Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York
http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/

Policy Transfer and Learning in the field of Transport: A review of concepts and evidence

Dr Greg Marsden, Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds

Dr Dominic Stead, OTB Research Institute for the Built Environment, Delft University of Technology

Abstract

This paper presents a state-of-art review of why and how policies and policy lessons in the transport planning arena are transferred between cities. It begins by drawing on literature from the fields of political science, public administration, organisational learning and management to outline a conceptual framework for policy transfer and learning. This framework is then used to structure a review of policy transfer literature in the fields of transport and planning policy. Although there is only a limited amount of literature on policy transfer in this field, the findings suggest that transport has much in common with other areas of public policy in terms of the main aspects and influences on policy transfer. As well as being part of a process for introducing new ideas into countries or cities, policy transfer in the transport sector (as in other areas of public policy) can also be a highly politicised process that seeks to justify preferred solutions. Little is known about the relative importance of different parts of the transfer process or the extent to which learning about policies in other areas can influence the effectiveness of policy design in the transport arena and/or policy outcomes. The paper concludes with some research and methodological recommendations that may help to answer these questions. It is suggested that policy transfer concepts can be important to both practitioners and researchers in the transport arena given the pressures to seek solutions to accelerate progress to a more sustainable future.

1.   Introduction

This special issue is dedicated to the study of the transfer of policies between cities across the world (and particularly in the developed world) – a key issue associated with current trends in state reorganisation. According to Jessop (1997), the internationalization of policy regimes represents one of three key contemporary trends in the reorganization of the state, and an implication of this is that foreign agents and institutions increasingly function 'as sources of policy ideas, policy design and implementation' (p575). The notion that policies move across the globe in space and time is not disputed in the literature. What is contested however is whether this process is an observable phenomenon that is sufficiently distinct from general policy making and one that can be studied and influenced (see for example James and Lodge, 2003).

If it is, as we contest, a real phenomenon this raises questions about who participates in policy transfer, as well as how and why. It also raises questions about what exactly individuals and organisations seek to learn. Different theoretical frameworks can be used to explore these questions and these are reviewed to determine their contribution to the study of policy transfer in the transport

context. [1] Whilst the analytical lens could be restricted to studying the movement of policies between organisations, it is clear that this is a process which is strongly mediated by a series of state, quasi-state and private-sector actors within these organisations and therefore the role of structure and agency in the transfer process becomes important (MacKinnon et al., 2008).

Ultimately, it is of interest not just to know that transfer occurs and to understand why but also to evaluate whether it is able to facilitate better policy outcomes than might otherwise be achieved, and under what conditions this is most likely. The evidence base in the field of transport, together with the related fields of planning and environmental management, available prior to the assembly of this special issue is reviewed to begin to answer these questions. In order to do this, we first review the theory of policy transfer, the key underlying questions and the relationships with associated concepts such as imitation, emulation, policy learning and lesson drawing. From this we then construct a framework for reviewing the evidence base. We conclude the paper with some reflections on the importance of different aspects of policy transfer, the implications for researchers studying the concept, the key gaps in the transport knowledge base and finally what the findings mean for practitioners looking to learn from policies that are in place elsewhere in the world.

2. Policy Transfer and Related Concepts

There are various definitions of policy transfer but most share the idea that it is a process of using knowledge about policy-making from one setting and applying it to another. One of the most frequently cited definitions comes from the seminal work of Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) and states that policy transfer is 'a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place' (p344). Irrespective of which definition is chosen, most commentators contend that policy transfer is becoming more prevalent (see for example Evans, 2009a; Common, 2001). This is due to a variety of factors related to the growth in opportunities for the exchange of information such as increased networking between policy-makers and politicians, the globalisation of advisory and consultancy businesses and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), certainly in the case of Europe (see for example Borras and Jacobsson, 2004), where the European Community is instrumental in promoting all kinds of policy comparisons so that "member states can become aware of what their competitors are doing and decide which elements of foreign programs they may wish to copy or adapt" (Rose, 1993: p.105). Pressures of increased accountability and changes in governance structures have also provided additional impetus for comparative policy analysis (Evans, 2009a).

The literature suggests various reasons why policy transfer takes place. One common explanation is that public organizations do not always possess the necessary in-house expertise to tackle new or more complex policy problems, and therefore increasingly look outside their own organization to

---

[1] Levi-Faur and Vigoda-Gadot (2006) note that two complementary but philosophically different paradigms have been used to study the same phenomenon: policy transfer and policy diffusion. Policy transfer derives from a political science approach which typically pre-supposes the importance of the state in policy transfer whilst policy diffusion has its roots in sociology and focuses more on the transfer of information through social systems, sometimes to the exclusion of the influence of governance systems. Our primary focus in this review is on the policy transfer literature.

other governments or non-governmental organizations for answers (Evans, 2009b). In general, policy transfer mainly occurs when there is dissatisfaction with existing policies and this provides a motivation for change in the status quo (Rose, 2005). New solutions are sought either by looking at how the problem was dealt with in the same place in the past, or by examining how the same problem is (or has been) dealt with elsewhere. Consequently, there can be a time and/or a space dimension to the process of policy transfer. A range of actors can be involved in the policy transfer process, both in terms of pushing for new policies or implementing the transfer. Policy transfer has a number of different facets which Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) summarise in terms of seven main questions underlying the policy transfer process (Table 1). These questions are outlined below.

