The Open Society Institute: Transnational Philanthropy, Policy Advocacy and Global Civil Society

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This paper investigates the role of the Open Society Institute (OSI) programs that build capacity and/or provide expert advice in the configuration of forms of transnational governance. Founded in 1993 by the billionaire philanthropist George Soros, the OSI is a private operating and grant-making foundation based in New York City that serves as the hub of the Soros foundations network, a group of autonomous foundations and organizations in more than 60 countries. OSI and the network implement a range of initiatives that aim to promote open societies by shaping government policy with knowledge and expertise.

The ‘open society’ discourse of transition and reform in the countries of the former Soviet Union and beyond, is multi-faceted. Open society leaders are inculcated via a range of fellowships and grants for individuals. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to support the rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI works to build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses. The idea is to give ‘voice’ to communities, and emerging policy elites, in transition countries through capacity building, the spread of ‘best practices’ and country-specific translation of ‘open society’ values. The OSI policies and discourses can be considered an “international normative frame” while the practices and strategies of the network are similar to that of ‘transnational advocacy networks.

As a global network, the OSI provides an excellent case study of the strategies of transnational activism of civil society organizations and of an institutional mechanism for the international transfer of expertise and ‘best practices’ to transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union (fSU). OSI also represents a vehicle to address questions about the role of private philanthropy in public policy. As such, it represents one kind of international organisation that is under-researched and neglected.

On a broader theme, the paper will address some of the problems posed by the dominance of experts. That is, the various academics, specialists and consultants engaged by OSI or the scholarly or expert organizations that OSI partners with in knowledge networks. The point of departure is that knowledge is not free of politics nor is policy independent from knowledge.

The paper will draw upon the related literatures of policy transfer (Ladi, 2005; Larmour 2005); regulatory diffusion (Levi Faur, 2005) and knowledge networks (Krause Hansen, 2002; Parmar, 2002; Stone & Maxwell, 2004). In undertaking this conceptual synthesis, this paper is concerned to widen our understanding on three fronts:

- First, to broaden cognition of the potential domains where policy transfer takes place from its horizontal intergovernmental focus to vertical supranational policy venues indicative of multi-level governance. In this regard it

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is distinctive from some international relations analyses that also suffer from methodological nationalism when they seek to explain norm diffusion in terms of its impacts only upon domestic politics (see Checkel, 1997).

- Second, to extend the range of who (or what) engages in policy transfer and the spread of international discourses to include transnational non state actors and structures such as global networks. In this regard, key players are epistemic communities that create and disseminate specialised policy knowledge and transnational advocacy networks (TANs). Yet, these networks are outsiders to decision-making compared to the insider status and official links of ‘global public policy networks’ (see Stone & Maxwell 2004).

- Third, to show how global civil society actors are implicated in multi-level governance. The involvement of non-state actors in certain fields of policy making and policy delivery can lead to the ‘transnationalisation of policy’. Policy development is not the exclusive prerogative of government or international organization (or NGOs acting on their behalf) but incorporates independent societal and corporate interests into a policy network. Transnational policy communities of experts and professionals share their expertise and information and form common patterns of understanding regarding policy through regular interaction (international conferences, government delegations and sustained communication) (Bennett, 1991: 224-25).

In short, the paper will seek to show how international policy debates on transition and development, and national public reception of such discourses, are mediated by OSI as a civil society entity that has multiple identities as a global, regional, national and local policy actor.

The paper is structured into three parts. The first section outlines the concept of policy transfer, knowledge networks and the connection to global public policy. The second section makes the links between writings on global civil society and philanthropy. The third section applies some of the ideas of the preceding two sections to the Open Society Institute. In particular, OSI is portrayed as a networked ‘transnational expertised institution’ (St Clair, 2006) sometimes conforming to the concept of a transnational advocacy network (TAN), at other times parts of OSI displaying features of an epistemic community. The legitimacy and credibility of OSI’s expertise is drawn through a circular process between the knowledge it produces and the audiences that legitimise that knowledge. The fourth and concluding section draws upon some of the insights of the ‘science, technology and society’ (STS) school of scholarship to analyse the ‘boundary work’ of the OSI in its guise as a transnational organization.

1. Policy Transfer and Transnational Governance

By focusing on the role of international actors in transferring policy and diffusing knowledge internationally, a dynamic for the transnationalisation of policy comes into analytical sight. In particular, ‘soft’ forms of transfer – such as the spread of norms in which non-state actors play a more prominent role – is a necessary complement to the hard transfer of policy tools, structures and practices pursued by government agencies and international organisations. International transfers of policy and practice do not always occur in a simple bilateral exchange between sovereign states but can be complemented and/or by-passed by transnational transfer networks.
Policy transfer or 'lesson-drawing' is a dynamic whereby knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements or institutions in one place is used across time or space in the development of policy elsewhere. Policy transfer can involve a number of processes. The objects of transfer can include (i) policies, (ii) institutions, (iii) ideologies or justifications, (iv) attitudes and ideas, and (v) negative lessons (Dolowitz, 1997). Transfer can take place across time, within countries and across countries. The focus in this paper are the transnational transfers of the Open Society Institute. Additionally, there are different degrees of transfer in that actors engage in straight-forward copying of policy, legislation or techniques as well as various forms of emulation, synthesis and hybridisation, and inspiration (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996: 351).

Policy and normative transfers can be either voluntary or coercive or combinations thereof (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 13-17). Terms such as ‘lesson-drawing’ (Rose, 1993) and ‘systematically pinching ideas’ (Schneider & Ingram, 1988) portray transfer as a voluntary and somewhat rational activity. Other terms emphasise compulsory conformity; that is: ‘penetration’ (Bennett, 1991) and ‘external inducement’ (Ikenberry, 1990). By contrast, the more atmospheric term of ‘diffusion’ has been used in World Bank circles (see inter alia, Stiglitz, 2000) and which has more neutral overtones of a natural, gradual and apolitical process.

Transfers of ideas or programmes are sometimes underpinned by deeper and prior process of learning. Here, the emphasis is on cognition and the redefinition of interests on the basis of new knowledge which affects the fundamental beliefs and ideas behind policy approaches (Hall, 1993). The concept of learning has been subject to numerous interpretations and criticisms in public policy (Bennett & Howlett, 1992: 277) and international relations (Checkel, 1997). Richard Rose in his analysis of lesson-drawing suggests learning occurs via transnational ‘epistemic communities’ (Haas & Haas, 1995). For Paul Sabatier (1991), policy oriented learning occurs within advocacy coalitions. This notion of learning (rather than simple copying) is of relevance when discussing ‘transnational advocacy networks’ and the manner in which they operate as ‘norm brokers’.

