

# 1. Introduction: the centrality of arenas, agents and actions

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary policy work is deeply informed by the circulation of policy initiatives and models from other jurisdictions. Sometimes close and at other times distant, the influence of various ‘elsewheres’ (Allen and Cochrane, 2007) has become a routine feature of the policy process. Researchers from a range of academic disciplines have matched the increased traffic of policy knowledge with a growing body of knowledge that seeks to document and understand it. While political scientists have the longest history of engagement with travelling policy, anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, urban planners and other social scientists have joined the fray in recent years, creating a lively multidisciplinary research effort (Benson and Jordan, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2012). Yet, for the most part, this research effort has been disjointed. Despite having a common interest at their core (the movement of policy), there are largely separate conversations occurring, structured around concepts such as policy diffusion, policy learning, policy transfer and policy mobility. These conversations have ‘lived together apart’ for some time now, but appear to be converging toward a focus on diverse arenas, agents and actions implicated in the circulation of policy. We have also seen shifts from structure–agency binaries to notions of contextually-embedded agency, from neat, spatially and temporally delimited processes to messy, ongoing processes, and from an exclusive interest in the ‘why’ of travelling policy to a broader set of research questions regarding the ‘how’. In this book we use ‘policy circulation’ as an expedient umbrella term that signifies this emergent zone of common ground. We intend the notion of policy circulation to be largely agnostic (in ontological, epistemological and methodological terms), but it is inescapably oriented toward the work involved in moving policy and the ongoing nature of such efforts. It provides a loose conceptual and empirical space in which

a properly interconnected *transdisciplinary*, not simply *multidisciplinary*, research effort might flourish.

The general aim of this book is to explore contemporary practices of policy circulation, provide diverse case studies of specific policy ideas and practices and, from this, expand theoretical frames for understanding the circulation of policy. The manner in which policy circulates draws our attention to people and organisations that are active in the process (the agents), what they do (their actions) and where they engage in processes of exchange and collaboration (the spatial arenas involved). If attention towards arenas, agents and actions defines the emergent transdisciplinary field of policy circulation studies, we must first take stock of the multidisciplinary ‘roots’ of this field. This is the task of the following section. Following this, we discuss the themes of arenas, agents and actions, demonstrating the importance of these core concepts for understanding policy circulation. The chapter concludes with an overview of the chapters to come.

## THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY ROOTS OF POLICY CIRCULATION STUDIES

### Policy Diffusion

Policy diffusion emerged as a distinct area of inquiry in the 1960s, put to the task of studying patterns of intra-national policy adoption in the context of United States federalism. Policy diffusion studies seek to map and explain sequential patterning related to the uptake of ‘policy innovations’ – defined by Walker (1969, p. 881) as ‘a program or policy which is new to the state adopting it’ – to understand when and why certain jurisdictions adopt policies from other jurisdictions (see Simmons and Elkins, 2004; Levi-Faur, 2005; Simmons et al., 2006). Although the term ‘policy diffusion’ is often invoked to describe ‘a process through which policy choices in one country affect those made in a second country’, Marsh and Sharman (2009, pp. 270–71) argue that those researching policy diffusion more often have in mind ‘a process of interdependent policy convergence’. Here, the choices of governments are not just interdependent, whereby ‘the choice of a government influences the choices made by others and, conversely, the choice of a government is influenced by the choices made by others’ (Braun and Gilardi, 2006, p. 299). Rather, those choices are also convergent, as successive jurisdictions adopt the policies of innovator jurisdictions.

Two key implications arise from the policy diffusion literature and its focus on convergent patterns of policy adoption. First, policy diffusion studies rely on a treatment of policy adoption as dichotomous, such that a jurisdiction either has or has not adopted the policy innovation in question (Marsh and Sharman, 2009). While this allows an analyst to simplify the process of policy change for the purposes of statistical interrogation, it necessarily forecloses the possibility of investigating ‘the scope of change in program adoptions’ (Clark, 1985, p. 61) and the processes through which a policy was diffused. Second, as a result of its intellectual debts to modernism and neoclassical economic theory, diffusion is thought to result from unrelenting processes of technocratic modernisation and competition, carried along by rational, optimising policy-makers ‘scanning the “market” for potential policy products’ (Peck, 2011, p. 776). The politically inflected historical-geographical production of ‘common sense’ remains outside the frame of reference for diffusion studies.

