

METAPHORS OF POLICY MOBILITY: FLUID SPACES OF “CREATIVITY” POLICY

by

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ABSTRACT. This article considers the metaphors we use when studying what geographers have come to call policy mobility. Specifically, it argues that a metaphor developed by Mol and Law (1994) of ‘fluid space’ offers something different to metaphors that are currently being used in the area, including diffusion, transfer and network. In particular, the metaphor of fluid space describes a distributed and highly differentiated space of policy mobility and circulation that remains connected and robust despite the lack of a strong centre. This is illustrated through a discussion of the global spread of policies that claim to act on or through some aspect of human creativity, such as the creative industries, the creative class, the creative city and so on. The article concludes that this metaphor helps us to explain why some policy types are able to move to so many places while avoiding the tendency to link this movement to a universal critique.

Keywords: creativity, metaphors, policy mobilities, policy transfer, policy network, fluid space

Introduction

It seems that the last decade has seen “creativity” usurp knowledge as the key to post-industrial economic competitiveness. Policies claiming to act on or through human creativity have achieved currency worldwide, with their advocates claiming this reflects the fact we now live in a creative age where human creativity is what makes all the difference to our economies, cultures and societies (Howkins 2001; Florida 2002; Hartley 2005). Critics are less sanguine, suggesting that if a focus on extracting value from ephemeral creative activities and products is not representative of the last gasps of an exhausted accumulation regime, they are at least indicative of the limitations of our neoliberalized economic system (Miller 2004; Garnham 2005; Peck 2010). Meanwhile, at the level of actual policy there appears to be little agreement on the best way to develop and exploit creativity, with programmes ranging in focus from developing particular industries, to making space for creative work, to attracting creative individuals from elsewhere (Cunningham 2009; Evans 2009). These differences reflect questions over how creativity concentrates in particular places, communities and industries, and the nature of its relationship to economic, social and cultural development (Pratt 2008; Hellmanzik 2010; Gibson 2011; Harvey *et al.* 2012). Given the likely variation of outcomes for these programmes, it is questionable whether such differentiation can square with general assessments, both positive and negative, of the meaning of policy discourses regarding creativity.

This question resonates with efforts to reconcile the general and the particular in analyses of transnational rule regimes, such as neoliberalism. In human geography and other cognate disciplines there has been a relatively recent turn to the study of processes of policy mobility as a way of connecting discussions of neoliberalism-in-general with ‘actually-existing-neoliberalism’ on the ground (Brenner and Theodore 2002; see Brenner *et al.* 2010). The study of policy mobilities focuses on how particular policy programmes and ideas developed in one place come to be used in other places (Peck and Theodore 2001, 2010a; Ward 2006; England and Ward 2007; McCann 2008, 2011a; Prince 2010a; McCann and Ward 2011; Peck 2011a). This provides the opportunity to consider how particular manifestations of a programme of rule are linked to other manifestations, providing some purchase in thinking about how particularity emerges in the context of a more general trend. For Peck (2003, p. 229), ‘[t]he methodological challenge here is to develop adequate conceptualizations and robust empirical assessments of policies “in motion”, including descriptions of the circulatory systems that connect and interpenetrate

“local” policy regimes.’ It is with how we conceptualise and describe these circulatory systems, and in particular the metaphors that we use, that this article is concerned.

There are a number of issues at stake in these descriptions. One is how to explain how particular policies come to be adopted in a wide range of places. What is it about particular policies that mean they travel far and wide? What is the nature of the circulatory system through which they travel that allows this to happen? A good description of what the circulatory system looks like should help us to understand why and how things circulate through it. A second issue is understanding the meaning of a widely utilized policy. For example, insofar as neoliberalism describes particular policies, how do we assess the circulatory systems that took these policies from one place to another? The description of the system is all important here: one that focuses on its systemic characteristics might be more likely to emphasize the importance of neoliberalism-in-general to its functioning, whereas one that emphasized some of its more contingent elements and connections might be more inclined to talk about actually-existing-neoliberalism. And third, these descriptions matter to how we understand what policy is and the role it plays. Circulatory system descriptions might imagine policy in very narrow terms as just policy documents travelling across electronic networks and being “applied” in different places, while descriptions that emphasise the way policy travels in a variety of forms might see policy as involving more than words on a page to include the relationships that get arranged around it.

This article makes an argument for thinking about these circulatory systems with a metaphor of fluid space. This concept was developed by Mol and Law (1994) to describe relational spatialities that have many of the characteristics of a network topology insofar as they are able to maintain coherence despite cutting across institutionalized boundaries, but which are also able to cohere despite variation in how the objects which circulate through the space manifest and function at different points. The next section begins this argument by considering the different metaphors that have been mobilized in work on these circulatory systems, which has come in the form of the study of policy diffusion, transfer and mobility. It argues that this image of fluid space is particularly useful for thinking about policy mobility in terms of topological space. The third section discusses the wide distribution of what I refer to as creativity-type policies. This is, quite simply, policies that claim to act on or through some aspect of human creativity. The section shows how the fluid space metaphor is useful for understanding this particular phenomenon of widespread creativity policy. The article concludes with a discussion of how the metaphor of fluid space helps us to think about the spaces of policy mobility.

