

Geographies of Policy Mobilities

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Abstract

This article reviews geographic literature on policy mobilities. It outlines the emergence of the policy mobilities, mutations, and assemblage approach, and the geographic, sociological, and political science literatures from which it draws its origins. Focusing attention on the interplay between the structuring fields of policy transfer and the policy actors who are ultimately responsible for the construction, conceptualization, adoption, education around, and implementation of policies, this article charts work that has focused on the mechanisms through which policies are mobilized, altered, and touch down in various places, and how these processes shape cities. It concludes with commentary on possible future directions, both empirical and conceptual, that the policy mobilities approach might take and notes the various methodological contributions that are emerging from it.

Introduction

Strangely familiar. We've all had the feeling, whether we're sitting in a café looking out on a 'regenerated' streetscape of new-old cobble stones and luxury boutiques patrolled by private security guards, or listening to a mayoral candidate outline her vision for the future of the local economy, or reading a blog extolling the virtues of a new planning model. 'Haven't I seen a place like this before? Haven't I heard about a model like that somewhere else?' Certain governance strategies or policies, 'best practices,' and 'received wisdoms' seem to be everywhere and they resonate with us in their familiarity, even if we have not consciously studied them. They have 'gone viral,' they move around from place to place, and they hang in the air during discussions about how to govern places. Policy models such as creative city plans, Business Improvement Districts, and sustainability frameworks have gained political currency across the globe. Municipal decision-makers strategize about the best ways to attract the creative class or become the 'greenest' city, thus empowering particular policy models, regimes, and constituencies through appeals to perceived success.

Yet, these policy models do not exist everywhere in the same form. While they are familiar, they are *strangely* familiar: they are *estranged* from – partly foreign to – the context in which we encounter them, even as they are being actively embedded and made familiar, normal, or desirable by local politicians and policy actors. Furthermore, while traces of these popular strategies and models appear in many places at once and while they are always presented by their proponents as the best solutions to pressing problems, we should not assume that the policies themselves, or their proliferation, are somehow 'natural,' or teleological. They are not naturally or unproblematically good or 'best' and what is important about them is not so much that they move around in some abstract sense, but that *people move them around* for particular purposes.

New planning and design strategies, economic development models, etc. are social products, built up from the ground over time and bearing the imprint of the interests involved in producing them (McCann, 2008, 2011a, 2011b; McCann & Ward, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2010a; Ward, 2006).

How, then, might we characterize, conceptualize, and research these movements and strange familiarities? What are the geographies that constitute and reflect the global circulation of policies? Contemporary writing in urban, political, and economic geography, has employed the notion of ‘policy assemblages, mobilities and mutations’ as a frame through which to analyze these geographies. This approach is characterized by a concern for the actors, practices, and representations that affect the (re)production, adoption and travel of policies and best practice models across space and time. Attention to what happens to policies while they are ‘in motion’ is another important focus, since the paths traveled and the things that happen to policies along the way are just as important as the policies themselves and the places they affect (McCann, 2011a). As Ward (2006, 70) puts it:

The ‘making-up’ of policy is ... a profoundly geographical process, in and through which different places are constructed... It is not only policy that is ‘made-up’ through the involvement of a network of actors: the identities, rationalities and subjectivities of those that are doing the making are subject to change through the process of ‘inter-local policy transfer.’

Early statements like Ward’s (see also Peck & Theodore, 2001; Theodore & Peck, 2000; McCann, 2004, 2008; Ward 2007) have spurred what Peck (2011) has recently characterized as a ‘rolling conversation’ on the characteristics of policy mobilities and mutations.

It is a conversation that is attracting an increasing number of voices while it also expands its ambit to make connections with other discussions in geography and cognate disciplines (e.g., McCann & Ward, In Press). Through this process, a research agenda has begun to emerge that offers a rich conceptualization of ongoing practices, institutions, and ideas that link global circuits of policy knowledge and local policy practice, politics, and actors (McCann, 2011a; McCann & Ward, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2010c). This conceptual work informs, but also benefits from, detailed empirical research into how the local and sometimes immobile or fixed aspects of place interact with policies mobilized from elsewhere. Indeed, it can be argued, building upon Harvey (1982) and Massey (1991), that the tension between policy as fixed, territorial, or place-specific, on the one hand, and dynamic, global, and relational on the other is not a problem for conceptualizing policy mobilities. Rather, it is precisely this tension and its productive effects on policies and places that should be our research focus (McCann & Ward, 2011; Massey, 2011).

