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**International Institutions and Policy Diffusion:
Sources – Mechanisms - Impact**

Abstract

This session analyses the impact of international institutions on policy diffusion. Policy diffusion is the subsequent adoption of policies by different actors, governments or organizations, supported by different voluntary or coercive mechanisms. Despite a growing literature on diffusion, little is known about the role international institutions play in this process and how they can trigger diffusion process across countries and regions. Starting from this account, the workshop explores this link, applying a broad notion of international institutions that encompass international organizations, international regimes, and networks. Diffusion effects will be examined on the global, regional, national and subnational level, taking into account the many linkages that international institutions have among themselves and other actors.

The workshop is conceptualized as a forum for exchange on the link between international institutions and policy diffusion. We welcome scholars from international relations, comparative politics and other research fields who carry out empirical research in this area. Contributions should fall in one of the three categories: sources of diffusion, mechanisms of diffusion, and impact of diffusion. In any of these fields, we are open to a variety of research methods, both qualitative and quantitative. However, given the aim to present empirical research results, a basic restriction is that conceptual papers and papers without empirical work are less likely to be accepted.

Outline of the Topic and Relation to Existing Research

This session examines the impact of international institutions on global and cross-national policy diffusion. Policy diffusion is the subsequent adoption of policies by different actors, governments or organizations, supported by different voluntary or coercive mechanisms (compare Simmons et al. 2008). Diffusion is visible in converging policies in various policy fields, like environment, economy, education or social policy, signifying an increasingly important cause of external influence on national policy-making (e.g. Meseguer and Gilardi 2009, Knill 2005).

So far, however, studies mostly focused on examining spatial and temporal pattern of diffusion and causal variables on the adopters' side. This typically involves a detailed examination on the side of the recipient, either by quantitative or qualitative research methods. However, research has mostly overlooked the side of the 'sender' or promoter of policies, particularly international institutions that provide important forums for, and contacts to, multiple policy-makers of different countries or other institutions. As a result, very little is known about how these institutions operate with a view to policy diffusion, in which fields they are particularly important and successful, and why they are. Starting from this account, the workshop explores their activities, applying a broad notion of international institutions that encompass international organizations, international regimes and networks (e.g. Zürn 1998).

The workshop will examine diffusion processes by singling out how international institutions generate, promote and disseminate policies and practices, by which channels or instruments they are transferred and what their impact is, also in comparison to other actors. Such focus is connected to several research strands: International relations (IR) research has regularly analyzed international institutions, starting from formal international organizations to regimes and networks. Most of the empirical work in this literature is focused on single cases, thus lack a comparative perspective that would be necessary to draw more general conclusions on diffusion mechanisms. Also, research has only recently started to compare very different governance instruments – like idea transfer, coordination, rankings, power – that can be crucial for diffusion processes (Rogers 2003, Holzinger et al. 2008, Jakobi 2009, Sharman 2011). Network research, finally, has only recently become more prominent in IR and is yet in its infancy with regard to what the effects of networks are. Consequently, studies have usually not taken into account that networks may be crucial components of diffusion processes (but see the early work in sociology, DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Owen-Smith and Powell 2008).

In comparative politics, diffusion is an important cause for similarities across countries and source of globalization effects (Jahn 2006). On the conceptual level, different mechanisms of diffusion have been linked to activities of international organizations, from learning and harmonization to the imposition of policies (Meseguer 2004, Brooks 2005, Holzinger et al. 2008). The empirical relevance of international organizations and networks for a process of diffusion or learning has been demonstrated (Haas 1992, Eising 2003, Simmons and Elkins 2004, Nedergaard 2006; Holzinger et al. 2008). However, particularly quantitative studies often apply a black-box approach and thus lose sight of details on the role of international institutions. A greater focus on international institutions in this literature would be capable to locate diffusion to specific actors and their instruments.