Metaphors of movement

The metaphors used when we try to theorize any social or spatial process shapes that theorization, and so our understanding (Demeritt 1994; Howitt 1998; Barnes 2009). Conversely, an examination of the metaphors particular theories use can be revealing as to how those theories think about and understand the social and spatial processes they theorize. Thinking and theorizing about policy mobility is no exception. Political science has long been preoccupied with the factors that catalyze or militate against policy convergence: where the policy programmes of different administrative units become increasingly similar over time (Bennett 1991). The metaphor that they have used to describe the spatiality of this process has been diffusion: as in particular policy programmes diffusing across space (e.g. Dobbin *et al.* 2007; Meseguer and Gilardi 2009). The image created of policies radiating out from a centre across a Cartesian space, gradually taking hold in more and more places until it is orthodoxy, almost seems to suggest it is the policy that has the agency here as the diffusing substance. This is not helped by the way this work tends to focus on the conditions of the places that the policy may or may not diffuse into, such as degree of democratization or economic development, rather than the actors that move the policy itself.

Other recent political science work tries to overcome this problem by talking about transfer as the metaphor to describe a more active process involving politicians, policy-makers, policy entrepreneurs and other policy actors (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2000). This brings a human element to what is, after all, a social process. But the metaphor of transfer still constructs an image of a centre from which particular policies have transferred out to take hold in other places. Although the possibility that the policy may look different in those other places is countenanced, the singular nature of the idea of transfer suppresses the idea of policy developing through its circulation in and out of different places. Moreover, as geographers have pointed out, this literature has inherited from the diffusion literature a tendency to hold the world still while tracing policies, and so understanding them as moving across relatively stable and self-contained entities in the form of discreet countries or cities (Peck 2011a; Peck and Theodore 2010a; McCann 2011a). Metaphors of diffusion and transfer as they stand in the political science literature offer little as resources for thinking about space as the dynamic product of social and spatial processes.

Geography's incursion into this area has in part been shaped by what they are trying to explain. The rapid spread of neoliberalism around the world has led many geographers to inquire into the channels through which neoliberalism has made its way into so many societal nooks and crannies that it seems to be everywhere (Peck and Tickell 2002). This has meant a shift in focus from neoliberalism as ideology or policy programme, to a focus on neoliberalization as a process (Peck 2003; England and Ward 2007). Because so much of what is called neoliberalism comes down to particular policy programmes, those processes described by diffusion and transfer appeared a promising avenue. This has meant that for many geographers, the underlying concern has not been to simply describe these processes, but to theorize them in the context of the spatial upheavals that neoliberalism has brought about across and within a variety of spaces and places (Ward 2006; Brenner *et al.* 2010).

The preferred metaphor of geographers has been policy *mobility*,¹ which is explained in terms that emphasize the almost continuous movement of some policy forms and types, not so much from particular "centres", but back and forth between different places and in various directions, changing as it travels, splits off, and folds back on itself (McCann 2008, 2011a; Peck and Theodore 2010a; McCann and Ward 2011; Peck 2011a; Clarke 2012; Cook and Ward 2012). Mobility is not just the mobility of a policy in spatial terms, but in the policy itself, as it mutates across space and time. In this metaphor, policy itself is conceived as a network, looking different in different places while still being connected. It has been observed that an explosion in potential channels, pipelines, circuits and trading zones for policy (to name a few more of the metaphors being deployed here) has allowed the emergence of what Peck and colleagues call 'fast policy' transfer, which they argue has been central to the rapid neoliberalization of space: a phenomenon that allows for further neoliberal experimentation and development in more and more places (Peck 2002, 2011b; Peck and Theodore 2010b).

The metaphors here rely on and consolidate a model of relational space, producing an image of interconnected places that are constituted by those relations (Massey 2005). By studying policy mobility, we are studying those relations and how they are changing, leading to changes in places. And this is the other aspect of geography's incursion that has shaped how the metaphors have developed: the places that the empirical project has, for the most part, focused on, have been cities (e.g. Bunnell and Das 2010; McCann and Ward 2010, 2011, 2012; Ward 2010; McFarlane 2011; Clarke 2012; Peck 2012). And it is in thinking about cities in relational terms that geography's metaphors have been critiqued. Jacobs (2012) has argued that these images of

networks and circuits of policy between cities continues to rest on a model of topographical space, where *cities themselves* maintain a sense of stability and fixity even as these circuits and networks multiply and change them. She argues we need to view cities through an ontology of movement, where cities change not because they are *in* networks that connect them to other places through mobile objects, but because they *are* networks that exist in a topological space that involves almost continuous folding and unfolding of the distant and the proximate (see also McFarlane 2009, 2011; McCann and Ward 2012).

By thinking cities topologically, Robinson (2011b) suggests we can think about spaces of circulation as emerging in multiple ways through the multiple spatialities involved in how people, ideas and activities are drawn into closer proximity (or not). Such a conception envisions the city as involving multiple connections in multiple sites of varying importance and duration, which serve to give the city its character. In her example of urban planning, despite a tradition of thinking itself in a methodologically nationalist fashion, it has been internationalized for over a century at least, embracing ‘formal organisations and associations as well as individual relationships, shared publications, and targeted learning across localities’ (Robinson 2011b, p. 27). Detecting these connections and enfoldings, and detecting how they matter, is difficult, and Robinson argues cannot necessarily be achieved by focusing on the networks and channels that have been carved out across space through methodological approaches that ‘follow the policy’ (Peck and Theodore 2012).

