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International Policy Learning and Policy Change: Scientific Inputs for the Dialogue on Social Protection with Global Partners

The Role of International Policy Transfer and Diffusion for Policy Change in Social Protection – A Review of the State of the Art

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades many governments of low and middle income countries have started to introduce social protection measures or to extend the coverage and improve the functioning of public social protection systems. **These reforms are a "global phenomenon" and can be observed in many African, Asian and Latin American countries. Likewise, social protection is gaining increasing importance at the international level.** This is highlighted for example by the recent Communication on Social Protection in EU Development Cooperation by the European Commission, the adoption of the Recommendation on National Floors of Social Protection by the International Labour Conference 2012, or the current World Bank Social Protection and Labor Strategy 2012-2022. Further, international or regional policy networks on social protection are growing in number (e.g. Joint Learning Health Network, Inter-American Social Protection Network, Network for Social Security (NeSSt), Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board). Thus, there is a growing role of international dialogue on social protection.

Yet, even though these reforms are a global phenomenon, they are not uniform across countries. Social protection systems in place and reform strategies applied differ in terms of scope and characteristics. The characteristics of the reform processes themselves differ as well across countries both in terms of scope and speed of institutional change. Whereas in some countries reforms are directed at one particular pillar of social protection only, other countries have initiated comprehensive reform processes encompassing multiple pillars of social protection such as health, old age, and social assistance either simultaneously or gradually. In terms of speed some countries are continuously progressing on their reform paths, whereas in other countries reforms get stuck or even reversed.

So what explains why these policy changes take place or - the opposite case - why in some countries no policy changes take place? Traditionally, attempts to explain policy change focus on domestic factors, for example the role of political institutions, partisan structures or socio-economic conditions. **However, apart from domestic factors, policy change can also be attributed to international influences and interdependencies.** The possibility that countries do not constitute independent observational units is not new and is known as "Galton's problem" (Ross and Homer 1976).[1]

Considering the increasing role of social protection at the international level and the growing number of international policy networks dedicated to facilitate exchange about experiences in social protection among policy-makers, it is of interest to know more about the potential interactions at the international level have to eventually contribute to domestic policy change. In contrast to coercive mechanisms of international policy diffusion imposed by a supranational or international entity (for example conditionalities imposed by IFIs), these international dialogues focus on voluntary exchanges such as mutual learning. Thus, a focus is placed on "soft governance" via horizontal processes. However, there is of course no automatism that policies are adopted simply because policy-makers observe "good working" policies in other countries.

The idea that international interdependencies matter for the spread of social protection is not new. Already in 1961 Asa Briggs wrote that "Bismarck's reforms of the 1880s—laws of 1882, 1884 and 1889 introducing compulsory insurance against sickness, accidents, old age and invalidity—attracted immense interest in other European countries. Just as British factory legislation was copied overseas, so German social insurance stimulated foreign imitation. Denmark, for instance, copied all three German pension schemes between 1891 and 1898, and Belgium between 1894 and 1903" (Briggs 1961, 246-7). The seminal contribution by Collier und Messick (1975) is another early study analyzing the role of international spatial interdependencies for the diffusion of social protection throughout the world.

But it was only in the 1990s that the analysis of international influences on policy change gained momentum with "Policy transfer studies" or "Policy diffusion studies" representing the two major research programs in the field. Although having a similar research objective, these two research programs differ in terms of methodologies applied. Whereas policy transfer studies are generally qualitative in orientation focusing on 'process-tracing' as method to describe (and to a lesser extent) explain policy transfer, policy diffusion studies are mostly quantitative studies aiming at assessing the existence of policy transfer and explaining its underlying reasons. One drawback of studies on international interdependencies is that the different research streams usually are considered separately from each other, although both are providing complementary methodologies. This review therefore deliberatively aims at jointly considering both research programs.

This paper aims at critically assessing the current state of the art within both research programs with a specific focus on social protection and social policy respectively. It is the result of the first part of the **joint research project** *International Policy Learning and Policy Change: Scientific Inputs for the Dialogue on Social Protection with Global Partners* carried out by the International Centre for Sustainable Development of Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences in close cooperation with the program "Global Alliances for Social Protection" by the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)*. This paper is followed by an empirical study analyzing transfer processes in international policy networks in the field of social protection as the second part of the joint research project.

To assess the current state of the art the paper addresses four **guiding questions**:

I. Are international interdependencies (policy transfer/diffusion) relevant for policy outcomes? (Descriptive level)
II. Why does policy transfer/diffusion occur? (Explanatory level)
III. Do international interdependencies improve national policies (Normative level)?
IV. What (preliminary) lessons can be deduced for the international dialogue with global development partners on social protection?

The paper proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview over the policy field of social protection in international cooperation. Chapter 3 summarizes the general theoretical debate on policy transfer and policy diffusion offering an introduction to both policy transfer and policy diffusion as approaches to cross-national policy development. After defining the central terms 'policy change', 'policy transfer' and 'policy diffusion' (chapter 3.1) mechanisms of policy diffusion and policy transfer identified in the literature (chapter 3.2) and mediating variables influencing diffusion and transfer processes (chapter 3.3.) are discussed aa well as normative implications explored (chapter 3.4). Chapter 4 provides a summary of empirical studies dealing with policy transfer and policy diffusion in social policy. Chapter 4.1 focusses on policy transfer studies and chapter 4.2 on policy diffusion studies. As the methodologies between both research approaches differ, the guiding questions used for summarizing the literature differ slightly between both chapters as well. Chapter 5 concludes by assessing lessons learnt and highlighting knowledge gaps and further research needs.

[1] "Galton's problem" is termed after the anthropologist Sir Francis Galton and dates back to 1888. It refers to the problem of drawing inferences from separate elements/units as if they were independent whereas in fact they are mutually dependent (autocorrelation).

2. Background: Social protection in international cooperation

2.1 Social protection - Sectoral characteristics

Depending on the underlying model for social protection various definitions of the term "social protection" itself exist. For example, in a **Social State Model** social protection is based on (a) the social insurance principle, meaning adequate, continuous income replacement in case of the occurrence of certain existential risks (social security), which is financed by income-related contributions; and on (b) complementary social assistance, meaning residual economic or social support for poor and needy individuals or vulnerable groups of society, and which is means-tested and financed by taxes. The **Welfare State Model** in contrast aims at providing comprehensive social protection against all existential risks based on general provisions of public care and financed by taxes, thus applying universality and without means-testing. The main difference between the two approaches is therefore the extent to which responsibility for provision against common risks is shared between the individual and society (Bender et al. 2007, p.14-18).

However, irrespective of the underlying model of social protection, **income redistribution, risk pooling and risk sharing** are the defining features of social protection. Combining these characteristics, social protection aims at protecting individuals and households from existence threatening risks (e.g. illness, age, unemployment) and protecting individuals and households who are not able to secure an income for themselves (e.g. due to age, invalidity, disability).

Ensuring financial access to health systems and establishing systems of old age protection as well as providing support to the poor and near-poor are currently among the core areas of political interest in low and middle income countries. **Instruments** of social protection cover a broad scope of approaches such as mandatory and voluntary contributory social insurance (the latter targeted in particular at informal sector workers in low and middle income countries), tax-financed non-contributory universal or targeted social transfers or private and microinsurance.

2.2 Social protection and its emergence on national and international policy agendas

Many low and middle income countries are currently pursuing reforms extending the coverage of their public social protection systems. Extension of coverage happens both in scope - by including previously excluded population groups - and in depth - by revising existing benefits. Prominent policy areas include the extension of social protection in health and social assistance, in particular the extension of cash transfers.

Within the area of **social health protection** low, lower middle and upper middle income countries all over the world are reforming existing health financing mechanisms towards extending coverage. Country examples include Brazil, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico in Latin America; China, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam in Asia or Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, or Zambia in Sub-Saharan Africa. **Social transfers**, and cash transfers in particular, are spreading around the globe as well. In 2010 cash transfer programs were operating in 52 countries (including 16 low income countries), covering 191.4 million households including a total of 863.3 million beneficiaries worldwide (Barrientos and Niño-Zarazúa 2011; Barrientos, Niño-Zarazúa and Maitrot 2010). As of 2012 cash transfer programs were discussed, planned or implemented in 35 out of a total of 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa reviewed by a recent study. 80% of these countries are low income countries, in which the emergence of new initiatives has been accelerating during the past decade (Garcia and Moore 2012).

However, this current status quo is already the result of a **long term process.** At the **country level** the extension of social protection (sometimes with an explicit focus on universal coverage) has been emerging over (at least) the past 20 years on the national policy agenda in many low and middle income countries. The same is true for the **international level**, where already almost 20 years ago at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 governments committed themselves to "develop and implement policies to ensure that all people have adequate economic and social protection during unemployment, ill health, maternity, child-rearing, widowhood, disability and old age." Table 1 sketches the developments at the international level since 1995 in terms of international declarations made or strategies issued by international organizations. An acceleration of activities throughout the previous decade is discernible.

