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When West–East planning policy advice fails to gain traction

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This article focuses on west-east planning policy transfers in Europe – the movement of ideas, principles, priorities, and processes related to the development, implementation and evaluation of planning policy. It examines the case of Albania, where various activities to promote the transfer of policy have taken place over the last quarter century. Since the end of communism in 1990, foreign consultants have been involved in providing advice on a range of policy issues, including urban and regional planning. Drawing on a survey of consultants with direct experience of providing policy advice in Albania, the article explores the impact of west-east planning policy transfer and the key barriers it has faced.

Keywords: Albania; europe; foreign consultants; policy transfer; regional planning; urban planning

1. Introduction

At the end of communism in the 1990s, Albania entertained high hopes of becoming "the Switzerland of Southeast Europe" within a decade. Locals envisioned attractive and pristine cities with well-functioning transport systems and well-maintained buildings. Since then, foreign consultants have provided policy advice on a range of planning laws, regulations, policy reports, and plans. However, much of this policy advice has had little impact on the practice of planning on the ground, despite the fact that policy reform was (and is) certainly needed in various areas (e.g. public participation, environment, law, housing, and transport).

Not only do the various policy transfer efforts represent a low return on the investment of time and money of both local and foreign experts, they have also had a detrimental effect on planning practitioners, stakeholders and members of the public who often had high expectations at the start of these processes, but have since been disappointed or disillusioned by the outcomes. This has resulted in a general fatigue in such processes and even a sense of hopelessness among Albanian policy professionals, politicians, and the general public.

This article illustrates the dynamics and outcomes of asymmetric power relationships associated with West-East policy transfer related to the management of urban and regional development. Drawing on surveys of foreign consultants who have been directly involved in providing policy advice in Albania, the authors explore the reasons for the low impact of West-East planning policy transfer and the key barriers to this transfer. Policy transfer attempts at three levels (national, regional, local) and in three

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planning areas (housing, land-use, and transport) are considered. The study is placed in the context of coercive (also referred to as conditional or supply-driven) policy transfer literature on Eastern Europe. The analysis is structured around six aspects of policy transfer: (i) the objects of transfer; (ii) the outcomes of transfer; (iii) the direction and arenas of transfer; (iv) the groups and individuals involved in policy transfer; (v) the motivations for transfer; and (vi) the barriers to transfer.

The aim of this article is to chart the processes of asymmetric policy transfer, from donor countries in Western Europe (and North America) to Eastern Europe (Albania). Asymmetry in this context refers, among other things, to the unequal power relationships, resource availabilities, and levels of economic development between the donor and recipient country. Examining the processes of policy transfer focuses primarily on the interactions (or missing interactions) between the foreign consultants providing policy advice and the local policy officials to whom the policy advice is addressed.

Relatively little is known about the relationships between dominant "donors" of planning policies and subordinate "recipients" with fewer resources. Most previous studies of policy transfer with an urban and regional planning focus, have dealt with developed countries, especially European ones (Pojani and Stead 2014a). Although a number of studies on policy transfer from Western Europe to Eastern Europe in different policy domains can be found, very few are related to urban and regional planning. To date, only a handful of studies have been carried out on policy transfer relating to urban and regional planning in Eastern Europe (see, e.g. Adams 2008; Pojani and Stead 2014b; Stead, de Jong, and Reinholde 2008; Vinke-De Kruijf, Augustijn and Bressers 2012).

2. Literature review: West–East policy transfer

Because literature on West-East policy transfer in the planning arena is scarce, this review is primarily based on theories developed from studies of policy transfer in other policy arenas, as well as studies of "Europeanization" in Eastern Europe. The literature below is divided into three main parts. First, it reviews the reasons why West-East policy transfer activities have intensified. Second, it outlines a critique of the ways these activities have been organized. Third, it considers the future direction of West-East policy exchange.

2.1. Upsurge in West–East policy transfer

The exchange and transfer of ideas about the planning and governance of cities has a long history (Stein *et al*. 2017). In Eastern Europe, factors such as the post-communist transition and the EU accession process have contributed to the intense West-East policy transfer over the last quarter century. General processes of globalization and policy diffusion have also played a role (Busch and Jorgens 2005). After the fall of communism in 1990, experience from the West was actively sought in order to understand how to develop public policy in market economies. The urgency to do so was acute, since the transition from the old system to a market economy was extremely rapid. While, in the past, it was branches of government and professional bodies that tended to dominate policy transfer activities, in the post-communist era "knowledge intermediaries" such as consultancies and think tanks came to play a prominent role (Cook, Ward, and Ward 2014). The World Bank and the International Monetary fund were among the main policy donors in the early years of the transition (Woods 2006). During this

period, post-communist countries were eager for reforms in most policy areas, often aiming to closely mimic the West (Eriksen 2007; Randma-Liiv and Kruusenberg 2012; Ivanova and Evans 2004). Past policy experience was labeled as "communist" and considered unfit (Randma-Liiv 2005). At the same time, international donors had little experience in dealing with transitions from socialist to market economies.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, a new wave of reform was driven by the EU accession process. The EU encouraged applicant countries toward greater convergence with particular policy models that had been implemented earlier in the EU (Grabbe 2003). Eastern European politicians accorded a high priority to EU membership, which allowed Western Europe to exercise an unprecedented influence on, and even intrusion in, Eastern European policies and institutions. Many candidate accession countries engaged enthusiastically in policy transfer activities (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004).