### **Policy Learning**

By the 1990s, political scientists were looking for a corrective to the dichotomous rendering of policy adoption and rational-teleological overtones associated with diffusion studies. The policy diffusion literature had been primarily interested in the sequence of diffusion, seeking to ‘identify states or countries that are leaders and laggards in adopting programmes, and to account for the difference’ (Rose, 1991, p. 9), leading Wolman (1992, p. 29) to remark that ‘we know almost nothing about the process by which such policy transfer occurs’. Rose’s (1993, 1991) work was an early and influential attempt to move beyond the conceptual and theoretical baggage associated with policy diffusion. He sought to explain policy movements by replacing the prior emphasis on *patterns* of diffusion across jurisdictionally demarcated spatial arenas with an emphasis on *process*, in particular what he called ‘lesson-drawing’: the process by which policy-makers learn apparently applicable lessons from exogenous sources. Under this approach, policy circulation began to be explained less by emulative, mechanistic adoption of policy innovation and more by the differentiated way that policy-makers source, assimilate and apply knowledge. It was, in other words, much more concerned with agents and actions associated with policy circulation. Rose (1991, p. 9) explicitly fashioned his lesson-drawing approach as a reaction against policy diffusion studies, which he thought ‘often presuppose a kind of technocratic determinism’, where ‘the existence of common problems in many places will dictate a common response’. By

contrast, the practice of lesson-drawing was more voluntary and volitional. Doing away with the notion that 'there must be, or even can be, a common response', lesson-drawing centred the policy-maker as 'a social engineer seeking knowledge instrumentally' (Rose, 1991, pp. 9, 5). Policy-makers were framed as problem-solvers, abstracting conceptual lessons from the fug of contextual detail, playing off the advantages and disadvantages of one policy against a range of others. Lesson-drawing studies acknowledge that policy-makers operate under cognitive, institutional and political constraints, thwarting the possibility for truly rational decision-making. For one, policy lessons are themselves 'weapons in political conflict' which, despite claims to impartiality, 'simplify the premises of complex policy decisions and in doing so ... bias the outcome of the policymaking process' (Robertson, 1991, p. 57). By relinquishing the grip of the rational policy agent, lesson-drawing studies provided an important enrichment to issues overlooked by modernist policy diffusion studies. With the turn to process-tracing, they began to open up analyses of policy circulation to issues of political contestation and strategic selectivity in policy-making.

### **Policy Transfer**

The concept of policy transfer became an interest of political scientists from the late 1990s, at a time when economic globalisation, the growth of information and communications technology, and the ascendancy of international organisations was enabling more policy circulation activity (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Evans, 2004; Levi-Faur and Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). Building on lesson-drawing's turn to process-tracing, and continuing the march away from pattern-finding policy diffusion studies, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) popularised policy transfer as 'the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system' (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000, p. 5).

Noting how jurisdictions are at times induced and coerced to adopt certain policies, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) claimed that lesson-drawing – wedded, as it is, to voluntarist policy learning – was incapable of dealing with the full range of policy movements. Just as they were doubtful of purely voluntary transfers, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 348) cautioned that the 'direct imposition of policy transfer on one country by another is rare'. As Evans (2004, p. 11) points out, direct imposition requires that one government force another 'to introduce constitutional, social and political changes against its will and the will of

its people'. Under this view, transfers that are in many respects highly coercive, such as the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, are not truly 'direct impositions' given that the sovereignty of the adopter country is not overridden. Policy transfer analysts have emphasised the role of functional and economic interdependence as well as the emergence of international consensus as factors that induce rather than impose certain policy prescriptions through different modes of coercion. In critiquing the improbability of purely voluntary and directly imposed transfers, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) have helped locate the intervening, messy zone of 'indirect coercive transfers' – where the actions of policy agents are exposed to varying degrees and modes of coercion – as the centre of gravity for policy transfer studies.

More recently, scholars came to understand policy transfers as re-shaping, not merely reacting to, wider institutional contexts and local territorial politics. This amounts to a growing appreciation that the spatial arenas involved in policy transfer are both constitutive of, and constituted by, those transfers. Although it has long been noted that 'the process of modification in transfer requires closer attention' (Stone, 1999, p. 57), only recently have political scientists begun to heed this call. Recognising that 'transfer does not create a cryogenically preserved policy forever more', Stone (2012, p. 7) remarks on emergent multidisciplinary research that has 'criticised the rationalist underpinnings of early transfer approaches and instead stress[es] the complexity of context [and the need for] interpretation or experimentalism ... in the assemblage of policy' (Stone, 2012, p. 5). Stone (2012, p. 487) refers to this work as a 'nascent third generation' of policy transfer research, after earlier policy diffusion (first generation) and traditional political science policy transfer approaches (second generation). Accordingly, there has been a shift away from policy 'transfer', with its spatiality of simple, transactional policy movement, toward a conception that, on one hand, grasps how the 'form and effects' of certain policies are 'transformed by their journeys' (Peck, 2011, p. 793), and on the other, how the journeys of policy 'serve continuously to remake relational connections across an intensely variegated and socio-institutional landscape'. This provides the context for literature on 'policy mobility', which has developed outside, but in dialogue with, the discipline of political science.

