

Policy Transfer, Consultants and the Geographies of Governance

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7 June 2012

(accepted at *Progress in Human Geography*)

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Abstract

The emergence of increasingly transnational geographies of governance presents a challenge to geographers. Geographical work on policy transfer, which links this process with the extension of the hegemonic 'regimes of truth' that define policy norms, has much to offer conceptions of emerging geographies of governance, particularly when linked to the production of governance structures, such as global policy networks. The paper argues that increased use of ethnographic methods in policy transfer studies enables a focus on how global policy networks are produced through the actors driving the transfers. This is illustrated through a discussion of policy consultants.

I Introduction

One of the big stories of globalisation has been about the emerging geographies of governance which now rule us. From a global political system defined by nation-states, we have seen myriad trends and counter-trends leading towards a new spatial organisation of power, affecting how populations are governed, economies are managed and policy is produced (Peet, 2007; Harvey, 2005). These trends, described most systematically by Jessop (2002), have included the apparent 'hollowing out' of the state as the nation-state's powers and responsibilities are rescaled 'upwards', 'downwards' and 'outwards' to supranational institutions, local administrations and non-state actors respectively; the internationalisation of policy regimes as national governments are increasingly guided (or coerced) in their policy decisions by foreign and transnational agencies; and the destatisation of government as nation-state hierarchies are replaced or supplemented with market and network forms of organisation. While there is no doubt that stories of the death of the nation-state have been exaggerated, it is certain that political forms continue to change, with consequences for societies, economies and cultures, as well as democracy, independence and self-determination.

The emergence of work in geography around the theme of policy transfer has the potential to offer insights into these changes, particularly around the internationalisation of policy regimes (Peck, 2002; Peck, 2005; Peck and Theodore, 2001; Peck and Theodore, 2010a; Peck and Theodore, 2010b; McCann, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2010; McCann, 2008; Ward, 2006; Ward, 2010; Prince, 2010a; Swain, 2006). Policy transfer, in simple terms, is the process whereby policies developed in one place are used in the development of policies in another place (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Much of the work in the area has been conducted by political scientists seeking to track the diffusion across space of particular policy programmes in relation to macro-level processes such as democratisation, demographic change, growing affluence and so on (e.g. Dobbin et al., 2007). But geographers have had a different focus, studying policy transfer in order to think about how they manifest the changing power relations which shape the circumstances in which they occur. This work speaks to the inter-scalar and cross-national power struggles that produce the policy harmonisation and differentiation that together constitute internationalising policy regimes. In this vein, the geographical study of policy transfer casts a light on the strategies through which various actors change the geographies of governance across space.

Recent developments in this geographical literature have also seen a growing focus on the actors involved in policy transfer and the kinds of social forms these actors take (McCann, 2011; Larner and Laurie, 2010). The proliferation of one such social form, global policy networks, has been a topic of interest for a range of scholars studying global governance (Detomasi, 2007; Reinicke, 1999; Stone, 2008; Stone, 2004; Slaughter, 2004). These networks are the boundary-crossing web of influences that shape political and policy decisions. They can include the political advisors and policy-makers that make day-to-day policy decisions, the guiding hand of supra-national actors and foreign governments, as well as legitimating transnational epistemic communities of relevant experts. In a wide ranging discussion of such networks, Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004) argues that the transnational networks of different kinds of governmental actors, from regulators to judges to legislators, represent an emerging 'new world order'. The connections between, for example, American and European judges, or between British and Australian central bankers, enable practices to be shared and trust built up which allows for cooperation and collaboration, even if this stops short of complete calibration. She argues this new world order could create a situation of disaggregated sovereignty through which solutions to truly global problems may be found without the naive assumption that we will eventually create what she regards as an undesirable and unworkable global state.

In addition, the image of the 'global public policy network', described as 'loose alliances of government agencies, international organisations, corporations, and elements of civil society such as nongovernmental organisations, professional associations, or religious groups' (Reinicke, 1999: 44), captures a slightly different kind of network. They are not, in principle, networks that only involve state actors. They can however, it is argued, overcome many of the shortcomings of the latter through their defining ability to draw on appropriate knowledge from anywhere in the world provided it is accessible to the network, enabling a broadening of participation that can help to overcome government and market failure (Reinicke, 1999). Networks of public health researchers and officials, for example, can help to transfer knowledge about the spread of water borne viruses from the places it is developed to the places it is currently needed. Less optimistic readings argue, however, that as global policy networks become more powerful, nation-states increasingly are only able to react to them, with deleterious consequences for democracy (Stone, 2008).

There is potential for cross-fertilisation here: global policy networks represent another side of the internationalisation of policy regimes. They are the structures that emerge around the dynamics of policy transfer processes, and they will likely

drive policy transfer efforts in the future. They increasingly provide the means, possibilities and limits of internationalising policy regimes. Understanding emerging geographies of governance depends on understanding how these networks have emerged and evolved, and policy transfer offers a way into this.

