

The international dissemination of policy norms in the water sector: the South African National Water Act as a case in point?

Magalie Bourblanc, PhD
CIRAD UMR G-EAU, Montpellier/
CEEPA, University Pretoria

Presentation outline

- Empirical puzzle
- State of the Art with Policy Transfer Studies
- Research Question
- Hypo. linked to a specialized literature review
- Research method
- Conclusions

Empirical puzzle

- The Ecological Reserve as the only water right = an ambitious Act from an environmental perspective in a country whose priority challenge is to redress past inequalities in access to water
- the decision to create decentralized river basin organizations (CMAs) in a country where since the 1950s most of the rivers are interconnected through massive inter basin transfers

We wonder to what extent the introduction of such provisions might be linked to the influence of international norms and so-called “best practices” over the NWA

Policy Transfer Studies

- Emphasis on “reception” dimension of policy transfers
- the least studied is the making of international norms: not only their diffusion but their production too
- few research works focusing on South-South Transfer or South-North ones.
- Lack of historical depth in analyses
- Discussing the heuristic value of Policy Transfer concept:
 - ✓ the false idea that two ideal-type models exist separately, one that is national/domestic and the other one which is international
 - ✓ the making of policy at the global/transnational level without any reference to a national model

Research Question

- Focus on the international/transnational dissemination of policy norms, paying a particular attention to knowledge **production** and diffusion at **both international and national levels**.
- How did these two provisions (ER and CMA) get introduced in the Water Act?

Hypotheses

- ER and a North –South policy transfer (“natural state of reference”; perennial rivers in the Northern hemisphere and flow variability in SA)
- ER: to store more waters during raining years and thus better maintain a constant flow= ecological reserve would serve to reinforce the long tradition of big hydraulic infrastructures?
- IWRM and the functionalist explanation
- International donors’ community variable
- IWRM and Domestic variable : 1970s and 1986

Research Method

- Policy transfer as an *explanans* among others
- How to notice a policy transfer? Microsociology
- Comparing as a research method (comparing a less widely diffused norm)
- Relevance of case selection (**non-diffusion within the same policy prescription package**)
- How to study « transnational actors coalition »?

Conclusions

- a South-North policy transfer? (with UK: holistic approach; Australia; Tanzania)
- Explaining implementation challenges
- Unravel mechanisms of policy « transfer » and « norms dissemination »