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To cite this article: Chisung Park, Jooha Lee & Mark Wilding (2017) Distorted policy transfer? South Korea's adaptation of UK social enterprise policy, *Policy Studies*, 38:1, 39-58, DOI: [10.1080/01442872.2016.1188904](https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2016.1188904)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2016.1188904>



Published online: 26 May 2016.



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## Distorted policy transfer? South Korea's adaptation of UK social enterprise policy

Chisung Park<sup>a</sup>, Jooha Lee<sup>b</sup> and Mark Wilding<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>College of Public Service, Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Korea; <sup>b</sup>Department of Public Administration, Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea; <sup>c</sup>School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences, University of Salford, Salford, UK

### ABSTRACT

This study draws upon communicative processes in policy transfer to consider the ways in which policy may be adapted to context or distorted. The theoretical framework is used to investigate exactly what the South Korean government borrowed from UK social enterprise policy. Despite claims that the UK was the source of both the general policy direction and the particular regulatory device, the Korean government did not learn about the specific contexts of the British policy, nor attempt two-way communication with domestic stakeholders. Rather, the UK policy was interpreted in accordance with the Korean government's own ideas about how to utilize social enterprise. Historical legacies of top-down decision-making played an important role in this process, as did the state's role as a regulator which mobilizes the private sector to achieve policy goals. The consequences have been negative for those organizations refused social enterprise status under the Ministry of Labor's strict approval system, as well as for the original target population: the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable. It is suggested that the model advanced may help to illuminate the reasons why some borrowed policies differ considerably from the originals, and the use of policy transfer as a means of legitimization.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 February 2015  
Revised 27 December 2015  
Accepted 6 April 2016

### KEYWORDS

Policy transfer; legitimization; social enterprise; South Korea; UK

It is no secret that policy-makers draw inspiration and borrow from other locations when developing new policies. During the process of formulating social enterprise policies and legislation, the South Korean government, think tanks and academics showed considerable interest in the policies and laws of other countries including, among others, the UK (e.g. ML 2006; Uri Party 2006; Chung and Song 2010). Within the field of public policy, the policy transfer framework has made considerable progress in analysing the way that this kind of interest may result in the borrowing of policies (e.g. Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; 2000; Evans and Davies 1999; Stone 2001, 2004, 2012; Evans 2009; Marsh and Sharman 2009; Benson and Jordan 2011). Although policy transfer research has long stressed hybridization (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996), a criticism is that there is a tendency

in the literature to privilege the role of government over other actors or stakeholders (Peck 2011; McCann and Ward 2012; Stone 2012). Still, there are studies which emphasize the role of domestic policy actors in embedding transferred policies in their new contexts (Stone 2001; Ladi 2005, 2011).

The present study attempts to complement and advance understanding of the movement of policies through investigating how and why policies may be distorted in the policy transfer process. In doing so we aim to contribute to the understanding of communication in policy transfer, and its role in adapting policies to context (Wolman and Page 2002; Johnson and Hagström 2005; Park, Wilding, and Chung 2014). In some cases of policy transfer, learning about original policy contexts takes place and feedback is received from stakeholders, but in others, learning and feedback may be at a minimum (Marsh and Evans 2012; McCann and Ward 2012). We suggest that focusing on communication can aid understanding of processes that are often overlooked in policy transfer research, including the reconstruction of borrowed policies in ways that render them almost unrecognizable, and the invocation of policy transfer as a means of legitimization.

This framework is then used to analyse a claim of policy transfer. It has been stated, both by the Ministry of Labor (ML) and the then ruling party, that the Korean government referred to experiences in Western countries, such as the UK, the USA, Italy and France, when establishing the social enterprise law (ML 2006; Uri Party 2006). The official Korean government website for social enterprises also cites the British model, along with the American, as particularly influential (Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency 2013). More specifically, research published by a Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare affiliated think tank claims that the approval system (the means of regulating social enterprises) is based upon the UK model (Bae 2007). Korea does have a history of referencing British policies, for example, Hahn and McCabe (2006) highlight how the Korean government was influenced by its British counterpart's approach to developing the third sector, and so these claims are worthy of further investigation. Although the UK represents just one location that the Korean government may borrow ideas from, an exploration of these processes may contribute to a more general theory of how policy transfer takes place through the process of 'analytic generalization' (Yin 2002). This research is grounded on a wide range of primary and secondary resources including government reports, newspapers, published articles and secondary data sets from several organizations.

The main research questions are: In the process of policy transfer, did the Korean government distort British social enterprise policy? If so, how and why did this occur? In seeking to answer these questions, particular attention will be paid to two ways in which borrower governments can manage the policy transfer process (i.e. 'democratic' and 'distorted' transfer). The next section of this study draws on debates in the policy transfer literature to develop an analytical framework to understand the role of communication in the policy transfer process. The study then investigates the case of Korean social enterprise policy. In the final section, the implications of the case analysis are discussed, and a conclusion is offered.

## Theoretical section

### *Policy transfer: international and domestic considerations*

In approximately the last 20 years, along with studying policy at the national level, a much wider approach has begun to be taken. Policy transfer has been a key part of this shift, as researchers have attempted to not only improve understanding of policy inter-connectedness, but also the processes involved in the movement of policy. Building upon earlier concepts, including policy diffusion (Walker 1969; Berry and Berry 1990) and policy convergence (Bennett 1991), policy transfer received attention from a number of researchers from the 1990s (e.g. Dolowitz and Marsh 1996; Evans and Davies 1999). Dolowitz and Marsh define policy transfer as ‘the process by which actors borrow policies developed in one setting to develop programmes and policies within another’ (1996, 357). Learning has long been an important consideration, most obviously in processes labelled policy learning (May 1992), lesson drawing (Rose 1993) or social learning (Hall 1993). Indeed, Evans (2009, 244) distinguishes policy transfer from policy convergence by suggesting that the study of policy transfer ‘should be restricted to action-oriented intentional learning: that which takes place consciously and results in policy action’.