## Policy Mobility

Just as political scientists have oscillated between metaphors of diffusion, lesson-drawing and transfer, the organising metaphors used by geographers, urban studies scholars, anthropologists and sociologists have centred on notions of assemblage, mutation and mobilities (McCann and Ward, 2012; Peck, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010). However, McCann's (2008, 2011) concept of 'policy mobility' has become increasingly common. There are at least three core features of policy mobility studies. First, policy mobility research is social constructivist in its outlook. This amounts, ontologically, to an insistence that social reality does not exist independent of interpretation and, epistemologically, tasks researchers with understanding the world through the cognitive, textual and representational interpretations of research subjects. Speaking of an anthropological approach to policy, Wedel et al. (2005, pp. 35, 37) see the task of social constructivist policy studies as 'understanding how policy functions in the shaping of society' and to 'expose the political effects of allegedly neutral statements about reality'. Where orthodox policy transfer studies isolate policy processes by 'holding the rest of the world still' (Prince, 2012, p. 191), social constructivist accounts are intent on locating policy as situated, contested and constitutive of the social world.

Second, studies of policy mobility focus on a host of socialised actions, sites and contexts. Sympathetic to these sentiments, a number of authors have set about analysing the spaces within which policy-makers do their learning, emphasising that while policy-makers are increasingly able to learn at a distance – through email, websites, YouTube videos, and so on – such activities 'also depend on the intermittent co-presence of those actors in specific places like conferences [and] site-visits' (McCann and Ward, 2012, p. 329). Learning is viewed as a translative, selective and necessarily partial process whereby policy actors learn through these experiences and materials – or as McFarlane (2011) has put it, learning is the development of 'situated seeing', where one's policy consciousness emerges via engagements with particular materials, people and environments. Yet, while learning is done by embodied actors, those actors are also embedded in specific contexts and in networks of association that channel learning potential (Peck, 2011). So the analysis of agents, actions and their locational arena becomes relevant to understanding the policy circulation process.

The third and final feature of policy mobility studies relates to their conception of space. Taking issue with the spatial foundations of orthodox policy transfer research – which, until recently, tended to suggest that policy moves through static, transactional transfers across defined

(often national) jurisdictional boundaries – policy mobility accounts conceive of policy movement in terms of spatial multiplicity and dynamism. Policy-making tends to be viewed as an assemblage of components that are not easily located within state territory despite the influences running across and through such territories (McCann, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2012; McFarlane, 2011; Prince, 2010). ‘Contemporary policy-making processes’, Peck (2011, p. 773) claims, ‘have promiscuously spilled over jurisdictional boundaries, both “horizontally” (between national and local political entities) and “vertically” (between hierarchically scaled institutions and domains)’, pointing to a diverse set of spatial arenas influencing the mobilisation of policy. In addition to spatiality being seen as multiple and overlapping, policy mobility research calls attention to policy mutation, both in the process of extrapolating a ‘model’ and in applying that model to different local contexts. While policy mobilities are influenced by scaled and networked relations coursing through particular places, institutions and people, they are simultaneously involved in re-wiring those relations, establishing and severing connections to produce new spatial formations (McCann and Ward, 2012).

## THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY FUTURE OF POLICY CIRCULATION STUDIES

In narrating the evolution of research on policy circulation, the central position of arenas, agents and actions in contemporary multidisciplinary scholarship becomes apparent. We suggest that a more thoroughly interconnected transdisciplinary future for policy circulation studies might emerge from these three aspects of inquiry and the following provides a brief overview of each.

