



## Whose authority? Exporting Canadian urban planning expertise to Jordan and Abu Dhabi



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### ABSTRACT

This article incorporates a diverse set of approaches that draw upon mobility and diffusion in geography and urban planning, constructivism in international relations theory, and transfer in knowledge management studies in order to investigate: How do international planning consultants who hail from the developed world interact with their indigenous counterparts in developing countries? How do these international consultants navigate the local planning cultures? And how do the interactions between these international urban planning consultants and local planners impact the process of knowledge transfer–acquisition? A global ethnography approach facilitates a micro-level of analysis that elucidates the interactions between the transferring and the acquiring agents; explains the methods by which the transferring agents navigate the planning culture of the acquiring context; and also, explicates the outcomes of the knowledge transfer–acquisition process – i.e. the adaptation of knowledge. To achieve its objectives, this article compares two cases of the transfer of urban planning knowledge from Canada to the Middle East: from Toronto to Amman, Jordan and from Vancouver to Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates. The combination of global ethnography and comparative analysis enables us to ascertain four key observations that explain the transfer–acquisition interactions, and which also challenge existing assumptions on transferring urban planning policies to developing countries. The first explains the links between possessing the necessary expertise and becoming ‘an authority’; the second addresses the ‘an authority’–‘in authority’ nexus; the third discusses building local capacity versus drawing on local authority; and the last concerns authority and the sustenance of newly formed knowledge.

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### 1. Introduction

The unprecedented extent of global interconnectivity at the turn of the 21st century has increased the cross-national exchange among urban planners (Healey and Upton, 2010; Sanyal, 2005b). This article focuses on a micro-level of analysis and examines the interactions between individuals by elucidating the role of international urban planning consultants who have been particularly involved in Middle Eastern cities, and asks: How do these international planning consultants who hail from the developed world (also known as transferring agents) interact with their indigenous counterparts in developing countries (acquiring agents)? How do these transferring agents navigate the internal politics of the acquiring contexts, which are dubbed by Sanyal (2005a) as the planning culture? And lastly, how do the interactions between these international urban planning consultants and their indige-

nous counterparts impact the process of knowledge transfer–acquisition?

We follow in the steps of other scholars who are concerned with the transfer of urban planning knowledge between non-Western contexts. Such research is often focused through a ‘socially-structured and discursively constituted space’ that highlights the complexity of social and political interactions in policy mobility/mutation (Peck and Theodore, 2012: 23). Therefore, we draw upon the geography literature that discusses the mobility of both policies and international experts. We also draw on the constructivist international relations (IR) theories in political science and on knowledge management studies, which facilitate an understanding of individual agency in knowledge transfer. By integrating these theoretical approaches, we complement our urban planning theoretical and empirical sources, which for the most part emphasize institutional arrangements and contextual compatibility. Based on these theoretical combinations, we propose a synthetic model that hones in on the micro-level of interactions between the transferring and the acquiring agents. Our model identifies four different levels of these interactions namely: (1) expertise and ‘an authority’; (2) the ‘an authority’–‘in authority’ nexus; (3)

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building local capacity versus drawing on local authority; and lastly, (4) Authority and the sustenance of newly formed knowledge. We then apply the proposed synthetic model to the work of Canadian urban planning experts who have been involved in Amman, Jordan and Abu Dhabi, the UAE.

Our methodology employs a global ethnography approach (Roy, 2012) that facilitates an investigation of what Lee and LiPuma dub as 'cultures of circulation' (2002: 192) in reference to the interactions between the international and the local consultants (i.e. the transferring and the acquiring agents). Depending primarily on in-depth interviews, the analysis and findings underscore the nature of the interactions between these agents of knowledge transfer. Specifically, the findings elucidate the processes by which the transferred knowledge is adapted (i.e. mutates) to suit the new context by focusing on each of the four types of interactions and pinning how each influences this process.

The following section introduces the various debates on the interactions between individuals during knowledge transfer. We begin with knowledge management, and then discuss the geography, urban planning, and IR literature, and then accordingly conclude with the proposed synthetic model.

## 2. Contextual compatibility and the hard transfer of policies

Stone (2004: 545) distinguishes between the transfer of 'hard policy' and 'soft norms.' The mobility of hard policies has been described in various terms including 'policy convergence, institutional transplantation, imitation and emulation, policy diffusion, transnational policy-learning, and lesson-drawing' (De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007: 690). The transfer of hard policy places the emphasis on the compatibility – or lack thereof – between the transferring and the acquiring contexts and whether the new policies will fit with their new context (Peck, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2010). Cook (2008: 7–8) argues for more attention in empirical research to the success and appropriateness of transferred and adapted policies. In fact, contextual compatibility assumes particular importance in urban planning given the difficulty of translating some policies into the planning practices and institutional frameworks of other contexts such as with land use and land ownership (see for example Friedmann, 1967; Hall, 1996; Kunzmann, 1994, 2005; Leichter, 1979; Masser, 1990, 1986; Ward, 2000a,b, 2010).

