Policy-Borrowing and Lending in Comparative and International Education

A Key Area of Research

GITA STEINER-KHAMSI

INTRODUCTION

The expectation that one may learn "something" from experiences in other educational systems or "borrow" innovative ideas from the international data banks that compile, review, or advocate for "best practices," is inextricably linked to the field of comparative and international education (CIE). In fact, it has been put forward for over two hundred years as an argument for why rigorous comparative studies of educational systems are needed (Cardoso and Steiner-Khamsi, 2017). In 1808, French Professor César-Auguste Basset (1780–1828) urged the university to dispatch a researcher to "foreign countries" to "observe, compare, and present the facts" (Brickman, 2010, p. 47) concerning their educational systems and methods of instruction. Two centuries later, international comparison has become standardized and routinized. The Programme in International Student Assessment (PISA), for example, "focuses on providing data and analysis that can help guide decisions on education policy" (Schleicher, 2017, p. 115). The question is: Under which circumstances are policy actors likely to engage in lesson-drawing? Formulated in terms of sociological systems theory, the same question may be rephrased more narrowly: When do systems learn? That is, when are they receptive to change?

Given the focus on theory in this chapter, it is an opportune moment to embed comparative research on policy-borrowing in its larger conceptual framework. In this chapter, I examine the topic across national boundaries (borrowing from other school systems), beyond national boundaries (borrowing from the absent or the globalized other, i.e., the world society), and between sectors or function systems (borrowing from other function systems, such as, for example from the economy or from the science function system). A comparative method of inquiry is indispensable for examining policy transfer processes across and beyond national boundaries as well as between function systems. For this reason, some of us use the terms policy-borrowing research and comparative policy studies interchangeably (Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi, 2019).

OVERVIEW

The operative closure of systems

A theory determines, or rather guides, how we see, analyze, and interpret phenomena. It is an instrument of sense-making. A myriad of questions emerge when phenomena surface which are at first sight non-sensible and, upon closer examination, complex. For example, the proliferation of global education policies which, on the surface, suggests that national school systems—i.e., the different ways schools are regulated and what is taught in them—are converging towards a singular model of schooling. Yet, examined on the ground, test-based accountability, public–private partnerships, and other traveling reforms mean something entirely different even though they sail under the same reform label.

In my own work, I have adopted key notions of sociological systems theory for the comparative study of education policies. The theory helps us to understand why, when, how, and to what effect policy-borrowing occurs. In this chapter, I explain a few key concepts of Niklas Luhmann's (1927–1998) sociological systems theory, including the notion of externalization, first applied in comparative education in 1990 (Schriewer, 1990; Schriewer and Martinez, 2004).

Systems theory is difficult to understand for a variety of reasons. Perhaps most challenging of all, Luhmann (1990; 1995) moves imperceptibly back and forth between three levels of analysis: the macro (system), meso (organizational), and micro (interactional) level. In order to comprehend systems theory, readers must also kick the habit of intuitively inserting the adjective "national" whenever they come across the term "the educational system." For Luhmann (1990; 1995), there is only one universal system of (world) society and only one universal economy, science, legal, political, or education function system. This is not to downplay differences (sometimes vast) in how these different function systems are organized at national levels. In the functional system of education, for example, the normative beliefs of how schools should be organized and what should be taught in them vary widely. Contextual or national differentiation at the organizational (meso) level is acknowledged but ultimately is of little interest to sociological systems theory. Luhmann (1990; 1995) is concerned primarily with understanding how a system works and how it interacts with its environment; that is, how it deals with the interdependence of systems. Catapulting Luhmann's (1990; 1995) intellectual project into the contemporary language of actor-network theory (see Chapter 25), it would be accurate to say that sociological systems theory explores the performativity of systems.

In an attempt to refine his theory but also to make his reading better understood, Luhmann (2002) applied his interpretive framework to several function systems of society. His elaboration on the system of education ranked among his very last writings. The book *Das Erziehungssystem der Gesellschaft* (Society's System of Education), published after Luhmann's death, contains a succinct three-page summary of sociological systems theory, written by Luhmann himself. In the summary, he lists key features of systems, of which the following are relevant for this particular article: operative closure, communication, functional differentiation, self-referentiality, and production of meaning.

By definition, a system is a closed social entity that constantly enforces and reproduces its boundaries towards other systems. For a system, other systems constitute an environment. In a constant movement between inclusion and exclusion, a system solidifies its identity by means of boundary setting; that is, it distances and thereby distinguishes itself from other systems. Change occurs as a result of functional differentiation. In fact,

one of the prominent features of modern society is functional differentiation. Differentiation also occurs internally, leading to inequality or social and ethnic stratification within a system. Society then consists of functionally differentiated systems; all operating with their own codes, identity, and modes of regulation. The function systems are closed vis-à-vis other function systems, but they are interdependent. For example, even though the education system has its own (socialization) function, its own organizations (schools), its own actors (teachers, students), and its own modes of regulation (until recently driven more by moral and legal rather than market considerations), the function system of education both depends on and contributes to the functioning of other function systems. For example, it depends on the financial resources made available in the economic system, and it contributes to preparing students to become law-abiding, moral, and civic-minded citizens. Since societies are stratified, the system of education also teaches students the myth of meritocracy very effectively, making them believe that one's position in society is determined by credentials and hard work.

Relevant for the study of policy-borrowing is the concept of "autopoiesis" (self-reproduction) and "self-referentiality," two key features of systems that result from their operative closure (Luhmann, 1990). At certain moments, systems open up or externalize. In the quest to reduce uncertainty, interruption, and perturbation, a system receives and translates demands for change in a self-referential manner. At such moments of uncertainty, it temporarily opens up to other function systems or to the generalized other ("the world"), only to then reframe or translate these external impulses in its own code and logic (Luhmann, 1995; 1997a; 1997b). In other words, function systems observe and react to each other, but are not able to communicate with each other, because each one of them is bound by its own code or language of communication. Finally, systems are not only self-referential but also self-reflective and self-aware. They are able to communicate what other function systems expect to hear. The education system, for example, communicates that it is at all times and in all places committed to supporting the wellbeing of the child.