It is important to note that the creation of hybrid policies, rather than simple duplication, has long been emphasized in the literature, with the subjects of transfer being seen to range from specific policy instruments, techniques and institutions, to policy goals, ideologies or even negative lessons (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996). In this sense the policy transfer literature moved on from policy diffusion’s emphasis on patterns of adoption through focusing on agency and the ‘domestic and international circumstances that are likely to bring about policy transfer’ (Evans 2009, 243). Still, a tendency to focus on government to government exchanges to the detriment of markets and networks has been identified (Peck 2011; McCann and Ward 2012; Stone 2012).

Policy transfer research has matured considerably, however, paying increasing attention to both the level of complexity involved and the importance of context in the transfer process (see Marsh and Evans 2012). Seen from this perspective, domestic policy transfer processes can be viewed as the adaptation of a candidate policy for transfer according to domestic circumstances within borrower country policy networks (Stone 2004; Ladi 2005; Park, Wilding, and Chung 2014). Although there are a variety of policy actors involved, these can be categorized as (1) ‘borrower’ and ‘lender’ governments (including bureaucrats, politicians, affiliated agencies and think tanks) and (2) policy stakeholders (such as nonprofit organizations, businesses, interest groups, civil associations and citizens in general). It is important to note that although policy transfer can be initiated outside of government, for public policies or programmes to take shape, government is required to play a role. Although we refer to borrowers and lenders as governments, we seek to understand not only government-to-government processes, but also how transferred information is processed in borrower countries and the relationships with domestic policy stakeholders.

When it comes to embedding a transferred policy, political-systemic characteristics of the borrower government and the role of domestic policy actors should not be underemphasized (Ladi 2005). More specifically, domestic policy circumstances are crucial to understand the outcomes of policy transfer – how transferred knowledge is used or interpreted – because ‘power dynamics of political interests and the socio-historical make-up of

a polity' within a borrower country help to decide what is learned and how the transferred policy is used (Stone 2012, 485). In other words, the learning process in policy transfer 'concerns how knowledge is used and deployed by political actors to facilitate learning' (Dunlop and Radaelli 2012, 601).

In addition, from the policy-oriented learning perspective, uncertainty in identifying the (domestic) policy situation significantly influences how the policy being transferred is interpreted and employed. If the policy goal or problem is clear, knowledge of other policies as potential solutions can be used to improve collective learning through deliberative processes or as evidence to persuade stakeholders, due to a broadly shared understanding that makes it possible to minimize differences of opinion from diverse stakeholders (Dryzek 2000; Evans 2009). In contrast, if the policy problem or goal is uncertain, powerful policy actors such as bureaucrats and/or politicians have more room to influence how transferred policy knowledge is (re)interpreted. In this way, policy preferences of government (or politicians) can play a key role (Ladi 2011). More specifically, policy transfer can be used as 'a political strategy aimed at legitimizing conclusions that have already been reached' (Evans 2009, 245). Under these circumstances, the role of epistemic actors (i.e. think tanks) in the borrower country 'is less educative and more legitimating, as they reinforce policy makers' positions' (Dunlop and Radaelli 2012, 602).

### ***Policy transfer as communicative processes***

At times implicit or taken for granted, communicative processes are nevertheless essential to policy transfer (Wolman and Page 2002; De Jong and Edelenbos 2007; Park, Wilding, and Chung 2014). Considering policy transfer as communicative processes (i.e. knowledge exchanges between diverse policy actors such as producers, senders and recipients) offers a useful lens for understanding processes of policy transfer (De Jong and Edelenbos 2007), because policy transfer is fundamentally about learning by communication of information (Wolman and Page 2002). For learning to take place, there must be some kind of communicative exchange (written or oral) between transfer agents.

Based upon the international and domestic processes in policy transfer, referred to above, the communicative processes involved can also be organized into two aspects: (1) the acquisition of knowledge about a policy in a lender country and (2) utilization of the knowledge within the borrower country, not only as policy learning (which contributes to decision-making), but also as political processes of negotiation or legitimization between government and stakeholders (Wolman and Page 2002; De Jong and Edelenbos 2007).

In order to understand policy transfer as communicative processes, it is important to outline both what is communicated (i.e. contents of policy transfer as a message) and the characteristics of the communicative process. What is communicated includes policy relevant knowledge such as ideas, policy programmes and institutions (e.g. Rose 1993; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996). While borrowers have been found in some instances to transfer policies in a relatively straightforward way, for example between Westminster-style democracies (Marsh and Evans 2012), communication between borrowers and lenders can be fraught with complications. In particular, the receiver (i.e. borrower) may interpret the message differently from how the sender (i.e. lender) intended (Johnson and Hagström 2005; Freeman 2009). In other words, it is not always possible

to arrive at a shared understanding, even when borrowers and lenders have the best of intentions.

