P70 / From policy transfer to the transnational policy process: research agendas and emerging concepts

Topic : Policy Transfer/Diffusion/Learning

Chair : Michelle Morais de Sa e Silva (The University of Oklahoma)

Second Chair : Osmany Porto de Oliveira (Universidade Federal de São Paulo)

Third Chair : Cecilia Osorio Gonnet (Universidad de Chile)

Fourth Chair : Gita Steiner-Khamsi (Columbia University)

5th Chair : David Dolowitz (University of Liverpool)

6th Chair : Carolina Milhorance (CIRAD)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Thirty years ago, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) published their seminal review on policy transfer. Their work has been widely cited not only for highlighting the concept and phenomenon of policy transfer, but also for convening related concepts, such as policy learning (Rose, 1991) and convergence (Bennet,1991). Their 1996 review and their 2000 article that define policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000) laid the foundations upon which a community of scholars began working not only on policy diffusion, which emerged as a US-based concept (Berry & Berry, 1990), but on international policy transfer. Numerous books and articles have been since dedicated to update the debate (Hadjiisky, Pal, Walker, 2018; Baker, Walker, 2019; Porto de Oliveira, 2021) and push the frontiers of knowledge on policy transfer, diffusion, circulation and related concepts, as global policy, transnational public administration, multilevel governance (i.e. Osorio, 2020; Moloney e Rosenbloom, 2020; Stone, 2019; Milhorance, 2018; Morais de Sa e Silva, 2017; Porto de Oliveira, 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Work on policy mobilities and translation has further shown that policies rarely travel intact, since they are reinterpreted and reassembled by the actors and institutions that receive them (Peck & Theodore, 2010; Stone, 2012; Mukhtarov, 2014). Through conference panels and scholarly exchanges, this agenda evolved into the transnational approach to the policy process (Morais de Sa e Silva & Porto de Oliveira, 2023).

In this approach, the policy process is embedded in a transnational policy space, meaning that policy problems, agents and solutions exist and interact beyond national boundaries (Stone, 2008; Porto de Oliveira and Osorio, 2021). Policy transfer remains central as it enables the study of traveling policies. Context also remains essential, revealing the spatial, political, and temporal dimensions of interactions between the domestic and the international (Steiner-Khamsi and Morais de Sa e Silva, 2024). However, the geography of these flows has changed, as countries of the Global South increasingly act as exporters of policy models through South-South cooperation. At the same time, polarization and democratic backsliding now require attention to how traveling policies are politicized, contested or dismantled.

Comparative policy research adds a complementary angle. Domestic actors and coalitions often initiate reforms and invoke external models selectively to support choices made at home (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). National policy regimes, institutional legacies and veto configurations also condition whether traveling policies are adopted and what they become once layered onto existing arrangements (Falleti and Lynch, 2009; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; May and Jochim, 2013). In sectors such as education, this often produces convergence in policy talk and formal adoption alongside durable divergence in policy design and practice (Pollitt, 2001). This divergence is easy to miss when analysis stops at formal adoption. Choices are rarely purely technical: they reflect the political forces that design, contest and use instruments (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007). Bringing transnational and comparative perspectives into dialogue can explain not only how policies travel, but also why some do not, and why formally similar instruments may serve different purposes across countries.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Panel conveners invite proposals that engage with the transnational existence of public policies, be it in the form of research on policy transfer, diffusion, circulation and learning, or in these more recent strides to build an analytical framework on the transnational policy process. Conveners also welcome comparative studies of how national institutions and policy regimes initiate, filter, reshape or resist policy change in the

transnational policy space.

The following questions are meant to encourage paper proposals, but should not be interpreted as a restrictive list:

- How can we robustly integrate approaches on policy transfer, diffusion, circulation and learning with other policy-process frameworks to explain public policy change?

- What lessons and challenges emerge from conducting studies on policy transfer, diffusion, circulation and learning at different levels of analysis (global, regional, national, local)?

- How can we best integrate the local nature of many policy models into the global policy agents and processes driving policy transfer and learning?

- How can we incorporate the variable of power into studies of policy transfer, diffusion, circulation, learning, and transnational policy processes?

- What does the materialization of traveling policies, through instruments, practices and infrastructures, reveal about the transnational policy process, and how and why do the settings, uses and goals of formally similar instruments differ across countries and governing coalitions?

- How has the choice of reference societies, that is, countries used for lesson-drawing and emulation, changed in today’s multipolar world, and which domestic political needs drive these choices?

- How do national institutions, policy regimes and domestic coalitions initiate, filter or block policy change, and when do they draw on, invoke or ignore external models?

- What new concepts are needed to further develop the transnational approach to the policy process?