Contextual incompatibility, such as when the economic and international political power are asymmetrical, is thought to yield imposition where the more advanced Western planning cultures establish a monopoly over the techniques and knowledge of non-Western contexts (Amin, 1976; Kunzmann, 2005; Masser, 1986; Ward, 1999, 2000a,b). For example, imposition supposedly occurs when former colonizing nations continue to diffuse their practices to their former outposts (Ward, 1999, 2000a,b), such as in Mwila and Lubamo's (2010) empirical study of postcolonial knowledge transfer in Zambia's water sector. Imposition also occurs when the former colonies that inherit colonial institutional practices continue to uncritically perpetuate them (Chatterjee, 1993; Said, 1979; Ward, 2010) as in Volait's (2003) study of Cairo's urban development at the turn of the twentieth century. Imposition may also take place when non-Western cultures uncritically copy and emulate the planning policies and practices of Western ones (Ward, 2000a,b, 1999) as in Vidyarthi's (2010) research on the adaptation of the American neighborhood to India. Blaut (2012: 1) defines uncritical emulation as 'Eurocentric diffusionism', whose advocates laud the merits of the flow of ideas and cultural elements from European to non-European contexts. In fact, embedded in most arguments is the assumption that transfer is a one-way process where urban planning policies and knowledge flow from

the more advanced into the lesser advanced context (Kunzmann, 1994, 2005; Masser, 1990, 1986). In contrast, exchange is considered a two-way process among equal partners (e.g. the EU institutions); (De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007). Friedmann (2010: 313) observes that notwithstanding this supposedly one-way flow, globalization is in fact not yielding homogenizing planning cultures and thus calls for planning research that offers 'thick descriptions' of contemporary cases of cross-national knowledge transfer.

Indeed, in discussing Asian cities, Ong (2011) builds on the rhizomatic connections of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and argues for a view that transcends the binaries of both post-colonialism and of globalization. Ong (2011: 12) claims that 'If the city is a living, shifting network, then worlding practices are those activities that gather in some outside elements and dispatch others back into the world', and accordingly identifies three distinct styles for the transfer of urban planning knowledge through which non-Western contexts aspire towards distinguishing themselves, namely modeling, inter-referencing, and the configuration of new solidarities (Ong, 2011: 13–14). Notably, these types also range from the hard transfer of policy to the soft transfer of norms. To begin with, modeling certainly represents a hard transfer by replicating the policies and plans of other contexts such as in the diffusion and emulation of the Singapore model (Huat, 2011). In contrast, inter-referencing typifies the soft transfer of another city's achievement through 'citing, allusion, aspiration, comparison, and competition' (Ong, 2011: 17), as in the case of the inter-referencing of Hong Kong's urban form, firstly in Vancouver and then in Dubai (Lowry and McCann, 2011). Similarly, the absorption and diffusion of planning knowledge pertains more to the soft transfer of norms, and seems to be occurring among cities in Asia and the Arabian Gulf through forming new solidarities, such as in the prevalence of what Goldman (2011: 230) dubs 'speculative urbanism.' The latter represents an emerging form of 'transnational urbanism' that emerged from the influence of networks of globalizing financing actors whose urban development undertakings are yielding a 'string of overlapping practices, forces, and events' (Goldman, 2011: 230).

The soft transfer of norms depends less on the contextual compatibility and more on the interactions among the transfer agents – i.e. the senders and receivers who facilitate the processes of knowledge transfer and acquisition (De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007). González (2011) advocates for more emphasis on the constructs, both institutional and social, that facilitate the transfer of knowledge while simultaneously acknowledging the uneven power distribution among the involved actors. Similarly, in the cross-national transfer of knowledge, McCann (2011) argues in favor of research that underscores the individual roles played by transfer agents. Such individual human interactions play an important role in urban planning. According to Sanyal (2005a: 3), they actually define the planning culture, which is the collective ethos of professional planners. Likewise, Friedmann (1973: 171) underscores the role of individual planners in his transactive planning model where planning knowledge is converted into action through continuous sequences of interpersonal interactions among individuals, even where wider institutions are involved.

Freeman (2012: 13) identifies how these exchanges, which occur through oral and textual 'communicative interactions' either yield new policies or mutate ones that exist elsewhere. Drawing on Hecló's (1974: 316) wave analogy, Freeman likens the repetition of policies across contexts to 'a sound which endures even after its source is interrupted or removed, as waves bounce back and forth and across each other in a given space' (Freeman, 2012: 13). Freeman claims that Hecló's choice of analogy was intentional to underscore the similarities between the enduring nature of reverberations and policies; the irrelevance of the source after they both spread; and the importance of the movement for their sustenance as opposed to their source or direction. Certainly,

since policies represent a response to an often shared conceptualization of a particular issue, it is then not surprising when policies that are initially formulated in one locale would be later replicated in another (Freeman, 2012). Communicative interactions indeed yield a cyclical process of collective production, especially when policies that are produced in meetings are then disseminated through documents. These policies mutate as different actors translate them differently in different contexts (Freeman, 2012: 13–14)

### 3. Socialization and the soft transfer of norms: expertise and authority

Coined by political scientist Stone (2004), the moniker ‘transfer agents’ refers either to the international experts who transfer knowledge across borders (i.e. transferring agents), or to the indigenous experts who acquire this knowledge (i.e. acquiring agents) (De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007; Ward, 2000a,b). Ward (2000a,b) contends that the roles of the transferring and acquiring agents are mutually exclusive – in other words, a higher role for one entails a weaker role for the other. Noticeably, most of the empirical studies that are based on Ward’s model address historical rather than contemporary cases such as those presented in the edited volume by Nasr and Volait (2003). In contrast, King (2003) argues that the indigenous acquiring agents are not passive recipients of instructions from international experts. Instead, King asserts that these indigenous acquiring agents are exposed to various theories and practices through education, training, professional experience, and/or networks in other planning cultures (King, 2003). More often than not, these acquiring agents draw upon the best practices of other contexts through their own knowledge of available guides of such best practices, professional reports and studies, websites, and professional networks among others (Cook, 2008; González, 2011; McCann, 2004, 2008; Wolman and Page, 2002). Mintzberg (1994) further suggests that these indigenous agents possess an intuitive grasp that transcends the limitations of their professional practice to incorporate their personal experiences of living, working, and interacting within their city.