During both stages of the transition, Eastern European countries often lacked the time, money, expertise, and international partnerships to mold their own policies and institutions into a democratic and market-based tradition. Political environments lacked stability in some cases, and most countries were enveloped in an atmosphere of crisis. While developing policies that were geared to their particular circumstances required extensive analysis, testing, and tailoring, key decisions with deep repercussions needed to be made very quickly to avoid policy bottlenecks or even reversals (Tavits 2003). Local public administrators were overwhelmed by the sheer load of new policies and laws that needed to be drafted. Moreover, many staff members and politicians lacked the necessary qualifications, specialization, and policy sophistication owing to the multidecade isolation imposed by the communist dictatorships (Coombes and Meaker 2006) and, in some smaller countries, to a generalist education system (Pojani 2012). Under these circumstances, countries frequently opted for ready-made solutions imported by foreign experts, seeing little benefit in attempting to reinvent the wheel on their own (Randma-Liiv 2005, 2007; Jacoby 2004).

2.2. Critique of West–East policy transfer

Given the haste of post-communist and Europeanization reforms in Eastern Europe, insufficient time and consideration was given to many policy decisions. As a consequence, some policies were transferred quickly and uncritically, without understanding their scope and limitations or without due consideration of local context (Coombes and Meaker 2006). Some Western policy transfers benefitted the donor country (or countries) more than the recipient (Vermeersch 2005; Holden 2009). Eastern governments sometimes even imported policies and programs with a poor performance record in their Western homelands (Randma-Liiv 2007). In some cases, the inappropriate adoption of multiple policies and practices from elsewhere led to dysfunctional conditions (Bache and Taylor 2003).

Rather than producing beneficial change, foreign policies sometimes merely served to legitimize decisions that had already been made (Randma-Liiv 2007; Brusis 2005). While policy transfer was used as a tool to reduce start-up costs, preventive action to tackle problems before they arose rarely occurred (Stead, de Jong, and Reinholde 2008). Certain policies and practices advocated by dominant donors drove out established or conventional practices in recipient countries, leading to wastage and disruption (Coombes and Meaker 2006).

During the implementation stage, a range of policies and programs ran into problems due to poor local administrative capacity and lack of funds (Randma-Liiv 2007; Vinke-De

Kruijf, Augustijn and Bressers 2012). Laws and regulations from Western Europe faced problems of enforcement in Eastern European countries leading, in turn, to corruption and policy failure (Eriksen 2007). Some of the main beneficiaries of policy transfer were various groups – politicians, consultants, and academics in both the donor and recipient countries – but frequently not those directly suffering the consequences of inadequate public policies. Cases have even been documented where consultancy and implementation funds were appropriated by individuals in recipient countries and diverted into private accounts (Coombes and Meaker 2006).

Cultural differences between West and East Europe added to the complexity of policy transfer (Stead, de Jong, and Reinholde 2008; Common 2013). For example, the power distance (between staff and management) is smaller and the hierarchy is less rigid in Western European countries than those in the East. As a consequence, communication-based policy instruments favored in the West were less relevant in Eastern European administrative cultures (Eriksen 2007; Paraskevopoulos and Leonardi 2004).

Relationships with foreign advisers were also problematic. Because Eastern European decision-makers had few contacts with colleagues in Western Europe, the choice of foreign partners, consultants, or role models was often haphazard and made without systematic comparison. Choices were often based on a limited number of informal contacts. In some cases, foreign examples that were incomparable with the receiving context were studied and endorsed (Randma-Liiv and Kruusenberg 2012). These choices were also heavily influenced by foreign governments or international organizations, especially those that paid the consultants' fees (Randma-Liiv and Kruusenberg 2012). Conditions of foreign assistance were attached by donor agencies and were not necessarily led by local political agendas (Grabbe 2003). International governments and organizations were not simply motivated by altruism: they also sought to further their own ideological, economic, and political agendas.

Because of the funding arrangements for foreign policy advisors, their recommendations were sometimes biased towards the interests of the funder rather than the recipient country (Ivanova and Evans 2004). Some international organizations promoted the one-size-fits-all policies and idealized "best practices" in transition countries, with little attention to context. Not only was this due to their ideological orientation but also to the bureaucratic pressure to move from one project to the next in the competitive foreign-aid business (Randma-Liiv 2007, 2005; Woods 2006). Foreign policy advisors were suspicious of their local counterparts, and vice versa. At the same time, the lucrative salaries provided by foreign donors tempted talented local personnel to join donor agencies themselves, thus further weakening local institutions. Only a few of the many foreign consultants deployed in the field had the endurance and perseverance to absorb the local culture and build the necessary bridges over time (Coombes and Meaker 2006; Tulmets 2005).