(i)   Why do actors engage in policy transfer? The answer is often complex: transfer can be purely voluntary or it can be entirely coerced. In many cases, however, the policy transfer process lies in between these two extremes. In cases where governments are voluntarily involved in searching for policy solutions to new or changing problems, they are increasingly looking for 'solutions' from abroad. This is now easier than it was in the past because of the growth in global communication and increased networking between politicians and civil servants from different countries. Examples from elsewhere are often seen by politicians and civil servants as a quick, cheap and/or simple means to solve their policy problem without reinventing the wheel where solutions to problems already exist (the underlying assumption being that policies that have been successful in one setting will be successful in another, although this is clearly not always the case). At the same time, policy entrepreneurs are more actively 'selling' policies around the world and promoting policy transfer (and ideas of 'best practice') via international policy networks, advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Dunlop, 2009). In addition, transnational organizations and international aid agencies are sometimes coercing governments to adopt certain programs and policies, especially in less developed regions (Marsh and Sharman, 2009). Uncertainty can also be a reason for policy transfer. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) for example note that uncertainty is a powerful force that encourages imitation, and argue that organisations are often more likely to model themselves on others when 'organizational technologies are poorly understood…, when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty' (p151).

(ii)   Who is involved in the policy transfer process? Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) identify nine main groups of political actors that can be engaged in policy transfer processes (Table 1). In understanding the importance of different actors in the transfer process it is important to consider issues of both structure and agency (MacKinnon et al., 2008). Some groups are privileged through their position in the policy process (e.g. politicians) whilst others, such as policy experts, can legitimise the search for and consideration of new policies but ultimately their influence on implementation is limited by institutional structures (Bulmer and Padgett, 2004).

(iii)   What is transferred? Policy transfer studies do not just confine themselves to examining the transfer of policy instruments alone: a variety of other transfers that have an impact on policy-making can be studied. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) identify eight different categories of transfers that can be included in policy transfer studies: policy goals, policy content, policy instruments, policy programs, institutions, ideologies, ideas and attitudes and negative

lessons. Some are clearly more amenable to transfer than others (OECD, 2001): ideologies, ideas and policy goals may be far simpler to transfer (wholly or partly) than policy instruments, policy programs or institutions, particularly where there are substantial differences in the local social, economic, political and institutional conditions between the policy 'borrower' and 'lender'.

(iv)   From where are lessons drawn? Policy transfer can be local, national and/or international. Local actors will often choose to draw lessons from other examples within their own region or country (Rogers, 2003). National actors on the other hand will often search more widely (internationally) for policy lessons since there may not be any relevant examples nationally. According to Bennett (1991), there is "a natural tendency to look abroad, to see how other states have responded to similar pressures, to share ideas, to draw lessons and to bring foreign evidence to bear within domestic policy-making processes" (p.220). Also of relevance to this question is why certain countries, regions or cities are often preferred as the example to follow. A variety of factors may influence the preference for specific countries or regions, including language, culture, constitutional system, geographical proximity and economic structure. Whilst these factors tend to identify geographic neighbours as key sources of lessons, there are clear exceptions. The United States and the United Kingdom, for example, share many of these factors, offering some explanation for a number of examples of policy transfer between these two nations in the past (see for example Wolman, 1992). Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) state that close attention must be paid to the economic, social, political and ideological contexts of the 'borrower' and 'lender'. Otherwise this could lead to inappropriate transfer.

(v)   What are the different degrees of transfer? Policy transfer is not an all-or-nothing process: there can be different degrees of transfer. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) distinguish between four gradations of transfer: (i) copying, which involves direct and complete transfer; (ii) emulation, which involves transfer of the ideas behind the policy or program; (iii) combinations, which involve mixtures of several different policies; and (iv) inspiration, where policy in another jurisdiction may inspire a policy change, but where the final outcome does not actually draw upon the original idea. This is very similar to the literature on lesson-drawing where Rose (1991) for example identifies five types of lesson-drawing: copying, emulation, hybridization, synthesis and inspiration.

(vi)   What restricts or facilitates the policy transfer process? In most studies of policy transfer, it is rare that actors are perfectly rational. Actors have to work with limited information or within the confines of 'bounded rationality': the search for 'solutions' is bounded by time and resources and also by the search area (i.e. the areas or examples considered 'worthy' of examination). The transfer process is also influenced by the current (and past) policy-making environment. Rose (1993: p.78) for example argues that 'new programmes cannot be constructed on green field sites… they must be introduced into a policy environment dense with past commitments'. A further factor that influences the transfer process is the complexity of the example being transferred: the greater its complexity the more difficult the policy transfer process is likely to be and the less successful it may turn out, which leads to the seventh and final question underlying the examination of policy transfer processes.

(vii)   How successful is the policy that was transferred? According to Marsh and Sharman (2009), there is no generally accepted framework for judging policy success, and academic literature in the field is limited. Evans (2009b) suggests that success ought to be traced at multiple levels. At a pre-decision process level, policy learning can for example influence the nature of the debate. At a decision-process level it can influence the design, evaluation and selection of options. At a post-decision stage it can affect operational efficiency, policy outcomes and future learning processes.

In addition to literature referring directly to policy transfer, a range of other studies can be found that examine some aspects of this same phenomenon, using terms such as policy convergence (Bennett, 1991), legal transplantation (Watson, 1993), institutional transplantation (de Jong et al, 2002), institutional transfer (Jacoby, 2000), imitation (Jacoby, 2000), emulation (Howlett, 2000), policy learning (May, 1992) and lesson drawing (Rose, 2005). To date, much of the literature on policy transfer (and related concepts) has originated in the US and Europe (including a number of studies on policy transfer between the UK and US) and typically focuses on the convergence of policies between countries (Bennett, 1991; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz, 1997; 1998). So far however there has been relatively little attention to policy transfer (or similar concepts) in the transport policy arena (e.g. Heichal et al., 2005). In the following section, we review a selection of empirical literature related to processes of policy transfer and learning in the transport, urban environment and planning arenas. Our review is structured around the seven main questions underlying policy transfer processes that are set out above.