Part of the problem here is the metaphor of the network and associated imagery of channels, pipelines and suchlike. This image underpins a lot of the thinking in geographical work on policy mobility that Robinson and Jacobs critique. While it is often not the intention of those that deploy a network metaphor, it creates an image of a spatial and social form that must be actively and deliberately built according to particular logics. So if your foray into the study of policy mobility is in order to get a better handle on neoliberalization, then the construction of networks inevitably comes back to this broader process. Local differentiation is understood in this context as part of successful or unsuccessful efforts to establish a neoliberal fix and its attendant logics (Robinson 2011a). Thinking topologically means starting by thinking about the diversity of spaces and means that policy development occurs in, the variety of connections that contribute to this process in those spaces, and the role of particular power relations pertaining there in shaping the outcome. This can involve connections to policy in other places, which may be well described as neoliberal, but it is not this fact but the multiple relations that constitute the policy

which are brought to the fore with this approach. The spectre of global neoliberalism fades into the background.

The strategy of thinking about policy mobility through the spatiality of the city rather than the spatiality of the policy proceeds in part from the fact this field is dominated by urban geographers. When your concern is theorizing the city, using policy mobility to think about the spatiality of the city is a productive strategy. And Robinson shows how it can help us to conceive policy mobility as well. But what if your concern is the geography of policy itself? And particularly those species of policy that seem to get everywhere? How can we think about the spaces and processes that the policy mobility literature described with the metaphors of network, channel and pipeline? Keep in mind Robinson's relational ontology multiplies the number of potential channels, rather than suggesting they do not matter to analysis. What would be an appropriate metaphor for capturing and thinking about these spaces with a topological sensibility?

There is ongoing debate about appropriate metaphors for relational thinking in geography. Jones (2009), for example, argues that the notion of phase space can help us to think relationally about regions without jettisoning what he regards as key aspects of the geographical perspective that recognize the inertia around constructions of territory. Phase space is space that takes account of both what is there, and what is possible given what is there, in relational and territorial terms. Jones's perspective, however, remains centred on particular spaces, in this case regions instead of cities, rather than what is "between" the administrative, policy-making sites of different regions. Another metaphor that focuses on the relational nature of policy is Freeman's (2012) notion of policy-making as occurring in wave form. He argues that policy exists not as a document, but in communicative interaction. Policy emerges through people talking, perhaps then writing a document, someone reading and interpreting the document, then going on to talk to someone else, or perhaps produce another document, which references the first document, but gets read by someone else again, and so on in various directions across social space. Through this movement policy both takes shape and (sometimes) gets enacted. And sometimes those waves move across borders, producing the effect of transnational policy mobility that we observe. The strength of this metaphor is the way that policy is conceived as movement itself, equally both within and between different policy-making sites, so that the borders around those sites effectively dissolve. If we consider the nature of the social space that the waves move through,

however, then this wave metaphor also dovetails with the metaphor I offer here: fluid space (Mol and Law 1994).

The metaphor of fluid space comes from the actor-network theorists Annemarie Mol and John Law's work on social topologies (Mol and Law 1994; Law and Mol 2001). They contrast fluid space with what they call regional space and network space.² In a sense these map nicely onto the metaphors I have already discussed: diffusion and transfer studies tend to work with the spread of policies across different regions of space, while policy mobility work talks about networks and circuits of policy. So for the purposes of this article fluid space is conveniently set up as a useful metaphorical development that we might use for thinking about cities in topological space. But this is also an idea from a specific, actor-network (ANT) tradition (see e.g. Law and Hassard 1999; Latour 2005), so we need to draw out an understanding of it from this context.

One of ANT's central claims is that many of our taken-for-granted spatialities are constructed, or performed, through actor-networks. So what they call regional spaces, which includes bounded spaces like cities, countries and continents, emerge as bounded and distinctive through the building of actor-networks across space that do the work of bounding and distinguishing them. In Mol and Law's (1994) example of anaemia, we may talk about the incidence of anaemia in the Netherlands and compare this with Mozambique as two self-contained regions of space. This effectively performs these as separate regional spaces in these terms, as any unevenness and nuance to anaemia in each region is reduced to a single number: incidence of anaemia in the Netherlands is higher/lower than in Mozambique. But what makes this performance possible is the existence of a network of laboratories connected in terms of the technologies they use, the metrics they abide by, and the practices through which they convert anaemia from a phenomenon into a set of numbers. It is because there are otherwise identical laboratories in the Netherlands and Mozambique, which exist because of a conscious effort to build networks of identical laboratories in these two places, that the performance of comparable but separate regions is possible. Network space and regional space are interlinked.

Through actor-networks like these, points in space are drawn closer together in a topological sense. But when looking at anaemia, Law and Mol found that often these laboratories were not as similar as you might expect. In the Netherlands, where anaemia is rare, its existence is confirmed by a blood test through a specialized machine. In Africa, where anaemia is common, and the resources for such a machine do not exist, it was often diagnosed through observation,

such as of conjunctiva. Elements like resources, frequency, time, medicine and so on, come together in different combinations in these networks, and make anaemia and its existence a different proposition for the two laboratories. They are not a network in the strict ANT sense because the things that are supposed to bring them together – practices, technologies, metrics – do not exist in the same way in each place. And yet, they are networked: like with the circuits of policy discussed above, people and texts of different types move back and forth between these different laboratories, and they tend to think of themselves as acting on the same physiological state: anaemia. These are fluid spaces. They resemble network topologies, but they do not depend on fixed relations that are identical across the network and do not come apart just because the meaning of something, and the practices associated with it, become different. For Mol and Law, fluid spaces, unlike regional and network spaces respectively, are characterized by ‘variation without boundaries and transformation without discontinuity’ (1994, p. 658).

