer takes place in a multi-organisational context. The policy network literature provides a method for understanding the politics of inter-organisational policy transfer. Networks are increasingly being cultivated and managed by governments and by international organisations as ‘global public policy networks’ for the delivery of public goods (Reinicke, 1999/2000); that is, formal networks that are governance structures involved in the delivery of goods and services. In many issue areas, governments and international organizations no longer have the ability to design and/or implement effective public policies. ‘Global public policy networks’ – composed of NGO, government and international organisation actors – are helpful in some issue areas to come to terms with these challenges. Examples include the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research and the ‘Roll Back Malaria Initiative’ (Reinicke & Deng 2000). A key feature of a network is a shared problem on which there is an exchange of information, debate, disagreement, persuasion and a search for solutions and appropriate policy responses. In short, networks are a structural framework for policy oriented learning (Knoepfel & Kissling-Näf, 1998: 347). Within such networks, knowledge institutions provide important information and analytic resources. And they can be utilised for the spreading of ideas and reforms through the network as well as beyond.

Networks bring together representatives from international organisations and state agencies with politicians, the media, business groups, trade unions and sometimes grass-roots associations.

The term 'network' describes the several interdependent actors involved in delivering services. These networks are made up of organizations which need to exchange resources (for example, money, authority, information, expertise) to

achieve their objectives, to maximize their influence over outcomes, and to avoid becoming dependent on other players in the game (Rhodes, 1997: xii).

Of particular relevance to this paper, is the resource of knowledge, information and expertise. Within such networks, knowledge organisations perform useful roles as information clearing-houses, initiating research and developing network infrastructure – starting newsletters, building data-bases, organising conferences, moderating e-dialogues and preparing submissions. Such infrastructure aids policy transfer agents to become aware of innovative policies adopted elsewhere and the opportunity to provide analysis and commentary of the relevance of such policies to their own context.

Networks represent a soft, informal and gradual mode for the international diffusion and dissemination of ideas and policy paradigms. Networks enable actors to operate beyond their domestic context and networks are the means by which organisations individually and in coalition can project their ideas into policy thinking across states and within global or regional fora. When there is an aspiration for transfer, active participation in policy networks provides one mechanism to achieve this end. Through networks, participants can build alliances, share discourses and construct consensual knowledge. From this basis, policy entrepreneurs can work to shape the terms of debate, networking with members of a policy making community, crafting arguments and ‘brokering’ their ideas to potential political supporters and patrons.

Networks are an organisational form with extraordinary capacities for innovation, managing risk, building trust, facilitating joint action and gathering information in a manner that flows around and between geographical, legal and institutional barriers. When networks include the active participation and involvement of decision-makers they have the potential to influence policy. Even without such political involvement, the norms, values and aspirations of networks can have significant impact on the climate of elite opinion and culture of public debate. Moreover, the interaction of official decision-makers (politicians and bureaucrats) with relevant stake-holders and experts, helps to reinforce the credibility and legitimacy of network participants in the formulation and implementation of policy.

Networks can also be viewed as a mode of governance whereby the patterns of linkages and interaction as a whole should be taken as the unit of analysis, rather than simply analysing actors within networks. This approach focuses on the structure and processes through which joint policy is organised. In short, there is a functional interdependence between public and private actors whereby networks allow resources to be mobilised towards common policy objectives in domains outside the hierarchical control of governments (see Börzel, 1998). This tendency is particularly noticeable in global politics where governance structures are more diffuse and lack the central coordination hierarchies characteristic of national polities. Furthermore, the transnational character of many policy problems establishes rationales for research collaboration, sharing of information and co-operation on other activities that creates a dynamic for policy transfer. Relatedly, this connects to a view of policy transfer as having 'steering capacities' to become a form of 'governance by diffusion' (Jørgens, 2001)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the conceptual literature on policy networks in any detail (but see Börzel, 1998; Klijn, 1998; Messner, 1997). Concepts such as 'policy communities' and 'advocacy coalition' (Sabatier, 1991) are well established in the comparative public policy field. Similarly, frameworks such as 'epistemic communities' (Haas, 1992) and 'transnational advocacy coalitions' (Keck & Sikkink, 1997) are familiar to the international relations community. Less well known is the concept of 'discourse community' (Hansen, *et al*, 2000) and 'discourse coalitions' (Hajer 1993) which place considerable emphasis on shared constructs and a common policy language.

These frameworks have varying understandings about the potential for learning via networks. It is least pronounced concern in the policy community literature that tends to focus on the (observable) interplay of interests and bargaining over resources. Epistemic communities are founded upon 'consensual knowledge' and learning is prompted by scientific knowledge advanced by experts. It is a more codified and professionally constituted form of knowledge. In transnational advocacy networks, the type of knowledge behind advocacy can be expert but it can also be indigenous, grass-roots or local. The emphasis is upon norm-building whereas in epistemic communities it is upon scientific interpretation and consensus. By contrast, the advocacy coalition framework places greater emphasis on the cognitive order, core beliefs and

perceptions of decision-makers. Rather than consensual knowledge, the ‘discourse community/coalition’ concepts stress the manner in which language, symbols and ideas identify networks bound by consensual knowledge.

