

## Project 6

### **The Travel of ideas – Origins, Diffusion and Reception of the World Bank’s Social Policy Ideas (funded by the Graduate College ‘World Concepts and Global Structures’, since 2003)**

*This project looks at the World Bank’s approach to Social Policy, specifically focusing on pensions. This is a relatively new issue area for the World Bank to engage in and currently ranks high on the Bank’s agenda. By tracing the itinerary of the publication “Adverting the Old Age Crisis”, this research will investigate how old age security became a key focus for the Bank, how the Bank positioned its agenda in the international development community and how other transnational development actors received the Bank’s ideas.*

Academic interest in social policy issues in developing countries is, with the exception of medical care and emergency relief, a relatively new phenomena: Recent Social Policy has produced a new body of literature on “New Welfare States” and current Development Studies literature turns this argument that social policy is affordable for countries only if they have reached a certain level of economic development and industrialisation around. Instead, it is argued that a certain level of social security is a prerequisite for economic development.

A second innovation in contemporary literature on social policy is the attention paid to emerging structures of a *Global Social Policy*. While the mainstream literature still conceptualises social policy concerns as an exclusively domestic affair, an increasing number of scholars has shifted their focus to analysing activities at the level beyond the nation-state when addressing social policy questions, taking both governmental and non-state actors into account.

The project takes these considerations about an emerging global social policy discourse and practice as its point of departure to analyse the role of the World Bank in framing social policy as a new area of development policy. More specifically, the itinerary of a social policy idea will be illustrated by taking the example of the World Bank’s approach to Old Age Security. Most research which studies the impact of international organisations concentrates on the effects of their activities on the state and state policies. This project, in contrast, analyses genuinely world societal processes by focussing on the reciprocal influences between different international development organisations.

Pension reforms have become a core social policy topic following the US advised Chilean pension reform in the early 1980ies. The Bank’s 1994 “Adverting the Old Age Crisis” marks a watershed in terms of positioning the topic on the global development agenda: 51 countries have received World Bank pensions assistance since 1994. However, this research is concerned with the reception of the Bank’s recommendations by the development community and not with the outcome of the reception as implemented in the projects in recipient countries. The selection of one publication and the analysis of its “success-story” raises questions of the representativeness of the research. By choosing a highly consequential publication, this detailed analysis of just one document promises to produce insights into the micro-processes underlying global dynamics that are highly illuminating. This innovative and potentially very fruitful method of approaching global subject matters from a micro-level, i.e. looking for the local in the global and vice versa justifies the limitation to a single publication. By opting for this approach, this project explicitly wants to distance itself from the ideology-driven accounts often found in the discussions about the Bank’s activities. Providing evidence for the Bank adopting persistently a neo-liberal stance and contrasting this with more social outlook of other international organisations like the International Labour Organisation seems to contribute little to our understanding of a changed role of the state in world society and the new prominence of international organisations of any political leaning.

The research will focus on the origin, diffusion and reception of the Bank’s publication “Adverting the Old Age Crisis”. Why did this issue prevail over others? What were the internal and external factors that shaped the Bank’s approach to old age security? What were the procedures for the modulation and fine-tuning of the Bank’s stance? These are important

questions to answer when trying to explain the prevalence of the issue. A second step will consist in analysing the Bank's dissemination strategies: What are the target groups that the Bank identifies? Does the Bank address these target groups differently? Third, the reception of the publication by international and transnational development institutions will be considered: Have these organisations initiated any socio-structural in response to the Bank's agenda? And finally: In what ways were the Bank's ideas transformed in the process of adoption by the organisation?

By addressing all three, the origin, diffusion and reception of the Bank's ideas on old age security, this project tries to go beyond simple policy diffusion models that often limit themselves to analysing just one of these, focusing either on the transmitter the receivers. In contrast to these, the aim here is to stress the reciprocity and circularity of influences in the evolution of global social policy ideas. The world society perspective fosters a view that takes actors at the subnational, national, regional, international and global levels and their interconnectedness simultaneously into account without implying a hierarchy or preference for any particular level. Unlike accounts concerning the denationalisation or deterritorialisation described in most of the globalisation literature, a world society perspective avoids the depiction of the activities as a zero-sum game, i.e. the assumption that more activities on the international or global level implies a weakening of local or national actors. Instead, a world society approach enables one to see all of the actors (i.e. both nation states and International organisations and Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs)) as internal differentiations of world society. The relationship between them is constantly changing and differs according to the subject matter under consideration. Structural innovations and changes are thus better described as overlying rather than replacing previous structures.

Researchers: Dipl.Pol. Veronika Wodsak; Prof. Lutz Leisering PhD (supervisor)