

Policies as Translation: situating trans-national social policies

Noémi Lendvai

University of Bristol, UK

and

Paul Stubbs

The Institute of Economics, Zagreb, Croatia

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Introduction

A constructivist ‘anthropology of policy’ “treats the models and language of decision-makers as ethnographic data to be analysed” (Shore and Wright, 1997, p13) so that policy is viewed as a *process* rather than a *fact*. This approach is more concerned with *how* policy means rather than with *what* policy means. It reverses a traditional anthropology of ‘making the strange familiar’ with a commitment to ‘making the familiar strange’ (MacClancey, 2002, p7). In addition, policy has become internationalised, with important policy-making arenas existing at levels beyond those of the nation state;

transnationalised, as policy models and frameworks travel across time and place; and even globalised through the formal conditionalities of international financial institutions and the 'soft' power of 'global public policy networks' (see Stone, 2003). This chapter, essentially, explores some of the implications of developing an anthropology or ethnography of the transnational dimensions of policy, that is, those dimensions of policy which encompass levels beyond the individual nation-state.

This is framed, theoretically, in terms of the notion of transnational policy not as *transfer* but, rather as *translation*. It is addressed, contextually, in terms of our own work on understanding changes in 'social policies' in a number of post-communist countries in transition in Central and South Eastern Europe as a somewhat dramatic, although perhaps not unique, site of a decade and a half of 'symbolic hyper-inflation' of 'symbols, metaphors, language and emblems' (Scott, 2002). A complex conceptual architecture has emerged, under the umbrella of 'reform', constructed in the encounter with supranational bodies including the European Union, the World Bank, and the United Nations and its agencies, as well as, in and through encounters with a range of international non-state actors, including international NGOs and private consultancy companies.

In this sense, our work is part of an emerging tradition of international social policy research which replaces a notion of international actors as all-powerful with a much more complex, contextually-rooted understanding of the interactions within and between supranational and national actors, in

which ethnographic accounts of policy change processes emphasise policy mediation, dialogue, translation, compromise, and resistance. We focus on social policy in terms of its 'deep uncertainties' or 'displacements' of the taken-for-granted (Rustin and Freeman, 1999, p12) in the context of a new internationalisation in which countries compare their social policies with those of other countries and in which notions of 'European social policy' and even of 'global social policy' suggest reform models and benchmarks which are beyond those of the nation-state.

The first part of the chapter outlines the basic conceptual apparatus, in terms of policy as meaning-making. The second part of the chapter examines policy as translation and explores the implications of this in terms of the transnationalisation of policy and, in particular, seeks to contrast policy translation with more orthodox notions of policy transfer. The third part explores policy translation through a reflexive ethnographic approach developing a number of vignettes based on our own practical involvement in, and intellectual understanding of, social policy reform in parts of Central and South Eastern Europe. The fourth part draws some brief conclusions, and notes some theoretical and ethical objections that can and should be raised concerning our approach.

Our work is an encounter between two scholars, travelling between sites and across disciplinary boundaries. One of us (NL) is a Hungarian living and working in the UK, the other (PS) is British, living and working in Croatia. Schooled in more empirical and normative traditions in social policy

and social administration we have, each in our own ways, struggled to find our anthropological voices, and to explore new relationships between research and praxis as part of a process of re-examining our own work on globalisation, Europeanisation and social policy in Central and South Eastern Europe.

I. Policy as meaning-making

Framing policy as a meaning-making process is to acknowledge that policy is always 'layered by implicit meanings' (Innes, 2002) which involves, in Stone's terms, "a constant discursive struggle over the definitions of problems, the boundaries of categories used to describe them, the criteria for their classification and assessment, and the meanings of ideals that guide particular actions" (Stone, 2002, p60). In a sense, policies are always meaning-making and claims-making processes (Yanow, 1996), which have to be 'studied through' in terms of "tracking policy discourses, prescriptions and programs and then linking them to those affected by the policies" (Wedel, 2005, p37). In other words a series of interesting, and sometimes even surprising, disturbances can occur in the spaces between the 'creation', the 'transmission' and the 'interpretation' or 'reception' of policy meanings.