When it comes to utilizing transferred knowledge within the borrower country, communication between government and stakeholders also shapes the ways in which policies are indigenized in their new location. While this may take the form of dialogue which aims to assist shared understanding, and to gain feedback, it could also be about misleading stakeholders as part of the process of policy legitimization, particularly in cases where the reality of what is borrowed falls considerably short of the rhetoric (Wolman and Page 2002). For example, Peck (2011) emphasizes how, rather than actual transfer, the process is often more about lending the weight of evidence and constructing a sense of history for what are essentially new policies that have little in common with the 'originals'. Consequently, the borrowed policy may differ from the original to such an extent that it is difficult to see what has actually been transferred. In the next section, the different types of policy transfer arising out of various communicative processes will be presented.

### ***Types of policy transfer communicative processes***

Despite efforts to highlight the importance of communication in a general sense, the impact of different types of communication and the ways in which policy-makers adapt policies to context remains underexplored. An attempt to develop these ideas was made by Park, Wilding, and Chung (2014), who identified four modes of translation in the transfer of policies based upon communication between (1) borrowers and lenders and (2) borrowers and stakeholders. They suggest that policy transfer is most likely to be of practical use when there is two-way communication with both borrowers and stakeholders under 'democratic' policy transfer. On the other hand, they take the perspective that 'distorted' policy transfer stands the least chances of success, as this is based upon one-way communication only. For the purposes of this discussion we will focus on these two modes in order to highlight the very different processes which policy transfer may follow.

Under democratic transfer, the borrowing of policies from other countries takes place based on learning about the ways in which policies work, in both their original and new contexts (Park, Wilding, and Chung 2014). When policy transfer involves mutual learning between (1) a borrower and a lender, and (2) a borrower and stakeholders, the policy will be reconstructed through deliberation (i.e. understanding both the lenders' and domestic contexts, and making corrections to the policy if necessary). In this case, policies are tested and discussed, not simply according to policy leaders' preferences, but on the basis of whether they meet the needs of stakeholders and the borrower. Then, if something is found which needs to be changed to meet the specific contexts of the borrower, the policy is modified accordingly. In this sense, democratic transfer is a process of policy indigenization over the long-term (Stone 2012). This process of policy change takes time because a borrower should adjust policy transferred from overseas with its domestic stakeholders (Ladi 2011).

In terms of borrower-lender communication, this may be one-way at first as a borrower searches for an appropriate candidate policy from abroad (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). The borrower then selects the most plausible policy option, and attempts to engage in mutual learning on the basis of communication with the lender (Wolman and Page 2002). The purpose is to judge whether the policy could be adapted to the

borrower's situation by examining the specific policy contexts of the lender country (i.e. what was the policy goal, what was the socio-economic situation, how did the lender government communicate with the public, and what were the main factors leading to policy success or failure).

If policy leaders fully understand the policy and are still interested in introducing it, then further communicative processes may be initiated by informing domestic stakeholders about the proposed policy (De Jong and Edelenbos 2007). The purpose of this is to enable stakeholders to understand the policy and to receive feedback from them regarding its feasibility. If the stakeholder feedback is positive, then policy leaders may decide to utilize the policy or particular parts of it (Park, Wilding, and Chung 2014). Still, legitimization takes place during this process through interaction between policy leaders and stakeholders. Policy leaders not only want the general public to recognize the value of the policy and the expected benefits of the policy tool, but also to receive feedback from them to iron out any potential problems. Through discussions both before and after enactment, policy leaders and the public move towards a shared understanding of the policy, which finally leads to a policy which is adapted to context and identifies the values of its audience and achieves legitimacy by consent (Bobrow and Dryzek 1987; Andrews 2007).

The process of policy transfer is often very different, however, and involves the misrepresentation or misinterpretation of policy information (Wolman and Page 2002; Johnson and Hagström 2005; Freeman 2009). In other words, policy ideas or content, as well as public understanding of them, can be biased due to the unilateral exertion of government or policy leaders in communication processes (Habermas 1973). This may be the case if the needs of the public or intrinsic nature of the borrowed policy are not fully considered.

In this type of distorted policy transfer, policy leaders create a shortlist of possible policies through international research (Park, Wilding, and Chung 2014). From the shortlist, policy leaders select the most favourable parts of the policies without communicating with the lender and policy stakeholders (i.e. what Dolowitz and Marsh 2000 term uninformed and incomplete transfer). Therefore, the borrower is likely to fail to fully understand the detailed and concrete ways in which the policy works in the lender's context. As such, the borrower may misinterpret or twist the policy by selectively borrowing without considering the original policy environment, or conducting extensive research (Peck 2011; McCann and Ward 2012). The selection criteria of policy leaders in distorted policy transfer are likely to be political appropriateness and/or mechanistic calculation.

Moreover, if the borrower government pre-determines the policy option which is to be used, it is likely that the government will engage in one-way or top-down communication with policy stakeholders (Park, Wilding, and Chung 2014). In other words, policy leaders think that they already know the needs of domestic policy stakeholders or simply ignore them. In this case, the legitimization process signifies post-factum efforts to justify the pre-determined selection (Robertson 1991; Wolman 1992). Policy leaders may intentionally overemphasize particular aspects of the preferred policy through selective use of information which may result in further distortion of the original policy. A risk here is inappropriate transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000), such as in the transfer of Ecotrans to Greece, where contextual factors, not only in terms of organization of the public sector, but also societal interest in the environment, meant that the policy transfer was unsuccessful (Ladi 2005).

