



CALL FOR PAPERS

INTERNATIONAL Workshop

POLICY DIFFUSION, INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFERS, TRAVELLING SPATIAL CONCEPTS AND THEIR LIMITS:

A multidisciplinary perspective on cross-cultural transfers

Organized by

**IN-EAST School of Advanced Studies,
University of Duisburg-Essen**

Organization Committee:

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**October 08–09, 2018
Duisburg, Germany**

Abstract deadline **August 10th 2018**
Notification by **August 31st 2018**

Key Words:

policy diffusion, institutional transfers, cross-cultural transfers, best practices, translation and implementation, spatial implications, transnational urbanism, isomorphism, limits of transfers, challenges, and opportunities of unsuccessful transfers.

The workshop “Policy diffusion, institutional transfers, travelling spatial concepts and their limits: a multidisciplinary perspective on cross-cultural transfers” intends to bring together scholars from different disciplines (political science, sociology, urban studies, spatial planning and urban design, economics and business administration, as well as area studies) to critically debate the notion of “limits” in the analysis of cross-cultural transfers/diffusion. To do so, this workshop focuses, on the one hand, on the working principles, mechanisms and processes (macro and micro) of diffusion and/or transfer of policies, institutions, and spatial planning concepts (e.g. “sustainable urban development” or “smart city” concepts). On the other hand, it looks at the aspects of local adoption and translation, focusing in particular on their limits from various perspectives (social, economic, spatial, cultural, etc.).

The transfer of policies, ideas, and institutions across national borders, cultural belief systems, and technological sectors is happening every day – with transfers criss-crossing the globe from North to South, South to North, South to South, and North to North. But what drives this frenzy of activity and how can successful transfers be differentiated from unsuccessful initiatives?

Obviously, successful (however “success” may be defined) transfers of policies, institutions, and ideas across space require the existence of specific benign framework conditions. Political science stresses a series of crucial actors in the processes of policy transfer and diffusion (Porto do Oliveira 2017; Stone 2012; Jacoby 2000; Lehmbruch 2000) among many other factors; sociology and area studies highlight cultural parameters and fits between belief systems (Sun 2016, Strang and Meyer 1993); literary and cultural studies focus on how successful transfers rely on “scripts”, persuasively narrativized and mediated blueprints (Buchenau and Gurr 2018, 2016); economic and business administration approaches focus on issues such as transaction cost differentials, utility gains (and the point of time of their realisation), entrepreneurship (Herrmann-Pillath and Zweynert 2014, Taube 2014), while built environment scholars speak of transnational urbanism (Smith 2001), planning approaches that transgress regional or national boundaries (cf. Dühr et al. 2010), planning cultures (Sanyal 2016), or the effects of globalisation and different planning approaches (Hein 2014, 2016; Friedmann 2002, 2011; Sassen 1991). Research integrating these different approaches is lacking and in high demand.

Talking about limits of transfers, in their seminal article, David Dolowitz and David Marsh (2002) identify three possible unsuccessful outcomes of transfers, namely “uninformed transfer”, “incomplete transfer”, and “inappropriate transfer”. Uninformed transfer refers to a situation in which the borrowing country “may have insufficient information about the policy/institution and how it operates in the country from which it is transferred” (ibid.: 17). Incomplete transfer occurs when elements fundamental for the functioning of the policy or

institutional structure are not transferred, leading to failure. As for inappropriate transfer, it occurs when the borrowing country has paid insufficient attention to the differences existing in its economic, social, political and ideological aspects compared to the country of origin of the policy/institutional structure (ibid.). For the two authors, these outcomes can be considered as “policy failure”, and they suggest researchers should look into the factors causing these outcomes. However, if our research is informed by different perspectives and different approaches, can we still assume that a lack of the success factors listed above inevitably leads to “failure”?

This workshop is guided by this question and is informed by the framework described above and by more recent literature on public policy transfers (cf. Hadjiisky et al. 2017). It does so by setting for itself a two-fold goal: to identify the factors that lead to unsuccessful policy diffusion and transfers of institutions and planning approaches; and to pose questions that aim at challenging the very notions of “successful” and “unsuccessful” transfers, thus allowing for a reflection that goes beyond these categories and looks for opportunities in the limitations. To this aim, the meeting should remain sensitive to discipline-specific features of transfers while making a critical appraisal of the notion of “limits” to diffusion and transfers, answering the following questions:

- Do the limits to transfers represent a problem or are they just normal components of transfer/diffusion processes?
- Could these limits even represent opportunities rather than normal components and problems of the transfer/diffusion process?
- Are these limits and boundaries of transfers perhaps even desired and promoted?
- Must transfers that result in different functionalities of the transferred institutions/ideas be classified as “failures” or do they constitute local adaptations? (Teubner 1998)

The analysis of “limits” is developed through the following research steps:

- a) identifying types and sources of “limits” in the different phases of transfers (from idea exchange to adaptation and implementation);
- b) critically reappraising the notion of limits and “unsuccessful transfer”; identifying opportunities;

a) Identifying types and sources of “limits” in the different phases of transfers (from idea exchange to adaptation and implementation);

This first research step aims at identifying the origins and types of limits that exist in policy diffusion/institutional transfer processes – focusing on the phase of local adoption and adaptation. This exercise can be considered as a “classic” research direction followed by diffusion and transfer studies, research in the past decades having largely contributed to develop knowledge on the processes of local adaptation and translation, and their limits (cf. Inkpen and Wang 2016; de Jong 2013; Delpeuch and Vassileva 2010; de Jong et al. 2002; Jacoby 2000). Classical questions accompanying this research aim at comparing the outcomes of diffusion and transfers with the original policy or institutional structure or spatial concept (did it merge into the new context? Does it remain a “foreign particle”?).