Policy, in Fischer's terms, "is not only expressed in words, it is literally 'constructed' through the language in which it is described" (Fischer, 2003;

43). We would go beyond this notion of language as 'descriptive', to assert that policy is inscribed through language and cannot exist outside of language. This is, however, never neutral or technical, but rather, as Bourdieu and Wacquant assert:

... linguistic relations are always relations of symbolic power through which relations of force between the speakers and their respective groups are actualised in a transfigured form. Consequently, it is impossible to elucidate any act of communication within the compass of linguistic analysis alone. Even the simplest linguistic exchange brings into play a complex and ramifying web of historical power relations between the speaker, endowed with a specific social authority, and an audience, which recognises this authority to varying degrees, as well as between the groups to which they respectively belong. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p142-3)

Bourdieu and Wacquant suggest that linguistic relations are 'unintelligible' outside of the "totality of the structures of power relations" (ibid; 143) although whether, as they suggest, these are usually rendered invisible in linguistic exchanges is a more open question, particularly in the case of transnational policy encounters and discourses. For Yanow, policy is fundamentally an interpretive process, which "focuses on the meanings of policies, on the values, feelings, and/or beliefs which they express, and on the processes by which those meanings are communicated to and 'read' by

various audiences” (Yanow, 1996, p8-9) In her work, she demonstrates convincingly how the meaning of policy is never singular, but always plural and contested, involving an ‘active readership’ by various policy actors and policy relevant publics, who are both interpreters as well as creators of ‘new’ meanings. Policy in this sense is always multiple and changing, transforming both the content as well as the context of policy, from formation to implementation.

In a number of languages, including all the Slavic languages and Hungarian, the same word usually serves for both the English words ‘politics’ and ‘policy’. Recently, in Croatian, the word ‘*politika*’ for policy has been partially replaced by the word ‘*mjere*’ (literally ‘*measures*’) in order to capture the difference between policy and politics. In addition, the word ‘policy’ is almost inevitably framed by a number of other words: consider ‘public policy’, ‘social policy’, ‘family policy’, ‘gun-control policy’, ‘equal opportunities policy’, and so on. This suggests that the word policy is, in and of itself, insufficient in order to ‘map’ or ‘frame’ that which is being discussed. Of course, meaning-making in policies is never an apolitical or technical process, although a cadre of ‘policy makers’ and ‘advisers’ seek to suggest that this is the case. As Shore and Wright have argued, the political nature of policies is often “disguised by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which they are portrayed” (Shore and Wright, 1997, p8). Central to this is the achievement and ascription of ‘expertise’ and ‘expert knowledge’ within the policy-making process. Whilst a vast body of work on ‘governmentality’ points to the role of ‘expertise’ in fixing subjectivities, the dangers of this becoming little more

than “the functionalist accumulation of premise-confirming anecdotes dressed up in uniform conceptual garb” (Gould, 2005), are all too real. For this reason, whilst we continue to emphasise the importance of policy technologies, including statistics, standards, contracts, terms of reference, logical frameworks and the like, we insist on the historical and contextual specificity of these technologies. Perhaps even more importantly, we take a keen interest in the complexity of ‘expert domains’ and the creative need for ‘experts’ to deal with “contradiction, exception, (and) facts that are fugitive” (Holmes and Marcus, 2005, p 237).

II. Policy translation and the transnational: beyond policy transfer

Translation as a concept has, itself, travelled a long way from its origins in linguistics and translation studies, to a situation in which “(t)oday an increasing number of scholars are aware of both the conceptual complexity and the politico-ethical significance of translation”, in terms of its ‘complicity with’ or, as we would prefer to state, inseparability from, “the building, transforming or disrupting of power relations” (Sakai, 2006, p71-72). A long-standing ‘sociology of translation’ emphasises the fluid and dynamic nature of ‘policy’, where meanings are constantly transformed, translated, distorted and modified (Latour, 2005). The notion of translation problematises policy, which is seen as a continuous process of ‘displacement’, ‘dislocation’, ‘transformation’ and ‘negotiation’ (Callon, 1986). ‘Translation’ occurs in a complex web of social actors, and non-social actants, called actor networks,