In fact, oftentimes it is the indigenous acquiring agents who initiate knowledge transfer in what is known as import-led transfer when they identify the problem and the relevant knowledge that should be acquired according to their own needs, and accordingly, through a rational process, selectively invite consultants (De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007; Masser, 1986; Peck and Theodore, 2012: 23; Ward, 2000a,b). Certainly, these local acquiring agents represent a crucial link between the local needs and knowledge on the one hand, and the transnational expertise on the other (McCann and Ward, 2010: 179). Conversely, in export-led transfer, the transferring agents transnationalize planning policies and practices when they actively promote their knowledge and best practices through venues such as think tanks (Stone, 2002; Stone et al., 1998), direct professional relations (Ward, 2000a,b, 2010), marketing, publications, and conferences (De Jong and Edelenbos, 2007; Masser, 1986) among other informational infrastructures (McCann, 2011: 114). For example, the diffusion of Singapore’s planning model is primarily an export-led activity (Huat, 2011).

We set out to investigate what González (2011: 1408) calls ‘power relationships’ among these actors whether within the acquiring context, or beyond in the international arena by focusing our research on policy transfer processes within the wider context of power and authority arrangements (Prince, 2012). We therefore draw upon contemporary and popular constructivist approaches in IR theory, which argue that policymakers can be influenced by intangible elements such as shared ideas, norms, and beliefs. This growing body of scholarship, loosely labeled *social constructivism*

for its emphasis on the inter-subjective character of social contexts, has attempted to unpack international relations by better understanding the cognitive factors involved therein (Ruggie, 1998). Influenced by sociology, social constructivist scholars look into social contexts to uncover the transnational socialization of state officials and policymakers and the impact this has on the reshaping of both state and international norms and policies (Finnemore, 1996). Constructivists argue that the legitimacy and expertise of international transfer agents also explain the regard that policymakers attribute to their advice (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004: 68). Over time, transfer agents are deemed to be experts who gain the respect and deference of state policymakers through repeated contact (Arend, 1999: 142–147).

In such non-western contexts, these western experts who are highly esteemed in their field are accorded greater authority (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 899). Such authority, Barnett and Finnemore (2004: 25–26) explain, is gained through being ‘in authority’ by holding key positions and by proximity to seats of power. Being in authority gives these international western experts a missionary eagerness to spread their exclusive knowledge in the form of best practices that they persuade non-Western policymakers to follow (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004: 33). Specifically, these Western experts are often viewed as the possible ‘norm entrepreneurs,’ or transnational agents of policy change, in their capacity to instruct non-Western policymakers on how to better perform their duties in accordance with internationally held standards of practice and in accordance with accepted beliefs and norms (Finnemore, 1996). As ‘socializing agents,’ Western experts prepare non-Western policymakers to become ‘norm followers’ as they proffer particular political or economic goals (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 902).

Simultaneously, the power of these international experts also stems from their status as ‘an authority’ backed with their exclusive expertise, training, experience, and internationally respected solutions to certain policy-related dilemmas – all of which culminate in an unwavering international influence even among non-Western policymakers. Therefore an international Western expert who possesses both types of authority can create, form, and endorse knowledge and, in effect, mold transnational social reality (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004: 31). Indeed, McCann (2011: 114) highlights how the combination of their cross-national mobility and their knowledge of best practices lends greater credence to these transferring agents’ recommendations, effectively creating policy harmony among often very diverse contexts.

Though constructivist studies have explored macro-historical normative changes such as international embedding of economic liberalism (Ruggie, 1982) and the evolution of human rights norms (Risse et al., 1999), they have not yet addressed what Checkel (2003: 209) calls the ‘pathways and mechanisms’ of teaching and learning among the transferring and acquiring agents. Part of the problem is the assumption that outsiders (i.e. the transferring agents) assume a teaching role in transferring knowledge, although the mechanisms for this are often informal and have gone largely unexplained (Checkel, 1999; Johnston, 2001). Hence, there is a consensus on the lack of empirically-based research that identifies the minutiae of knowledge transfer and the social interaction between the international transferring agents and the indigenous acquiring agents (Checkel, 1999; Johnston, 2001).