Learning can lead to the development of ‘consensual knowledge’ by specialists and epistemic communities about the functioning of state and society but which is also accepted as valid by decision-making elites. When consensual knowledge is developed at a transnational level, the potential exists for the exchange of ideas providing impetus for policy transfer. Learning via regional or global networks helps promote an ‘international policy culture’, but it is not automatically the case that learning will institutionalise in international organisations or in national governments. Learning is uneven and imperfect across different actors within a policy network, as well as highly differential in implementation. Certain actors may have a greater capacity for learning whereas others may adopt lessons for symbolic purposes or as a strategic device to secure political support rather than as a result of improved understanding. Political and bureaucratic interests are constrained by electoral considerations, issues of feasibility, funding shortfalls, war or famine that prevent ‘harder’ institutional forms of transfer.

Ascertaining the kind of learning and where or with whom it is taking place can provide understanding of the kind of policy change taking place as well as the possible effectiveness of that change. In short, there may be transfer of policy knowledge but not a transfer of policy practice. With regard to OSI, it would require extensive fieldwork with national foundations and interviews with staff to assess how open society values are translated into practice, if at all, and the degree to which the OSI normative frame is, or is not, accepted.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties and imperfections in such processes to transmit ‘best practices’ or normative values, theses processes have benefits. As Schneider and Ingram note,
Cross national policy comparisons contribute to innovation. National governments are introverted and career officials identify with particular ministries. Unless the examples of other countries are brought to light through analysis, changes will be incremental (1991: 67).

The structural dynamics of globalisation entail the policy transfer processes becomes a more frequent and conscious process. These processes are enabled by the low cost of travel and communication that allows the rapid spread of ideas, personnel and resources.

Initially, most of the policy transfer literature was focused on official exchanges between government agencies and officials at the state level. Recently, more analysis has been devoted to the role of other transfer agents. Key actors in the mechanics of policy transfer are international organisations and non-state actors such as interest groups and NGOS, think tanks, consultant firms, law firms and banks. These non-state actors have been shown to have considerable agenda setting influence when they function as part of ‘transnational advocacy networks’ (TANs, Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Recognition of non-state and international organisation roles complicates understanding of policy transfer processes beyond that of simple bilateral relationships between importing and exporting jurisdictions to a more complex multilateral environment. It draws attention to the transnationalisation of policy via three sets of actors: states, international organisations and non-state sectors.

1. States have been engaged in policy transfer and exporting lessons for centuries as empires and colonizers. Today national development assistance agencies export policy lessons such as via ‘democracy promotion’ built around US experience (Carothers, 1999) and that of other countries (Larmour, 2005). A more recent phenomenon is the internationalisation of public sector agencies (Ladi, 2005). Similarly, on issues ranging from organized crime and terrorism to human rights, the environment, finance, and trade, government officials are exchanging information, coordinating policies, enforcing laws, and regulating markets through increasingly elaborate informal intergovernmental channels. Public policy is enacted in the decentralized (and less visible) activity of judges, regulators, and legislators working with foreign counterparts on specific issues (Slaughter, 2004). This is horizontal intergovernmental networking on transboundary problems. This has been described as a new form of capitalist governance – “regulatory capitalism” – that is reliant upon an increase in delegation (recasting the boundaries between experts and politicians), a proliferation of new technologies of regulation as well as mechanisms of self-regulation and the growth of influence of international experts who spread best practices and international standards of regulation (Levi Faur, 2005).

2. International organisations like the OECD or the United Nations (UN) are means to help develop common policy responses in some fields. Likewise, international regimes – a set of similar norms and principles, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge – can also lead to harmonisation. Numerous studies of Europeanisation now exist (eg., Ladi, 2005; Future Governance at: http://www.hull.ac.uk/futgov/). In its external relations the EU is also a transfer agent. In preparation for the eastern enlargement of the EU, there were three pre-accession instruments available to the ten candidate countries designed to help induct the candidate countries into both the norms and technical arrangements of the EU regional policy model.

3. Some non-state actors are ‘policy transfer entrepreneurs’ (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996: 345) or ‘norm brokers’ (Riggiozzi, 2006) facilitating exchanges between actors in several countries at any one time. Think tanks or research institutes, consultancy firms, philanthropic foundations, university centres, scientific associations, professional societies, training institutes and so forth help transfer the intellectual matter that underpins policies. Ordinarily private or quasi-autonomous organisations, many have used their intellectual authority or market expertise to reinforce and legitimate certain
forms of policy or normative standards as ‘best practice’. Non-state actors in transnational advocacy networks may be better at the ‘soft transfer’ of broad policy ideas (Evans & Davies, 1999; Keck & Sikkink, 1998) influencing public opinion and policy agendas. TANs give ‘normative resonance’ to cause groups by pulling together the symbols, language and ‘cognitive frames’ that portray ‘morally compelling’ issues in a concrete manner to which the public can respond.

The interest of this paper is primarily with the third form of policy transfer. Philanthropic capacity building, knowledge or expert-based organisations like the Open Society Institute transfer knowledge, practice and people. In theory, bodies like the OSI have the institutional capacity to scan the international environment and undertake detailed evaluations of policy that will help prevent the simplistic, ad hoc copying of policy that leads to inappropriate transfer and policy failure. However, it is difficult to generalise about the character of lessons drawn by non-state actors. The capacities and intentions of these actors throughout the constituent parts of the OSI differ considerably and will shape the interpretations of policy experience, which lessons are drawn and how and why they are ‘exported’ or ‘imported’. Notwithstanding evidence of considerable degree of information sharing, policy research and expert advice incorporated in OSI-NY, OSI-Budapest and the various national foundations, the causal nexus between transferred policy ideas and their adoption is muddied by many intervening variables.

It is relatively easy to engage in the ‘soft’ transfer of ideas and information. It is a more difficult enterprise first to see ideas or knowledge about ‘best practice’ structure thinking and secondly, to ensure that ideas become institutionalised. While some ideas may capture the political imagination, many more fall by wayside. Non-governmental modes of knowledge transfer are more extensive than harder transfers of policy tools and practice. The non-governmental status of non-state organisations is a major structural constraint to policy transfer. Non-state actors cannot bring about policy transfer alone but are dependent on governments, international organisations and local communities to see policy transfer instituted. Accordingly, these non-state actors are often to be found in partnership or coalition on either an ad hoc or more permanent basis with government departments and agencies, international organisations or with other NGOs.