This network literature can provide some explanation of how and to what effect knowledge and information about policy practices in one context is transmitted. Combined, these literatures provide tools for assessing whether transfer takes place for reasons that are reactive or purely pragmatic or whether it is ideological or epistemic. It recognises that learning can be of different ‘orders’ and that it can be uneven and imperfect across different actors within a policy network. Thus an international consensus may prevail on ‘best practice’ but local political realities may mean that this consensus cannot take root in policy development or that through processes of adaptation and synthesis present significant variation from one country to another. Political and bureaucratic interests – emphasised in the policy community framework – are constrained by electoral considerations, issues of feasibility, funding shortfalls, war or famine that prevent ‘harder’ or undiluted forms of transfer. Ascertaining the kind of learning (or absence of it) and where or with whom it is taking place can provide understanding of the kind of policy change taking place as well as the possible effectiveness of that change. In short, there may be transfer of policy knowledge – a shared discourse – but not of practice or policy.

The following discussion concentrates on knowledge actors within networks that are central to producing discourses, developing justifications for policy change and building communication structures for the exchange of information. They create their own professional or scholarly networks but they also propel experts into ‘global public policy networks’. Through their inclusion as partners in global public policy networks, the cross-national transfer of ideas becomes more than intellectual exchange. Such global public policy networks are not simply a means for transferring ideas or norm-building but are also new global governance structures.

Part 2: Carriers, Exporters and Inducers of Policy Ideas

If the question is, 'Who (or what) transfers policy?' the usual answer is 'governments'. An emphasis in the literature has been on the role of *official* actors in such processes; that is,

bureaucrats, politicians and state agencies. For example, through the International Public Service Unit (IPSU) attached to British Cabinet, advice is exported to other countries. Established in 1996, IPSU helps to promote and export UK expertise in public sector reform and public administration. It does this by co-ordinating and helping to deliver visits to the Cabinet Office for overseas visitors and by providing support to a wide range of overseas projects, mainly on behalf of the Department for International Development and the British Council. (www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4221/4221-02.htm).

However, the agents of lesson drawing and policy transfer are a much broader category of individuals, networks and organisations. Additionally, the public policy literature tends to be focused on the state. Accordingly, there has been a tendency towards 'methodological nationalism'; that is, a focus on dynamics within the nation-state (Scholte, 1996). Transfer can also be facilitated by organisations outside and between the state. In other words, policy transfer is just as likely to be achieved by mechanisms embedded in markets and networks as in the hierarchies of the state. The role of business in policy transfer and marketing of ideas should not be under-estimated. Enhanced capital mobility is regarded as one impetus for convergence and the transfer of regulatory standards. The hypothesis here is that transnational corporations 'as a group are coherent and these firms act in ways consistent with their preferences' pressuring states into a 'regulatory race to the bottom' through threat of capital flight (Walter, 1999). They are reinforced by international standard setting bodies such as the 'independent' bond-rating agencies that provide authoritative judgements on the credit worthiness of nations (Sinclair, 2000). However, a 'race to the bottom' is not always the case: self-regulation by private firms at a global level, undertaken either voluntarily or via official delegation of responsibilities by public agencies, is becoming increasingly prevalent (Haufler, 2000). For example, the self-regulation of the dyestuffs industry, especially through the Ecological and Toxicological Association of Dyes and Organic Pigments Manufacturers (ETAD), has led to the establishment of 'Safety Data Sheets, Guidelines and codes of conduct' and contributed to global environmental management (Ronit, 2000).

A focus on trans-national networks and non-state actors in global and regional fora helps overcome a further absence of analysis on the role of what has been variously been described as

non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or the Third Sector in governance. Voluntary and other organisations have met the entrepreneurial opportunities afforded to them by the retreat of the state. Often they are characterised by a distinctive organisational ethos that facilitates contact and communication across countries/jurisdictions.

These non-state actors and their informal methods are perhaps better placed than their official counterparts to promote 'lateral thinking' around policy problems and to generate potential solutions from a broader range of perspectives. Their political non-alignment and altruistic tendencies place them outside the usual political bounds, allowing greater freedom to search for and share 'new' ideas' (Nedley, 1999: 30).

In other words, Third Sector organisations may have a greater capacity to engage in experimentation, flag new ideas and engage in policy trials independently of the state. Again, a problem of terminology arises: '*Policy transfer*' directs analytical gaze towards the state when it may be that ideas, interests, behaviours, perceptions and discourses are transported and adapted irrespective of state structures.

The extant literature also exhibits a doubly entrenched geographic concentration. On the one hand, most writing has been transatlantic comparing the USA and UK. On the other hand, there has been a strong European focus. This tendency may have resulted from a process of lesson-drawing from what is 'psychologically proximate' (Rose, 1993) to social scientists in advanced industrial democracies. It results in a 'myopia' that 'inhibits the opportunity for genuine global dialogue' in that the literature is primarily Western ignoring the experiences and lessons to be drawn from developing countries (Nedley, 1999: 1). More importantly, the coercive character of many forms of transfer remains unaccounted. Indeed, coercion is sometimes masked. The language adopted by leading World Bank figures and in its official documents is revealing. It is the apolitical language of 'diffusion' and 'sharing knowledge' (Stiglitz, 2000) alongside the technical or neutral terms of 'best practice' and 'bench-marking'.