### **Arenas**

While policy circulation requires the action of particular agents, this effort must happen somewhere: in specific locations and contexts, or what we refer to as spatial arenas. Two broad types of spatial arenas have garnered the attention of policy circulation scholars. First, scholars are increasingly attentive to a wide range of macro-spatial geopolitical arenas associated with policy circulation. Literatures on policy diffusion, transfer and mobility have tended to focus on circulations within the geopolitical arena of the Global North. Due, in no small part, to the preponderance of academic researchers and research funding in Europe

and North America, scholars have documented the ways in which the perception and actuality of economic, cultural, linguistic and ideological similarity between nations and cities in the Global North structures the circulation of policy knowledge (Bulmer, 2007; Peck and Theodore, 2010; Ward, 2010). In policy areas such as welfare, municipal finance and economic policy, studies point to strong professional, political and popular affinities between Anglophone nations (Ward, 2007; Cook, 2008; Legrand, 2012; Baker et al., 2016) and between continental European nations (Bulmer, 2007). The power relations associated with such affiliations are often uneven, and this is a point that becomes particularly apparent in accounts of North-to-South policy circulation. Whether through colonial (for example direct sovereign control) or neo-colonial relations (for example indirect control, such as debt obligations), places within the Global South have long contended with the valorisation and imposition of policy knowledge from wealthy nations and institutions dominated by wealthy nations (Clarke, 2012).

More recently, however, scholars have begun to document the seeming growth of policy circulations within the Global South as well as South-to-North circulations. For example, Bogota and Porto Alegre are widely promoted and emulated for welfare and sustainable transportation policies, respectively (Wood, 2014; Montero, 2017a; Morais de Sá e Silva, 2017; Porto de Oliveira, 2017b). These ‘best practices’ circulate within a geopolitical arena where the policy imagination is populated by a set of places, experts and developmental trajectories that tend to diverge from that of the Global North. Circulations also run ‘uphill’, against the grain of typical geopolitical relations, to influence places that are typically positioned as sources of diffusion, not emulation (Peck and Theodore, 2010; Smith, 2013). Thus, scholars have highlighted the existence of various macro-geopolitical ‘trading zones’ that shape and are sustained by policy circulations.

By contrast, policy circulation literature also emphasises the importance of micro-spaces (Larner and Le Heron, 2002). Advancements in communications and information technology have meant that policy actors’ understandings of the world around them are profoundly inter-mediated by digital technologies. Rapoport (2015) discusses the way circulating images – in her case, digitally-manipulated images of planned urban redevelopments – support the circulation of particular policies by familiarising their audience to the apparent benefits of those policies. In a similar fashion, the availability of digitised reports and PowerPoint slideshows, and one’s position in social media networks, create a particular reality or ‘policy world’ (Shore et al., 2011) that contemporary policy actors inhabit. Despite these acknowledgements, scant attention

has been paid to the virtual worlds within which today's policy agents are profoundly enveloped. On the other hand, while it is arguably easier to assess and apply global policy developments at a distance, policy actors continue to visit sites of policy innovation and continue to engage with their colleagues and counterparts through face-to-face gatherings. Site visits and study tours are methods for learning that precede digital technology – as Cook et al.'s (2014, 2015) studies of post-war policy circulation between the Soviet Union and Britain demonstrate – but they remain as important as ever (Cook and Ward, 2011; Hudson and Kim, 2014; Wood, 2014). In locations where demand is high, local administrations have developed standardised tours and hired dedicated staff to handle the volume of 'policy tourists' (see González, 2011 on Bilbao and Barcelona). Additionally, face-to-face events, such as conferences, summits and workshops, appear to be proliferating, rather than diminishing. These events are key components of the informational infrastructure that undergirds policy circulation (Cook and Ward, 2012). They are 'ephemeral fixtures' (Temenos, 2016): time-limited spatial arenas through which learning happens, connections are forged, and relationships are maintained. The perceived importance of tacit knowledge acquisition and experiential learning, and the need to develop trust among coalitions of local and international policy actors, have meant that being physically co-present with other policy actors and other policy sites remains central to policy circulation (Wood, 2014; Montero, 2017a).

## **Agents**

The study and identification of agents is important since it is the action they undertake and the arenas where this occurs that shape policy circulation (Clifford and Morphet, 2015). Agents of transfer are growing in diversity and capability. They act as the conduits of knowledge transfer and may instigate (or constrain) action that brings together parties in the policy circulation process (Grin and Loeber, 2006; Unalan, 2009). Agents range from individuals to organisations and are no longer limited to public officials and their agencies (Benson and Jordan, 2011). Private and non-government actors increasingly play an active role in policy transfer (Porto de Oliveira, 2017a; Bok and Coe, 2017). While recognised as important players, the process is less driven by global institutions such as the World Bank or European Union (Stone, 2000, 2012; Hadjiisky et al., 2017) and involves a mix of local, national and global players. The mobility of policy is shaped by an ongoing process of inter-referencing between agents as circulating policy is considered and remodelled into new locations (Webber, 2015).

