

## **Chapter 1 Introduction: The Family Tree of Policy Learning**

*Claire A. Dunlop, Claudio M. Radaelli and Philipp Trein*

Demand for learning is high in practically all policy domains, whether we consider growth, the control of corruption, improvement in schools and health, or the dissemination of benchmarking and good practice by international organizations. At the same time, the supply of research findings shows that learning mechanisms are often stymied, the most obvious triggers like evidence-based policy do not work or work differently than expected. Or learning is not desirable, either because it is inefficient, for example by persevering in listening to the wrong teachers or by implementing the wrong lesson, or by applying the right lesson to the wrong institutional context. In other circumstances, learning may fail our criteria of democratic quality – such as, transparency, fairness, equality, accountability.

One way to describe this state of play is to say that the constellation of actors, incentives and norms in a policy process or a political system is not aligned with the objective of learning how to improve on public policy and following the criteria of democratic theory. Another is to say that bureaucracies, politicians in office, pressure groups, organized citizens and experts have objectives that are normally different from policy learning, such as consensus, the control of expertise and knowledge, cultivating membership, influence over the definition of a social or economic problem, and the management of implementation processes.

This raises a number of questions that today define the field of policy learning. First, what exactly do we mean by learning in the context of comparative public policy analysis and theories of the policy process (Weible and Sabatier, 2017)? Second, what do we know about the causes of learning, its mechanisms, how it develops in different policy processes, within and across countries? Third, what are triggers and hindrances of mechanisms of learning? (Dunlop and Radaelli, under review). Fourth, what are the consequences of different types of learning for the efficiency of public policy as well as for the normative criteria of the democratic theory we adopt? The first question brings us to definitional issues. The second and third question are about causality – in fact, they refer to causes, mechanisms and consequences. Even if our ambition is not to develop policy learning as stand-alone theory of the policy process, but rather to perfect our knowledge of learning within the established theories of the policy process, we have to assemble the building blocks of causality more systematically, in terms of micro-foundations, learning in organizations, and how group learning becomes policy learning and, sometimes, social learning (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2017). The fourth question is about the

outcome of learning – in the literature, this is often captured by the relationship between learning and policy change (Moynon, Scholten and Weible, 2017), but actually there are many more possible outcomes, and some involve normative issues that haven't always been prominent in the field.

In this introductory chapter, we explain how the study of policy learning has evolved to the point where it is today, and show how the contributions to the volume provide empirical and conceptual insights that, to be entirely honest, do not answer the four questions, or at least not completely, but assist us in providing the building blocks for a research agenda that has potential to provide successful answers. In doing this, we are aware of the existence of some important reviews of the state of play in the field, and we refer the readers to these in order to keep our chapter within a decent word budget limit. Chapter 2 of our volume also provides a systematic bibliometric review of policy learning based on the most recent data by Goyal and Howlett – hence all the bibliometric data we need to support our discussion are in there. Other comprehensive reviews include Dunlop and Radaelli (2013), Freeman (2006), Hekkila and Gerlak (2013), Moynon and Scholten (2018) and Trein (2015).

At the outset, what do we mean by learning? Obviously there isn't a single definition in the field. Indeed, the history of the political science literature on this topic suggests that learning is seen by different strands and authors as the solution to different problems, including:

- the problem of cybernetic equilibrium in a system,
- the problem of managing and reducing radical uncertainty,
- the problem of cross-national diffusion and convergence,
- the problem of knowledge utilization,
- and, (more recently), the problem of learning in different modes or types of policy processes.

Thus, definitions do not come out of thin air. Rather, they are linked to approaches that capture one problem-solution association instead of another.

For us, it is sufficient to begin our brief overview of the historical development of the field by keeping in mind a basic definition of learning as updating of knowledge and beliefs about public policy (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013). In turn, updating is either the result of social interaction among policy actors, or personal-organizational experience, or the provision of new or different evidence. It can of course also result from variable combinations of the three.

