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“Global Concept, Local Contexts: A case study of international criminal justice policy transfer in violence reduction”

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Research Aims & Contribution to Knowledge

My research allows an examination of the differences between Cincinnati and Glasgow in gang culture, policing, criminal, legal and socio-economic environment. It has been stated that there is a dearth of empirical research in the field of criminal justice policy transfer literature (Newburn and Sparks, 2004; Jones and Newburn, 2007). The main focus of existing research has been on crime control and penal policies ‘imported’ from the United States of America. It is this area of research that I intend to contribute to fill the gap on criminal justice policy transfer.

Background to Research - Gangs

Greater Glasgow has a population of 2.5 million, while Glasgow city has a population of 600,000. Gangs have been a major problem in the west of Scotland, which has approximately 170 gangs with the east end of the city having 55 gangs with 600 members and an age range 12-26 (Source: Police Intelligence). There have been numerous studies of gang problems over the years (Patrick, 1973; Kintrea et al, 2010; Deuchar & Holligan, 2010) These include minor ASB through to serious crimes, violence and murders. Solutions were required, which led to Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) looking for new ideas elsewhere.

Research Context – USA

Operation Ceasefire was developed in the mid-1990s to deal with the growing homicide problem in Boston and utilised the focused deterrence strategy and ‘Pulling Levers’ approach developed by a team of academics (Kennedy, et al, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2005). This approach led to a 63% reduction in homicide rate in 2 years.

The Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence was formed in 2007 (Engel et al, 2008) to deal with the extreme levels of homicides in the city and resulted in a significant reduction in homicide rates in 2 years.. Both of these approaches were identified by the VRU as best practice.

Research Context – Glasgow

The Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) was formed in June 2008 to tackle and reduce gang violence in the east end of Glasgow city. It adopted a partnership working approach with a central co-ordinating hub of key staff from Police, Housing, Social Work, Education and Council Community Safety Services.

It used 3 key messages delivered at Self-Referral Sessions which were based on the Cincinnati style Call-Ins. (1) The violence must stop: (2) The community has had enough: and (3) There are ways out.

Review of Previous Research- Policy Transfer

Policy transfer has always existed and the development of world-wide communications since the Second World War, has led to an increase in the transfer policies on a global scale. Policy transfer has its roots in comparative policy analysis in the USA: e.g. Policy Diffusion (Walker, 1969; Eyestone, 1977), while Lesson Drawing (Rose, 1991) and Policy Convergence (Bennett, 1991) developed out of a critique of Policy Diffusion. Policy transfer focuses more on voluntary transfer by rational actors and on societies to grow more alike and develop similar structures, processes and performances. Policy transfer is defined by Dolowitz and Marsh (1991) as: ‘a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions in another time and/or place’ and encompasses both ‘voluntary’ and ‘coercive’ acts of transfer, which can occur when a government or supra-national forces or pushes another to adopt a policy. The authors posed a series of questions to inform Policy Transfer: What is policy transfer? Who transfers policy? Why is there policy transfer? What is transferred? Are there different degrees of transfer? From where are lessons drawn? What factors constrain policy transfer? What problems are there with the literature? They expanded these in 2000 to examine: The extent of and reasons for the growth of policy transfer. Outline a framework for the analysis of policy transfer. They also presented a continuum to distinguish between different types of policy transfer and addressed the relationship policy transfer success and failure.

Research Findings

I have carried out 20 interviews with key participants in Glasgow and a further 10 interviews in Cincinnati. It is apparent that Glasgow adopted a public health approach to violence in the city to minimise the harm that accrues to both victim and assailant and their families and wider society. This public health approach is not evident in Cincinnati.

There are different degrees of transfer: Copying, Emulation, Hybridisation/Synthesis, and Inspiration (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996, 2000; Evans, 2009). My preliminary findings indicate that Glasgow Copied the Cincinnati model and then quickly realised that they had to adapt to suit the local needs of their society – Emulation.