In the last few paragraphs, I attempted to capture in very broad strokes and with purposefully sparse use of systems-theoretical jargon, the logic of systems.

The phenomenon in need of theorizing

Once we acknowledge that systems are in general operatively closed but, every now and then, open themselves up towards external impulses ("irritations"), the timing of that opening up (known as externalization) becomes the focus of study. Strikingly, the temporal dimension of the global spread of ideas is also widely used in the diffusion of innovation studies and social network analysis (Watts, 2003). The epidemiological model of diffusion theory traces the deterritorialization process of a reform over time. It distinguishes between early and late adopters of an innovation. In the early stages, only a few educational systems are "infected" by a particular reform. Adopters make explicit references to lessons learned from other educational systems, especially those that they are specifically seeking to emulate. At a later stage of explosive growth, however, the policy is globalized or deterritorialized, and the traces to the "original" are eased. In network analyses, the diffusion of innovation model takes on the shape of a lazy s-curve (Watts, 2003).

Several outstanding dissertations have been produced *in the field of* CIE at Teachers College, Columbia University which examine the local policy context to understand why a global education policy has been adopted at a particular time and how it was

subsequently translated to fit the local context. Three examples may suffice here: Morais da Sa e Silva (2017) examined the global spread of conditional cash transfer programs, Janashia (2015) the spread of per-capita financing in the post-Soviet education space, and Lao, (2015) the global dissemination of quality assurance (QA) policies in higher education. For example, Lao (2015) has produced a fascinating international comparative study on the global diffusion of QA in which she examines in which year higher education systems established formal QA institutions that were separate from ministries of education. As shown in Figure 19.1, her analysis of the higher education literature demonstrates that at least 48 countries had adopted QA policies over the period 1983–2010 QA reforms in higher education. The pioneers were the governments of Britain, France, England, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. Starting in the early 1908s, they institutionalized QA by developing distinct policies, putting mechanisms in place, and appointing agencies in charge of QA in higher education. Within the former socialist world system, Poland and the Czech Republic are considered early adopters of quality assessment in higher education. Lao's (2015) analysis resembles the lazy S-curve, depicted by Watts (2003). In line with the diffusion of innovation studies, she differentiates between three stages of global reforms: slow growth, exponential growth, burn out. She identifies the decade of the 1990s as the exponential growth phase of QA. In the new millennium, the adoption of QA is still occurring but at a slower pace; mostly because the higher education landscape is already saturated with QA reforms.
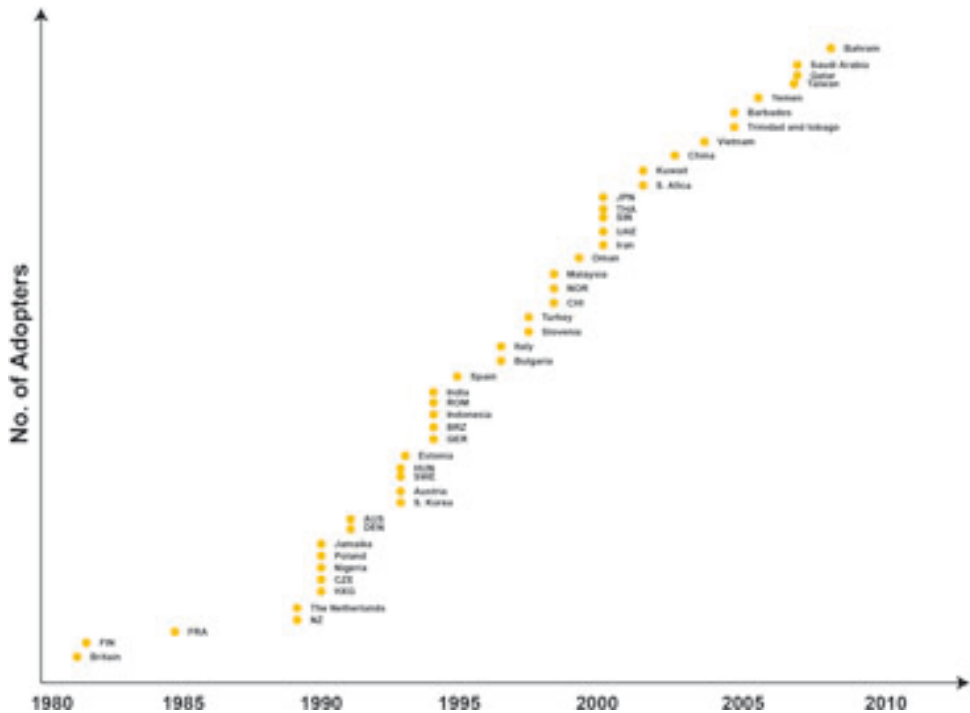

FIGURE 19.1: The global spread of quality assurance policy. Source: R. Lao, *The culture of borrowing: One hundred years of Thailand higher education reforms* (London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

The lazy s-curve is helpful for understanding why it becomes obsolete to assume cross-national or bilateral policy-borrowing. A traveling policy, such as conditional cash transfer programs (Morais, 2017), per-capita financing (Janashia, 2015) or quality assurance in higher education (Lao, 2015) becomes deterritorialized and decontextualized at a take-off point, when several countries adopt the policy or the policy tool, respectively. Eventually, it becomes everyone's and nobody's reform at the stage of explosive growth, thereby further increasing its attractiveness to the late adopters.