The political nature of policy work means that it both attracts and engages a multiplicity of actors, some as insiders, well positioned and familiar with the process, and others as outsiders, activists and advocates who may often struggle to obtain a seat at the decision-making table (Colebatch, 2009). There is an intrinsic level of political interaction amongst agents (Peck and Theodore, 2010) and hence policy circulation progresses through various networks and webs of connection that draw on different sources of power, expertise and influence (Stone, 2004). Here we see the interaction of agents shaped by both institutional and historical context, often specific to location (Smith, 2013; Lee and Hwang, 2012).

Identifying agents of policy circulation and their engagement with local actors is important since this interaction shapes policy implementation. While the literature has a strong focus on how policy circulation orientates towards learning (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, 2000; Dunlop, 2009; Malik and Cunningham, 2006), the competitive and political nature of economies means more is at stake for agents than a simple desire to learn how to do things better. Policy allocates resources, power and influence and agents have an interest in how this might occur as subsequent decision making and action reshapes new ideas for local implementation (McCann and Temenos, 2015; Unalan, 2009). The process therefore engages a range of agents including the political (activists, governments and global agencies), the benevolent (donors, philanthropists and transnational agencies), the expert (civil servants, academics, professions and think tanks) and the commercial (corporations, consultants and trade frameworks).

An interdisciplinary analysis of policy circulation cases helps highlight the diversity of agents, their interests and varying degrees of influence that shape contemporary experiences, and should also point to how different disciplines can learn from each other about the dynamics of policy circulation. The following discussion identifies key agents of policy circulation and draws attention to some of the characteristic influences they exercise on policy circulation.

### **The political and expert**

The circulation of policy is enhanced by activists who champion ideas and engage in the inter-personal advocacy of local programmes that can be generalised to alternative settings (Porto de Oliveira, 2017a; Temenos, 2016). McCann and Temenos (2015) note how public health actors working in the area of harm reduction strategies for drug users proactively advocate the adoption of their practices as they share evidence, principles and practice with interested jurisdictions. Agents become

activists connected through particular global distribution networks, conferences and events that exchange ideas and information. Activists are proactive in the way they reach out to connect and support the work of others, helping them remould policy so that it is both place specific and connects with a broader body of global knowledge and experience (McCann, 2008). Conferences and face-to-face forums provide opportunities for activism and building interpersonal connections with experienced people in another location and this, in turn, lends validity and expertise to the circulation of policy that activist agents support (Temenos, 2016).

The production and dissemination of expert knowledge plays a key role in policy circulation. Technical and practitioner experts, civil servants and academics are important agents that lend legitimacy to policy practice and define aspects of policy success. Academics are noted agents of policy circulation, often producing policy-relevant research, translating and generalising the experience of practice in one jurisdiction for others (Jacobs and Lees, 2013; Walker, 2018). Expert agents are powerful conduits of information often well connected to networks of actors that both inform and disseminate ideas, assessments and determinations (McCann, 2008). Experts are not lone actors but embedded members of professional, epistemic and practice communities that both inform and learn from interactions with other policy actors (Peck and Theodore, 2010). This iterative process strengthens their agency role.

### **The global and benevolent**

While the analytical exercise of categorising and defining agents of policy circulation helps identify different modes of interaction and influence, the reality of policy practice is a messy, less structured process where individuals and organisations may take on multiple and changing roles. Expert agents blend into a grouping of ‘policy entrepreneurs’ – think tanks, NGOs, philanthropic organisations and business coalitions – that have all been observed as playing an influential role in the translation and promotion of policy ideas (Stone, 2012). Expertise gravitates towards organisational forms at the national and global level and so we see authoritative state and multi-state institutions acting as legitimate agents of policy circulation.