Table 1: Social protection at the international level

1995	UN World Social Summit
1999	OECD: Pour un Mondiale Sociale – Le Nouvel Agenda Sociale, Paris
2000	UN: Enhancing Social Protection and reducing vulnerability in a globalizing world. Report of the Secretary General to the 39th session Asian Development Bank (ADB): Social Protection for Equity and Growth
2001	World Bank: Social Protection Sector Strategy Asian Development Bank (ADB): Social Protection Strategy OECD-DAC Guidelines on Poverty Reduction
2003	ILO: Global Campaign for Social Security Coverage for all
2005	UNDP Human Development Report Office: New Thinking on Aid and Social Security, Occasional Paper World Health Assembly (WHA): Resolution on "Sustainable Health Financing, Universal Coverage and Social Health Insurance"
2007	G8 Summit Declaration
2009	OECD DAC: Policy Statement on Social Protection and Employment UN Chief Executive Board: Social Protection Floor
2010	G20: "Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth 2010" High Level Panel on MDGs European Development Report: "Social Protection for Inclusive Development - A New Perspective of EU Cooperation with Africa"
2011	G20: "Development cooperation priorities of the G20" International Labour Conference: Resolutions and Conclusions on Social Protection (Social Security)
2012	International Labour Conference: Adoption of the "Recommendations concerning National Floors of Social Protection" EU Commission: Communication on Social Protection in European Union Development Cooperation World Bank: Social Protection Strategy 2012-2022

Source: Own compilation

The current reform wave originating in the 1990s and accelerating during the past decade differs from another – partially overlapping - wave dating back to the 1980s and 1990s, when debates on social policy were closely linked to debates on economic structural reforms. Then, reforms were primarily driven by cost considerations and the need to relieve burdens on fiscal budgets. The "liberal welfare agenda" was characterized by shifting the balance between public and private sectors in both financing and provision towards private involvement; reorganizing the public sector itself; and on targeting social spending to the most vulnerable groups, e.g. greater emphasis on basic social services, targeted anti-poverty programs and social safety nets (Haggard and Kaufmann 2008: 183-185). Prominent examples include the privatization of pension reforms in Chile and its spill-over to other Latin American countries or the introduction of user fees in many African countries.

2.3 Governance structures in international cooperation in social protection

The past few years have seen changes in the governance structures of development cooperation. Classical bilateral North-South development cooperation or multilateral development cooperation have been supplemented with alternative forms of development cooperation. The following chapter gives an overview over selected concepts of these "new" forms of cooperation.

South-South-Cooperation

The concept of South-South-Cooperation (SSC) and its practical applications already have a long standing tradition, starting from 1940s with the Bandung Conference in 1955 and the Buenos Aires Action Plan of 1978 as important waypoints. Thus, these forms of cooperation are not new phenomena as such. Still, the total amounts of financial flows in SSC have always been dominated by those of multilateral institutions and aid agencies in OECD/DAC-countries. This is partially due to the focus of SSC on financially less intensive technical cooperation. The notable exception is China.

Ideally SSC is "guided by the principles of solidarity and non-conditionality, while promoting cooperation between developing countries" (Amorim/Dale 2013, p.5). Advantages that can be attributed to SSC are for example the greater adaptation to the needs of countries concerned, the greater sensitivity to specific contexts, the encouragement of reciprocal learning processes, the utilization of sectoral capabilities of MICs and the relatively low cost and faster execution (Morazán/Sanahuja/Ayllón 2011, p.7). However, these advantages have not yet been analyzed and therefore remain rather idealized.

During the first decade of the new millennium there has been an exponential rise in SSC projects and invested financial amounts. Most important actors in this scenario are Brazil, China, India and South Africa. Despite the long standing tradition of SSC these actors are often referred to as "New Donors". The majority of the "New Donors" lack a centralized ministry or institution for their development efforts. It can be argued that because of the relatively small amount of money invested by "New Donors" (an estimated 10% of the net flow of global aid), their mixed role between donor and recipient and their lack of institutionalized aid coordinating mechanisms, the future of the global aid regime will still be dominated by DAC-countries and principles (Quadir 2013, p.335).

Triangular/Trilateral Development Cooperation

Triangular or Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC) are most commonly defined as "partnerships between DAC [OECD/Development assistant Committee] donors and pivotal countries (providers of South-South Co-operation) to implement development cooperation programmes/projects in beneficiary countries (recipients of development aid)" (Fordelone 2009, p.4).

Beside this common definition there are different forms of TDCs i.e. collaborations between two beneficiary countries and one DAC-donor or between two pivotal countries and one DAC-donor. One of the intentions behind TDC-projects is the integration of pivotal countries/"New Donors" into the international (OECD/DAC-standard) consensus. Also a closer relationship between Northern/DAC-donors and pivotal countries is anticipated. Furthermore, similar to SSC-projects, the utilization of cost benefits in pivotal countries can be expected (Altenburg/Weikert 2006, p.4-10). These kinds of projects have been criticized for missing the intended learning effects and for solely focusing on the efficient use of financial and human resources (BMZ 2013, p.6).

The analysis of TDC still has several obstacles to overcome. Publications about the theoretical outlines of the TDC-topics and empirically-based analyses of TDC-projects are still rare (Langendorf et al 2012, p.15). Further, there is a lack of studies examining the aspect of cost-effectiveness. Despite the underdeveloped area of analysis some factors for successful TDC have been established. Among them is the importance of "ownership" of the beneficiary countries which means that the conception of projects has to consider their demands (Langendorf/Müller 2011, p.7).

Global Development Partners

Global Development Partners (GDP) is a relatively new concept of Partnership in Development Cooperation mainly used by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). GDPs are those outstanding countries of the global south that possess regional social, political and economic weight and therefore have the capacity to shape global processes (BMZ 2011, p.6-7). The GDP-concept replaces the former concept of anchor countries. This approach pays credit to the increased importance of emerging countries.

Cooperation with GDPs focuses on climate change and the protection of global public goods, the promotion of sustainable economic development which includes a pro-reform economic policy, and the continuous exchange and dialogue on global development issues and goals (BMZ 2011, p.11-12). According to BMZ, cooperation with GDPs has two dimensions: first, bilateral cooperation and second, international cooperation together with GDPs in order to influence regional as well as global development agendas. This second dimension further extends to those emerging countries that are of regional importance and do not receive development aid, e.g. China.

International Policy Networks

Networks have emerged as specific forms of governance in which actors are not embedded in a formal hierarchy. Reiterative relations between interdependent actors make up the structure of a network. Factors determining network structure are actors' behavior, the intensity of their connection, and the power they hold. Networks can further be distinguished by their goals, degree of institutionalization, and geographic set-up (Springer Gabler Verlag). Additionally, networks are defined by the types of actors involved. Policy networks denote those networks that are involved in political processes. They deal with specific policy fields (see Knill/Schäfer 2014).

Policy networks have gained practical relevance internationally over the past decades addressing issue areas such as environmental protection, economic policy, and social protection. Two types of policy networks in the international sphere can be distinguished, namely transnational and transgovernmental policy networks. Whereas a wider range of actors participate in transnational policy networks, including non-governmental actors such as businesses, NGO's, and issue experts, transgovernmental networks are mainly open to units of national governments. Transgovernmental policy networks according to Slaughter (2004) can be disaggregated into three categories. Information networks are based on the exchange of information, dissemination of best practices and support regarding technical issues. Harmonization networks serve the development of shared regulatory standards, also with regard to international agreements. Enforcement networks help states comply with standards that have insufficient capacities or are inexperienced regarding the respective regulations (also see Jakobi 2009; Slaughter and Hale 2014).

3. International policy transfer/diffusion and policy change – Theoretical background

3.1 Policy transfer, policy diffusion and policy change - Definitions and typologies

Policy change

According to Hall's widely perceived conceptualization of policy change (1993), three variables can be disaggregated in the policymaking process: ***"the overarching goals that guide policy in a particular field, the techniques or policy instruments used to attain those goals, and the precise settings of these instruments"*** (Hall 1993, p. 278). Following from there, Hall distinguishes between first order, second order and third order change. **First order change** is understood as "the process whereby instrument settings are changed in the light of experience and new knowledge, while the overall goals and instruments of policy remain the same" (Hall 1993, p. 278). **Second order change** has taken place "when the instruments of policy as well as their settings are altered in response to past experience even though the overall goals of policy remain the same" (Hall 1993, p. 278, 279). **Third order change,** accordingly, presents a wholesale change, and thus "simultaneous changes in all three components of policy: the instrument settings, the instruments themselves, and the hierarchy of goals behind policy" (Hall 1993, p. 279). A goal shift includes first and second order changes.

With respect to social protection a first order change relates to e.g. changes in contribution rates or benefits. A second-order change relates to a change in instruments such as changing health provider payment mechanisms within social health protection or targeting methods in social assistance. A third-order change implies a goal shift, e.g. shifting from individual responsibility to redistribution.[2]

Policy transfer

The term policy transfer was coined by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) and defined 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 administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system"*** (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, p. 5).[3] The following section aims to give an overview over the forms, scope, actors, objects and degrees of policy transfer (see also table 2).

- **Forms:** The policy transfer approach distinguishes between voluntary, negotiated, and coercive forms of transfer and thereby tries to answer the question as to why actors engage in transfer processes (see Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, p. 8; Evans 2008, p. 8). Coercive policy transfers occur when political units are forced to adopt certain policies by other actors, e.g. states or international or supranational organizations. Negotiated transfer processes take place when decision makers are compelled to change their policies in exchange for loans or grants. Furthermore, the literature often equates voluntary policy transfer with lesson-drawing (e.g. Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Evans 2004, p. 3; 2008) or policy learning (Toens/Landwehr 2008) by treating "voluntary policy transfer […] as a process in which policies implemented elsewhere are examined by rational political actors for their potential utilization within another political system" (Evans 2008, p. 7). However, this equalization leaves out other mechanisms that have been identified in the study of cross-national policy developments and which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.2.