### ***Historical and institutional legacies in policy transfer***

The process and nature of policy transfer, in particular distorted policy transfer, can be more adequately appreciated with an understanding of the borrower countries' historical and institutional legacies. This is because policy transfer does not exist in isolation from a historically specific set of social and institutional dimensions. As Peck puts it, 'context matters, in the sense that policy regimes and landscapes are more than empty spaces across which borrowing and learning take place' (2011, 775). In other words, policy design and implementation are inevitably 'shaped by local conditions of existing constellation of interests, entrenched institutional structures and political culture' (Stone 2001, 35).

This study thus aims to provide a historically and institutionally sensitive framework of policy transfer. As Benson and Jordan point out, policy transfer has 'an innate capacity to combine with many different theoretical toolkits' (2011, 374). There have been attempts to integrate the literature on policy transfer with other theoretical approaches, such as constructivism, governance and neo-institutionalism (e.g. Bulmer and Padgett 2004; Evans 2009; Marsh and Sharman 2009; Laguna 2010; Ladi 2011). In particular, the analysis of policy transfer needs to be complemented by a consideration of the crucial role of institutional arrangements shaping transfer, which involves drawing on the literature from a historical institutionalist point of view.

Path-dependency, which lies at the core of historical institutionalism, implies that once initial policy and institutional choices are made, the pattern or the path created will persist with a continuing influence over the policy, unless there is some force sufficient to overcome inertia created (e.g. Thelen and Steinmo 1992; Immergut 1998; Peters 1999). Policies encourage decision-makers to act in ways that 'lock in' particular policy trajectories, partly because pre-established policies generate increasing returns (i.e. large fixed costs, learning effects, coordination effects and adaptive expectations), and partly because policies shape individuals' information and interpretations (see Pierson 1994, 40–50). Path-dependency is not the functional equivalent of historical or institutional determinism, however. Rather than following logical and efficient paths, history is marked by accidents of timing and circumstance, which 'may leave lasting legacies, but such legacies are equally vulnerable to unexpected change' (Immergut 1998, 23).

These path-dependent effects of historical legacies can be particularly observed in the process of distorted transfer, as the borrower government only engages in one-way communication with policy lenders and stakeholders, thus reducing the likelihood that policy-makers will receive information that challenges the assumptions built up since the last major change of policy direction. Hence, policies transferred on the basis of one-way communication are prone to be utilized within the pre-established general policy trajectory. According to Ladi (2011), the path-dependency approach meets policy transfer when policy actors take shared interpretations of transferred policy knowledge for granted because the transferred knowledge is interpreted via shared pre-established policies. As also discussed above, arriving at a shared understanding is not so straightforward, and so interpretation without two-way communications with the lenders and stakeholders is highly likely to result in distorted transfer. To this end, we argue for more 'nuanced' dynamics of policy transfer by incorporating and emphasizing the key elements and insights of historical institutionalism in our analysis.



## Case analysis

This section begins with a discussion of the historical context and specific features of policy-making in Korea. As outlined above, policy contexts and historical legacies are vital to understanding the ways in which policies may be distorted as they are transferred. In particular, the historical legacies of the Korean government's earlier policy-decisions could enable us to identify why the Korean government was motivated to construct social enterprise as an instrument to meet its employment and welfare goals. Subsequently, we will compare contexts and social enterprise policies in Korea and the UK, before addressing the impact of communication in the process of policy transfer.

### *Historical legacies behind the formation of social enterprise policy in Korea*

The initial introduction of social enterprise can be attributed to key policy problems including unemployment, jobless growth and population ageing in the era of globalization and post-industrialization. The economic crisis of 1997 had devastating economic and social repercussions, such as declining macroeconomic conditions, increasing unemployment and greater income disparities (National Statistical Office 2000). Compared with the period of near full employment prior to the crisis, unemployment became a major source of economic hardship. Under conditions of unprecedented high unemployment, the Korean government was unable to rely any longer on increasing income in the labor market through economic growth to meet social needs. In the wake of the economic crisis, the Korean government implemented 'Comprehensive Countermeasures against Unemployment' including job creation, employment stabilization, vocational training and job placements (ML 2001). The post-crisis government also guaranteed income maintenance in terms of enhancing social assistance and unemployment benefits. The latter initiative represented a significant departure from the pre-existing array of welfare systems associated with minimal income support and a strong emphasis on self-reliance (Ringen et al. 2011).

Although such social policies by themselves did not resemble the standard neo-liberal route to welfare reform, the post-crisis government pursued neo-liberal restructuring measures in line with the typical prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In other words, a wide range of neo-liberal structural reforms were introduced to facilitate financial liberalization, labor market flexibilization, deregulation and privatization (MFE 2000), which exacerbated the adverse consequences of the economic crisis. Therefore, the Korean government required an enhanced policy as a means of mitigating unemployment and job precariousness.

Before the introduction of the current social enterprise policy, the Korean government experimented with policy options such as a self-reliance programme to respond to the unemployment and welfare problems simultaneously. After the implementation of the new social assistance scheme in 2000, the 'Self-reliance Work Programme' was developed under the supervision of the MHW. Subsequently, the 'Self-reliance Aid Centre' was introduced in order to 'provide information on available jobs, to offer job counselling and job placement services, to support community based business and self-employment, to mediate the self-reliance fund, and to teach skills and management techniques' (MHW 2000, 99). However, as the problems of jobless growth and unemployment were

intensifying, the government selected social enterprise as a feasible policy instrument. In this way, the social enterprise policy was initiated by the ML in 2005 within a turf war between national ministries, which were vying with one another to increase their supervisory power in (new) policy initiatives. Internal documents from the ML-led ‘Task Force on Social Workplaces’ at this time suggest that the ML, which emphasized long-term job creation rather than social service provision for the socially disadvantaged, saw many continuities with its previous programme for job creation (Park C.-U. 2008).

