Translation across borders: exploring the use, relevance and impact of academic research in the policy process
Dr Steve Connelly
Department of Town & Regional Planning, University of Sheffield
for the Translation across Borders team
Tuesday 5th May 2015
Translation across Borders

• the issue
• conceptual resources
• methods & findings
• the tools
• conclusions/challenges
Researchers are encouraged to increase the impact of their research by collaborating – with practitioners, service users, international partners, and across disciplinary boundaries. Collaborations can be both exciting and rewarding for all parties, but skill is needed to manage them well to produce effective research.
The issues - a civil servant’s view

• Something is not working - but what is it?

• Mutual incomprehension – caricature ‘academics’ and ‘civil servants’

• Communication - role of emotion - language of evidence based policy

• Little activity at the interface (with notable border spanners)
The origins of *Translation across Borders*: conversations between UoS and DCLG

- Mutual frustration over persisting barriers to effective use of academic knowledge
- Dissatisfaction with commonly proposed solutions
  - Academics learn to ‘speak in human’? (Flinders)
  - Academics learn about the policy world? (Stoker)
  - Work together? (The ‘coproduction agenda’)
- Recognising complexity...
Policy as meaning making

→ interest in translation as transfer + creation of *meaning* between actors (Freeman 2009) - not (just) transfer of *evidence, ideas,*...

→ humanities theories of translation and performance: sensitise us to otherwise unseen aspects of ‘translation’ and the ways meaning is created and borders are erected and crossed

→ social psychological ideas about relationships between and within groups
Translation theory

translations of *texts* ↔ translating as *socio-cultural act*

(Munday 2012)

fidelity ↔ function

(Schaffner 1997)

• Translation as
  – *purposeful* action: visible translator(s) and strategic action (Reiss 1977/1989; Schaffner 1998)
  – *situated* action: power-laden and norm-structured contexts (Lefevere 1992; Toury 1995; Chesterman 1997)
  – communication: multi-dimensional and multimodal (Kress 2010) (→ issues of interpretive legitimacy)

⇒ interest in ‘practices of translation’

i.e. what translators (academics *and* civil servants *and* neighbourhood activists) do, the contexts they work in, and the nature of the stuff they work on and (re)create
Thinking about borders

• Two species on different planets? ('Speak in human')
• Networked governance and no borders?
• Something in between: (more or less) poorly communicating cultures and (more or less) well-rehearsed roles
Methods

• Symmetrical to some extent
• Field work in DCLG
• Workshops with academics and civil servants
• Interviews – of civil servants by academics, and of academics by a civil servant/academic pair
Findings

• Multiple borders
• Mutual ignorance, familiar role performances and stereotyping

What we learnt was our second-guesses about what we thought you thought that they needed were a long way from the reality
## Stereotyping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Civil servants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considered, theoretical, structured, measured, thorough, rigorous, abstract, and analytical.</td>
<td>neutrality, impartiality, balance, astute, resilient, cautious, smart and dedicated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Civil servants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passionate, challenging, activists, idealistic and utopian, political, balanced and detached, independent, and free</td>
<td>politicised, pragmatic, strategic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathologies</th>
<th>Academics</th>
<th>Civil servants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Removed and distant, ignorant, stuffy, pompous, impenetrable, verbose and long-winded, impractical, abstruse, misguided, not grounded, rigid, slow, unresponsive, self-absorbed and effete</td>
<td>‘satisficing’, short-termist, uncreative, staid and boring, jargonistic, defensive, fatalist, and ‘arse covering’, remote, conservative, risk averse, narrow, path dependent and service-siloed under pressure, busy, harried, and rushed, uninspired, institutionalised, bureaucratic, and frustrated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

• Multiple borders

• Mutual ignorance, familiar role performances and stereotyping

• Different needs: tension/complementarity between fidelity and function

• Different goals – changing the world? CS code vs. Academics’ agendas

• Common issues but different realities – Structures: REF, PMQ, promotions, politics

– Cultures of expression and motivation – emotions, politics and the code – working with the Stasi

– Acceptable (familiar, legitimate) forms of communication

⇒ Need ‘tools’ to inform, destabilise and encourage reflective practice

People want to see the function, they know, the key succinct messages and why it’s relevant ... OK, if you [academics] want to rail against [their] philosophy you can do but then you’ve got to understand that you’re not going to have that influence.

Poems I’m not sure about... it comes down to getting across really clear, really simple messages. You’ll have seen our infographics work ... underpinning them is a huge amount of intelligence and thought and analysis.

Having an easily-accessible and then relatively easily-digestible evidence base to inform [our] thinking is valuable... shaded by the need to kind of respond to the political realities. There is little point us putting up advice that says ‘one of our best ideas... is to vastly increase taxation...’
The Tools

- Policy and Research
- Academic life
- Pack of (diagnostic) cards
- Pen profiles (anti-stereotypical civil servants and academics)
- Do’s and Don’ts of engaging with academics – analysis of academic interviews

Website: host and tool
Academic lives are complex

The Black Box of our hidden lives

Outputs and activities

Pressures to achieve outcomes
Pressures to achieve outcomes

Research
- Research income
- REF (4x4* papers)
- Publish (lots) or perish
- Academic standing
- Do coproduction
- Be interdisciplinary
- Have demonstrable impact

Teaching
- Satisfied students
- National Student Survey
- Educated students
- High student recruitment

Outputs and activities

Administration
- Maintaining a financially viable, legal and functioning institution
Motivated/balanced by...

The Good Life
- Job satisfaction – politics (change the world), ambition (become well-known, a professor, a public expert), travel, friendship, intellectual pleasure
  - Job security
  - Work/life balance

Outputs and activities

Research

Teaching

Administration
Outputs and activities

Research
- Projects
- Papers
- Bids
- Events
- Non-academic writing
- Social media
- Contacts

Teaching
- Classroom contact
- Supervision (1:1 contact)
- Marking
- Teaching materials

Administration
- Meetings
- Reports
- Etc. etc.
Academic lives are complex

The Black Box of our hidden lives

Outputs and activities

Pressures to achieve outcomes

Research cycles

Teaching cycles

Admin.
B3

The differences were just too big to tackle.

We all got on like a house on fire.

We would be much clearer on what to do next time!

Not sure what we should have... we learnt, but...

M7

C7

They took ages to reply to emails or calls.

Only had to pick up the phone...
Where tools might be used

• Workshops
• Staff training
• Staff review / reflection sessions
• Evaluation
• Personal reflection on events
• Cube/cards on desk
• Doctoral Training Centres
• Where else?
Conclusions

• Borders are real – these are ‘different places’
• Talking to each other is a start, but not enough (talks can fail)
• Intercultural communication is hard – but also learnable and teachable and supportable (‘intercultural communicative competence’ - Byram) and tools can catalyse this
• Scope for a ‘shared endeavour’ – common purpose, or at least common enough – and recognition of difference
• Need to build institutions which support this
References


