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AQ1 RESEARCH ARTICLE

The merry mandarins of Windsor: policy transfer and transgovernmental networks in the Anglosphere

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This article looks at the formation, evolution, operation and outcomes associated with a hitherto unexamined elite policy transfer network. The Windsor Conference, as it is known, is an Anglophone international policy network that is populated by the mandarins of labour market and social policy institutions in the Anglosphere countries of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. This article presents the preliminary findings of qualitative research undertaken with senior policy officials active in the network. The research highlights the impact that transnational policy networking can have on the dissemination of policy ideas, especially amongst a cohort of elite policy officials. These findings offer an opportunity for critical reflection on the intersection of the concepts of policy transfer and transgovernmentalism, and it is contended that the research yields valuable empirical insights into the murky processes of transgovernmental policy transfer, policy learning and discrete regulation.

Keywords: policy transfer; transgovernmentalism; labour market policy; social policy; policy networks

Introduction

Champions and critics of globalisation can agree that the world financial crisis has shown how political and economic interdependency should be measured in units of both weakness and strength. On one hand the crisis has illustrated how rapidly systemic economic collapse can spread across the globe. On the other, the crisis has shown how governments, by and large, surmise that the way out of the financial quagmire is by increased international cooperation, not less. Government officials are encouraged to promote stronger, not weaker, links with their counterparts overseas to negotiate a common and/or combined strategy to escape the financial doldrums. It seems that while the global economic meltdown was a communicable disease, it was one not fatal to transnational engagement. While the nature, depth and extent of globalisation are the subjects of intense academic debate, governments frequently appeal to the processes of globalisation as constraints on or facilities for state action. The UK Cabinet Office warns policy officials: 'The world for which policy makers have to develop policies is becoming increasingly complex, uncertain and unpredictable' (Bullock *et al.* 2001, p. 15). Still, the UK government expects officials to collaborate with 'counterparts in other international administrations'

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(Bullock *et al.* 2001, p. 13). In short, one way or another the processes of globalization matter to public administration.

We should not forget that the modern state has had to evolve rapidly to accommodate administrative dynamics that were scarcely conceivable 30 years ago. The first digital revolution transpired with the arrival of the desktop computer into civil service offices in the 1980s. In the 1990s the networked interoperability of computers allowed the construction of, and universal access to, vast electronic government databases containing detailed and cross-referenced personal information. Now, the rapid growth and evolution of the Internet has profoundly changed the rules of engagement between all sorts of political agents, from individuals to NGOs, to local authorities, to governments and to international organisations: the world's political landscape now has a distinctively digital structure. The almost ubiquitous access to shared information via the Internet has entailed fundamental changes in the way governments acquire, analyse and disseminate information. Systematic data collection on consumer, economic, social and financial information has considerably enhanced the possibilities (though perhaps not the capacity) for governments to interact with society in new ways and understand the impact of policies.¹ Scholars have observed that comparability of data between countries has led to a commensurate increase in policy learning opportunities between state officials (see Legrand 2012), and amongst academics a considerable research literature has grown around the processes of international and domestic policy learning (see the early work of Bennett 1991, Rose 1991, Hall 1993, and later work by Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2000, Evans and Davies 1999, Evans 2004, 2009, Stone 1999, 2004).

The shifting dimensions of the international technological, economic and political sphere give us cause to revisit some fundamental questions of policy learning and diffusion: how do policy officials learn? From which countries? What lessons? Why these lessons? Inevitably, research on this topic is hindered by the opacity of policy processes, or what is sometimes referred to as the 'black box' of policymaking, a product of the natural reticence of officials to declare the source of their inspiration, negative or positive. As a consequence, it is easy to see why there is relatively little substantive knowledge of international policy learning *networks* (as opposed to processes and outcomes, on which the policy transfer literature is very active) and why few transgovernmental policy networks, especially those populated by elite officials, have been identified.

The aim of this article is to provide an empirical and theoretical insight into the opaque processes of transgovernmental policy transfer and regulation. At an empirical level, the article presents the findings of research into a hitherto unreported international network of government mandarins from English-speaking countries. While the research is still at an early stage, this article provides an overview of the origins and evolution of the network; initial insights into the structure and format of the network; outcomes associated with the network; and reflections on future empirical research. At a theoretical level, the article attempts to locate this empirical study within analyses of policy transfer and transgovernmentalism with a view to arguing that, together, these theoretical frameworks present a compelling account of contemporary processes of transgovernmental policy transfer.

Transgovernmental policy networking: a theory in practice?