A focus on coercion tends to direct a methodological focus on exogenous factors impelling conformity. This can result from structural factors such as global economic integration and financial liberalisation or from agency such as when the IMF imposes conditions on loans. By contrast, a focus on voluntary transfers directs analytical attention to the internal attributes and

salient features of polities that ease transfers – similar political ideologies, languages, policy styles, institutions or administrative arrangements.

In addition to a Western bias, research remains weak in the consideration of global, international and transnational structures, and whether policy transfer has become more widespread in recent decades (Evans & Davies, 1999; also Ladi, 2000). The literature has focused on lessons and policy transfers between nation-states with an implicit tendency to assume a bilateral relationship. Similarly, the diffusion literature often posits a core source of policy innovation. However, it is possible to learn from more than one jurisdiction and to take away a multiplicity of lessons. This ‘mixed scanning’ might result in transfer pastiche of negative lessons taken from one or two places and positive lessons drawn from elsewhere. It results in policy transfer that is an accumulation of lessons that leads to hybrids or combinations in order to make policy development best fit local conditions.

An additional problem arising from methodological nationalism is that the policy transfer metaphor implies a direct exchange process between exporting and importing countries. However, there can be transfer agents that are not based in or identified with either the importing or exporting jurisdiction but which facilitate the exchange between a number of polities. That is, a transfer broker or policy entrepreneur. International organizations, think tanks, consultancies, law firms and banks often perform this role. In an era of compromised state sovereignty, the transfer of ideas, the spread of norms and consensus building is helping create new policy arrangements for global governance. In other words, rather than horizontal transfers between states, policy transfers can occur vertically between states and international organisations or between transnational non-state actors. Moreover, the ahistorical character of the literature has neglected a key question that there may be historically specific periods during which transfer is more apparent and more easily enacted. Globalisation has been both propelled by and creates new opportunities for policy transfer, especially through ‘global public policy networks’.

Transfer Networks and Knowledge Producers

The centrality of knowledge in much of the international political economy and emerging forms of global governance suggest new manifestations for the mobilisation of knowledge through

networks. The diffusion of policy ideas, expertise, programmes and personnel from NGOs and social movements can be extensive (McAdam & Rucht, 1993; Stone, 2000). Non-state knowledge actors are especially interested and involved in lesson-drawing, and many can be regarded as 'policy transfer entrepreneurs' (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996: 345). They help transfer the intellectual matter that underpins policies. They can provide the rhetoric, the language and scholarly discourse to give substance and legitimacy to certain preferred positions in the manner of discourse coalitions. They can be proactive in policy transfer processes as independent advocates or policy entrepreneurs. In other circumstances they can be co-opted into such processes in partnership with development agencies and international organisations. In these policy communities, they potentially becoming involved in the indirect coercive transfer of policy ideas and practice. A variety of organisations construct the intellectual infrastructure for cross-national learning and create justifications for transfer.

Governments and international organisations are using private organisations to help diffuse lessons, build consensus and entrench ideas. Decision-makers face a number of constraints. Firstly, either they do not have the time or resources to accumulate sufficient evidence to make valid comparisons for lesson-drawing or are confronted by problems of under-supply of knowledge; and secondly, they sometimes need to build acceptance and establish legitimacy before lessons can be introduced or imposed. Knowledge actors can provide essential services for decision-makers by

1. acting as resource banks for information where experts utilise their intellectual and scholarly base to provide expertise and informed judgements;
2. advocating policy ideas and inculcating awareness of experience in different domains;
3. spreading ideas and information through their networks, domestically through 'insider strategies' into the political parties and bureaucracy, or via 'outsider strategies' into media and civil society, and internationally with other NGOs.
4. Judging, evaluating, synthesising and weeding out 'useful' or 'valid' research and analysis from among the cacophonous welter of information pressed upon public bodies by NGOs, corporations, lobbyists and others.

In short, there are strong sources of demand in governmental circles and international organisations. Moreover, these institutions establish structures and encourage practices to facilitate the spread of ideas.

For example, the World Bank has adopted the discourse of knowledge and learning in its development programmes. This is most clearly reflected in the *World Development Report 1998-99* (World Bank, 1999) which heralded a multi-year initiative to mobilise its internal knowledge resources to be made accessible to client countries. Through developments such as the Global Development Network (GDN) initiative, its Distance Learning programme, the Learning and Leadership Center and the Training Institutes managed by the World Bank Institute (WBI), the objective is to create partnerships not just with governments but increasingly with NGOs, training institutes and think tanks. In other words, the Bank presents itself as an agent of learning and a prompt for lesson-drawing; or in the words of one Bank Director, "the world's nations can learn a great deal from each other's experience" and "... we will continue to facilitate this learning" (EDI, 1998: 2). For example, 'the objective of the Environment and Natural Resources Group of The World Bank Institute (WBIEN) is to promote sustainable development in its social, economic, and environmental dimensions, by facilitating a learning dialogue and disseminating innovative approaches to sustainable development, primarily among policy-makers and opinion leaders'.⁸ This is to be achieved through, *inter alia*, intensified partnership within and outside the Bank, harmonizing programs with other multilateral institutions, and expanded use of distance learning technologies. One programme is the Environmental Economics and Policy Network (EEPNET) – a common repository of ideas, experiences and knowledge to which independent regional networks can contribute, and share.