There are dangers, however. The discourse of scholars like Slaughter and Reinicke echoes a particular narrative about governance that emphasises normativity over its actual structural constitution in a particular time and place: the notion of 'good governance' (see Williams, 2009). 'Good governance' is an epochal discourse that attempts to give form and meaning to the structural shifts we have seen under conditions of globalisation. It claims that the bureaucratic state reached a crisis point in the 1970s as the world came to be more chaotic and ungovernable in the context of economic crisis, globalisation and technological and social change (Walters, 2004). The unwieldy nation-state is not sufficiently responsive to govern this new, fast-paced world, and the image of the network is something of a natural response to these conditions (Fraser, 2003). Unlike the state, networks are decentred and so more enduring, self-organising and so more flexible, and more embedded in civil society and so more responsive to its needs. Such a discourse does not comprehend the possibility that global policy networks are as much a

cause as a consequence of the present state of the global political economy, or that transnational social forms have a longer history than the discourse implies.

Moreover, as William Walters (2004: 40) points out, in a similar way as 'civilisation' underpinned much political thought in the nineteenth century, and 'modernisation' much of the same in the twentieth, so millennial political thought has been underpinned by 'complexity': 'it is argued... the problems we face are more intractable and less amenable to 'top-down' or 'linear' solutions. Complex societies call out for (good) governance, for multilevel, networked, cooperative, and smart alternatives to statist forms of rule.' This discourse naturalises the political forms emerging over recent decades, including global policy networks, invalidating any injustices associated with them while hiding their potentially questionable origins. Without situating global policy networks in their historical and geographical context, and taking account of their conditions of emergence and its implications for their character, we will not be able to understand their significance beyond such reductive and ultimately disempowering imagery.

This paper argues that it is a strength of geographical work on policy transfer that it offers a way out of this normative trap. As will be demonstrated in the first section, the various strands of policy transfer research in geography seek to

elucidate the history, context, and, importantly, power struggles that lie behind instances of the transfer of policy. The section goes on to propose examining the emergence of global policy networks through examining the transfer of policy that they are associated with. Moreover, it argues that achieving a stronger focus on global policy networks will mean a stronger focus on the individual actors and communities that are both a part of fomenting global policy networks and agents driving policy transfer processes. This will require, as Larner and Laurie (2010) suggest, a different methodological orientation with a greater emphasis on ethnographic techniques. This possibility is explored in section three through a discussion of the emergence of one such set of actors: policy consultants. It is argued that through researching the conditions of the emergence of consultants in particular contexts, we can begin to understand the particular shape global policy networks take and how they influence global policy. The paper concludes by reflecting on what this cross-fertilisation can offer for conceptions of global policy networks and for the geographical literature on policy transfer.

II Geographies of Policy Transfer

Geographers' attention to processes of policy transfer is a relatively new phenomenon but the subject has been studied within political science for several

decades, albeit in a number of different guises, including policy diffusion, policy convergence and policy learning. The increasing use of the term policy transfer, intended to denote its active composition by a range of actors as well as its voluntary and involuntary realisation, stems from a widely-cited article by David Dolowitz and David Marsh in which they define it as: 'a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place' (1996: 344). This and subsequent reviews (e.g. Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Dobbin et al., 2007) reveal the extent of both the phenomenon of policy transfer in a globalising world and the amount of work political science has put into studying it.

However, much of this work has been guilty of a tendency to fixate only on the act of transfer while holding the rest of the world still. The focus on transfers between countries often relies on a form of methodological nationalism where the transfer is between two discrete political units whose institutions are coterminous with its territorial borders and does not recognise the importance of institutional formations 'above' and 'below' the national scale (Stone, 2004; McCann, 2011), or consider how acts of transfer are changing the institutional context in which the nation-state exists. The actors involved in policy-making are generally assumed to

be rational actors seeking optimal policy solutions in an increasingly global policy 'marketplace', rather than political actors subject to a wide range of different pressures and situated in shifting organisational fields (Peck and Theodore, 2010a). Even the more subtle conception of bounded rationality for policy-makers (e.g. Larsen, 2002) still reifies them as universally rational in the first instance rather than having their rationality constructed in specific geographical and temporal circumstances.

The following discussion summarises the emerging geographical research programme into policy transfer. While a number of different, often overlapping, and occasionally conflicting, strands exist within this new literature, they all seek to move beyond the overly normative, ahistorical and ungeographical accounts of policy transfer present in the political science literature.