Table 1. Policy Transfer Framework according to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000)

Why Transfer? Continuum (Want To.............Have To)			Who Is Involved in Transfer?	What Is Transferred?	From Where			Degrees of Transfer	Constraints on Transfer	How To Demonstrate Policy Transfer	How Transfer leads to Policy Failure
Voluntary	Mixtures	Coercive			Past	Within-a Nation	Cross-National				
Lesson Drawing (Perfect Rationality)	Lesson Drawing (Bounded Rationality)	Direct Imposition	Elected Officials	Policies (Goals) (content) (instruments)	Internal	State Governments	International Organizations	Copying	Policy Complexity	Media (Newspaper) (Magazine) (TV) (Radio)	Uniformed Transfer
	International Pressures		Bureaucrats Civil Servants	Programs	Global	City Governments	Regional State Local Governments	Emulation	Past Policies	Reports	Incomplete Transfer
	(Image) (Consensus) (Perceptions)									(Commissioned) (uncommissioned)	
	Externalities	Pressure Groups	Institutions			Local Authorities		Mixtures	Structural Institutional	Conferences	Inappropriate Transfer
	Conditionality	Political Parties	Ideologies					Inspiration	Feasibility	Meetings/ Visits	
	(Loans) (Conditions Attached to Business Activity)								(Ideology) (cultural proximity) (technology) (economic) (bureaucratic)		
	Obligations	Policy Entrepreneurs/ Experts	Attitudes/ Cultural Values						Language	Statements (written) (verbal)	
		Consultants Think Tanks Transnational Corporations Supranational Institutions	Negative Lessons				Past Relations				

6

3. Evidence from Studies in Transport, Planning and Environment

This Section reviews the evidence base on policy transfer in the transport, urban environment and planning policy fields: three closely interrelated policy domains where numerous examples can be found in which transport is governed jointly with these other fields (e.g. Shaw et al., 2009). The papers were selected through a process developed using the principles of systematic review (see Anable et al., 2006). Search terms were derived on the basis of the key elements of policy transfer described in the previous section.[2] Over 120 abstracts were checked for relevance and over 50 papers were initially reviewed (the search and review process is described in more detail by Marsden et al., 2008). A further update to the review was also conducted in early 2010. The primary evidence base used in this paper consists of 13 papers published in the last 11 years (Table 2) of which seven are from the field of transport, three from planning and two from urban environment policy. The other papers that were initially reviewed were not included in this article due to the lack of a strong connection to policy processes or insufficient detail in their reporting of the process of transfer or of the policy outcomes.

This section first considers the methodological approaches adopted by the various studies and discusses the limitations that this places on interpretation. The remainder of the section then organises the findings according to the policy transfer framework described in the previous section of this paper.

The small sample size is an indication that the study of policy transfer in transport is still in its infancy. In a review of 74 empirical studies on policy convergence for example, Heichal et al., (2005) found evidence in 15 public policy spheres but none in transport. Van den Bergh et al. (2007) suggest that the process of the adoption of new policies is rarely studied in transport as the tradition for examining sustainable transport innovations in transport is largely of "an ex-ante orientation" (p248). Ward (2007) suggests that "the actual process by which that learning is sought and the technical, institutional and political filters that are applied to convert learning into lessons and actual policies remain remarkably uninvestigated" (p396).

---

[2] Process search terms used were: Implementation, Best Practice, Good Practice, Transfer* (able, ability), Uptake, Take up, Disseminat* (e, ed, ion), Acceptability, Adoption, Co-operation, Networks, Policy transfer, Policy diffusion, champion, Community of practice

Table 2: Summary of Key Literature Sources

Policy Field	Source	Scale	Method	Comments
Transport	Langmyhr (1999)	Urban	Case Study	Tracking the consideration of road tolling projects in four Norwegian cities
	Lodge (2003)	National	Case Study	Examining the different approach to rail market reform in UK and Germany
	De Jong and Geerlings (2005)	National/regional	Case study and interviews	Transfer of transport infrastructure policies and practices in Denmark and the Netherlands
	Iseki et al. (2007)	Sub-national	Questionnaire	Study of smart card adoption in 106 US transit agencies
	Matsumoto (2007)	Urban	Case Study	Tracking policy transfer in the uptake of BRT in Seoul, Beijing and Jakarta
	Stead et al. (2008)	Urban/regional	Case Study	Transferring concepts from German regional transport authorities to Wroclaw and Riga
	Shaw et al. (2009)	National	Case Study	Examining policy divergence and convergence following administrative devolution within the UK
	Wang (2010)	National	Case Study	Examining the policy fit of four innovations that are or have been considered for adoption in China
Planning	Wolman and Page (2002)	Local/Urban	Interview and Questionnaire	Interviews and large sample (293) questionnaire on learning practices of individuals
	De Jong and Edelenbos (2007)	City	Case Study	Direct observation of learning amongst seven cities within an EU project
	Ward (2007)	National	Case Study	Study of cross-national learning in three national planning policy reviews
Environment	Betsill and Bulkeley (2004)	City	Case Study	Six cities participating in the ICLEI Cities for Climate Change Programme
	Kern et al. (2007)	Federal State and local	Case Study and Numeric	Study of the diffusion of Local Agenda 21 policies in four German Länder

3.1 Methods

The literature review indicates that the predominant method of studying policy transfer is by means of case study analysis, with the consequence that the number of case studies is small in most papers

on policy transfer. One of the advantages of case-studies is that they enable the research to conduct "process-tracing" (Marsh and Sharman, 2009) which provides depth on the factors involved (although they cannot be generalised to other contexts). For example, Lodge's study of the opening up of railway markets in the UK and Germany provides insights into the quite different processes adopted, where lessons were drawn from and how they were applied (Lodge, 2003). It is not, however, possible to determine from this how a country considering reforming its network can or should draw on evidence from elsewhere.