2.3. Future of West–East policy transfer

Despite the problems and complexities of West-East policy transfer, recent evidence suggests that West-East policy transfer is becoming more competent and responsible (Randma-Liiv 2007; Randma-Liiv and Kruusenberg 2012). By the mid-2000s, most countries in Eastern Europe had joined the European Union, so the pressure to harmonize local policies with EU policies diminished. Meanwhile, local public administrations have become more mature with increasing members of staff participating in international professional networks

which have empowered Eastern European policy makers to evaluate and select policy options more carefully (Randma-Liiv and Kruusenberg 2012). This represents a move from policy replication to policy emulation (Tavits 2003; Randma-Liiv 2007; Scherpereel 2010). Also, policy officials in Eastern Europe have become more proactive and selective in their choice of foreign partners and consultants (Randma-Liiv 2007).

Donor attitudes and practices have also changed. These have shifted from technical assistance to direct budget support, thereby eliminating transaction costs and other wastage arising from brokers. Nevertheless, Western European countries often still remain the guiding star for their Eastern European counterparts. The desire for recognition and acceptance within the European Union has influenced choices about "suitable" policies for transfer (Marsden and Stead 2011; Grabbe 2003). Western European rhetoric in various policy areas has certainly been successfully imported (Adams 2008). Alongside their policy-importer status, new EU member states (e.g. in the Baltic or the Balkan regions) are now beginning to serve as policy exporters to EU candidate countries, whereby East-East transfer channels are opening up (Stone 2010).

3. Study method

This study considers salient examples of planning policy transfer at three administrative levels: (1) the national level in regards to the management of multi-family housing; (2) the regional level in the development of strategic spatial plans for 'Durana', Albania's core region and economic powerhouse; and (3) the local level, focusing on sustainable transport interventions in Albania's capital, Tirana.

The analysis of planning policy transfer to Albania draws on four main sources: (1) planning documents from the three administrative levels (national, regional, and local) relating to three specific planning areas – housing, land-use planning, and transport (Table 1); (2) the authors' personal experience and observations while working in Albania; (3) informal discussions with local and national policy administrators who have been involved in policy transfer activities; and (4) surveys of foreign consultants involved in the preparation of the planning products listed in Table 1. All surveys of foreign consultants were conducted via email and contained open-ended questions, the responses to which were treated as qualitative data. In total, 34 survey requests were sent and 13 completed questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 38%). At least three responses were received for each administrative level and planning area under study.

The empirical material for this article was collected, analyzed, and presented according to a multi-dimensional framework adopted from Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) and Evans (2009). This analytical framework has been widely employed to study policy transfer in a range of policy areas and in a multiplicity of geographic contexts (see Benson and Jordan 2011; Dussauge-Laguna 2012).

At the same time, the analysis presented below is cognizant of the policy mobility literature, the authors of which observe that policy transfer is often non-linear ('A' is sent to 'B'), and that policies rarely travel as complete packages, but instead move in 'bits and pieces', picked and changed according to local contexts, interests, and actors (Stein *et al.* 2017). A possible consequence of this approach is that a transferred policy instrument from one country may not only look completely different in another country, but it can also be operationalized in a substantially different way than originally conceived or used, because something is either lost or added, or learnt in translation (Stone 2017).

Table 1. Materials consulted for this article.

No.	Document name, consulting firm, funding organization, and funding amount (if known)
1	1993-1995. "Support for urban bus reorganization, Tirana." Study by a Belgium-based transportation planning firm, Transurb Consult (now Transurb Technirail), funded by the European Commission PHARE program.
2	1993-1994. "The Condominium Housing Project - A Component of USAID Technical Assistance to Albania," project led by Padco, a US-based planning firm, and funded by USAID and the World Bank.
3	1995. "The development of the city of Tirana." Plan by Regional Consulting, an Austria-based urban planning firm, funded by the Austrian government.
4	1995. "Preliminary structural plan for the Tirana metropolitan region." Plan by Land Management Task Force (an expert group combining local planners, planners from Padco, a US-based planning firm, GHK, a UK-based planning firm, and researchers from the Graduate School of Design of Harvard University), funded by the USAID and the World Bank.
5	1997-1999. CGEA, a transportation company based in France (now part of Veolia Transport), led a technical assistance program in Tirana, to decentralize public transport management. Funded by the European Commission PHARE program.
6	2000. "TUTIS." A large comprehensive transport study for Tirana prepared by T.E.C.N.I.C. Consulting Engineers, a transport firm based in Italy, and Transurb Consult, funded by the World Bank.
7	2002. "Strategic plan for Greater Tirana." Plan by Padco, funded by the World Bank.
8	2002. "Towards a sustainable development of the Tirana-Durrës region." Study by two German planning consultancies, GTZ GmbH and IOER, funded by the German GTZ.
9	2004. "Tirana metropolis." Plan by Berlage, a planning institute based in the Netherlands, funded by the Dutch Embassy in Albania and the German GTZ.
10	2005. "Sustainable development and promotion of the architectural and environmental heritage in Albania." Strategy by AlbanianTech Project (an Italian-Albanian cooperation) funded by the UNDP.
11	2006. "A parking system for Tirana." Study by Peter Guest, a UK-based consultant, funded by the City of Tirana.
12	2007. The European Commission and FIAB, an association of cyclists in Italy, provided 166,700 Euro for a one-year training program in transportation planning for the City of Tirana staff, in the framework of the MO.S.T. Programme for sustainable mobility.
13	2007. "Sustainable and integrated development of the Tirana-Durres region." Strategy by two UK-based planning firms, Landell Mills Development Consultants and Buro Happold, funded by the European Union.
14	2008. "Integrated strategy for a sustainable traffic development in Tirana." Study by the Albanian chapter of an international non-profit environmental organization, the Environmental Center for Administration and Technology (ECAT) in collaboration with a German consultant, Rainer Graichen, funded by the EU LIFE program, the German government, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
15	2008. "Study of current transport and mobility conditions in Tirana." Study by the Polytechnic University of Bari, Italy, in collaboration with several Albanian partners, funded by the New Neighborhood Programme Italy-Albania Interreg/Cards 2004-2006.
16	2009. "Tirana municipal sustainable transport strategy." Strategy by two Italian consultants, Apri and Bridge, and funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