One well-developed strand is concerned with what particular processes of policy transfer can tell us about the political-economic contexts in which the transfers are occurring. Associated especially with the work of Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore and more recently Neil Brenner, this perspective views policy transfer through the lens of neoliberalisation (Peck, 2004; Peck et al., 2010; Peck and Tickell, 2002; England and Ward, 2007). This moves beyond the analysis of *neoliberalism* as a political

philosophy and/or set of market-oriented interventions on the social, economic and political landscape to consider how this landscape is being reconstructed under neoliberal imperatives into a fundamentally altered political settlement that is increasingly difficult to roll back (Peck, 2003; Peck and Theodore, 2010a; Peck and Theodore, 2010b; Peck et al., 2009; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Brenner et al., 2010; Peck et al., 2010).

There is a multi-level analysis that considers at least two general processes. One of these is the establishment of 'ever more deeply interconnected, mutually recursive policy relays within an increasingly transnational field of market-oriented regulatory transfer' (Brenner et al., 2010: 185). This describes the increasingly transnational character of policy-making processes as more and more policy-makers find themselves working in a context where neoliberal, market-oriented policies are communicated as 'best practice' orthodoxy. This is achieved through the construction of 'fast policy' circuits in which various crises in different places are latched onto, exaggerated or invented by actors associated with particular think-tanks, consultancies and international institutions: crises for which their answer is always some variant of neoliberal policy. This is helped by the construction of certain neoliberal policy models that have been instituted elsewhere (usually, but not always, in some 'successful' place other places aspire

to) and packaged up into a transferrable and implementable form. 'Fast' here refers to the speed with which this is done, often overriding traditional and more circumspect policy processes (Peck, 2002; Peck and Theodore, 2010b; Peck and Theodore, 2001).

The second process describes the ongoing reworking of the 'rule regimes' within which policy is made. Not only are policy-makers surrounded by constant messages restating neoliberal 'best practice', but their opportunities for regulatory experimentation and intervention that falls outside of neoliberal parameters are increasingly circumscribed (Brenner et al., 2010; Peck et al., 2010). The financialisation of the economy and freeing of capital from its spatial constraints, the erosion of the tax base, the privatisation of state services and assets, the disciplining of state budgets, and myriad other processes accelerated, if not set in train, by neoliberal policy combine to restrict the options of policy-makers to policies which do not require massive redistributions of wealth but do require the cooperation of hawkish economic elites intent on manoeuvring state power to their advantage. This is a consequence of 'fast policy' not only changing policy but changing the very conditions of the policy process so that the paths that policy is on become ever more dependent on new neoliberal solutions – supplied to them by those same 'fast policy' circuits. Now more than ever new policy concepts which

travel around the world rapidly do so not because they are in any way rolling back neoliberalism, but because they can be implemented on this neoliberalised policy landscape (Peck, 2005; Peck and Theodore, 2010b), meaning they represent at best a mutation rather than a movement on from neoliberalism (Peck et al., 2009).

Moving in from this focus on more generalised processes, a second strand of research starts from the way particular places are constituted within dynamic relational geographies (McCann, 2008; Robinson, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2010; McCann, 2011; Swain, 2006). This perspective draws on two fundamentally geographical insights: the productive dialectic of fixity and flow, expounded particularly by David Harvey (1982) in relation to the geography of capital; and Doreen Massey's (2005) conception of places as situated within numerous cross-cutting relations of varying spatial extensiveness (McCann and Ward, 2010; McCann, 2011). From here policies are understood as mobile objects, produced in this capacity by various actors, from policy entrepreneurs to bureaucrats, who take them from place to place, translating and implementing as they go. These relational connections, which often open up into more permanent channels down which policy knowledge and ideas can flow (Ward, 2006), are constitutive of places in a very real sense through the influence they have on policy formation in them. But policies do not simply exist in spaces of flow: they need to have been implemented

somewhere to qualify as best practice – a fact implicitly recognised in the tendency to associate particular policy models with places they are perceived as originating in, such as the ‘Barcelona model’ for urban regeneration, or ‘Vancouverism’ for urban sustainability design (McCann and Ward, 2010). Based on these experiences, policies can be packaged into forms amenable to travel and translation on policy circuits, out of which they can be re-fixed elsewhere, often with different results, and occasionally resulting in a new, mutated policy approach for release back onto the circuit. This dynamic, between the various compulsions making policy move and its need to be situated somewhere to have a form in the first place, comprises an important relational geography connecting up various places and (re)constituting them in a globalising world.