Externalization: global education policies and ILSAs

The group of researchers in CIE that applies the externalization thesis to the study of school reforms has grown visibly over the past few years (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2012; Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi, 2019). As mentioned in the previous section, the thesis relates specifically to Luhmann's (1995; 1990; 1997a) work on self-reference and reference to "world" and is firmly grounded in the key concepts closure, self-reproduction (autopoiesis) and self-referentiality of systems. As with other conceptualizations, the ecological orientation of systems theory comes to bear here. Since systems are considered to be operatively closed social entities, everything around them is environment and therefore observable. As a corollary, reference is an act of observation that serves the system to distinguish itself from the other. In the same vein, systems also observe themselves from a quasi-external perspective in order to better communicate their distinct logic, mode of operation, and regulation to themselves and to others. Both self-reference and other-reference *(German: Fremdreferenz)* are intrinsically linked to the act of observation. As Luhmann (1997b) asserts: "[t]he system reproduces itself in the imaginary space of its references and uses the differences between self- and other-references as an impetus to reproduce itself" (p. 98).

As expected with coherent interpretive frameworks, a multitude of research questions open up: At what particular moments do systems externalize, that is, open up, observe, and reference others? Whom, or rather what, do they choose as their object of observation? What do they do with the observation or reference—that is, how do they (back-) translate it to fit their own (system) logic? To sum up, studies on externalization investigate when systems open up, examine which other school systems are selected as reference societies, and finally trace how they "project," that is, translate the observation into their own system logic. Meant to pique the reader's curiosity, these questions merely represent a small sample of questions that arise when the concepts of system closure, self-referentiality, and observation/reference are applied to concrete examples from comparative policy studies, presented in the following sections.

My preoccupation with externalization—later in my work captured with the dual term reception and translation—began with the intellectual desire to understand a phenomenon that at first seemed to be odd. In my early work on multicultural education policies (Steiner-Khamsi, 1992), I noticed that some education policies travel from one country to another thereby generating global reform movements. Inspired by the anti-Apartheid movement and embraced by the New Left in the United Kingdom, a progressive movement spread at the time within Europe which demanded to drop the lopsided notion of multicultural education (which culturally exoticized disenfranchised minorities and in effect meant assimilation and compensatory education programs for immigrants) and replace them with more politicized and combative anti-racist policies which targeted the elimination of structural discrimination. I found it fascinating to see that not all school

systems were open to this discursive shift, and even if they were, implemented the elements of the transnational anti-racist education policy selectively. It did not come as a surprise that policies get implemented differently than planned. What was notable, however, was policymakers' explicit references to other countries. Progressive policy makers insisted that they borrowed the concept even if their own contextualized variant barely resembled the original model that they supposedly had emulated. They were eager to signal their sense of belonging to a larger (Western) European space that tackled discrimination and inequality in schools. What was more: externalization, or the recourse to Europe or the world, occurred whenever policy makers were under political pressure to justify the introduction of controversial reforms.

As I started to differentiate between diffusion (passive) and reception/translation (active), it became apparent that reforms do not simply travel from one country to another. A more agency-oriented explanation was needed; one that acknowledged the active role of policy actors in importing, borrowing, or adopting a traveling reform. My keen interest in understanding the politics of policy-borrowing in multicultural Europe gained a new momentum when, inspired by German systems theorist Radtke (Dittrich and Radtke, 1990; Radtke, 2014). I started to draw my attention to the local policy context rather than to the policy itself. It became of secondary importance to study the features of the policy or "best practice" that went global; what mattered more was a focus on why, how, or when externalization—references to other countries or to the "world"—occurred. In retrospect, it was a wise decision to drop the "what question" and investigate instead the reasons, processes, and timing of transnational policy transfer. Clearly, it would have been a fruitless exercise to study each reform that went global, especially because the number has increased exponentially over the past few years. Following the third-order policy changes (Hall, 1993) during the Thatcher-Reagan era, an avalanche of new policies was put in motion, such as the introduction of a national curriculum, school choice, and standardized exams. Upon closer examination, it is clear that these policies were all part and parcel of a larger "globally structured educational agenda" spreading around the globe, better known as neoliberalism (Dale, 2000; Robertson and Dale, 2015).

In policy-borrowing research or comparative policy studies today, we differentiate between two broader interpretive frameworks that complement each other but use different angles to examine the effects of globalization on education. In one camp are scholars who have adopted a bird's eye view in order to prove the worldwide diffusion of global scripts, whereas scholars in the other camp analyze the local context to understand why policy actors are at a particular moment receptive to adopting the global script. The first set of frameworks rests on longitudinal sociological analyses to prove the existence of similar patterns, ideas, and values across a wide range of countries. Of course, there are several theoretical approaches within each of the two camps. The first camp hosts neo-institutionalists at one end of the spectrum and political economy theorists on the other end. The group with affinity to neo-institutionalism tends to focus on positively connoted global scripts, such as the global spread of human rights education or gender equality (Bromley and Meyer, 2015; Lerch et al., 2016; see critique by Carney et al., 2012) whereas the group affiliated with political economy emphasizes the neoliberal agenda underlying the rapid spread of global education policies (Dale, 2000; Jules, 2016). Similarly, it is important to differentiate between various groups within the second camp. The theories of scholars with a keen interest on reception and translation include both sociological systems theory (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2012) and historical institutionalism (Verger et al., 2016). Ultimately, their research agendas are

similar: both systems theorists and historical institutionalists attempt to identify the different reasons or historical paths for why one and the same global script (e.g., the spread of accountability reforms, privatization in education, etc.) has resonated in a particular context, and how it has been adopted and translated locally.

For innocent bystanders, the two interpretive frameworks may come across as dismissive vis-à-vis one another because neo-institutionalist theory considers the local variations of the global script (the main focus of sociological systems theory) simply as loose coupling and therefore irrelevant for further scrutiny. Analogously, system theorists find the preoccupation with identifying global scripts (the main focus of neo-institutionalism) futile given the semantics of globalization and the ubiquitous and inflationary use of "international standards" and "best practices." The two approaches are, however, not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, precisely because the various interpretive frameworks differ in terms of focus or object of study, they complement one another.