## **The roots**

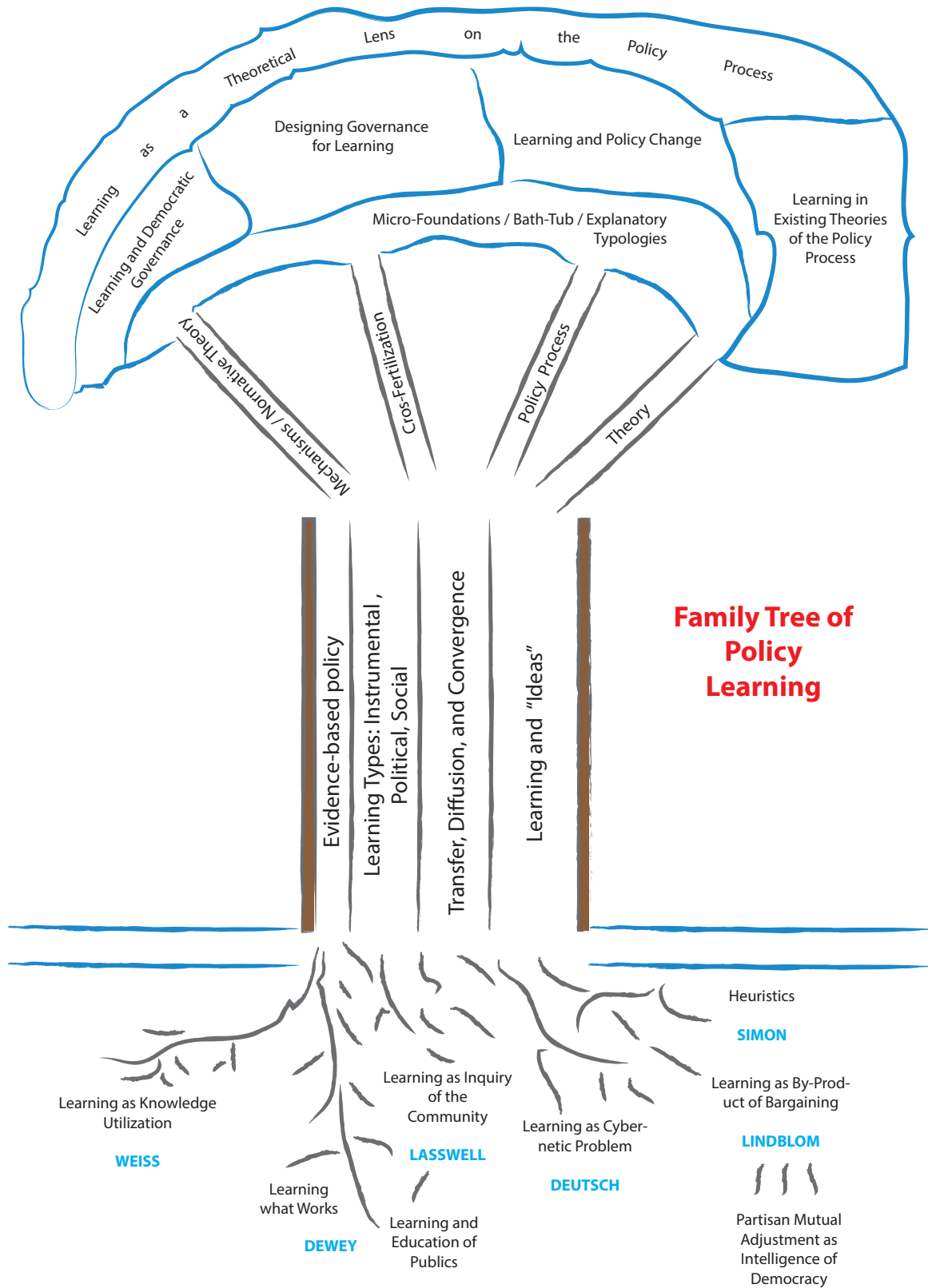
Let us now briefly see how political science research on policy learning has emerged and developed. We do so because an appraisal of what has already been done is the strongest foundation to design the coordinates of an agenda like the one supporting our volume, and more generally the research agenda in the field for the near future. The metaphor of the family tree of learning will assist us in our journey through authors and themes (see Figure 1.1).

It is not difficult to identify the roots of policy learning. Names like John Dewey, Harold Lasswell, Karl Deutsch, Charles Lindblom (in turn, intimately connected to the research agenda of the economics Nobel prize-winner Herbert Simon), and Hugh Heclo belong firmly to the roots of this family tree. We realize we are grouping together authors that did not live in the same period, but what matters is the overall consistency of the roots as developed by these giants.