The third developing strand often overlaps considerably with the previous strand but focuses most intently on the transferring policies themselves. This perspective considers how particular kinds of connections are forged before, during and after policy transfer to form socio-material assemblages in which particular policies are (successfully or unsuccessfully) realised (McFarlane, 2009; Prince, 2010a). This reflects the socio-materiality of policy itself. Policy comes in a number of forms: apart from the policy documents, they can be advocated, described, evaluated or discussed in books, reports, documentaries, websites, blogs, press releases,

newspaper reports and so on (see also McCann, 2008). As already highlighted, certain policies will also be pushed by a range of actors, such as politicians, academics and consultants, in a number of social forums, including conferences, seminars, meetings and even informal chats over coffee. The implementation of a policy in a particular place involves the further proliferations and arrangements of materials and people to translate and realise it in a new context. This is a complex and hard to control process. The directions policy goes in, and which policies are transferred, cannot necessarily be read off the intentions of interests close to the policy process: how socio-material aspects of the process shape the outcome need to be attended to.

Importantly, this perspective is insistently focused on the technical. Socio-material assemblages are held together through the construction of relatively enduring relations and often this means the abstraction of disparate and distant objects from their social context into technical systems in which they can be lined-up, compared, contrasted and made commensurable (Prince, 2010a; Collier and Ong, 2005; Larner and Le Heron, 2002a; Larner and Le Heron, 2002b; McCann, 2008; McCann, 2011; McFarlane, 2011). The various statistical tables, diagrams, spreadsheets, charts and other abstracting and universalising technologies which enable comparisons and translations to be made with ease bring these objects, and

the places that contain them, into a virtual space of comparison (Larner and Le Heron, 2002b) where policy learning, exchange and transfer can take place. The assembly of these technical systems across geographical space enables particular objects that draw on and refer to them (such as policies that claim to drive growth in the technical GDP measures that virtually all countries now judge their economic affairs by) to travel relatively unproblematically from place to place (Prince, 2010a; Collier and Ong, 2005). The assembling of socio-materialities and technical systems across space is a fraught, multi-directional process. The resulting assemblages in which policies circulate are not necessarily what anyone intended, and their durability can range from short-lived to relatively enduring. They do allow us, however, insight into the day-to-day work of constructing geographies of governance, and a perspective on the often uneven and chaotic geographies that result (Allen and Cochrane, 2010).

This last point speaks to the value of work on policy transfer conducted in the geographical literature. It moves beyond political science conceptions by making history and context more central, rather than treating them as background. Policy transfer is a manifestation of processes occurring that have deep historical roots and/or which shape the wider context they are situated in. It has also provided a way out of what McCann (2011) calls the 'literalist trap' of much political science

work: the tendency to reify the places policy transfer occurs between by fetishising the idea of policy transfer itself, rather than thinking about transfers as one of many forms through which relations between places have been constructed or altered throughout history. More generally, the geographical approach to policy transfer shows a concern for understanding policy transfer as a fundamentally geographical process through which we can interrogate the spatialised and historicised construction of what Gramsci would call hegemony, or what Foucault would call a 'regime of truth'.

Of course, these two concepts (hegemony and regime of truth) are not necessarily compatible, and nor are the different geographical approaches to policy transfer discussed above, despite their frequent overlaps. But both hegemony and regime of truth try to capture the particular notions of legitimate knowledge, expertise, authority and 'common sense' that are valorised in a particular social formation at a particular time. With the processes we associate with globalisation continuing to change the foundations on which such regimes are constructed, studies of policy transfer can help us to think about both what exactly is being constructed and the foundations they are being constructed on. Global policy networks need to be recognised as not just policy-making capacities getting stretched across global space so that they can link into and take advantage of all the most appropriate

sources of knowledge, but as social forms in which *what* the most appropriate sources of knowledge for making policy are constituted. They are one of the manifestations of new geographies of governance, not simply because they make policy, but because they are part of the construction of regimes of truth.

Accounting for the nature and shape of social forms like global policy networks will mean widening the focus of policy transfer studies to consider the networks and communities taking shape around the transfers. This is already occurring: while the strands I have identified above start from political-economic context, place and policy; a fourth strand, and the strand I will contribute to in the rest of this paper, takes as its starting point the people involved in the transfers. Larner and Laurie (2010), for example, focus on the role of mid-level engineers from the telecommunications and water industries of New Zealand and Britain respectively in spreading ideas and practices associated with privatisation. After these processes had seen many of these individuals learn first-hand how they worked, and even though it had resulted in many of them losing their jobs, they were able to go on to spread the privatisation gospel in places like Eastern Europe and Latin America by providing advice and support for the privatisation of those industries in those places. They argue that 'geographical accounts of policy transfer would benefit from a methodological imperative that draws future analysis away from

the current focus on publically available texts towards ethnographic approaches which would allow further interrogation of embodied expertise' (Larner and Laurie, 2010: 225). McCann (2011) concurs, arguing that while sometimes the political science literature is guilty of focusing too intently on the typologies of actors involved in policy transfer, it is still necessary to identify who transfers policies precisely because this is always a social process. The next section will consider one such group of policy actors, consultants, and how we might conceptualise their place in global policy networks and other geographies of governance.