(*Continued*)

Table 1. *Continued*.

No.	Document name, consulting firm, funding organization, and funding amount (if known)
17	2009. Law no. 10-112, 9/4/2009 on Condominium Associations, approved by the Albanian Council of Ministers, prepared with the assistance of Larrauri & López Ante, a Spanish consultancy firm, funded by the International Finance Corporation (World Bank).
18	2009. "Tirana Great Ring Road, Environmental Impact Assessment." Report by Bernard Engineers, an Austria-based consultancy firm, funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
19	2010. "Tirana Master Plan." Plan by Urbaplan, a Swiss planning firm, and CoPlan, funded by the World Bank and the Dutch government.
20	2012. "Tirana Master Plan." Plan prepared by the City of Tirana, funded by Cities Alliance and GTZ.
21	2012. "Thematic plan for Greater Tirana." Plan prepared by Japan International Cooperation Agency, a Japanese consultancy, funded by the Japanese government.
22	2012. "Tirana LRT PPP – Strategic Review of Basic Options." Plan prepared by Spiekermann AG, a German engineering firm, and funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The analytical framework is also cognizant of the emerging literature on the policy failure, which highlights the role of different analytical levels (e.g. individuals, professional groups, national cultures) for exploring and explaining the relationship between processes and outcome (see, e.g. Dunlop 2017). This literature draws attention to the observation that policy transfer has multiple dimensions, which can mean that there can be both successes and failures attached to any transfer of policy. This implies that a simple binary distinction between success and failure cannot be applied to many transfer processes.

The analytical framework employed in this article considers the following six facets of policy transfer with particular focus on the sixth:

1. Objects of policy transfer. What is transferred or sought to be transferred (i.e. policies, goals, instruments, or programs).
2. Results of policy transfer. Policy transfers can be "soft" (e.g. changes in ideas, concepts, and attitudes) or "hard" (e.g. changes in programs and implementation). Negative or positive lessons can be drawn during and after policy changes, which may be equally valuable. The transfer and learning process can take the form of copying, emulation (benchmarking), hybridization, or inspiration. Learning can also be negative, such as when borrowers are faced with undesirable policy outcomes due to uninformed, incomplete, or inappropriate transfers. Policy copying and negative learning are the focus of this study.
3. Direction of policy transfer. Transfer outcomes are affected by whether they occur within a nation or between nations. Cross-national transfer is the focus of this study.
4. Agents of policy transfer. At least eight main categories of agents of transfer can be identified, including politicians (elected officials), bureaucrats (civil servants), pressure (advocacy) groups, policy entrepreneurs (think-tanks, consultants), knowledge institutions, academics (experts), international organizations, and supranational institutions. A variety of policy beliefs can be found among these groups,

each one bringing a different set of attitudes, cultural values, and resources to the process.

5. Motivations for policy transfer. Motivations for transfer vary from voluntary, perfectly rational, to coercion by pressure groups, political parties, funding bodies, and policy entrepreneurs or experts. Voluntary transfer tends to occur in developed countries, while coercive transfer is common in developing countries. The middle ground involves mixed forms of transfer undertaken in order to secure grants, loans, or other inward investments, or as a result of politico-economic crisis or image concerns.
6. Barriers to policy transfer. Three types of obstacles to policy transfer can be identified: (1) "cognitive" obstacles in the pre-decision phase (i.e. insufficient search for new ideas, low cultural and ideological receptivity of existing actors and organizations, excessive complexity of the policies to be transferred, physical distance, and language barriers); (2) "structural" obstacles during the process of transfer (i.e. failure to effectively mobilize the elites, lack of cohesive policy transfer networks, and technical implementation constraints, including limited financial and human resources); and (3) public opinion, elite opinions, media reports, and the attitudes and resources of constituency groups.

