INTERNATIONAL CONVERGENCE IN POLICY AND PRACTICE:

TRANSNATIONAL DIFFUSION AND ADOPTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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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.