Two studies provide large-sample questionnaire responses which allow the findings to be generalised further within the contexts studied. A study of Smart Card adoption in Metropolitan Transit Agencies by Iseki et al (2007) was designed to understand the factors explaining the variable uptake of such technologies. As such, the main goal was not to study the process of policy adoption (and potentially transfer) so only a limited part of the study helps inform our framework. By contrast, Wolman and Page (2002) took an information theory approach to studying the adoption of new ideas within planning and regeneration in UK local authorities. This person-centred approach provides information on who supplies information, where information is sought and how it is used, although the paper provides no insight into the effectiveness of the information on outcomes.

Wolman and Page (2002) also carried out a qualititative study built around a set of interviews that were used to frame their questionnaire. Neither their study nor any of the other studies within our sample set out to test a particular theoretical position, such as the notion that policy entrepreneurs are critical in the consideration and transfer of policies (see Mintrom, 1997 for an example from the field of education), which, according to Evans (2009b), is a general weakness of many studies of policy transfer.

Our review helps to populate the policy transfer framework (set out in the previous section) which we then use to consider the prevalence of different elements in different contexts. This helps us to identify gaps in existing research and provides us with a way of suggesting future directions for new empirical research in this field.

3.2 Why Transfer?

The review of evidence supports the notion that the search for solutions is often tightly bounded rather than perfectly rational. Langmyhr's review of road tolling in Norway suggests that the search for solutions was driven by the earlier successes in Bergen and Oslo and the solutions were clearly bounded (Langmyhr, 1999). Wolman and Page (2002) found that UK regeneration partnerships often do not look further than other UK local authorities for ideas, lessons or inspiration. Motivations for learning included efficiency (e.g. to avoiding reinventing processes) and effectiveness (e.g. to understand what types of schemes were successful in attracting funding), both of which are strongly bounded. Shaw et al. (2009) noted that following devolution in the UK there was some divergence in the uptake of policies such as concessionary bus fares for the over 60s. Within a few years of devolution, the different administrations had adopted a common stance which Shaw et al. suggest may be due to limited resources to investigate alternative policies and political pressures to emulate. The findings of Shaw et al. and Wolman and Page both lend support to the notions of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1993) and in particular mimetic practices (copying to achieve funding success) and coercive pressures (where political legitimacy is important).

Betsill and Bulkeley (2004), in their review of cities from the ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection programme (established to promote knowledge exchange between cities), found that one of the main reasons for joining the network was to legitimize actions already being undertaken at a local level (e.g. by adopting global terminology or citing other non-local examples) rather than to learn from examples in other settings. In some instances, the ability to attract additional financial resources and the personal interest and kudos of individuals were seen as more important than the information exchange function. This is closely related to observations by Benz (2007), who argues that sub-national governments in Germany are becoming increasingly active in developing (or claiming) innovative policies, which they then try to sell as 'success stories' and best practices. To be highly ranked and used as a benchmark is not only good for the image of the locality, but it can also attract additional funding.

There is only limited evidence of more coercive mechanisms motivating policy transfer in the transport arena. Lodge's account of the railway reforms of Germany and the UK notes that, whilst these reforms were conducted at the time that European Union directives required the separation of infrastructure from operations and the opening up of access, the motivation for the reforms were more closely linked to national financial and political pressures. The framing of the problem and the institutional setting were critical in the type of reforms and lessons being considered, which conforms with the idea of bounded search strategies (see above). Evans (2009a) suggests that coercive transfer mechanisms will be more important in developed to developing country transfers which are more heavily influenced by lending institutions (e.g. USAID, World Bank – see for example the account by Razumeyko (2010) on the development of the strategic plan of St. Petersburg). Matsumoto's study of BRT implementation in Seoul, Jakarta and Beijing suggests that external funding sources do indeed influence the learning process although the primary motivations for seeking out BRT as a potential solution appear to have been locally derived needs to deliver an affordable mass transport system (Matsumoto, 2007).

3.3 Who is Involved in Transfer?

Our review provides evidence of the influence of a wide range of actors on the policy transfer process. Here we focus our examination on the relative importance of different actors in different circumstances. First, there is considerable evidence that some decisions are regarded as insufficiently important to require significant political involvement and, where this is the case, the process is driven by local government officials. This is confirmed in a number of studies, such as the review of the uptake of Smart Card Schemes in US Metropolitan Transit Agencies (Iseki et al., 2007), a study of the uptake of local regeneration policies (Wolman and Page, 2002) and an examination of spatial planning processes (De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007). Ward (2004) notes the importance of civil servants and, increasingly, non-governmental experts in informing national planning practice reviews in the UK. Whilst politicians may not be directly involved in the initial transfer of ideas amongst experts, they do influence what type of transfer occurs in practice (ibid.). The selective adoption of solutions from Buchanan's seminal work on Traffic in Towns and Cities is also symptomatic of this (Hass-Klau, 1991).