Our group of scholars with affinity to sociological systems theory tends to investigate the timing and the local context in which externalization occurs, because we expect to find reasons for why a temporary system opens up to the "world" by making references to "best practices," "international standards" broadly defined, or experiences in other countries. For this chapter, I confine myself to presenting the most recent studies on reception and translation of International Large-Scale Assessment (ILSA) results, carried out in collaboration with Waldow and a long list of accomplished contributing authors (Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2018; Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi, 2019).

The spectacular growth of countries participating in ILSAs is noticeable and deserves theorizing. In terms of PISA alone, 43 countries participated in 2000, 72 countries and territories in 2015, and 80 administrative entities in 2018. In analyzing the explosive growth of PISA and other ILSAs, researchers have proposed several explanations, ranging from broad ones, such as globalization and the political pressure to be part of a larger international educational space, to very concrete ones, such as an ever-increasing number of evidence-driven policy actors who rely on international comparison for measuring the quality of their educational system (Addey et al., 2017; Verger et al., 2019). Once the demand has been created and governments start "seeing like PISA" (Gorur, 2016), global actors sell their tests for an ever-increasing number of subjects, grade levels, and educational systems. In addition to PISA, we now have PISA-D (PISA for Development), PISA for Schools, and a proposed "Baby PISA" (International Early Learning and Child Well-Being study), that are administered all three years worldwide. Learning portals for policymakers, such as, for example, the one developed by UNESCO-IIEP, or other global platforms that disseminate quantifiable or evidence-based "best practices" have mushroomed over the past decade.

APPLICATION IN COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Borrowing across function systems: the case of political translation

The two key concepts of policy-borrowing research—reception and translation—may also be applied to transfer processes between function systems. In sociological systems theory, the term structural coupling is used to denote the interpenetration of two systems.

In educational research, two recent forms of tight structural coupling have become objects of intense scrutiny: the tight coupling between the education and economic system (often referred to as the quasi-market model in education), and the tight coupling between the science and political system, discussed here in greater detail.

As mentioned above, systems absorb complexity and irritations by making sense of them in a system-logical, meaningful manner. As a result of tight structural coupling, the education system has become more economized, and vice versa; the (knowledge) economy nowadays takes into account "effective years of schooling" (one of the indicators of the Human Capital Index) as a predictor of economic productivity (Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2018; Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi, 2019). Similarly, as a result of the tight structural coupling between the science and political systems, an additional type of knowledge production has emerged: "mode 2 research." In contrast, "mode 1 research" represents the traditional type of knowledge production, also known as foundational research or basic research (Nowotny et al., 2003). Unsurprisingly, policy analysts and politicians are enamored with the applied mode 2 research, because they find it relevant and useful. In fact, the current political system tends to explain and justify its political decisions with a recourse to "evidence" and makes (political) arguments based on a scientific rationality. Even though there is a general agreement on the mutual transformation process—the politicization of science and the scientization of politics—a systems-theoretical perspective may help to dig deeper by asking: has the political system indeed become more scienticized, and if it has, how does the government translate scientific knowledge into political action? Thus, the focus is on knowledge production *and* utilization.

The changing nature of the relationship between politics and science has preoccupied comparative policy studies for a while. One of the early, important comparative studies exploring the interpenetration of the two function systems was the research project "the role of knowledge in the construction and regulation of health and education policy in Europe: convergences and specificities among nations and sectors," abbreviated as Knowandpol, and funded in the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission (Fenwick et al., 2014; Maroy, 2012). Among other foci, the Knowandpol research project examined the changing role of the state in the wake of new public management reforms and knowledge-based regulation. The changes have indeed been substantial. The role of the state has changed from being a provider of educational programs to a standard-setter and monitor of learning outcomes. As a result, a multitude of providers, including businesses, have nowadays entered the school market as providers of educational programs. Knowledge-based regulation also enlarged the radius of individuals contributing to policy-relevant educational knowledge. The open-access policies that both governments and research councils have put in place in recent years need to be seen as an early indication of changes that occurred in knowledge production and sharing. In fact, the system theorists Weingart and Lentsch (2008) consider such open-access policies to be part and parcel of a democratization of expertise.

Arguably, ad-hoc expert commissions, which review policies and make recommendations to the government, lend themselves for the study of tight coupling between the science and politics systems. According to Weingart and Lentsch (2008), these government-appointed commissions experienced three distinct shifts over the past seventy years. During the early period of scientific policy advice (the 1950s to 1970s), the ad-hoc expert commissions insisted on being autonomous and independent from the government. As a corollary, their reports amassed foundational studies (mode 1 scientific knowledge) that policy actors

could or could not use, respectively. In a second phase, the commissions became increasingly politicized (the 1970s to 1990s) because they were charged with the task of producing policy-relevant scientific knowledge. In the current, third phase, governments in many countries have experienced a shift from "knowledge-based legitimacy" to "participation-based legitimacy." Governments are under pressure to "democratize" scientific policy advice by 1) providing open access to reviews and expertise; 2) expanding the definition of "experts" (including nowadays, both producers and users/consumers); and 3) insisting that the knowledge products are useful, that is, provide a clear foundation for stop/go policy decisions.

Researchers of structural coupling have introduced compelling new terminologies to capture the trend towards evidence-based governance. They have astutely pointed out that this type of structural coupling, often framed as a democratization of expertise, has led in practice to a (pseudo) rationalization or sciencetification of political decisions (Maasen and Weingart, 2005), is driven by, and at the same time exacerbated by, governance by numbers (Grek, 2008; Ozga, 2009) and steering at a distance (Rose and Miller, 1991). The *façade* of rationality has been thoroughly dismantled in policy studies and includes critics who shed doubts on whether governance by numbers is less political or more rationale than other modes of regulation. Finally, a few scholars have examined the impact that this particular type of structural coupling has had on the relations between different levels of bureaucracies within a state. Most recently, Piattoeva et al. (2018) convincingly argue that the governments of Brazil, China, and Russia (the objects of their study) resort to "governance by data circulation" in an effort to reach out to district authorities.