III Consultants as Policy Actors

If we are to use the study of policy transfer as a way into understanding the dynamics of the emerging structures of internationalised policy regimes, such as global policy networks, then it is necessary to consider in greater depth the actors involved. These policy actors are not isolated, rational actors learning in a free market of policy ideas, 'they are sociologically complex actors, located in (shifting) organizational and political fields, whose identities and professional trajectories are often bound up with the policy positions and fixes that they espouse' (Peck and Theodore, 2010a: 170). Getting to grips with their situation and subjectification

within policy processes is necessary to understand their form, their actions, and the discourses they mobilise. This section will consider a key set of policy actors who are often involved in policy transfer processes: policy consultants. It argues that they are not simply a natural response to the political economy in which they exist, but have been shaped by the conditions of their emergence. It seems likely that as they become increasingly globalised that these characteristics will in turn shape the global networks they are a part of. The section concludes with a discussion of how an ethnographic method can provide insights into how consultants participate in policy transfer processes.

For the purposes of this paper, policy consultants are understood as non-state, private sector, profit-driven actors that are nevertheless involved in the policy process through (usually) contractual arrangements with state agencies. This differentiates them from policy-makers that sit within the bureaucracy, think-tanks and NGOs – which are non-state but non-profit, and research institutes such as universities – which are non-state but are not guided by contracts in the research they do. In reality, such lines are not clearly defined: each of these actors, including consultancies, cross them in different ways (on think-tanks, for example, see Stone, 2007), and many consultants are housed in universities, think-tanks and (for the government department contracting them) foreign bureaucracies. The

particular set of dynamics that structure their interventions in the policy process, however, which revolve around being profit-driven and formally independent, mark out their distinctive place in policy-making structures. Consultants who have influenced the policy process in a variety of places include management consultancies aligned with the 'big four' multinational accounting firms; smaller, more focused consultancies who perform contract work for particular government departments and ministries; and individual or small group consultants who do occasional contract work in their area of expertise in addition to their usual work in a university or elsewhere.

Consultants have been involved in policy-making in a variety of countries, particularly since the 1980s. The UK, France Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Martin, 1998; Saint-Martin, 2000; Hodge and Bowman, 2006; Hood and Jackson, 1991; Boston et al., 1991) have all employed policy consultants at varying degrees and for different purposes since this time. The early 1990s also saw consultancies closely involved in the reconstruction of Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism (Wedel, 2001; Swain, 2006). Consultants have been used in a variety of ways. Martin's (1998) study of the use of consultants by the Hawke Labor Government of 1980s Australia examines the independent policy reviews conducted by outside consultants on policy areas as diverse as the country's

HIV/AIDS strategy, immigration and housing. The New Zealand government used consultants in the management of government restructuring. Mascarenhas (1991) notes that during the second term of the Fourth Labour Government from 1987 to 1990, NZ\$72.5 million was spent on consultants from merchant banks, share-broking firms and management consultancies to oversee the corporatisation and privatisation of a number of state assets.

The UK too has made extensive use of consultants in the last few decades, with the amount spent estimated to have reached £1bn annually by the end of the 2000s (BBC, 2010).¹ Denis Saint-Martin (2000) shows that the use of consultants really gained momentum under the Conservative Thatcher Government of the 1980s. Influenced by public choice theory, which claimed that the public service was an unaccountable hive of vested interest, and fervent in their admiration of the 'wealth creating' private sector, the administration turned to the (then) 'big six' private sector management consultancies for advice on how the public service could be restructured to deliver their services for less while also undermining the alleged gravy train of the public sector which, they claimed, had made it inefficient.

Not only was the door now open to private sector consultants to get government contracts, but their influence meant that the way that the public service was run

began to change, shaping how consultancies would engage with the government in the future. The consultancies were at the centre of the rolling out of what has been called the New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991). Also known as 'entrepreneurial governance' (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), it was based on the principles of introducing competition to service provision, responsabilising the heads of government agencies, setting targets for them to achieve, and rewarding success while punishing failure. One necessary aspect was the rolling out of a calculative system of performance measurement, with the use of benchmarking and audit forcing, in principle, service providers to become accountable to whether they meet their targets within their set budget.

While many of the perverse outcomes of this approach have been well documented (e.g. Power, 1997; Shore and Wright, 1999), they continued to be developed under the Blair Labour government where the use of especially quantitative evidence was extended from just verification to become central to the development of 'evidence-based policy'. Defending existing budgets or justifying new spending would, again in principle, depend on being able to produce evidence that it would generate the desired results. As government departments often did not have the skills or independence to produce this evidence, the gap was there for consultants to insert themselves into. The extent to which policy developed during this period

was truly 'evidence-based' is debatable (Marmot, 2004), but this indicates the kind of political context consultancies now operate in, particularly those that have emerged in the wake of the original interventions of the 'big six'. Without the ability to speak to the rationales that inform these political processes, and without the technical skills to produce information that is usable in this context, they would not be able to get government contracts (Prince, 2010b). This highlights that policy consultancies should not be thought of simply as repositories of expertise for government to call on; they are specific organisational forms that are shaped by the conditions of their emergence.