because everybody and everything enrolled in the network are active members and mediators shaping and transforming claims, artefacts, discourses, and interpretations according to their different projects (Latour, 1987), “actively paralleling and even displacing those of political authorities” (O’Malley, 1996, p316). Translation can be seen as “a continuous process through which individuals transform the knowledge, truths and effects of power each time they encounter them” (Herbert-Cheshire (2003, p456). An unpublished paper by Richard Freeman comes closest to our own sense of the use of ‘policy as translation’. For him, translation transfers and transforms: it entails representing something in a new way and in a new place, inevitably changing what it means. It is a ‘craft of compromise’, an art not a science, and entails mediating between different claims. Above all, it is more than interpretation: it is active, productive and creative (Freeman, 2004).

Translation is, then, the very working of power. In postcolonial theory, recognising that a root meaning of ‘translate’ is ‘to conquer’ (Kiberd, 1995, p624) so that ‘cultural translation’ is a significant site of a ‘re-ordering of worlds’ (Loomba, 1998, p101), there is a focus on representation, power and historicity (Niranjana, 1992). The sociology of translation considers the particular ways by which ‘objects’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘facts’ are produced through displacement or suppression of dissenting voices, or of those ‘*facts unfit to fit*’ (Gebhardt, 1982, p405). A recent text by Rada Ivekovic suggests that neglecting translation may contribute to “the premature shutting down of alternative histories” and “suppressing the diverse, constructing un-translatabilities and incomprehension, forcing separation between related

idioms: constructing otherhood and striving to expulse it outside the 'system', or outside the 'good world'" (Ivekovic, 2005, p1). She contrasts 'translation' with 'dialogue', where the latter implies symmetrical dichotomy and hides hierarchy, while the former is a form of resistance "to the hegemonic lines of imposition of the meaning" (ibid.). In a broad sense, translation is used as a sensitising device, emphasising the traversals of meaning and the power relations that translation practices entail.

Monaci and Caselli frame translation as:

... a result of a linked set of social and material processes that take place within a network of relations and that *modify knowledge at each stage*. Contrary to the diffusionist view of the knowledge transfer process as akin to contagion by a virus or the flow of electricity, the metaphor of translation suggests that the production, circulation and sharing knowledge among different socio-cultural contexts should be analysed by investigating how its users change their cognitive and normative attitudes; but it also stresses the role of the cultural categories of those who 'en-act' and bring into being the knowledge transferred to local contexts of application by *mobilizing, mediating, distorting, exposing, ignoring* and so *recreating* it. (Monaci and Caselli, 2005, p56; emphasis added).

John Clarke (2005) considers translation as a useful metaphorical insight into three critical policy practices. Firstly, translation illuminates some

processes of policy diffusion and policy transfers in transnational forms. Here he argues that “the Anglophone domination of policy expertise and policy networks, the passage of concepts into and out of ‘Policy English’ may be a site of significant articulation and variation” (Clarke, 2005:8). Secondly, translation sheds new light on implementation, or how policy moves from policy formation to ‘front line’ practice. Finally, he asserts that translation as a conceptual framework can draw attention and indeed ‘visibilise’ the work of ‘translators’, ‘brokers’, and ‘mediators’, “those translocal agents who mediate languages, contexts, sites and levels” (Clarke, 2005:8; cf. also Lendvai and Stubbs, 2006).

The transnationalism of policy as translation focuses on the attempt to render certain specific policies as universal and to ‘re-transcribe’ (Venn, 2006, p82) existing socio-economic, administrative and cultural practices within its idiom. There is nothing new in the movement of ideas, institutional blueprints, discourses and knowledge claims between and across sites, scales and actors. However, in the last thirty years and, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe in the period of ‘transition’ over the last decade and a half, these processes have intensified.

Space precludes a thorough examination of the mainstream, objectivist ‘policy transfer’ approach which builds on earlier work on the international movement of ideas and practices, particularly utilising concepts such as policy diffusion and lesson-drawing (cf. Hulme, 2004; Rose, 1991; Bennett,

1991). The approach has been developed, in particular, by writers such as Dolowitz and Marsh, who define policy transfer as:

The process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000, p5).