[2] It should be noted that policy change and reform are not necessarily identical term. For a conceptualization of the term "social protection reform" see for example Bender (2013).

[3] However straightforward this definition seems, it has been acknowledged by various scholars that policy transfer does not represent a coherent theoretical concept, and analytical categories still remain open for discussion (Lütz 2007, p. 142). The explanatory value of policy transfer remains controversial/weak (see Evans 2004, p. 5). Rather, it is maintained that policy transfer was developed as an umbrella heading compiling several approaches to policymaking (Evans 2004, p. 20), as an analytical tool (Hulme 2005, p. 418) that can be linked to different theories to understand policy processes (Lütz 2007, p. 132), or as a set of research questions (Dolowitz/Marsh 2000, p. 8).

• Scope: According to Dolowitz and Marsh, policy transfer has both a temporal and a spatial dimension. Policies can be transferred from a political unit's own past (temporal), another political unit's past (temporal, spatial), or another political unit's current legislation (spatial). The focus is on transfers which include a spatial dimension.[4]

• Agents: Agents of transfer can take many forms, ranging from state officials (politicians, bureaucrats) to policy entrepreneurs, academicians and other experts within 'epistemic communities' (Haas 1992), international and supranational organizations, global financial institutions or non-governmental and transnational advocacy networks as pressure groups (see Evans 2008, p. 7).

• Objects of transfer: Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, p. 12) identify eight potential categories for policy transfer, namely policy goals, policy content, policy instruments, policy programs, institutions, ideologies, ideas and attitudes and negative lessons. Thus, the term "policy" is used in a very broad sense.

• Degrees of transfer: The degree to which policies are transferred can vary. With reference to Rose (1993), Dolowitz and Marsh distinguish between four degrees of transfer, namely "copying, which involves direct and complete transfer; emulation, which involves transfer of the ideas behind the policy or program; combinations, which involve mixtures of several different policies; and inspiration, where policy in another jurisdiction may inspire a policy change, but where the final outcome does not actually draw upon the original" (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, p. 13).

Table 2: Categories of policy transfer

Forms	Coercive; negotiated; voluntary
Scope	Temporal and spatial dimension
Agents/actors	Politicians; bureaucrats; policy entrepreneurs (including think tanks); knowledge institutions; academicians and other experts; pressure groups; global financial institutions; international organizations; supra-national institutions …
Objects	Policy goals; policy content; policy instruments; policy programs; institutions; ideologies; ideas and attitudes; negative lessons
Degrees	Copying; adaptation; hybridization/combination/synthesis; inspiration/influence

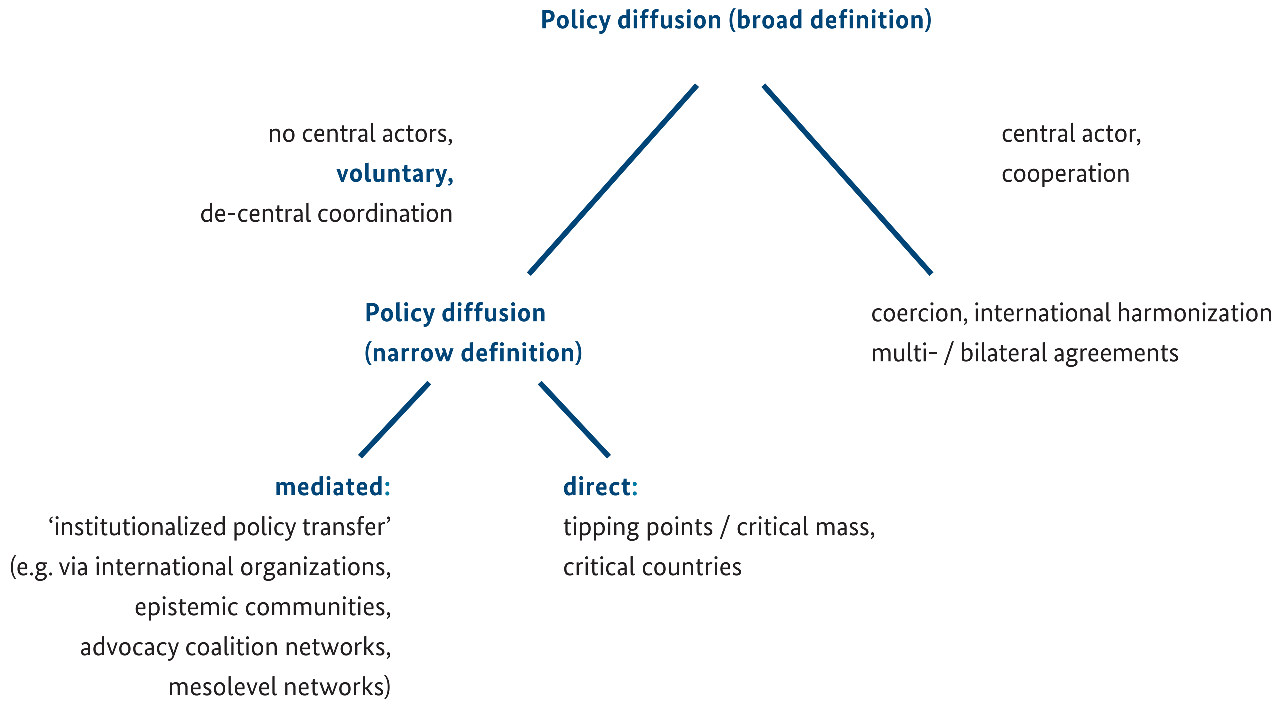
[4] Although cases studied mostly include a spatial dimension, the question of whether cases that lack the spatial dimension and thus represent intra-organizational transfer should be included into the study of policy transfer is not yet settled (see Evans 2004)).

Policy diffusion

Maggetti and Gilardi define policy diffusion as ***"the process whereby policy choices in one unit are influenced by policy choices in other units"*** (2013, p. 3). Rogers understands policy diffusion as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (Rogers in Lütz 2007, p. 132). As such, policy diffusion is generally concerned with the spread of policy between policy units, with interdependence being its defining characteristic. Units can be of various nature with regard to level (international, transnational, national, subnational etc.) and type (country, city, public organizations, firms etc.) (see Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 3).

It is possible to distinguish between a narrow and a broad conceptualization of policy diffusion (see figure 1). In its ***narrow conceptualization*** policy diffusion is understood as a de-central mode of policy coordination characterized by the absence of a central governing instance (e.g. the state; supra-national institutions). Diffusion in this sense is understood as a horizontal approach to policy development whereby actors voluntarily and unilaterally adopt policies from other settings without getting anything in return (see Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 59).

Figure 1: Policy diffusion



This locates policy diffusion in between top-down approaches whereby policy adoptions are the result of external pressure or harmonization, and bottom-up approaches that seek to explain policy outcomes with reference to internal (e.g. domestic) variables. This conception of policy diffusion seeks to explain how political actors coordinate in the absence of hierarchy by communication (observation) and can be defined as "the spreading of innovations due to communication instead of hierarchy or collective decision making within international institutions" (Tew in Holzinger et al. 2007, p. 15). In this narrow sense the study of policy diffusion aims to shed light on "governance by diffusion" (see Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 68). A **broader conceptualization** of policy diffusion includes interdependent spreads of policy motivated by any type of motive force such as harmonization, multilateral and bilateral agreements and de-central policy coordination. This broader conceptualizations is predominantly found in earlier studies, which tend to answer questions such as whether or not policies diffuse, how fast they do so, and who is involved in the process.

Further, the literature distinguishes between **direct and mediated policy diffusion**, whereby mediated diffusion is also understood as the 'institutionalization of policy transfer' by establishing networks for information and communication flows (see Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 70). Within mediated diffusion, information can be accessed simultaneously by any actors involved. International Organizations, epistemic communities, transnational advocacy networks etc. help facilitate and accelerate communication and information flows, and are at the same time important transfer agents in policy transfer processes (see above). Direct diffusion is indicated by dynamics such as critical mass or tipping points, whereby once a certain amount of political units adopt certain policies, others will follow more quickly. An alternative concept is that of critical countries, whereby prestigious countries are more often imitated (see Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 71, 72).