The foundations of policy learning are philosophically grounded in pragmatism and its concern for what works. Pragmatic thinking marked a fundamental historical turn away from ideological approaches to public policy. If all that matters is what works, we have to be open to whatever mechanism may empirically occur in public policy, and learn how to generate usable lessons from experience and evidence.

Dewey's pragmatism, however, went beyond that, because it included the seeds of a profound reflection on the normative issues we mention above. One of his core ideas was that education, policy and the public define a single social problem of learning. In fact, Dewey's (1927) classic *The Public and its Problems*, reprinted in 2012, was all about re-connecting a public distracted and un-interested in public policy problems with the essence of democracy – a normative direction that is also appropriate in the current mood of anti-politics. Dewey's utopia was to turn the Great Society into the Great Community (Dewey, 2012: 141). To achieve this, he even thought of mobilizing the arts to draw the attention of the public towards the assimilation of 'accurate investigation' (Dewey, 2012: 140). We can call this 'nudging the attention' of the citizens, to use contemporary social science vocabulary (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). At the macro-level of analysis pragmatism implies an evolutionary learning perspective on democratic governance (Ansell, 2011).

Figure 1: The Family Tree of Policy Learning



His lesson was not lost on Harold Lasswell: most of his intellectual effort was directed towards closing the gap between academic knowledge and society: ‘[O]ne thing Lasswell learned from the pragmatists, and Dewey in particular, was that inquiry requires community’ (Torgerson, 1992, p. 231; see Torgerson, 1985 for a wider exposition of Lasswell). Thus, Lasswell called for a ‘... collective cultivation of professional identity’ amongst policy analysts (Torgerson, 1985, p. 246). It is a limitation of the field that in the contemporary literature, only Ian Sanderson (2006, 2009), an evaluation scholar turned analyst for the Scottish Government<sup>1</sup>, has coherently developed a Deweyan perspective on learning in public policy.

In the Deweyan perspective, learning is the solution to the problem of aligning what works with public policy and an informed, vigilant democratic public. Instead for Deutsch learning is a cybernetic problem, classically exposed in his 1963 *The Nerves of Government* (celebrated among others by Hecló in his 1974 study, see also Hecló 1972) and other seminal works like *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Deutsch et al., 1957). Each system needs capabilities of its core institutions. These capabilities are indispensable to manage ‘the burden’ of the ‘traffic load of messages and signals upon the attention-giving and decision-making capabilities of the persons or organizations in control’ (Deutsch et al., 1957, p. 41). The discriminant between a system that learns and a system that does not is to secure these capabilities. For Deutsch, organizations are webs of communication. Their core function is to generate and transmit information, to react to signals and events, to deploy self-controlling mechanisms and to manage feedback. The essence of learning is a kind of special dynamic capacity of systems to recombine resources when something changes and to manage feedback coherently. Feedback is not simply finding something in the system that provides a response to an information input in the external environment. In fact, the information input ‘includes the results of its own action in the new information by which it modifies its subsequent behaviour’ (Deutsch, 1966, p. 88). Learning is not going back to the previous point of equilibrium in the system. It is the capacity to pursue changing goals. Thus, the kind of learning that Deutsch has in mind is similar to the zigzagging of the rabbit in a field, when the rabbit re-adjusts its direction continuously, as new changes and opportunities arise. Applied to public policy, this is a notion of learning-as-improvement (today we would say ‘instrumental learning’) that is socially progressive. In fact, it allows a society to draw on learning capacity to pursue new and changing goals. An implication of this cybernetic view is that learning is not limited to making policies work better or stay efficient when the economy or demographics are altered. It also

includes adapting and transforming policies to follow the search for new equilibria of a zig-zagging, open society.

Lindblom's most profound intuitions did not arise out of a concern with learning but rather with the analysis of decisions, and its empirical and normative dimensions (Lindblom, 1959, 1965). Decision-makers, pressure groups, experts and civil society organizations make policies because they have objectives of power, influence, prestige or epistemic authority in society. They are not pupils in a class where the main goal is to learn. They are partisans. They mutually adjust in a process of bargaining, not a process of truth-seeking. And yet, bargaining is also a mode of learning (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013). Why? Because through bargaining, and mutual adjustment, an actor learns about the strategies, intentions, volitions and preferences of other actors. This actor will accumulate usable knowledge (Lindblom and Cohen, 1979). Collectively, all actors are involved in discovering the possibilities for cooperation, assuming that bargaining ends up with an agreed choice. They are therefore involved in a process of exploration of what can be achieved together, what problems can be solved, and how. Their goal may be power, votes or more members, but collectively they engage in a process of knowledge generation, exchange, and utilization.