There are certain characteristics of fluid spaces that Mol and Law draw out, which reinforce the appropriateness of the metaphor. For one, the objects that occupy fluid spaces and which circulate within them tend to not have clear *boundaries*. In a article with de Laet, Mol (2000) provides the example of the Zimbabwean bush pump: a water pump that has penetrated many villages in the country, providing water, health, community and national identity in different measures in different places and times. This fluidity of purpose is matched by a certain material fluidity, as the pump is adapted, fixed in new ways when it breaks down, and reconstructed according to the conditions. It is the fluidity of the bush pump that allows connections to be made across space through this object. The second characteristic is the ability of fluids to *mix*. As with other fluids, some mix in a way that changes both irrevocably (eggs and oil), while some will not mix at all (water and oil). But this mixing is not necessary or consistent at every point – fluid space maintains its integrity even if fluids mix in different combinations, or not at all, across the space. So anaemia is mixed with blood tests, machines and numbers in the Netherlands, but with eyelids and iron tablets in Africa.

And these two characteristics, which are the ones that draw directly on the metaphor, give fluid space a third characteristic of *robustness*. It does not fall apart just because there are some elements in one place that are not in another place, or because there may not be a centre that defines what is and is not in the space. It is the fluidity in the space that allows it to be enduring. But this does not mean that centres do not get constructed, or at least try to get constructed. Nor does it mean that there are not objects moving across the space that are not fluid. The

fourth characteristic of fluid spaces is that they have particular *interrelations with regional and network spaces*, as the latter two do with each other. Fluid spaces are not superior, and in many ways they may depend on the existence of other kinds of spaces, including regions and networks, whose elements they may often absorb, like doctors who consider both blood measurements and conjunctiva observations.

The latter point shows that this is not about doing away with other spatial metaphors. The metaphors used in diffusion studies and in much of the policy mobility work are often appropriate for what is being described and capture how space is thought about and acted on. I advocate here another metaphor, that of fluid space, that captures some of the other key characteristics of those circulatory systems in which policy is moving. This can help us to understand the nature of some kinds of policy circulations.

Law and Mol's work on social topology is not new to geography. It has been used to think about some of the spaces where the social intersects with the technical and the natural, including climate change (Blok 2010), fisheries (Bear and Eden 2008), old growth forests (Kortelainen 2010) and water catchments (Medd and Marvin 2008). This work is fairly typical of how social topology has been studied: it shows how the construction of fluid spaces is necessary to be able to stabilize and manage these spatial phenomena. As with anaemia, these fluid spaces are understood to be in the service of something that is presupposed to the space, even if its ontological actuality is best understood as fluid. But a policy type, such as what I am calling creativity-type policy, *emerges* in the fluid spaces of policy mobility. It is dependent on fluidity for its stability in a different way: through the ability of its various components to mix, and to strike out in new directions through this process.

In what follows I illustrate how the metaphor of fluid space is useful for understanding the spread of creativity-type policy. I am not suggesting the metaphor will always be appropriate for every type of policy circulating, but I have found creativity to be an illustrative case of where it is appropriate. It draws on research conducted from 2005 to 2008 into the transfer of creative industries policy from the UK to New Zealand. This research involved interviews with 37 informants based in the two countries, attendance at a number of forums (conferences, seminars, workshops) where the substance of policy programmes that seek to develop creativity were discussed by public and private sector practitioners, academics and policy analysts, and analysis of policy documents from the UK, New Zealand and a range of other countries. In the course of

this research it became clear that those involved were working in a much broader context than the policy systems of the two countries (Prince 2010b). Since 2008 I have sought to further flesh out this context through following and analysing other documents and actors involved in developing policy interested in creativity.

Tracing creativity in fluid space

A routine search on Google can reveal the extent of creativity policies around the world. Countries as diverse as China, Australia, Tanzania, Columbia and Sweden have developed policies in the last decade that try to tap into some creative capacity in their populations to improve economic competitiveness, social cohesion and/or cultural distinctiveness. Such policies are not limited to the national scale either, with cities like New York, Manchester and Auckland, and supra-national organizations like the European Union, also developing policies that cite creativity (Evans 2009). Given their absence in preceding decades, this suggests a textbook case of policy diffusion – evidence we have entered a ‘creative age’ where policy-makers are recognizing the capacities required to be competitive (Florida 2002).

The normative explanation here is that we will see a convergence around best practice as policy settings come to deviate only in intensity rather than substance. But a closer look reveals a high degree of differentiation in the policy programmes being produced (Kong *et al.* 2006; Cunningham 2009; Evans 2009). While all tend to proclaim the importance of creativity in a globalized or hyper-competitive world, policy programmes differ markedly in the particular objects they focus on, including the ‘creative industries’, the ‘creative class’, the ‘creative city’ and the ‘creative economy’, each with particular policy approaches befitting that object. Local institutional variation in the face of a generalized normativity struggles to explain such extensive differentiation, but the linkages that exist between even quite distinctive policy programmes shows they are unlikely to have developed entirely independently (Kong *et al.* 2006).

Unlike diffusionist approaches which make geographical proximity central to their explanation, relational approaches, such as those used in geography, emphasize connections which can often be stronger between distant sites than between sites that are geographically close. But imagining this relational geography through the image of the network, as geography has tended to do, has consequences. It becomes easy to overstate its coherence and imagine a relatively integrated policy-making space that nevertheless spreads across transnational space. In some aspects, as I will discuss, this is close to being the case, but overall the spaces of creativity policy are not well

described by these metaphors. What follows demonstrates how the metaphor of fluid space is a useful way of capturing and describing these spaces of circulating creativity policy.