### 4. Knowledge transfer as a social process

The discussion above reveals that there is a need for a dynamic approach that explains the individual interactions between the transferring and the acquiring agents. The field of knowledge management offers such an opportunity to delve into the micro-level in

our analysis since it underscores Friedmann's (1973: 171) 'interpersonal relations' between the transfer agents whose activities are tempered by political and sociological complexity (Peck and Theodore, 2012: 23). In knowledge management, learning occurs through a transfer of knowledge that is fundamentally based in social interactions, where individuals and the collective learn from one another reciprocally (Dalkir, 2005). Knowledge may be transferred and acquired through three types of interpersonal interactions, or various combinations of them, namely: interviews, direct statements from the transferring agents, or simply through observing these agents at work (Dalkir, 2005; also see Tomassini, 2000, 2001). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995: 70–73, 109) further explain these interpersonal interactions through a model that comprises four stages of interactions that begin at the individual level and end at the group level.

In the first stage, individuals, both transferring and acquiring agents, interact directly and one-on-one to share their practical 'know-how' knowledge. This is **socialization** – an exchange that typically yields new knowledge that, through dialogue, is then **externalized** by sharing it with other individuals and groups within the institution. This same ensuing dialogue is bound to generate new concepts, which in turn are **combined** with concepts that already exist within the institutional culture. As these emerging concepts and theories are molded and formed to suit the institution's needs and objectives, they undergo validation and acceptance, and thus, are **internalized** by converting them into new prototypical practices that are specific to the institutional culture of the acquiring context (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Such an ongoing collective learning process entails that these four stages continuously occur in a loop-like sequence (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) and also require 'willingness' (Liyana et al., 2009: 125). According to Liyana et al. (2009), for the knowledge transfer model to function effectively, the institution should identify both the appropriate sources that possess the required knowledge and also the individuals who are willing to share this knowledge (i.e. the transferring agents). Simultaneously, at the receiving end, the acquiring agents must also combine willingness and an absorptive capacity for an effective acquiring of new knowledge (Liyana et al., 2009).

The knowledge transfer loop addresses the failure of the constructivist model to delineate how learning (i.e. knowledge acquisition) should be measured or determined since the constructivist model simply presumes that learning has taken place if the prescribed policy changes are implemented. The knowledge transfer loop concept helps to elucidate the nature of transfer agents' interactions with the acquiring agents in these contexts, particularly their impact on the adaptation of knowledge to suit the new context. Indeed, in his study of European cooperation programs for regional development, Hachmann (2008), drawing on organizational learning theory, highlights that effective cross-national learning demands equal contributions of knowledge by all the involved partners. Hachman then differentiates between four key forms of learning, namely: adaptive, generative, single-loop, and double-loop (Hachmann, 2008: 12). Likewise, in discussing the mobility of urban policies, McCann (2011: 107) stresses the need for contemporary studies that zoom in and qualitatively investigate the micro-scale processes that pin down how knowledge travels, and how learning and adaptation occur. The following section therefore underscores the methodology adopted in the research project that led to this article.

## 5. Methodology: a global ethnography approach

We use Roy's (2012) global ethnographic approach that facilitates the study of the mobility of both experts (international and local) and knowledge (also see Goldman, 2011; McCann, 2008,

2011; McCann and Ward, 2012; Peck and Theodore, 2012: 21). Roy (2012: 23–33) has deployed global ethnography to create vignettes that are 'dynamic space–time abstractions', akin to Wassily Kandinsky's 'small worlds' – a feat that enabled her to demonstrate the global and local interactions in Egypt's poverty management sectors. We draw on Roy's (2012: 33) 'methodological imaginations', particularly by shifting from the study of globalization's commodity chains to ethnographically defamiliarize and problematize Lee and LiPuma's (2002) cultures of circulation. The ethnographic circulations facilitate a reconstruction of the small worlds of the 'interpretive communities' (Roy, 2012: 34), whose collective agency manifests through what Heclo (1974: 316) calls 'a cobweb of socioeconomic conditions, policy middlemen, and political institutions.' We also draw on McCann and Ward (2012: 46) by following the globally mobile Canadian experts and their policy contributions in order to highlight their multifarious activities across numerous contexts, specifically in Middle Eastern cities.

As such, our work represents a departure from 'an ethnography of locations' and instead embodies 'an ethnography of circulations' (Roy, 2012: 35). These circulations parallel Haas's (1998: 32) conceptualization of how ideas are formed and transferred across contexts through the influence of epistemic communities that consist primarily of cross-national networks of policy professionals. This explains our interest in these experts' experiences in other contexts beyond the Middle East including, Bangladesh, Botswana, and Gaborone in a typical extension of both spatially and temporally vast ethnographic research (Peck and Theodore, 2012). In fact, these experts' reminiscences were crucial in elucidating their authority relationships.

We also draw on Roy's (2012: 33) recommendation for re-conceptualizing ethnographic objectives in research, which parallels McCann and Ward's (2012: 47; 2010) call to shift the discourse from the mobility of policy to the situational conditions surrounding transnational policy transfer. Here, we deploy Roy's 'methodologies of composition' to facilitate the study of networks – both of mobile individuals and of mobile universal concepts, such as sustainability (Roy, 2012: 35). Indeed, Marcus (1995), McCann and Ward (2012: 46) have argued that in addition to individuals, mobility studies can address a range of issues including, 'metaphors, stories, and conflicts.' Thus we conducted content analysis of planning documents such as the Amman Master Plan and the subsequent plans in Irbid and Al-Salt in Jordan, as well as the documents of Capital 2030 for Abu Dhabi and the plans for other cities in Emirate of Abu Dhabi such as al-Ain and Al-Gharbiyya. We also analyzed the content of Abu Dhabi's Estidama documents including the PEARL, which is a mutation of its north American equivalent LEED (Leader in Energy and Environmental Design). Similarly, peer reviewed publications, web publications, and newspaper articles provided insights on the public perceptions of the knowledge transfer process in Jordan and Abu Dhabi.