Now, combine this with Herbert Simon's proposition that actors have limited rationality and pursue 'satisficing' solutions instead of impossible utility maximization (1947; see also March and Simon, 1958). Simon opened the door to the world of heuristics, biases, framing and nudging that provides a realistic account of how partisan mutual adjustment ends up in more or less functional and desirable forms of learning. The Lindblom-Simon roots have paved the way for today's interest in cognitive psychology and experimental social sciences. A fundamental corollary of Lindblom's approach to the analysis of decision and Simon's bounded rationality is that partisan mutual adjustment is not just an explanation of how collective decisions are taken. It is also a normative model of a pluralist, open democracy. The public good is not pre-determined by intellectual cogitation but results from conflict, different opinions, pluralist views... in one word, it emerges from partisan mutual adjustment. The latter is the equivalent (in political systems) of the market in the economy.

Heclo is famous for having identified learning as solution to the problem of puzzling, or, less metaphorically, to social problem-solving under conditions of uncertainty. However, for Heclo the social dimension of learning has its own micro-foundations. Heclo argued that learning appears only at the individual level (Heclo, 1974, p. 306). Yet, individuals interact: learning is therefore acquired and then diffused through patterns of collective action. Heclo's

approach to learning combines individual cognition as well as the features of the social and institutional environment.

And yet, there isn't anything pre-determined in this process. Here, Heclo is mindful of Deutsch's lesson. He presents learning as a process taking place in a maze. But, this is a special maze. The walls are re-patterned all the time. Individuals work in different teams or groups. Each group has an idea of how to get out of the maze and gets in the way of other groups. Some teams even reason that getting out of the maze may not be the best solution! Note that Heclo's learning mechanisms are not random, but they are significantly shaped by social interaction, organizations (the teams), and institutions (the structure of the maze) (Heclo, 1974, p. 308).

We cannot conclude the section on the roots of policy learning without mentioning the body of work developed by Carol H. Weiss (1979, 1986), who passed away on 8 January 2013. With eleven books and hundreds of articles, she made a remarkable contribution to the fields of usable knowledge and policy evaluation. But, deep down in her work runs a powerful stream of ideas about learning as solution to the problem of knowledge utilization. Her findings about instrumental, conceptual, enlightened and, later on, forced usages of evidence by organizations and in policy processes defined the pathway for the literature on policy types we will see in a moment (Weiss, 1979; Weiss, Murphy-Brown and Birkeland, 2005).

Thanks to her, some hard lessons dawned on the minds of political scientists: research is often not utilized by policy-makers; knowledge can be manipulated for political reasons, for example to support pre-fabricated biases; and, learning can end up in policy endarkenment, thus destroying the benign assumption that all learning is policy improvement and enlightenment. We can call this section of the roots the knowledge utilization perspective. In more recent times, authors like Boswell (2008), Radaelli (2009) and Dunlop (2014) anchor their contributions to learning to this organizational perspective on knowledge utilization and Weiss in particular, showing the vitality of these roots.

### **The tree gets stronger**

The learning family tree grew stronger in the 1990s. Bennett, Howlett, May and others developed the categorical approach to policy learning. This was the decade of learning types.

Essentially, these authors break down the concept of learning by considering different types, and identifying the prima facie evidence that lead us to recognize a type (of learning) as

‘political’, ‘social’, or ‘instrumental’. For example, Peter May (1992) delineates the evidence that would lead us to conclude that learning is instrumental (that means supportive of policy improvement), political (that is, learning about policy in a way that assists political strategies like winning elections or gaining more popularity, with policy improvement being at best an indirect outcome), and ‘social’ (this is the broadest type of learning, where a whole society moves from one set of ideas or policy paradigm to a new one). Contemporaneously, Peter Hall (1993) published one of the most-cited political science articles of all times in which he described paradigmatic change. Although Hall was eminently interested in building a neo-institutional theory of change, his notion of policy paradigm and the accompanying reference to social learning made a lasting contribution to the family tree (Hall, 1993). Drawing on Hall, a whole literature on ideational politics, discourse, epistemic communities, technocracy, and policy paradigms developed, crossing roads with policy learning (Béland and Cox, 2010; Haas, 1990; Haas, 1992; Schmidt, 2002).