As presented above, even though many have critically examined evidence-based policy planning, the focus has very much been on educational researchers who carry out commissioned work for the government and therefore are suspected to manufacture evidence in line with their political mandate. In contrast, whether government officials produce and use scientific knowledge, is somewhat under-explored.

Our research group intends to fill this gap in policy-borrowing research—especially the transfer of policy knowledge from a scientific space (government-appointed expert commissions) to a political space (government-issued policy documents)—in a five-year comparative research project, based at the University of Oslo. We use bibliometric network analysis to examine the use of "evidence" in policy knowledge over time, across levels (national, regional, international), across national contexts, and across function systems (scientific and political). The comparison over time consists of an investigation of policy knowledge produced and references over three distinct school reform periods in Norway (reforms of 1996, 2006, and 2020).[1] The primary data source are the government-produced policy documents, issued by the Ministry of Education and Research to explain a school reform, as well as the reports of government-appointed expert commissions preceding the reform. The first type of documents represents White Papers and the latter are Green Papers. We entered the references, listed in the reference section of the

documents, in endnotes or embedded in the actual text, into the database. Thus, our bibliometric database consists of White Papers (government-issued policy documents), Green Papers (reports of government-appointed expert commissions), as well as the references listed in White and Green Papers. One of the findings is directly related to the topic of borrowing across function systems: the small amount of shared knowledge between government (reflected in White Papers) and its expert commissions (Green Papers).

We explored the political translation process, that is, the transfer from scientific knowledge (produced by expert commissions) to political knowledge (produced by government) by asking: from all the references listed in the Green Papers (produced by the government-appointed expert commission), how many are also shared, that is, cited in the White Papers (produced by the Ministry of Education and Research)? In other words, we examined the political translation of expert knowledge. The finding was unexpected: the Ministry of Education and Research uses surprisingly little of the knowledge produced in its expert commissions. Of the 469 texts that the five commissions cited in their Green Papers, only 22 of them were also referenced in the two ministerial White Papers. This means that 95 percent of the commissions' body of knowledge was lost in (political) translation. The disregard of knowledge amassed in Green Papers is not to be underestimated. The Green Papers of the 2006 reform range from zero references (Green Paper 2646) to 172 references (Green Paper 172). Figure 19.2 visualizes the nexus between expert and political knowledge. This also means that the Ministry of Education and Research does come up with its own sources of (political) knowledge. In fact, only 9.5 percent of the references (22 references) in the two ministerial White Papers (number 2140 and number 58) are identical with those listed in the commissioned Green Papers. Of course, not all commission reports or Green Papers carry the same political weight. The government-issued White Papers have the greatest ratio of shared knowledge or references, respectively, with the Green Paper *In the First Row* (NOU 2003; marked as
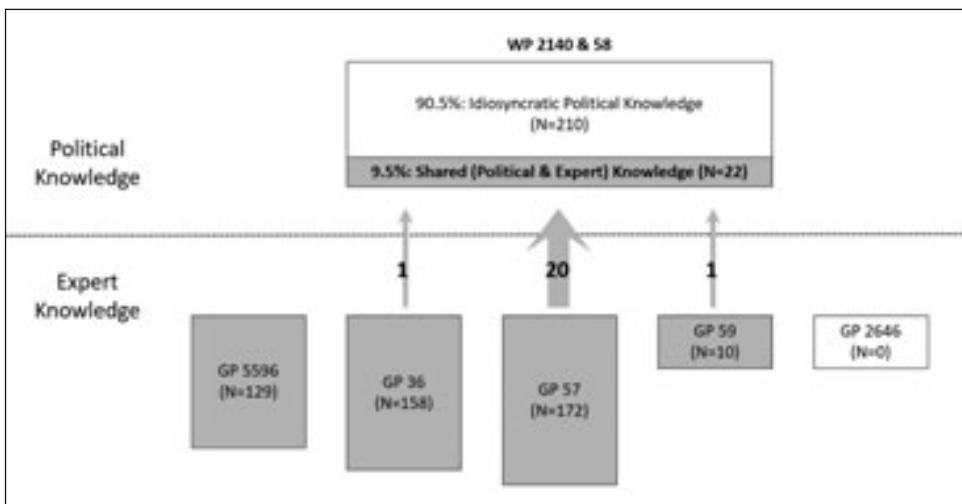

FIGURE 19.2: The political translation of scientific expertise in the 2006 school reform. Source: G. Steiner-Khamsi, B. Karseth, and C. Baek, *Between science and politics: Commission reports and their political translation* (forthcoming).

Green Paper 57). As shown in Figure 19.2, 20 references of the Green Paper 57 were also listed in the bibliographical section of the two White Papers (see top row). With the exception of Green Paper 2646, which does not contain any references, the other three Green Papers (GP 5596, GP 35, GP 59; see bottom row), either share one or zero references with the White Papers. Not only are the references from the Green Paper 57 *In the First Row* cited the most, they are cited in both White Papers (White Paper WP 2140 and 58; see top row), thereby serving as a "network broker" (Menashy and Shields, 2017) connecting the knowledge networks of the two White Papers.