Their list of key questions: “Why do actors engage in policy transfer? Who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process? What is transferred? From where are lessons drawn? What are the different degrees of transfer? What restricts or facilitates the policy transfer process? and how is the project of policy transfer related to policy ‘success’ or policy failure?” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000, p8), appear somewhat linear, simplistic, and, ultimately, normative.

Our main concern, however, is that the trope of ‘transfer’ catches much less that is important in the process than that of ‘translation’. As Yanow has suggested:

Translating is not the same thing as transferring knowledge. ‘Transfer’ suggests an objectification or commodification of knowledge, extrapolated from its context, with the translator serving as a mere conduit or channel through whom the meaning simply passes. Even this simple model of knowledge transfer,

however, incorporates the problem of 'noise' – a distortion of the original meaning – which recognizes the likelihood of altered meaning ... (Yanow, 2004, p15)

'Noise' and the mediation, distortion, and recreation of transferred knowledge which it entails, is crucial, and points to one of the central contradictions of a universalistic understanding of both the policy process and policy transfer on the one hand, and the cultural, political and social particularities of their diverse meanings, interactions, consequences and resistances on the other. In the Table below, we note the different registers or vocabularies of the two sets of literatures.

Table 1. The different ‘vocabulary’ between mainstream ‘policy transfer’ literature and a sociology of translation

Keywords for the mainstream policy transfer literature¹	Keywords for the sociology of translation approach
Construction	Deconstruction
Policy transfer, diffusion, learning	Translation, transferability, displacement, ‘norm-alisation’
Policy change/stability	Transformation, hybridity, fluidity, reflexivity
Adaptation, dissemination	Negotiation, en-actment
‘Goodness of fit’	‘Unfit to fit’
Institutions	Knowledge networks, Actor networks, agency, social relations, processes

¹ In particular applied by the Europeanisation scholarship

While the mainstream policy transfer literature with its realist ontology sees 'policy' both in the source and in the recipient context as a stable, pre-existing, and uncontested 'reality', and the transfer as a more or less linear process, a sociology of translation works with a much more fluid and dynamic framework. For scholars using sociology of translation:

... policy does not exist somewhere else in finished form, but is finished/produced in the act of transfer. Policy is not available to be looked at and learned from, but is produced in the act of looking. Policy is the output of a series of communications, not its input. The issue is one of germination, not dissemination.
(Freeman, 2004, p2)

From this perspective, policy translation goes beyond policy transfer since the world cannot be reduced to binary notions of stability versus change, or adaptation versus resistance, determined by the 'goodness of fit' (based on the distance or gap between the original policy and policy in the recipient country). The mainstream literature operates within a perspective that has a narrow conception of power primarily in terms of institutional veto points or veto players, and their ability to block change. Most of the policy transfer literature adheres to a "re-hashed neo-pluralism in which societies are seen as composed of diverse interests, with power distributed along various dimensions (Stubbs, 2005, p71). By reconsidering our understanding of the policy transfer process from the point of view of translation we would argue instead that the policy transfer process should be seen as one of

continuous transformation, negotiation, and enactment on the one hand and as a politically infused process of dislocation and displacement ('unfit to fit'), on the other hand. Emphasizing processes of formation, transformation and contestation implies that policy transfer is never an automatic or unproblematic, taken-for-granted, process. Rather, it suggests the need to pay attention to the ways in which policies and their schemes, content, technologies and instruments are constantly changing according to sites, meanings and agencies. In that sense, a sociology of translation provides "a language by which we can begin to explore the interrelation of discourse and agency" (Newton, 1996, p731), where social structure is seen not as a noun, but as a verb (Law, 1992), accentuating a relational approach that emphasizes heterogeneity, uncertainty, fluidity and contestation.

One aspect of understanding policy as a translation process taking place within a transnational space is the notion of 'contact zones' which involve "the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (Pratt, 1992, p6). A contact zone is a kind of in-between or 'interstitial' space akin to Homi Bhabha's notion of the 'third space' which is never fixed but is, rather, always becoming (Bhabha, 1995, p208), characterized by forces and directions rather than forms or dimensions. Pratt suggests that a 'contact zone' perspective "foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination." (Pratt, 1992, p6-7), Whilst offering, in Bhabha's terms, the

possibility of eluding ‘the politics of polarity’ (Bhabha, 1995, p209), the term emphasises “copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 1992, p6-7) or, in James Clifford’s terms “a power-charged set of exchanges” (Clifford, 1997, p192). In the ‘contact zone’ encounters are rarely, or rarely *only*, about words and their meaning but are, almost always, more or less explicitly, about claims-making, opportunities, strategic choices and goals, interests, and resource maximisation. In the ‘contact zones’, all kinds of complex negotiated interactions occur, on multiple stages, as well as off-stage.