We begin this paper by briefly outlining the literatures from which urban policy mobilities emerges in order to provide an understanding of why questions of relationality/territoriality are key to current analyses of the geographies of policy mobilities. The second part of the paper reviews work that has been done on policy mobilities thus far with a focus on the interplay of structures and regimes that mobilize policy, the (mostly) urban nature of policy mobilization, and the importance of practice and of the local in researching globalized policy models. We conclude with a discussion of where policy mobilities research might go, paying attention to the diverse methodologies that can aid in the study of global-local policy-making.

An assemblages, mobilities, and mutations approach

The policy mobilities conversation draws together and builds upon three literatures: the longstanding study of policy transfer in political science, the recent mobilities approach in sociology, and the geographical conceptualization of scale. The policy transfer literature highlights some of the key actors involved in moving policies around and generates insights into the institutions and practices involved in this process (for a recent review, see Benson & Jordan, 2011). While drawing on these elements of the political science approach, geographers have critiqued the literature for focusing on a narrow set of institutional transfer agents operating mainly between national-state institutions, for conceptualizing them as rational actors, and for tending toward a literal notion of transfer in which policies are assumed to move fully-formed from point a to b. Geographers thus see the policy transfer literature as limited in its conceptualization of space, scale, social process, and – troublingly and ironically – the political (see McCann & Ward (In Press) for a summary of the critique and Marsh & Evans (2012) for a response).

Since the mid-2000s, geographers have found different ways to conceptualize how and why policies move around. They refer, in part, to the sociological literature on mobilities and, thus, shift the terms of debate from policy transfer to ‘policy mobilities’ – a term deliberately, although not uniformly, pluralized to connote the multiplicity of processes and outcomes involved (McCann, 2008). The mobilities approach has a number of empirical foci including automobile and air travel, tourism and migration, and the infrastructures, like airports and road networks that support them (Adey, 2006; Hannam et al, 2006; McNeil, 2011; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Conceptually, mobilities scholars reject both understandings of places as natural steady-state containers of socio-spatial processes and also the glamorization of free-flowing movement

as the new ‘unsteady-state’ of globalization. Thus, they question received spatial binaries like global/local or near/far and emphasize the importance of connections: “all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each... and mean that nowhere can be an ‘island’” (Sheller & Urry 2006, 209). Furthermore, they take issue with the ‘black-boxing’ of the powerful socio-spatial relations that constitute the connection between the beginning and end points in any displacement process. While these points are important, powerful, and meaningful, so is what happens *in transit* among them (Cresswell 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Mobilities are, nonetheless, tied to and facilitated by various ‘moorings,’ organizing nodes, or fixed infrastructures. They “entail distinct social spaces that orchestrate new forms of social life around such nodes, for example, stations, hotels, motorways, resorts, airports, leisure complexes, cosmopolitan cities, beaches, galleries and roadside parks” (Sheller & Urry 2006, 213). The study of policy through a mobilities frame not only enhances our understanding of policy-making but also promises to enhance understandings of mobilities. First, the policy mobilities approach adds more ephemeral spaces of knowledge production and circulation, including the Internet and social media, conferences, mega-events, and sites of protest to the spaces that most mobilities scholarship has addressed. These are sites of encounter, persuasion, and motivation. They are places where mobilized policy knowledge must touch down in one sense or another to gain fuel and traction – literally in the case of an airport, for example, or figuratively, in the case of conferences where encounter around ideas directs and invigorates policy circulation (Adey 2006; England & Ward 2007; Ward & Cook 2012; McCann 2011c). Second, a focus on policy emphasizes and elaborates the role states at various scales play in shaping geographies of knowledge circulation. Tracing the travels of policies allows us to disrupt common conceptualizations of states as territorially, politically, and socially bounded

entities. Such a tracing allows us, instead, to understand the interconnections among ‘unbounded’ states and state actors as crucial circulatory infrastructures while simultaneously emphasizing the continued importance of territorial fixity and embeddedness – of both state actors and other policy actors – in powerful geographies of knowledge production.