There is a need to explain why Green Paper 57 *In the First Row* (NOU 2003) was the only report that carried a political weight. Concretely, it was the only report, produced by a government-appointed expert commission, that drew on a similar body of knowledge as the government-issued White Papers. According to our study (Steiner-Khamsi et al., forthcoming), the important role of the Green Paper 57 can be explained by its specific mandate, the composition of the commission, and its focus on OECD knowledge. The commission was tasked with producing an overall analysis of the education system and producing recommendations regarding how to improve the quality of education. Strikingly, the report focuses very much on recommendations from the OECD and the DeSeCo project (Definitions and Selections of Competencies) and makes a case for a competency-based curriculum. In addition, it reconfirms the need for a national testing system that would allow for monitoring quality improvement in schools. The global language of the OECD is not to be overheard, and the report comes across as an "indigenization" or a national adoption of OECD education policies. Both recommendations of the Green Paper (NOU, 2003)—the shift toward competency or outcomes-based curriculum reform and the introduction of test-based accountability— carry features of school reforms that the OECD has propelled globally, including in Norway, and merit the label "global education policy" or in this particular case "OECD education policy." The Green Paper *In the First Row* (NOU, 2003) may be regarded as a typical example of externalization; references to experiences in other countries and to the authority of the OECD are made to justify the need for fundamental reform at home.

The focus on political translation brings to light that the Ministry of Education and Research produces its own scientific knowledge. The interpenetration of the two function systems has not only politicized knowledge-production of researchers, but also vice-versa; it has sciencitized political decisions made by government officials. In justifying the 2006 school reform, the Ministry of Education and Research of Norway clearly favored the scientific authority of the OECD over the evidence produced by its own, national expert commissions, as discussed above (see Figure 19.2).

To come back to the earlier elaboration on mode 1 and mode 2 research, the structural coupling of science and politics accounts for a new type of research—research that must be applied, policy relevant, and if possible multi-disciplinary. The Norwegian study on the political translation of scientific knowledge, summarized in this article, demonstrates that mode 2-type of knowledge (Nowotny et al., 2003) is produced both by the expert commissions *and* by the government itself.

As may be expected, systems nowadays have to cope with an "over-production of evidence" (Lubienski, 2019). In this new policy environment, intermediaries assume great discursive power. The intermediaries—including the private sector—broker knowledge, fill the space between science and politics, and translate knowledge from one function

system to another in a self-referential manner, ultimately serving their own business interests.

Translating system-theoretical concepts into theories of the policy process

Arguably, it does matter a great deal which interpretive framework is used to examine policy-borrowing, whether discursive or real, and whether the transfer is within a system, between systems, or to the world society. In sociological systems theory, the system is the unit of analysis for understanding why there is an openness to externalize and how the borrowed discourse or policy is subsequently adapted to fit the system. The dual focus on receptiveness (reasons why an operationally closed system temporarily opens up) and translation (adaptation to the code or language of the system) represents a genuine systems-theoretical approach to the study of policy-borrowing.

Naturally, the sky is the limit for understanding recent phenomena in education policy with the analytical tools of policy-borrowing research. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that several systems-theoretical concepts may also be found in other interpretive frameworks that theorize the policy process. Explaining how they are used in the other conceptual frameworks, may help sharpen the understanding of how they are used in sociological systems theory.

A good case in point is the concept of "pathways," used in historical institutionalism. It is similar to how system theorists use the terms system logic and, applied to national contexts, "socio-logic" (Schriewer and Martinez, 2004). Verger and his associates trace the pathways to privatization in different countries (Verger et al., 2016). They identify six different pathways, ranging from pathway one (e.g., in Chile and the United Kingdom), where the state was systematically restructured along market lines and services previously provided by the public sector were outsourced to the private sector to pathway six, labeled "privatisation by catastrophe" where policy actors use the chaos during catastrophe to advance their privatization agenda (e.g., in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, aftermaths of wards in El Salvador and Iraq). Verger et al. (2016) intend to demonstrate that the global neoliberal wave of privatization has encountered varied degrees and variants of privatization that already existed in various national contexts. The receptiveness or resistance towards the new neoliberal wave of privatization can only be captured adequately against the backdrop of past adaptations of privatization. National policy actors buy into global education policies, such as privatization in education, for different reasons. In systems theory, the terms reception or resonance, rather than pathways, are used to explore why national policy actors demonstrate an openness towards privatization and other global school reforms.

Similarly, the timing of policy change is a well-known unit of analysis in the multiple-streams approach, formulated by Kingdon (1984) and taken up by other scholars, including by Zahariadis (2014). Kingdon (1984) coined the term "policy window" to identify favorable conditions for policy change. He found that the convergence of the following three streams is likely to produce change: the problem stream (recognition of a problem), the policy stream (availability of solutions), and the political stream (new developments in the political realm such as, for example, recent change in government). It is important to point out, however, that the multiple-streams approach does not take into account the impact of transnational interaction or transfer for problem recognition and policy solution (see critique of Baek, 2019). In an era of globalization transnational policy-borrowing, whether rhetorically or factually, is the norm and not the exception.

Thus, the policy stream tends to be available to politicians and decision makers at all times in the form of "best practices," "international standards," or lessons learned from other educational systems. In fact, the pressure to borrow is great to the extent that policy analysts are frequently placed in the awkward position of having to retroactively define the local problem that fits the already existing global solution or reform package.

Finally, the concept of punctuated equilibrium—related to the systems-theoretical concept of operative closure—is widely used in policy studies (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Policies remain uncontested and policymaking is idle, resting in an equilibrium stage, until they are challenged and destabilized profoundly. As a corollary, punctuated equilibrium scholars draw their attention to agenda-setting. How do policy actors manage to prevent problems put on an agenda for reform, and inversely, how do they manage to generate a coalition that helps them to generate reform pressure, when deemed necessary? The latter focus is systematically pursued in Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework (1988). In a similar vein, system theorists consider systems to be operatively closed or in a punctuated equilibrium. Therefore, the attention is drawn to the moments of change, reform, or "interruptions in relations of interdependence" (Schriewer and Martinez, 2004, p. 31).