This exercise is fundamental to spot the limits to transfers and diffusion and it is important to do so with acknowledgment of specificities of the thematic areas in which transfer occurs. Equally fundamental is to question whether we have the appropriate assessment tools to make this type of measurement, whether we can make effective measurement, and propose to revisit methodological approaches or propose new ones to bridge identified gaps. By combining research on diffusion and transfers of ideas, approaches, and policies in different fields (economy, political science, sociology and urban planning, cultural studies, area studies), in this step of the workshop we aim at “mapping” and categorising types and origins of limits, and providing tools to spot these same or differently shaped limits. This could inform future research in the fields of policy diffusion, institutional transfers, and planning approaches, thus increasing researchers’ awareness of challenges in methodological and theoretical frameworks, knowledge gaps, and biases in cross-cultural transfer studies.

The following aspects are examples of topics necessary to be examined further in this step of the workshop:

- Identify where and what the main limits to policy diffusion, institutional transfers, and planning approaches are through a multidisciplinary and multi-focus perspective; examine the origins and reasons of these limits.
- Highlight unsuccessful and partial or incomplete transfers. What are the factors explaining these outcomes?
- Highlight the benefit(s) of employing an interdisciplinary approach in observing and identifying these problematic nodes/limits.
- Identify the role and dynamics of involved stakeholders (e.g. how the limits of transfers have been shaped by the interaction of international and local actors).
- Identify whether the limits of transfers are desired and even ‘promoted’ by local actors.
- Identify the challenging aspects/factors of cross-culturally transgressing planning approaches and their social dimension.
- Identify the role of culture and what type of culture (national, supranational, world culture? Administrative and political culture? Local vernacular culture?).
- Identify and discuss the limits, challenges, new scopes of tools of assessment and methods of analysis of policy diffusion, institutional transfers, and planning approaches.
- Question whether there are there different/local definitions of successful transfers that concur with our own frames for defining success. If yes, what are their characteristics, indicators of success and their mechanisms?

b) Critically reappraising the notion of limits and “unsuccessful transfer”; identification of opportunities;

This second research step investigates whether or not it is justified exclusively to view the above-discussed limitations as negative for the process of transfer. In this segment, the following questions are asked: do limited transfers really represent a problem, or do they rather represent a universal “norm”?; can we also consider limits as opportunities?; does the notion of and focus upon “unsuccessful transfer” prevent us from looking at other

important effects of diffusion/transfers?; does thinking in terms of institutional transfers and transfers of planning approaches bring certain limits to our understanding of phenomena or narrow down our perception of phenomena, overlooking other aspects?; can the studies on “limits” contribute to opening up a new research arena on policy diffusion/institutional transfers?

The following aspects are examples of topics necessary to be examined further in this step of the workshop:

- Identify whether the limits of transfers contribute to reshaping the nexus and interaction pattern between senders and recipients.
- Explore whether the limits of institutional transfers provide a new conceptual and theoretical angle of studies on transfers and might contribute to generating new theory and/or methodological frameworks.
- Explore whether looking at the limits of institutional transfers prevent us from becoming aware of many other policy effects.
- Add a perspective based on the instruments of public policy (cf. Lascombes and Le Gales 2004) to seize the non-neutrality of the approaches transferred.
- Add an international relation / geopolitical perspective in diffusion and transfer studies: do power politics play a role in determining the outcomes of local adaptations? If yes, how? Are certain models more “successful” simply because they originate with certain (powerful) “senders”? What are the types of political considerations made vis-à-vis certain models and approaches?
- Explore the theory and provide cases of limitations – both on the sender and receiver sides – that have worked as opportunities in the process of transfer of planning approaches and spatial concepts. How did limitations of transferred concepts and of the senders work as an opportunity and chance for the receiving environment?
- Explore the different interpretations of transfer limitations in different local settings, as well as their resulting adaptation and contextualization opportunities.

We would like to foster discussions from different theoretical backgrounds and scholarly approaches and welcome contributions with multi-scalar approaches and encourage contributions with similar questions extending the lists above.

Publication:

Please note that it is planned to gather a selection of the best papers from this workshop into a peer-reviewed publication. We are aiming at publishing this edited volume with an esteemed publishing house within the next two years.

Requirements:

Abstracts should be submitted to Dr Giulia Romano and Dr Katharina M. Borgmann, IN-EAST School of Advanced Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany. (giulia.romano@uni-due.de, katharina.borgmann@uni-due.de) no later **than August 10th 2018**.

Abstracts should consist of:

- Title
- Abstract (500 words maximum)
- Contributor's name(s)
- Academic discipline
- Affiliation

Please note that the University of Duisburg-Essen is not in a position to help fund contributors' trips to the seminar should they be selected. Decisions on panels / papers accepted to the workshop will be sent out by **31 August 2018**.

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