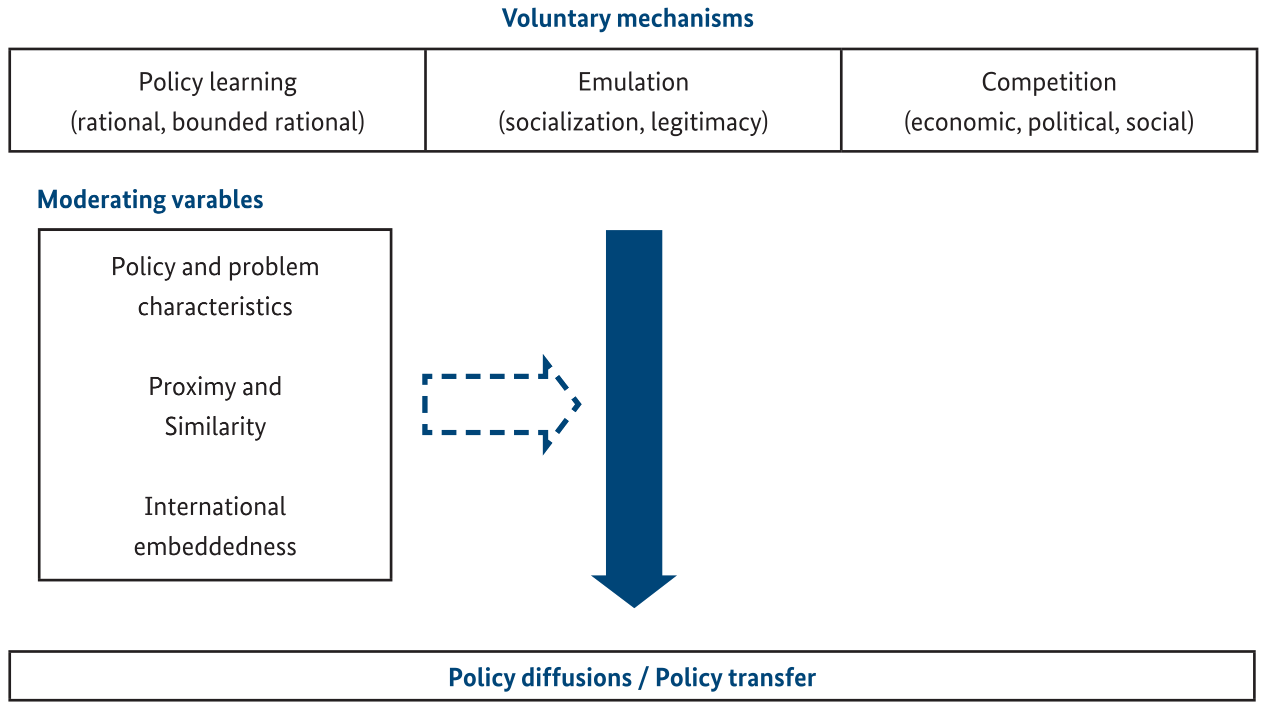
3.2 Mechanisms of international policy transfer/policy diffusion

The literature discusses several mechanisms of policy transfer and policy diffusion. At first, it is possible to distinguish between coercive or voluntary policy transfer/diffusion, the latter referring to horizontal coordination. Mechanisms of voluntary policy transfer/diffusion include learning, emulation and competition. All of those can be understood as communication based mechanisms, if observation is understood as a form of communication. In order to give an overview over possible diffusion and transfer mechanisms as well as influencing framework requirements (moderating variables), we will discuss each in the following section. The following discussion is primarily based on the policy diffusion literature as the policy transfer literature does not clearly specify explanatory variables. Figure 2 provides an overview of the variables discussed.

3.2.1 Coercion

Coercion occurs when political units are forced to adopt certain policies by other actors, e.g. states or international or supranational organizations. Conditionality can be considered as one form of coercion. Coercion is a top-down measure and as such not a horizontal governance mechanisms as those emphasized by the narrow definition of policy diffusion. Unfortunately, there exists no consistent categorization of coercive and voluntary processes (see Holzinger/Knill 2007, p. 89), which consequently leads to rather intuitive classification of transfer processes by the various scholars. Thus, policy transfers that were motivated by international agreements within IOs, or best practices have been classified as coercive transfers and voluntary transfers at the same time by different scholars on the basis of different reasoning (see Holzinger/Knill 2007, p. 89, 90).

Figure 2: Explaining policy diffusion and policy transfer - Overview



3.2.2 Voluntary mechanisms

3.2.2.1 Learning

Policy learning is generally understood as **"the acquisition of new relevant information that permits the updating of beliefs about the effects of a new policy"** (Braun et al. 2007, p. 42). In this view, decision makers are (bounded) rational actors interested in finding solutions to pressing problems. Learning supports the decision between alternative policy options. Scanning other jurisdictions and making use of experiences of other countries forms the basis of policy learning, helping decision makers to evaluate the effects of alternative and prospective policies. The literature distinguishes between rational learning or lesson-drawing (Rose 1993), which presupposes fully rational actors and perfect information, and bounded learning, whereby actors use relevant information readily available to them ("cognitive shortcuts", see Braun et al. 2007, p. 42; Meseguer 2005, p. 72). **This learning mechanism is directly related to the performance of a policy, e.g. whether it is successful or not.** Maggetti and Gilardi distinguish three types of success, namely "(a) the goals that the policy is designed to achieve, (b) the challenges of its implementation, and (c) its political support" (Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 4). Learning by policy makers includes all of these aspects. Policy learning can result in different degrees of policy transfer/diffusion specified above, but does not have to lead to transfer/diffusion, if so called "negative lessons" are drawn (see Holzinger/Knill 2007, p. 93).

3.2.2.2 Emulation

The underlying theoretical assumption of emulation in contrast to that of learning is that political units aim to conform to their normative environment (Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 4). As Gilardi (2012) points out referring to Checkel (2005) and March and Olsen (1998) emulation differs from all other mechanisms: Whereas learning, competition and coercion rely on the "logic of consequences", i.e. in one way or another choosing by evaluating the consequences of alternative actions, **emulation relies on the "logic of appropriateness", where action "involves evoking an identity or role to a specific situation"** (Gilardi 2012, p. 22). Decision makers are not so much interested in effective policy solutions. Instead, "the symbolic and socially constructed characteristics are crucial" (Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 4) to decisions taken by policy makers. This makes emulation "a 'blind' action in that it does not entail enhanced reflection about the mapping from policies to outcomes […]" (Meseguer 2005, p. 79), which can lead to the adoption of policies widely accepted and valued highly, and conversely, to the dismissal of policies that might be beneficial but do not enjoy the same acceptance or even present a taboo (see Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 4). Thus, emulation might facilitate the public acceptance or feasibility of a policy change, but in terms of outcomes, it may not lead to improvement or even to a deterioration of a given situation. It is argued that emulation typically implies copying of foreign policies (see Holzinger/Knill 2007, p. 94).

It is possible to distinguish between at least **two different channels of emulation.** According to Meseguer, "Governments may imitate what peer countries do simply because they are peers, or governments may imitate what apparently successful countries do simply because they are high-status countries that are considered to know best" (Meseguer 2005, p. 73). This **'taken for grantedness'** can either happen on the basis of shared socialization and the development of common norms among peers or be a result of policies being understood as appropriate and therefore as being taken for granted. As Braun et al. put it, "[p]olitical rights for women have spread as a result of their being progressively taken for granted as an essential component of citizenship" (Braun et al. 2007, p. 43).

The quest for legitimacy or also termed symbolic imitation constitutes another form of emulation. This mechanism describes the adoption of policies by decision makers as a way to "enhance their status, credibility, or 'modernity'" (see Meseguer 2005, p. 76). The adoption of policies that conform to prevailing normative structures can also function as a 'ceremony' protecting policy-makers from criticisms (Meyr and Rowan 1977 cited in Braun and Gilardi 2006, p.312). As an example of symbolic imitation Braun et al. point out that "it has been argued that the establishment of independent central banks was less linked to attempts to fight inflation than to the need for governments to show their alignment to socially valued policy-making models" (Braun et al. 2007, p. 44).

'Taken for grantedness' impacts on how policy-makers subjectively judge the effectiveness of a given policy, whereas 'symbolic imitation' influences the utility policy-makers attach to a given policy (Braun and Gilardi 2006, p. 313).

3.2.2.3 Competition

Competition can refer to either economic, political or social competition. **Economic competition** occurs when states react strategically to one another in order to attract or retain resources (see Holzinger/Knill 2007, p. 92; Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 5). Depending on the policy area (process vs. product regulation), competition can lead to a regulatory "race to the bottom", e.g. lowering process costs in order to increase economic

competitiveness, or under certain conditions conversely to a "race to the top" (see Holzinger/Knill 2007, p. 92), e.g. raising product standards in order to keep products manufactured in countries with low product standards from entering the market. Political and social competition are mentioned less frequently than economic competition. **Political competition** occurs when states aim to adopt the role of international leaders or early followers in order to influence international policy developments and thereby minimizing adaptation costs (Busch and Jörgens 2007, p.73).[5] **Social competition** or 'structural equivalence' denotes a relationship shared by two entities towards a third party. In order to stabilize this relationship, these two entities observe and if necessary imitate each other (see Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 74).

3.2.3 Links and interrelationships

It is often stated in the literature that diffusion and transfer processes are usually caused by a mix of mechanisms. However, the literature still falls short on showing how mechanisms interact with one another (see Marsh/Sharman 2008, p. 33), and what role country-specific factors play (see Braun et al. 2007, p. 44). Further, the additive handling of these mechanisms poses theoretical challenges.[6] For a fuller understanding it is necessary to explore if the factors addressed are in a complementing, substitutive, competitive or in no relationship with each other at all (Kemmerling 2007, S.160).[7] Braun et al. accordingly conclude that this "'vague theory' […] leads to a simplified view of diffusion process that neglects the possibility of "conjunctural" and "multiple" causation […], that is, the fact that the effects of learning, for example, may depend on country-specific factors, and that different paths may lead to the same outcome (for example, some countries may learn while others imitate)" (2007, p. 44, 45). Consequently, it remains difficult to deduce links and interrelationships between mechanisms from the current state of the art. The systematic interactions between mechanisms remain to be studied both theoretically as well as empirically in future research (see Holzinger/Knill 2007, p. 105).