CONCLUSIONS

Comparative education research has dwelled for too long on the traditional area of borrowing research—cross-national policy attraction and transfer between two or more school systems—thereby neglecting other transfer processes, notably, the orientation towards "best practices" or "international standards" and the transfer between different function systems (science and politics, economy, and education, etc.). It is perhaps for this overly narrow focus that other scholars have rightfully recommended a spatial turn (Larsen and Beech, 2014), more nuanced definitions of globalization (Robertson and Dale, 2015), and a multi-scalar perspective for analyzing policy-borrowing (Jules, 2012). The multi-scalar orientation also prevails in sociological systems theory. From a systems-theoretical perspective, the (world) society is omnipresent. In fact, a system's observation of, or reference to world society, constitutes a momentum for change.

The examples presented in this chapters merely represent a small fragment of studies in which policy-borrowing has been examined. Strikingly, with every new case of policy-borrowing, the theory itself becomes refined. This too needs to be interpreted as a continuous process of differentiation, albeit a differentiation of the theoretical kind.

FURTHER READING

1. Jules, T. D. (2016). *The global educational policy environment in the fourth industrial revolution.* Bingley, UK: Emerald.
2. Morais da Sa e Silva, M. (2017). *Poverty reduction, education, and the global diffusion of conditional cash transfers.* New York, NY: Palgrave.
3. Steiner-Khamsi, G., and Waldow, F. (Eds). (2012). *Policy-borrowing and lending.* London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge.
4. Verger, A., Fontdevila, C., and Zancajo, A. (2016). *The privatisation of education: A political economy of global education reform.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
5. Waldow, F., and Steiner-Khamsi, G. (Eds.). (2019). *Understanding PISA's attractiveness: Critical analyses in comparative policy studies.* London, UK: Bloomsbury.

MINI CASE STUDY

A good case in point to illustrate the attention to context and the focus on *local* encounters with global forces is the system-theoretical research on reasons for engagement with PISA, TIMSS, or other international large-scale student assessments. Comparative education researchers, with an affinity to sociological systems theory, have made it their intellectual project to understand the rapid growth of standardized international comparisons against the backdrop of what is debated, contested, or at stake in a local policy context. As a corollary, the focus lies on exploring the system logic in policy reception and translation processes. Several system theorists use the rapid growth of standardized international comparison as an opportunity to understand why PISA resonates, or does not resonate, and how PISA results are translated or interpreted in various policy contexts. Finally, we do not assume that PISA has *a priori* a salutary effect on national school reform but we rather analyze why, how, and when national policy actors open up, are receptive to, and in fact at times welcome, "irritations" caused by PISA, or by any other ILSA, and how policy makers subsequently translate these external impulses into the language of the system.

The focus on the idiosyncrasies of a system and its national forms of organization brings a fascinating phenomenon to light that at first sight appears to be contradictory: despite the widespread rhetoric of learning from "best performing" school systems, there is no universal consensus on why some school systems do better than others on tests, such as PISA. On the contrary, there is great variation in how national governments, media, and research institutions explain Finland's, Shanghai's, or Singapore's "success" in PISA or TIMSS. However, there is a pattern in these varied, sometimes diametrically opposed, explanations, which is best captured by the term "projection" (Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2018; Waldow, 2017). The reception and translation of ILSA results reflect controversial policy issues in a country's own policy context, rather than the actual organizational features of the league-leaders. "Finnish success" is a good case in point. There is a long list of explanations for why Finnish students do well on ILSAs. Depending on what the controversial policy issue is for which policy actors seek a (internally produced) quasi-external source of authority, Finland's success is attributed to its strong university-based teacher education system, the system of comprehensive schooling with minimal tracking of students, or the nurturing environment in schools where students ironically are exposed to very few high-stakes standardized tests.

The same applies for the league-leaders themselves: depending on the timing, notably whether the positive results are released at the end or the beginning of a reform cycle, the policy actors tend to take credit for the positive results or, on the contrary, belittle the success and proclaim that the students performed well for all the wrong reasons, including private tutoring, stressful school environments, and teaching to the test (see Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi, 2019).

REFERENCES

Addey, C., Sellar, S., Steiner-Khamsi, G., Lingard, B., and Verger, A. (2017). Forum discussion: The rise of international large-scale assessments and rationales for participation. *Compare*, *47*(3), 434–452.

Baek, C. (2019). Understanding windows for global policy: An examination of the free-semester programme in Korea. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*.

Baumgartner, F., and Jones, B. D. (1993). *Agendas and instability in American politics.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Brickman, W. W. (2010). Comparative education in the nineteenth century [reprinted]. *European Education*, *42*(2), 46–56.

Bromley, P., and Meyer, J. W. (2015). *Hyper-organisation. Global organisational expansion.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Cardoso, M., and Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2017). The making of comparability: Education indicator research from Jullien de Paris to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. *Compare, 47*(3), 388–405.

Carney, S., Rappleye, J., and Silova, I. (2012). Between faith and science: World culture theory and comparative education. *Comparative Education Review*, *56*(3), 366–393.

Dale, R. (2000). Globalisation and education: Demonstrating a "common world educational culture" or locating a "globally structured educational agenda?" *Educational Theory*, *50*(4), 427–448.

Dittrich, E. J., and Radtke, F. O. (Eds.). (1990). *Ethnizität, wissenschaft und minderheiten*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Fenwick, T., Mangez, E., and Ozga, J. (Eds.). (2014). *World yearbook of education. Governing knowledge: Comparison, knowledge-based technologies and expertise in the regulation of education*. London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge.

Gorur, R. (2016). Seeing like PISA: A cautionary tale about the performativity of international assessments. *European Educational Research Journal*, *15*(5), 598–616.

Grek, S. (2008). From symbols to numbers: The shifting technologies of education governance in Europe. *European Educational Research Journal, 7*(2), 208–218.

Hall, P. A. (1993). Policy paradigms, social learning and the state. The case of economic policymaking in Britain. *Comparative Politics*, *25*(3), 275–296.

Janashia, S. (2015). *Introduction of per-capita education financing in former USSR countries.* New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University, Proquest Digital Dissertations.