It is, precisely, for this reason, that, whilst we recognize, in the domain of social policy, some aspects of both the “the homogenizing ambition of Anglo-American as (a) universal language” and the “systematic attempt by neo-liberal discourse to colonize ... practice” (Venn, 2006, p82), we remain highly sceptical of linear notions of intentionality and causality and, most importantly of all, critical of notions of total closure. ‘Anglo-American’ is, itself, a complex product of an encounter between two traditions, although whether this resembles the world of ‘Indo-China’ or that of the language of ‘Serbo-Croatian’ is an open question (Hersak, 2003, p132).

Undoubtedly, the ‘Anglo-American’ of which Venn speaks is the *lingua franca* of the World Bank and the IMF, both of whom employ vastly more US and British citizens than those of any other country. But is it the dominant or hegemonic language of the European Union? One could,

certainly, argue that whatever the EU's pretensions are to celebrating all member state languages as somehow 'different but equal', some are more equal than others and, as linguistic pluralism grows apace with new members, then English is becoming increasingly important. However, this is a peculiar EU-English the codes and terms of which are, perhaps, more able to be exchanged between a Portuguese-speaking and an Estonian-speaking EU policy maker, consultant or bureaucrat than between either of them and a lay, or even an academic non-policy-making, native English speaker. Whilst various English-Croatian EU dictionaries exist, the value of each able to be judged in an instant in terms of whether a sound translation of 'to benchmark' is given (most Croatian negotiators still prefer a Cro-English verb *benčmarkirati*), the least translatable word or phrase, in fact, appears to be French, namely *acquis* or *acquis communautaire*. Indeed, the EU's concern with 'social exclusion', not just as a concept but in the way in which it is framed and discussed, can be traced back to an earlier French discussion of *exclusion sociale*, and many other social scientific concepts and debates in a European arena are most understandable when their routes are traced to German writings. Hence, there is not total closure, although the tendency for English to dominate is there, and we are far from real diversity in which, say, Slovenian or Polish come to have an influence beyond the confines of their own linguistic communities.

The idea of universalising neo-liberalism is also problematic. The neo-liberal project is by no means as unchanging, all-powerful, and universal as some of the critics of neo-liberalism suggest. On these lines, John Clarke

has argued that, whilst 'neo-liberal globalization' is the dominant form of contemporary globalization, any attempt to understand it as 'a hegemonic project' has to address "both the logics and limits of neo-liberalism, and the different ways in which people and places live with/in – and against – neo-liberalism" (Clarke, 2004, p89). He is profoundly interested, therefore, in 'uneven neo-liberalisms', varying in space and time, and able to enter 'national-popular formations' only in and through alliances, 'assemblages of political discourses' which inevitably change shape, and produce 'hybrids, paradoxes, tensions and incompatibilities' rather than "coherent implementations of a unified discourse and plan" (Clarke, 2004, p94).

Global policy forms are always articulated in specific places and times, or as Collier and Ong would have it, "territorialised in assemblages" which "define new material, cultural and discursive relationships" (Collier and Ong, 2005, p4). If, following Tickell and Peck's influential? work on the topic (Tickell and Peck, 2003), we consider neoliberalisation as a *process*, the outcomes of which are "contingent and geographically specific – since they are working themselves out in a non-necessary fashion across an uneven institutional landscape" (ibid page number needed), then what are needed are (ethnographic and anthropological) studies of policy as translation as part of the study of 'grounded globalizations' exploring 'forces, connections and imaginations' (Burawoy, 2000, p344).

