

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