In reporting the study findings, the names and positions of participants have been withheld in order to protect their privacy. Their statements have been summarized and combined in the text; no direct quotes are reported.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Objects of planning policy transfer

At the national level, the management of multi-family condominium housing became a major policy issue following the transfer of ownership at nominal prices of communist-era apartment units to sitting tenants in the early 1990s. Housing privatization was standard across Eastern Europe, but it was more rapid in Albania than elsewhere. Within a few years, nearly the entire public housing stock (over 97%) had been privatized.

In the minds of foreign experts, this transformation to private ownership without the formation of condominium associations to manage the privatized buildings was unthinkable and would lead to disaster (Pojani and Baar 2016). Policy makers, as well as foreign experts, advised that privatization would result in a growth of private housing management businesses thus improving condominium housing maintenance. The first national law on condominium maintenance was adopted in 1993 at the urging of foreign experts, followed by a new law in 2009. US consultants assisted in the first case and Spanish consultants in the second case. US and EU technical assistance was also received in the mid-2000s to update the cadaster system.

At the regional level, the spatial development of the Durana megalopolis emerged as a critical issue in the post-communist era. Although Durana is a key development area in the core of Albania, it is not an official administrative unit. It encompasses the country's two most populous cities, Tirana and Durrës, as well as the territory in between them. During communism, Tirana and Durrës were separate and self-contained cities, surrounded by green belts, but have been gradually merging over the last two decades. The Durana territory contains more than a third of the national population, at least one third of domestic enterprises, nearly two thirds of foreign investments, the country's largest

markets, the only international airport, and the main seaport. From a planning perspective, Durana's development is chaotic: residential and commercial sprawl is rife. The transport system is dominated by cars. Visually, the region encompasses an assortment of building types and styles, ranging from single-family homes to multi-storey warehouses and light industrial plants to large exurban shopping centers (Pojani and Pojani 2011; Pojani 2017). Because of Durana's economic importance in the country, several strategies have been prepared by foreign consultants to deal with its spatial problems. More recently, an international competition was held for the urban design of three sites within Durana, along the Tirana-Durrës highway.

At the local level, urban transport has emerged as a major issue in Tirana. During communism, private car ownership was forbidden. Cycling, walking, and a limited bus system served almost all mobility needs. Since the fall of communism, Tirana's population has exploded (from 300,000 to well over 800,000) and car ownership has skyrocketed. Currently, more than half of the households own a car and the city is choked with motorized traffic and pollution. Moreover, conditions for pedestrians and cyclists are treacherous, and bicycle use is almost extinct (Pojani 2011). Parked cars have invaded sidewalks and other spaces adjacent to streets. Most residents, including those who own and use automobiles, are keen to see interventions to change this situation. Over the last quarter of a century, foreign consultants have been hired to prepare no less than a dozen plans and policy reports on sustainable urban transport in Tirana.

4.2. Results of planning policy transfer

In terms of tangible outcomes in the built environment, various forms of resistance to policy transfer in the three areas and administrative levels under study have frequently resulted in low levels of policy change. Where transfer has occurred, it has either been merely coincidental or the result of a general diffusion of planning ideas rather than a direct consequence of targeted technical assistance and international consultancy or collaboration projects. The main positive effect, albeit indirect, of planning policy transfer activities has been the on-the-job-training of a range of planning professionals (at various administrative levels in the capital), who have worked in close contact with foreign advisors. However, even this effect has been undermined by the high job turnover rate in the Albanian public administration, in which public employment of planners is extremely politicized and generally only lasts one political term of office.

At the national level, both condominium management laws (1993 and 2009) have not resulted in the types of impacts that were originally envisaged. Legal associations of apartment owners, which would manage the buildings and provide for maintenance payments by the residents, have not materialized. Most of the associations to have been formed are informal and are likely to remain so despite recently revived efforts on the part of the City of Tirana to formalize them. While performing similar functions to those that they would have performed as legal entities, informal condominium associations do not have to pay any registration taxes (Pojani and Baar 2016).

At the regional level, the strategic plans for the spatial development of Durana have not been formally adopted, or even widely circulated among professionals. It is currently too early to discuss the outcomes of the international competition because, although a project winner has been selected, a full project has not yet been started.

However, it is unclear how a project-based approach will align with a general strategy for the region.

At the local level, a more complex situation surrounds the transfer of urban transport planning concepts. Foreign consultants have prepared a multitude of studies on this topic and made various recommendations on sustainable transport development, consistent with international concepts. Some of the earlier studies focused on the reduction of government subsidies in the public transport sector, through the gradual introduction of competitive mechanisms and, eventually, full privatization. Several studies proposed the introduction of pricing mechanisms in urban transport, such as the application of parking charges on main streets and in residential neighborhoods. In addition, many studies made recommendations for physical interventions, the principal of which have been the creation of exclusive bus and bicycle lanes and pedestrian areas in the center. A few studies proposed the introduction of light rail on major urban and suburban corridors.