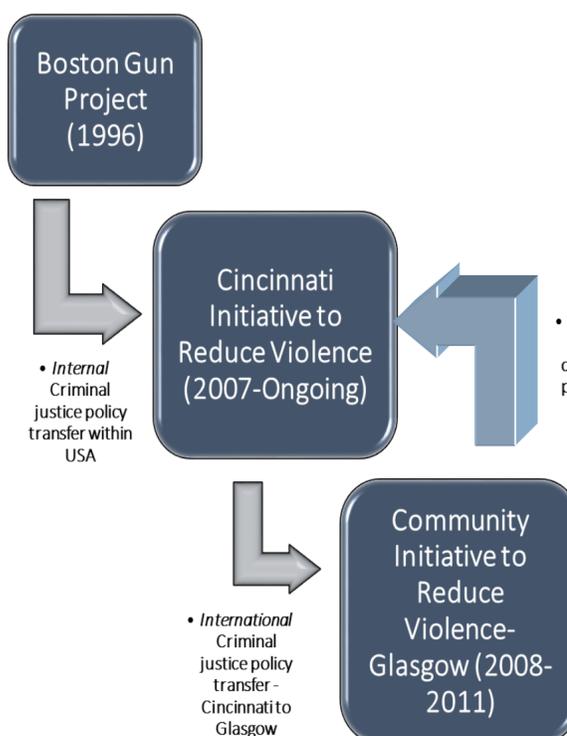
One interviewee described this process as ‘tartanisation’! (Interview: Glasgow 1). While another interviewee commented: “...we come over here. All we did was put it into the context that was here and changed it to suit our context. We didn’t change it because it was better. We didn’t change it because to make it better than what was happening in Cincinnati. We changed it so that it would work; because that’s what we had to do you know.” (Interview: Glasgow 17).

The Glasgow Project consisted of a central co-ordinating hub, which is different from Cincinnati, who employs a manager to act as a focal point for strategic leaders. Engagement differs in Glasgow from Cincinnati: Cincinnati – offenders are compelled to attend Call In’s. While in Glasgow, clients are invited to attend as there are no legal powers to compel them to attend the Self-Referral Session (name changed from Call In to reflect the voluntary nature of attending). Glasgow engages with under 16s as well as adults whereas Cincinnati engage with adult offenders only.

Backflow of Policy Transfer

A main finding of this research is a concept that I have termed as a ‘Backflow of Policy Transfer’ that does not appear to have been documented before in the field of criminal justice policy transfer. A site visit to Cincinnati in April 2009 by the Glasgow CIRV team, led to the US CIRV team changing their working practices to mirror those of Glasgow CIRV in adopting an holistic approach to engagement and case management. Prior to this point US CIRV had only engaged with adults over 16 and focused on employability only. The change adopted opened this approach to work with young people as well as adults and to look at causes of violence, including social, health and employability issues.

Backflow of Policy Transfer Model (Source: Graham, 2015)



Limitations of the Dolowitz and Marsh Model of Policy Transfer

It has also been determined that the Dolowitz and Marsh model of policy transfer is limited in its scope and does not allow for the conceptualisation of this phenomenon, which requires a more cyclical approach. Furthermore, this research ascertained that the model was also limited in its analysis of what was considered a failed transfer. Glasgow CIRV operated successfully for 3 years but failed in its goal of long-term sustainability due to various factors. Not least of which was a change of focus to replicate the original approach taken by US CIRV, while in fact US CIRV changed focus to replicate Glasgow CIRV’s approach, hence the backflow of the policy transfer from Glasgow to Cincinnati. The policy transfer model is somewhat limited in that it does not allow for the critical conceptualised theorisation of what happens after a policy has been transferred, where the model stops, but the process may continue.

Contribution to Knowledge

This research therefore extends existing knowledge in the field of criminal justice policy transfer by extending the model beyond its linear and finite scope, identifying what it does not encapsulate and reinforcing the significance of the local contexts, which cannot fail to have an impact on such transfers.

References

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