The Global Environment Facility (www.gefweb.org) also facilitates the exchange of knowledge. Monitoring and evaluation is especially vital to GEF's effectiveness for three reasons: GEF's projects are often innovative or experimental, GEF is pioneering coordination among many parties, and successful operational programs requires continuous learning. Thus, integrating lessons learned from earlier efforts via project monitoring and evaluation is a central GEF goal. Cultivating 'institutional memory' is a mode of lesson-drawing across time. Furthermore, on-

going innovation, coordination and evaluation establishes a dynamic for sharing information and determining 'bench marks' or 'global standards'. GEF and WBIEN are two institutional examples that seek to promote transfers through multilateral means of persuasion and partnership or what could be described as a 'global public policy network' or regime. By contrast, the World Trade Organization (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism is a more compulsory and legally binding method to prompt member states trade policies to conform to agreements and commitments. More generally, international law as well as resort to (or threat of) sanctions can be a force for compliance.

However, experts and (social) scientists along with the organisations they are associated with – universities, think tanks, institutes, etc. – do not simply respond to demand for information and advice. Some are also 'policy entrepreneurs' (Kingdon, 1984). That is, 'political actors who promote policy ideas'. These entrepreneurs engage in a variety of strategies to win support for ideas. 'These include identifying problems, networking in policy circles, shaping the terms of policy debates, and building coalitions' (Mintrom, 1997: 739).

The non-governmental status of private organisations and associations is a major structural constraint to their role in policy transfer. Nevertheless, non-state actors may be better at the 'soft transfer' of broad policy ideas (Evans & Davies, 1999) influencing public opinion and policy agendas. By contrast, officials are more involved in 'hard' transfer of policy practices and instruments involving formal decision-making. Scientific associations, foundations, training institutes, NGOs, consultants and other knowledge actors stimulate the spread of policy ideas through persuasion and advocacy but also through co-operative engagement with official actors. That is, networking in and around governments and international organisations. Primarily private organisations, these bodies have interacted with other official agents of transfer and have used their intellectual authority or market expertise to reinforce and legitimate certain forms of policy or normative standards as 'best practice'. Four examples of knowledge organisations will be used to illuminate private and non-profit modes of transfer and the international movement of ideas. These organisations are think tanks (also known as research institutes), consultancy firms, foundations and academia.

⁸ <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/wbien.html>

Think tanks

Lesson-drawing is regularly undertaken by think tanks. Cross-national comparison is part of their *modus operandi*. A good example of think tank advocacy that has assisted policy transfer concerns privatisation (Stone, 2000). A more recent example of think tank roles in transfer is the Global Development Network. The GDN attempts to allow greater scope for 'home-grown' policy, information-sharing and enhanced research capacity in and between developing countries. The partnership is a collaborative arrangement for the co-production of local, regional and global knowledge on 'best practice'. It entails information and resource sharing, as well as joint action by research institutes and think tanks in conjunction with development agencies, governments and foundations (www.gdnet.org). Nevertheless, the GDN is primarily a World Bank initiative and very much infused with the values and priorities of that organisation.

Within the GDN, the key agents of transfer have been identified as research institutes. They are seen as having three-fold capacity. Firstly, think tanks are viewed as a mechanism to bridge the national and the international domains of policy through their networking ability. Secondly, they are regarded (sometimes incorrectly) as a vehicle of civil society traversing the governmental and non-governmental domains helping to build wider social and political support for policy reform. Thirdly, they have the intellectual infrastructure to construct channels of communication between the political and the research worlds thereby facilitating the flow of knowledge into policy. Rather than the language of transfer, it is discourse of 'diffusion' and 'best practice' that is adopted. The clearest example is to be found in then Chief Economist, Joe Stiglitz', keynote address at the launch of the GDN where he advised:

Prudent counsel is to scan globally for best practices but to test them locally since local adaptation often amounts to reinventing the "best practice" in the new context. The Knowledge Bank can "scan globally"; the GDN partners have to "reinvent locally" (1999: 8).

In effect, he recognises the necessity for modification where 'global' ideas are synthesised and adapted to suit local conditions.