However, most of the local transport studies and plans have not been implemented, or have only been implemented in a patchy manner. A few bus and cycle lanes have been created, but they are not connected to a broader network and the level of bus service is modest. For the most part, parking continues to be free of charge, while the main square was finally pedestrianized. This is one concept introduced by foreign consultants (French, then Belgian), which was successfully implemented – albeit only after a decade-long political battle (see Pojani 2015). A light-rail system has long been promised by politicians (see below), but proposals were never assessed against other alternatives (e.g. Bus Rapid Transit) and have not seen any implementation to date.

4.3. Direction of planning policy transfer

Throughout the post-communist transition, developed countries in Europe and North America (and also Japan in a few cases) have been Albania's main policy transfer sources. This asymmetric relationship (dominant donors and a subordinate recipient) is closely linked to the positive image of the United States and Western Europe in Albania. Working in international teams with experts from these countries is considered highly prestigious (and more financially lucrative) among local administrative staff, despite the fact that the US is not renowned for planning policy.

Neighboring countries at a more similar stage of development to Albania (e.g. Turkey, the ex-Yugoslav republics, Romania, or Bulgaria) have never served as a role model for policy transfer. The experiences of more distant countries in Latin America, Southeast Asia, or parts of Africa could potentially be relevant for Albanian cities, but these models have typically been rejected as unsuitable, reflecting Albania's efforts to emancipate from its "developing country" status and join the "EU club."

As one of Albania's close neighbors, Italy has traditionally served as an exemplar to follow, starting with Albania's independence from the Ottoman Empire in the early part of the twentieth century. During the 1920s and 1930s, Italy funded the development of the center of Tirana, and during WWII, Albania was subject to Italian rule. The interrelationships between the two nations faded during Albania's communist isolation, but links have been reestablished since the end of the communist period, due in part to close economic relations between the two countries. Approximately 400,000 Albanians are currently employed in Italy, thousands of Albanian students are pursuing degrees in Italian universities, and numerous Italian entrepreneurs are running

businesses in Albania. For these reasons, Italian is widely spoken in Albania. Because of the short distance between Albania and Italy, and frequent flights between Tirana and numerous cities in Italy, business links are increasing. Albania's construction boom of the late 1990s and early to mid-2000s represented an opportunity for Italian urban design consultancies faced with limited prospects within their own country. Meanwhile, various Italian planning consultants have established themselves in Albania, often as a consequence of their closer cultural affinity with Albania than their Northern European or American counterparts.

By contrast to Italian advisors, advisors from the US and Northern Europe were used to a system that was driven by laws and contracts, rather than loyalty and personal connections. Also, they faced more substantial language barriers and had to rely on translators (although many locals speak English). Also, there has been a difference between foreign advisors working for non-profits with low budgets, who were highly committed to a cause (e.g. environmental protection), and highly paid but time-poor consultants from major international organizations, such the USAID, who often expected prompt adherence to their proposals. The latter had little time to understand the complexities of the local situation.

The choice of Western policy donors, and therefore the direction of policy transfer, has been dictated by funding sources (see later) rather than cultural affinity. International planning concepts have also reached Albania, sometimes through professionals who attended foreign universities and returned to practice or teach planning at home.

4.4. Agents of planning policy transfer

Technical assistance in planning has been provided by a variety of donors, including the World Bank, USAID, the United Nations (especially UNDP), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Open Society Foundation (formerly Soros Foundation), the European Union, as well as individual European country governments, including the Dutch, German, Austrian, and Italian governments. The latter have generally allocated funding for planning consultants from their own countries.

More recently, Albania has been able to pay for planning consultancy services through its own budget. For example, some recent international competitions for Durana were paid through the Albanian Development Fund which was set up by the national government. This new-found confidence likely stems from Albania's growing feeling of proximity to Europe – especially since it was awarded candidate status by the EU in 2014. Other key factors include an increasing maturity of local institutions, higher levels of training and capacity among local staff, and more international contacts, especially in EU countries.

It could be argued that the increased ability to afford the services of foreign consultants will result in more rational and country-appropriate choices of planning policy models. However, in a planning environment subject to corruption and politicization, the selection of foreign consultants is certainly not a transparent process, and established networks of local and international consultants dominate the planning scene.

A large number of local, regional, and national institutions, especially those with an office in Tirana, have been involved in planning policy transfer activities. Because of the small size of the country (three million people) and a limited number of practicing planners, the same individuals tend to participate in most planning meetings and workshops. However, only a restricted circle of professional actors – typically those based in the capital – has had

direct and ongoing contact with foreign consultants and has benefitted the most from international expertise. A sort of path dependence has been at play: initial personal contacts have often tended to endure. By virtue of their English or other language skills, professional ability, and personality, various local professionals were able to establish a rapport with international experts early on and have since "stayed in the loop" throughout the transition years. While this has been positive in terms of team-building and smooth working relationships during individual technical assistance projects, it has also prevented expertise from spreading to other locations, some of which are in greater need of assistance than the capital city.