The efforts of government officials to learn from counterparts overseas have been the subject of increasing academic interest in recent years. The mechanisms by which policy learning and transfer occurs have been variously depicted by, to take only a few of the available scholars, Richard Rose (1991), Harold Wolman (1992), Peter
 AQ4 Hall (1993), David Dolowitz and David Marsh (1996, 2000), Mark Evans and Jonathan Davies (1999), Mark Evans (2004, 2009), Diane Stone (1999, 2004, 2008) and David Marsh and Jason Sharman (2009). This steadily expanding literature has attracted inter-disciplinary interest for its conceptual accessibility and the relative ease with which it accommodates different empirical approaches. The orthodox approach, by consensus and citation, is that of Dolowitz and Marsh who drew from a range of early work by, inter alia, Rose (1991) and Wolman (1992) to posit a heuristic framework for policy transfer researchers who sought to capture and link the dynamics of the policy transfer process. The policy transfer heuristic regards policy transfer as, ‘a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative
 AQ5 arrangements several elements of policy as potentially transferable between jurisdic-
 AQ6 tions: policies, administrative arrangements and institutions’ (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; see also Dolowitz 1997). For Dolowitz and Marsh, the process by which this occurs is contingent on gradations. These include a power relations gradient of voluntary to coercive transfer that underpins the motivations of a policy transfer; a policy content gradient of the extent of adoption of ‘policy goals, structure and content, policy instruments or administrative techniques; institutions, ideas, attitudes and concepts; and negative lessons’ (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, pp. 349–350); and a policy locus that ranges from domestic political systems to other countries with ‘ideological and resources similarities’ (1996, p. 353).

Although the heuristic of Dolowitz and Marsh has been deployed across a wide range of empirical approaches, this is not to suggest there is theoretical harmony amongst policy transfer theorists. Far from it, the parameters and powers of the policy transfer approach remain subject to sustained debate, as demonstrated in a recent interchange between David Benson and Andrew Jordan (2011, 2012), Mauricio Dussauge-Laguna (2012), Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward (2012) and
 AQ7 Dolowitz and Marsh (2012). Without rehearsing with the multiple strands of argument (although I encourage readers to review the series of articles), I would draw attention to one of the McCann and Ward’s critiques of the mainstream political science conception of policy transfer:

the traditional literature retains a problematic separation between the domestic and the international which does not acknowledge that urban policy actors can act globally in their own right, meaning that policy regimes of various sorts are relationally interconnected. (McCann and Ward 2012, p. 327)

Although it is not quite clear what they mean by ‘urban’ in this context, the broader point is an interesting one. Policies, according to McCann and Ward, can be understood as ‘unbounded, dynamic, relational assemblages’ (p. 327). This notion of a relational interconnectedness between actors raises a timely question of the networked relationship between policy regimes. To date, the policy transfer literature has held a relatively weak conception of the role of policy networks in the transfer process, specifically as policy transfer has been depicted by some of its key theorists

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135 as an *impromptu* process. Mark Evans describes policy networks involved in transfer
 140 as: ‘an ad hoc, action oriented policy-making structure set up with the specific
 intention of engineering rapid policy change. They only exist for the time that a
 transfer is occurring’ (Evans 2004, p. 22). This perspective echoes his earlier work
 with Davies, which disclaimed the coalition-building aspects of policy transfer
 networks:

Conversely, policy transfer networks are an ad hoc phenomenon set up with the
 specific intention of engineering policy change and thus no extensive process of
 bargaining or coalition building external to the transfer network is usually required.
 (Evans and Davies 1999, p. 376)

145 In this respect, the policy transfer approach has yet to potentially capture the
 relational network dynamic between policy regimes. Of course, a variety of
 theoretical frameworks already address different elements of international policy
 networking. Some scholars refer to transnational policy groups (Carroll and Carson
 AQ8 2003) or transnational policy networks (Norman 2001). Others refer to epistemic
 150 communities (Haas 1992), advocacy coalitions and knowledge networks (Stone 2004,
 2008, 2010). Yet, perhaps the international relations literature has captured the
 notion of transgovernmental networking most fully. Joseph Nye’s and Robert
 AQ9 Keohane work in 1972 provided the original conceptual development of transgo-
 vernmental relations in the international relations literature, which they defined as
 155 contacts between officials of different countries that occur beyond the aegis of
 AQ10 traditional foreign policy organs of government (1972, pp. 330–331). More recent
 work has connected these transgovernmental relations with increased global
 regulatory interaction. Anne-Marie Slaughter and David Zaring contend that
 ‘Regulatory networks parallel and comport with the disaggregated but powerful
 160 way that globalization has actually happened’ (Slaughter and Zaring 2006, p. 218).
 The literature on transgovernmentalism imputes a global environment in which
 agencies of the state operate without centralised direction and display a propensity to
 network with their counterparts overseas (Raustiala 2002, p. 3). Political institutions,
 then, can be their own operators in the international space. One well-known example
 165 of transgovernmental networks is the Basle Committee on Banking Supervision.
 This network has since 1974 coordinated banking supervision worldwide² between
 state central bank officials. Aside from the crop of formal transgovernmental
 networks, Slaughter describes the emergence of ‘spontaneous government networks’,
 which are transnational networks that form outside of any formal inter-governmental
 170 agreements (2001, p. 355, see also Slaughter and Zaring 2006). Such networks are
 self-organising and independently regularise their interactions as a network.
 Typically, a transnational network ‘comprises agreements between domestic reg-
 ulatory agencies of two or more nations’ which effectively institutionalises transna-
 tional cooperation (Slaughter 2001, p. 359). According to Slaughter:

175 These agreements embrace principles that can be implemented by the regulators
 themselves; they do not need further approval by national legislators. Widespread
 use of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and even less formal initiatives has
 sped the growth of transgovernmental interaction exponentially, in contrast to the
 lethargic pace at which traditional treaty negotiations proceed. (2001, p. 359)

180 Slaughter is sensitive to accountability fears raised by closed-door networks. The notion that governments undertake forms of inter-governmental collaboration raises the prospect of unaccountable policy decision-making and ‘the removal of issues from the domestic political sphere through deliberate technocratic de-politicization’ (2001, p. 363).