Jones, B. D., and Baumgartner, F. R. (2005). *The politics of attention: How government prioritizes problems.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Jules, T. D. (2012). *Neither world polity nor local or national societies: Regionalization in the global South—The Caribbean community*. Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang.

Jules, T. D. (2016). *The global educational policy environment in the fourth industrial revolution.* Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Kingdon, J. W. (1984). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies.* Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

Lao, R. (2015). *The culture of borrowing: One hundred years of Thailand higher education reforms.* London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge.

Larsen, M., and Beech, J. (2014). Spatial theorizing in comparative and international education research. *Comparative Education Review*, *58*(2), 191–214.

Lerch, J., Bromley, P., Meyer, J. W., and Ramirez, F. O. (2016). The rise of individual agency in conceptions of society: Textbooks worldwide, 1950–2011. *International Sociology, 3*(5), 38–60.

Lubienski, C. (2019). Advocacy networks and market models for education. In M. Parreira do Amaral, G. Steiner-Khamsi, and C. Thompson (Eds.), *Researching the global education industry* (pp. 69–86). New York, NY: Palgrave.

Luhmann, N. (1990). *Essays on self-reference.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Luhmann, N. (1995). *Social systems.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Luhmann, N. (1997a). Globalisation or world society: How to conceive of modern society? *International Review of Sociology, Revue Internationale de Sociologie, 7*(1), 67–79.

Luhmann, N. (1997b). *Die gesellschaft der gesellschaft.* Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.

Luhmann, N. (2002). *Das erziehungssystem der gesellschaft*. Frankfurt/M, Germany: Suhrkamp.

Maasen, S., and Weingart, P. (Eds.). (2005). *Democratization of expertise? Exploring novel forms of scientific advice in political decision-making.* New York, NY: Springer.

Maroy, C. (2012). Towards post-bureaucratic modes of governance: A European perspective. In G. Steiner-Khamsi and F. Waldow (Eds.), *World yearbook of education 2012. Policy-borrowing and lending in education* (pp. 62–79). London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge.

Menashy, F., and Shields, R. (2017). International partners? Networks, centrality, and aid to international education. *Comparative Education*, *53*(4), 495–517.

Morais da Sa e Silva, M. (2017). *Poverty reduction, education, and the global diffusion of conditional cash transfers*. New York, NY: Palgrave.

Nowotny, H., Scott, P., and Gibbons, M. (2003). Introduction: "Mode 2" revisited: The new production of knowledge. *Minerva*, *31*(3), 179–194.

Ozga, J. (2009). Governing education through data in England: From regulation to self-evaluation. *Journal of Education Policy*, *24*(2), 261–272.

Piattoeva, N., Gorodski Centeno, V., Suominen, O., and Rinne, R. (2018). Governance by data circulation? The production, availability, and use of national large-scale assessment data. In J. Kauko, R. Rinne, and T. Takala (Eds.), *Politics of quality in education. A comparative study of Brazil, China, and Russia* (pp. 115–135). New York, NY: Palgrave.

Radtke, F. O. (2014). Luhmann als Erzieher. *Rassegna di Pedagogia/Pädagogische Umschau*, *LXXII*(1–2), 99–113.

Robertson, S. L., and Dale, R. (2015). Towards a "critical cultural political economy" account of the globalizing of education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *13*(1), 149–170.

Rose, N., and Miller, P. (1991). Political power beyond the state: Problematics of government. *British Journal of Sociology*, *43*(2), 173–205.

Sabatier, P. A. (1988). An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein. *Policy Sciences, 21*(2/3), 129–168.

Schleicher, A. (2017). The future of PISA. *Tertium Comparationis*, *23*(1), 113–124.

Schriewer, J. (1990). The method of comparison and the need for externalisation: Methodological criteria and sociological concepts. In J. Schriewer in cooperation with B. Holmes (Rds.), *Theories and methods in Comparative Education* (pp. 3–52). Bern: Lang.

Schriewer, J., and Martinez, C. (2004). Constructions of internationality in education. In G. Steiner-Khamsi (Eds.), *The global politics of educational borrowing and lending* (pp. 29–52). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Steiner-Khamsi, G. (1992). *Multikulturelle bildungspolitik in der postmoderne.* Opladen: Leske & Budrich.

Steiner-Khamsi, G. (Ed.). (2004). *The global politics of educational borrowing and lending.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Steiner-Khamsi, G., and Waldow, F. (Eds.). (2012). *Policy-borrowing and lending*. London, UK & New York, NY: Routledge.

Steiner-Khamsi, G., and Waldow, F. (2018). PISA for scandalisation, PISA for projection: The use of international large-scale assessments in education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 16*(5), 595–607.

Steiner-Khamsi, G., Karseth, B., and Baek, C. (2019). Between science and politics: Commission reports and their political translation. *Journal of Education Policy*, *35*(1), 119–144.

Verger, A., Fontdevila, C., and Parcerisa, L. (2019). Reforming governance through policy instruments: How and to what extent standards, tests and accountability in education spread worldwide. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*.

Verger, A., Fontdevila, C., and Zancajo, A. (2016). *The privatisation of education: A political economy of global education reform.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Waldow, F. (2017). Projecting images of the "good" and the "bad school": Top scorers in educational large-scale assessments as reference societies. *Compare*, 47(5), 647–664.

Waldow, F., and Steiner-Khamsi, G. (Eds). (2019). *Understanding PISA's attractiveness: Critical analyses in comparative policy studies.* London, UK: Bloomsbury.

Watts, D. J. (2003). *Six degrees: The science of a connected age.* New York, NY: Norton.

Weingart, P., and Lentsch, J. (2008). *Wissen—beraten—entscheiden.* Weilerswist, Germany: Verbrück Verlag.

World Bank. (2018). *The world development report 2019. The changing nature of work.* Washington, DC: World Bank.

Zahariadis, N. (2014). Ambiguity and multiple streams. In P. A. Sabatier and C. M. Weible (Eds.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 25–58). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.