The concepts of ‘policy transfer’ (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000), ‘policy diffusion’ (Marsh and Sharman 2009), ‘lesson-drawing’ (Rose 1991), and ‘policy convergence’ (Bennett 1991; Knill 2005) gained currency in this decade. This was not exactly a new trajectory. Since the 1970s, scholars of American federalism observed the interaction between innovation in a state and adoption of the same innovation by other US states, with more or less predictable ripple effects (Walker, 1973). But, the 1990s debate generalized the topic of laboratory federalism in the USA in terms of more explicit theories of cross-national learning.

This turn in the research agenda takes to learning as lens to identify solutions to the research questions and practical problems arising out of cross-national diffusion. The idea is attractive: instead of learning from the experience at home, which invariably includes making mistakes, a government can learn from vicarious experience, that is the experience of other countries. Analytically, the most powerful and more general way to capture this is spatial interdependence (Plümper and Neumayer, 2010): policy in country A depends on policy decisions made somewhere else. Convergence may or may not be the end-point of the learning process. Diffusion can be limited by spatial or institutional variables, like legal tradition or family of welfare. Learning from early adopters follows an S-shaped curve, but diffusion is also triggered by conditionality, imitation, and regulatory competition (Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett, 2006; Shipan and Volden, 2008).

In the family tree we are examining, there has been progress in our understanding of individual and collective learning in diffusion processes (Gilardi, 2010; Meseguer, 2005).



Interestingly, Gilardi draws explicitly on the 1990s typological approach, distinguishing instrumental learning from political learning, and adding considerable empirical precision to his findings about the dynamic of diffusion. The difficulty with the quantitative study of diffusion (similar to other macro-level analysis of latent concepts) is ensuring the cross-national patterns identified empirically are truly representative of learning processes rather than other processes. It is plausible to attribute patterns of adoption to learning, but it's equally plausible to think of other variables. Qualitative work comes to the rescue by specifying the causality of learning in diffusion process (Weyland, 2007). Rather than seeing quantitative and qualitative approaches to spatial inter-dependence as mutually exclusive, we prefer to think of them as complementary.

But, how do countries 'learn' exactly, given that they do not have cognitive capabilities of their own? And, how should they learn? The extrapolation model (Bardach, 2004; Barzelay, 2007) – as well as Rose's lessons-drawing approach (1991) – pins down the steps that policy-makers should follow in their search for adaptation of lessons emerging abroad to the home destination. Theoretically, Barzelay has the merit of having introduced an explicit conceptualization of the mechanisms of learning. Indeed, his approach to extrapolation is anchored to analytical sociology, where mechanisms play an important explanatory role (Hedström, 2005).

Another impulse to the research agenda came from policy-makers rather than academia. Over the last twenty-five years governments and international organizations have embraced the evidence-based policy agenda – at least in their manifestos and official discourse (for example, Cabinet Office, 1999). Research on evidence-based policy, or evidence-inspired policy, its biases, presuppositions and consequences has naturally emerged. Often it has crossed roads with research on the new public management (Davies, Nutley, Smith, 2000; Nutley and Davies, 2003). But, significantly for our volume, it has drawn attention to learning mechanisms from a critical angle. Indeed, the applied results (as opposed to academic findings) of the evidence-based policy vision are at best mixed – possibly because of the weak and simplistic theoretical foundations of this agenda. In its most simplistic approach, evidence-based policy does not take into account the mechanisms, especially triggers and hindrances, of knowledge utilization. It assumes a deficit model (that is, policy-makers have a deficit of good, sound evidence) that is unrealistic. Policy-makers are bombarded with information, and in any case they look at information with their own priorities, preferences, biases and political interests. At the same time, this impulse towards more evidence-based choice has inspired the adoption and diffusion

of specific policy instruments, such as evaluation programmes, randomized controlled trials, and regulatory impact assessment. Thus, the last twenty-five years have also produced findings on whether evidence-based policy instruments really support learning, and if do what type of learning: instrumental or political (Dunlop, 2016)? Are these instruments adopted symbolically, to show compliance with the beliefs and policy doctrine of international organizations and donor countries (Radaelli, 2004)? How does their pattern of diffusion look like (De Francesco, 2012; Trein, 2017), are they adopted one by one, or in ecologies or constellations (Damonte, Dunlop and Radaelli, 2014)?