3.3 Framework requirements (Moderating variables)

Diffusion and transfer processes cannot be explained by pointing to different mechanisms and information flows only. The literature mentions several moderating variables which influence the likelihood or propensity of policy transfer/diffusion. These variables include policy specific qualities, similarities among and countries, and international aspects (see Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 74):

- **Policy specific qualities:** It is maintained that policies with a higher potential for domestic conflict of interests diffuse more slowly. Thus, redistributive policies would be expected to diffuse more slowly than regulative policies due to their high potential to cause conflicts between national interest groups (see Lütz 2007, p. 141; Holzinger et al. 2007, p. 30, 31). Further, problem structures influence diffusion and transfer with regard to the visibility and intensity of domestic problems and the solutions they require, e.g. first order policy changes such as simple technical solutions or changes in institutional or political paths (Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 74).

[5] However, contrary to this position it is also possible to argue that countries refrain from acting as international leader or policy innovators in order to save the costs of innovation.
[6] It has been mentioned above that policy transfer studies often equate voluntary policy transfer with lesson-drawing and policy learning. It can be understood though, that policy transfer processes are motivated by all of the mechanisms explained above.
[7] Cao (2010) is the only study known to the authors explicitly considering this interaction by focusing on the relationship between learning and competition: Learning might be motivated by deciding between alternative options in order to improve performance. But leaning might also be induced by competition, e.g. adopting innovations from other countries are adopted in order to save innovation costs, which would reduce the overall level of innovations (Cao 2010).

• **Proximity and similarities between countries:** Proximity and similarities between countries are said to positively influence diffusion and transfer processes (see Lütz 2007, p. 139; Holzinger et al. 2007, p. 30; Busch/Jörgens 2007, p. 74). Proximity basically refers to geographic proximity. Similarities include socio-economic similarities (e.g. same level of economic development, similar demographics), but also cultural and institutional similarities. Cultural similarities can refer to a common language, religion, and shared values such as individualism or equality. Decision makers might look to those countries for models with which they have tight cultural relations, and their openness for certain policies might be restrained by 'cognitive filters' (see Holzinger et al. 2007, p. 30.[8] Further, diffusion of certain policies might depend on the institutional set up, whereby institutional similarities between countries positively influence diffusion and transfer (Holzinger et al. 2007, p. 30).[9] As an example, studies suggest that Unitarian, pluralist and corporatist countries might each choose different policies (see Lütz 2007, p. 139).

• **International embeddedness:** Diffusion and transfer processes can be positively influenced by the degree to which a country is embedded internationally in communication networks or international organizations (see Lütz 2007, p. 140).

3.4 Normative implications

It is important to note, that voluntary policy transfer/policy diffusion do not automatically induce an improvement in the functioning of domestic policies. Firstly, even if learning is the dominant mechanism, policy-makers surely do not consider the implications of a specific policy only, but also the political outcomes of a policy change (see also Gilardi 2010).[9] Secondly, learning based on cognitive shortcuts ("bounded rationality") might imply that important implications of a policy are not considered. The same holds for transfer/diffusion induced by emulation which might increase the domestic acceptance of policy changes, but not necessarily their effectiveness.

In this context, Dolowitz and Marsh distinguish **three types of transfer that influence policy success or failure**, by defining successful policy transfer as achieving the goals governments set prior to engaging in policy transfer (see 2000, p. 17), namely uninformed transfer, incomplete transfer, and inappropriate transfer. **Uninformed transfer** occurs when governments "have insufficient information about the policy/institution and how it operates in the country from which it is transferred" (Dolowitz/Marsh 2000, p. 17). **Incomplete transfer** denotes the exclusion of "crucial elements of what made the policy or institutional structure a success in the originating country" from the transfer process (Dolowitz/Marsh 2000, p. 17). **Inappropriate transfer** occurs when "insufficient attention may be paid to the differences between the economic, social, political and ideological contexts in the transferring and the borrowing country" (Dolowitz/Marsh 2000, p. 17).

3.5 Interim conclusions

The studies of policy diffusion and policy transfer both aim to pay credit to interdependency in policymaking. Both policy transfer and policy diffusion studies link internal processes of policy making with policy developments in the external political environment, thereby incorporating the dynamics of border-crossing into the analysis of policy development. Thus, awareness of policy developments in other political units is the defining characteristic of both policy transfer and diffusion. Both approaches can be applied to the description and analysis of policy change at different levels, including international, transnational, national, sub-national state, regional and local levels. An important analytical implication is that from a normative point of view policy diffusion or policy transfer do not automatically imply an improvement in domestic policy making (e.g. improving the performance of policies).

Apart from interdependence via coercion three different voluntary mechanisms are suggested - specifically by the literature on policy diffusion - through which policies are internationally diffused (learning, emulation, competition). In addition, the theoretical literature suggests different framework requirements which impact on the responsiveness of one country to pick up policies from another country (specific qualities of the policy and policy problem itself, proximity and similarity among countries, international embeddedness).

However, as has been stated by various scholars (see Marsh/Sharman 2008, p. 32; Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 2, 3), policy diffusion and policy transfer approaches are still characterized by theoretical heterogeneity, ambiguity and openness. In this context at least three aspects need to be pointed out:

• **No uniform theoretical background:** Mechanisms considered in the study of both transfer and diffusion do not share one theoretical background (Braun et al. 2007, p. 39, 40), lack theoretical grounding (see Graham et al. 2012: 21), and often apply incoherent operationalization (Maggetti/Gilardi 2013). Thus, they present an assemblage of mechanisms, and are often simply added up. Braun et al. (2007) point out that the different mechanisms presuppose different types of actors, and attach different weight to agency and structure. In their words, "rationalist mechanisms neglect social structures, while constructivist mechanisms neglect agency" (2007, p. 44). Consequently, studies are characterized by the inclusion of "as many mechanisms as the data allow in a simple, additive fashion" (Braun et al. 2007, p. 44), although they actually might be incommensurable.

• **Inter-linkages/Interrelationships between diffusion/transfer mechanisms, framework requirements and domestic factors:** Further, inter-linkages between mechanisms are not considered: The propensity to learn might surely be influenced by shared social norms or shared socialization. Competition might as well increase incentives to learn. Also the relationship between mechanisms and framework requirements is not specified. For example, proximity and similarity of countries might be highly correlated with emulation in the sense of shared norms. Or similarity in terms of quest for legitimacy might be linked to competition. The current state of the art does not address these relationships at all, thus it is still very vague. Last but not least, the relationship between international interdependencies and domestic factors is not theoretically analyzed in a systematic way.

• **Organizational structures shaping interaction among policy-makers:** Both strands of research mention the role of 'policy networks' or 'mediated diffusion'. However, how this works, i.e. the impact of institutional respectively organizational structures through which actors are linked to each other on diffusion/transfer has not been addressed in a meaningful way (see also chapter 5.2). As mechanisms addressed are said to rely on communication and observation respectively, the structures which shape communication and observation are of importance.

Thus, theories on policy diffusion and policy transfer can offer guidance for empirical research but this guidance is still severely inhibited by the shortcomings mentioned above.

[8] Please note the conceptual overlap to emulation, which is one of the independent variables explaining policy transfer/diffusion. See also the critical assessment of the current state of the art in section 3.5˙

[9] A noteworthy exception is Braun and Gilardi (2008) who put forward a unified model based on expected utility-theory.

4. Policy transfer/policy diffusion and policy change in social policy – Empirical studies

4.1. Policy transfer

The following chapter will examine four cases where policy transfer took place. The guiding questions will be:

- **Did policy transfer occur?**
- **To what degree was the original policy transferred?**
- **How can the result be explained, i.e. what are the factors for success or failure?**
- **Which framework conditions respectively mediating variables can be observed?**
- **In which part of the policy-cycle did the transfer happen?**

Not all of these questions can be answered for every project. Precise literature and evaluations remain scarce. Further, not every case study gave answers to all our guiding questions.

4.1.1 Policy transfer in Brazil's international policies

South-south-cooperation is an important pillar of Brazilian foreign policy. Projects in this area are often focused on social protection or social security. The Brazilian model of social protection emphasizes social assistance as a right. It is decentralized but demands strong coordination between the different levels of the political system. Furthermore, civil society and the private sector are generally involved in the implementation process (Leite/Suyama/Pomeroy 2013, p.4).

4.1.1.1 Bolsa Escola

One of the most famous and most discussed examples of policy transfer is the Brazilian "Bolsa Escola"-program. "Bolsa Escola" is a Conditional-Cash-Transfer program (CCT). In this case families were granted a certain amount of money when their children had an attendance of 85% at school. It was preceded by similar programs at the local level in the mid-1990s. In 2001 the program was launched nationwide (Britto 2005, p.10-11). The first phase of "Bolsa Escola" from 1995-2001 is an example of policy transfer within one country. Starting with two Brazilian cities in 1995 the program was implemented by 88 cities until 1997 and by 200 cities until the nationwide launch in 2001 (Sugiyama 2005, p. 198). As Sugiyama shows the implementation of this innovative measure does not originate in political incentives in electoral competition. Rather, the ideology of the main actors and the links between the city and the professional network mattered (Sugiyama 2005, p. 207-209).

