The international dissemination of policy prescriptions in the water sector: the South African National Water Act as a case in point?

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Presentation outline

• Introduction and Empirical puzzle

• State of the Art with Policy Transfer Studies

• Research Question

• Hypo. linked to a specialized literature review

• Research method

• Preliminary Findings
Empirical puzzle

- The Ecological Reserve as the only water right = an ambitious Act from an environmental perspective in a country whose priority challenge is to redress past inequalities in access to water.

- The decision to create decentralized river basin organizations (CMAs) in a country where since the 1950s most of the rivers are interconnected through massive inter-basin transfers.

We wonder to what extent the introduction of such provisions might be linked to the influence of international norms and so-called “best practices” over the NWA.
Policy Transfer Studies

- Emphasis on “reception” dimension of policy transfers
- The least studied is the making of international norms: not only their diffusion but their production too
- Few research works focusing on South-South Transfer or South-North ones.
- Lack of historical depth in analyses

Discussing the heuristic value of Policy Transfer concept:

- The false idea that two ideal-type models exist separately, one that is national/domestic and the other one which is international
- The making of policy at the global/transnational level without any reference to a national model
Research Question

• Focus on the international/transnational dissemination of policy norms, paying a particular attention to knowledge production and diffusion at both international and national levels.

• a Science and Technology Studies approach

• How did these two provisions (ER and CMA) get introduced in the Water Act?
Hypotheses

- IWRM and the functionalist explanation
- IWRM and Domestic variable: 1970s and 1986
- International donors’ community variable

- ER: to store more waters during raining years and thus better maintain a constant flow\= ecological reserve would serve to reinforce the long tradition of big hydraulic infrastructures?

- ER and a North –South policy transfer (“natural state of reference”; perennial rivers in the Northern hemisphere and flow variability in SA)
Research Method

- Policy as a *explanans* among others
- Comparing as a research method (focus on norm/knowledge production at both international and national levels; comparing a less widely diffused norm)
- Relevance of case selection (non-diffusion within the same policy prescription package)
- How to notice a policy transfer? Microsociology
- How to study « transnational actors coalition »?
Preliminary Findings

- Pongola floodplain and its consequences on downstream traditional community leaving out of the river products
- No evidence of ER granting dam construction with new legitimacy

- Apartheid and boycott of scientists: closing-up the gap between the scientific community and water managers in DWA

Epistemic cultures

- a South-North policy transfer? (with UK = policy paradigm with « Environmental flow requirement » and holistic approach)