4.5. Motivations for planning policy transfer

Information from policy officials in Albania reveals that most efforts to transfer planning policy into Albania have been primarily driven by funding opportunities. They have occurred wherever funding sources were made available, either from supranational organizations or from national governments of developed countries, which have had a strategic interest in assisting Albania's planning sector. Some of the earlier policy transfer activities could be considered as "policy gifts" which the Albanian counterparts did not seek, or even necessarily want or need (see later). In those cases, consultants were hired directly by the funding organization.

In the last decade or so, some Albanian planning agencies have been empowered to seek foreign expertise on their own, as noted. This is an indication that the local planning system is maturing. However, the continual dependence on foreign expertise – which has not been greatly beneficial, as discussed above – suggests a certain inferiority complex on the part of local practitioners. Local and regional governments remain dependent on national government funding (to hire consultants and for other purposes). Many cases have been recorded where the national government has withheld funding to sub-national levels governed by opposition parties. These types of political and personal paybacks restrict local governments (including the City of Tirana) from utilizing international expertise based on specific needs. There have also been a few recent cases of foreign consultancy and advice for the main purpose of legitimizing policies which had already been formulated locally. One example is the development of a light-rail system – a prestigious but costly intervention which would absorb funding that could be used for pedestrian or cycling improvements. For this purpose, several feasibility studies were commissioned which merely buttressed the mayor's ambitions to proceed with his plans.

4.6. Barriers to planning policy transfer

Numerous barriers stand in the way of successful policy transfer in planning. Some are related to the local context, while others are connected to the types of planning policies recommended by foreign consultants and the way transfer activities were set up and implemented. The most common barriers identified in this study are summarized below (not necessarily in order of importance):

4.6.1. Policy gifts

Some of the earlier policy transfer activities constituted "policy gifts" (see above) where consultants were hired directly by the funding organization without much (or any) local input. Albanian counterparts did not seek, or even necessarily want or need, the plans

prepared by foreign consultants. In these cases, the motivation to implement received advice was low or nonexistent. In some cases, policy transfer-related activities and projects were carried out in, or by, different parts of the public administration normally responsible for similar projects that receive local funding (i.e. funding from within Albania).

4.6.2. Policy impositions

Some of the regional spatial planning strategies and local urban transport strategies prepared by foreign consultants were motivated by European requirements to deal with informal settlements in Durana and/or curb air pollution as part of the EU accession process leading to the incorporation of EU norms, standards and instruments into planning policy documents. However, because these did not stem from the bottom-up and did not resonate with local planners, they often found little application on the ground.

4.6.3. Local culture

In some cases, planning policies proposed by foreign consultants were in opposition to local cultural expectations and practices. For example, the 1993 law on condominium associations required each condominium owner to sign a binding contract. This policy import from the US found little support in a culture where contracts have little weight. Albanians were more accustomed to conducting financial transactions on an informal basis, rather than on the basis of contracts. Moreover, the concept of imposed consent had little resonance in a society that had lived under an exceptionally repressive state for decades. The 2009 housing law was based on a belief from donors that the adoption of legislation is sufficient to produce legal condominium associations. As a result, both laws became impractical to enforce.

4.6.4. Local institutional arrangements

Some plans prepared by foreign consultants ignored the local institutional context. For example, spatial planning strategies were prepared for Durana, a region in which the political power was held in several municipalities without formal mechanisms for coordination. The goals of these imported plans would only have been achievable in a context of strong regional governance, which was absent in Durana at the time (and elsewhere in Albania). This situation meant that these strategies became relatively ineffective exercises without a specific client. More recently, a broader County government has been created, which has consolidated some of the formerly fragmented local governments in the Durana region. The effects of this administrative reform are awaited.

4.6.5. High pitch

Some of the plans prepared by foreign consultants, especially spatial strategies for Durana and urban transport plans for Tirana, were too abstract and difficult for local planners to operationalize. Although these types of plans can work in mature planning systems, in which professionals are trained to transform higher-level strategies into feasible action plans, they were unworkable in Albania's context, based on a tradition

of detailed master-planning (a legacy of the communist era). As a consequence, these plans amounted to little more than academic exercises.

4.6.6. Uncoordinated technical assistance

In some cases, international advisory planning activities on related topics have run in parallel, or have overlapped, without communication between them. Similar work for different local recipients has often been uncoordinated and project reports have reiterated the same findings, largely ignoring prior work. As a result, studies on local transport and regional spatial planning have frequently restated what was contained in earlier studies.

4.6.7. Information bottlenecks

Many studies prepared by foreign consultants were not widely circulated; many were not even translated into Albanian. As a result, current public administration employees were unaware of the existence of these studies. Despite recent freedom of information laws in Albania, the study reports are still not easy to obtain and are commonly treated as confidential. In many cases, they simply cannot be found; the authors needed to undertake major efforts to obtain some of the study reports.

4.6.8. Lack of information and awareness

In only very few of the cases studied here has the preparation of plans and strategies been accompanied by information and awareness-raising activities. In the case of condominium laws, condominium owners were not well informed about the value of maintaining commonly owned assets. In the case of urban transport plans, campaigns to promote public transport or revive cycling have been extremely limited.