As is well documented, the form of knowledge that is mobilised by the World Bank is primarily focussed on financial liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. As a consequence, the World

Bank is prone to develop partnerships with other organisations that exhibit common values and norms. Furthermore, the structural power of World Bank in shaping not only the supply but also demand for development knowledge is significant. Political themes and policy approaches are reinforced by Bank capacity-building programmes for research institutes at a domestic level and through building regional networks to share information, spread policy lessons and develop a consensus. Many of these NGOs are also changed in the process of engagement with the Bank (see Dezelay & Garth, 2000). The Bank is interacting to a much greater degree with NGOs and various groups affected by Bank programmes, and change is slowly taking place within both communities. Alternative forms of knowledge -- such as social democratic perspectives or radical ideas on ecological sustainability -- are not excluded but can have a more difficult passage. Unsurprisingly, 'New ideas are more likely to travel if they have powerful partisans' (Walt 2000: 38)

The GDN reflects a broader intention to use think tanks as a vehicle for the education of developing countries into global 'best practice'. This is more to make available the best research and information. It is then left to think tank to devise the appropriate political strategies and marketing techniques to engineer wider societal and political support for policy. However, it is not only through GDN supported activities that think tanks engage in policy transfer. Eastern and Central Europe is an area of significant think tank growth in the past decade and where the exchange of ideas, policy and practice is dense (see Struyk, 1999). Similarly, the think tank form (primarily an organisational form of English speaking advanced democracies) has been transplanted to many transition countries as an institutional tool of Western donors to promote civil society (Stone, 2000).

More generally, however, the value of think tanks within policy networks is that they are often extremely effective policy entrepreneurs. That is, active networkers and proficient advocates. Given that these organisations occupy a political space between universities and decision-makers, they are able to translate scholarly, scientific material composed of complicated ideas into a format that is palatable for policy use. This policy entrepreneurship helps ideas spread to a wider constituency.

Consultancy

A commercialised mode of transnational policy advice that institutes a dynamic for policy transfer occurs through the international activities of law firms, banks and consultants. Consultancy companies have acquired a high profile in the transport of policy ideas, management principles and social reforms from one context to another (Saint-Martin, 2000). Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 10) are critical of the manner in which consultants 'push' models but pay 'little attention to the particular context in the borrowing political system' when proffering or imposing advice on 'best practice'. The 'one-size-fits-all' method can often result in inappropriate transfer (Stiglitz, 2000). In Eastern and Central Europe, consultancy firms have been prominent in providing advice throughout the transition processes becoming central actors in privatisation, legal reform and financial liberalisation in the post-communist states (Wedel, 1998).

In a different field, David Farrell and Shaun Bowler (2000) draw attention to the phenomenon of 'Americanization' by example'. That is, they chart the rise of 'political campaign consultants' selling their expertise concerning election campaign practices in democratising countries such as El Salvador, Brazil and Chile and in Europe, Bulgaria, Hungary, Malta, Spain and Turkey. The firm Environmental Resources Management Ltd (ERM) is probably the largest global environmental consultancy network. It is represented in thirty countries with one hundred offices and is regularly commissioned by government departments and international organisations on large infrastructural projects.⁹ In such a large firm, the diffusion of ideas and transfer of models is endemic to the movement of personnel between offices, the force of 'standard operating procedures' in ERM along with more conscious procedures of lesson-drawing of applying organisational models from one country or project to the next.

With the advent of managerialism and its stress on exploiting the tools of financial management for efficient government, political executives and the senior officials of management consultancies have increasingly come in close contact with one another (Bakvis, 1997). Consultancy companies have acquired a high profile in the transport of policy ideas,

⁹ <http://www.ends.co.uk/consultants/index.htm> ENDS Environmental Consultancy Bulletin April/May 2000

management principles and social reforms from one context to another. Indeed there is an international network of American-based management consulting organisations which "preach" the *Reinventing Government* "gospel around the globe" (Saint-Martin, 1998: 5). They have found an audience among decision-makers in many OECD countries eager to learn about 'best practice' in the private sector and to 'modernise' the public sector (Common, 1996).

However, the role of American management consulting has a longer history in policy transfer. As Denis Saint-Martin (1998: 13) charts, the implementation of the Marshall Plan in the immediate post World War Two era relied upon consultancy companies to help provide 'technical assistance' in the form of American management knowledge and know-how. More recently, consulting firms have been provided enormous opportunities by rapid changes in information technology, down-sizing and out-sourcing, as well as the political transformations and move towards market economies in the former soviet states. The large consulting firms such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers, KPMG or Arthur Andersen are establishing 'government consulting divisions' in their organisations, producing policy relevant research, liaising with public servants and advocating the adoption of 'a more managerial approach in government'. They play a role in packaging, selling and implementing reforms. In particular, through extensive networking to diffuse ideas and cultivating links into international organisation (such as the public management committee, PUMA, of the OECD), they have been instrumental in international lesson-drawing about *Reinventing Government* (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) to mould the language in which public sector reform is understood and sell the methods for its implementation. The NPM ideas of *Reinventing Government* were "rapidly spread around the globe because of the existence of a global 'fashion-setting' network of management consulting firms and because of growth in the use of external consulting services by governments" (Saint Martin, 1998: 26; see also James & Manning, 1996).

