

AIB 2020 CONFERENCE THEME
HOW CROSSING BORDERS CHANGES BUSINESS:
THE MULTIDIRECTIONAL MOVEMENT OF POLICIES, PRACTICES AND
KNOWLEDGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Rebecca Piekkari, October 11, 2019

Crossing borders has a transformative effect on business. Firms take products, services, strategies, management models, organizational practices, and knowledge across social, political, and economic contexts – and these often change in incremental, radical, planned and unanticipated ways as they move. IB scholars have recognized that firms can learn from those changes, giving them an innovation and learning advantage. Moreover, international firms change the countries and the global governance systems in which they operate. In the 21st century, cross-border activities have become increasingly multidirectional, as the East-to-West and South-to-North movement of firms is expanding rapidly. The beginning of the third decade of the 21st century provides an opportunity to examine how this multidirectional movement is changing business – and changing the field of IB itself.

IB scholars are increasingly turning to the concept of translation to understand cross-border processes and their resulting changes. Many associate translation with reverbalization of meaning in another language. Policies, practices and knowledge that move across borders often need to be expressed in another language, but not only as texts but also as pictures, power points and videos. This poses questions about language choice, authorized and unauthorized translations, and translator roles. Moreover, language poses significant methodological issues for IB scholars doing research across language boundaries.

But translation is also a much broader concept, which captures on-going change and transformation when the global meets the local. Translation means changing the original to make it accessible to receiving audiences in local contexts. As a process, translation involves both retaining what is most valuable in the source and transforming elements of the source to gain acceptance in a new context. In this process, something may also be lost. Translation highlights the importance of translators who make choices about what and how to translate. These choices are influenced by the norms and practices in their field, by previous translations, and by translators' expectations about how receivers will respond. Translations continue to evolve when contexts change, as translators try to improve on previous translations, and receivers re-interpret the translations. The concept of translation is widely used in organization theory, where scholars are interested in the travel of management models and practices across societies, and in public policy, where researchers use it to investigate how models and practices of public management move across borders and how international regulations are created and put into practice.

IB scholars can draw on and contribute significantly to theory and empirical research on translation in the fields of organization theory, public policy as well as translation studies. For example, when

a large multinational corporation (MNC) introduces a new human resource management system or a new code for social responsibility into its network of subsidiaries, both its corporate and local managers engage in translation: interpreting what is new and unfamiliar, putting a set of guidelines and regulations into practice, and, over time, reversing the direction of translation, taking the evolving practice into a revised set of guidelines. When a small entrepreneurial firm works with international partners to bring a service to new markets, its managers engage in translation: articulating their business model and explaining their offering to their partners, often changing both their model and practice in those interactions. When an international NGO engages in a partnership with an MNC, both sides translate their own expectations and models into specific practices in ways that are acceptable to both. Thus, the concept of translation provides a framework for examining – and re-examining – some of the most important issues in IB.

The conference theme also raises a number of intriguing new questions, such as why and how do some locations, such as Miami (a bridge across the Americas and across the Atlantic) and Hong Kong (a bridge between East and West) become centers of translation? As things get lost in translation, when does “imperfect” translation lead to innovations? How do multinationals, small firms and NGOs manage translation processes and develop distinctive translation capabilities? What challenges do translators face when they span boundaries? When people cross borders and move from one social context to another, why and how do some of them become translators who expand the translation capabilities of the organizations they join? And what does it take – methodologically and philosophically – to engage in cross-language research?

These and a number of other questions will be explored under the following the tracks. As a new initiative for AIB 2020, the three shared interest groups (SIG) – Research methods, Women in AIB, and Teaching and education – will have their own dedicated tracks.

Conference tracks:

1. Internationalization processes and international entrepreneurship
2. International marketing strategy
3. International consumer research
4. International finance, accounting and corporate governance
5. Global strategy, organization and value chains
6. International HRM, global leadership and cross-cultural management
7. Gender and diversity
8. Teaching and education
9. Research methods
10. Emerging markets and emerging market MNEs
11. Business, politics and society
12. Global Innovations
13. Conference track: International business as translation: How crossing borders changes business
14. Local track: De-globalization, slowbalization, and regionalization