4.6.9. Lack of funding for implementation

Some plans prepared by foreign consultants were very detailed and proposed practical and realistic policies, but lacked the means for implementation. In the mid-2000s, for example, a detailed plan for a new citywide parking system in Tirana was prepared for by a foreign consultant. Although it contained step-by-step recommendations and detailed costings of the necessary items, no funding was provided for its implementation. A decade after the plan was drafted, Tirana still lacks a parking system despite the fact that it would have generated revenues for local government well beyond the cost of implementation. In the case of the first condominium law, seed donor funding was provided for partial implementation, but it was ineffective and the project soon stalled after the seed funding had been spent. The new ownership of condominiums in Albania was created among a population that was used to public maintenance of their properties and many owners could not afford to cover the maintenance needs of their buildings.

4.6.10. Misplaced implementation funds

In the case of urban transport, the substantial support that donors provided largely went to road construction and maintenance rather than public transport, notwithstanding the

fact that all the internationally funded studies highlighted the need for assistance in this sector (Pojani 2010). Explanation for this disparity is notably absent in official plans and policies. However, at least two possible explanations can be suggested. First, international organizations and governments often prefer to fund specific identifiable projects with discrete visible outcomes, thus favoring the development of new roads rather than improvements to existing infrastructure, such as bus services. Second, the elites have been highly concerned with improving the conditions for cars, even though a relatively small amount of funding could have had a major impact on the attractiveness of alternative transport.

4.6.11. Local indifference

Many foreign consultants noted that local planners generally seemed to be welcoming and receptive to international expertise. However, some acknowledged that this attitude might not have necessarily been an indication of assent. It may have been more closely linked to the local culture of hospitality and the fact that some local staff members were deriving considerable personal benefit from collaboration projects (e.g. study trips abroad). While local planning staff and politicians might have been receptive in principle, they were often unwilling or unable to commit to implementing the recommendations of foreign experts, particularly where these were not accompanied by donor funding.

4.6.12. Corruption

Much of the development sector is affected by corruption in Albania. The situation is more serious than in the neighboring countries of Italy and Greece. Clearly, this forms a major obstacle to policy transfer, as no rational planning policy transfer or any rational planning practice can be expected to take place in a context characterized by corruption.

Clearly, many of the barriers to policy transfer (discussed above) are not specific to the planning arena: similar barriers to transfer in other policy arenas have been reported (see Section 2). However, not all barriers to transfer in other policy arenas were mentioned by the survey respondents and local policy officials questioned in this study. In contrast to the general literature on obstacles to policy transfer, few foreign consultants who provided planning advice in Albania were unfamiliar with the country. Many spent considerable time familiarizing themselves with the country and its context, and returned to the country to provide advice on several occasions. In general, these individuals have come to form an affinity for the country and have established good working relationships with local professionals. This can partly be explained by the fact that Albania is an unusual destination for policy consultants (and many other types of visitors), influenced by a mixed international reputation in terms of personal safety, which can detract individuals from visiting (a few months of anarchy following the collapse of some pyramid schemes in 1997 created enduring negative stereotypes). At the same time, those who have spent time there have often found it an attractive, affordable and very safe place to work. During their stay, many experts gained a detailed understanding of the country and its people. In many cases, their experience in Albania has been advantageous for them in securing subsequent advisory projects in the country and in the Balkan region more generally.

5. Conclusions

The study has identified a range of barriers that can hinder the transfer of planning policies from highly developed Western countries to less developed post-communist countries. While some barriers are country-specific, many others apply to other parts of the world. In part, this is due to the nature of planning as an ongoing, evolving process which cannot be transferred in its entirety, since it is strongly influenced by its surrounding context and the stakeholders involved.

Inexpensive efforts to raise public consciousness about planning issues may have been more productive than the relentless production of plans by foreign experts. In the case of housing (national level), residents could have been educated about the need to preserve the housing stock and the financial and safety stakes that each individual has in the accomplishment of adequate maintenance of their building. In the case of land-use planning (regional level), campaigns could have focused on the effect of urban sprawl on commuting costs and time. In the case of transport (local level), the population could have been informed about the adverse effects of high levels of car use on the urban environment and health. In a nation where "rules" have little credibility, information about the threat of losses to wealth and health has the potential to influence action more than plans and legislation.

Planning policy transfer activities need to be well organized to have significant impacts. Proposals need to work with, rather than against, the local culture. Funds need to be allocated to the education of local planning practitioners and academics in sustainability concepts and in awareness-raising campaigns for the population at large. New planning consultants should be selected based on local input. Meanwhile, plans and studies produced through international technical assistance should be made freely available online and in hard copy – both in English and in the local language, and widely distributed among local staff members. This should be a precondition for funding. Plans by foreign advisors must strike a balance between flexibility and discretion (to accommodate and adapt to local needs) and detailed practical guidance (to be operational). Most importantly, new plans and studies should only be commissioned if a significant amount of implementation funding has already been secured. Otherwise, policy transfer is unlikely to gain traction on the ground.

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