It is perhaps unsurprising that the role of politicians comes more to the fore in large infrastructure projects, regulatory reform and pricing. In Jakarta and Seoul for example, the political leadership of

the mayor, including visits to other systems, was critical in maintaining the momentum for the Bus Rapid Transit schemes (Matsumoto, 2007). Betsill and Bulkeley (2004) identify the key role of individual political champions, noting that they are "important not only for securing participation but also for maintaining involvement" (p481). They also warn however that the role of individuals should not be overstated: actions can be very limited even with committed individuals involved because of broader institutional constraints (which is consistent with the ideas of Mintrom, 1997).

Alongside the above list of actors involved in policy transfer processes, a number of other important groups involved in processes of policy transfer can also be identified. Advocacy groups or coalitions (i.e. lobby or interest groups) provide one example. These groups act in various ways (e.g. campaigns, publications, presentations) to promote specific solutions or models that further the cause of the group. A number of examples in the transport sector can be identified, such as environmental groups (e.g. Friends of the Earth, Transport and Environment), representatives of public transport operators (e.g. UITP, UIC) and the road and construction lobby, many of which are active in trying to 'sell' specific policy options. Advocacy groups and charitable foundations are identified by Wang (2010) as important in raising the awareness of Chinese policy makers about potential policy options. Professional consultants and policy advisors form another important group involved in policy transfer processes. McCann and Ward (2010) for example write about a roving band of 'charismatic consultants who trek from place to place with their policy solutions in their laptop hard drives' (p181). This group can often act as 'ideas brokers' (Smith, 1991).

3.4 What is Transferred?

Our review indicates that a range of different concepts, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure design and planning techniques have been transferred in the transport policy arena. For example, Matsumoto's review of Bus Rapid Transit transfer suggests that it was not only the concept that was transferred to the adopter cities but also certain design aspects. Jakarta borrowed the median roadway concept, the accessible boarding design, bus technology and pre-paid ticketing systems from Bogotá. Seoul by contrast adopted a reimbursement model from Curitiba but did not see Bogotá as a suitable example to adopt lessons from. Beijing adopted more limited lessons from both Bogotá and Curitiba. Clearly, lessons are often drawn from multiple sites and some lessons consist of rejecting existing practice. Different conclusions or interpretations may result from the study of examples. De Jong and Edelenbos (2007) describe the outcomes of a European project in which the original aim was to transfer a specific model of planning to partner cities. This plan was not achieved although certain elements of planning process were nevertheless transferred and these elements were often interpreted differently in the partner cities.

In the case of regulatory reform of the railways in the UK in the 1980s, the process drew substantially on lessons from other utility policy fields (e.g. gas, water, telecommunication) that had been privatised several years before (Lodge, 2003). This process of 'lateral transfer' did not however involve direct copying: significant political compromises were made and, as a result, different reforms took place in the railway sector than in the other utility sectors. By contrast, the German experience of railway reform was very different to the one in the UK, despite the fact that they occurred at similar times. The German response was to dismiss lessons from elsewhere as inferior unless they supported the preferred reform model (which is also very much related to the concept

of bounded rationality discussed above). The external search was used for post-hoc legitimisation rather than as a real search for solutions with "railway reforms in other countries... used as "nonlessons"" (Lodge, 2003: p171).

3.5 From Where?

Rose (2005) notes that an early reaction to a policy challenge is to look for pre-existing solutions within that organisation (which might be interpreted as a form of inter-sectoral policy transfer). If internal solutions are exhausted or considered to be inadequate to solve the problem under consideration, the next step is often to seek external lessons, usually first amongst near neighbours. A lack of local examples or experience and/or the ambition for greater innovation may however lead to a wider search area.

A study of the diffusion of Local Agenda 21 within German Länder by Kern et al (2007) suggests that bi-lateral diffusion of policies is most likely in the early stages of the process and that diffusion is likely to occur most rapidly in agglomerations and metropolitan regions, largely as the network of actors is more dense. The authors also report that the formalisation of a transfer process through a transfer agency lead to multi-lateral rather than bilateral exchanges which they identify as a key factor in the accelerated diffusion of the uptake of LA21 commitments in German authorities. Wolman and Page (2002) report a bias towards local or regional neighbours as sources of lesson drawing in planning. According to their research, very few authorities regarded lessons from overseas as relevant for their policies and practices (Ibid.). Inspiration from local examples is often regarded as more relevant and easier to translate to a local context. Shaw et al. (2009) find evidence of relatively enduring historic and institutional ties between civil servants in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and suggest that these neighbouring comparators are the most evident sources of learning and emulation. This relates to observations by McCann and Ward (2010) who contend that, while policy transfer is central to contemporary policy-making, 'policies and policy-making are also intensely and fundamentally local, grounded, and territorial' (p175).

Whilst learning often relies on local or regional examples, there may sometimes an international dimension. Ward (2003) notes the use of case studies from Europe and the US (largely) in UK national planning reviews. De Jong and Edelenbos (2007) demonstrate that European Union funded research programmes provide some clear opportunities for transnational information exchange. Lodge (2003) shows that German rail reforms examined experiences in Sweden, Japan, Austria, Switzerland and Netherlands (although none were considered desirable). Matsumoto (2007) reports that Jakarta, Seoul and Beijing all visited sites in South America (Seoul also looked at Los Angeles in North America). For some policies, there may be no local or regional examples to learn from and this then makes the search for solutions an international search. There is often a preference for learning from culturally similar contexts (see de Jong et al, 2002) but that this does not prevent more expansive search strategies. Wang (2010) is critical of the lack of consideration given to the 'institutional and structural differences' (p147) when considering the transfer of policies to Chinese cities and suggests that this may lead to inappropriate or inefficient transfer.

In the area of urban regeneration, Wolman and Page (2002) report that information from study tours, electronic information and academic journals are not widely used to formulate new policy. There is a mixed degree of trust placed in "good practice" which, although identified as frequently

accessed and useful in the questionnaire survey, is often seen as highly subjective and weak in quality.