Boundaries

The objects that occupy and circulate in this space are, for the most part, ideas: ideas about what policy that wants to make creativity flourish needs to focus on. The creative industries concern a particular economic sector (see Hartley 2005), the creative class a discernible group of workers (see Florida 2002), the creative city focuses on urban economies and societies (see Landry 2008), and the creative economy on a subset of drivers in the broader economy (see Howkins 2001).³ These concepts each have particular histories and genealogies with initial generative moments of conception(s) and articulation(s). And they circulate.

The creative industries concept, for example, can be traced in this way. Its genesis was in the UK in 1998 with the release of the Creative Industries Mapping Document (CIMD) by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). This became an important point of reference for policy-makers and researchers worldwide, but it also drew on preceding policy knowledges. These included a cultural strategy produced by the Australian Government some years earlier called *Creative Nation* (Government of Australia 1994) (an influence cited by Secretary of State for Culture at the time, Chris Smith; see Smith 1998), and the *cultural* industries strategy of the Greater London Council from the early 1980s which members of New Labour's Policy Unit had been involved with (Garnham 2005). Policy knowledge influences such as these were translated into the "New" Labour, "Cool Britannia" political context of the time (see Bewes and Gilbert 2000), and manifested in the CIMD.

As well as coining the term creative industries, the CIMD made three other key moves. It provided a definition (DCMS 2001, p. 5):

Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.

It populated the sector with a particular set of industries (DCMS 2001, p. 5):

Advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio.

And it “mapped” the sector, which involved the measurement of the contributions of each creative industry sector in terms of revenue, exports, employment and contribution to Gross Domestic Product.

The creative industries then, in its first and most influential form, had a number of different elements. There was the idea itself, but there was also the particular set of industries giving the idea content, and there was a particular technique – mapping – which produced numerical measurements of this content. These elements provide markers with which we can trace the travels, and changes, of the concept. In policy circles, the creative industries concept has emerged in administrative sites on every continent and at city, region, state and supra-state levels. One study found some 1200 documents published worldwide between 1998 and 2006 that refer to the creative and/or cultural industries, including what they call 120 ‘key’ documents (*excluding* UK documents) ‘dealing with government research and/or policy containing the terms Creative Industries, Creative Economy or Creative City’ (Cunningham 2007, p. 349; see also Cunningham 2009; Evans 2009). These overlaps with other concepts are significant and I will return to them later. For now, what these numbers highlight is the extraordinary penetration of concepts articulated in the CIMD. According to one DCMS official (interview with author 2006):

There are a whole raft of countries looking to the UK and DCMS to learn about how the UK government is developing creative industries policy here. The mapping documents seem to be used world-wide as a model of best practice or as a reference. (There have been recent) approaches from South Africa, Holland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, New York.

A cultural policy academic who has studied the field for two decades offered a more direct interpretation (interview with author 2006):

It’s purely that document (the CIMD). Absolutely that document. It’s amazing the story of a document. It gives a nice definition and some statistics and it’s had a big effect.

However, it was not the internal characteristics of the CIMD lending solidity to the idea that made it able to travel and be so influential, but its *fluidity*. The way that the CIMD has been

articulated with other knowledges as it has been translated into new policy-making sites has been highly variable. For example, policy documents from Singapore (see ERC 2002, p. iii–iv) and Hong Kong (see HKTDC 2002, unpaginated) adopt the moniker⁴ and definition up front and perform an equivalent mapping exercise, although they designate a different set of industries as constitutive of the sector. The same translation strategy was deployed by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research in the service of their government’s policy project (Walton and Duncan 2002). In other cases the moniker is adopted and the definition referenced in their discussions of the conceptions of the creative industries, but it is set alongside a range of other conceptions. A Vienna study, for instance, offers an in-depth account of the history of the concept from Adorno and Horkheimer’s formulation of the ‘culture industry’ through to the idea of creativity as a factor in production (Ratzenböck *et al.* 2004, pp. 9–12). In South Australia the CIMD is critiqued as ‘a very broad definition and there are inconsistencies between the criterion and the inclusion of industries’ (Doust 2005, p. 21) before going on to compare definitional approaches taken in other policy documents. Other, generally later, documents do not refer to the CIMD at all but incorporate the creative industries term into their policy projects (Keegan *et al.* 2005).

The creative industries as a policy object does not have strong boundaries (Mol and Law 1994). A policy-maker can plausibly take the whole construct from its original conception and mobilization at DCMS or just the term itself, and still reasonably claim to be talking about the same thing. The particular list of industries DCMS produced, and its mapping technique, are not central to adopting the idea, even if these were vital to giving the creative industries their initial notoriety. Indeed, as the examples above show, the creative industries can be attached to a range of political projects. One commentator observed the concept is like a Rorschach blot, ‘invested in for varying reasons and with varying emphases and outcomes’ (Cunningham 2009, p. 376). This kind of fluidity is typical of creativity-type policy concepts. The policies as they stand in particular places will generally say at least as much about the reality of policy making in that place, than about any kind of “global” policy model. Their fluid nature makes them highly adaptable.

This fluidity speaks to the ease with which they move. When Robinson (2011b) talks about the multiple possible connections that can be made in a particular policy-making site, not all of them will be down carefully constructed networks and channels through which policy-makers and others try to learn from each other about a specific policy. Some connections will be by chance,

based on something someone read or saw on a documentary, some will result from connections being made for other reasons, such as an informal meeting at an international conference, or be based on a personal connection between old friends working in different places. As discussed above, the creative industries concept itself was the result of a particular intersection of an Australian policy document (read in a particular way) and the memories of particular individuals of their policy-making pasts. Fluid objects like the creative industries are ripe for travel down such connections, as their weak boundaries mean they can be translated into a new context easily in the way, for example, a more geographically specific policy concept cannot. And as they have travelled further, the chances of them being realised in such connections increase.