Structural adjustment loans are often supplemented by technical assistance, frequently in the form of consultants (Larmour 2001). During the course of an e-discussion convened by the World Bank in November 1999, much anecdotal information emerged about the conduct of consultants in the development field (<http://www2.worldbank.org/hm/hmgdn/html>). The preference for foreign consultants, especially by donor agencies that tie technical assistance to

the hire of donor-country experts is often regarded as a constraint on the development of in-country policy expertise. “This causes resentment among locals and discourages them from active participation” (Stanley Samarasinghe, 2nd November 1999). Consultancy advice is often viewed as sub-standard; that is “masquerading as research” (Geoff Wood, 2nd November 1999). Another cause for complaint has been the imposition of ‘one-size-fits-all’ development models and inappropriate application of ‘world standards’. “Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to argue with some foreign consultants in developing projects, especially with foreign donors, that not all research instruments that work in some part of the world also work in the others” (Lilia Dimova, 17th November, 1999). Whilst these views are expressed by ‘competitors’ to consultants (that is, policy analysts based in universities, think tanks and research institutes) they raise valid questions about both the quality and utility of practical and policy knowledge marketed by the consultancy industry and the interests of donors in demanding such knowledge. “What is perhaps often the problem ... is that one wishes the market for long term knowledge generation (as opposed to the consultancy market) was much bigger.” (Jan Isaksen, 3rd November 1999).

In global policy networks, consultants are both advisors and implementers. Like think tanks, they represent a store of knowledge about practices and approaches elsewhere. Consultants embody ‘acquired knowledge’ on the basis of individual and corporate experience that can be publicly accessed, at a commercial rate, and transferred to different settings. In this sense, consultants are contracted by governments or international organisations and act at their behest in the spread of policy approaches and international ‘best practice’. The question raised above, however, is that inappropriate transfers may sometimes result.

Foundations

Foundations have diverse mission orientations and range from relatively small organisations to large international bodies like the Ford Foundation. Another front of difference is the degree of independence they operate with in relation to the state, corporations or political parties. Political foundations are quasi-governmental actors that tend to provide support to political parties (as in the case of the German Stiftungen) or incumbent governments, particularly in the USA where the

government contracts-out to these organisations.¹⁰ Two examples include the Canadian International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development and in the UK, the British Westminster Foundation for Democracy which have been proactive in exporting democracy. Although many rely upon governments for most of their funding, they are semi-autonomous as they are not part of bureaucratic structure or staffed by bureaucrats. While they are often tied to the pursuit of certain 'national interests, these foundations function with greater freedom of action and can act more quickly than state agencies. They also encounter fewer legal and diplomatic problems of interference than an official aid agency (Scott, 1999).

Foundations are involved in the transnational spread of ideas, values and norms as well as specific programmes. Giuliana Gemelli (1998) has compiled a study of the role of the Ford Foundation in Europe in 'the spread of American style management education' from the 1950s into the 1970s. As is well known, the Soros foundation network is concerned to promote 'open societies' by introducing programmes developed in the West into countries of the former Soviet Union, Haiti and South Africa. However, the Open Society Institute in New York has 'launched an array of programs focusing on the United States (and) a transfer in the opposite direction is also taking place'. For example, 'debate programs' were introduced into schools in countries of the former Soviet Union and are now being transplanted to inner city schools in the US on the understanding that 'learning does not all flow in the one direction' (1996: 17-19). It raises interesting questions about feed-back loops and the 're-export' of ideas in a continuous process of learning and adjustment. Relatedly, it is not just a flow of ideas between political jurisdictions or entities but also a movement from the private sector to public sector to third sector.

Corporate foundations as well can have significant impact on what is researched, considered important and emulated. In 2000 the Shell Foundation was launched.¹¹ Of its two components, the Sustainable Energy Programme (SEP) is most relevant to the discussion here. SEP will

¹⁰ The US system of political foundations centers on the National Endowment for Democracy which is funded by Congress (about \$30-35 million annually). NED works primarily through four 'core institutes': the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity and the Center for International Private Enterprise.

¹¹ <http://www.shellfoundation.org/sep/>

support activities, such as research and analysis, technical assistance, education, training, conferences, study tours, pilot and demonstration projects. Special initiatives may range from major funding commitments to specific topics, high-profile communication projects to the convening of key experts or decision-makers in order to address critical issues. In such a way, foundations can influence research agendas or policy analysis by indirectly encouraging the search for lessons in particular fields through positive inducements and steering. It does not close off other avenues of investigation but choices are made in the allocation of resources that favour certain research agendas.

Within global policy networks, foundations provide key financial resources for think tanks and universities to conduct research and investigate the viability of transmitting policies developed elsewhere. They are essential to the development of international knowledge networks that feed into and help sustain global public policy networks. An international knowledge network is 'a system of coordinated research, study (and often graduate-level teaching), results' dissemination and publication, intellectual exchange, and financing, across national boundaries' (Parmar, 2001). As funders, they provide an important glue to networks.

Universities, scholars and 'invisible colleges'

The role of academics in promoting lessons should not be neglected nor the manner in which "Education and skills acquisition are major elements of the policy transmission process across borders" (Sinclair, 1999: 17). There are at least three dimensions to university involvement in policy transfer. Firstly, academics can be directly involved in transfer. For example, the role of the so-called 'Chicago boys' transmitting monetarist ideas is well documented (Dezelay & Garth, 2000). Transnational knowledge elites are often attractive to local governing elites. They represent an authority beyond their borders to which to appeal in reform processes. Governments are sometimes willing to voluntarily listen or defer to the expert authority of academics in that academics and their institutional base are presumed to hold insight, understanding or experience of especial eminence (Sinclair, 1999).