185 One of the limitations of this brief literature on transgovernmental networks is that it contains no explanation of how and why networks select their membership. Little is known of the dynamics of these networks; how they are convened, how frequently they meet, their shared or divergent norms, their agendas, and so on. Importantly, and crucially for this article, these networks have not yet been considered as a locus of policy transfer. While, for Slaughter, the networks operate as ‘channels of regulatory cooperation’ (2001, 2003), the prospect of policy learning and transfer is not considered. The following case study addresses this shortcoming directly by empirically and conceptually exploring political and cultural characteristics of a transgovernmental policy network amongst a specific group of English-speaking countries. To describe this group of countries, herein I borrow James C. Bennett’s term Anglosphere (2004, 2007). Bennett uses the term to describe a group of English-speaking countries ‘marked by differing degrees of sharing of the core Anglosphere characteristics’ or ‘a network civilization without a corresponding political form’ (2007, p. 80). The countries listed above are all part of what Bennett describes as the ‘inner core’ of Anglosphere countries (which notably also includes English-speaking Caribbean and some small islands and territories). The term, while not entirely unproblematic, is useful for my purposes here.

The Windsor Conference Policy Network (WCPN)

205 The Windsor Conference is an informal network of Anglosphere public service mandarins from Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. The Windsor Conference was originally formed with the intention of exchanging ideas and experiences pertaining to social policy and labour market policy. The inception of the network’s predecessor (the Five Countries meeting) in 1989 coincided with the era in which information technology was making its mark on state administration. Indeed, as outlined below, the use and utility of IT in government was the first order of business for the network. The network was, and remains, exclusive to the Anglosphere countries that, as members of the OECD, share a common heritage and, of course, language.

Study scope

215 In anticipation of an extended qualitative research study, this article reports the first phase of empirical findings. Here, I discuss the history and structure of what I term the WCPN and the significance of the network in the context of international regulation and policy transfer analysis. Further, I contend that this hitherto unreported policy network potentially transforms narratives of social and labour market policy development across the Anglosphere countries. The empirical study commences with an outline of the background to the WCPN’s formation. Using the findings taken from interviews, the article provides a brief history of the network and

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what motivated participants to create the network. I conclude with an overview of the network's key dynamics, as far as they are apparent at this point in time.

Methodology

The principal findings reported in this scoping report are derived from four semi-structured interviews conducted by the author with CEOs who are existing or previous network participants. These are supplemented by two interviews with ancillary officials involved in a network meeting in 2002. Participants were identified in one of two ways: (1) travel and accommodation expenses associated with attendance at network meetings. These, for most countries, were subject to public disclosure in institutional annual reports. (2) Pre-existing contacts with policy officials aware of the network enabled the author to identify and approach network participants. With the exception of the ancillary officials mentioned above, all interviewees are current or former CEOs of social policy or labour market policy from the Anglosphere countries. The interviews were conducted under the Chatham House rules, and the findings are reported with the permission of interviewees. These findings are, of course, subject to a number of methodological limitations: (1) as a network of elite policy officials, there is a relatively small pool of participants able to furnish valid insights, (2) the small pool of participants are relatively inaccessible because they are diffused across six countries, (3) senior officials, such as the WCPN participants, are possibly constrained by contractual confidentiality requirements, or are naturally reticent about what is a highly informal exchange of views and (4) the time they have available for research interviews is limited by the demands of their senior role in government.

These interviews are supplemented by a review of electronic media, and academic and government literature. This review has generated very little substantive data relating to the WCPN and its proceedings. References to the regular conferences are found in parliamentary/congress reports, agency annual reports and expenses reports. These confirm some of the WCPN conference dates, participating officials, venues and, occasionally, provide a brief summary of the items discussed at a particular conference. Searches of government databases have yet to locate more than a cursory reference to the WCPN.³ The network's proceedings and agenda are, as yet, a relatively unknown quantity. Indeed, the paucity of details on the Windsor Conference is in line with observations made by interviewees: the Windsor Conference exists as an informal mechanism of policy learning. The discussions are deliberately confidential to allow full and frank discussion amongst participants.

The origins and evolution of the Windsor Conference

The Windsor Conference was formed in 2009 as an amalgamation of two closely connected policy networks. The first of these formed in 1989 and was concerned with social welfare policy. Known initially as the Five Countries (latterly renamed the Six Countries upon the entry of Ireland into the network), the network was used as a template for the formation of the second network, framed around labour market policy, known as the Belmont Conference. These networks operated in parallel during the 1990s and into the next decade until April 2009 when the two combined to form the Windsor Conference. Below I discuss the evolution of the network(s) in more detail.