Networks

Principal in its armoury to inform policy debate and educate opinion has been OSI’s structural properties as a network. There are three types of network of relevance regarding OSI operations:

- Global Public Policy networks are trisectoral in character; that is, they are alliances of government agencies, international organisations, corporations and elements of civil society (Reinicke & Deng, 2000). Actors invest in these communities to pursue material interest but have in common a shared problem. Their interactions are shaped by resource dependencies and bargaining. They tend to cohere around international organisations and governments that have entered into a policy partnership for the delivery of public policy. Examples include the Roll Back Malaria Initiative, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Global Environment Facility. There are, however, many more networks. Virtually, all draw in experts and advisers along with various NGOs, community groups and business interests specific to the policy focus of the network. Over time the network may become institutionalised with the creation of formal arrangements such as advisory committees, consultation procedures and recognition by state and multilateral agencies in the implementation of policies to gradually become governance structures. The concept is neo-corporatist in inspiration.
Transnational advocacy networks (TANS) accommodate a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and activists. These networks seek to shape the climate of public debate and influence global policy agendas and are often less integrated into policy-making than GPPNs. They are bound together by shared values, dense exchanges of information and services, and a shared discourse where the dominant modality is information exchange. They are called advocacy networks because ‘advocates plead the causes of others or defend a cause or proposition’ (Keck & Sikkink, 1998: 8). Participants in advocacy network can sometimes lack the status of recognised professional judgement of ‘experts’. However, these networks have been prominent in ‘value-laden debates over human rights, the environment, women, infant health and indigenous peoples, where large numbers of differently situated individuals have become acquainted over a considerable period and have developed similar world views’ (1997: 8-9). Research, data and analysis are used as evidence supporting a cause in policy advocacy These networks cohere around ‘principled beliefs’ – normative ideas which provide criteria to distinguish right from wrong – unlike epistemic communities which form around ‘causal beliefs’ or professional understandings of cause and effect relationships. Consequently, transnational advocacy networks are more effective in valuing ‘grass roots’, traditional and non-scientific knowledge. TANs are of a neo-pluralist in conception.

An ‘international knowledge network’ is “a system of coordinated research, study (and often graduate-level teaching), results dissemination and publication, intellectual exchange, and financing across national boundaries” (Parmar, 2002:13). The primary motivation of such networks is both to create and advance knowledge as well as to share, spread and, in some cases, use that knowledge to inform policy and apply to practice. The expertise, scientific knowledge, data and method, analysis and evaluations that help constitute knowledge networks provides the experts within them with some authority to inform policy (for a full outline see Stone & Maxwell, 2005). The knowledge credentials and expertise of network actors (PhDs; career profile in a think tank, university or government research agency; service on blue ribbon commissions or expert advisory groups, etc) bestows some credibility and status in policy debates that gives weight to their recommendations. It is an elite perspective of experts informing policy, or a neo-Gramscian view of hegemonic projects. It is also a type of network often equated with epistemic communities (Haas & Haas, 1995) and ‘transnational expertised institutions’ (St Clair, 2006).

Due to the diversity of its operations, OSI can be seen at various junctures to be exhibiting features of all these three types. Where policy transfer is the process, and OSI is the ‘norm broker’ agent with its policy discourse of open society transitions; the network is the infrastructure and networking is the strategy.

2. Global Civil Society and Philanthropy

Non-governmental groups (NGOs) form one important part of civil society but they are complemented by other segments of “civil society” such as community-based organizations, academia and research institutes, trade unions, political parties, members of parliaments, religious movements, opposition groups, journalists, and the private sector. Civil society includes not just the individuals who participate but the institutions they participate in.

Most observers argue that civil society refers to voluntary participation by ordinary citizens. This does not usually include behavior imposed or even coerced by the state. However, the dividing line between state and civil society is often very blurred. Many associations continue to exist only as a consequence of extensive government patronage and/or financial support. As will be discussed, there is considerable more blurring at global and regional domains of civil society where authority is not always, or only, embedded in the state.
Needless to say, there are different understandings of the impact of globalisation on civil society. For Ulrich Beck, ‘globalisation’ means world society without a world state and without a world government. That is, a multi-polar world of continued civic expansion and contraction along global-local axes. Manuel Castells talks of ‘network society’. It involves a fundamental shift in power relations in modern societies, where the power of flows (information, goods, finance) takes precedence over the flow of power (government, class relations) that characterised nationally constituted industrial society. Civil society feeds on, and reacts to, globalisation. There is a complex relationship between firstly, economic globalisation and secondly, the thickening in international rule of law and new forms of political authority as another driver of globalisation, then, global civil society as the third ‘driver’ of globalisation.3

One aspect of global civil society is the ‘elite’ forms of associational life. This includes a variety of groups with different modes of membership, networking and organisation:

- **Policy Dialogue Groups** (such as the World Economic Forum4 in Davos which acts as a transnational convenor bringing together opinion leaders in government, business, academe and NGOs – see Pigman, 2002; Graz, 2003);
- **Business Associations** (such as the Trans Atlantic Business Dialogue, or the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS)5;
- **Foundations** (such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; the Ford Foundation or the Aga Khan Foundation6 that provide funding and resources to other civil society organisations, public policy initiatives and local community development);
- **Scientific associations and research groups** (for instance, the Global Research Alliance or the Global Development Network7 which produce scientific research and scholarly analysis for public benefit);
- **Promotional groups** (such as Freedom House8 that are more activist in orientation and engaged in the advocacy of certain values and ideals).

These are entities with substantial financial resources and/or patronage as well as a high international profile. The sphere of global civil society is not only hierarchical, but open and accessible primarily to those with resources; that is rich, westernised professionals supported by philanthropic foundations and/or donor agencies. It is an uneven playing field.

In this rough schema, OSI overlaps with all in some degree. OSI is a philanthropic foundation. Some of its constituent elements – such as EUMAP and the East-East Programme – operates as policy dialogue venues. East-East supports exchanges among actors from civil society in order, inter alia, “to share best practices/lessons learned in social transformation”.9 EUMAP is a monitoring and advocacy programme that works with national experts and nongovernmental organizations to encourage broader participation in the process

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3 For a discussion of the debates on conceptualising global civil society see the semi-annual Global Civil Society produced jointly by the Centre for the Study of Global governance and the Centre for Civil society, both at London School of Economics.