Mixing

So the fluidity of these objects means that they can be translated easily into the political concerns and aims of policy-makers in a variety of different places, allowing it to move like a wave across space (Freeman 2012). But why do I continue to talk about creativity policy as if it is singular, when it is clearly not? The different objects focus on different things, and get transported through different mediums. For example, while the CIMD was initially responsible for the circulation of the creative industries concept, other concepts have circulated in other forms, such as through particular people. Prominent examples include Charles Landry, Charles Leadbeater and John Howkins, although probably best known is the father of the creative class concept, Richard Florida (see Florida 2002). Florida's "three T's" formulation of talent, technology and tolerance has proven so attractive he has now spoken in cities in Europe, New Zealand, Australia and North America (Gibson and Klocker 2004; Peck 2005). Charles Landry's (2008) book *The Creative City* offers urban policy solutions which oscillate between culture and creativity as their core driver, giving him claim as a leading expert on the future of the city. This has enabled him to work with organizations as diverse as the World Bank, Wellington City Council, the OECD and the Western and South Australian State Governments (Gibson and Klocker 2004). Like Florida, Landry not only reinvents the links between culture, creativity and economy, he transports his vision to a variety of places.

I talk about creativity-type policy in general because these concepts regularly mix with each other. While they have different origins and have travelled down different paths, other creativity policy concepts, such as the creative city and the creative class (for useful discussions of the paths of these particular policy concepts, see, respectively, Peck 2005; Gibson and Klocker

2004), regularly intersect with one another and the creative industries strand to produce new policy forms and strategies.

For example, in 2005 the Auckland City Council produced a report on the city's creative industries (Auckland City Council 2005). This drew on the concept of the creative industries as formulated in the government commissioned *Heart of the Nation* cultural sector report (HotNation 2000), itself a rearticulation of the creative industries concept from the CIMD (Prince 2010a). The result was a mapping document that produced quantitative measures of the city's creative industries augmented by an analysis of interviews conducted with 375 workers from the city's 'creative sector'. But the report goes a step further than the mapping studies carried out by HotNation and DCMS by marrying this research with arguments made about creative cities and the creative class by Charles Handy and Richard Florida. Florida's arguments in particular are central to the argument of the report. Here the creative industries are understood as economically significant in their own right, so are worth developing, but they are also part of what make the city attractive to Florida's creative class.

It is not just in policy documents that such articulations occur. The then Dean of the Queensland University of Technology Creative Industries Faculty John Hartley's edited collection *Creative Industries*, published in 2005, collected together writings which draw on the concept of creativity and arranges these into themes about creative world, creative identities, creative enterprises and so on. In doing so it juxtaposes the work of Richard Florida, Charles Landry, Charles Leadbeater and others writing on these themes. Importantly, the introduction Hartley penned for the volume attempts to synthesize the arguments and concepts used by many of these writers into a broader argument about the role of creativity in the economy. He argues that the rise to prominence of the creative industries and its accompanying discourses is indicative of this trend (Hartley 2005, p. 4):

The creative industries ... are not merely an area of economic development but an idea – namely that creativity can have decisive social and economic effects.

The trajectory we see here is the opposite to an idealized process of knowledge production in which knowledgeable experts agree that creativity is a heretofore unrecognized element of economic activity and gradually they have identified different dimensions to this – industries, classes, cities, economies. Instead the different dimensions have been arranged next to each

other (in policy documents as well as academic tracts like Hartley's), in different places and in different combinations and configurations, *as* dimensions of creativity's role in economic activity.

Robustness

As with other fluids, as Mol and Law (1994) point out, some mix in a way that changes both irrevocably, while some will not mix at all. But this mixing is not necessary or consistent at every point – fluid space remains connected even if fluids mix in different combinations, or not at all, across the space. So some places use the creative industries concept, others the creative class concept, and still others some combination of both. And here this mixable quality has been a notable strength. As the different strands have mixed policy options have expanded in terms of available policy knowledge, available policy knowledge producers and depth of potential engagement and contestation between different ways of objectifying creativity (Evans 2009; Waitt and Gibson 2009).

This lends robustness to the fluid space: it has no need of either a powerful “centre of calculation” or an overarching logic to keep it together. Although each concept has a genealogy and arguably a point of origin that is often referred back to, these are not centres with any control over what is occurring elsewhere. This does not mean they are not important sites – they did after all first conceive the objects in question – but if they were to disappear this is unlikely to lead to these policy concepts disappearing from policy discourses.

Other spaces

Finally, fluid spaces are related to other types of space. Or, more accurately, other types of spatial metaphors which also shape space. In relation to regions, these concepts both depend on, and reproduce, regional spaces. This is a consequence of policy-making having specific jurisdictions defined by bounded territorial space. The policy concepts lend themselves to regional thinking. Ideas like the creative city and the creative economy refer to regions of space, while the creative industries and the creative class are understood in terms of, respectively, developing and attracting them to a particular region. The regional spatial imaginaries that inform our political imaginations shape the kind of policy concepts that will be regarded useful, and so able to circulate in a fluid space.