Here it is worth noting historical and institutional legacies which eminently influenced the formation and evolution of the social enterprise policy in Korea. Historical legacies of the authoritarian developmental state have remained entrenched in the state’s role and policy-making framework in Korea. The developmental state set economic growth as the fundamental goal and coordinated socio-economic resources towards state-led export-oriented industrialization on the basis of two distinctive features of institutional arrangements: bureaucratic autonomy insulated from various social interests; and powerful economic bureaucracy (Amsden 1989; Evans 1995). The policy-making framework in Korea can be characterized as power concentration, specifically in the considerable influence of the presidency over the bureaucracy and of the bureaucracy over societal groups – although power and control enjoyed by state actors over societal actors has declined since democratization in 1987. The developmental state also relied on ‘organizational and institutional links between politically insulated state developmental agencies and major private-sector firms’ (Deyo 1987, 19). Accordingly, there was a bipartite coalition between the government and *chaebol* (family-owned, diversified conglomerates), combined with the political subordination of civil society and labor (see Ringen et al. 2011). This coalition again highlighted how Korea does not have an inclusive policy-making tradition, nor a framework to support a negotiated approach to policy reform through consulting with societal actors, such as labor and civil society groups.

The state in Korea, as a low social spender, was less involved in direct social provision than its Western counterparts, but it did play a significant welfare role as a regulator (Goodman, White, and Kwon 1998; Ringen et al. 2011). On this basis, the Korean developmental state shifted welfare responsibility onto the private sector, including companies, nonprofit organizations and families, and used its regulatory power to force the private sector to provide and finance certain types of social provision and care. Given the prominent position of the private sector and the minimal role of the state as a welfare provider, the motivation for the introduction of social enterprise policy might be interpreted in terms of historical legacies, in which government mobilizes private resources, rather than directly investing its own finances.

### ***Comparing contexts and social enterprise policies in Korea and the UK***

While many Korean accounts describe UK social enterprise policy as government-driven and therefore an appropriate case to learn from (e.g. Bae 2007; Kim 2008; Kim 2008; Lee 2009; Cho Y.-B. 2011; Cho, Kim, and Kang 2011), the actual influence of the UK policy is less clear. In order to begin to explore the extent to which the social enterprise policy in Korea was influenced by UK policy, this section compares the policy contexts and features of the Korean Social Enterprise Promotion Act (SEPA) with the UK’s *Strategy for Social*

*Enterprise* (DTI 2002) and provision for Community Interest Companies (CICs) under the *Companies Act 2004*.

As discussed above, the main goal of the Korean social enterprise policy has been job creation, especially in the social service field. However, low social spending coupled with reductions in the size of government after the 1997 crisis mean that it was never a realistic possibility that the government would directly run job creation programmes itself. Therefore, the Korean government found a way to encourage private and nonprofit organizations to take on this role. While the government aimed for a market-oriented solution, it nevertheless wanted to retain control of private organizations. In order to continue the pattern of top-down control and to best utilize social enterprise, the government introduced the approval system.

As the name implies, the approval system requires organizations using the name 'social enterprise' to receive approval from the ML. When an organization receives this approval, it becomes eligible to receive support including financial subsidies, tax exemption and social insurance support (ML 2009). However, gaining approval can be difficult as it requires organizations to meet criteria regarding organizational type, number of paid employees, social goals, organizational rules and governance, as well as limited profit distribution.

The British government's focus on social enterprise was also motivated by an interest in facilitating greater non-state provision of services. However, in contrast to Korea, the British government was more focused on responding to a broad range of social problems (Teasdale 2012). More generally, while government had long been pushing contracting in public services, there was initially a lack of service delivery capacity among private and nonprofit organizations (Kendall 2000). It was against this backdrop that the first social enterprise policy in 2002 was accompanied by funding initiatives to build the capacity of third sector organizations to deliver public services through loans and grants (Alcock 2010). The case can therefore be made that the UK policy goal of utilizing social enterprises, along with other voluntary and community organizations, in order to provide a range of public services (i.e. social services, housing, work integration, etc.), was wider than that of the Korean policy.

The varied contexts and policy goals suggest that the two policies may be used differently. Still, for more detailed analysis, it is important to examine the actual policies in the two countries. At a glance, the social enterprise policy of both countries seems to be similar in that both governments made substantial policies and laws to support social enterprise. However, as shown in Table 1, the policies, while not entirely dissimilar, contain significant differences.

Though some of the policy contents in the UK are broad, the Korean Act tends to be more specific (i.e. target population, organizational type and managerial support). In particular, of the 13 points in Table 1, 5 are substantially different, 5 vary in range or focus, and only 1 is the same or very similar. The differences can become quite stark when examining the details. For instance, the meaning of financial support in the two countries differs significantly. While financial support in Korea is mostly allocated to employee salaries, in the UK it is targeted at programmes through government contracts, or more generally building capacity to meet a particular area of need. In sum, the policy constructed by the Korean government not only serves a more specific purpose, but it also varies substantially in policy content from that of the UK.