4 [www.weforum.org/](http://www.weforum.org/)


7 [www.gdnet.org](http://www.gdnet.org) and [www.research-alliance.net/](http://www.research-alliance.net/)

8 [www.freedomhouse.org/](http://www.freedomhouse.org/)

9 [http://www.soros.org/initiatives/east/about](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/east/about)
of articulating the EU’s common democratic values as well as in ongoing monitoring of compliance with human rights standards throughout the union.\textsuperscript{10} Although OSI is not a business association, it has a number of programs aimed at promoting entrepreneurship, ‘economic and business development’.\textsuperscript{11} OSI also supports various research groups in its organizational domain, including the Local Government and Public Sector Initiative (LGI).\textsuperscript{12} Although it is legally separate from OSI, parts of the Central European University (CEU) are connected with OSI activities. These scholarly oriented bodies can be contrasted with the more advocacy-oriented units such as the Justice Initiative and the Roma programs. As such, OSI can not be considered to be part of the anti-globalisation movement.

In contrast to the elite manifestations of global civil society, the anti-globalisation movement is often portrayed as ‘bottom up’ globalisation. A diverse and quite fragmented aggregation of groups and interests, sometimes convening at public meetings like the Global Social Forum, the anti-globalisation movement has attracted some negative publicity. The term ‘alter-globalisation’ is a positive spin on the activities of the reform-minded groups that demand that the values of democracy, economic justice, environmental protection and human rights be put ahead of purely economic concerns identified as neo-liberalism. Groups that advocate alter-globalisation include ATTAC (\textit{Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens})\textsuperscript{13} an international trade reform network; an example of so-called “contemporary progressive civic transnational advocacy” (Khagram, 2006).

Groups in the anti/alter-globalisation movement frequently decry lack of access into and accountability of international organisations. The WTO is a case in point. Unlike business groups and corporate sector actors, civil society actors do not find it so easy to secure access to the decision-making processes. The language of the WTO is the language of liberal globalisation. Unsurprisingly, it projects an emphasis on core market norms of competition and efficiency. This is also, of course, the language of business groups and experts, comfortable with the neo-liberal discourse and competent in the technical economic and legal language of the WTO. This empathy and expertise ensures a high degree of access to the trade policy community. By contrast civil society actors, especially those with a development focus critical of the WTO, are mostly not regarded as sources of ‘expert knowledge’ on the trade regime. Their role in the decision-making processes of the WTO has not been normalised in the manner accorded to corporate actors. As a consequence, the decision-making processes of the WTO, indeed, the international economic institutions more generally, will remain contested domains of legitimacy.

Access is partly conditioned by official recognition and public perceptions of legitimacy to participate. The authority and legitimacy for non-governmental public action in global affairs is not naturally given but has to be cultivated and groomed through various management practices and intellectual activities. The private authority of WEF or Freedom House or OSI rests in large degree with their establishment as non-profit organisations or charities. Their executives can argue on the one hand, they are not compromised by the need to generate profits in tailoring policy analysis to the needs of clients, and on the other hand, that they have independence or autonomy from bureaucracies and political leaders. Indeed, the Annual Reports of the Soros Foundations Network are littered with references to the ‘independence’

\textsuperscript{10} \url{http://www.soros.org/initiatives/eu}
\textsuperscript{11} \url{http://www.soros.org/initiatives/business}
\textsuperscript{12} \url{http://lgi.osi.hu/}
\textsuperscript{13} \url{http://www.attac.org/indexfla.htm}
and ‘autonomy’ of the national foundations, a perspective that has been echoed by other observers (Carothers, 1999: 273).

Another strategy to enhance legitimacy is rhetorical resort to the professional and scientific norms of scholarly discovery and intellectual investigation. For instance, think tanks set themselves apart from other non-state actors as independent knowledge organisations, and often cultivate a reified image as public-minded civil society organisations untainted by connection to vested interest or political power (Stone, 2006). An alternative and not necessarily complementary strategy is for NGOs to adopt the mantle of protectors of the principles and philosophies underlying democratic societies. Numerous organisations lay claim to participation in public debate by ‘representing’ the interests of minorities, the human rights of oppressed communities, future generations or minorities. The ends of both the donor and the grantee organisation are served. Such discourses of authority and legitimacy are a necessary component in effectively diffusing ideas and propelling them into official domains.

Civil society dialogues with governments and international organisations have become more frequent, where such groups are treated as ‘partners’ and ‘stakeholders’ in international development and global governance. It is within this context that the Open Society Institute can be found. The OSI is an organisation that operates independently. However, various units of the OSI are frequently to be found in partnership with UNDP, the World Bank or the European Union. Many more organisations that are recipients of OSI grants are likewise enmeshed in dialogues, alliances or multilateral initiatives with international organisations.

Increasingly noticeable is the competition between groups for international funding and donor patronage. Some NGOs are seeking to expand their programs, responsibilities, budgets and bureaucratic empire losing sight of their original vision and mission (see Cooley & Ron, 2002). Such bodies can become politicised – some say co-opted – by their dependency on resources from multilateral initiatives, governments and international organisations. Instead of global civil society being a sphere for apolitical ‘associational life’, ‘social engagement’ and ‘non-governmental public action’, it becomes a domain dominated by rich and powerful organisations engaged in policy advocacy and political activism for their benefactors (see Hodess, 2001).

As has been noted elsewhere in a critical study of George Soros’ philosophy and policy aspirations, private philanthropy offers a privileged strategy for generating new forms of “policy knowledge” convergent with the interests of their promoters (Guilhot, 2006). This is an acute observation when assessing the purposes of the OSI and CEU, and more generally, the political and ideological functions of philanthropic initiatives aimed at higher education.

… it gives us indications regarding the strategic value of these fields as laboratories of social reform – both as the training ground of new elites and as generators of policy knowledge. Investing in higher education does not only earn philanthropists some social prestige: it allows them to promote “scientific” ideas about social reform and to define the legitimate entitlements to exercise power by reorganizing traditional curricula and disciplines. Educational philanthropy allows specific social groups, using their economic and social capital, to shape the policy arena not so much by imposing specific policies as by crafting and imposing the tools of policy-making (Guilhot, 2006).

CEU was established to help educate a new cadre of Central European leaders facilitate the transitions of the region. The mission of OSI is to promote the development of ‘open society’ leaders in the post-socialist world. This liberal mission in economic development and public policy has been and continues to be bankrolled by private philanthropy.14

14 It can be argued that philanthropy is providing a regional public good, or a club good.
3. The Open Society Institute, Transnational Advocacy and Expert Advice

Most information about the Open Society Institute is to be found on its web-site. There is very little independent scholarly material available to access and evaluate the OSI (but see Guilhot, 2006). By contrast, there is a considerable amount of journalistic material that focuses on George Soros as the billionaire hedge fund speculator and philanthropist. The focus is on the individual rather than the organisation. This is not unique to the OSI. In similar fashion, more attention is devoted to the Bill Gates the individual, rather than to the operations of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (see for example, The Economist, 2006).