Global organisations, such as UN agencies, the World Bank and major international donors are powerful agents mobilising resources, authority and undertaking strategic action to push and impose ideas and policy practices in certain locations (Schroeder et al., 2013; Nay, 2012). They can be active in sharing successes and promoting further circulation and adaptation in new locations (Webber, 2015). However in some instances the autonomy and power of agents (foundations and donors) may result

in an ‘oligarchic diffusion’ of selected policies that represent the agenda and preferences of powerful elites and lack democratic accountability (Smith et al., 2014). Other transnational bodies such as the OECD play a more nuanced, mediating role disseminating ideas and working to build consensus on new understandings and practices towards contemporary policy challenges (Theodore and Peck, 2011; Pal, 2014). Such agencies are active in forward thinking around policy ideas and the circulation of policy norms. Here we see stronger evidence of the circulation of expert frameworks, models of best practice and preferred neoliberal principles defining the parameters for action and the structuring of policy responses (Theodore and Peck, 2011). Global and transnational organisations are effective in creating openings for policy ideas to further circulate and encounter new audiences and locations of interest. On these occasions the affinity and engagement of organisational actors with expert agents is most evident. This softer form of policy advocacy evident in the socialising of policy norms is in contrast to the more radical activist agents of advocacy mentioned earlier.

### **Governments and civil servants**

Governments and their agencies are also active agents in the circulation of policy. Soft advocacy, the hosting of expert and technical visits, exchanges and partnerships through formal programmes facilitate the circulation and interaction of both solutions and problems. Many government agencies are active supporters of policy reform and readily work with peer agencies across and between levels of government (Walker, 2018). For many agencies the ongoing documentation of their work and provision of free access to reports, evaluations and policy documents through their internet presence actively mobilise policy into an untargeted global terrain. This practice reflects the active interest of civil servants in sharing, learning and keeping track of others. The interdepartmental and intergovernmental work of civil servants sustains a web of interpersonal connections that also plays an active role in circulating policy ideas (Clifford and Morphet, 2015).

There is significant documentation of local governments as primary sources of policy circulation, lending both technical expertise and reconfiguring knowledge and experience into different settings (Ewijk et al., 2015). The increasing recognition of local government as a driving force for economic and social development has underpinned a number of partnerships in North–South and South–South development cooperation that further institutionalises policy circulation and exchange. In this context policy circulation is dominated by an interest in peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange and the evidence from a number of

studies suggests such partnerships and programs are effective in mobilising policy concepts into multilevel governance systems (Ewijk et al., 2015; Temenos and McCann, 2012). At the local government level policy circulation is noted for the shift away from hierarchical exchange of policy ideas from lender to borrower to a more equitable exchange where effort is focused on the reconstitution of ideas and practices into a local political and cultural context. This is not to say policy circulation occurs without struggle, negotiation and political complexity (Lee and Hwang, 2012), rather the experience for cities and local governments is much more localised in context and highlights how policy tends to ‘travel in bits and pieces’ and then is reassembled in different locations, often in different ways (Clifford and Morphet, 2015).

### **The commercial**

Policy is embedded and concurrently structures the economic and social context of economies. The political and economic nature of policy means private interests also play a role in mobilising, supporting and also resisting policy ideas (Wiig, 2015). Neoliberalism and the practice of New Public Management have orientated governance systems towards a reliance on private parties to contribute to and shape policy systems and services (Larner and Laurie, 2010). State and corporate actors are often integral in the mobilisation of policy ideas and progressing (through investment) to implementation. The transnational links of corporations and their motivation to maximise profits means that firms are important agents driving economic activity and the circulation of policy frameworks that structure such interaction (Bok and Coe, 2017). Transnational processes of standardisation and norm-setting across numerous professions (such as engineers) and industrial sectors have also strengthened the policy agency of private firms (Grubbauer, 2015; Larner and Laurie, 2010).

Economic actors are experienced in the transfer of expertise across space and locations and they have an interest to frame issues and policy responses in ways that extend their interests (Faulconbridge, 2015). While industry-specific agents (such as banking associations or representatives of extraction industries) may be active in the circulation of policy models, global and national consultants are also active as non-state intermediaries mobilising and relocating policy ideas (Bok and Coe, 2017; Prince, 2014). As with the earlier discussion on experts, much of this work may be focused on best practice models, though often commercialised models, and the transfer of other ‘policy products’ that worked elsewhere are also included (Faulconbridge, 2015). The work of consultants is noted for their capacity to rearticulate policy concepts into

universally digestible forms, often emphasising quantitative measures as hard, neutral evidence of activity, impact and value (Prince, 2014). Analysing the role of private sector agents highlights the increasing corporatisation of policy circulation in certain arenas, and has been well documented in areas of infrastructure, planning and property development (Bok and Coe, 2017; Faulconbridge, 2015; Grubbauer, 2015).