These “globalizing microspaces” (Larner & Le Heron, 2002b, 765) through which policy models move and in which they mutate, can be thought of as assemblages; gatherings of “‘parts’ of elsewhere” into one assemblage by “representatives of professional authority, expertise, skills and interests ... to move forward varied agendas and programmes” (Allen & Cochrane, 2007, 1171; see also Anderson & McFarlane, 2011). By extension, the models themselves can be understood as assemblages, bundles of knowledge and techniques purposefully gathered together for particular purposes. This assembling process is also, then, about the production of scale, as elements of near and far are combined into a global-local policy formation. Thus, the policy mobilities literature both draws upon and also extends geographers’ ongoing conceptualization of scale as socially produced, relational and territorial, interconnected, and malleable (for a review, see Marston, 2000). From this perspective, the national scale and national states are no longer primary agents in the production of policies and places, as the policy transfer literature suggests, even as it also acknowledges that it would be wrong to discount national influence on urban policy. Under neoliberalism, individual places, particularly cities, are privileged sites of capital accumulation, political, and social change (Harvey 1982, Brenner & Theodore 2002, Peck & Tickell 2002,) and, as a result, urban, economic, and political geographers have maintained a call for both territorial and relational analyses that are sensitive to the inter-scalar conditioning of governance and policy (Brenner & Theodore 2002, McCann 2008, Peck & Tickell 2002, Ward 2006, 2007). Cities then, are more than just places that neoliberalism happens to. Their

histories, existing form, and sociopolitical structures all contribute to the (re)production of both ‘actually existing’ neoliberalisms and also cities themselves.

These three sources of thinking about policy mobilities and mutations – the literatures on policy transfer, mobilities, and scale – raise questions and encourage further explorations (see McCann and Ward, In Press for a fuller discussion). These questions and gaps in our understandings have shaped a set of core commitments that we suggest underlie the ongoing conversation. These are commitments to: detailed empirical analyses of the contexts and practices of policy mobilization; analyses of inter-local mobilizations while seeing wider contexts; analyses of mutation, hybridity, and emergence; and rich accounts of the politics of policy mobilities (Peck & Theodore, 2010; McCann & Ward, 2011, In Press). Singly and in combination, these foci help advance longstanding discussions about how policies circulate and how they produce and transcend scales. In the remainder of our discussion, we illustrate these commitments by discussing how a number of geographers address them in their research. Most of this work is urban in its focus, but what is important, from a relational perspective, is that urban policy is never ‘just’ urban.

Policy mobilities in, among, and beyond cities

Geographers, following Massey (1991), understand urban places as unbounded, as nodes within networks of relations, or as “the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing ... open and ... internally multiple” (Massey 2005: 141; 2011). They are assemblages of policy models and expertise drawn out of circulation and gathered in local contexts. Yet, these policy assemblages (Prince 2010) tend to be constrained and

conditioned by various forces, legacies, and pre-existing conditions. The range of opportunities for a city with a particular heavy industrial heritage and a declining population and tax base, for example, are likely to be quite different from a city with a booming economy and a growing population.

Critical research on policy-making seeks to grapple with the tension-filled relationships between territorial fixity and place specificity and global flows, relations, and interconnections. Similarly, researchers balance studies of the wider conditioning contexts and ideologies that delimit and define ‘best’ practice models with serious consideration of the role of individuals and small groups of policy actors in mobilizing and operationalizing policies.

Conditioning contexts and ‘middling’ technocrats

As we noted above, policy mobilities researchers reject the notion of policies as unitary objects, found in particular places and then moved in complete form across space. Rather, geographers argue that it is crucial to consider the conditioning contexts that shape these mobilities. As Peck (2011, 791) argues, the mobilization of policy “is saturated by power relations ... [shaping] what is seen, and what counts, in terms of policy innovations, preferred models, and best practices.”

Peck and Theodore’s (2010b) analysis of the travels of ‘conditional cash transfer’ (CCT) anti-poverty programs pays attention to these “institutional and ideological conditions that variously enable, envelope, and energize [the] purposeful mobilization” of policies (Peck 2011, 793). CCT policies have been in place across the Global South for over a decade, are promoted by the World Bank, and were adopted by New York City after policy actors from that city studied Mexico’s version. In their “genealogy” of the New York CCT program, Peck and

Theodore (2010b, 195) trace how Mexico's federal *Oportunidades* program was distilled, translated, and mobilized by Mexican technocrats, then adopted in localities elsewhere. In part, this involved translation into two colonizing languages: English and also a 'scientific' language, the jargon of CCT and of policy makers, complete with pre-packaged protocols for evaluating success or failure in new contexts. Peck and Theodore note that CCTs "have been actively co-produced with the new [global institutional] 'consensus' on poverty alleviation and as such can be seen as mobile and somewhat self-fulfilling affirmations of that evolving consensus." CCTs then, become 'best' practice models not so much as a result of their inherent qualities, but because they are produced by and reflect the ideological context in which they have emerged (Peck 2011b, 176).