If the emerging global consulting industry is an important vector driving policy transfer, then we need to recognise that its form and the nature of its interventions, involvements and engagements with policy transfer processes will be shaped by the conditions in which it is emerging. By linking this with their situation in global policy networks, we can historicise and spatialise (beyond the simplistic 'global') the latter. This enables a critical perspective on the particular shape of a global policy network and the kinds of interventions it makes. Importantly, because the consultancies are situated in the conditions of their emergence, this does not effect a separation between global policy networks and national policy-making contexts (e.g. Stone, 2008; Reinicke, 1999), instead

insisting that their emergence be recognised as a consequence of ongoing change in policy-making structures that cut across a variety of scales.

Nevertheless, a focus on structures of governance can reproduce some of the problems of the 'good governance' literature. Work on policy consultancies is thin on the ground and that which exists tends to emphasise their impact and position in governance structures. But inherited with this perspective is a tendency to naturalise the place and role of consultants in the same way that recent shifts in governance are naturalised: as an inevitable outcome of the growing complexity and pace of our world. For example, Martin (1998: 204) concluded in his study that '(t)he primary reason why consultants are increasingly used in the policy-making process is that the context of Australian government has become more turbulent, and therefore more problematic... consultants' work provides a shield which insulates government and administration from the immediate demands of a critical and demanding public.' This perspective reifies this 'turbulent' world but brackets consultants out from it, treating them as a response to the turbulence, rather than as integral to its reproduction as turbulent.

Even more nuanced accounts of consultancy involvement in state restructuring and policy-making, such as that of Saint-Martin (2000), rely on a normative picture

of the structures of governance they are a part of – one in which recognised expertise on particular issues is regularly and naturally deferred to. The resulting critique is also normative, arguing that the use of consultants, whether as independent and unaccountable policy advisors or to control and direct public participation in the policy process, can be undemocratic: a ‘consultocracy’ instead of a democracy (Saint-Martin, 2000; Hodge and Bowman, 2006; Hood and Jackson, 1991). Such criticism may be salient, but legitimated expertise has always been present in democracies. The bureaucracy itself, which the consultancies are changing and reforming in the process of producing the consultocracy, is founded on principles of a professional class with expertise in affairs of state (Du Gay, 2000; Boston, 1995). Shifting the source of that expertise to external policy consultants, so long as it is rationalised by public choice theory and similar discourses, is easily defended by the proponents of the shift. Without understanding how and why consultants do what they do, and especially how they construct their claims to expertise and influence within governance structures, normative critique will struggle to intervene in a meaningful way.

Without a sufficient examination of the actual practices of policy consultancies their presence in the policy process can be easily explained away as rational or natural according to the universal truths consultancies themselves often peddle:

whether this is their indispensability in a 'turbulent' world, or their rational use under public choice theory. The conditions of their emergence are telling in terms of both the political context of their existence and the shape of their interventions in any global policy network they are a part of. NPM, with its emphasis on responsabilisation and visible accountability, is not just a product of the management consultancies used by Thatcher and later Blair but a constitutive feature of their worldview. It renders the world in a very particular way, making it available for analysis, control and intervention (Newman, 2001; Clarke et al., 2000a; Clarke et al., 2000b). When the consultancies producing and using these tools with some success (however defined this might be) enter wider circuits of policy transfer, these tools are a key part of the forms their interventions take. The regime of truth and its associated geography of governance being constructed across space here is defined by the particular changes in power relations these interventions enable and circumscribe.

In methodological terms, going beyond the treatment of consultancies as 'black-boxes' of expertise that are naturally called upon or deferred to means, as Larner and Laurie (2010) argue, moving beyond document analysis and getting inside the organisations. Policy consultancies will present themselves as independent experts, contributing to the policy process at some or all of its different stages,

from agenda-setting through policy formulation, decision-making, implementation to evaluation. Certainly such a schema will probably structure the way that policy consultants think about their work, but an ethnographic approach will draw attention to other things, such as the daily practices, automatic scripts and rules of thumb which structure their engagement with policy. Through interviews, observation and participation the researcher would get the opportunity to (adapting James Scott (1998)) 'see like a consultant.'