The Six Countries meetings

Links between UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canadian officials had already existed in bi-lateral form between social policy agencies for some time prior to 1989. Instances of bilateral policy learning in this period are well documented elsewhere in the lesson-drawing and policy transfer literatures (Daguerre 2004, Ram *et al.* 2007, Cairney 2009, Dolowitz and Medearis 2009, Welshman 2010). The impetus for the creation of a formal multi-lateral network of policy learning, however, emerged from discussions between senior Australian, US and UK officials in the late 1980s. At that time, the network's founding officials recognised that global economic systems, underpinned by similar market mechanisms and populated by similar regulatory ideas, induced a series of policy problems that were common across Anglosphere countries. One of key officials involved in the network's creation noted:

I found the ISSA Conference in Vienna in 1988 interesting but not very helpful in regard to the sorts of issues we were facing. In conversation with the U.K., Canadians and the U.S. people it was clear that we were all in the same boat. At that stage we were a bit ahead on IT and we had the Bettina Cass Social Security Review well under way. It seemed sensible to have a high level get together to talk about common issues. The other potential participants all thought it was a good idea and we (DSS Australia) agreed to convene the first meeting. (Interviewee A: Six Countries meeting participant, May 2012)

With comparable, albeit far from identical, social security systems, an initial one-off conference in Australia was scheduled to flesh out some of the approaches to solving the emerging policy problems amongst the participating countries. The international conference of senior social policy officials was, from the outset, conceived as an informal network meeting in which discussions could be a confidential 'warts and all' dialogue on the separate and shared policy issues and problems faced by social security departments. According to one interviewee, it was made clear that network participants would only be heads of agencies and their most senior staff (Interviewee D: Six Countries meeting participant, June 2012). The initial Five Countries were selected on the basis of a set of shared policy characteristics: OECD membership, English-speaking; policy protocols and terminology; and shared institutional features. Of course, common features were not evenly mirrored. The USA, for example, is not modelled on a Westminster system and its social security delivery was and remains rather more fragmented than that of its counterparts.

The Five Countries meeting: a network born

The first international meeting was hosted by the Australian government in November 1989. Although hindered by a nation-wide pilots' strike, the meeting was attended by senior officials responsible for managing social security policy from Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the USA and Canada. Officials from these five English-speaking OECD countries included: Herb Doggette (Deputy Commissioner for Operations, 1979 until his retirement in 1990) from the US Social Security Administration. Deputy Secretary of the UK Department of Social Security, Ann Bowtell (later the Permanent Secretary); Derek Volker, the Secretary of Australia's Department of Social Security; John Grant, Director-General of New Zealand's

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Department of Social Welfare; and Ian Green, the Assistant Deputy Minister for Canada's Department of Health and Welfare.

315 The premise of the Five Countries meeting in Australia was to allow participating countries to identify common social security policy and administration issues. Despite clear differences between respective insurance- and contribution-based national social security schemes, policy considerations were regarded as substantively the same. At that time, all Anglosphere countries were struggling to handle growing privacy concerns and public calls for greater freedom of information. Further, it was
320 acknowledged at the conference that there were common concerns around how to establish effective social policy for single parents, workforce participation, the long-term unemployed, training and case management and disability support. Shortly before the 1989 Six Countries meeting, a comprehensive review of Australia's social security published its findings. The Cass Social Security Review, established in 1986, signalled the government's intention to focus efforts on enhancing the labour market
325 participation of individuals claiming social security benefits, such as single parents, the unemployed and people with disabilities. Indeed, the review's analysis of social security provided the impetus for the creation of Australia's JET scheme, an initiative to induce lone parents to take up paid work. The findings of the Cass Review were disseminated to the Six Countries meeting participants to provoke discussion and afford participants the opportunity to engage with social policy issues faced by the Australian government. All Five Countries faced similar challenges for disability/
330 invalidity pensions and, moreover, the question of how government should address issues specific to individuals with profound disability.

335 The agenda for the initial meeting was divided into two policy streams. The first examined common policy and administrative issues, as outlined above. The second focused on emerging applications of information technology and, in particular, the challenges of designing and implementing electronic administration of social security payments. The late 1980s was the dawn of the computer age in public administration. Information technology – – namely data centres, networked information and the
340 desktop computer – was becoming a core feature of service delivery for agencies in the Anglosphere countries, especially data-intensive agencies such as social security. According to one interviewee who attended the first conference: 'There was a view that [Australia] was ahead of the game on computing infrastructure' (Interviewee D, June 2012). The discussions soon furnished valuable shared outcomes. For example, on the delivery of social security benefits, Australia's payment of benefit by direct bank transfer attracted the interest of UK officials, where the benefit payments via 'Giros' had been particularly vulnerable to fraud. Discussions also centred on organisational arrangements including institutional systems, social security office
345 set-ups, IT link-ups and staff training. Notably, the IT group subsequently met separately from the main meeting to maintain knowledge links on IT infrastructure arrangements.