"Bolsa Escola" (as well as the Mexican "Progresa") was originally implemented mostly without international pressure. In those cases the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) played an important consulting role but did not take a coercive role. However, the international leverage did play a role in the replication of the CCT approach in other South American countries. CCT-programs already featured many characteristics International Organizations were looking for, but their visibility to them was further enhanced by evaluations of the examples from Mexico and Brazil and the connection of the program´s designers to the above mentioned financial institutions (Britto 2005, p.22-23).

Lana and Evans emphasize the important role of knowledge institutions and/or "policy entrepreneurs" in the diffusion of a program like "Bolsa Escola". The success of the example is closely related to Christovam Buarque and his organization "Missao Crianca". The organization employed many key experts from the original "Bolsa Escola" program and was very active in promoting the concept to governments and NGOs (Lana/Evans 2004, p.198-200). Beyond that they got involved in the process of policy implementation. The involvement of "Missao Crianca" in this case shows how knowledge institutions can benefit the diffusion process. In addition to their deeper knowledge in the relevant issues, they offer a higher degree of accountability and effectiveness (Lana/Evans 2004, p.201).

"Missao Crianca" established a very good reputation with International Organizations like the WB or the UNESCO. This led to their involvement in the transfer of "Bolsa Escola" to Ecuador. In 1999 Ecuador faced a severe financial and economic crisis which led to a downward spiral in the living conditions of many Ecuadorian families. The government was not able to resolve the problems and so they turned to the WB and the IDB for help. "Missao Crianca" was subsequently introduced into the Ecuadorian reform process by these organizations because the approach of "Bolsa Escola" was seen as a promising solution for the Ecuadorian problems, and "Missao Crianca" knew how to conduct such a project. Ecuador itself did not have much say in the selection of a strategy but had to be convinced nevertheless (Lana/Evans 2004, p.204-206). Although some elements from the Brazilian model have been left out in the actual implementation in Ecuador and have been altered to fit into the different cultural context, respectively, the overall scheme remains similar.

4.1.1.2 Solidarity in literacy program

"Alfabetizacao Solidaria (Alfasol)" was created in Brazil in 1997 as a program to "reduce adult illiteracy rates" and "to induce the public provision of Young and Adult Education in the country" (Morais 2005, p.16). "Alfasol" was coordinated and later actively promoted by the NGO "Association for the Support in of the Solidarity in Literacy Program (AAPAS)". The program was designed in a partnership structure. Not only were different levels of public governments involved, but also enterprises, NGOs, universities and citizens. Especially the universities were important partners. They were responsible for the training of teachers and the monitoring/evaluating of the program's progress. "Alfasol" was quickly established as a best-practice and therefore has been considered as a model for the fight against illiteracy in Mozambique. Despite the differences in history and economic performance between Brazil and Mozambique both sides wanted to transfer the program. The reason for this motivation to transfer on the side of Mozambique can be seen in the cultural influence of Brazil on the Mozambican society and the shared classification as a poor country (Morais 2005, p.23-24). On the Brazilian side the program benefited from the active promotion of the program by AAPAS and the fact that it was in line with the general strategy of the Brazilian foreign policy (Morais 2005, p.27-30).

The actual implementation ignored some major lessons of development practice. The program in Mozambique lacked ownership, which means that past local experiences were not embedded and cultural differences neglected. The fact that Portuguese is mother tongue to only a fraction of the population in Mozambique was ignored. This means that many people had to learn a different language before they were able to fight their illiteracy. Furthermore, the teaching material was not adapted to the Mozambican form of Portuguese (Morais 2005, p.33-35).

Notwithstanding the best-practice image and the resulting "how-to" approach the program's Mozambican version was different in some fundamental aspects. First of all the important aspect of the partnership structure was not implemented. There was no involvement of the private sector and Mozambican universities were left out. As mentioned above, in the original program universities were responsible for the actual implementation. After the Brazilian universities left Mozambique there was no instance to continue the program's implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Also, the important component of the teacher's training could not be continued (Morais 2005, p.42-43).

4.1.2 Health sector decentralization in Malawi

Although the process of decentralization in the health sector had already been on the agenda of the World Bank for Malawi, the 1993 World Development Report intensified efforts. In this report the importance of decentralization was stressed, donor organizations were advised to focus on countries willing for reforms only, and developing countries were urged to comply or otherwise loose support. In Malawi the implementation of the health sector reforms was supported by the European Commission with funding and consultancy (Tambulasi 2013, p.85).

The health sector decentralization was aided by "middlemen", international experts who are experienced in the process of reform implementation. Their approach to the transition of the Malawian health system was supplemented by the use of participatory learning, formal training and capacity building. Participatory learning means that the officials of the Malawian Ministry of Health (MOH) "were actively involved in the structure formulation processes" (Tambulasi 2013, p.89). For the formal academic training part MOH-officials got scholarships for universities in the UK, where they got a master's degree in a relevant subject like health policy or health economics. The capacity building part mainly aimed at the district health offices, so that they were enabled to manage their new duties in a decentralized health system (Tambulasi 2013, p.90).

Because of international pressure and incentives the Malawian politicians were very motivated to conduct the reform. However, bureaucratic resistance in the MOH slowed down the implementation. The resistance occurred because of the feared loss of influence, power and resources. As a first tactic the MOH-bureaucrats did simply not implement activities within the scheduled timetable. Furthermore they tried to slow down the process by reallocating trained personnel to other ministries. Also, the MOH tried to persuade the president to keep the health system centralized for longer (Tambulasi 2013, p.94).

But how were these resistance measures handled? First, donor organizations applied some pressure on the government and the MOH. Loans and financial aid were linked to a binding timetable for the implementation of the reform. The external pressure led to a "hide and seek tactic" by the government in order to bypass the actions of the MOH. Money for health facilities was directly transferred to the local assemblies without informing the MOH. The increasing pressure made the MOH implement the fiscal aspects of the reform but there were still efforts made to maintain control by allocating a bigger part of the budget to central authorities (Tambulasi 2013, p.97-99).

The case of Malawi showed that policy transfer strongly depends on the performance of the stakeholders involved, especially on the executing bureaucracy (Tambulasi 2013, p.82). It is often ignored that these bureaucrats are not compliant government actors and are able to effectively block developments, which in this case means the transfer of a policy. Despite the need for aid, the personal agenda of bureaucrats can differ from the counties agenda and external pressure and assistance is needed to circumvent their position (Tambulasi 2013, p.99-100).

4.1.3 Transfer of Chile´s "Programa de Mejoramiento de la Gestion (PMG)" to Mexico

The "Programa de Mejoramiento de la Gestion (PMG)" is a performance management tool introduced by the Chilean Government in 1998 as part of broader performance system. The system has been reviewed by the OECD and the World Bank (WB) and received very good ratings. The PMG development passed through several stages from an internal improvement tool in 1998 to a system with external reviewers under the ISO-9001 Norm, an international standardized quality management system to ensure the fulfillment of stakeholders needs while meeting statutory and regulatory requirements, in 2005 (Dussauge-Laguna 2013, p. 170-171).

Between 2006 and 2007 the Mexican government showed interest in transferring the technology to their country. This interest was part of a process of transformation of the public administration in Mexico, set in motion by a presidential decree in 2006. Mexican officials first gained knowledge about the PMG in Chile at the OECD´s Senior Budget Officials (SBO) meetings between 2003 and 2004, where Carlos Hurtado from the Mexican Ministry of Finance met the responsible head of the Chilean management reform program. At the same time officials from the Mexican Ministry for Social Development gathered information about the reforms for another program. The Chilean and Mexican officials were also brought together at an international seminar by the WB and the IDB in Washington. Furthermore, the IDB provided funds for the implementation of the program in Mexico which gave officials the opportunity to visit their Chilean counterparts and establish direct contacts (Dussauge-Laguna 2013, p.174).

Despite the profound insights into the Chilean process the program that was finally implemented in Mexico was radically different. One reason for this was the conflict between the Ministry of Finance (SHCP) and the Ministry of Public Administration (SFP) about the goals and the contents of the Mexican PMG. While the SHCP wanted to follow the original purpose of austerity and budget-control measures, the SFP preferred to develop a tool for administrative modernization and anti-corruption policy (Dussauge-Laguna 2013, p.177). Subsequently the Mexican PMG was not embedded in a broader performance system but became a stand-alone tool. In the end the Chilean PMG was a design-example for the Mexican PEMG.

Nevertheless the case study shows how policy can be transferred between countries. The process was initiated through international forums but pushed further by national officials. International Organizations helped and influenced the process, but never in a coercive way (Dussauge-Laguna 2013, p.182-183).

4.1.4 Interim conclusions

This chapter presented only a few examples of policy transfer. However, it is possible to draw tentative lessons. Firstly, policy transfer strongly depends on the persons responsible for the process. In the phase of agenda-setting NGOs, International Organizations or even citizens can be crucial for the future success of a project. They can actively promote ideas, "best-practices" and concepts. Also, especially International organizations are able to bring the relevant actors together and facilitate an exchange of ideas. Knowledge institutions or NGOs on the other hand can function as information carrier and support the implementation process. Likewise it is important that officials like the bureaucrats in the recipient countries are able and willing to implement the reforms. It is crucial that they are educated in the relevant matters and that they put aside reservations against a policy because of a differing personal agenda. In this process

International Organizations and NGO can help by conducting qualification measures and by conciliating in conflict cases, but also through coercive measures as a last resort.