### **The branches today**

In more recent years, the learning tree has produced new branches and research leaves and fruits. Indeed, there have been no fewer than six journal special issues on policy learning since 2009 – two on learning and transfer (Dolowitz, 2009; Evans, 2009), a third on learning at the organisational level (Zito and Schout, 2009), a fourth on lesson-drawing between Australia and the UK (Manwaring, 2016), a collection of articles exploring learning and policy change (Moyson, Scholten and Weible, 2017), and a sixth volume exploring the nexus of policy learning and policy failure (Dunlop, 2017a). We leave it to the readers to decide whether this is a kind of ‘learning 2.0 research agenda’ (see the top of Figure 1.1). Arguably, it’s more a continuity and deepening of themes that are foundational to this research programme.

We make the following claims. First, the new branches are more explicitly theoretical. Second, they are less concerned with the type of learning *per se* (instrumental, political, social ...) and more focussed on the characteristics of the policy process that determine varieties or modes of learning. Third, the field is healthy, but needs genuine cross-fertilization from other disciplines. Hence, we point towards examples of interdisciplinary research on learning. We cannot tell whether there is a rise, since systematic data are not available to demonstrate the percentage of interdisciplinary studies across time. But, we would certainly advocate that there is an objective need to go in this direction. Fourth, we are more aware of the mechanisms, especially in terms of hindrances and triggers, and of what learning does or does not do to our normative criteria.

### **More theoretical**

The classic way for a theoretical turn is to build explanations of learning within theories of the policy process that are explicitly formulated to explain policy change. *Theories of the Policy Process*, edited by Weible and Sabatier (2017), contains several examples of how learning research has turned into more theoretical directions inside major public policy frameworks. Empirical applications of the advocacy coalition framework have demonstrated however that the framework itself provides limited explanations for learning processes and how the beliefs of different coalitions translate into policy change (Henry et al., 2014, p. 304; see also Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, pp. 151-154). Colleagues who are developing the narrative policy framework now talk about narrative learning (Shanahan et al., 2017, pp. 201-202). Others have contributed with empirical and conceptual insights to our understanding of beliefs systems, knowledge utilization, the presentation of knowledge in policy narratives, and mechanisms of learning (Moyson, 2017, 2018).

Moreover, recent projects have taken learning as the object of explanation and have drilled down on its causality. Hekkila and Gerlak (2013) is a good example of how we can go theoretically from individual to collective learning taking into account both cognitive and behavioural features of the mechanisms at work. Dunlop and Radaelli (2017) have put learning on James Coleman's famous bath-tub. They start from the classic proposition, dominant in the 1990s, that learning produces policy change. There may be correlation between learning and change at the macro level. But, to make this an explanation, Dunlop and Radaelli (2017) reconstruct learning from the individual level, then discuss the individual-to-individual relationships, and finally aggregate from micro to macro. In yet another iteration of how to go in an explicitly theoretical direction, Dunlop and James (2007) look at learning from the perspective of principal-agent modelling.

### **It's the policy process....!**

Our second claim is that the field has become more confident in connecting learning to the characteristics of the policy process. In the 1990s, political scientists were breaking down learning by type. The types made empirical sense. They were, and are, plausible. But, they are inductive and, so, not anchored to theory.

Today, and here we take the liberty of referring to the work of two of the editors (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013), we break down learning by looking at the features of the policy process in which constellations of actors operate. These features are derived from explanatory typologies

– note that these typologies are built theoretically, it's the combination of two independent variables that generates the cell in the dependent variable. They are also built inter-disciplinarily, using political science as well as adult education (Dunlop, 2009). In short, this work shows that learning modes differ greatly depending on whether the policy process is epistemic, hierarchical, bargaining-oriented or reflexive. Kamkhaji (2017) has piloted an empirical instrument to control for the presence of these different types of learning.