The ethnography of a consultancy will require an appropriate orientation. The field of the global policy network that a consultancy might be a part of will be too vast to expect to study in its entirety, but the office of the consultancy will be too small if the focus remains on internal dynamics within the black box. One possibility is for the ethnography to be multi-sited, considering as Burawoy and his colleagues (2000: 5) do in their 'global ethnography' the 'forces, connections and imaginations' between and within each site. Consultants are the type of actor creating and reproducing connections across sites, such as between sites of American business knowledge and sites of British public management, and producing the global imaginaries within them that make that connection sensible. Another approach is to identify and select 'small sites that open windows onto larger processes of political transformation' (Shore and Wright, 2011: 12).

Consultancies are spaces where bodies and texts constantly circulate in and out, with that circulation and the knowledge contained within them being manipulated and controlled, although not always successfully or predictably. As the circulations change, the consultant's office becomes a window onto the wider networks they are a part of.

The connections the consultants make are important, and so are the power dynamics that flow through them. An ethnography would mean placing a consultancy within their networks: who they get their contracts from, who they go to for information, who they subcontract particular tasks to, who they form alliances with on permanent or temporary bases. But ethnography would also provide an insight into the networks within the networks: the personal relationships, trust, reciprocity and even deceptions involved in forming and reproducing those more formalised networks. The geographer-ethnographer would pursue those networks across space, distinguishing the flow of resources and knowledge between the consultancy and its various contractors, clients and colleagues. They can map this out to provide a picture of a global policy network and the role that the consultant has within it, and offer a sense of the forces that hold it together. But there is more to the work of the consultant than this.

Work on the ethnography of the state can help us here (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Mountz, 2004; Mountz, 2003; Gill, 2010; Sharma and Gupta, 2006). This literature has emphasised that the line between the 'state' and the 'non-state' breaks down the closer we move towards it. Mountz (2003: 628) highlights the interpenetration of state and society in the everyday: 'civil servants work, live, study, and send their children to school and daycare within the communities around them. They rely upon social systems of support and develop expectations in relation to their understanding of what it means to be a citizen and what rights and privileges are entailed therein.' Policy consultants are in themselves a testament to the blurriness of the line between state and society, if not its lack altogether, through their straddling of the private and public sector in the work they do. But the idea of the state remains, alongside the idea of the expertise, so often provided by consultants, that modern states rely on (Mitchell, 2002).

Reproducing the domain of the state, and the domain of expertise, is a fundamental task of the policy consultant. Understanding this means recognising that policy is not an objective entity directed at a problem to produce an expected outcome. Rather, policy is an assemblage of texts, bodies and networks trying to conceive and create order in a chaotic world (Shore and Wright, 2011). Central to this is the 'state effect', the idea that there is an overarching entity that is rationally

organising, enforcing and evaluating (Mitchell, 1999; Gill, 2010). The day to day working practice of the policy consultant is to build networks in which expertise and authority is assigned to them as agents of the state, and to do the work of ordering the world by, for example, defining and marking out the stakeholders and effected communities of a given policy and giving them a place inside or outside the network, but always through connections and interfaces that shape the possible engagements of the latter. For example, through audit procedures which discipline a particular group (Shore and Wright, 1999), or through the community consultation sessions consultants often run which allow communities to 'have their say' but always in circumscribed circumstances (Kothari, 2005). Moreover, by successfully delineating themselves as experts within these networks, they gain the legitimacy necessary to build networks further afield, and to extend that state effect across global policy networks. It is the practices of network building, and how these are linked to processes of policy transfer, that an ethnography can focus on.

Further to this, however, consultants are, almost by definition, concerned with knowledge. It is through the provision of expert knowledge that consultants make their living and the ethnographer should be concerned with how they use knowledge to shape, direct, inform and discipline: how they produce and mobilise

knowledge to build networks. For example, both the disciplinary apparatus of NPM and the requirements of evidence-based policy requires the production of knowledge that is primarily quantitative. But any quantitative science requires qualitative work in the first instance to classify, define, delineate, and order the world in such a way that it is amenable to counting and measurement (Holmes and Marcus, 2005). The quantitative moment follows a qualitative moment, and qualitative moments are always messier and harder to grasp than they are made to appear. The quantitative knowledge hides this reality: it tidies up the mess. This work of tidying up is central to how consultants order the world into particular policy logics. And the knowledge they produce, particularly in quantitative form, can become the kind of universalising knowledge (c.f. Tsing, 2005) that would seem to be able to order the world anywhere so long as those knowledge producing techniques are reproducible. So consultants – these producers, managers and mobilisers of knowledge – play a central role in making global connections by using their techniques to create equivalence between different places, making policy transfer, and global policy networks, possible (Larner and Le Heron, 2002b; McCann, 2008).