Secondly, it is important to consider all aspects of the model. According to Carroll and Common, "typically, only one or more aspects of an already existing policy, [tailored] to meet their own particular needs" is transferred (Carroll/Common 2013, p.188). But in some cases important parts are left out, which changes the whole project and endangers its success. However, omissions of program components can be justified in the adjustment process.

Thirdly, it is necessary to carefully observe cultural differences and similarities. For example, political cultures can be skeptical of change in general or bureaucrats fear loss of power. Problems can arise if policy concepts originate in e.g. a former colonial power or a certain region (Carroll/Common 2013, p.189). On the other hand cultural similarities can be important in the selection process of a transferable policy or be helpful in the process of convincing governments to transfer a policy.

All presented case studies call for more research in this area in order to validate the findings.

4.2 Policy diffusion

The following chapter will summarize studies dealing with the diffusion of social policies. The guiding questions are:

- **Did policy diffusion occur?**
- **Why does policy diffusion occur?**
- **Which framework conditions (mediating variables) or domestic factors matter?**

4.2.1 Relevance of policy diffusion

That international interdependencies matter, i.e. diffusion processes occur, is confirmed by a number of studies. This holds across different policy areas such as pensions (Brooks 2005, Brooks 2007, Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg 2012, Weyland 2005, Weyland 2007), labour market policies (Kemmerling 2007, Gilardi 2010), health policies (Gilardi/Füglister/Luyet 2009, Weyland 2007), or social policy in general (Jahn 2006). These studies cover different regions worldwide, albeit the majority is focusing on OECD countries (Gilardi/Füglister/Luyet 2009, Jahn 2006, Kemmerling 2007, Gilardi 2010, Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg 2012). Two studies cover a broad country sample including countries at different income levels and in different regions worldwide (Brooks 2005, Brooks 2007) and two studies focus on Latin America (Weyland 2005, Weyland 2007). Brooks (2007) finds variation among regions with the strongest impact of peer dynamics among Eastern Europe and Central Asian nations, medium impact in Latin America and no significant impact for OECD countries.

Further, diffusion does not entail simply copying one model. In his comprehensive study of the Latin American wave of pension privatization during the 19080s and 1990s, Weyland (2005) points out that although original model's design characteristics prevail the adaptation to specific domestic needs often occurs (Weyland 2005, p.267-268). He also cites the example of the diffusion of Bismarck style social insurance: "For instance, social insurance schemes were instituted (...) in countries with large industries and a numerically and organizationally strong working class (such as Germany), but also in nations with very little of either (such as Uruguay)" (Weyland 2005, p.268).

A few studies analyze differences in diffusion within the same general policy area. Brooks (2007) stresses that diffusion is conditional on the type of policy or the characteristics of a policy innovation depending on whether it imposes high or low sunk costs on adopters. She finds that "peer diffusion weighs heavily in the adoption of the costly "funded" defined-contribution pension reform model, and does so principally among middle-income nations, while the less-costly "notional" defined-contribution pension reform is not governed by diffusion." (Brooks 2007) Kemmerling (2007), focussing on active and passive labour market policies, finds diffusion processes to matter for active but not for passive labour market policies.

In addition, diffusion processes seem to impact on different types of policy changes as well. Following the typology introduced by Hall 1993 (see chapter 3) they include third order changes, i.e. goal shifting changes or structural reforms as the privatization of pensions systems throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Brooks 2005, Brooks 2007, Weyland 2005, Weyland 2007), second order changes, i.e. a change of instruments (Gilardi/Füglister/Luyet 2009) and first order changes, i.e. adjustment in levels such as changes in contribution rates or benefits (Gilardi 2010, Kemmerling 2007, Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg 2012).

4.2.2 Explaining policy diffusion - Mechanisms

Assessing the relevance of either coercive or voluntary transfers Brooks (2005, 2007) finds strong empirical support that voluntary peer dynamics matter. She finds no empirical evidence that pension reforms in Latin America or Eastern Europe were influenced by World Bank requirements (using World Bank loans and credits as measure). Likewise, one major finding of Weyland (2005) analyzing the role of International Finance Institutions for privatization of pensions in Latin America is that external pressures might constrain the decision space of national policy makers, but surely do not determine domestic policy choices. External actors might even be of strategic use for national policy makers as Weyland 2005 puts it: "Instead, to enhance their bargaining leverage with domestic opponents or hesitant political leaders, reform minded experts often ask IFIs to "impose" conditions on their country." (Weyland 2005, p. 273). Significant autonomy for national policy makers remains and international diffusion processes thus must be further explained by voluntary interdependencies (Weyland 2005).

Among the three different voluntary mechanisms (learning, emulation, competition) the **learning** mechanism is the most frequently researched mechanism within the policy diffusion literature. Those studies considering learning find mostly empirical evidence that learning mechanisms are at play (Weyland 2005, Weyland 2007, Gilardi 2010, Gilardi/Füglister/Luyet 2009). Only Kemmerling (2007) finds no empirical support for the learning hypothesis. In his study on the diffusion of labour market policies in the OECD, countries do not pick up from successful countries. Contrary, Gilardi/Füglister/Luyet (2009) show that the adoption of provider payment mechanism is influenced by the performance of respective approaches abroad: Adoption is more likely when experience of others shows that reforms lead to lower health expenditures or a slower rise in health expenditures. Further, learning effects are non-stationary: Learning effects become more important over time. Policy-makers seem to be more sensitive when a policy is already widespread than when it is a fresh innovation. Likewise, Weyland (2005) identifies learning as the most influential mechanism in explaining diffusion of privatization pension reforms in Latin America, but he shows that learning is clearly influenced by cognitive shortcuts (bounded rationality) such as selectivity in information processing with a focus on data readily available, overgeneralizations and inferential "stickiness", i.e. not fully adopting a model to domestic needs but sticking to certain core values irrespective of whether or not they fit to domestic conditions (Weyland 2005, p. 281-294). Gilardi (2010) points out that relevant outcomes from which policy makers learn include both policy and political consequences of reforms. Further, prevailing ideologies respectively prior beliefs about effectiveness of policies influence the propensity to learn.

Empirical evidence on the role of **emulation** is scarce and inconclusive. As concerns emulation, Weyland (2005, 2007) finds that the role of emulation differs among policy areas. Shared international norms did not play a role for explaining diffusion of pension privatizations in Latin America. For health-care reform in Latin America, however, shared international norms mattered. These shared international norms derived in particular from the successful establishment of the norm of universal coverage as an important objective for all countries by the World Health Organization since the end of the 1970s (Weyland 2007, p. 170-172).[10] Gilardi/Füglister/Luyet (2009) indirectly conclude that emulation is not a relevant factor for hospital financing reforms in the OECD: They argue, if emulation was important, then the role of other factors should decline as norms become stronger over time. However, as they find learning effects to increase over time, they conclude that norm-based explanations do not account for policy diffusion of hospital financing reforms. Using the number of ILO conventions a country has enacted to capture the influence of international norms on policy diffusion, Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg (2012) find only a modest impact for both, standard and minimum pensions. However, two aspects are noteworthy: Although modest for both, the impact on minimum pensions is slightly higher than the impact on average pensions. The effect is also negative for standard pensions and positive for minimum pensions. This could suggest that international norms are more beneficial for low income groups or labor market outsiders (Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg 2012, p.22-23), while policies for labour market insiders (usually the majority of the population) are stronger impacted by domestic factors.

The role of **competition** is almost non-existent in studies of policy diffusion of social policies. The only reference was found in Weyland (2005). He argues that economic competition cannot explain diffusion processes of Latin American pension privatizations: If competitive pressures were relevant one would expect diffusion processes to follow an exponential curve: The more countries adopt a policy model, the greater the pressure for laggards to follow. As the actual observed diffusion pattern rather resembles an S-shaped curve (meaning that diffusion decelerates over time) he concludes that economic competition cannot account for explaining the diffusion process (Weyland 2005, p. 280-281). No reference was found with regard to the role of political or social competition. Greenhill, Mosley and Prakash (2009) find that labour rights tend to be strengthened in countries that trade intensively with partners where these rights are already well protected. In this context, competition improves upon existing standards (race to the top) instead of inducing a race to the bottom.

In line with the lack of theoretical underpinnings, **interlinkages between mechanisms** have not been considered yet at the empirical level.