Larner and Laurie (2010) go further in their study of individual policy actors. "Travelling technocrats," they argue, are not only high-level agents of elite institutions like the World Bank. "[M]iddling' technocrats" play a crucial role in the spread and, crucially, the implementation of new policy ideas since, "[t]hey are ... on the ground as employees, contractors or consultants, rather than occupying high status roles in international think tanks, government offices or executive boards of transnational corporations" (Larner & Laurie, 2010, 219). They engage in ethnographies of how mid-level 'technocrats' in the telecommunication and water industries embody neoliberalization processes, bringing new models of privatization to new locations as they construct and travel along particular career paths. Similarly Kuus (2011, 1144) argues that the study of bureaucratic actors allows "a closer examination of the interconnections between geopolitical practices and the agents of these practices." From both perspectives, the number of actors involved in mobilizing policies is much greater than might be first expected: 'policy actors' are not only those elites who write the policies, nor are they only "the hegemonic

institutions and actors, and NGOs and transnational social movements, who feature in most existing accounts” (Larner & Laurie, 2010, 224-225). Rather, they are also those ‘middling’ actors who engage in the seemingly banal technocratic work of teaching and spreading new models. Thus, the ‘making up’ of policy that Ward (2006) discusses is an everyday activity linking localities through the work of a range of actors.

Policy mobilities researchers are interested in how policymaking gets done and how policies travel in a detailed sense. As the work of Peck and Theodore and Larner and Laurie, suggests, this specific interest in the global-local ‘making up’ of policy can be served by different analytical approaches, from the structural to the post-structural. Most work in this area tends to draw from the former but takes seriously the critiques and approaches of the latter. As we suggest below, these conceptual threads can be seen in the study of specifically inter-urban policy mobilities and in the local politics that often reflects and shapes global flows of policy models.

Inter-urban policy mobilities and policy tourism

Many policy models that gain popularity are associated, to varying degrees of accuracy, with particular cities (Bogota for transportation, Porto Alegre for participatory budgeting, Copenhagen for bicycle lanes, etc.) and, certainly, most travelling policy models journey through cities in one way or another. It is perhaps not surprising then that most of the work on policy mobilities has an urban orientation. Ward’s (2006) study of Business Improvement Districts is an early example (see also his later papers: Ward, 2007, 2010b, 2011, and Cook 2008, 2009). BIDs are areas of cities where businesses have agreed to be taxed at a higher rate and to use the

revenue to fund place-specific governance strategies like private security, extra street cleaning, or advertizing. They are a particular mobile policy model that is representative of both the activities and priorities of contemporary urban business leaders and politicians and also of the wider institutional and ideological context of global neoliberalism. Ward traces the BID model's development in one city, its circulation through particular government institutions, professional bodies, specific places, and its adoption, in mutant form, elsewhere. It is an example of how apparently mundane practices – e.g. local government bureaucrats attending conferences or going on fact-finding trips – lead to the production of a transnationally-celebrated (and critiqued) model that is commonly exemplified not by its place of origin in Toronto, but through its adoption and recirculation by policy actors in a more dominant global city, New York.

New York has thus become the destination for delegation on study trips. Indeed, these trips are an important element of policy mobilization. They are a form of 'policy tourism,' in which local policy actors travel to elsewhere to see, first-hand, the implementation and consequences of particular policies and to learn directly from those involved in their development and implementation (Cook & Ward 2011). According to Gonzalez (2010), who has studied how the Bilbao and Barcelona models of urban generation have been disseminated widely over the last fifteen years, policy tourism is a key part of the process by which places become strangely familiar. Policy tourism is a relational, power-laden practice: the tours on which visiting delegations are taken and the places they visit are carefully regulated by their organizers, thus the knowledge generated through this practice is relationally produced and packaged. Yet, policy tourism remains a popular activity among local policy actors (even in the face of accusations of 'junketing' at public expense). They regard seeing a policy operating in its 'natural environment' as an effective learning experience, as have generations of policy actors

before them (Clarke 2011a, 2011b). Furthermore, Gonzalez (2010) argues that the travel of policies through policy tourism is an agent in their mutation: policies do not arrive at their destination in the same form as they appeared elsewhere. Yet, they are not entirely different, they still bear a strange familiarity that exhibits and encourages some degree of ‘policy convergence’ across the world.