3.6 Degrees of Transfer

The literature reviewed offers little analysis of the extent of policy transfer. This is in part due to the focus of many studies on processes rather than policies themselves. Studies by Langmyhr (1999) and De Jong and Edelenbos (2007) both describe processes of policy inspiration taking place although it appears that this can occur relatively independently of learning.

Matsumoto's study reports the hybridisation of solutions in Jakarta and Beijing and selective copying (incomplete transfer) in the case of Seoul, where some lessons were drawn from a single site. Likewise, Lodge (2003) asserts that, although the UK rail reforms drew on lessons from previous privatisations, the lessons were adapted to a new context and its particular constraints. The study of policy transfer in Wroclaw and Riga by Stead et al (2008) indicates that, whilst certain ideas or principles were transferred, policies and institutional structures were not (which was originally anticipated): the process involved adaptation to local contexts. As Rose (2005) suggests, direct copying is both very rare and unlikely to be a sensible approach as the key to effective policy design is interpretation in the local context (see also Wang, 2010). Shaw et al. (2009) note that the national concessionary fare scheme for public transport for the over 60s was copied across the UK administrations despite evidence to suggest that the policy had significant limitations, which suggests that strong political intervention can override local technical preferences for adaptation or rejection of policies.

3.7 Constraints on Transfer

The literature seems to suggest a degree of consensus on the importance of institutional constraints on both the search for lessons and their subsequent interpretation and adoption. Langmyhr (1999) identifies various issues surrounding the introduction of road pricing including acceptability and coalition building, the role of the media, political constraints. Matsumoto (2007) notes the tensions surrounding significant reform of the public transport network in Seoul, although it is not clear to what extent this influenced the system implementation. De Jong and Edelenbos (2007) suggest that local institutional differences reduce the uptake of potentially interesting processes in planning (e.g. a lack of culture or formal processes for consultation). De Jong and Geerlings (2005) conclude that policy and organisational transfer is not only related to common cultural and administrative characteristics but also to similar economic and geographical conditions.

Lodge (2004) suggests that the structure of the political-administrative nexus helps to shape the selection of particular policy options. The tradition of lateral transfer of civil servants in the UK led to railway reform based on experiences from other areas of utility policy whilst the sector-expert tradition in Germany led to a more sector-specific approach. Meanwhile, Low and Astle (2009) suggest that institutions are enduring and their influence extends across long time periods creating a path dependency in policy selection and implementation and this may act as a brake on the introduction of certain innovations. Shaw et al. (2009) conclude that whilst institutional arrangements are clearly important, stating that "the role of informal factors such as political leadership and organisational culture should not be discounted" (p563).

For lessons to be adopted, Wolman and Page (2002) note that trust in the information is paramount and that this may explain why trusted peer networks are more frequently used and seen as more useful than most other sources. Political continuity (and political interest) is identified as one of the reasons for the occurrence of policy transfer in a case study examined by Stead et al (2008). By contrast, in their second case study, this political continuity and political interest was lacking and here they found little evidence of policy transfer.

In the case of Local Agenda 21 in Germany, Kern et al. (2007) note that resources may have been an important constraint on policy transfer, observing that "Pioneering cities tend to be middle-sized or large cities with sufficient financial resources" (p620). Similarly, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004) conclude that "limited capacity to address climate protection locally is not primarily the result of an absence of information and knowledge, but rather stems from a lack of resources or powers to act, and tensions over how urban sustainability is to be interpreted" (p489).

3.8 How to Demonstrate Transfer and the Success or Otherwise of Transfer?

The literature reviewed is relatively weak in its ability to fully demonstrate transfer and no studies have provided much evidence about the success of the policies transferred. Only the studies by Matsumoto (2007), de Jong and Edelenbos (2007), Lodge (2004) and Langmyhr (1999) considered specific policies and were therefore able to track the policies through to adoption (or otherwise). Other studies are more process or actor-based. In the case of Local Agenda 21, Kern et al (2007) examine the level of diffusion but do not evaluate the content and effectiveness of policy transfer.

The question of how to quantify the success of transfer is more difficult to answer than simply whether or not a policy achieved its objectives. It requires an understanding of the extent to which the policy search led to the adoption of a genuinely new policy or to significant changes to the design or implementation of a proposal. Whilst it is clear that there is much effort expended in the search for new policies there is no evidence to date on the return on such investment. Different agencies appear to take quite different views on the importance of such investment.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The evidence from the review confirms that policy transfer does occur and can be influential in the transfer/uptake of some policies in the transport arena. Policy lessons are sometimes spread without active intervention, typically through communities of practice where there is trust in the transferability of the policy between similar contexts. There is also a range of programmes, policies and projects which actively supports and promotes policy transfer through policy networks and best practice guides and databases. This is particularly true in Europe and the US where there is a common belief that policy solutions already exist and simply need to be implemented more widely.[3] Such thinking is also commonplace amongst development banks seeking to support particular policy solutions in developing countries.

---

[3] See for example the EU's 2006 Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment, which states that 'many solutions exist in certain cities but are not sufficiently disseminated or implemented' (CEC, 2006: 5).