Lastly, we take up Roy's (2012) call for a novel approach to addressing power and resistance thereof in policy arrangements as part of our analysis of the interactions between the Canadian and local experts. This warrants a shift from 'studying down' to 'studying up' as well as 'an intimate ethnography' akin to the one Roy has deployed with those individuals with whom she shares similar professional and research interests and whom she dubs 'defamiliarized double agents' (Roy's, 2012, 37), because of the simultaneity of their presence within the network and their ability to be subversive and critical of their own network. Indeed, these agents include more than the elites of Nader (1972) but also Heclo's aforementioned policy middlemen (1974: 316) whose so-called rebellions, both in favor of and against their networks, should be captured through close scrutiny ethnography (Roy, 2012: 37). An intimate ethnography however did not preclude a

'studying through' approach that enabled us to delineate authority and its impacts on the interactions among the transfer agents and between them and the institution (Shore and Wright, 1997: 11). Studying through, according to McCann and Ward (2012: 47), facilitates a study of the policy as it travels across space and time, and particularly, a study of the places of origin – the models – as they travel, leading up to the rational study of the situations of these places. Consequently, McCann and Ward (2012: 47) emphasize the specific modes and settings through which policy ideas are expressed, collected, and passed on, whether through formal professional activities (e.g. at conferences, workshops, and site visits), or through informal socialization (e.g. at cafés and bars) – feats that we have certainly undertaken in our research.

Indeed, our in-depth interactions with the transfer agents have occurred over the span of 4 years – between 2009 and 2012, and were held at various locations in Canada, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates and included both groups: the Torontonians in Jordan, and the Vancouverites in Abu Dhabi. Our comparison of the two groups builds on Mcfarlane's (2010) strategies namely, that comparisons pin down the distinctiveness of each particular case study, but also serve to shape new forms of investigation. In Jordan, our global ethnography focused on the fifteen Canadian planners who hailed from three Toronto-based planning firms and who have worked as consultants for the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) in devising The Amman Master Plan (AMP) (Greater Amman Municipality, 2008) but then later expanded their involvement to other Jordanian cities. Likewise, in Abu Dhabi, our global ethnography focused on the five senior planners from the City of Vancouver and numerous other consultants from various Vancouver-based planning firms who were involved in Abu Dhabi's Capital 2030 and in the subsequent Estidama initiative (Bula, 2007, 2008; Grant, 2009; MacDonald, 2007). These Vancouverite planners also expanded beyond the capital city of Abu Dhabi to work on other cities within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Throughout our fieldwork, we have also recorded our observations of the interactions among the transfer agents (Canadian and local) whether at meetings, workshops, conferences, and even at social gatherings. For example, one of our team members attended two public keynote speeches for the leading Canadian experts in each of Jordan and Abu Dhabi. John van Nostrand spoke about his experience in transferring knowledge to Amman, Jordan at the opening of the Second Regional Conference on Creativity and Initiatives of Development in Arab Cities in April 2009 while Larry Beasley spoke of his experience in transferring knowledge to Abu Dhabi at the opening of the Canadian Urbanism (CanU) Symposium in Montreal in October 2011. Additionally, this team member also observed a daylong workshop that was held at the Greater Amman Municipality between 9:30 am and 4:30 pm on 30 April 2009 in which six Canadian and ten Jordanian planners were involved. Our team member was invited later that day to join all the participants (Canadian and Jordanian planners) for a traditional mansaf<sup>1</sup> supper that was held in the city of al-Salt in Jordan. Moreover, during the aforementioned conference in Amman, which was held between 27 and 29 April 2009, several Jordanian and Canadian planners offered presentations and papers related directly to the transfer of knowledge from Toronto to Amman and the subsequent formation of the Amman Master Plan (AMP). These combinations of situations have yielded what Peck and Theodore call 'judicious combinations of ethnographic observation and depth interviewing' which, they claim 'are essential to any adequate understanding of the inescapably social nature of those continuous processes of translation, intermeditation, and contextualization/decontextualization/recontextualization,

through which various forms of policy mobility are realized' (Peck and Theodore, 2012: 23–24).

## 6. Expertise and 'an authority': Establishing best practices

Notwithstanding Peck and Theodore's (2010: 169) claim that 'the new generation of critical policy studies is more inclined to adopt sociological, anthropological or institutional frames of analysis,' we cannot ignore the validity of the opposite point of view in the cases of Abu Dhabi and Jordan where 'rational-choice' scenarios were observed, harkening back to more traditional forms of policy analysis in which policy decision-makers are seen as being beholden to bounded rationality (Peck and Theodore's, 2010). Certainly, in both cases, the upper echelons of authority initiated knowledge transfer as a rational approach to attract good policies based on the best practices of idealized models – Toronto and Vancouver. Worried about the accelerated proliferation of high-rise towers in Amman, the King of Jordan ordered a halt on all such new developments in 2006, appointed a new mayor, and requested the involvement of international experts. In his letter to the newly appointed Mayor of Amman, the king specifically requested that 'I would also like you to invite experts from all over the world to contribute to this effort, as the sharing of successes and failures that they have witnessed in other cities can be of tremendous value to us' (Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, May 3, 2006). The selection of Planning Alliance from Toronto was attributed to their expertise in planning high rise developments not only in Toronto, but also in several cities in Africa (interviews with Canadian and Jordanian planners). Similarly, in relaying the story of his involvement in Abu Dhabi, Larry Beasley told his audience at the CanU Symposium in Montreal how, after his retirement, he received several emails from the office of Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince – emails that Beasley initially thought were hoax. Beasley explained that the Crown Prince's choice stemmed from Beasley's role in building Vancouver's reputation as a model of sustainability – a manifestation of the simultaneous mobility of an expert and a universal concept (Roy, 2012: 35).

