Keeping pace with policy mobilities

Critical conceptualizations of how policy travels among places and how it is conditioned in and through wider institutional and ideological fields have burgeoned in geography in the last decade. Building conceptually on a combination of insights from neo-Marxian political economy and post-structuralism, with a generally social constructivist orientation, this work seeks to extend and question some of the key assumptions and arguments of a longer-standing political science literature on policy ‘transfer.’ As such, it has tended to involve geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and others in the multidisciplinary development of ‘critical policy studies.’

Empirically, this geographical work tended, at first, to focus largely on the global North and, particularly, on transatlantic circulations of workfare/welfare models, Business Improvement Districts, urban planning and design strategies, and social and health policies. More recently, the literature has broadened empirically, encompassing new cases, connections, and continents, thus allowing the policy mobilities approach to become one part of a wider conversation in urban studies about ‘provincializing’ global North cities in our conceptualizations and about the ‘worlding’ of a wider range of cities and urban experiences.

Politically, this literature eschews any naïve or celebratory embrace of currently ‘hot’ or hegemonic policy models. It demonstrates a commitment to contextualizing and critiquing the conditions for, and interests involved in the proliferation of certain policies and ‘best practices.’ Furthermore, the policy mobilities literature shows a still nascent inclination to use the insights gained from the study of how, why, and where policies travel to inform and mobilize alternatives.

The purpose of this seminar is to provide an overview of the policy mobilities conversation, to position it within related and cross-cutting discussions, and, primarily, to offer a chance to keep pace with the recent proliferation of studies that have, in one way or another, drawn upon, extended, and/or critiqued the policy mobilities approach.
Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on:

(a) Thorough reading of the weekly assignments & conscientious participation in all class discussions and activities (25%).
(b) Submission, each week at the beginning of class, of two responses to the readings, each about one paragraph long and engaging critically with the arguments in the texts (25%).
*Note this is a requirement of participation even for those auditing or sitting in the course.
(c) Writing a substantial paper of journal article style and length (c. 5,000 – 7,000 words), based on the themes of the course and presentations of an in-progress version and a final version to the class (50%).

Discussion topics & readings (tentative)

Jan 10    Introduction
• No readings.

Jan 17    Foundations

Jan 24    From transfer to mobilities, mutations, & assemblages

Jan 31  Talking with political scientists about policy-making  

Feb 7  Policy worlds  

Feb 14  ~Reading break. No class meeting~  

Feb 21  Critiques and ongoing conceptualizations I  

Feb 28  Critiques and ongoing conceptualizations II  

**Mar 7**  
Advancing methods / Research paper progress reports & presentations


~DUE: Students writing a paper for the course will submit a 3 page summary today and present a version for comment to the group~

**Mar 14**  
A book-length case study of travelling policy


**Mar 21**

~Vicky Lawson (UW) visit (tentative)~

**Mar 28**  
Planning, development, & policy mobilities

Apr 4
Last class meeting

Presentations

~DUE: Students writing a paper for the course will give a 15-20 min conference-style presentation in class. Time will be allotted for comments and questions.~

Apr 11

~DUE: Final papers, via email, by 5pm~