Despite the observation of the phenomenon of policy transfer and the explicit goals of some organisations to promote such transfer, there have been relatively few studies to date in the transport field examining how policy transfer works. Remarkably little is understood, for example, about the precise role of learning from elsewhere and its influence on processes of policy reform since no studies have yet thoroughly linked policy outcomes to the learning. Few of the studies that we have reviewed in this paper have traced policies through to implementation. Our view is that there is a significant gap in the evaluation of the success (or failure) of policies that have been subject to some kind of transfer. Research has only just started to scratch the surface on questions relating to the search for new or different solutions, the adaptation of good (and bad) examples to fit local circumstances, the degree of transferability of different 'objects' of transfer and negative cases of where policy transfer/diffusion has not occurred (see also OECD, 2001; Marsh and Sharman, 2009). These are all important areas for further study. As with the wider policy transfer literature, there needs to be a greater understanding of the experiences of developing countries or regions. There is for example substantial interest in the South American approach to public transport and its relevance for other countries, including Europe and North America (Smith and Raemaekers, 1998; Wright, 2001).

The effectiveness of a search for policy lessons is dependent in part on framing the problem. Examples can be found where policy learning has been highly politicised and used to justify existing positions ('non-lessons') rather than as a genuine search for new ideas. In some cases it appears that the search is heavily influenced by a preconceived preferred answer. Future research should pay greater attention to the exact question which the policy search was meant to address, who set it and how. The search, analysis and uptake of policy ideas, concepts or instruments from elsewhere are subject to a range of different influences, including political, professional, economic and social. Relating policy transfer processes to these wider influences is another promising area for further research, which could try to link policy transfer concepts with theories of organisational cultures (Hofstede, 1980), welfare models (Esping-Andersen, 1990) or path dependence (Pierson, 2004).

There is little evidence or prospect of 'copying' of one policy from one area to another, certainly outside national boundaries. Different contexts demand different policy responses. Hybridisation is a key feature of transfer with lessons being drawn from multiple sources. Local adaptation is also important. This would suggest caution both in terms of the appropriateness and effectiveness of standard policy solutions being exported from one context to another, especially if these contexts are quite dissimilar (e.g. west to east Europe or north to south). Institutional conditions can also have an important influence on the translation of what is learnt. And what is learnt cannot be observed purely through studying what is adopted: negative lessons are sometimes equally valuable to the policy development process. Whilst this points to the need for a case study approach, this could limit the extent to which the knowledge base can be generalised beyond the specific narratives that are studied. There is great potential for mixed method approaches which first map out the diffusion of policies and seek to identify and test potential hypotheses about aspects of the transfer process. The findings can then be further validated and/or challenged through process tracking or review with case study organisations.

It is suggested that the research agenda highlighted here is of high priority to transport practitioners and academics alike for two key reasons. First, it is crucial to understand the impacts of the

significant resources devoted to the generation, promotion and sharing of practice from one context to another. If the process of policy transfer is better understood it is then likely that mechanisms for sharing knowledge could be substantially improved. Secondly, as the appetite for foreign policy lessons increases (as a result of discontent with existing policies and/or the failure of policies to achieve existing policy objectives), greater understanding about policy transfer in the transport arena might offer new opportunities for accelerating progress towards more sustainable policies that are appropriate to specific contexts.

Acknowledgements

References

Anable, J., Lane, B. and Kelay, T. (2006). An evidence base review of public attitudes to climate change and transport behaviour, London: Department for Transport Report, available online from www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/climatechange (accessed 13 October 2009).

Bennett, C.J. (1991). What is Policy Convergence and What Causes It? British Journal of Political Science, 21(4) 215-233.

Benz, A. (2007). Inter-Regional Competition in Co-operative Federalism: New Modes of Multi-level Governance in Germany. Regional and Federal Studies 17(4) 421-436.

Betsill, M. and Bulkeley, M. (2004). Transnational Networks and Global Environmental Governance: The Cities for Climate Protection Program, International Studies Quarterly, 48, 471–493.

Borras, S. and Jacobsson, K. (2004). The open method of co-ordination and new governance patterns in the EU. Journal of European Public Policy 11(2) pp.185-208.

Bulmer, S. and Padgett, S. (2004). Policy Transfer in the European Union: An Institutionalist Perspective, British Journal of Political Science, 35(1), 103–126.

Commission of the European Communities – CEC (2006). Communication for the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment. COM (2005) 718 final, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, available online from www.ec.europa.eu/environment/urban/thematic_strategy.htm (accessed 13 October 2009).

Common, R. (2001). Public management and policy transfer in Southeast Asia. Aldershot: Ashgate.

De Jong, M., Lalenis, K. and Mamadouh, V. (2002). The Theory and Practice of Institutional Transplantation; Experiences with the Transfer of Policy Institutions. Dordrecht/London/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

De Jong, M. and Edelenbos, M. (2007). An Insider's Look into Policy Transfer in Transnational Expert Networks, European Planning Studies, 15(5), 687-706.

De Jong, M. and Geerlings, H. (2005). Exchanging experiences in transport infrastructure policies between Denmark and the Netherlands. International Journal of Technology, Policy and Management 5(2) 181-199.

DiMaggio, P and Powell, W (1983). The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organisational fields. American Sociological Review 48, 147-160.

Dolowitz, D. and Marsh, D. (2000). Learning From Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy Making, Governance, 13(1), 5-24.

Dunlop, C. (2009) Policy transfer as learning: capturing variation in what decision-makers learn from epistemic communities, Policy Studies, 30(3), 289-311.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.

Evans, M. (2009a). Policy Transfer in Critical Perspective, Policy Studies, 30(3), 243-268.

Evans, M. (2009b). New directions in the study of policy transfer. Policy Studies 30(3) 237-241.

Güller, P. (1996). Urban Travel in East and West: Key Problems and a Framework for Action. In: ECMT (ed) Sustainable Transport in Central and Eastern European Cities. ECMT, Paris, 16-43.