4.2.3 Explaining policy diffusion - Framework requirements and domestic factors

Considering the **framework requirements or mediating variables** explained in chapter 3 available empirical evidence points to the relevance of the specific qualities of the problem at hand: Increasing "problem pressures" (e.g. higher unemployment levels, increasing health expenditures, ageing population) increases the likelihood for policy diffusion (Brooks 2005, Brooks 2007, Gilardi 2009, Kemmerling 2007). In terms of similarities and proximity between countries the mediating variable most frequently considered is geographic proximity. In all studies analyzing geographic proximity a positive relationship between proximity and diffusion is confirmed (Brooks 2005, Kemmerling 2007, Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg 2012, Weyland 2005). However, as Weyland (2005) points out with reference to the diffusion of 'Chilean type pension reforms' the relationship is time dependent: Diffusion occurred first in the region where the innovation was designed, and later it spread to other parts of the world. Further, Weyland (2005) does not find a systematic relationship between economic similarity (e.g. in term of income level) and diffusion. A positive relationship between economic similarity in terms of income level, economic growth and openness and diffusion is found in Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg (2012). The role of **cultural and political/institutional similarities** have not been considered within the policy diffusion literature on social policies.[11] The same holds for the role of **international embeddedness.**

Apart from international interdependencies a number of domestic factors are examined as well. These factors comprise of political constraints (e.g. ideology, political fragmentation, political system, quality of government), financial constraints (e.g. budget balance) or economic constraints (income level, economic growth). **However, outcomes are often inconclusive or not-comparable across studies due to different methodologies.** For example, as regards political constraints Brooks (2005) finds an important role for political institutions: In countries with a higher degree of political fragmentation and strong democratic freedom the role of privatizing pension systems decreases. However, in their study of pension reforms in the OECD Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg (2012) find only a weak impact of the number of veto points on diffusion. Similar to Brooks (2005) Gilardi/Füglister/Luyet (2009) in their study on diffusion of health financing reforms find a negative effect of veto points, which however is time-dependent: Countries with more veto points simply need more time and "catch up", i.e. veto points are not blocking, but slowing diffusion. Interestingly, Rasmussen/Skorge/Stoltenberg (2012) find a positive impact of the quality of government on diffusion. As concerns domestic economic factors Brooks (2005) finds that neither wealth (per capital income) nor the size of the economy (gross domestic product) are relevant for policy change. However, in Brooks (2007) wealth does mediate the importance of diffusion in domestic policy choices.

Therefore up to now it is not possible to draw any conclusions or to establish a systematic influence of the difference factors discussed. **Probably the most what can be said by today is that –not surprisingly – domestic factors matter and do influence diffusion processes and policy change.**

4.2.4 Interim conclusions

Given the limited number of empirical studies analyzing the different mechanisms the empirical evidence is far from being conclusive, but is at least pointing into certain directions: To explain international interdependencies voluntary linkages are important, whereas external pressure or coercion cannot be confirmed by (the very few number of) studies dealing with the subject matter. Both, learning and emulation, need to be considered, but no conclusions can yet be drawn under which conditions both effects are more or less likely to occur or how theses mechanisms interact. Interestingly, in the two cases examining the role of competition, economic competition played

[10] These shared international norms derived in particular from the successful establishment of the norm of universal coverage as an important objective for all countries by the World Health Organization since the end of the 1970s.

[11] Geographic proximity might be considered as an indicator for cultural similarity, but its validity is at least questionable: Sharing the same borders is not guarantee for cultural alikeness.

either no role or a positive role, i.e. strengthening labour rights. As regards the mediating variables geographic proximity and similarity between countries seem to matter, although the effect might decrease over time. Domestic factors such as political constraints (e.g. ideology, political fragmentation, political system, quality of government), financial constraints (e.g. budget balance) or economic constraints (income level, economic growth) play an important role (all studies found systematic impacts of various domestic factors), but the current state of the art does not allow any systematic conclusions.

The final conclusions address the last research question outlined in the introduction: Based on the current state of the art, what (preliminary) lessons can be deduced for the international dialogue with global development partners on social protection and – in terms of 'lessons learnt regarding the identification of aspects we do not know yet' - what are the knowledge gaps? Generally speaking, it needs to be kept in mind that the empirical evidence is still limited and often rather anecdotal so that any 'lessons learnt' can only be 'tentative lessons learnt'.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Facilitating policy transfer/ diffusion – Lessons learnt

To start with, the literature on international policy transfer and policy diffusion clearly establishes that **voluntary international interdependencies matter:** Decisions in one country are systematically linked to decisions made in another country. This holds across **different policy areas** (social protection, health, education) as well as for **small and large-scale policy changes.** Further, policy diffusion and policy transfer are observed in **different regions and in countries at all income levels**, but empirical evidence for low and middle income countries is less available than for high income country (see chapter 5.2). Further, it seems that **adaption instead of simply copying** models is the rule: Whereas copying of policies rarely occurs, policies transferred are frequently adopted in certain ways, although the core model remains. **Thus, one rather firm conclusion is that changes in social protection policies or in a broader sense social policies cannot be attributed to domestic factors or coercive external influences only. In fact, based on the empirical evidence available the role of coercive influences seems to be rather neglectable. Domestic (political, economic or cultural) factors instead do play a crucial role, but no conclusive empirical evidence is available.**

The qualitative studies point to the fact that change agents (e.g. 'policy entrepreneurs') and organizations involved in the transfer process matter. For example, for agenda setting, both International Organzations and Non-Governmental Organizations seem to be important actors within the transfer process. For implementation the role of Knowledge Institutions and again Non-Governmental Organizations are pointed out. In terms of transfer/diffusion mechanisms empirical evidence points to the **relevance of learning** as transmission channel for international diffusion. Policy makers do in fact look to other countries in order to find out what works. **The responsiveness to learn from other countries might be influenced by factors such as domestic problem pressure (not surprisingly) or proximity and (economic) similarity, but is not strictly conditional on the latter two.** Contrary empirical evidence is available as well. Further, the relationship might also be time-dependent, meaning that initially countries close to each other learn from each other and subsequently policies diffuse within a larger radius.

However, even if learning matters **it cannot be taken for granted that international interdependencies lead to better domestic policies.** Or as Elkins and Simmons (2004) put it „The question, then, is whether diffusion is responsible for a nation's squeezing into ill-fitting but fashionable institutions or whether it leads them to the most functional and efficient ones available?" (Elkins/Simmons 2004: 15). The answer is: It depends. One reason for this is that **learning is not always strictly 'rational', but 'bounded rational':** Everyone is prone to selective information biases, overgeneralizations or 'anchoring', i.e. attaching specific weight to status quo or 'initial values'. **Here lies probably one of the challenges for international networks to structure communication processes in a way which facilitates "less" bounded learning**. Further, **emulation**, i.e. factors such as shared norms, quest for legitimacy or prevailing ideologies influence which policy options are considered and how they are evaluated.

One remark regarding **methodology**: The different empirical research approaches are complementing each other as quantitative analysis can identify broad and general patterns whereas qualitative analysis points out detailed information on underlying dynamics.

5.2 Facilitating policy transfer/ diffusion – Knowledge gaps and further research needs

Given the rather recent origin of both research programs it is not surprising that several 'knowledge gaps' exist:

Firstly, there is a **lack of empirical evidence on diffusion/transfer in middle and low income countries** as most empirical evidence focusses on high income countries. The majority of transfer studies focus on the nation-state level (Holzinger et al. 2007, p. 13), e.g. transfers within the European Union, the OECD, or transfers from International Organizations to states. Thus, the vast majority of studies are concerned with transfers between developed countries (see Evans 2004, p. 5). Transfers from developed to developing and vice versa, or between developing countries have not yet gained widespread academic interest.

Secondly, **the recent wave of extending social protection in low and middle income countries has not yet been taken up** by the literature at all (except those very few qualitative case studies as presented in chapter 4.1).

Thirdly, **both research programs still score unsatisfactorily at the explanatory level:** "Policies diffuse, but why?" (Gilardi 2010, p.650): Although the identification of specific diffusion mechanisms (learning, emulation, competition) and framework requirements (qualities of the policy, proximity and similarity between countries, international embeddedness) is already an achievement, the current state of the art is still far away from providing a unified framework. Inter-linkages between mechanisms remain unexplored, so does the overall relationship between mechanisms, framework requirements and domestic factors. For example regarding the mechanisms of learning and emulation (socialization and legitimacy), it remains an analytical challenge to establish if diffusion or transfer was motivated by "learning advancements or mere ideational trends, the formation of ideational hegemony or cognitive diffusion without learning advancements" (Toens/Landwehr 2008, p. 110). **This vagueness provides also a severe hindrance for empirical research, which up to now only provides suggestive evidence on some variables ('yes, learning seems to matter, well and so does emulation'), but does not produce any convincing answers yet.** Further, as concerns empirical research the qualitative studies almost exclusively rely on cases where policy transfer took place. However, cases where policy transfer did not take place or failed need to be included as well. As a consequence, this heterogeneity and general ambiguity pervading the studies of policy diffusion and transfer has until now challenged the cumulativeness and comparability of empirical results as well as the theoretical sophistication of the two concepts (see Maggetti/Gilardi 2013, p. 2, 3). Or as Gilardi puts it **"The disconnect between theories and empirical analysis is currently the main problem of this research program, and progress on this issue is essential to move beyond generic claims that interdependence matters and policies diffuse."** (Gilardi 2010, p.660).

Fourthly, the **fora through which (mediated) diffusion occurs (e.g. policy networks) present up to now a "black box".** Almost no attention has yet been devoted to analyze the role of communication resp. interaction mechanisms (diffusion/transfer surely pre-suppose some form of direct or indirect "interaction") or the role of governance structures in which interactions take place.

Fifthly, in this context it also seems essential to **extend empirical research methodologies** applied in the study of policy diffusion and transfer. Up to know, the empirical evidence is based on either qualitative case studies or on quantitative studies relying on aggregate data. However, as ultimately any diffusion is based on individual decision-making it seems promising to acknowledge the importance by collecting and analyzing survey data.

This paper is the first part of the joint research project *International Policy Learning and Policy Change: Scientific Inputs for the Dialogue on Social Protection with Global Partners* carried out by the International Centre for Sustainable Development (IZNE) of Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences in close collaboration with *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)*. The second part of this project focusses on international policy networks in social protection. It adds to the current state of the art in that it analyzes transfer and exchange processes within various networks which have been identified to facilitate international policy diffusion.

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