

Soft Diplomacy or Hard Policy Benefits? Exploring the Value of Cross-jurisdictional Learning Exchanges in Policy and Public Administration across the Asia-Pacific Region

Catherine Althaus

School of Social and Political Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne, Parkville, VIC 3010, Australia

The Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG), PO Box 230, Carlton South, VIC 3053, Australia

Corresponding author. E-mail: c.althaus@anzsog.edu.au

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ABSTRACT

Cross-jurisdictional learning exchange opportunities are unanimously endorsed as offering value, not only to individual and organizational development, but also to policy growth and jurisdictional diplomatic relations (see, for example, Robinson, 2016). When pressed for measurable impact, however, the question is how? On what grounds do such pursuits provide value and what, if anything, is unique to the style or practice of exchange that promotes value? This article explores links between three otherwise disconnected literatures to explore the possibilities of a unique Asia-Pacific pedagogy that marries substantive comparative policy learning with practical soft diplomacy outcomes, as well as learning and executive training enhancement. The first two literatures exist in comparative policy theory and practice, namely: (a) policy learning literature on best, smart, promising, and wise practices (see, for example, Bardach n.d.; Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou, 2011); and (b) policy diffusion/transfer/lesson-drawing literature (see, for example, Rose, 1993; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Shipan and Volden, 2008). The third literature set is situated within policy training practice, namely, interactive and immersive learning pedagogy used in the executive education space (see, for example, Alford and Brock, 2014). These literatures all speak to value propositions underpinning cross-jurisdictional learning exchanges, but in different ways. This article uses the discrete case of the partnership between the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP) to probe and synthesize these different literature perspectives. It maps an exploratory set of propositions to test with empirical research. It argues that there may be unique Asia-Pacific benefits in the soft diplomacy and hard policy arenas that come with cross-jurisdictional learning exchanges in the policy and public administration sphere. The paper advocates for more self-conscious reflection by practitioners and theorists on unique elements of

an Asia-Pacific pedagogy that might characterise particular value impacts for countries in the region, as well as for the region itself.

INTRODUCTION

Cross-jurisdictional learning exchanges, in the policy context explored here, are fixed-term educational experiences where practitioners or students physically travel to another jurisdiction (usually international) for a (usually) short period of time to intensively listen and engage with experts and to witness and connect with established programs, policies, or ideas in that particular setting. They may take place as part of professional development or mandated workplace opportunities, or as part of wider tertiary education programs.

Cross-jurisdictional learning exchanges are distinct from educational mobility programs, which focus on students performing entire degrees in other countries (see, for example, David, 2010). They are also different from academic or professional conferences, which are dedicated to building and sharing knowledge relevant to the academy or a profession.

In both of the latter examples, the intent of the mobility program or conference is not aimed specifically at cross-jurisdictional learning as the direct outcome or objective, but rather as an indirect benefit. Mobility programs and conferences take advantage of the setting of another country to encourage cross-jurisdictional learning as a potential byproduct. They are undoubtedly related and all these mechanisms exist as part

of a continuum or architecture of 'informational infrastructure' (Cook and Ward, 2012) that contributes to policy transfer and diffusion.

For the purposes of this paper, however, there must be *direct intention* and usually *intense experiential immersion* to leverage the benefit of physical presence in the chosen jurisdiction. The deliberate purpose is to gain insights and draw lessons from the cross-jurisdictional experience. In this way, we can distinguish cross-jurisdictional exchanges from Cook and Ward's (2012) discussion of conferences, although this paper draws on their insights in the literature review.

Cross-jurisdictional learning exchanges have ballooned in frequency and number over the last three decades with the onset of globalization, improved transport and communications technologies, and the modern quest to improve policymaking and practice based on sharing international experience and innovation. Policy practitioners now have quick and easy access to what is happening in the rest of the world, inspiring their interest in new ideas, what works or doesn't and why, and comparing problems and solutions with what is happening in other places. This access occurs through shared information obtained through either technological or personalized means. Technology mechanisms, such as the Internet and