However, this methodological individualism is detrimental as it deflects social science attention away from organisational manifestations of non-governmental public action. By focusing on the source of funding, a tendency comes into play where the motivations of the philanthropist are assumed to guide and direct the operations of the foundation. Analysis is foreshortened without delving into the organisational ‘black box’. Removed from sight is the internal politicking, the deviations from principles, the poor implementation records, and financial misappropriations that may or may not occur. Moreover, other individuals and stakeholders of an organisation also shape its vision and strategies.

According to the OSI web-site:

The Open Society Institute (OSI), a private operating and grantmaking foundation, aims to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights, and economic, legal, and social reform. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to support the rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI works to build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses.

OSI was created in 1993 by investor and philanthropist George Soros to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help countries make the transition from communism. OSI has expanded the activities of the Soros foundations network to other areas of the world where the transition to democracy is of particular concern. The Soros foundations network encompasses more than 60 countries, including the United States. (http://www.soros.org/about/overview, accessed 17th March 2006)

OSI has been built as an international network but it overlays and funds a series of national foundations. The Soros foundations are autonomous institutions established in particular countries or regions to initiate and support open society activities. The foundations network consists of national foundations in 29 countries, foundations in Kosovo and Montenegro, and two regional foundations, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). OSISA and OSIWA, which are governed by their own boards of directors and staffs from the region, make grants in a total of 27 African countries.

The two central offices are located in New York and in Budapest. Easily identifiable as a non-profit or third sector organisation, OSI-New York is exempt from United States income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. OSI-Budapest is a separate organisation. Together with OSI-Budapest, OSI-New York provides administrative, financial, and technical support to the Soros foundations. OSI-New York operates initiatives, which address specific issues on a regional or network-wide basis internationally, and other
independent programs. OSI-New York is also the home of a series of programs that focus principally on the United States.

The Soros foundations operate as autonomous organisations with a local board of directors and considerable independence in determining how to implement the ideals of the open society. To varying degrees, these foundations participate in Network wide activities coordinated from New York and Budapest. Given the concern with transnational advocacy and global public policy, this paper is primarily focused on the network wide activities as these initiatives are those that are most transnational in design.

OSI Leadership and Organisational Culture

As noted, much has focused on Soros as the creator and guiding benefactor of the OSI. However, it is important to map into analysis that other individuals play key strategic roles. Moreover, on the ground, those that implement have considerable impact on the shape, extent and effectiveness of OSI mission.

Nevertheless, the inspiration for the organization originates with George Soros (and advisors around him) and in particular, his fascination with the work of Karl Popper. In his book, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945), Popper argued that totalitarian ideologies have a common element: a claim to be in possession of the ultimate truth. Ideologies such as communism and Nazism resort to oppression to impose their version of truth on society. The ‘open society’ is presented as an alternative that holds there is no monopoly on truth and that there is a need for institutions to protect human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of choice. After making billions from hedge fund speculation, Soros established a foundation around values and principles that interested him. In 1979 he established the Open Society Fund with the objective of “opening up closed societies; making open societies more viable; and promoting a more critical mode of thinking” (Soros, 1997).

In Hungary, the Soros Foundation was established in 1984 long before the transition had any visible reference. Initially it funded scholarly and professional exchanges for the local intelligentsia. Gradually, “that support reached the underground democratic movement: copying machines, books, all sorts of material and immaterial support was made available through the Foundation” (Miszlivetz and Ertsye, 1998: 82). Many public figures in liberal circles were associated with this Foundation or with an ‘alternative college’ supported by Soros (Roelofs, 2003: 180). Some went on to form the core of a new political party – FIDESZ. A few remained to help shape the development of the OSI. Outside Hungary, networks of émigrés and cultural cold warriors also informed the early discussions of funding dissidents and liberal intellectuals in CEE.

Unsurprisingly, the influence and relevance of open society principles, or of the programs built around these principles, is contingent on host of factors concerning the character of political regimes in power, the strength of political culture, the state of economic development, cultural preferences and so forth. National foundations have been closed in a couple of cases (for example Belarus) due to the oppressiveness of the incumbent regimes towards OSI (as well as other non-governmental actors).

15 Quotations not referenced in this section are based on a number of personal conversations with OSI-CEU related staff in Budapest over the period January 2004 to March 2006.

16 An independent researcher who has done considerable archival work on the origins of the OSI argues that its genesis lays further back in time with Soros’ interactions with the staff, donors and grantees of the Fondation pour une Entraida Intellectuelle Européene, an affiliate of the Congress of Cultural Freedom (see Guilhot, 2005). The Fondation’s mission was to organise the circulation of cultural goods and products between Eastern and Western Europeans, particularly among “non-conformist” intellectuals in CEE.
‘Open society’ principles as conveyed by the OSI have had mixed reception within the organization in the development of its organizational culture, as well as within target countries and communities. The interpretation and implementation of the ‘open society vision’ as held by Soros, by the Board members and by directors of major OSI programs, is dependent on its staff and their values and interests. The ‘open society’ is “an abstract idea, a universal concept” (Soros, 1997: 7) that will be operationalised in a multiplicity of imperfect ways. This is all the more the case given that OSI operates as a decentralised network.

Rather than this being seen as poor control and problematic coordination, this diversity is welcomed. Due to the strong ethos of localism and the budgetary control of national boards, the national foundations display a high degree of country ownership. Indeed, “the Soros national foundations are often perceived in their host countries as being organizations of those countries” (Carothers, 1999: 273) rather than subordinates of OSI-NY or subject to the personal whims of Soros.

In day to day management of this network of organisations, others have been equally important in shaping the OSI. A key player is Aryeh Neier, president of the OSI, who joined the body in 1993. A human rights activist, he was executive director of Human Rights Watch, and before that, he served for 15 years with the American Civil Liberties Union. Stuart Paperin is the executive vice president and has a background in finance and portfolio management. Katalin Koncz has oversight of operations coordinated from Budapest. Istvan Rév runs the Open Society Archives and teaches in the history Department at CEU.

At a meeting of former dissidents and intellectuals in Dubrovnik in 1989, the idea to establish a regional educational institution was first canvassed. Among those present at the meeting who went on to become associated with what is now Central European University were: George Soros, Péter Hanák, Miklós Vásárhelyi, William Newton-Smith, István Teplán and Endre Bojtár. Many others could be named. The board members of OSI-NY and OSI-Budapest are also elemental to organisational character.