III. Case Vignettes: towards a reflexive ethnography of social policy reform

This text is underpinned by a commitment to reflexive ethnography as offering an intellectual base, and something of a privileged standpoint, for the analysis of policies as translation. This commitment is less to an ideal type notion of 'intensive fieldwork' as a kind of anthropological *rite de passage*, and more to Willis and Trondman's notion of ethnography as a "layered and evocative ... presentation of located aspects of the human condition *from the inside*" (Willis and Trondman, 2000; 7, emphasis in original), as a corrective to over-theoretical, over-functionalist, and over-structuralist explorations. The problem is, as Jeremy Gould has suggested, "the range of things we can know first hand – the time-space coordinates we can physically occupy, much less learn to know well, within the scope of a research project or a lifetime – is extremely narrow", and transnational policies ('aid' more generally in Gould's formulation) are "comprised of multi-sited, multi-level, trans-scalar ...processes" which themselves necessitate trans-scalar observation as a 'translation device' (Gould, 2004, p283).

Above all, our concern is to acknowledge and embody the need to research alternative research sites, breaking down some of the boundaries between the role of a researcher and other roles such as consultant, policy-maker, activist, and the like. It is through the bending and the blending of different positions and perspectives that we are enabled to see 'policy' as a constant

move between the formal and the informal, the institutionalized and unofficial practices, the paperwork and 'the reality'. In this sense, our commitment to reflexivity, notwithstanding justifiable critiques of its 'relativism' and lack of conceptual clarity (Lynch, 2000) involves, in Marcus' sense, "cognitive and intellectual identification between the investigator and his variously situated subjects in the emergent field of multi-sited research" such that the ethnographer is located "within the terrain that she is mapping" which serves to reconfigure any methodological discussion that pretends "a perspective from above or 'nowhere'." (Marcus, 1995).

As a part of this, we would suggest that presentation of fragments of research material in the form of short vignettes or case studies is useful, not least because it allows for a somewhat truncated, but no less intelligible, rendering of a 'peopled ethnography' which, following detailed participant-observation, represents extracts from "field notes, interview extracts and the texts that group members themselves produce" (Fine, 2003, p41). Ethnography is highly sensitive to the issue of the construction of meaning, which is often neglected in structuralist accounts of political processes. It offers a way out of the agent-structure binary within mainstream social science although, of course, the issue of how to 'write up' vignettes remains complex and contested. Here, we offer both a multi-voiced ethnography and a privileged reading of certain encounters with policy from our own experience and practice.

I. Structural Funds in Hungary: from social policy to social cohesion

In 2000, one of us (NL) was working in the Ministry for Social and Family Affairs of the Government of Hungary as a consultant on the preparation for the Structural Funds to be absorbed for social policy programmes. At the time not many civil servants spoke or understood English, and since the Structural Funds' regulations were only available in English and French, those who spoke either of the two main EU languages were in key positions to move the programming forward. The preparation was also given a high priority, because it was offering substantial funds for generally under-funded social policy schemes. However, understanding the logic of the European Social Fund for a country that did not have a 'project culture' before, and interpreting the eligible types of activities for the funding, was immensely difficult. NL and her colleagues soon learned that nurseries are not nurseries, but 'reconciliation of family and work' (a label against which some heads of nurseries protested); that gender mainstreaming is more than just (re)-training of a few unemployed women; that regions and their inequalities are of concern, with newly established NUTS I I (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) regions a key scale in public policy making; and that the notion of social cohesion funded by the EU is significantly different from a traditional understanding of social policy in Hungary. There seemed to be a fundamental mismatch between eligible funding and existing social policy schemes at the time. Instead of talking about social needs, the Structural Fund wanted to see community initiatives, social development and innovative ideas to promote employment, gender equality and social

inclusion. However, employment was not considered part of social policy; policy-makers were not familiar with community initiatives; and 'innovation' constituted only a very small and fragmentary part of the social policy budget. Core domestic policy activities (social assistance and benefits, child protection and social services and institutions) were outside of the eligible activities, and previously marginal policy domains (such as gender, Roma policy, innovation, and community or regional initiatives) became the centre of attention. Yet, no week would go by, without NL's boss asking: 'but what is social cohesion after all?'