An example of this relational production of policy through study tours can be seen in Portland, Oregon, a city known in North America for its sustainability and transportation planning. One of the city’s universities has created First Stop Portland, an office that organizes study tours to the city, focused on innovation around sustainability. For a fee, First Stop helps organize tours, workshops, and urban experiences, and promises to provide visitors with “unparalleled access” to the city’s “business, academic, and political leaders who know Portland's story best” (First Stop Portland, 2012). Through this agency, policy tourists receive a relatively consistent story about Portland’s attempts to promote compact urban growth, vibrant neighborhoods, and sustainability. Their attention is directed and channeled in ways their hosts believe will be most beneficial, while individual members of city government benefit from not being overwhelmed by requests for meetings and tours.

Policy mobilizations, therefore, often seem to happen among cities working under or around, rather than with or through, the structures of other jurisdictions, like provinces and national states. However we should be careful not to suggest that national states are entirely unimportant. They provide important infrastructures through which inter-urban connections are made and maintained (Ward, 2011). It is also important to note that while technocrats, such as urban planners, will often find ways to engage in policy tourism of their own volition, their mental maps of where to visit and what to learn are conditioned by wider institutions and

infrastructures such as those that provide information on best practices.

Local politics is global

The definition of a policy as a ‘best’ practice or the definition of a city as a worthy ‘model’ for others is not a straightforward matter, however. The critical question is, best for whom? Every policy serves particular interests more so than others. For some, a policy encouraging dense condo living around a downtown core is a beneficial form of ‘revitalization.’ Yet, for others, the same model of new urbanism threatens to gentrify existing neighborhoods and displace vulnerable populations. The question of whether such a model is good for a city then becomes not a technical question of zoning bylaws, green building technologies, and rapid transit but one of inequality, rights, and community.

The study of policy mobilities must then be the study of politics and power. In general terms, we might ask if, when a locally-developed policy becomes a global ‘model’ by receiving accolades and being copied by others, this positive attention is likely to confer weight and legitimacy on its advocates and thus increase their influence in the local politics of policy-making? When a ‘best practice’ policy model is brought into a city from elsewhere, is it somewhat armored against local criticism and questioning by its global renown, even as it has to be modified to the local context? Furthermore, when local policy-making is ‘globalized’ in these ways, does local politics also take on a partially global character as those involved in debating the pros and cons of a new policy direction in a specific city seek to characterize and evaluate how, in whose interests, and with what outcomes it operated in cities elsewhere?

In this regard, policy experts and consultants whose travels spread ‘best practice’ models

are not only members of a growing ‘consultocracy’ (Saint-Martin 2000) who act as mediators of policy knowledge, but they are also political actors. Temenos and McCann (2012), for example, chart how a sustainability framework originally associated closely with a particular consultant and originally developed for the corporate sector was introduced into a municipal planning process because its precepts dovetailed with local political elites’ desire to both educate the local population in growth management planning and recycling practices and also to develop and market a brand for their municipality as a model of sustainable development.

An analysis of the local politics of policy-making also highlights how activists hoping to radically change cities can also be transfer agents, using similar circuits and strategies as business and political elites to spread their own particular ‘best practices;’ a process Purcell (2008) dubs ‘fast resistance transfer.’ For example, the development of Vancouver, Canada’s drug policy at the turn of the current century involved significant changes in local discourses around injection drug use, public health, and the (de)merits of criminalizing users of illicit drugs. In a few years, a standard criminalization approach was replaced by a strategy in which drug use was defined as primarily a public health issue and a new facility was established to allow users to inject under supervision and in relative safety. This new ‘harm reduction’ strategy was modeled on several European cities via Internet and document searches, fact-finding trips, conferences, guest experts, lectures, workshops, etc. (McCann, 2008). During this time, local politics became framed by points of reference elsewhere. Critics of the harm reduction approach opposed its implementation in Vancouver by articulating different stories of its impacts in European cities while also offering up other places as alternative models (McCann, 2011b). The local politics of policy-making is, then, also a global(ized) politics.