At least as significant are network spaces. Fluid spaces of policy mobility result from deliberate efforts to build relations across space through which policy concepts can flow. This is often

understood quite explicitly as network building by the actors involved in this, and the network metaphor, which I have argued brings such imagery to mind, is appropriate to describe it. Their work building networks produces elements that then get absorbed into the more fluid spaces in which creativity-type policy, in general, exists. Conversely, it is often in fluid spaces that these networks take shape, as actors recognize the extent of this space, in terms of the wide geographical penetration of the policy objects, and try to make themselves a significant centre within it. There are a lot of examples of this kind of network building in relation to creativity. Network builders generally try to position themselves at the centre of their network, and here I discuss two of the generalized forms that these centres have taken: centres of knowledge exchange and centres of knowledge production (Prince 2010b).

What I call centres of knowledge exchange are event-spaces usually set up by policy entrepreneurs in coalition with policy-makers and interested academics to facilitate the circulation of knowledge forms and the policy knowledge and ideas contained within them (cf. Ward 2007; McCann 2011a; Cook and Ward 2012). As a result, they are a key driver for reproducing and expanding the broader policy community. The organization Creative Clusters was particularly active on this front during the 2000s. They ran an international conference from 2002 until 2008, and have run “summer school” events for small groups of generally local level policy-makers and officers since 2009. While the 2008 global financial crisis putting limitations on the resources on the kinds of policy actors and researchers who attended helps to explain why the size of the events Creative Clusters runs have been reduced, a statement on the website for their work shows an important continuity in their rationale for their work (Creative Clusters 2012):

Through events, consultancy and publication we work with policy-makers who are helping their nations, cities and regions to face some of the challenges of the creative economy. We believe that the creative industries are central to recovery in advanced economies, and that culture is one of the keys to sustainable development everywhere.

Creative Clusters contributes to the reproduction of creativity-type policy concepts and associated discourses across transnational space by providing a space for attending policy-makers, consultants, politicians and academics to meet, learn from each other and shape public policy. The conference ran until 2008 and regularly attracted around 300 delegates, although the Brighton event in 2004 and the London event in 2007 attracted over 500. Approximately 75 per cent of the delegates come from the UK, 15 per cent from the rest of Europe and the remainder

from elsewhere. The 2007 conference in London had delegates from 41 countries (Creative Clusters 2010). The delegates bring case studies of their particular programme or region and attend themed sessions developing different policy approaches to the development of creativity. It allows for the exchange of policy ideas, policy learning, and the development of transnational policy networks.

An event like creative clusters can be an important ‘point of passage’ for would-be policy community members to pass through, but it is far from obligatory (Mol and Law 1994, p. 661). This is partly because as the policy community has grown so more and more events with similar remits have emerged.⁵ But it is also because knowledge about creativity policy is produced in a diversity of sites of knowledge production where new texts and experts are produced for circulation. These sites include not only universities but think-tanks and consultancies. Both Landry and Florida have their own consultancies with wide arrays of clients from around the world (see, respectively, Landry no date; and CCG no date). In the UK soon after New Labour came to power and began promoting the creative industries a number of private consultancies emerged specializing in researching and working with the cultural and creative industries, including Candlestar, Brian Debnam Associates, the Burns Owens Partnership and Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy. These agencies tend to work in the interstices between cultural actors and their sources of revenues, whether these are the market for cultural products, charitable donations, or government funding, while producing and providing practical knowledge about the creative industries and creative economy.

Apart from this kind of practical knowledge, more abstract knowledge about creativity is also being produced in more traditionally academic environments. Since 2008 there has been a *Journal of Creative Industries* from the publisher Intellect Books, which incorporates the definition of the creative industries offered by the CIMD (Intellect 2009):

The scope of the journal is global, primarily aimed at those studying and practicing activities which have *their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and which have the potential for wealth creation.*

The activities they list as constitutive of these industries are also drawn from the CIMD. This shows the way the creative industries concept, along with other creativity-type concepts, have made their way into scholarly research as social scientific categories in their own right (although their use is often problematized) rather than just as policy concepts (see e.g. Rantisi *et al.* 2006;

Vorley *et al.* 2008; Asheim 2009). In addition, since 2000 a number of university faculties and departments have been created or re-branded with the creative industries moniker and/or have begun offering degrees and diplomas in the creative industries, including the Universities of Portsmouth, Glamorgan, Auckland, City University London and King's College London. However, this incipient disciplinarization is clearest at the Creative Industries Faculty of the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, which, since its establishment in 2001, has sought to become highly visible in debates about the creative industries and the creative economy more generally through the production of knowledge⁶ and the building of research networks.

One attempt to establish such a network came early in the faculty's life in late 2002 through the New Economy, Creativity and Consumption Symposium held on the campus. This event invited researchers from Australia, the US and the UK in order to 'link universities where new things were being done institutionally in the general area of the creative industries' and create a research 'chain ... around the planet' (Hartley 2004, p. 5). Some of the papers that were presented at the symposium are collected in a special issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (see Hartley 2004). Through the dual processes of linking internationally sourced research works and international researchers the faculty is attempting to situate itself in an influential position in wider policy networks.

Although the space of circulating creativity policy is a fluid space, it is cut across, and reproduced, by more actively built networks. These will vary in size and durability. And the logics they are built to will vary. But the reason this is a fluid space is the difficulty of building and maintaining such networks: the linkages inside them will dissolve into the fluid for all sorts of reasons, including "external" shocks like recessions undermining the resources for the network, to "internal" problems around the difficulty of keeping a complex network together. And as they dissolve, they often leave a trace in the form of new or renovated objects, circulating through the fluid space in the form of publications, experts or just ideas. These networks mean it will always be possible to identify particular logics in this space, but they will always be seen from a particular angle, from a particular place and at a particular time. Overall, it will be the nature of a fluid space to not be reducible to a singular logic.