The encounter and the (not necessarily equal) dialogue of two policy frameworks (the EU Structural Fund and Hungarian social policy) offer a reflexive space. On the one hand, the difference between the two policy frameworks results in a 'stretching' of the understanding and framing of 'social policy' in Hungary and re-couples issues such as regional policy and social policy; employment and social policy; education and social policy; and so on. On the other hand, it creates new 'centres' and new 'peripheries'; it fosters new policy activisms (for example in programmes promoting gender mainstreaming or Roma integration), while marginalising other agendas; and it forges new policy networks at the same time as weakening others. It both enables and delimits the activism of policy actors. The stretching process is both flexible and open, because of the lack of a grasp of those 'EU' concepts, agencies such as Ministries have a large manoeuvring and claiming space. Yet, at the same time, meanings can only work on the basis of previous policy memories. This is the policy space

where nothing can be taken-for-granted, and nothing seems to fit the classic policy studies dichotomy between policy change and stability. Everything is changing, yet at the same time, resistance to change prevails and the possibilities are limited. New discourses, concepts, ideas and policy frameworks emerge; yet, in this intensified meaning-making, sense-making process, the institutionalisation of these ideas can only be limited. NL's experience in the Ministry framed 'policy' and the 'policy process' as a constant puzzle, where meanings never settle into any stable entity, but rather are constantly contested, challenged and therefore changing. Certain imaginaries are rejected outright, some hit institutional barriers, and others are picked up as a political discourse, in a very fluid context. That is why dynamic and process-oriented approaches are so crucial for any claims towards understanding policies in practice.

II. Croatia's 'Social Protection Reform Project'

In April 2002, the first meeting of the main participants in the World Bank, UK Government DFID and Government of Japan funded Social Protection Project, took place in the conference room of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Zagreb. One of us (PS) had been recruited directly by DFID to be part of the 'social services' team, one of no less than nine consultancy teams or companies contracted to work on a broad blueprint for the reforms, including teams for social assistance; labour and employment; fiscal issues and decentralization; administrative strengthening, IT and

database issues; poverty monitoring; as well as an overall team leader and a local resources team. The supposed importance of the occasion, with introductions by the responsible Minister, the State Secretary charged with leading the reforms, the World Bank staff member, and the Team Leader, was challenged by an earlier discussion PS had had with a senior politician, the father of a close friend, who replied, on understanding the nature of the work, 'oh, I see, it's one of those projects', before politely declining to intervene to speed up the start of the project. Fairly quickly, cracks and disagreements began to appear between the consultancy teams. A Croatian colleague, a Lecturer in Social Policy in the University of Zagreb, surveyed the foreign consultants and noted the massive over-representation of British and US consultants: 'Is there no-one from Holland here?'. The team leader, on his second visit to Zagreb, quickly alienated Croatian colleagues, and some of the foreign consultants, by insisting on exploring the project goals within a logical framework matrix and, indeed, delivering a very long and largely incomprehensible and certainly unnecessary lecture, on the virtues of the approach. By the mid-way point, relationships were at breaking point with one team already dismissed for late submission of work judged to be of a low quality. Consultants disagreed constantly regarding the contours of the reform in the context of a clear message from the State Secretary of the importance of advocating 'radical' change, and the equally clear message from career civil servants that nothing of the sort should, or could, be undertaken. The Team Leader was dismissed prior to the end of the project, with the final composite report compiled by the fiscal and decentralization team, best able to manage its

informal relationships with key local stakeholders and its strong links to both USAID and the Croatian Ministry of Finance, advocating 'marketised' recipes for social protection reform. None of the reforms were implemented although, some time later, a loan agreement was signed between the World Bank and the new Ministry of Health and Social Welfare based, loosely, on some of the measures proposed.

The vignette shows the fragility of discussions about the content of policy in the context of project modalities and problematic processes of systematic mis-communication in a projectised contact zone. It quickly became clear that those teams who could manage relationships with key insiders would achieve more. Sometimes, the key part of this, however, was the ability to turn notes from group discussions into polished 'power point' presentations, or to summarise discussions from participatory workshops in ways which privileged one reform option over others. Language issues were important as, indeed, an Anglo-American policy speak and presentational style (bullet-points preferred) met a more rhetorical Croatian style. Trans-national complexities of communication rubbed up against and interacted with, differences based on disciplinary perspectives, political leanings, and prior memory and experience. In many ways, technologies of presentation and, to an extent, technologies of involvement (Haahr, 2004), in terms of somewhat constructed 'participatory workshops', came to dominate over judgements either of the quality of the work produced or over its ideological or political leanings. Echoing aspects of the first vignette, the possibilities of change and the limitations to change co-exist, with an expansion of the

range of available repertoires of meanings, concepts, and ideas emerging but with limited coherence in terms of their inter-relationship and no immediate prospects of their institutionalisation.