350 Crucially, although the meeting in Australia was intended as a one-off opportunity to share the successes and failures of the respective participating countries, the 1989 Five Countries meeting sparked considerable enthusiasm amongst participants to continue not only the regular multi-lateral network meeting, but also secured strong professional bilateral and multi-lateral relationships. It was determined that hosting of the Five Countries meeting would rotate between participants and that subsequent meetings, which included the subnetwork IT

group,⁴ would be thematically focused. For example, the 1990 meeting in Canada was dominated by discussions over Child Support policy. The 1991 meeting was held in the UK and focused on management of fiscal resources and administrative structuring. It attracted officials with a similar seniority⁵ and cost the UK government an estimated £40,000⁶ to host. After the fourth meeting, held in Washington DC in 1992, meetings were scheduled to run approximately every 18 months.

The Belmont Conference

A parallel policy network, the Belmont Conference was convened in the 1990s in the USA. The network was inspired in part by the success of the Six Countries and held to an identical format: a meeting of the heads of department responsible for employment policy from the Anglosphere countries. As with the Six Countries meeting, the proceedings of the Belmont Conference are held confidentially and little – beyond an acknowledgement of its occurrence – is published regarding its outcomes. One interview gave this summary of the Conference's beginnings:

Of their volition, six heads of social security equivalent departments of six English-speaking countries, it used to be five but then we discovered the Irish spoke English, formed an informal group and decided to meet annually to meet for three days and just debate in a very open free discussion the trend of policy in those countries. (Interviewee B, Belmont Conference network participant, October 2004)

The 2002 Belmont Conference in Canada focused on the shift from income transfers to investment in human capital. The format was much the same as the Six Countries meeting: discussions were structured to elicit meaningful comparisons and policy issues. An interviewee attending the conference – part of the ancillary staff – observed the following:

Even in my short time with them, it was clear that similar program structures and labour market strategies meant that they shared many of the same policy and management problems. They could have a very informed discussion about the design of earned income tax credits/supplements, for example. A lot of "sharing" was going on over meals and at breaks.⁷ (Interviewee E: Belmont Conference ancillary participant, October 2007)

The 2006 meeting of the Belmont Conference occurred in New Zealand. According to the New Zealand Department of Labour, the meeting generated perspectives on 'social and economic issues affecting labour market participation and resulted in an informal and frank exchange of views on medium to long-term policy developments'.⁸ The meeting was foregrounded by New Zealand's high employment and labour market participation, a combination that was the basis of concerns over dwindling supply and diversity of labour. The Conference sought to generate a focus on:

- boosting labour productivity and the quality of work
- enhancing labour market participation
- ensuring a more comprehensive and responsive skills base.⁹

The Windsor Conference, the UK 2009

In recognition of the overlaps between the issues and portfolios of employment and social welfare policy, the Belmont Conference and Six Countries meeting combined at the Windsor Conference in the UK in April 2009. The impetus to combine the two networks was led by Peter Hughes of New Zealand, Jeffrey Harmer of Australia and Leigh Lewis of the UK. The combined conference, held in London and Stratford-upon-Avon in April 2009, sought to combine the two networks and discuss the issues presented to social security, welfare and the labour market by the global financial crisis and, specifically, the impact on youth training and employment.

The combined conference produced its first substantive combined output: an information sharing agreement to tackle benefit fraud. The 'Windsor Arrangement for Mutual Co-Operation on Benefit Fraud Between Heads of Department of the Six Countries'¹⁰ (hereafter the 'Windsor Arrangement') is a non-binding accord: a 'gentlemen's agreement', according to one interviewee (Interviewee A, June 2012). In the first public acknowledgement of the WCPN, a UK press release stated that the aim of the information sharing agreement was to 'achieve stronger prevention, earlier detection and effective deterrence of benefit fraud'.¹¹ The press release described the Windsor Arrangement as an agreement on sharing of intelligence and risk profiling related to benefit fraud, and included an ambiguously worded commitment to 'work together . . . to determine the scope for carrying out investigations and enforcement for each other . . .'. The Agreement was described by the Australian Government as 'a cooperative agreement between Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America to work together on a program to increase collective protection against benefit fraud'.¹² The UK DWP Permanent Secretary, Leigh Lewis, stated that: 'This arrangement will ensure each country works together more systematically and, in turn, increase our individual and collective protection against those who seek to defraud our benefit systems'.¹³

The Windsor Arrangement marked a watershed in the nature of the policy network. Up until 2009, the focus of the Six Countries and Belmont Conference meetings was to share ideas, experiences and policy. The Windsor Arrangement indicates a new direction of regulatory cooperation. The exchange of data pertaining to benefit fraud implies the disclosure of individuals' personal information to overseas agencies, albeit as the details of the agreement are not in the public domain it is not possible to be certain of the extent or detail of the data exchange. Certainly, the Windsor Arrangement is an indication that the WCPN has turned full circle: the initial Six Countries network was set up with the intention of sharing knowledge on constructing IT systems to support social services. The Windsor Arrangement represents a transition from sharing knowledge about data management to sharing data itself. There is little more information available to the public.¹⁴

Network features and dynamics

This next section reports the insights of senior policy officials interviewed in the course of this research. In the course of interviews, the chief concern was to acquire insights into the dynamics of the WCPN and its participants. Below, I set out some of the prominent findings: (1) the value of confidential policy learning; (2) the importance of common institutional/cultural characteristics.