Conclusions

The wide circulation of policies that claim to target, develop and utilize human creativity more effectively has been one of the more noticeable policy trends of recent years. This article offers a partial answer to the question of why this is: it is the fluid nature of the policy spaces it circulates in (Mol and Law 1994). Creativity-type policies have in common not just the use of a particular term but an inherent fluidity. They can be mobilized for a range of economic, social and cultural projects in different places. And the fact they have a common term means they can be mixed in various combination with each other, as well as with other concepts and discourses. This fluidity means that not only do creativity policies travel easily, they have proliferated. And the more creativity gets cited in policy initiatives around the world, the more likely it will continue to be as policy-makers scan the horizon of policy possibilities, and find these terms being used more and more.

Of course, this conclusion risks reproducing normative constructions of policy-makers as rational, if bounded, actors. Arguably, this is a consequence of the apparent expulsion of any human element in these metaphors of what are, after all, supposed to be 'social' topologies (Simonsen 2004). By using metaphors that emphasize the nature of the space and the objects circulating through it, not only are people marginalized, but so are the power relations they are embedded in. It is a weakness of the metaphors of ANT generally that the multiplicity of power, and the way it is mobilized to produce effects like the movement of policy, is marginalized in favour of elegant topological diagrams (Allen 2003). By not considering how actors take shape as policy mobilisers, we risk their becoming just functionaries in relation to various topologies.

This is why the metaphor of fluid spaces of policy mobility provides only a partial answer: the rest requires more empirical work. There may well be something to creativity, in that a particular policy may tap into a reservoir of human potential in some way that lifts economic and social performance, and this is why this notion of creativity is being used. On the other hand, creativity may serve as a convenient fiction to cover over policy with implications that would likely be unpopular if they were recognized. Particular conditions in place may also mean that creativity is unable to find a foothold in the local policy imagination (Waitt and Gibson 2009). The answer to what creativity means in a particular policy context can only be answered with that context in mind: just using the same term does not necessarily mean policies in different places will mean the same thing, so why policy-makers use creativity always needs to be understood in place, and a critique of creativity policy made in one place (e.g. Garnham 2005) will not necessarily automatically transfer to somewhere else. Fluid space needs to be understood with this other

aspect in mind. It does not float free of these contexts, but is bound up with them. The spaces it describes are the spaces in between, connecting different places and contexts up but not necessarily making one subservient to the other, or both subservient to the fluid space itself.

The strength of this metaphor is that it does not imply that just because there are identifiable policies circulating it means that space is overlaid with strong networks connecting all the points up. Sometimes this is the case, and this article is not advocating doing away with these metaphors. But often policy concepts move in less recognizable forms, down connections that are fleeting or invisible from the outside, to places where they are used in entirely unexpected ways that never again reference or resemble where they came from. Such connections are impossible to map – Robinson (2011b) suggests it would be like trying to map the internet. So we see networks as operating in a more fluid space: taking form in it, and sometimes dissolving into it. Moreover, this metaphor allows us to separate specific moments of policy mobility when a policy seems to travel from one place to another, from deliberate projects of network building and making fast policy. Not all moments of transfer are equivalent. Sometimes policy is adopted because of coercion or consent to a powerful policy network situated in international organizations, and sometimes policy moves just because somebody likes the sound of a particular term. Often these networks do have an overarching logic that may be well described as, for example, neoliberalism. But this does not mean that every instance of similar mobility in the broader fluid space, even ones that can be connected to each other through the policy, can be understood in the same terms. What it does mean is that there may be openings and opportunities to articulate circulating policy objects with alternative policy knowledges, that then have the opportunity for wide circulation in these fluid spaces without being immediately marginalized by powerful centres or networks.

The metaphors we use matter because they shape how we understand the phenomena we are observing, and as a final point, the metaphor of fluid space matters for how we think about policy itself. Policy does not exist in any kind of permanent, objective form. Documents may exist which give us an idea about what a particular policy looked like in a particular time and place, but there is always more to any policy than just words on a page: they are themselves relational, drawing on and shaping relations between people, places and objects. In this sense, policy is an element in the construction of the various social, cultural, economic, urban and political assemblages in which we live (McFarlane 2009; Prince 2010a; McCann 2011b). Understanding policy-making will often mean understanding the economies, socialities, politics

and cultures of the fluid spaces in which policy moves. This is fertile terrain for further investigation.

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Endnotes

1. I should point out here that elsewhere I have used the policy transfer rubric (see Prince 2010a, 2012), although I have subscribed to the many of the same critiques of the use of this term in political science as those that have used the policy mobility metaphor.
2. They offer one other spatial topology: fire space (Law and Mol 2001). This space that requires an ‘absent presence’, like the flame of a fire requires fuel that is not actually present in the flame itself. Certainly policy documents can be conceived as requiring absent presences, such as other policy documents, but I do not have the space to explore it further here.
3. These are not the only constructs: less prominent examples that circulate through some policy-making sites have included the creative region and the creative nation.
4. The Singapore case slips between referring to the ‘creative industries’ and the ‘creative cluster’.
5. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, unsurprisingly, the size and frequency of these events has diminished since the global financial crisis of 2008, as reflected in Creative Clusters’ own downscaling. They still occur, however. I attended two events in London when I was in the city in November 2010: one held at UCL and involving academics and practitioners and one a “national” conference on the creative industries involving different kinds of researchers, private sector actors, government officers and politicians. The latter was described to me by one of the organisers as deliberately smaller and shorter due to the current “transition stage”.
6. Information on research and publications can be found on the faculty website (QUT no date).

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