Conclusions

Ulrich Beck (2005) in his latest manifesto for 'reflexive modernity' argues that we are witnessing a contemporary transformation where the dualism, and the 'either/or' principle of the first modernity is replaced by the 'both/and' principle in the second or reflexive modernity. In this process, along with the breaking down of boundaries and distinction between categories, "it is no longer possible to fall back on the tried and tested, usually scientific resources of rationalization, as these themselves have become ambiguous and uncertain" (Beck, 2005, p527). In this process, which for Beck entails the discontinuous transformation of basic institutions, policy, and its claiming, meaning-making processes play a crucial role.

In this chapter we have argued that policies are not simply rationally engineered, linear processes. Rather, they are complex, multiple and fluid processes of knowledge production, meaning-making, and claims-making that are taking place in multiple spaces, including the transnational. Drawing

on our experience in social policy reform in Central and South Eastern Europe, we highlight and amplify four issues crucial to our reconsideration of policy: the role of language; the problematic of policy transfer; the importance of researching alternative or unusual sites; and methodological issues around how we produce knowledge about the policy process, through reflexive ethnography and multi-sited research.

In the context of the transformation of social policy in Central and South Eastern Europe, language, and as a result, meanings, cannot be taken for granted. Linguistic representations are constantly and radically changing, with new concepts and discourses emerging and becoming (re)-inscribed. In addition, the unprecedented transnational influence that accompanies and frames this transformation produces an encounter or clash between local and transnational languages, along with their implied representations, claims, and norms. Language then becomes an important site for policy resistance and contestation. To an extent, language becomes a site for an exclusion/inclusion process depending on whether various policy actors are able or willing to speak the dominant language, be it Anglo-American, EU-English or another.

The multiplicity of languages, meanings, representations, claims, and norms in the transnational social policy space foregrounds important questions around translation practices. In this chapter we have argued that policy transfers are complex cultural, political and social practices, and as such, are far from mechanistic, top-down, and exclusively formal processes.

Instead critical issues of distortions, displacement, negotiations, and, as a result, transformation need to be addressed. Translation practices are always plural and multiple, and since our vignettes are as much about confusion and puzzlement as about domination and resistance, we contest the complete closure that grand narratives of neo-liberal hegemony often seem to suggest (see Clarke, 2004 for a critique of this type of theorising). The trope of translation is to emphasise the alternatives, and processes of re-transcription, which produces very diverse stories, voices and as a result, meanings and practices, in policy processes. Translation is also a dynamic framework to capture the fluidity of policy processes, with an emphasis on the constant (re)-construction of issues, discourses, and actor networks, as a part of real human agency.

Finally, any attempts to reconsider policy need to address methodological issues. In order to unfold complex translation practices, we argued that a more dynamic and open-ended framework is required to capture the complex interplay between discourses and ground-level practices, conflicting choices and pressures, between the 'political' and the 'technical', and indeed the metamorphosis of flexi-actors, criss-crossing sites, scales and spaces. Indeed, new hybrid concepts, terms and new theoretical perspectives are needed if we are to grasp important fragments of this complex transformation process. This suggests the need to reconceptualise politics, institutions, and contexts themselves. Of course, the wider implications of this approach need to be developed in terms of multiple positionalities, no longer necessarily privileging either the nation state or the

complex 'transition' setting as in these vignettes. Many problems remain, not least in terms of the situatedness of the reflexive observer and the dangers of over-stating the creative nature of interactions between agents. There is much to recommend a translation approach, however, as worthy of exploration as part of an emerging reflexive ethnography of policies in general and social policy in particular. The challenge is no less than the need to re-configure understandings of the policy process, transforming our own vocabularies around it, and ultimately producing new forms of knowledge that have meaningful theoretical and practical implications.

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