



Preface: Policy mobilities – geographical perspectives on policies on the move

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1 Introducing policy mobilities

The topic of policy mobilities has emerged as one of the major strands in scientific communities interested in the diffusion, adaptation, and resonance of policies in the global age (Temenos and McCann, 2013; McCann, 2011). Inspired by the mobility turn in the social sciences (Sheller and Urry, 2006), policy mobility studies focus on the governing practices of policies including their “mutations” (Peck, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010) and the practices of policymakers and individuals emerging in resonance with the policy. Particular attention has been given to the contestation (Liu, 2017) and failure of policy mobilities (Lovell, 2019, 2017). The focus on failure underlines the fact that the mobilities of policies are no longer studied from an effectiveness or best-practice vantage point but rather in the context of critical scholarship seeking to unravel the hidden logics, power relations, and inequalities that can emerge through policy mobilities.

Human geographers have done a great deal in laying the conceptual foundation of this interdisciplinary discourse (in alphabetical order): Nigel Clark (University of Lancaster), Heather Lovell (University of Tasmania), Eugene McCann (Simon Fraser University), Jamie Peck (University of British Columbia), Cristina Temenos (University of Manchester), Nik Theodore (University of Illinois), and Kevin Ward (University of Manchester). Especially these authors have elaborated on the ontological and methodological questions regarding policy mobilities as a lens through which social life, in particular in an urban agglomeration, is shaped by policy discourses and practical interventions. Geographers also highlighted the particular geographies of policy mobilities and argued that the directions and movements are expressions of power relations. Despite the emphasis on issues of power and governance in the context of policymaking, it re-

mains an unsatisfactory state of affairs that despite growing interest in policy mobilities in cities and regions beyond the United States, Australia, and the European Union, scholars from countries in the Global South have so far had little involvement in the debate. This raises elementary concerns with regard to scientific-knowledge production in human geography (Müller, 2021).

In this preface, I would like to shed light on a few scholarly strands of the debate with regard to policy domains, the time–space dimension of policy mobilities, and the failure of policy mobilities. It is important to note that the articles of this special issue were published online in 2017–2018, whereas the printed version of the special theme is being issued 5 years later. This provides the unique opportunity to consider the resonance of the theme articles and to evaluate their impact in the policy mobility debate.

2 Characteristics and trends of the policy mobility debate

In the beginning of the debate and still today, the policy domain the most frequently addressed has been urban-development policy, such as transport or energy infrastructure (Carr and Hesse, 2020; Wood, 2020; Levenda, 2019). The reason why the topic of policy mobilities is dominantly a phenomenon of urban governance is the inclination of urban planners to seek and apply comparisons and best practices not only in national contexts but also on the international scale assuming that cities share similar problems and can benefit from the experiences of others. Moreover, science has reinforced this tendency via practical research projects (with international teams, cross-national comparative studies, etc.). The fact that we perceive only little cross-border policy mobility in rural-peripheral areas also has something to do with the scientific occupation of these “left behind places”

(Leyschon, 2021). In recent years, development policy has concentrated primarily on economic-growth cores which are located mostly in urban agglomerations. This scientific focus has contributed greatly to policy comparison and exchange. Recently, policy mobilities have extended their views to regional and more peripheral settings (Andersson and Grundel, 2021) dealing with non-urban-specific policy domains, such as green economic policies.

The second aspect deals with the temporal and spatial scales of policy mobilities. When the debate emerged, the focus was clearly on recent, up-to-date policies which could be examined with the help of various qualitative methods (Peck and Theodore, 2010). However, the research perspective of mobile policies is not limited to the present. Hence, the concept was applied to case studies of historical policies (Cook et al., 2014; Craggs and Neate, 2017), which interestingly stretch beyond the typical case studies located in North America and Europe. These studies are based on archival research which can be an invaluable tool, allowing for examining “a particular window on the geographies of earlier times” (Roche, 2010:174), especially times which cannot be explored through “direct contact” with involved policymakers and planners (Hoggart et al., 2002). Besides the time scope of policy mobilities, there are specific spatial configurations of policy circulation which allow researchers to examine not only policy mutations but also the distances, scales, and socially constructed spaces associated with these mobilities.

The third aspect, which relates the idea of immobilities of policies (Malone, 2019), addresses the interpretation of policy outcomes stressing that definitions of failure and success can be fluid and rhetorically weaponized for political gain (Temenos and Lauermaun, 2020). Whereas policy mobilities in the beginning were focused on successful policy transfers, the contestation (Liu, 2017) and failure of policy mobilities (Lovell, 2019, 2017) have become more central in the academic debate. Lovell indicates that not only successful policies but also negative lessons travel, making a plea for the “geographies of worst practice policies” and examining how far negative policy lessons travel and whether their mobility and effect is substantially different to the best practice (Lovell, 2019:46). These analyses are supported by the integration of concepts of the political and social sciences, such as science-and-technology studies, governmentality (Mattissek and Sturm, 2017), and the notion of a dispositive (Ortegel, 2017). Taking this stand, policy mobilities become a conceptual lens through which policymaking in the global age can be critically examined.

3 Contributions of this special issue

The perspective of policy mobilities as an expression of power relations and negotiations is like an invisible link between the four contributions of this theme issue which will be presented in the following paragraph.