**Table 1.** Social enterprise policies in Korea and the UK.

	Korean Social Enterprise Promotion Act (2007) (revised 2010/2012)		UK Strategy for Social Enterprise (2002) Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act (2004)
Definition	– ‘Social enterprise seeks social goals by offering social services or jobs to the socially disadvantaged and the vulnerable’	~	– CIC is defined as a company which serves the community interest – Social enterprise is more generally defined as ‘a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or the community’ (DTI 2002)
Requirements for paid employment	– Yes	≠	– No
Target population	– Specific: social stratum under 60/100 of national average household-income, the elderly, the disabled, women engaged in prostitution, and the long-term unemployed	~	– Very wide: ‘A company satisfies the community interest test if a reasonable person might consider that its activities are being carried on for the benefit of the community’ (Companies Act 2004, s35(2)).
Governmental department	– Ministry of Labor	~	– Initially the DTI – Although from 2006, the Office of the Third Sector (which in 2010 became the Office for Civil Society) has had responsibility and there is also a social enterprise unit in the Department of Health
Permitted organizational types	– Corporate body and cooperative stipulated by civil law, business stipulated by commercial law, and foundation and nonprofit stipulated by special law	≠	– Any type of business that is not a charity and complies with the asset lock
Regulation of title	– Very strict: only approved organizations are entitled to use the name ‘social enterprise’	≠	– Use of the term social enterprise is not regulated – Registration system for CICs
Managerial support	– Specific: – Management consulting – Education and training of professionals – Priority purchase by public agencies	~	– Formally, the regulator has the right to appoint a director or manager of a CIC or remove a director – In practice social enterprises are more likely to receive support through umbrella organizations such as Social Enterprise London
Financial support	– Purchase of facilities or use of government premises – Salaries, consulting fees, and administrative costs – Tax exemption and provision of social insurance costs of employees	≠	– State funding has mostly come from contracts as well as capacity building quangos such as Futurebuilders and Capacity Builders
Asset lock	– Applied only to profit-making firms: more than 2/3 of the whole profits should be reinvested into social goals	=	– Applied to all CICs: less than 35% of profits can be redistributed to stakeholders
Governance structure	– Mandatory for stakeholders to participate in decision-making process	≠	– Not specified
Support organizations	– Top-down: Korean Social Enterprise Promotion Agency established in 2011 by ML – Supervised by ML	~	– In the UK these have generally been bottom-up organizations, established by social enterprises themselves, such as Social Enterprise UK

Notes: Legend: = same or similar, ~ different in range or focus, ≠ different.

Source: DTI (2002), Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act (2004), MGL (2012).

### ***The role of policy transfer in Korean social enterprise policy***

Following on from the lack of similarities in contexts and policies, this section will discuss the formation of the policy in the borrower–lender and borrower–stakeholder processes of policy transfer from the UK to Korea. The most influential factor in the policy

reconstruction appears to be the Korean government's intention and interpretation. More specifically, after deciding to use social enterprise, the Korean government interpreted the UK policy in a way which did not accurately reflect the original context, and then sought to legitimize the Korean policy on the basis of this interpretation.

### *Borrower–lender processes*

From its initial introduction in Korea, the concept of social enterprise has been closely connected with social job creation. The first formal academic conference to discuss the benefits of social enterprise was an international forum to overcome poverty and unemployment in December 2000. In this forum, social jobs were the main focus, and the European work integration social enterprise (WISE) was introduced as the most appropriate candidate to solve the nation's problems (Kim 2008). On this basis, the ML adopted the social job creation programme in 2003 and then implemented it in 2004. Here it could be argued that the Korean government first set the policy goal of increasing the number of newly created social jobs before it chose a specific policy tool. According to a report published by the Korea Labor Institute (KLI), a government-affiliated think tank, which operates under the auspices of the ML, Korean social enterprise policy aimed at a social job creation agency for the vulnerable (Park, C. I. 2008a).

In order to find ways to best use social enterprise in achieving this goal, the ML convened a task force of seven to eight members chosen from the ML, the KLI and academia. The aim of the task force was to outline a social enterprise policy, and the result was a draft policy which included the approval and financial support schemes (Cho D.-K. 2011). On the basis of this policy outline the ruling party proposed social enterprise legislation, with a focus on job creation and the approval system, which it claimed was influenced by the UK (Uri Party 2006).

The differences between the UK and Korean policies, particularly in regard to regulation and degree of focus on job creation, raise questions regarding the extent to which those drafting the government policy had a deep understanding of the ways in which the UK policy works. However, in 2006, an opposition party in the National Assembly proposed an alternative social enterprise law. The proposed legislation was based upon a broad definition of the role of social enterprise, and instead of an approval system, would have introduced a registration system like that for CICs in the UK. This version shares more similarities with UK social enterprise policy, and as such, illustrates how a policy which understands the specifics of the UK policy might have looked.

As part of the wider debate that followed, the KLI published a special issue of its journal, which contained an invited article by a British WISE specialist that focused on the work integration aspect of social enterprise in the UK (Aiken 2006). In this special issue, the KLI appeared to interpret UK social enterprise policy as a means of employing the vulnerable, particularly as no articles about other kinds of British social enterprises were included. This focus on WISEs suggests that the interest was narrow, and more about the Korean government's desire to use social enterprise in a particular way, rather than achieving an understanding of the context in which UK social enterprises operate.

While WISEs play an important role within the UK social enterprise sector, the reality is of course that there are a wide range of organizations, particularly as the government purposely kept the definition of social enterprise loose, so as to allow for the inclusion of a wide range of organizations working on many different social problems (Teasdale

2012). Indeed, the *Strategy for Social Enterprise (2002)*, published by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), was not explicit on whether UK social enterprises would be required to provide a minimum amount of paid work (Ridley-Duff and Bull 2011).