This brief account highlights the diversity of agents as well as the numerous modes of interaction through which they engage. From an analytical perspective the categorisation is helpful in identifying and differentiating the different forces of agency motivation. However, agents are mobile, shifting across organisations and between sectors, and often engage in concurrent roles. An impartial, expert civil servant in public health may also proselytise and advocate for greater policy circulation at international conferences. And similarly, the experienced water engineer from a European transnational corporation working with governments in mobilising infrastructure privatisation policies may subsequently move to a third sector environment agency, becoming an agent for more localised forms of policy participation (Larner and Laurie, 2010). Agents may be multifaceted in their interests, working with governments to deliver on policy objectives but also seeking to maximise personal goals and ambition. Agents are not neutral and how they act and what they do is shaped by their affiliations to political, commercial or organisational interests. So agents are important because of what they do and the following discussion on ‘actions’ examines how this important characteristic may be understood through processes of policy circulation.

## **Actions**

Actions and decisions that impact on and activate policy circulation are diverse. There appears ongoing growth in more-or-less ‘voluntary’ policy circulation involving cooperation between distant agents and jurisdictions. Yet complex power relations remain, ranging from outright coercion to more veiled forms of power associated with agenda-setting and ‘best practice’ designation. So while an agency or state may appear to voluntarily adopt a policy, this may actually occur under the shadow of institutional-structural preferences and hence interests and institutional actors are directed towards particular policy preferences. Larner and Laurie (2010) provide an informative account of how agents representing specific professional expertise are active in policy circulation and mobilising action in favour of infrastructure privatisation. Similarly, multi-national donors and NGOs play an important role in institutionalising dominant understandings of policy action and within this framework

exercise a subtle influence on policy circulation into particular policy fields. Non-government policy oligarchs have emerged that are not constrained by multinational state apparatus or formal international conventions. This makes policy transfer a diverse activity that is no longer the result of the more traditional studied state-to-state action. Private-to-state and state-to-private action can also be seen to drive the process of policy circulation (Walker, 2017).

Policy circulation involves the sharing of knowledge and ideas, transmitted and developed through pedagogical discourses and learning within and between actors and institutions. Learning and teaching is seen to be 'at the heart of the international mobilization of ideas' (Rapoport, 2015, p. 308; McFarlane, 2011). Agents involved in policy circulation regularly engage to learn from others. However, in many instances there are some agents active in promoting their achievements, demonstrating a willingness to teach others, since perceptions of political and social success often rest on the broader acceptance by others (McCann, 2013). Facilitated learning through study tours are notable means through which policy ideas are circulated. These activities present opportunities to educate local policy-makers as well as expand local coalitions of policy agents engaged in addressing a particular policy problem (Montero, 2017a). Policy learning can take on a two-way communication model in which lenders and borrowers provide each other with forms of feedback, a dynamic that can enhance the chances of successful policy transfer (Park et al., 2014). Feedback represents a form of learning that can transmit ideas between borrowers, lenders and policy stakeholders, bringing an expansive complexity to the traditional policy cycle (Park et al., 2014; Walker, 2017).

Case studies of learning and pedagogical practices have covered diverse fields such as sustainable urban transition management (Sheldrick et al., 2017; Rapoport, 2015), higher education (Moore et al., 2015), transportation (Montero, 2017a; Walker, 2018) and public relations (Park et al., 2014), among others. A key action that supports learning involves comparative analysis and the generation of technical data. Data in the form of charts, tables and benchmark studies build a universal language that links diverse locations and experiences into a 'global space'. Benchmarking builds a connection between peers and supports policy learning and circulation as locations both emulate and compete through shared instruments of measurement and comparison (Prince, 2016). These practices of enumeration and measurement are the primary actions technicians and experts undertake that facilitate policy circulation. Technical data and analysis renders policy fields visible, knowable, comparable and governable (Prince, 2016) and in this context the iterative

analysis and reflection on circulating policies becomes a constructive policy development exercise.

While data and measurement help break down and deduce an interpretation of phenomena in a particular policy space, the interaction of agents involved in policy circulation also relies on sharing conceptual understandings of policy spaces. Here action is about building up a comprehensive understanding of locations, systems and an integrated whole (Kennedy, 2016). The use of models and modelling represents an argumentative action around shared understandings of what might be 'good', 'a success' or 'failure'. The construction, reference and articulation of models mobilises policy and provides a basis for agent interaction (Webber, 2015). Kennedy (2016) explains how in urban planning reference to policy from the 'model' city is a persuasive method for gaining support in new locations. Models can link locations (best practice and replication sites) and identify sites for further policy leaning (Webber, 2015). The design and selection of models may also be a strategic argument intended to support particular claims and convince diverse actors to converge on joint action (Montero, 2017b).