Moreover, a comparative perspective also enables us to conceive the impact of diffusion on sub-national and transnational actors like business or civil society. International institutions like the United Nations often use public campaigns to raise awareness in civil society, ranging from literacy campaigns to the fight against human trafficking. It is, however, widely unclear whether these campaigns have an influence and lead to diffusion of such ideas and related policies. Other international institutions have caused the diffusion of more

coercive regulations like anti-money laundering practices in banks (Sharman 2008). Here, the relation between the national and international actors could be an important explanation for explaining the diffusion of such regulations, but such multilevel accounts to diffusion are yet rarely examined (compare Abbott et al. 2010).

Participants and Types of Papers

We welcome scholar from international relations, comparative politics and other research fields who carry out empirical research in this area. Papers should fall in one of the three following categories:

Sources of policy diffusion

The question of where the diffused policies come from is put at the center in this part of the workshop. Papers are expected to examine questions like: How do ideas – and subsequently policies – diffuse within international institutions? Is this a process that is mainly related to individuals in these institutions or can we conceptualize organizations as the main source? How is policy promotion planned, executed and considered in international institutions? Are some institutions significantly more successful to get their policies disseminated than others? Where do international institutions actually get diffused policies from: Do they pick up national models, do member state representatives promote and upload their own policies, or are international and supranational bureaucracies truly innovative? Are transnational actors, like NGOs or business organizations, involved in diffusion processes within international institutions? Which policies show particularly quick and wide-ranging diffusion patterns compared to others, or which policies have only become diffused in a specific window of opportunity?

The mechanisms of diffusion

International institutions are linked to the potential recipients of policies in different ways that range from simple membership to delegated authority. This part of the workshop will investigate how the diffusion process is influenced by these different ways. Questions include: Which institutions rely on which mechanisms? Which mechanisms – voluntary or compulsory – are most likely to cause diffusion, and if yes, how? Is diffusion an intentional process, e.g. linked to benchmarking procedures, performance reviews or any kind of recommendations, or is the dissemination of policies rather a byproduct of an organization's activity? How do mechanisms differ between issue areas or policy fields? Do international institutions combine mechanisms to maximize diffusion? Are they more successful then? When do international institutions coordinate with regard to diffusion and when do they compete with each other? Do international institutions orchestrate state representatives or transnational actors to disseminate policy models?

The extent and impact of diffusion

This part of the workshop examines the different results of diffusion processes, but also the diffusion process per se: Which policies have been disseminated by international institutions, when and to what extent? Which are regular difficulties in policy diffusion, both for senders and recipients of policies? Which countries are more likely to respond to dissemination activities of international institutions and which are not? Papers can also focus on multilevel

or cross-regional settings, e.g. examining whether policies diffuse to subnational actors only in specific countries or independently of national settings. But impact-related questions also include: Do we find evidence of cross-regional diffusion – if so, among which regions? Do policy ideas disseminate easier than corresponding reforms? In which issue areas is diffusion more common than in others?

In any of these fields, we are open to a variety of methods, both qualitative and quantitative. Given the aim to present results of empirical research, a basic restriction is that conceptual papers and papers without empirical results are less likely to be accepted from our side. The workshop directors presume that the presented papers are dedicated for subsequent journal publication, but depending on the outcome of the session, an edited volume may nonetheless be compiled.

Biographical Notes

Anja P. Jakobi, Dr. is senior research fellow at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF/HSFK). She has been working on international institutions, world society and global political change. Recent publications include *International Organizations and Lifelong Learning: From Global Agendas to Policy Diffusion* (2009, Palgrave), *Mechanisms of OECD Governance. International Incentives for National Policy Making?* (2010, Oxford University Press, co-edited with Kerstin Martens), and *International Organizations and Policy Diffusion: The Global Norm of Lifelong Learning* (forthcoming 2011, Journal of International Relations and Development).

Thomas Sommerer, Dr. is a post-doc fellow at Stockholm University, Department of Political Science. He has been working on policy diffusion, convergence and comparative environmental politics. Currently, he is involved in research on civil society participation in international organizations. Recent publications include *Environmental Policy Convergence: The Impact of International Harmonization, Transnational Communication, and Regulatory Competition* (with Katharina Holzinger and Christoph Knill, 2008, International Organization) and *Race to the Bottom or Race to Brussels? Environmental Competition in Europe* (with Katharina Holzinger, 2011, JCMS).

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