The borrower–lender processes are thus characterized by the Korean government’s distortion of the policy. After deciding to use social enterprise as a means of addressing an ongoing policy problem, the Korean government borrowed from the UK without learning about the ways in which the policy worked in its original context.

### ***Borrower–stakeholder processes***

Since the enactment of the SEPA in December 2006, criticisms have been levelled against the Korean government’s approach. These have been concerned both with the approval system generally, and the way in which it has facilitated the use of social enterprises, which are financially dependent upon the state, to meet wider employment goals (Ko 2007; Park C. -U.2008b). More specifically, the ML’s emphasis on reducing unemployment figures means that in practice the target beneficiaries of many social enterprises include the general unemployed, despite the law only including the poor and the vulnerable (Ko 2007). Instead of discussing these criticisms with policy stakeholders, the Korean government has attempted to legitimize the approval system through the diffusion of information. In particular, several research papers published by government-sponsored research institutes have attempted to offer legitimacy to the policy.

First, an article published by the MHW-affiliated Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (Bae 2007) argues that one of the key lessons from UK social enterprise policy is an approval system which was designed to raise business reliability. However, it is difficult to describe the system in the UK as an approval system. Instead, the UK uses a registration system for CICs in which the regulator plays a light touch role (Nicholls 2009). As long as new organizations meet some basic requirements, including that their activities will be carried out for the benefit of the community, they have an asset lock, and are not a charity, then they will be given CIC status. Furthermore, the definition of social enterprises in the UK is not limited to CICs, and organizations may self-define as social enterprises.

Second, reports have played down the extent to which there has been a conscious decision by the ML to emphasize job creation. In the first year of the approval system in 2007, approximately 70% of all approved social enterprises (25 out of 36 organizations) were of the job creation type. In the case of the social service provision type, 21 organizations applied and only three were approved (approval rate of 14.2%). Yet, in the case of the job creation type, approval rates were much higher (25 out of 71, or 35.2%). These statistics indicate that organizations with job creation as their primary focus were more likely to be approved. However, when evaluating these results, a report published by the KLI argued that the main reason for rejection was giving incorrect or inappropriate answers in the administrative sections of the application according to the SEPA, and never mentioned that job creation type social enterprises were over-represented in terms of approval rates (Cho 2007).

Third, the top-down system is now cited as the reason for social enterprise success. For example, a report published by the KLI evaluated the approval system as very successful, especially in terms of the image of social enterprises which it helped to create:

Social enterprises have come to be viewed in a positive way in a short space of time. Thanks to the relatively thorough approval examination system, social enterprises were viewed as organizations to realize social goals as well as organizations with sound management. The approval system played a role in delivering social enterprises' messages to heads of municipalities and local activists. It also demonstrated specific models for nonprofits and charitable organizations to pursue, which led to organizational and behavioural changes. (Kim 2010, 2–3)

The evidence suggests that the borrower–stakeholder processes have been characterized by further policy distortion, due to the government's top-down communication, which can be attributed to the impact of historical legacies on the policy-making framework. Rather than listening to the concerns of stakeholders, the UK CIC registration system was used as evidence to legitimize the intention and interpretation of the Korean government, despite the existence of substantive differences with the Korean approval system. In addition, further attempts were made to justify and sustain the government led policy by playing down the level of support for job creation social enterprises, and attributing social enterprise success to the top-down approval system.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study has outlined theoretically the different ways in which policies may be adapted to context in the process of policy transfer, and used this to assess the formation and evolution of Korean social enterprise policy. In developing this approach we have sought to contribute to an underdeveloped area in the policy transfer literature. More specifically, we have illustrated how an understanding of communicative processes can help to explain (1) the ways in which policies may become biased towards the perspective of the borrower government, despite the intentions of policy leaders, and (2) the ways in which policy transfer may be used as a means of legitimization. We suggest that these scenarios are more likely to occur under distorted policy transfer, due to borrowing without learning the specific contexts of the lender, and one-way communication from policy leaders to stakeholders.

The case analysis reveals how, despite the claims of the Korean government, especially regarding the employment creation role of social enterprises, and the approval system, there are few similarities in terms of actual policy contents. There are similarities in terms of government department (until 2006), and the asset lock. Still, differences include regulation of the social enterprise title, permitted types of organizations, governance structures, requirements for paid employment, and the financial support system, while in other areas it is difficult to make a direct comparison due to differences in the range or focus of policy initiatives.

The process resembles what we have termed distorted policy transfer, firstly as the borrowed components, rendered almost unrecognizable, are used in a way that does not appreciate their meaning in the original context. Secondly, a lack of consideration has been given to the new policy context, in the sense that the Korean social enterprise policy has been justified through one-way communication, without adjusting the policy according to the concerns of stakeholders. This process has been significantly influenced by a legacy of top-down control, along with the regulation of welfare provision, and fuelled by turf wars between government departments. These institutional legacies help to explain both why the Korean government appears to have interpreted the UK social enterprise

policy as enabling top-down control, and why one-way communication was used to try and legitimize the policy. As such, the role of institutional structures and path-dependent effects should not be overlooked (Laguna 2010; Benson and Jordan 2011; Ladi 2011).

