Policy mobilities, territorial knowledge dynamics and the role of KIBS: Exploring conceptual synergies of formerly discrete approaches☆

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ABSTRACT

Although contemporary policy making is substantially affected by consultants, little is known about the interconnection of their role inside policy making networks and their key product – knowledge. This paper matches the approaches on Policy Mobilities (PM) and Territorial Knowledge Dynamics (TKD) to fill this theoretical gap. By exploring the synergies of both concepts, a research agenda is suggested that enables to investigate the multifacetted entanglements of knowledge and policy making dynamics as well as what stake consultants have in this complex assemblage. Accordingly, this paper claims appreciation of 'variegated consultocracies' rather than global homogeneity of consultants' engagement in policy making processes by explicating better integration of 'scale, 'time', and actors' embeddedness into PM. The paper thus primarily aims to provide a solid theoretical and methodological basis for exploring the complex dynamics consultants take part in, and how they in turn impact policy making processes.

1. Introduction

Since the approach of Policy Mobilities challenged the rather unsatisfactory outcomes of Policy Transfer literature, a huge amount of new and revealing insights on contemporary policy making has been gained. Especially the accelerating global dynamics with which policies are mobilized, implemented, and changed were object to numerous articles (e.g. McCann and Ward, 2012b; Temenos and McCann, 2012; Cook and Ward, 2012). This corresponds with what Peck (2011) required by emphasizing that it is not rational decision making that dominate modern politics, but a multi-facet and contested system characterized by power relations and personal interest (McCann, 2013). With the development of 'Good Governance' (Peck, 2011: 777) in which politicians work closely with private sector experts, a new group of players stepped in the political arena occupying central positions of modern policy making (McCann, 2008; Prince, 2010a). In spite of their vital role in today's political systems and the Policy Mobilities approach, relatively little is known about the way that these experts operate in detail, which strategies they pursue, or how they bias politics indirectly and directly. There are some decent exceptions dealing with these actors (e.g. Prince, 2014a, 2014b; McCann and Ward, 2010). However, an in-depth examination of experts' influence on policy mobilities lacks to date and remains a black box in most studies.

In this paper, we argue that it is necessary to get a deep

understanding of policy making and knowledge related dynamics originating from experts' work on multiple scales and their interconnections to other involved policy actors. Besides existing empirical lacks we want to highlight and respond to a missing adequate theoretical framing in the Policy Mobilities approach. Up to now, there is no frame that enables to grasp the core product of experts – policy knowledge. Hence, we suggest filling this theoretical gap by employing the Territorial Knowledge Dynamics (TKD) approach (Crevoisier and Jeannerat, 2009; Halkier et al., 2012; Manniche, 2012; Strambach and Halkier, 2013; James et al., 2016). Although this approach developed from geographical innovation research, numerous synergies between PM and TKD can be assumed as both theories focus on the success (and failure) of products in contested multi-scalar markets. The territorial knowledge dynamics approach allows investigation from the individual to the global level and enables, by connecting processes of knowledge change (learning) and policy mutation, examinations of policies over time. In other words, the present notion of policy mutation is extended by a temporal dimension that has been absent to date. The paper, therefore, examines possible synergies of these formerly discrete approaches to overcome existing theoretical and empirical lacks. Building up on this, we derive a proposal of integrating knowledge dynamics in the Policy Mobilities approach to better frame future empiricism in this field.

With this in mind, we address the problem in four sections. Section

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two specifies the approach of PM. It is argued that although investigations on the multi-scalar processes of policy making are frequently advocated, only little is known about policy knowledge, its underlying micro-dynamics and what specific role consultants play in this field. Based on this, section three shows promising approaches of contemporary innovation and KIBS (Knowledge Intensive Business Services) research, that may fill the theoretical gaps revealed before. In section four, a mutual theoretical enrichment of TKD and PM will be suggested embracing the epistemological synergies of conceptual similarities and presenting substantial complements of the two approaches. Establishing this theoretical basis allows further research to shed more light on consultants' work and particularly on their employment of knowledge in the multi-facet field of Policy Mobilities.

2. Essentials of policy mobilities

In the last decades, multiple debates on political science theories on Policy Transfer revealed that to some extent this orthodox concept increasingly suffers from deficient explanatory power (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Exemplarily, Evans and Davies (1999) tried to introduce a more holistic view by combining agency aspects, on the one hand, and the wider structures those agents and their actions are embedded in, on the other hand. It turned out that this 'multi-level approach' was indeed beneficial to firmly expand knowledge about Policy Transfer. Even though the theory's structuralistic character did still not tackle important aspects of interconnections between both agency and structure (Marsh and Sharman, 2009: 275), the involvement of new elements in Policy Transfer ushered remarkable theoretic progress leading to the contemporary social constructivist Policy Mobilities approach (McCann and Ward, 2012b). Although PM assumed progressively shape, it is rather a dynamically evolving than a static or final framework for analysis embracing all aspects topically connected to the notions of policy *assemblages*, *mobilities* and *mutations* that dominate today's geographic literature in this field (Temenos and McCann, 2013; McCann, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). Given the fact that processes of policy movement are highly intricate, Policy Mobilities offers a nearly all-embracing theorization of grasping this complexity. Accordingly, McCann (2013:6) defines Policy Mobilities as 'the socio-spatially produced and power-laden inter-scalar process of circulating, mediating, (re)molding, and operationalizing policies, policy models and policy knowledge.' In other words, a differentiated model has been created, focusing on how policies get mobilized, mutate and are realized in places and spaces by the interplay of global flows and local conditions (Swanson, 2013).