Inside the black box: the value of confidential policy learning

Primarily, the WCPN is regarded as ‘a framework to interact and talk about what worked and what did not’ (Interviewee A, June 2012). The learning value of the network to participants was widely expressed in interviews and published data. In a verbal exchange with the Parliament of Ireland Committee of Public Accounts, Rody Molloy, the Former Director General of Foras Áiseanna Saothair (Training and Employment Authority) of Ireland, said of the Belmont Conference: ‘We exchange experiences in an up-front way and try to learn from each other’s mistakes or successes. It has been extraordinarily useful to us in terms of devising labour market policy’¹⁵ (2008). The meetings occur in a strictly informal setting and are not minuted:

You don’t know about this because people don’t want you to know about these things. It’s informal... We do use the Chatham [House] rules. We don’t publish anything for public consumption or anything like that. We see this as a very informal network where people can talk as freely as possible. (Interviewee C: Belmont Conference ancillary participant, November 2007)

The exchange of ideas and documents in this setting is regarded as confidential and, as emphasised by another interviewee, highly valued:

They’re not formalised, they’re not approved by government, except that the ministers would know that the secretary goes and would approve his travel. So, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S. would meet. I went to two of those in my period as Secretary of XXXX.¹⁶ Very very rich exchange of experiences, policies, documents, etc. (Interviewee B, October 2004)

Discussions within the network over individual policy experiences were seen to serve two purposes: first, to create a comparative context in which officials can make sense of their own operating environment in relation to that of their peers. Second, to initiate bilateral policy learning, where valid lessons/ideas seem valuable. One official noted the following:

What we did there was, I guess, we found out that more or less we were thinking alike. It’s very bizarre. I’m not saying that this actually creates the exchange of policy per se. I would say it is one way of doing this. Most importantly, I think it is a way of getting people to meet and see how different or similar their policies are. If they’re similar they find reassurance. If they are different then they decide whether they will assess whether they like it. Or, if they don’t, and then they see further whether the political situation is good enough, then they will pursue that. It’s mostly for getting together and discussing openly and then afterwards [XXX] would decide to go to Australia or Australia would decide to come visit us because of what they have seen. (Interviewee C, November 2007)

The formation of strong personal connections within the network is regarded as a crucial element in forming collaborations. One interviewee stated that ‘Collaboration comes from trust and trust comes from knowing someone’ (Interviewee F: Six Countries meeting participant, June 2012). The same interview imparted a brief anecdote to underline the importance of cohesion and collaboration to the network. At the 2004 conference meeting in Ireland, one of the social policy mandarins of the Six Countries meeting tasked his deputy to attend the meeting in his/her stead. The

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other network members, keen to ensure the fidelity of the network to its purpose as a meeting of mandarins, subsequently sought and obtained direct assurances from the mandarin concerned that s/he would attend the following meeting, in New Zealand in 2006.

Common institutional characteristics

The countries involved in the WCPN share a set of common features, although not equally. All are common law countries, share a Commonwealth background and speak English as the primary language of society and government. From these factors, much else might be derived: common social values, political ethos, popular culture, and so on. The common political mindset was a dynamic noted by one of the interviewees of this study:

We have similar political regimes. And I think that's very very important. Above all, we have a mentality: we use legislation as a last resort, as opposed to Europeans who use legislation front and centre. That differentiates us a great deal from the others.

It's that you've got a problem, that you can see it in other countries, but it's got to be a country that's sufficiently similar to you that the solution is going to make sense... You've got to find an ethos that is compatible with yours for political reasons, but also for socio-political reasons; it's got to be acceptable in society, it's got to have legitimacy... So you're selective, and that brings you back to a very narrow socio-economic group which probably clones policies all over. (Interviewee B, October 2004)

There is nuance to the traits shared by Anglosphere countries. Some of these traits can be regarded as *a priori*; that is, they are independent variables from which others emanate. These are mainly historical characteristics. A first-order trait precedes all others: the shared heritage of the colonial era. Colonial heritage – exerted via British imperialism – precedes all else. Second-order characteristics might then be regarded as those derived directly from the colonial era: English culture and language, religion, system of government (except the USA), legal philosophy, democratic participation; mercantilism or capitalism, state infrastructure, and so on. Third tier characteristics – related to policy – emerge from this milieu: policy protocols, political partisanship, legitimacy and equity, social justice norms and, indeed, perhaps elitism, class and gender roles, and so on. As noted above, the comparability and compatibility of policy is a key prerequisite of transgovernmental policy learning. An ancillary participant in the Belmont Conference observed this dynamic:

it was clear that similar program structures and labour market strategies meant that they shared many of the same policy and management problems. They could have a very informed discussion about the design of earned income tax credits/supplements, for example. A lot of “sharing” was going on over meals and at breaks. (Interviewee E, October 2007)

It is noteworthy that out of all the Anglosphere countries, the USA exhibits the fewest common third tier political or institutional factors. The US political system represents an exception amongst the Anglosphere countries insofar as is not derived

from the Westminster model. One interviewee noted that, in general, US policy organs operate in relative isolation from overseas influences: ‘the Americans never join us. They are very isolated: don’t allow foreigners into the government’. Yet, the WCPN was a notable exception to the rule. The same interviewee went on to state, ‘So, to have the American head of social security come to this Six-Country thing, and participate actively and freely, was a coup and it was valuable’ (Interviewee B, October 2004). Another interviewee concurred with this view:

Now, again, the United States have had a lot of public evaluations but to give you exposure to what they’re thinking internally is a bit of a rare event. It is always a bit of an exciting episode to see what the Americans are thinking internally because they’re not open. (Interviewee A, May 2012)

The access to US internal policy thinking underlines how the WCPN operated as a substantively different sort of policy learning for the Anglosphere officials involved in the network. Moreover, it suggests that even policy officials are unable to peer inside the so-called ‘black box’ of policy-making of overseas countries.

Conceptualising the WCPN

From patrimonial to familial: key characteristics of the network

Insofar as it is possible to derive a complete picture of the WCPN at this point, there are some characteristics that are apparent. First-order similarity is derived from a common British heritage (albeit with varying degrees of influence). Second-order common characteristics bestowed by the colonial era – such as culture, language, and political ethos – resonate to this day, yet the balance of power has shifted considerably. No longer can the UK be regarded as a patrimonial figure amongst Anglosphere countries; rather the relationship should more appropriately be regarded as familial. This familial relationship in the WCPN is predicated on six concords: (1) *knowledge*, a broadly agreed understanding of what constitutes relevant evidence; (2) *peer mutuality*, a mutual recognition that each participant is an institutional peer; (3) *public administrative philosophy*, an implicit agreement of the objectives and underpinning assumptions of democratic government; (4) *bureaucratic savoir-faire*, a shared articulation of institutional language, processes and protocols; (5) *policy issues*, agreement on the challenges and threats facing their policy portfolio.

The WCPN’s dynamics of policy transfer

The WCPN is the first identified example of systematic policy learning – in social policy, welfare policy and labour market policy – between Anglophone countries since 1989. The WCPN’s founding rationale was to provide a forum in which mandarins could exchange policy ideas. The interviews reported above provide a number of policy areas where this was in fact the case including: active labour markets, welfare to work, disability, youth unemployment and benefit fraud. The dynamics of learning and transfer are underpinned by the six concords identified above: (1) *knowledge*, the communication and exchange of data on policy outcomes, (2) *peer mutuality*, bilateral discussions via telephone or email or face-to-face

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meetings, (3) *public administrative philosophy*, (4) *bureaucratic savior-faire*, sharing of
 580 internal policy documents and reviews, (5) *policy issues*, identification of emerging
 issues and transmission of possible remedies.

The WCPN regulatory dynamics

Prior to the 2009 combined conference, the primary purpose of Six Countries and
 the Belmont Conference was to share policy ideas, experiences and outcomes.
 585 Essentially, these networks operated to augment the knowledge capital of its
 participants. With the amalgamation in 2009 to become the Windsor Conference
 and the announcement of an information-sharing agreement to combat benefit
 fraud, the networks transformed into a quasi-regulatory network. Operating beyond
 590 the boundaries of traditional sovereign foreign policy organs, the participating
 institutions have created and occupied an international foreign policy space, albeit
 one structured by a non-binding agreement. Conceptually, the *prima facie* conclu-
 sion is that we might regard the WCPN as two sides of the same coin: on one side, a
 policy learning and transfer body; on the other, an international quasi-regulatory
 mechanism. Although the WCPN has maintained its founding *raison d'être* as a
 595 mechanism of policy learning, the Windsor Agreement demonstrates that transgo-
 vernmental regulatory functions are not only a possibility but also a reality.

Conclusion

Empirically, the active exchange of policy ideas and experiences relating to welfare,
 labour market and social policy by the WCPN since 1989 has clear implications for
 much of the literature on the transfer of public policy (see e.g. *inter alia*, Dolowitz
 600 AQ11 and Marsh 2000, Stone 2003, Daguerre 2004, Banks *et al.* 2005, Hulme 2005, 2006).
 In the background of the processes and mechanisms of policy transfer described by
 these scholars in the 1990s, 2000s and beyond, the WCPN was in operation as a
 structural conduit of policy learning between Australia, Canada, Ireland, New
 Zealand, the UK and the USA. The network adds an important dimension to these
 605 existing analyses and offers an array of alternative explanations of policy exchange.
 Much of the literature concerned with the underpinning model or framework of
 policy transfer analysis focuses on the process by which transfers occur. In part, this
 is a corollary of the definition offered by the progenitors of the policy transfer
 approach, Dolowitz and Marsh, who regard policy transfer as '*the process* by which
 610 knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas' of one
 political system is used elsewhere (my emphasis, 2000, p. 5). Evans and Davies (1999)
 and Evans (2009) undertook theoretical development of policy transfer analysis that
 strengthened the spatial dynamics of the model with a 'multi-level analysis' of policy
 transfer. In particular, they imputed a model that recognised the importance of
 615 international, transnational, domestic and interorganisational dynamics and called
 for empirical work to determine the link between transfer and internationalisation
 (Evans and Davies 1999, p. 365). The case study presented in this article goes some
 way to providing that empirical link and, further, to emphasizing the utility of the
 transgovernmental approach for policy transfer analysis. The activity and mechan-
 620 isms of the WCPN indicates that there has been systematic social and labour market
 policy learning and exchange between Anglosphere institutions over the period 1989