The first planners in each context, Gerry Post in Jordan and Larry Beasley in Abu Dhabi, later influenced, directly and indirectly, the choices of local decision makers (Amman's Mayor and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince) when, in their position as an authority, each of these norm entrepreneurs identified local needs and hence recommended individuals and firms from their own professional network as consultants. Thus the decision to bring in specific experts was seemingly in the hands of the local decision makers but was in reality import-led. In fact, some went as far as to dub the Canadian team in Abu Dhabi as the 'Vancouver Mafia' (Alayedrous Bani Hashim, 2010). In both contexts, the transfer agents came to represent Haas' (1998) epistemic community by including dozens of experts on various aspects of urban planning (e.g. land use, urban design and transportation) who hailed from several Toronto and Vancouver-based planning firms, some of whom came to permanently reside in Amman and Abu Dhabi.

In fact, during interviews with many of the Canadian and local planners in both Amman and Abu Dhabi, many references were made to Dubai's urban development and whether to model these two cities after it. Specifically, these planners shared how the upper echelons of leadership (the Jordanian king and the Emirati prince) sought to, borrowing Ong's (2011) definition, 'world' Amman and Abu Dhabi by combining local policy and planning elements with imported ones. The question however, in both cases, was 'To be Dubai or not to be Dubai.' Interestingly, the choice to 'not model' after Dubai was taken – in both Amman and Abu Dhabi, the choice was mutually made by the local leadership and the Canadian experts to underscore sustainability as the antithesis to

<sup>1</sup> A traditional Jordanian dish made of yoghurt, lamb, and rice.

Dubai's model, by emphasizing universals such as smart growth, walkability, and streetscape to name but a few. It seems that in both cases worlding was achieved through international recognition – in the form of internationally recognized awards for both planning initiatives as testimonies of their compliance with universal best practices: the Amman Master Plan won the 2007 World Leadership Award for Town Planning and the Canadian Institute of Planners' (CIP) award, while Abu Dhabi's Capital City District Plan received one of the Cityscape Awards (Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, 2013; Canadian Architect, 2010; World Leadership Awards, 2007; World Leadership Forum, 2007).

This, however, does not imply that knowledge was transferred neatly from Canadian planners to Middle Eastern cities (Dalkir, 2005). To illustrate, the following sections thus discuss the socializations during which knowledge was transferred, filtered, and synthesized.

### 7. The 'an authority' – 'in authority' nexus: Who learns from whom?

Jordan's King Abdullah specifically requested from Amman's new Mayor that qualified Jordanian planners be involved along with international experts and emphasized that 'expertise and professional experience [should be] the only criteria upon which [...] choices should be made' (Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, May 3, 2006). This ensured from the outset that Jordanian planners would be active participants in the planning process. Indeed, the Mayor of Amman appointed a Jordanian planner and a Canadian planner jointly as the project managers for the AMP. This indicates that the Canadian planning consultants were perceived as hired advisors – 'an authority' figures in their areas of expertise who were entrusted with helping and advising in whatever capacity they could, rather than taking on the role of someone 'in authority' who conducts public work. In his CanU speech, Larry Beasley clearly articulated that he was advisor to the Crown Prince. Furthermore, in all our interviews with the Canadian planners who were involved whether in Jordan or Abu Dhabi, they emphasized the role of local experts and the local knowledge in the successful drafting of plans. Primarily, the Canadian and the local experts socialized through formal venues such as workshops and brainstorming sessions with a wide variety of experts and local decision-makers in the form of design charrettes, and through informal activities such as exchanges over traditional meals. One Canadian planner emphasized how as an authority, although 'people hold you to high regard', he also 'want[ed] people to criticize you, and they will do' (Canadian planner, personal interview, July 14, 2010).

A Canadian planner in Jordan explained how it was important for the Canadian team to understand Jordan's urban development prior to their arrival and the lessons that Jordanian planners can share: 'you want to replicate it but keep going [...] in a more planned way' (Canadian planner, personal interview, April 9, 2009). It was certainly interesting to observe the interactions during a workshop in Amman, where Canadian and Jordanian planners worked collectively to propose a master plan for a particular area, and where particularly the Canadians were encouraging their Jordanian counterparts to make active contributions to the problem at hand (observations, 9:30 am to 4:30 pm workshop GAM's offices, April 30, 2009). This intensive day-long workshop was followed by further discussions during a picnic and a traditional Jordanian mansaf meal in the nearby city of al-Salt. There was clear evidence that the knowledge that emerged from socialization was a key driving-force behind Canadian–Jordanian interactions on the project. Canadian planners noted the importance of a 'process versus product discourse' (Canadian planner, personal interview, April 30, 2009). It was important for the Canadian planners to tailor their

blueprints and expertise to the progress already achieved in the Jordanian cities and to understand the phenomenological character of the city: the process of how the city developed and what steps had been taken in the past, irrespective of specific products in mind. This challenges the notions of contextual compatibility, and allows for non-prescriptive ways for the development of context-specific knowledge that fuses the universal concepts and the local ones. Indeed, one Canadian planner acknowledged that planning consultants do not necessarily know that their prescriptions may not fit into the local context and only through dialogue with local experts did it become increasingly clear to the Canadians that their preconceived notions of what constitutes workable ideas must be amended to fit the local circumstances (Canadian planner, personal interview, May 10, 2009).