The advantages of this approach are threefold. To begin with, it opens the door to an explicit consideration of what can go wrong with learning. If an expert takes an epistemic attitude within a bargaining process, they will most likely become irrelevant or professional knowledge will be distorted (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2016). Another advantage is that this approach allows us to bring together the classic intuitions of the roots, especially Lindblom's partisan mutual adjustment, together with more recent developments on the policy process, specifically the analysis of experimentalist governance (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2008). Finally, this approach is amenable to policy recommendations: essentially it tells actors that are frustrated with their attempts to produce learning to focus more on the structural characteristics of the policy process and less on the preferred solution or learning types (Dunlop and Radaelli, under review).

### **Cross-fertilization**

Beyond political science, there has been an exciting number of scholarly waves concerned with learning. Here, there is definitively continuity with the past. Already in 1988, Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (1988) re-discovered Herbert Simon in their 'Systematically Pinching Ideas' article on heuristics. Today, the logics of biases and heuristics is present in the analysis of how coalitions relate to each other (Leach and Sabatier, 2005) and the (in)consistency of learning (Moyson, 2017). The original intuition of 'Pinching Ideas' has supported a whole sub-field on policy design, which is explicit about the aim of drawing on how explanations of policy learning to design governance architectures (Eliadis, Hill and Howlett, 2005; Howlett, 2010).

Or, take the organizational and managerial lens. Grounded in organizational theory, authors like Metcalfe (1993) have taken learning as solution to the problem of triggering mechanisms of innovation in the public sector. Again, we have continuity: in the early 1980s. Etheredge and Short (1983) had spoken of 'governmental learning' to describe the rise in governmental sophistication, intelligence and analytical capacity (Etheredge and Short, 1983, pp. 77–8). Today, the learning perspective on public organizations is a lively field (Easterby-

Smith and Lyles, 2011). For example, in her work on innovation policies, Susana Borrás (2011) links learning types to organizational capacity (see also Zito and Schout [2009] on learning and governance). Silvia Gherardi (1999) has raised a critical voice on how public organizations self-describe themselves as learning organizations to camouflage the politics of controversial choices or simply silence criticisms of what the organization does. A similar take on the manipulation of language as learning appears in Thomas Alam's analysis of the European Commission (2007) – arguably, this is a critical lens on learning as solution to the problem of manipulating reputation and muting controversial political choice.

Other important disciplines explicitly embraced by political scientists in the field include cognitive psychology, evolutionary and experimental economics, and adult education. Sociology and network theory and models have provided fundamental tools to understand learning. In conclusion, the scene is set for interdisciplinary work. Experiments have become a classic way to ascertain whether learning follows the pathways hypothesized by political scientists, or other, intriguing but less explored micro and organizational mechanisms. Kamkhaji and Radaelli (2017) draw on cognitive psychology and experimental economics to argue that there are empirical instances where change causes learning, instead of learning causing change. They show that contingency and surprise change behaviour without updating of beliefs. First actors change, then, when the right feedback conditions appear, they sit down and make sense of what they have done, hence they learn afterwards.

### **Mechanisms and normative implications**

The assumption that learning is a 'good thing' is implicit in much of the policy learning literature. But, learning is not always desirable. We can think of individuals and organizations learning something that is dysfunctional and / or normatively unacceptable in terms of democratic accountability or legitimacy (see *Policy and Politics* special issue on policy learning and policy failure, Dunlop 2017a; Howlett and Nair, 2017).

Normative implications are also important because if we want to design learning architectures (see the upper part of the tree in Figure 1.1) or simply make recommendations we do not want to promote 'bad learning'. With this in mind, Dunlop and Radaelli's (2013) learning framework has been extended to identify the conditions for efficient learning in each of the four modes (Dunlop, 2017b; Dunlop and Radaelli, under review). Exactly because of the different policy process-related contexts, different modes of learning have particular triggers or

hindrances. So, for example, learning through bargaining requires repeated interactions, low barriers to contract and mechanisms of preference aggregation. To offer another example, in epistemic learning, expertise is key to problem-solving, but governments should design their advisory committees and special commissions of inquiry by recruiting a broad range of experts. The risk of excluding the next Galileo Galilei in a Ptolemaic committee is always there. At the same time, there are specific hindrances. Learning through bargaining stops when the winners are always the same, and scientific scepticism will dilute work of experts in governmental bodies.