Jonathon Soros (George’s son) and Tom Carrothers are recent additions to the Board, both of whom are bringing in a range of ideas and expectations about the conduct and operations of OSI. In particular, Jonathon Soros is asking “difficult” and “penetrating” questions about why certain programs exist and concerning their effectiveness. Matters of efficiency and effectiveness are a perennial concern for boards, foundation executives and increasingly their grantees. Waste is an issue (Roelofs, 2003: 188). As is a ‘dependency attitude’ towards funding from “uncle George”. Sometimes, it is sanctioned with statements such as: “If only $1 in $10 of Soros’ funds makes a difference, that is good enough to justify the work of OSI”.

The structure, strategies and mission of OSI to give autonomy to national foundations do pose risks in terms of management and oversight.

In some cases, national foundations have given funds to a closed circle of friends or political favourites. In other cases, most visibly in Russia, outright theft of program funds occurred (Carothers, 1999: 273-74).

To some outside observers familiar with ‘best practice’ in NGO and foundation management, there are significant problems of “conflict of interest” on the OSI board. That is, people who have been on the Board for many years, but who are also running OSI programmes and have a vested interest in the continued funding of such programmes.

In large degree, OSI has grown around the personal commitment of motivated individuals associated with bodies supported by Soros. In general, the senior OSI figures are people with strong personalities, interests and agendas of their own in their commitment to OSI and the CEU. The liberal globalist outlook of some is not necessarily shared by all throughout the Network (especially in countries where there has been a surge of nationalist sentiments) or it
is interpreted in conflicting styles. However, Soros “is a man who believes that OSI is driven by its philosophy” and that there is “not much need to question or evaluate that philosophy because it is the organisational mission and it is accepted”. Informality has prevailed. Consequently, there is some lack of transparency, professionalism and critical evaluation of methods or vision or commitment.

In the view of one insider, the OSI board “is not reflective”. It does not engage in self-reflection because of the pace of activity. The multiple snowballing of programmes and initiatives has meant that diversity, plurality, innovation and creative responsiveness to very different local political, economic and social circumstances has been the order of the day. This ethos is dominant vis-à-vis a bureaucratic emphasis on audit and financial accountability (but which is also important in OSI).

However, one OSI figure has remarked, with concern, upon a tendency to “universalisation” within the OSI that are going unquestioned. There is an assumption that there is commonness of the Eastern European experience (a homogenisation of the different country and local experiences) and a policy belief in the replicability of the experience in other venues. That is, what was done in Eastern Europe can be replicated in Central Asia. Such a development in thinking loses what was innovative and special in the encouragement of “local knowledge” and “local ability” via the national foundations.

Were such a universalisation in play, it would resonate with the “one-size-fits all” policy transfer approach for which international organisations like the World Bank have been criticised (Stiglitz, 2000). A reflex towards ‘universalisation’ would entail a shift towards a rationalist “problem solving” approach in OSI policy work.

Open Society Policy Transfers and Norm Brokerage

OSI is a transnational transfer network. It is engaged in explicit form of normative transfers. Thus in many respects its can be described as a TAN. Indeed, the OSI motto is: “Building a Global Alliance for Open Society” and is indicative of the organization function of brokering norms.

‘Norm brokerage’ has been defined as an agent that generates, disseminates and institutes norms regarding a political-economic model. The term ‘norm’ includes standardised knowledge and ideas, principles and practices that are usually framed into paradigms or policy proposals (Riggirozzi, 2006).

- As an agent in the generation of norms, the norm-broker creates and articulates policy paradigms combining pre-existing and new knowledge around which practices are oriented
- As a disseminator, it propagates policy ideas through different channels, such as capacity building; journals, reports, press releases; media websites and cyber forums; direct contact with local actors and funded projects
- As an implementer, the ‘norm-broker’ not only utilises knowledge resources creating financial and non-financial instruments for policy change but also engages with local actors through knowledge-related activities for the implementation of programmes on the ground

In other words, policy change does not entail a one-way exercise of power and imposition of paradigms, but rather the capacity of the amalgamation and compromise between the OSI and
local knowledge(s) found within community groups, local and national governments. In her view, the brokerage role articulating global and local expertise can make the difference between achieving consensual long-term reforms, or failure from the lack of support and legitimacy for the reform of institutions (Riggirozzi, 2006).

The OSI operates as a norm broker for ‘open society’ values or paradigm. That is, “rule of law; respect for human rights, minorities, and minority opinion; democratically elected governments; market economies in which business and government are separate; and thriving civil societies” (OSI, 2003: 187). At a more specific level, OSI engages in policy transfer primarily as a generator and disseminator via network wide initiatives, and less so as an implementer. The national foundations have been more closely involved in implementation.

In the analysis of two insiders – one from CEU, the other from OSI – the Network has played a prominent role in the region “promoting policy research, evaluating policy options, initiating and disseminating best practices, and monitoring policies…” As the “Communist menace” receded in the early 1990s, the Network “pursued individual grant making for scholarly research, academic advancement of the local expert communities, and enhancing diversified civil societies and independent media” (Krizsán and Zentai, 2004: 169-70). The language is less normative, and more social scientific and directed towards problem solving and policy development or reform.

LGI and PASOS are good examples of the OSI as a generator and disseminator of policy ideas. PASOS is the Policy Association for an Open Society – a network of policy institutes from 23 Central and Eastern Europe countries and the Newly Independent States. It provides institutional infrastructure for pooling and exchanging policy-related knowledge.

LGI is an older and more established OSI initiative to promote democratic and effective governance in the countries of the Soros Foundations Network. To that extent, it operates more as a disseminator and grant-maker than a generator of governance knowledge. LGI provided start-up funds for PASOS.

An important component of PASOS activity is to improve the capacity of the participating centers through exchange and sharing of best practices in a collaborative manner. LGI has targeted both managerial capacity of the centers and their capacity to prepare better policy documents and advocacy (through training workshops and mentorship). PASOS is grouping members in topical work-groups (or practice areas) and facilitates exchanges and joint projects. Considerable attention is dedicated to twinning centers and sharing of good practices. One area where policy transfer has already been facilitated by LGI as a ‘knowledge broker’ concerns the spread and adoption of ‘quarterly economic indicators’ in Ukraine, Moldova and Kazakhstan in national accounting systems (Ionescu et al, 2006).