Social science funding regimes potentially play an indirect role in transfer. Of particular note is the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) programme – *Future Governance: Lessons*

From Comparative Public Policy ¹² – which specifically funds study into lesson-drawing and policy transfer. Given that it was informed primarily by the work of Richard Rose on ‘lesson-drawing’ most of the 30 projects address voluntary forms of transfer between developed countries and only five projects address developing countries. Similar to most ESRC programmes *Future Governance* is meant to “address scientific and policy relevant topics of strategic and national importance”. Developments over the past two decades within the academic systems of most OECD countries has seen the institutionalisation of a discourse requiring greater relevance to industry needs and how ‘research’ can be tailored to the needs of ‘user groups’. It instils a dynamic for policy relevant research and collaboration with ‘users’ in government, international organisations and the private sector.

It is not unusual to see the establishment of centres or programmes within universities that seek to ‘bridge’ the scholarly and policy domains. Two Australian examples are the National Centre for Development Studies (NCDS) and the more recent Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI), both based at the Australian National University. The CDI is non-government but publicly funded organisation that “carry the load of government funded programs designed to promote good governance through international assistance”. The NCDS is a traditional university-based policy research institution whereas the CDI is the “newer government-outsourced policy development institution” (see Uhr, 2000). They exemplify the way in which groups within universities can become enmeshed with government agencies and in some cases, act as policy transfer agents. CDI has been portrayed as a vehicle for the spread of the idea of ‘deliberative democracy’ (Uhr 2000). However, the current director, Roland Rich, is sensitive to how CDI might be perceived by some Asian neighbours as a coercive attempt to “push Western ideas on how to govern” (www.anu.edu.au/pad/asia/news/cdi.html).

Also not to be neglected is the manner in which the movement of foreign students has as a consequence policy transmission and diffusion. A significant proportion of graduate students are

¹² The ESRC funds research in three broad areas. Theme A is 'Improving Future Public Policy by Cross-National Learning'. Theme B concerns "Policy Transfer through International Agreements and Obligations"; for example, the role of international organisations in imposing policy lessons. Theme C focuses on "How Policy Ideas and Lessons Spread". <http://www.hull.ac.uk/futgov>

sponsored by their home governments, usually a specific ministry to undertake policy or economically relevant degrees in Europe and North America (see Barber *et al*, 1984). Long-standing schemes of international student exchange such as the Columbo scheme, Rhodes scholarships and Fulbright fellowships, and the more recent example of Soros scholarship scheme as well as Erasmus and Socrates in the EU, represent significant channel for the international movement of ideas, policy and practice. In the case of the USA,

Its ability to spread ideas is further enhanced by the wealth and prestige of US universities which attract a growing number of foreign students. In addition to being immersed in US culture, foreigners studying business, economics, law and public policy in the United States also receive an education that stresses the virtues of free markets, democratic institutions, and the rule of law... When it comes to US cultural hegemony, American universities may be as powerful a weapon as the American military (Walt 2000: 40).

Thirdly, social scientists can improve understanding of policy transfer as a scholarly exercise. Specifically, they can identify the conditions under which policy transfer occurs, when policy transfer is either appropriate and will enhance 'best practice' or when it will lead to policy failures, and finally, they can aid decision-makers in the processes of policy transfer. In doing so, social scientists are not simply studying policy transfer but are constitutive of the process and become propellers of transfer; albeit some will be more passive observers of transfer than actively engaged in spreading ideas and approaches. This becomes apparent when academics accept secondment to the World Bank or IMF; or undertake consultancy work for state aid agencies such as DfID, AusAid or Finnida; or yet again, when they write position papers for think tanks and engage in research work for NGOs or consultancy that draws attention to overseas experience. In other words, academics directly or indirectly become agents of policy transfer. How self-conscious and reflective the profession is about this process requires further consideration.

Nevertheless, the counterfactual position must be observed. University research on policy matters may have very little or no impact on policy developments. In the field of democratisation, for example, one quasi-academic observer in a US think tank observes that:

... the actual direct influence of the scholarly work on democratization on the core strategy – or on democracy aid generally over the past fifteen years -- has been very low. Very few of the project papers, assessments and reports from democracy programs sponsored by USAID, the State Department, USIA, the Justice Department or others contain any reference to academic writing on democratization. There has been little borrowing of concepts from the literature, nor has there been that much direct interchange of ideas beyond the occasional lecture by a visiting academic or the input of a small number of political scientists who have served as democracy officers with USAID (Carothers, 1999: 93)

Herein lies a problem when addressing the role of knowledge organisations in the transfer of policy ideas. The criteria for influence differ considerably. Evidence of the use of the academic literature may be one criteria but is not the only one. Employing social scientists may be another. The causal nexus between new or transferred policy ideas and their adoption is not clear and transparent. There are many intervening variables. Notwithstanding the absence of hard evidence, the traditional activity of intellectual exchange and cross-national engagement via the ‘invisible college’ has become big business.