One of the main obstacles that Western planners encounter in non-Western countries is the degree to which cultural nuances encumber their ability to relate with local policymakers. A Canadian planner cited the reliance on close personal relationships, known in Jordan as 'wasta' (Kilani and Sakijha, 2002), rather than on legal and administrative procedures, as a necessity in achieving project goals. He explained how 'in most cases, the bridge of trust between the administration and the community is broken because of the corruption and wasta' (Canadian planner, personal interview, June 30, 2010). Accordingly, this planner was aware that 'parachuting' planning consultants—who lack the knowledge about such peculiarities in local institutions of governance—into unfamiliar environments is not, in fact, conducive to the constructivist notion of learning on the part of local agents. It is therefore more expedient to allow knowledge to flow through the acquiring agents, who are better positioned to disseminate it domestically. He therefore elaborated that by socializing with a select group of Jordanian planners, the Canadians are 'giving [them] the responsibility to cascade this knowledge down' to others in the institution (Canadian planner, personal interview, June 30, 2010).

### 8. Building local capacity versus drawing on local authority

Following the socialization exchanges in both Jordan and Abu Dhabi was the actual transfer of knowledge from Toronto and from Vancouver. This externalization phase certainly witnessed the introduction of 'new' best practices in each of Jordan and Abu Dhabi such as smart growth. The Canadian planners who were involved in Amman and in Abu Dhabi pointed out that certain planning concepts, like intensification (in Jordan) and LEED (in Abu Dhabi), had been imported directly from Toronto and Vancouver respectively. One Jordanian planner indeed confirmed that 'these ideas did not exist before at all.' Simultaneously, Cook's (2008: 8) 'mechanisms' for localizing and institutionalizing these planning concepts presented their own challenges. In particular, and in both Jordan and Abu Dhabi, it was the identification of qualified and receptive local experts that posed a challenge in light of the on-going brain drain of local planners to other countries, as one Canadian planner put it (Canadian planner, personal interview, June 30, 2010). An Emirati explained how a high ranking counterpart convinced her to work at Abu Dhabi's Urban Planning Council with the Vancouverite planners during her short vacation from her graduate studies at a prestigious university in the USA, insisting that more qualified Emiratis should be involved (Emirati planner, social interaction, IASTE Conference Beirut 2010).

Simultaneously, it seems that the Canadian planners in both Jordan and Abu Dhabi were aware that socialization is crucial for the transfer of knowledge – that the latter entails learning, which cannot occur if their counterparts passively receive instructions. The goal, one Canadian described, was to institutionalize local capacity (Canadian planner, personal interview, June 30, 2010)

and to let local planners assume ownership over the newly formed plans and their implementation (Canadian planner, personal interview, April 9, 2009)—thus allowing transferred knowledge to disseminate and percolate through acquiring agents' local networks, rather than having the western agents create these channels exogenously, as the constructivist learning model might suggest. Accordingly, in both contexts, the capacity building was formalized through establishing special groups such as a project management unit (PMU) in Amman, which evolved later into the Amman Institute for Urban Development (Ai), and the Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council (UPC). Both the Ai and the UPC started with Canadian leadership and predominantly Canadian expertise, but gradually shifted to come under the authority of local planning experts.

Local authority was crucial for the newly formed knowledge to take hold. A Jordanian planner, who worked closely with the Canadians insisted that 'there would have been no way that foreign planners would be able to create the AMP on their own without the aid of local help' (Jordanian planner, personal interview, April 9, 2009). Similarly, more than one Canadian planner claimed that this pairing was the Canadians' suggestion based on their experiences gained from their previous circulations. One of them described how his firm 'had a principle [of] always going into a partnership with another firm in the country' (Canadian planner, personal interview, July 14, 2010). Another Canadian planner recalled how, in his previous work at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) missions in Bangladesh, he 'ended up marrying the locals with the [western] experts,' in order to 'create a cascading of knowledge' which prompted Canadian and local experts to become 'mentors and friends' (Canadian planner, personal interview, June 30, 2010). Interestingly, this capacity building theme emerged constantly in the interviews with the Canadian planners in Jordan, particularly where one circulating Canadian planner articulated how his mission is about 'building capacity along the way' (Canadian planner, personal interview, April 9, 2009).