One PASOS member is the Center for Policy Studies (CPS), an academic unit based at CEU. CPS is an important link between the OSI and the CEU. The director of CPS is employed by OSI while CPS research fellows are CEU faculty employed by the University. CPS has a number of other activities that in varying degrees connect with OSI, especially LGI as it has its offices on the same floor as CPS in Budapest. CPS conducts “research and advocacy” on public integrity and anti-corruption; social diversity and equal opportunities; rural development and equal opportunities. Project areas where there is an apparent impetus for policy transfer include research work on “European Integration and Policy Making” and the European Commission funded program on ‘economic cultures’ that aims at identifying the types of cultural encounters in the European economy during and after the enlargement, mapping the major cultural gaps and strategies to bridge them, and enable the EU to draw lessons for the next rounds of accessions. Through the ‘Bridging Knowledge and Research’ programme CPS is involved in a series of projects investigating the role that research plays in
policy making in terms of the supply of independent (and semi-independent) policy advice and analysis.\[^{17}\]

CPS manages the OSI’s International Policy Fellowship initiative (Pop, 2006). The motivation for this programme is largely to counter ‘brain drain’ by giving in-country fellowships to researchers and activists who have potential as open society leaders. Policy transfer occurs through the mentoring process of fellows who gain professional advice on how to write policy documents, spark public discourse in transition countries, and promote their ideas into official domains (OSI, 2003: 159). In 2004, CPS also launched a graduate programme in public policy that has been depicted as an ideological instrument to ‘train the administrators of globalisation’ (Guilhot, 2006).

The transfer undertaken is of western standards of policy professionalism. Indeed, one of the most popular and widely utilised publications of LGI has been *Writing Effective Policy Papers* (Quinn & Young, 2002). A revised second edition of this “guide for policy advisors in Central and Eastern Europe” is in press. Its authors are regular participants in the IPF seminars, and in various capacity building workshops organised by OSI and other multilateral donors in the region. They transfer professional experience and provide ‘hands-on’ practical technical advice.

Notwithstanding structural, historical and individual ties between OSI and various parts of the University, the relationship between the two is increasingly marked by different trajectories. Like many universities, disciplinary boundaries are hardening with little cross-fertilisation in research and teaching. There is a decline of intellectual engagement and community at CEU in that scholars stick to their departments, and disciplinary interests. The pursuit of academic norms has implications in providing little incentive to engage with OSI.

The ‘Global Turn’ and the ‘Policy Awakening’

From the end of the 1990s, the Network engaged itself in various debates regarding global transformations and as a consequence, ventured to reach out new regions of the world (Palley, 2002). Combining East-West, West-East, and East-East transport of ideas, the programs of the Network sought to critically examine thorny issues of emerging democracies not only in a post-socialist but in a global context (see Krizsán and Zentai, 2004).

This ‘global turn’ is reflected in the public opinion of Soros who stated: “Our global open society lacks the institutions and mechanisms necessary for its preservation, but there is no political will to bring them into existence” (1997: 7), as well as in a number of its activities. Notable has been the role of the Washington DC office of the OSI which “works to promote cooperative global engagement in U.S. foreign policy…” (OSI, 2003: 189).

One of the first events to mark the newly re-fashioned goals of the OSI was a conference in 2001 at the Central European University. This was organised by the newly created Center for Policy Studies (CPS)\[^{18}\] at CEU for the University’s 10\(^{th}\) Anniversary conference in conjunction with the Center for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation (CSGR) at the University of Warwick.\[^{19}\] It was also an opportunity and vehicle for George Soros to present his ‘white paper’ on globalisation, (Soros, 2001). The conference brought together an array of senior academics as well as policy actors from international organisations like the IMF,

\[^{17}\] For full details of CPS research and advocacy go to: [www.ceu.cps.hu](http://www.ceu.cps.hu)


\[^{19}\] [www.csgr.org/](http://www.csgr.org/)
corporations such as Shell, former Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo, and transnational activists from ATTAC and Third World Network (Krizsán and Zentai, 2003). For CEU and its sister institution, the conference was a venue to publicise their joint commitment to the ‘global open society’ and the objective “to articulate critical and policy views in the global public sphere” (Krizsán and Zentai, 2003: 37, 35).

Through the mechanism of the Chairman’s and Presidential Grants, there are further signs of the global agenda of the OSI. This is especially apparent in the fields of human rights and anti-corruption. In 2003, funding went to bodies such as Global Witness, the Data Foundation (for educating the US public about debt relief, aid and trade), the Altus Global Alliance, the newly formed TIRI, and long standing OSI partners such as Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group (OSI, 2003: 190).

Another indicator of the ‘global turn’ is the degree of interaction and partnership between OSI and international organizations such as the World Bank, the European Union, UNDP and the WHO as well as a range of other non-state international actors (OSI, 2003: 193). One important example has been the long standing record of work of OSI regarding Roma communities, support for the establishment of the European Roma Rights Center and the regional Roma Participation Program amongst other initiatives. Much work involved surveys and data gathering simply to understand the dimensions of the situation faced by Roma. In mid 2003, the OSI in conjunction with the World Bank initiated the ‘Decade of Roma Inclusion: 2005—2015’. The two have subsequently brought to the partnership most regional governments as well as that of Finland and Sweden, the European Commission, UNDP and the Council of Europe (Krizsán and Zentai, 2004: 175-80).

As such, the ‘global turn’ has many dimensions. It includes the internationalisation of civil society at national and sub-national levels through capacity building initiatives to educate local communities and policy actors into the impact of globalisation and regionalisation. It incorporates OSI partnerships with international organisations and governments, sometimes in arrangements that are similar to ‘global public policy networks’. Indeed, the Roma decade partnership can be thought of as such a network, while more generally OSI has been described as a ‘global democracy promotion public policy network’ (Sisk, n.d.).

The global turn is also apparent in the re-articulation of the Network’s driving principles for a ‘global open society’. On this later score, the OSI displays many features of a TAN, but also some important differences from the concept. The OSI network “is a more formal and institutionalised network with an established bureaucracy, relatively secure funding and gradually centralising structure” (Krizsán and Zentai, 2004: 171). Rather than resembling an ‘epistemic community’ in its strict definitional sense, OSI nevertheless operates an ‘expertised’ organisation, or knowledge network.

Related to the ‘global turn’ is its ‘policy awakening’ (Krizsán and Zentai, 2004:169). As OSI has matured, it has moved from a focus on capacity building to using built capacity to influence policy. For instance, as stated by the former LGI Research director:

"http://www.globalwitness.org/

http://www.ura.org/project/project1_1.asp?section_id=9&project_id=69 Established by the Vera Institute of Justice

http://www.tiri.org/ TIRI was an acronym for Transparency International Research Institute (originally spun-off from Transparency International after a leadership dispute) but the organisation prefers to be known as TIRI. It describes itself as one of “a new generation of global policy network”.

OSI was a key funder of the Campaign to Ban Landmines. It has also partnered with the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest which is considered a GPPN."
We... have started to gradually move towards new forms of international development. Beyond traditional action-oriented, grant-giving and capacity-building activities, we are actively involved in policy design and policy-making (Gabor Peteri in the preface to Quinn & Young, 2002).