Ideal models and documentation of best practice are often based on policy work that originated through experimentation. Experimentation in public policy represents a favoured and low risk governance process that is also known to facilitate learning (Evans, 2016). It allows policy problems to be managed on a scale that is more readily manipulated, observed and documented, and can be undertaken at diverse sites and under variable settings. Policy development takes time and the less rigid nature of experimental action allows for more responsive adjustments to institutional and political reactions. The act of innovation, experimentation and trials, and the subsequent documentation of success and challenges, draws in an expanding network of actors, many of whom are importers looking for new ways of dealing with similar challenges (Walker, 2018).

Many agents learn of policy experimentation, innovation and successes through the promotional activity of others, what McCann (2013) refers to as 'policy boosterism'. Some agents may see the success of their policy innovation as undervalued or not adequately recognised by important constituents and so promotional efforts are undertaken. This serves both domestic interests as well as seeking to draw in an approving external audience. Here we see the proactive action of agents (the policy innovators) along with the interests of external actors that further activate processes of policy circulation. This iterative process of teaching and learning (McCann, 2013) connects with an expanding network of policy agents and often helps reshape understandings of policy experimentation,

innovation and trials into models of best practice. Such favoured labels of endorsement further promote processes of mobilisation and circulation (Montero, 2017b).

An important action of agents that underpins policy circulation concerns the career mobility and professional development of individuals. Policy ideas are articulated by people who travel, engage and build a body of experience and observations that continually inform understandings of policy and its uses. The earlier discussion on agents notes the mobility of experts, members of transnational organisations, firms and other agents. Yet it is more often the action of career development and advancement that sees individual agents actively engaging in policy circulation. The success of careers may be intimately linked with global recognition of policy innovation and models of best practice. Knowledge and expertise shape careers and individuals use careers to connect with new ideas, sites and contacts (Craggs and Neate, 2017). Ideas flow, move and develop with people and so the career trajectory of individuals and their connection with policy agents is important when tracing and observing policy circulation. The observation of careers takes the analysis of policy beyond organisation and national boundaries and we see policy circulation occur in a much more unstructured and serendipitous manner (Larner and Laurie, 2010). Often luck, unexpected opportunities, chance encounters and unpredicted events channel individuals into new careers and with them policy ideas circulate and morph into new organisational environments. The career of agents develops over time and with them a network of contacts and influence that see the action of career development intrinsically linked to policy circulation.

## OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

This collection showcases a range of accounts that consider the role of different agents in the circulation of policy, the various actions that shape policy circulation and the arenas within and through which circulations occur. We start with *arenas* since we feel this offers the most contemporary insight into policy circulation research and theory development. This is then followed by chapters on *agents* and *actions*. The development of this book was a highly collaborative process and so our Conclusion draws on the input of all contributing authors.

The idea of arenas is first explored by Spence, who brings an innovative approach to understanding how social media may constitute a new arena for exchange, critique and circulation of policy. The role Twitter plays in linking actors, sharing information and the time-limited

nature of such forums highlights how policy circulation continues to evolve. Baker and M<sup>c</sup>Guirk examine arenas of analysis, looking at how policy circulation is shaped by encounters between policy tourists and sites of social service delivery. This work considers sites (or arenas) of veneration where policy actors travel to engage and learn about new initiatives. Morais de Sá e Silva explores in detail transfer examples within a South–South context and here we see the arenas of circulation shaped by a diverse range of social, political and economic factors.

Part II considers *agents*, with chapters documenting the role of transnational philanthropic organisations (Jolkkonen), global intermediaries in public transport (Wood) and the diverse make-up of epistemic communities in health technology (Rusu and Löblová). These accounts note that while policy circulation is an increasingly global process, the range of agents involved varies, from those with explicitly global missions to more locally-embedded agents seeking to expand their influence.

Part III contains a range of accounts that highlight the influence of *actions* in policy circulation. Walker provides a comparative analysis of the action of agents in two transfer cases involving road transport compliance systems. Here the action is shaped by an interest in learning as well as experimentation. Dussauge-Laguna considers how actions around ‘policy-change strategies’ push actors to engage in policy circulation. The chapter by Montero provides an account of the role of ‘story telling’ in mobilising interest in the adoption of a new policy model and in a similar vein Soremi explores how transfer activity is shaped by narratives. In this section the case studies provide a growing account of policy circulation in lesser developed countries and the material helps expand accounts of transfer and circulation within a South–South context.

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