It also seems that there are problems with the content of the Korean policy. The majority of organizations which have applied under the approval system have not been granted social enterprise status, with the bar seemingly set even higher for those organizations which do not have job creation as their primary focus. This may represent a serious limitation, as a top-down approach with strict controls is more likely to stifle the potential for innovative approaches to social problems.

Furthermore, the expansion of the target population to the general unemployed as part of efforts to respond to government targets (Ko 2007) suggests that there has been a degree of goal displacement, as the focus on the needs of the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable has been replaced by a broader response to unemployment. While this type of scenario is of course not unique to Korea, it has been facilitated, in this instance, by a very high level of control on the part of the ML. Significantly, the Korean government cites UK social enterprise policies as the source, both of the degree of control and the bias towards job creation type social enterprises, despite the significant differences from the Korean policy. In other words, the Korean government adopted and utilized social enterprise policy in an attempt to legitimize its pre-determined policy goal (i.e. solving unemployment problems); but this process lacked legitimacy in terms of both inputs and procedures (Scharpf 1998; Wallner 2008). This case therefore highlights the importance of a thorough understanding of the original purpose and context of the policy to be transferred, the ways in which it would need to be modified to work in its new context, and the implications for stakeholders. These factors may require even more attention when the policy concerned is relatively new.

Our findings reveal that policy transfer should be set within a historically and institutionally sensitive framework. Policies, of course, are not literally transferred between countries; policy contents and outcomes are dynamically transformed by the local socio-institutional landscape (Stone 2001; Peck 2011). As identified by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), however, the existing literature on policy transfer tends to be preoccupied with pluralist assumptions, while paying insufficient attention to institutional structures, processes and constraints (see also Stubbs 2005; Lendvai and Stubbs 2007; Benson and Jordan 2011). Instead of adhering to a 're-hashed neo-pluralism', the policy transfer process should be viewed 'as one of continuous transformation, negotiation, and enactment on the one hand and as a politically infused process of dislocation and displacement ("unfit to fit"), on the other hand' (Lendvai and Stubbs 2007, 14–15). It should also be noted that the pluralist perspective on policy transfer is less likely to apply to the policy transfer process in political systems with a more interventionist tradition or greater power-centralization. This is the case for South Korea where the presidency and bureaucracy can enjoy strong power concentration due to institutional legacies of the authoritarian developmental state.

Public policies generally suffer from complexity, uncertainty and lack of feedback in the policy process (Dryzek 1983). Facing such feasibility problems, the learning of policy leaders may take the form of strategic retreat in order to avoid potential political costs (Wildavsky 1979), or political learning for more sophisticated policy advocacy (May 1992). In the latter scenario, policy leaders transfer favourable policy information (Evans 2009), which is open to misinterpretation to conceal problems. The type of policy learning which takes place depends on the circumstances of the borrower country. Based on the case analysis where



distorted transfer took place due to the degree of power concentration, we suggest that learning for policy legitimization is more likely in countries with developmental state experiences and centralized power structures. Further studies are required to explore this issue in more detail.

The model that we have presented also offers an alternative, in the form of democratic policy transfer. This type of transfer leads to a clearer understanding of policies and contexts, and as such requires a greater degree of mutual learning between borrowers and lenders. There are difficulties associated with this, not least the investment of a considerable amount of time and effort, which may be necessary to assess policy information. One possible solution is to place more emphasis on informal contacts with peers which borrowers may find more trustworthy (Wolman and Page 2002). More generally, it should be noted that two-way communication does not always need to include formal site visits and conferences, but could also include telephone and email exchanges. In any case, these problems are not insurmountable, and two-way communication can provide a useful way of checking understanding of policy initiatives and borrower contexts.

Similarly, two-way communication with stakeholders can help to increase the understanding of both sides, and lead to policies that are more beneficial to recipients. Indeed, if policy is to be truly adapted to context, then the feedback of policy stakeholders can be invaluable. Again, there are difficulties, not least in terms of expense and time. However, the benefits of participative approaches to public policy are that through learning and acting together, creative solutions can be made to social problems.

It could be argued that a limitation of the present study is that it has focused on the influence of UK social enterprise policy on Korea. Due to claims from the Korean government, academics and the media regarding the influence of social enterprise policies from other countries, there is considerable scope for future investigation regarding policy transfer and Korean social enterprise. In particular, a fruitful avenue for future research may be to investigate the influence of social enterprise policies of countries such as France and Italy upon the Korean policy. More generally, we hope that this study may encourage others to investigate the role of communication in policy transfer, and thus help to further understanding of a frequently overlooked aspect in the transfer of policies.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding information

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2013S1A3A2055108).

## Notes on contributors

*Chisung Park* is Associate Professor in the College of Public Service, Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Korea. Since gaining his Ph.D. from the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh, he has published articles in journals such as the *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *Policy Sciences*, and *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. His current work focuses on the effects of social constructions on policies in a range of areas including social enterprise and immigration.

**Jooha Lee** is Associate Professor in the Department of Public Administration, Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea. He holds a Ph.D. in Social Policy from Oxford University. His main research interests are comparative social policy, welfare politics, governance, and policy implementation. He is co-author of *The Korean State and Social Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2011). His English publications have also been published in the *Journal of Democracy and International Review of Administrative Sciences*.

**Mark Wilding** is Lecturer in Social Policy in the Directorate of Social Sciences, University of Salford, Manchester, UK. He has a Ph.D. in Labour Studies from the University of Manchester. His research interests include policy transfer, comparative policy studies, and social enterprise. His recent work has been published in the *Asian Journal of Political Science, Policy Sciences, and Administration & Society*.

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