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## **Making public policy mobile: On the interrelationship between public policy degrees and job trajectories**

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### **Research Domains**

Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

### **Abstract**

Public Policy degrees are expanding globally. The job position “policy analyst” is a common denomination in the Anglo-Saxon labor market for distinct work roles and policy decisions are increasingly made through knowledge frames such analysts have acquired in such schools. In drawing on the nascent case of one German public policy school the presentation aims to understand how academic public policy knowledge as educated in public policy schools and job positions respectively organizations in which Public Policy (PP) graduates exercise their academic expertise correspond. It analyses the productive role of the university in expanding certain academic fields in the world of work. It focuses on the organizational work of such schools (I) and the cognitive and dimension of what students learn in these schools (II)

### **Full paper**

Public Policy degrees are expanding globally. The job position “policy analyst” is a common denomination in the Anglo-Saxon labor market for distinct work roles and policy decisions are increasingly made through knowledge frames such analysts have acquired in such schools. Even in highly regulated higher education systems such as

Germany some universities have established degrees that are either directly public policy degrees or heavily draw on the syllabus of such programs.

Research that explains why the expansion of academic degrees takes place tends to take to common routes. One route investigates the professionalization of distinct (policy) fields either as functional responses to societal needs (Parsons 1939) through the boundary work of occupational groups or hybrid knowledge fields (Abbott 1988; Büttner and Mau 2014; Noordegraf 2015). The other investigates the distinct role of elite (educational) pathways and capital formation to 'command posts' (e.g. Brown et al. 2010; Mangset 2015; Rivera 2015). Along the first route the university consecrates relevant knowledge frames that correspond with specific professional demands, along the second universities are framed as distributors of elite credentials.

The distinct and independent role of university-generated knowledge is commonly overlooked. Academic degrees generate legitimacy and relevance in their own terms. Abstract knowledge is neither restricted to distinct professional fields nor to elite degrees. It is pervasive and co-constructs "new classes of personnel with new types of authoritative knowledge" on its own (Meyer 1977: 56; Armstrong and Masse 2014: 808). In the case of public policy schools academia "produce[s] students to colonize the bureaucracies, (...), to set things right" (Wildavsky 1985: 27).

The presentation aims to understand how academic public policy knowledge as educated in public policy schools and job positions respectively organizations in which Public Policy (PP) graduates exercise their academic expertise correspond. It analyses the productive role of the university in expanding certain academic fields in the world of work. It focuses on the organizational work of such schools (I) and the cognitive and dimension of what students learn in these schools (II). The organizational work dimension analyses the strategic coupling between public policy schools and influential employees which Zald and Lounsbury (2010), following Mills, call "command posts". The cognitive dimension (II) focusses on the interrelationship between the degrees and job descriptions as well as specializations students chose during their studies and the type of organizations they work for.

In a first step the presentation analyses the curriculum of German (17) and international (12) degrees to understand the academic “mind maps” (Byrkjeflot 1998) graduates apply in practice. In a second step it traces the “carriers” (Meyer 2002) of such knowledge frames based on the career paths of 1147 graduates from one influential German public policy school. It draws on publicly available year books and web information of more than 90% of the listed graduates. We have categorized more than 5000 career episodes of the graduates in more than 2500 work organizations. The data includes Information on their specializations, their internships, their job positions and work organizations allow to map out the variety of jobs to which such knowledge frames are applicable and the distinct ways in which these frames correspond and create expert positions for graduates of public policy schools. Drawing on Social Network Analysis, the data thus allows to exemplarily show the extend to which specific employment fields have become restructured in view of global public policy knowledge and how this restructuring mobilizes graduates across the world to take up such positions.

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