

INTERNATIONAL CONVERGENCE IN POLICY AND PRACTICE:

TRANSNATIONAL DIFFUSION AND ADOPTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Eric Beerkens
Faculty of Education & Social Work
University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

eric.beerkens@usyd.edu.au

Topics

- ❑ The internationalisation of domestic policies: convergence and/or divergence
- ❑ Global diffusion & convergence: explanations, mechanisms and agents
- ❑ Local adoption of “knowledge society policies” for higher education and research

Internationalising domestic politics

- ❑ Transnational and global problems
- ❑ Formerly local issues gain an international dimension through flows
- ❑ International influences in domestic politics through an emerging world polity and global normative pressures

Why do ideas spread?

❑ Functional explanations:

- Economic competitiveness / competitive isomorphism
- Convergence is a result of imperatives for efficiency and effectiveness

❑ Neo-institutional explanations:

- Organisations need to adapt to their new institutional environments and these environments have globalised
- Countries have become part of a world society/world polity
 - Q: through what mechanisms does this occur?

Theoretical problem

Two different strands of neo-institutionalism point to different directions:

- ❑ Sociological institutionalism: institutional isomorphism in the world system of nation states
- ❑ Historical institutionalism: institutions are persistent and therefore national peculiarities are durable

Stages of convergence

- ❑ There might be isomorphism/convergence in
 - Discourse,*but what about:*
 - Decisions & Policies
 - Practices
 - Results

- ❑ Going through the 4 stages, convergence is less likely (Pollitt, 2001, 2002)
 - the further down the line, the more the durable differences 'kick in'

Mechanisms & Agents of diffusion

- ❑ Imposition
 - International/regional organisations
- ❑ Harmonisation
 - transnational society
- ❑ Imitation & emulation
 - national state or focal organisation
- ❑ Norm socialisation in professional networks
 - formal & informal transnational networks of professionals

Examples from Southeast Asia (I-M-S)

☐ **Imposition**

- WB and ADB programmes and post-1997 IMF interventions in Indonesia

☐ **Harmonisation**

- Not so much regional harmonisation
- Harmonisation in anticipation on WTO/GATS

☐ **Imitation & emulation**

- Clear and conscious copying from US in S'pore & Malaysia (e.g. SMU/Wharton; regional innovation systems)

☐ **Norm socialisation in professional networks**

- Through education abroad
- Through professional consultations and visits
- Through training & capacity building programmes

Examples from Southeast Asia (I-M-S)

Examples of local adoption and adaptation:

- ❑ Singapore: policy borrowing from (market oriented) US system, but very strong state interference in own system
- ❑ Malaysia: many policies still based on ethnic diversity in the country
- ❑ Indonesia: policies get mixed with politics; much attention to geographical equity.

Conclusions

- ☐ convergence decreases when going down the ladder of the four stages of discourse, decisions, practices and results.
- ☐ useful to look at non-functional explanations in order to explain domestic higher education policies
- ☐ strong national forces are at play in the formalisation phase: issues that seemed to be converging in the discursive stage can result in very different policies, practices and results.
- ☐ statements about convergence need to be approached carefully
- ☐ convergence can be positive as well as negative