Conclusion

The recent emergence of the policy assemblages, mobilities, and mutations approach makes this an opportune time to consider the opportunities for future research into policy mobilizations (McCann, 2011a). It is also a crucial time to critically consider and deepen the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the approach, to expand its geographical scope (Robinson, 2005, 2011; Roy & Ong, 2011), and to engage with concerns about methodological linearity and presentism (Cresswell, 2011; Jacobs 2011). In the remaining paragraphs, we point to methods being used to investigate studies of policy mobilities and ways that we can bring these conversations forward.

While there is a general consensus that this work considers how policy movement shapes and is shaped through global-relational/territorial tensions, how it is always situated and uneven, and how it is tied to immobilities, questions remain to be answered regarding exactly how policies move or don't, what happens in the process, and what are the implications for cities, power relations, and the lived realities that they encompass. More detailed empirical research is needed to answer these questions. Policy mobilities work has, to this point, has largely employed qualitative research methodologies. A special issue of *Environment & Planning A* (Cochrane and Ward, 2012) details these methods and points to future directions. As McCann and Ward (2012) suggest, the current methodological approach in policy mobilities research employs a number of 'standard' qualitative, case study methods – interviews, discourse and document analysis, participant or direct observation – but directs researchers toward literally and figuratively following policies and policy actors through particular sites and situations of knowledge production and political struggle/legitimation. This type of multi-sited or networked qualitative analysis – one that takes seriously the conceptual point that any policy, place, or case

is unbounded – is expensive, both in time and money, as researchers cannot easily account for policy-change by working in one place alone. The impulse to ‘go global’ in one’s research project must then be tempered by resource considerations. Paradoxically, studies of characteristically ‘fast’ policy transfer, need time to fully explore the histories, presents, and outcomes of policy implementation, overcoming concerns of ‘presentism’ – a narrow focus on current successful policies, without regard for what has come before, for what was perhaps unsuccessful, or for alternative policy narratives – in policy mobilities research.

Creating space for detailed empirical studies of circulating policies will always be tempered by resource limitations, yet employing dynamic research methods such as those detailed in the special issue mentioned above contribute to detailed empirical studies that must also be informed through conversation and comparison with others and in reference to overarching conceptual discussions of conditioning ideological fields, extended/distended cases (Peck and Theodore, 2012), and relational comparisons (Robinson, 2011b; Ward, 2010), among others. Rich empirical studies of policy mobilization accompanied by strong theoretical engagements may thus overcome concerns about ‘methodological linearity’ – that traditional methods will lead to preconceived outcomes and thus *only* follow the policy, without engaging broader conditioning fields of policy mobilities.

The remainder of this section highlights elements of the policy mobilities approach that could be advanced further, both conceptually and methodologically. The study of circulating policies might go some way to addressing Robinson’s (2006) critique of the narrow geographical field of reference upon which most urban theory is based, for example. Robinson (2011) and Massey (2011) argue for a more serious consideration of the policy innovations and productive connections, power geometries, and flows developed in global south cities and connecting these

places to cities of the global north (see also Clarke 2011; Peck & Theodore 2010b; Roy & Ong, 2011). Studying the interplay between cities that experience neoliberalization and globalization in vastly differing ways has the potential to flesh out our understanding of ‘actually existing’ geographies of policy and gain a more thorough knowledge of the overlapping and intersecting networks through which cities, people, finance, knowledge and so on are produced, mobile, mutating, and touching down.

This also resonates with Robinson’s (2005, 2011b; see also Hart 2002; Ward 2010) call to reengage comparative urbanism through an examination of political processes across cities rather than ‘siloeing’ their effects within municipal boundaries. “A spatial understanding of the processes at work in cities can draw us towards alternative maps of causality, differently constituted cases for comparison and new ways of bringing cities together within the field of vision that is comparative research” (Robinson, 2011a, 13). Tracing policy mobilizations among cities as opposed to in between them thus enables a richer understanding of the processes embedded in contemporary urban realities. To that end, policy mobilities literature would benefit from engagement with geographic studies of networks (e.g., Jessop et al 2008; Nicholls 2009) since exploring the pathways through which policy mobility occurs can help to elucidate the various interconnections among people, policy and places that make policy-making a social and political practice.