In the first contribution, Annika Mattissek and Cindy Sturm show that the emergence of climate change adaptation impacts in urban agglomeration has led to an increase in urban climate policies. They analyze climate protection policies in German cities, integrating discourse studies and work on governmentality with the policy mobility debate. Their study shows that the number of laws and recommendations is growing and that local adaptations of climate policies vary significantly between different cities. The reference to the concept of governmentality is particularly well suited to grasping the discrepancies between discursively produced guidelines and actual planning practices and to conceptualizing these planning practices as effects of competing and often conflicting technologies of government. Annika Mattissek and Cindy Sturm’s paper was cited by Nanja Christina Nagorny-Koring (2019), and Cristina Temenos and John Lauermaun (2020) use Mattissek and Sturm’s case study as an example of shifting categories of success and failure.

The second paper by Moritz Ortegel analyzes policy mobilities as a transformation of dispositives. Michel Foucault’s context-sensitive notion of dispositives stresses the context-specific, heterogeneous relations between linguistic and non-linguistic practices, subjectivities and materialities, and the influence of power/knowledge and sedimented features in policymaking. These sensitivities are valuable contributions to policy mobility research. Ortegel draws on empirical research on “creative-city” policies, which are re-embedded in the European metropolitan region of Nuremberg to illustrate that line of argumentation. He reconstructs and compares related (sub-)dispositives: the mobile creative-city policies and the historical and current contexts of the policies’ re-embedding. Moritz Ortegel’s paper was already cited by various scholars in the field of policy mobilities. Among others, it is mentioned as an example of studies paying consideration to the role of place and context in understanding policy mobilities (Borén et al., 2020), and Heino and Hautala refer to Ortegel (2017) in the context of knowledge mobilization considering processes of disembedding, mobilizing, and re-embedding (Heino and Hautala, 2021).

Thomas Honeck authored the third paper (2018) dealing with different types of policy narratives that influence the trans-local motion of urban policies. The paper first introduces conceptual and methodological recommendations from policy narrative literature to debates on policy mobility. In an empirical section, it then analyzes narratives that support policies on the temporary use of vacant lands and buildings in the German cities of Berlin and Stuttgart. Based on semi-structured interviews with experts and document reviews, the paper finds different, partly competing narratives on temporary use in both case study cities. It identifies their typical elements, categorizing them by form and content. Referential narratives are understood as connectors between different cities and influencers of policy mobility. Finally, the paper shows how narratives work with association as well as imagination and thus emphasize the non-factual yet inherent

aspects of relational policy making. This contribution has impacted the discourses on temporary spatial uses (Karachalis, 2021) and policy narratives as an integral part of policy mobilities (Albrecht et al., 2021).

Whereas the first three paper focus on German case studies, the final contribution by Susann Schäfer shifts its geographical focus to South Korea (2017). According to Schäfer, policy mobility studies have focused on the movement and translation of policies as well as on the impact of mobile policies on policymaking processes and governed spaces. Given that policy mobilities have mainly been examined in comparable institutional contexts, the current debate has neglected the role of organizational culture in the translation of policies. Organizational culture is understood as a set of shared assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate practices of policymaking. The case study of South Korean adaptation policy (Schäfer, 2015) illustrates that organizational culture has a significant impact on the translation of mobile adaptation policy. Besides the claim to consider organizational culture more prominently in the field of policy mobility studies, this paper illustrates the translation process of adaptation policy in the South Korean political system. The practices in South Korean political institutions dealing with climate change adaptation are highly characterized by the avoidance of risks. The propensity to avoid risks leads policymakers to focus on technical solutions to climate change adaptation and to neglect the participation of civil society. Her paper resonated in debates regarding the role of elites in the context of state institutions, such as elected officials, political operatives, and bureaucrats (Baker et al., 2019), and regarding the significance of “organizational cultures” or state structures which shape policy mobilization path dependency by generating ideological and institutional legacies across political generations (Bok, 2020).

The four papers – published in 2017 and 2018 – contribute to the ongoing debate on policy mobilities both conceptually as well as regarding their case studies in Germany and East Asia. By focusing on climate policies, three of the papers do contribute to the understanding of power relations and policymaking in climate governance, which is of interest not only to the policy mobility community but also to climate change scholars. Conceptually, the papers link established lines of thoughts on power, governmentality, and assemblage with policy mobilities. These conceptual frames strengthen the dimension of power in policy mobilities and help to deconstruct discourses and practices of circulating, legitimizing, and implementing mobile policies.

4 Conclusions

Future research for the field of policy mobilities moves towards comparative studies (Montero and Baiocchi, 2021) based on a posteriori comparison allowing for a “fruitful

way to theorize repeated instances happening” (Montero and Baiocchi, 2021:16) in cities that are not necessarily thought to be comparable due to their size, history, and other factors. On the other hand, we can expect that future empirical studies extend spatial and temporal frames of policy analysis, e.g., by following policy mobilities of the past and a stronger consideration of mobile policies beyond the Global North.

In general, the debate on policy mobilities will profit from a stronger exchange with other geographical debates touching various branches of policies, such as economic, environmental, health, or international cooperation. Whereas these debates can benefit from the mobility perspective, scholars of policy mobilities can learn from the specifics of particular policies and conceptual underpinnings of these debates.

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