It is in the production of policy knowledge in particular that ethnographic methodologies can complement existing approaches to policy transfer that tends

to focus on the policies themselves and their public promotion. The generally slick presentation of the success or desirability of particular policy programmes (or the equally slick tales of policy failure and undesirability) is an area that policy-makers and the consultants they work with put a lot of work into. Studying them directly can tell us a lot about the logics that structure these programmes and the networks associated with them, but by revealing the realities of the production of knowledge behind this more of the cracks the presentation papers over can be brought to light. But ethnographies will not just be about critique; certainly consultants will be working towards particular logics, but ethnographic accounts can give them greater voice in the often hostile critical social science literature by showing the constraints and pressures they work under, the resulting technical and ethical compromises they make, and the greyscale moral world that emerges.

Rather than treating consultancies as 'black boxes' of expertise that are naturally called upon or deferred to, by focusing on how they produce knowledge, develop and maintain relationships, mobilise resources, organise events and work to include and exclude certain groups, people and ideas, we can ascertain the role they play in assembling the geographies of governance that increasingly cut across international space. And rather than putting this down to an unproblematic assumption of the consultancies' expertise which we can only judge in terms of its

perceived effect on democracy, politics or economy, we can begin to consider how that expertise is produced and maintained through the modalities of power (Allen, 2003) the consultancies mobilise, or have mobilised through them.

IV Conclusion

Geographical work on policy transfer has a lot to offer our understanding of the internationalisation of policy regimes. In particular, through the way studies of policy transfer by definition focus in on the dynamics through which policy regimes change and take shape across space, they can throw light onto the day to day work that goes into the internationalisation of policy regimes and the construction of systems of governance as they emerge. The critical slant of recent geographical work also widens the scope of policy transfer studies in comparison to that conducted in the political science tradition by situating policy transfer processes within the ongoing construction of hegemony and regimes of truth across space. In addition, the variety of critical perspectives on the topic within geography itself suggests this is a territory where geographers will be able to have productive conversations regarding shifts in how we are governed today.

This paper has argued that the contribution of geography can go further to consider the kinds of global policy networks that are precipitating around policy transfer processes and creating a space for further policy transfers in the future. The 'new world order', as Slaughter (2004) describes it, is one marked by networks of government actors, to which we can add non-government actors such as NGOs, academics, lobbyists and consultants. These are networks that cut across international space, creating communities of actors that are situated in their national political contexts but also in these international networks where their practices are often shaped, even if not entirely directed. The distinctive perspective of geographical policy transfer work helps to overcome the overly normative approach scholars that begin from the networks themselves (such as Slaughter) often use, while highlighting the dynamics that are at the heart of network construction.

The furthering of geography's contribution to policy transfer studies means a broadening of the methods used in the discipline, extending the current dominant focus on documents and discourses to include more ethnographic methods that consider the actors who constitute these networks in greater depth (Larner and Laurie, 2010; McCann, 2011). One strategy suggested by this paper is to focus on a particular group or set of actors, work to understand the conditions in which they

emerged as relevant to policy making and transfer processes, and try to grasp the particular practices they use to build the policy networks in which policy transfer is able to happen. The example considered in this paper, policy consultants, emerged in a range of countries as relevant to the policy process during the 1980s where they advocated and instituted the 'New Public Management'. Since this time, consultants have remained relevant to policy processes, and are often responsible for enabling these policies to travel across space. Through ethnographic techniques geographical researchers will be able to see how this history shapes the interventions of consultants in policy transfer and policy network-building processes, and how these interventions have evolved and changed over time. Moreover, by focusing on the often unheralded foot soldiers of changing governance structures – consultants, technocrats, bureaucrats, researchers and so on – geographers can contribute to the painting of the picture of how governance change is achieved that gets inside the big stories of globalisation to consider the necessary day to day work that shapes it.

The recent global financial crisis of 2007-09 and the political response to it suggest we may be in the midst of a period of significant political change, one where a new set of skills are going to emerge as dominant and potentially displace 'New Public Management' approaches (Hendrikse and Sidaway, 2010; Newman and Clarke,

2009). Judging by the articles in a recent special issue of *Antipode* (2010), what will emerge will not be clear for some time, both in its form and its implications. Certainly we should not be abandoning efforts to understand the geographies of governance that came before the crisis as the shape of these still dictates how the crisis is being dealt with, and so will influence what kind of political settlement occurs. As the geographies of governance undergo significant upheaval, tracing the networks of actors involved, from politicians to academics to consultants, and how they shape and have been shaped by those geographies, continues to be an important task.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been presented in seminars at the School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University in September 2010 and at the School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester in December 2010. I would like to thank the seminar attendees for their questions and comments. I would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions. Responsibility for the arguments in the paper is my own.

¹ The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government elected in 2010 has pledged to cut the amount spent on consultants by government, suggesting this

figure is a high one – at the very least in terms of what the electorate would think appropriate.

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