2.1. Knowledge and policy mobilities

Policy knowledge – i.e. substantial knowledge about how to solve a specific local or regional problem through appropriate strategies/activities – in PM is considered only one aspect in a wider field that is constitutive for a resulting policy. In contrast, reputation ascribed to specific actors or approved policy contents from elsewhere is perceived far more decisive for creating policies following an established hegemonic 'truth' (McCann, 2008). Yet, multiple studies see that the various interconnections between the two spheres – knowledge and reputation – lead to policies' successful mobilization, mutation and contextualization. The term '*assemblage*' appreciates these interconnections and therefore labels a constructivist way of thinking the composition of 'things' in general. It thus "encourage[s] both an attention to the composite and relational character of policies […] and also to the various social practices that gather, or draw together diverse elements of the world into relatively stable and coherent 'things'" (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011: 124; Anderson et al., 2012). Awareness of those compositions' unexpectedness and non-linearity is also integrated into the serviceable definition of 'assemblage' formulated by Allen and Cochrane (2007), as they accentuate the interconnections, dependencies and inducements of the several elements involved in

developing a certain way of governance; also transferrable to the social creation of policies or other entities. They state that "increasingly, it would seem that there is little to be gained about [urban or] regional governance as a territorial arrangement when a number of the political elements assembled […] are 'parts' of elsewhere, representatives of professional authority, expertise, skills and interests drawn together to move forward varied agendas and programmes […] There is […] an *interplay* of forces where a range of actors mobilize, enroll, translate, channel, broker and bridge in ways that make different kinds of government possible" (Allen and Cochrane, 2007: 1171).

Picking up these notions and following Prince (2012a: 198), policies can be considered 'as assemblages of texts, bodies and the networks they are creating'. In fact, he also highlights the gathering of different elements that lead to the result of a certain policy being more than just a bunch of texts on how to handle a specific problem. Insofar, the interplay between behavioral implications of involved actors which are in turn shaped by the circumstances they are embedded in, as well as their social linkages set the epistemological frame for investigating contemporary policy making processes.

However, although knowledge is considered an important factor in policy making processes, it is rather undertheorized in the PM approach. Recent studies primarily focus on political competition and struggle as origins for policy mobilities. As one example, Gotham (2014) highlighted the importance of competition and emulation of cities or regions as 'mechanisms' for policy mutation activities. The study indeed clarifies the inherently power-laden processes that emerged during the functional shift of the 'enterprise zone policy model' – developed for economic development – to an efficient disaster-devastated area policy. Yet, its in-depth analysis concentrates on socio-spatial processes that were central to this transition, without appreciation of learning processes and experience gathering during the policy's local implementations. Frequently knowledge is regarded as taken-for-granted and pervasive through the existence of globally acting consultants (Cook and Ward, 2012). In fact, this undifferentiated perception stands in sharp contrast to contemporary literature on geographical innovation research that conceptualize knowledge as the 'socially constructed outcome of interactive learning processes, communication and mutual understanding among the actors' (Strambach, 2012: 1846). Drawing on this, the central position of consultants in PM as knowledge mediators in policy making networks necessitates theoretical and empirical endorsement to fill this scientific gap.

2.2. Space and policy mobilities

In Policy Mobilities assemblage thinking is also applied to the understanding of space, place and scale. Frequently, specific arenas are appreciated beneficial for examining the various and globally stretched dynamics and processes of policy making. Spaces characterized and produced by conflating processes of multiple scales are in focus of most empiricism in PM appreciating their assembled constitution. In these regards, cities are esteemed compositions of the 'previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing, […] open and […] internally multiple' (Massey, 1991, 2005: 141) combined with Harvey's (1982, 1985) ideas about the tensional but productive relatedness of capital's fixity and mobility. In fact, this consideration implicates the mediating work of actors like politicians and consultants offering policy packages as moveable solution to local problems and therefore creating relational proximity between cities as these are consequently impacted by the same political strategies (Peck, 2002; Peck and Theodore, 2010a; Robinson, 2011a).

In these regards, another important aspect of policy mobility is the production of so called '*globalizing micro-spaces*' originally inaugurated by Larner and Le Heron (2002: 765). Evoked by policy agents yielding their specific expertise, skills and interests, these micro-spaces considerably affect the outcome of policy making processes. The term 'globalizing' is appropriate as the co-presence of actors and face-to-face