What happens ‘on the ground’ is also an important area for further research. Attention needs to be paid to spaces of immobility if we are to be careful not to glamorize movement (Adey 2006, Sheller & Urry 2006, McCann 2011a). Immobility in the service of mobility (McCann 2011c) engages territorialized, immobile spaces that affect policy transfer (or more broadly, the transfer of capital, finance, knowledge, or people). These spaces – conference

rooms, airplanes, computer networks, etc. – each have their own micro-geographies that are also situated and relationally understood. There has been some work done on these sites (Ward 2007, Cook & Ward 2012), yet further interventions into this area would prove useful at illuminating both the territorial significance of immobilities, and the ways that policy is shaped and (im)mobilized. To that end, further empirical work on the ‘local politics of policy mobility’ (Temenos & McCann 2012) more generally would also add to the mobility/moorings debate. Here, a ‘global ethnography’ approach (Burawoy et al, 2000; and see McCann 2011c, 121) can prove useful in engaging the particular ways in which the local is articulated with wider fields and forces of policy mobilization.

A greater breadth to studies of urban policy mobilities can also be achieved by an attention to policies or models that were perhaps mobilized at one time or another and did not succeed, or to why certain policies were successful while others explicitly failed or were never mobilized to begin with. As Jacobs (2011, 8) notes: “Sites of failure, absence and mutation are significant empirical instances of differentiation.” Interrogating the notion of ‘failed’ policies, as Clarke (2011a, 16) notes, also draws attention to the ways that mobile policies might in fact be traveling or touching down too fast: “such that policies come and go as they fail to turn cities around within short political timeframes.” So, if fast policy is too fast, where then is the ‘pay off’ of policy transfer? What is accomplished and who benefits from such outcomes? A close tracing of local instances of policy mobility has the potential to uncover the subtle (or explicit) tensions that exist within every situated instance of policy transfer. This, in turn addresses the claim that studies of urban policy mobilities are as ‘fast’ in their analysis as policies are to move (Clarke 2011a), resulting in the danger of an apolitical urban policy mobilities.

Another literature that could contribute to studies of urban policy mobilities is the

literature on the post-political. Clarke (2011a) argues that policy mobilities and anti- and post-political literatures are mutually constitutive – that the success of contemporary urban policy transfer is dependent on a ‘disorganized’ interlinkage of cities, institutions, actors, and capital that work together to produce technical policy outcomes. This outcome is dependent on an anti-political stance that negates the production of conflict (politics) within and between cities. He also notes, however, that there is evidence that urban policy mobilities are used to produce alternatives to dominant forms of policy and politics (e.g., McCann, 2008). Temenos (2012) takes this further by arguing that policy mobilities’ engagement with post-democratic literatures helps to extrapolate the focus of policy mobilities work beyond mere extensions of neoliberalization to highlight the politics involved in alternative ways of knowing places.

Similar conceptual fertility can be found through an engagement with science and technology studies (STS). Encompassing but also extending beyond actor network theory (ANT), useful engagements with this literature can be taken up when both engage the technocratization of policy-making and policy transfer (see also Clarke 2011a; Cresswell 2010). Pairing policy mobilities and STS literatures provides the potential for a deep investigation into the politics of policy mobilities and legitimation strategies used therein. Policy mobilities and STS’ parallel concerns encourage conceptual nuance around the ‘mundane’ practices of policy making under the rubric of scientific knowledge; a particular, previously legitimated method of argumentation.

So, the next time you are struck by that feeling of *déjà vu* on a city street or while reading a new planning strategy, it’s not your mind playing tricks. The strange familiarities of policies and the places they produce are not the result of happenstance. They are the work of numerous policy mobilizers, agents, institutions, and infrastructures who act to condition ideological fields

of accepted knowledge and practice, to define certain policies as best practice models, to create connections among places, and to circulate models through those connections. The policy mobilities approach, in this sense, strives to acknowledge the inherent politics of focusing on global-relational/territorial interlinkages and attempts to continue, enrich, and enliven the continuously 'rolling' conversations taking place. These connections and mobilizations are not extraordinary, however. They are not infrequent or unusual events. Rather, the work of global-relational policy-making is ordinary. It is deeply embedded in the everyday practice of both elite and 'middling' policy actors as well as political activists. The only extraordinary thing is that geographers have paid little attention to it.

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