Non-state actors cannot bring about policy transfer alone but are dependent on governments and international organisations to see policy transfer instituted in policies and programmes. However, the above examples are indicative of the extent of close interaction, extensive co-operation and growing institutional integration between the ‘research community’ and official actors in the spread of ideas. Accordingly, these organisations are often to be found in partnership or coalition on either an *ad hoc* or more permanent basis with government departments and agencies, international organisations or with other knowledge organisations. In short, they interact in networks.

In networks, the resources of knowledge institutions are ‘expertise’ on the hand; and their non-state status on the other. On the first score, an independent internationally-based market of commercial, charitable and scholarly expertise helps to legitimate certain normative standards and policy positions. Consultants provide technical and professional advice. Think tanks provide policy research and analysis. Foundations are presented as impartial, civil society charitable

organisations promoting the transnational spread of norms. Universities are the fount of academic knowledge and theories. Collectively they have scholarly authority and ideational power; or what has also been called discursive power. Sometimes this expertise or discursive power is directed towards challenging existing policy orthodoxies; at other times it is used to bolster the existing order. On the latter score, the 'independent' or private status of many of these organisations provides some legitimacy to the notion of 'global public-private partnerships' by incorporating a wider range of civil society insights and concerns. Moreover, they usually adopt the strategies of persuasion, education and consensus-building – long term efforts to instil learning – that complements the harder decision-making authority of official actors in the wider process of transfer and diffusion.

Within 'global public policy networks', knowledge actors acquire some power and authority in decision-making. Consequently, an important question for future research is the accountability of networks. The epistemic community concepts are relatively elite and closed structures. Participation is dependent cognitive resources or expert status. Networks can promote greater pluralism or representation of diverse views, but networks can also function as exclusionary devices that limit alliances and curtail exchanges to a select elite.

Conclusion: Knowledge Networks and Policy Transfer

This paper has suggested that it is relatively easy to engage in the 'soft' transfer of ideas, norms and information. The diffusion or transfer of ideas and ideologies can have significant agenda-setting impact. However, it is a more difficult enterprise first to see such ideas structure thinking and secondly, to see ideas and values institutionalised. While some ideas may capture the political imagination, many more fall by wayside. This is less likely to occur if specific ideas and policy approaches are championed within 'global public policy networks' where processes of social learning can be cultivated.

With the focus on knowledge actors, the paper has set out to broaden an understanding of policy transfer. Firstly, it has sought to bring into focus the roles played by non-state actors. Theoretically, knowledge organisations and networks have the institutional capacity to scan the

international environment and undertake detailed, scholarly evaluations of policy that will help prevent the simplistic, ad hoc copying of policy that leads to inappropriate transfer and policy failure. Not only essential for information generation, these organisations often also act as policy entrepreneurs and advocates for transfer.

Secondly, the framework of social learning has been adopted to address one shortfall in the literature; that is, a preponderance to positivism and inadequate conceptualisation of the role of subjective perception and judgement (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996: 357). However, it is difficult to generalise about the character of lessons drawn by knowledge organisations (or the actors in them) and, in particular, whether learning has taken place. The capacities and intentions of these actors differ considerably and will shape the interpretations of policy experience, which lessons are drawn and how and why they are ‘exported’, ‘imported’ or ‘imposed’. Furthermore, ideas, discourse and arguments are slippery and can be enacted in many different ways. The design, techniques and extent of policy implemented will be unavoidably shaped by local conditions of existing constellation of interests, entrenched institutional structures and political culture to the effect that hybridisation, synthesis and modification is inevitable.

Thirdly, it has suggested that transfer is a process that is often facilitated within networks. Networks are vehicles for the spread of ideas and structural location for social learning. In these multi-organisational contexts, common knowledge and common attitudes to policy change can be fostered. Yet, the inclusion of think tanks, consultants or other expert groups into a global policy network, ‘doesn’t depend so much on its innovative ideas, but rather upon whether or not it shares a common value system with the government or international organisation that desires the policy transfer to occur’ (Ladi, 2000: 211). Consequently, while ideational policy entrepreneurs may be independently effective in disseminating ideas, the political dynamics of networks entail that negotiation, compromise and persuasion are unavoidable and these actors are dependent upon decision-makers and other power holders to see ideas selected for transfer and institutionalised in policy.

Finally, the discussion has sought to emphasise that a more global focus – rather than one that focuses on direct transfers between OECD countries – draws attention to the coercive character

of transfer. Indeed, such form of transfer may be more predominant and historically unexceptional than the more recent fascination with voluntary modes of transfer currently to be found among some European and North American scholars. Moreover, attention to global actors involved in policy transfer highlights the governance functions and growing importance of global public policy networks. Accordingly, the international spread of ideas and practices cannot be extrapolated from the policy process. In particular, knowledge is not apolitical. In many instances (but not always), the knowledge organisations described earlier are engaged in a form of 'indirect coercive transfer'. The emphasis on 'diffusion' and voluntary transfer detracts from issues of power, the 'mobilisation of bias', and why some ideas are selected and others systematically ignored within global policy networks.

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