P92 / Policy Transfer and Diffusion beyond North-to-South Flows

Topic : Policy Transfer/Diffusion/Learning

Chair : Noe John Sacramento (University of the Philippines Cebu)

Second Chair : Byeongsun Ahn (University of Vienna)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

One of the most compelling questions in the study of policy transfer and diffusion is how we can bring the discourse beyond the mainstream North-to-South flows. Policy transfer and diffusion scholarship gives considerable attention to policy issues, particularly in a time of high complexity and uncertainty, when we cannot help but look at how policies work elsewhere and consider their potential when brought into our own context. On the one hand, policy transfer concerns more deliberately the micro-level processes by which policy knowledge, governance structures, and best practices generated in one context or political environment are actively imported and used in another. On the other hand, policy diffusion is broader, covering macro-level processes in which policy innovations, ideas, and norms spread, and in which decisions in one government or political environment are influenced or conditioned by the prior actions, choices, and decisions of other governments.

Contemporary scholarship on policy transfer and diffusion has largely concentrated on, if not given immense attention to, the movement of policies from developed, OECD, and affluent countries, broadly described as the Global North. We take these works as our point of departure in arriving at a critical response, questioning in turn how policy knowledge from the Global South also travels to, and is mobilized in, the North. Policies also move between Southern cities, among Northern cities, within regions, and across scales, and they are reworked at each stop. Our goal is not to remain within a dichotomous framing, the usual North-South binary, as such a geographic framing may be too limiting once we take seriously the diversity, complexity, and uncertainty of policymaking across countries and cities. We therefore ask: how are policies transferred and diffused beyond the common North-South flows?

One of the key topical areas in policy transfer and diffusion work is urban policy and planning, where much of the borrowing, adaptation, and localization of policy happens at the urban and regional levels. Ideas travel, practices that work are taken note of, and these bring usable, adoptable, and transferable ideas to implementation elsewhere. However, there are added layers of consideration to take note of, such as shifting political currents that affect not only national centers but also local governance, planning, and policy implementation. Likewise, the changing world order, the uncertainties of our time, and the complexity of public problems influence how policy actors make and reshape decisions, and how they draw insights from policies and practices elsewhere. This panel therefore pursues a sharp and specific aim: to examine how policies are transferred and diffused, how they travel to and from elsewhere, and how they move in different directions beyond North-South flows, informing decision makers with critical insights for addressing policy issues or concerns in other contexts.

In problematizing this, the panel organizes its inquiry around three dimensions: policy process, policy context, and policy type. First, policy process brings together the actors, instruments, and agendas or objectives that move policies and policy issues. As a policy is transferred and diffused, process raises questions of power: who is recognized as a legitimate source or bearer of knowledge, which actors are connected and at which stages, and under what conditions the concrete components of a policy actually move. Second, policy context sharpens the panel's core argument for looking beyond North-South flows of policy transfer and diffusion. How policy components travel often depends on conditions specific to each case. We therefore ask what kinds of institutional support and coordination mechanisms are in place, what problems a policy is meant to address, and how well it fits the context into which it is being adapted. Third, beyond procedural and contextual considerations, policy type draws attention to how different kinds of policy involve different actors, instruments, and dynamics. What travels, what is left behind, and how it is rebuilt may therefore look quite different from one policy type to another. Taken together, these intersecting dimensions may offer a comprehensive explanation of why policy flows need to be seen beyond the North-South assumption, clarifying the need to view them as moving in multiple directions and showing how they matter for decision making and local implementation.

Call for Paper:

This panel invites conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical papers on how policies are transferred and diffused in more than one direction. Both comparative and single-case studies are welcome. We are especially interested in papers that trace how policies are adapted, contested, and remade as they move across places, scales, and political contexts. In this way, the panel asks how policy knowledge travels beyond the common North-South flows, and what this means for decision making and local implementation.

The panel gives particular attention to urban and regional policy and planning, as much of the borrowing, adaptation, and localization of policy happens at these levels. We are also open to papers from other policy sectors, provided they engage with one or more of the panel's three dimensions: policy process, policy context, and policy type.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- City-to-city and inter-urban policy transfer, including South-South, North-North, and South-North exchanges
- The role of intermediaries, networks, consultants, and international organizations in moving policies, and the stages at which these actors become connected
- Power and legitimacy in policy transfer: whose knowledge travels, and whose knowledge is left behind
- Policy learning by publics, institutions, and the state in times of political change and uncertainty
- Institutional support, coordination mechanisms, and implementation structures in the receiving context
- How urban governance innovations and planning instruments are translated and localized in other cities and regions
- The fit between a transferred policy and the problems it is meant to address in a new setting
- The movement of policies across local, national, regional, and global levels
- Failures, resistance, and unintended consequences, including policies that do not travel
- How different policy types shape what travels, what is left behind, and how policies are rebuilt in new settings
- Digital platforms, data, and technologies as channels for, and objects of, policy transfer
- Conceptual and methodological approaches that move beyond the North-South binary

We also invite reflexive papers from scholars and practitioners who facilitate or study policy exchanges, as well as papers that bring the literatures on policy transfer, diffusion, learning, and mobilities into closer dialogue. Submissions from early-career researchers and from scholars based in the Global South are strongly encouraged.

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