to present. Few analysts identify policy learning between more than two countries, and even fewer identify systemic multi-lateral policy learning to the extent identified herein. This WCPN has clear repercussions for the current knowledge pertaining to how labour market and social policy within and amongst Anglosphere countries has developed over this period. Simply put, narratives and analyses of labour market and social policy are incomplete without consideration of how elite policy officials have learnt from one another in the manner of the WCPN. In addition, the formulation of the WCPN itself reveals a great deal about the philosophy of public administration shared by Anglosphere countries' members. The pattern of policy learning indicates an underlying governance affinity that reaches back to the common history shared by Anglosphere countries. Indeed, it seems increased internationalisation – greater global integration and co-dependency, convenient international travel and communication – has amplified the shared heritage of the Anglosphere countries and widened the prospect for institutional and policy cooperation.

Interviews

Interviewee A: Six Countries meeting participant (May and June 2012).

Interviewee B: Belmont Conference network participant (October 2004).

Interviewee C: Belmont Conference ancillary network participant (November 2007).

Interviewee D: Six Countries meeting participant (June 2012).

Interviewee E: Belmont Conference ancillary network participant (October 2007).

Interviewee F: Six Countries meeting participant (June 2012).

Notes

1. The UK Office for National Statistics Indices of Multiple Deprivation is a case in point. Data on income, employment, benefit uptakes, and so on, are regularly collected across the UK and made openly available. The resolution of the data is astounding: it is possible to view aggregated household data at a street level for any given postcode in the UK.
2. Current membership includes Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and the USA.
3. The claim that the WCPN is a hitherto unexamined and unidentified policy network is naturally subject to an important methodological proviso. A thorough review of published research was unable to locate any academic report of the WCPN, the Six Countries meeting or the Belmont Conference. Methodical searches of the scholarly literature were conducted on three occasions prior to publication: November 2010, July 2011 and April 2012. The literature searches included multiple Boolean searches of key words and identifiers associated with the WCPN. These key words were derived from the transcripts of interviews with network participants. Electronic literature searches of the ISI Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar were conducted. In addition, the library catalogue indexes of Griffith University and the Australian National University were subject to the same examination. In doing so, no academic literature was located pertaining to the network. Moreover, interviewees of the network have noted that, to their knowledge, scholars have not yet engaged with the WCPN or its activities.
4. The second stream of the first Six Countries meeting in 1989 focused on common issues, challenges and experiences in the IT architecture of social security administration. This sub-network subsequently took a similar form to that of its parent network and undertook an iterative collaboration exchanging ideas on practices and protocols.

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5. The UK – Department of Social Security: Sir Michael Partridge, KCB, Permanent Secretary; Mr. Nick Montagu, Deputy Secretary, Resource Management and Planning Group; Mr. Alec Wylie, Chief Executive, Social Security Agency, Northern Ireland. Australia – Department of Social Security: Mr. Derek Volker, AO, The Secretary; Mr. Jim Humphreys, National Manager, Operations; Dr. Owen Donald, First Assistant Secretary, Social Policy Division. Canada – Department of National Health and Welfare: Mrs. Margaret Catley-Carlson, Deputy Minister; Mr. John Soar, Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security Programs Branch; Mr. Ray Laframboise, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management Branch. New Zealand – Department of Social Welfare: Mr. Robin J. Wilson, Deputy Director-General; Mr. Alan Nixon, Assistant Director-General, Programmes and Services. The USA – Social Security Administration: Mr. Louis D. Enoff, Principal Deputy Commissioner; Ms. Janice Warden, Deputy Commissioner for Operations; Mr. Renato A. DiPentima, Deputy Commissioner for Systems [Mrs. Geraldine Novak, Director, International Activities Staff Mrs. Gertrude Wiggins, International Activities Staff].
6. Figure taken from Hansard: written answers to questions, Thursday 14 November 1991: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199192/cmhansrd/1991-11-14/Writtens-1.html>, accessed June 2012.
7. Correspondence with author, October 2007.
8. Taken from the Department of Labour (2007).
9. Taken from the Department of Labour (2007).
10. Signed by Heads of Department from: The Department of Human Services of Australia, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development of Canada, The Department of Social and Family Affairs of Ireland, The Ministry of Social Development of New Zealand, The Department for Work and Pensions of the United Kingdom and The Social Security Administration of the United States of America.
11. Department of Work and Pensions (2009).
12. Taken from: http://www.humanservices.gov.au/spw/corporate/publications-and-resources/annual-report/resources/1011/html/centrelink/chapter09/part08_compliance_and_fraud.html [Accessed June 2012].
13. Department of Work and Pensions (2009).
14. The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations declined a request for release of further information on the Windsor Arrangement.
15. Taken from <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/ACC/2008/12/04/printall.asp> [Accessed June 2012].
16. Obscured to retain anonymity.

AQ12 Notes on contributor

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