Institution building and open society advocacy has not been supplanted. However, recognition that “the collapse of a repressive regime does not automatically lead to the establishment of an open society” (Soros, 1997: 10-11) prompted more nuanced, targetted and policy focused approach in the Network. Indicative of the policy awakening is the support given to PASOS and other think tanks as well as the International Policy Fellowships outlined earlier.

The OSI is not a schizophrenic organisation in that it combines activities with normative aspirations and advocacy as a TAN alongside scientific pursuits and scholarly analysis that might be associated with a knowledge network. The Network has “functioned as a mechanism of bridging knowledge production and policy...” (Krizsán and Zentai, 2004: 169). The organization is sufficiently broad and flexible to encompass a variety of differently motivated actions and ideological positions. While there are contradictions or tensions inherent in such combinations, there are also potential benefits in consolidating the mission of the OSI. The network structure potentially facilitates the incorporation of local expertise into traditional research approaches (Krizsán and Zentai, 2004: 174). Parts of the Network can be engaged in policy from conceptualisation through to policy advocacy, concrete action and monitoring, although this does not happen as often as hoped (Krizsán and Zentai, 2004: 182).

It is the image as a relatively rigorous knowledge actor that is perhaps the most significant source of authority for OSI. Many of its operatives have social status as experts and reputable policy analysts. Many OSI operations are think tanks or other types of research and analysis organisation. Attributed as public-spirited and with a steadfast commitment to independence, objectivity and scholarly enterprise bestows authority on OSI in a dynamic that also boosts the reputations of the individuals associated with it. These groups (and often the media in its quest for expert commentary) legitimate their members as ‘serious’ and ‘expert’ persons.

However, the ‘aura’ of academic independence can be misleading. Universities, think tanks and foundations cast themselves above politics and profit but in reality, ideas become harnessed to political and economic interests. Expertise has been politicised by governments and interest groups and used as ammunition in policy battles. This is evident in the manner in which OSI-Washington DC. office has to tread carefully in its activities vis-à-vis the Bush administration. Other OSI national foundations have encountered significant political opposition, and sometimes harassment, in some CEE and fSU countries.

Nevertheless, to maintain their reputation and repudiate accusations of politicisation, advocacy and lobbying, or ideological polemic, OSI executives have encouraged engagement with academic communities. In this regard, the strong relationship and physical proximity of OSI-Budapest to its sister institution, the Central European University is important.

In sum, the OSI has been in constant renegotiation and reconstruction of its identity and in pushing out socio-political boundaries as a transnational actor. It is a self-conscious transnational network operating not in the separate domains at global/regional levels alongside the national/local but engaged in making critical cross cutting links. In re-inventing itself from a norm broker in opposition to communism and advocating open society values to a body with stronger research capacity, it has sought to bridge social science and praxis. Finally, although it is a non-state actor engaged in non-governmental public action, its partnership activities and policy aspirations substantially blur the distinctions of OSI as an independent civil society organisation and public agency.
4. Conclusion: Global Boundaries of Non Governmental Public Expertise

This paper argues that knowledge and policy is a mutually constituted nexus and that the OSI and its elements are not simple informants in transmitting research to policy. It is clear from its wide set of activities that is seeking to provide the conceptual language, the normative paradigms, the empirical examples that then become the accepted assumptions for those making policy.

OSI does not act alone in such intellectual action, but more usually in coalition with like-minded thinkers and activists in journalism, universities and so forth. Through its networks and policy communities, OSI has ‘boundary transcending’ qualities. It draws together intellectual resources allowing the OSI to do the work of articulation between the national, regional and global levels of governance. Mediation is required to manage the ideological operation of ‘decoding’, interpreting and reformulating socio-economic realities. Far from standing between knowledge and power, OSI is a manifestation of the knowledge/power nexus. In short, knowledge and policy are symbiotic and interdependent.

The very concept of ‘open society’ has also been represented as one that has boundary transcending qualities. According to Soros:

… the open society as a universal concept transcends all boundaries. Societies derive their cohesion from shared values. These values are rooted in culture, religion, history and tradition. When a society does not have boundaries, where are the shared values to be found? I believe there is only one possible source: the concept of the open society itself (1997: 7).

However, rather than just transcending boundaries, the OSI – and numerous other transnational actors – are carving out new transnational spaces for public action. The Habermasian notion of a public sphere goes some way to accommodating this idea of a realm for the evolution of public opinion (see Hodess, 2001: 130). However, this notion is based predominantly on debate and dialogue, neglecting in considerable degree the variety of institutional developments that populate this space or ‘global agora’.

Within this nexus, OSI has been consolidating its own credibility and authority by creating its own audiences. Funding intellectuals, NGOs, the CEU and other academic centres helps build clientele relationships between these grantees and OSI, as well as with other foreign donors. By no means is this exceptional to OSI, but a common feature of philanthropic foundations (Roelofs, 2003: 188). The point, however, is that OSI subsidises various experts and intellectuals to inform civil society and professional or bureaucratic audiences. Instead of the linear transmission of knowledge with OSI as a conveyer belt, a circular process is in operation whereby the constituencies of OSI are sources of legitimation for OSI as a “transnational expertised institution”. And in taking a ‘global turn’ in its ‘policy awakening’ OSI becomes more distant from local associations and closer to international organisations and other ‘transnational expertised institutions’.

OSI constructs narratives, routines and standards concerning its own roles between science and knowledge development with that of the state, society and global authority. Recognition of OSI supported think tanks as centres for expert, scientific and authoritative advice occurs because of the scholarly credentials of these organisations. It also happens because of the relationship with policy institutions and donor groups that have a vested interest in the general belief that think tanks think and are rational social tools for policy planning. Commissioning and funding studies, these interests want independent, rational, rigorous analysis. On the other side of the coin, these international agencies can legitimise their policy position by arguing that they are interacting with and consulting independent civil society organisations. These interactions raises the issue of independence and questions of capture and co-option. Moreover, the various policy networks of the foundations further embed OSI in a range of
official actions and public policies. The distinctions between state and non-state actors become extremely blurred.

To conclude, this paper has sought to contribute to discussions of ‘global civil society’ by avoiding assumptions that civil society is a separate and distinguishable domain from states and emergent forms of transnational authority. Synthesizing perspectives on philanthropy and civil society with that of policy transfer undermines the divisions and highlights the intermeshing and mutual engagement that comes with networks, coalitions, joint funding, ad hoc partnerships and common policy dialogues. OSI is just as much an elite global public policy actor as it is a global civil society actor.
Diane Stone: paper in progress.

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Diane Stone: paper in progress.


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