## 9. Authority and the sustenance of newly formed knowledge

One notable characteristic of the interactions in Jordan and Abu Dhabi observed throughout this study is the synthesis of universal concepts and local knowledge. For example, a Canadian planner who was involved in Amman discussed a newly-formed concept which he dubbed 'critical urbanism,' drawing on architect Ken Frampton's 'critical regionalism,' which fuses global and local practices, noting that 'we mustn't let one outweigh the other' (John van Nostrand, conference keynote address, April 22, 2009). Similarly, Abu Dhabi witnessed the evolution of the Estidama PEARL System, which translates the LEED principles into regulations that are designed to suit Abu Dhabi's contextual requirements. In both instances, these new contributions to knowledge emerged from a learning loop that was grounded in the socialization among Canadian and local agents. These learning loops were institutionalized in the Ai and in the UPC.

The UPC continues to thrive – not without challenges according to a Canadian planner (personal interview, June 6, 2012) but the Ai was forced to close by a governmental decision in 2011. The closure of the Ai is attributed to a complexity of interrelated reasons but certainly, the fact that the group of Jordanian planners involved in the Ai, who were selected from the Greater Amman Municipality (and beyond) and trained by the Canadians triggered the angst of others who were inadvertently excluded because they lacked Liyanage's willingness to learn (Liyanage et al., 2009). In particular, those excluded planners had insisted against intensification and advocated expanding the capital Amman into the desert areas to the east (Jordanian planner, personal interview, December 19,

2010). Instead of Roy's (2012: 37) double agents, the local lobbying against the Ai triggered, among Jordanian planners in the planning culture, an attitude of either with or against – limiting the ability of those who were involved with the Ai to continue their objective, constructive, and critical stance toward their institution. Eventually, the powerful—powerful, because of its wasta connections—outcry against the Ai and against the highly qualified local planners involved in it—who were mostly females—won, and unfortunately, the Ai eventually closed.

By choosing the highly qualified female Jordanian planners, the Canadian planners in Jordan had inadvertently triggered antagonism among the old guard in the Jordanian planning culture and hence, doomed the Ai's sustenance. A leading Canadian planner in Amman reminisced how in contrast, in a previous consultancy in Bangladesh, it was the Canadian government that sought to terminate the knowledge exchange process. He recalled how he sided with his Bangladeshi counterparts against the Canadian government (his employer) when the latter decided to terminate an environmental planning initiative 'I sided with the [Bangladeshis], so I had this incredible experience of fighting with Ottawa to protect [the project]. So I worked with the Bangladeshis and I ran into this massive opposition in Ottawa.' In the end, 'the project continued for another 5 years and the [Canadian government] doubled the funding' (Canadian planner, personal interview, June 30, 2010). As such, it was local authority that ensured the sustenance of the circulating expertise. Certainly, the Bangladeshi case demonstrates how, as opposed to the Ai's story, once local capacity is institutionalized, it can begin to function without—or in this case, in spite of—the sanction of authority.

## 10. Insights and conclusions

Our findings reveal that Ong's (2011) worlding practices can indeed take place in ways other than modeling, inter-referencing, and new solidarities. In particular, the analysis of the interactions between Canadian and local planners in Jordan and in Abu Dhabi reveal that worlding can occur through the processes of forming and forging new knowledge – as with the emergence of new theoretical concepts and practices such as Amman's critical urbanism and Abu Dhabi's PEARL. Indeed, it has long been argued that 'Cities are increasingly connected through and produced by complex relations of teaching, learning, and cooperation. These relations involve urban actors thinking and acting regionally, nationally, and increasingly, globally' (McCann, 2008: 2). Fundamental to these complex relations however, are the local planning contributions to the forming and forging of new knowledge, or what Prince (2010: 169–170) dubs the 'technical processes' through which the transferred policies are adapted to the specifics of the acquiring context. It is these exact technical processes that bestow a global or universal nature on the transferred policy thus ensuring its validity for the new context (Prince, 2010) – and by extension, to other contexts albeit through their own sets of technical processes in a continuous loop of knowledge transfer and adaptation.

Most importantly, in unpacking the interactions between the Canadian and the local experts, our findings reveal that these interactions were not only culturally grounded, but also required some level of adaptation on behalf of the Canadians – i.e. the international experts. This was crucial for ensuring the smoothness of the transfer process, which entailed an exchange of knowledge as opposed to a one-way transfer. This necessitated a disintegration and blurring of the traditional authority hierarchies between the Canadian and the local experts where, particularly in Jordan's case, the interactions were marked by the informality that stems from socialization. Such socialization allowed planners on both sides of the equation – foreign and local experts – to engage in a

constant willingness to learn and also to share knowledge, as described by Liyanage et al. (2009). Inevitably, this entailed tempering the new knowledge that was brought in by the international experts to the local conditions through local actors. Compatibility therefore became the willingness to adapt – by international and local experts – as opposed to the traditional view that considered compatibility as a precondition for knowledge transfer. This view of compatibility propelled the Canadian planners, who were influenced by their interactions with their counterparts in Jordan and Abu Dhabi, to re-evaluate their own views on what constitute appropriate regulatory frameworks. One explained: 'I found myself looking back to the Amman experience and having this different way to look upon certain things... What is acceptable? What is not? Why? What are the reasons we consider it to be acceptable back home? And why it wouldn't be acceptable here [Amman]? [...] unorthodox solutions become more acceptable, so you walk away thinking that 'maybe we could do that back home [...] as long as you can adhere to basic principles of safety and value oriented issues, you [can] have quite an open mind about how you implement things' (Canadian planner, personal interview, May 10, 2009).

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