Hass-Klau, C. (1990). The Pedestrian and City Traffic, London, Belhaven.

Heichel, S., Pape, J. and Sommerer, T. (2005). Is there convergence in convergence research? an overview of empirical studies on policy convergence, Journal of European Public Policy, 12(5), 817-840.

Hofstede, G. (1980). Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values. Newbury Park (CA): Sage.

Howlett, M. (2000). Beyond legalism? Policy ideas, implementation styles and emulation-based convergence in Canadian and US environmental policy. Journal of Public Policy, 20(3), 305-329.

Iseki, H., Yoh, A. and Taylor, B. (2007). Are Smart Cards the Smart Way to Go? Examining their adoption by US Transit Agencies, Transportation Research Record, 1992, 45–53.

Jacoby, W. (2000). Imitation and Politics; redesigning Modern Germany. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press.

James, O. and Lodge, M. (2003). The Limitations of 'Policy Transfer' and 'Lesson Drawing' for Contemporary Public Policy Research. Political Studies Review, 1(2), 179-193.

Jessop, B (1997). Capitalism and its future: remarks on regulation, government and governance. Review of International Political Economy 4(3), 561-81.

Kern, K., Koll, C. and Schophaus, M. (2007). The diffusion of Local Agenda 21 in Germany: Comparing the German federal states. Environmental Politics, 16(4), 604-624.

Kern, K. and Bulkeley, H. (2009) Cities, Europeanization and Multi-level Governance: Governing Climate Change through Transnational Municipal Networks. Journal of Common Market Studies, 47(2), 309-332.

Langmyhr, T. (1999). Understanding Innovation: The Case of Road Pricing, Transport Reviews, 19 (3), 255 – 271.

Levi-Faur, D. and Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2006) New public policy, new policy transfers: Some characteristics of a new order in the making. International Journal of Public Administration, 29(4), 247-262.

Lodge, M. (2003). Institutional Choice and Policy Transfer: Reforming British and German Railway Regulation, Governance, 16 (2), 159-178.

Low, N. and Astle, R. (2009). Path dependence in urban transport: An institutional analysis of urban passenger transport in Melbourne, Australia, 1956–2006. Transport Policy, 16 (2), 47-58.

MacKinnon, D., Shaw, J. and Docherty, I. (2008) Diverging Mobilities? Devolution, Transport and Policy Innovation, Current Research in Urban and Regional Studies – Volume 4, Elsevier, Oxford.

Marsden. G. (2008). Good Practice in the Exploitation of Innovative Strategies in Sustainable Urban Transport: A Review of Evidence, Leeds: ITS Project Report for the Volvo Research and Educational Foundation, available online from www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/policylearning/VolvoLitReview.pdf (accessed 13 October 2009).

Marsh, D. and Sharman, J.C. (2009). Policy diffusion and policy transfer, Policy Studies, 30(3), pp269-288.

Matsumoto, N. (2007). Analysis of policy processes to introduce Bus Rapid Transit systems in Asian cities from the perspective of lesson-drawing: case studies of Jakarta, Seoul and Beijing, Hayama: Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, available online from www.iges.or.jp/en/ue/pdf/activity03/BAQ_IGES_Ma.pdf (accessed 13 October 2009).

May, P. (1992). Policy learning and failure. Journal of Public Policy, 12(4), 331-354.

McCann, E and Ward, K. (2009). Relationality/territoriality: towards a conceptualisation of cities in the world. Geoforum, 41(2), 175-184

Mintrom, M. (1997). Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation, American Journal of Political Science, 41 (3), 738-770.

OECD (2001). Best Practices in Local Development. Paris: OECD.

Pierson, P. (2004). Politics in Time: Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.

Razumeyko, N. (2010). Strategic Planning Practices in North-West Russia: European Influences, Challenges and Future Perspectives. In: Adams, N.; Cotello, G. and Nunes, R. (eds.). Territorial

Development, Cohesion and Spatial Planning. Building on EU Enlargement. Routledge, London (in press).

Rogers, E. (2003) The Diffusion of Innovations. Free Press, New York.

Rose, R. (1991). What is Lesson-Drawing? Journal of Public Policy, 11(1) 3-30.

Rose, R. (1993). Lesson-Drawing in Public Policy. Chatham (NJ): Chatham House.

Rose, R. (2005). Learning from Comparative Public Policy: A practical guide, Routledge, Oxon.

Shaw, J., MacKinnon, D. and Docherty, I. (2009). Divergence or convergence? Devolution and transport policy in the United Kingdom. Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy, 27, 546-567.

Smith, H. and Raemaekers, J. (1998). Land use pattern and transport in Curitiba. Land Use Policy, 15(3), 233-251.

Smith, J. (1991). The Idea Brokers: The Rise of Think Tanks and the Rise of the Policy Elite. Free Press, New York.

Stead, D., de Jong, M. and Reinholde, I. (2008). Urban transport policy transfer in Central and Eastern Europe. disP – The Planning Review, 44(1) pp.62-73.

Wang, R. (2010). Shaping urban transport policies in China: Will copying foreign policies work? Transport Policy, 17, 147-152

Ward, S.V. (2007). Cross-national learning in the formation of British planning policies 1940-99: A comparison of the Barlow, Buchanan and Rogers Reports, Town Planning Review, 78(3), 369-400.

Watson, A. (1993). Legal Transplants; an Approach to Comparative Law. Athens (GA): University of Georgia Press.

Wolman, H. and Page, E. (2002). Policy Transfer among Local Governments: An Information-Theory approach, Governance, 15(4), 477-501.

Wright, L. (2001). Latin American busways: Moving people rather than cars, Natural Resources Forum, 25(2), 121-134.