Outlining the conditions for functionality and dysfunctionality of policy learning may also inspire policy actors to change their behaviour. Policy experts can achieve more effective engagement and impact by adopting a mode of engagement to match the context in which they operate (Dunlop, 2014; see also Pielke Jr, 2007).

To sum up, the policy learning literature has evolved from the contributions of the founding fathers towards a broad theoretical lens on the policy process. The theoretical lens has evolved from four – broadly defined – themes. These are learning and democratic governance; the designing of governance tools to enable policy learning; the link between learning and policy change; and, learning as an element of other theories of the policy process, such as the advocacy coalition framework. The themes are based on the conceptual foundations, such as the different modes and types of learning, as well as the micro-foundations in the learning-bathtub. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that some problems remain in current theories of learning. First, the link between policy change and learning is not yet fully theorized and the problem of establishing causality empirically still looms large in the field. Notably, there needs to be more systematic theory-building on how different types and modes of learning are linked to policy change. Second, learning remains prone to conceptual stretching because researchers have used the term in very different ways. In evolving towards a fully-fledged theory of the policy, it is important to distinguish learning clearly from other concepts that are relevant to the analysis of public policy, such as decision-making.

### **The contributions of this volume**

This book offers insights into the various branches and the top of the learning tree as well as new empirical results. In starting from the different branches of the learning tree, the chapters assemble an overview of the conceptual, methodological, and empirical variety of how learning

has been used in the literature. What is more, the book chapters advance the research in the field of learning empirically, methodologically, and theoretically. Therefore, the book is interesting for a large readership. Students and researchers who are new to learning will get an overview of the breadth of the topic. Readers who are already experts in the field will discover new empirical findings, methodological possibilities, and theoretical innovations to the study of learning.

### **Mapping and empirical application of learning modes and types**

Firstly, the book contributes to the literature by demonstrating the conceptual breadth of the learning literature. Thereby, the chapters employ older and more recent ways of how researchers used the concept of learning for political analysis.

Classic contributions to the public policy literature mostly point to learning types (for example, instrumental learning, political learning, blocked learning) to explain the link between learning and policy change. Some of the book chapters use these types of learning and apply them to new empirical materials. For example, chapter 8 by Bendaoud demonstrates instances of instrumental learning taking the example of low income housing, in three Canadian provinces. In chapter 11, Trein points to the relationship of policy (problem-solving-oriented) learning and political (power-oriented) learning, in a comparative social policy analysis but develops an explicit hypothesis of why different degrees of ‘problem-pressure’ come along with different forms of learning and policy change. The contribution by Vagionaki, chapter 9, refers to blocked learning and shows how learning is blocked (or trapped) due to the domestic features of the political system.

More recently, Dunlop and Radaelli proposed four modes of learning in order to advance learning conceptually and to better ground the study of learning in theory. The modes of learning – epistemic learning, reflexive learning, learning by bargaining and hierarchical learning (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013) – aim at inserting learning into different modes of democratic governance. Some of the contributions put these learning types to an empirical analysis. Notably, in chapter 7 Daviter’s analyses the relation of epistemic and reflexive learning, taking the example of EU biotechnology policy. Chapters 3 and 4, Rietig and Fasois propose yet other forms of learning. Rietig assesses experiential, factual, and constructive learning in the process of European climate and energy policy making. Fasois demonstrates how pension reforms in Belgium are a case of creative appropriation in the learning process.

### **Research design and method regarding the analysis of learning**

The second contribution of the book is that the chapters demonstrate already established and new research designs and methodological perspectives. For example, learning can be either the dependent or the independent variable for scientific analysis. In the chapters by Fasois (chapter 4), Polman (chapter 6), Stevens (chapter 5), and Vagionaki (chapter 9) learning is the dependent variable and the main object to be explained. Contrariwise, the chapters by Bendaoud (chapter 8), Helmdag and Kuitto (chapter 14), Legrand (chapter 10), Maggetti and Choer Moraes (chapter 13), and Künzler (chapter 12) use learning as an independent variable to explain policy change. Daviter (chapter 7) refers to learning as both a dependent and an independent variable, whereas for Rietig (chapter 3) it is an intervening and for Trein (chapter 11) a mediating factor in policy change.

The chapters also provide the reader with possible varieties concerning the comparative dimension of the research design. Learning can be analysed regarding single case studies of countries or policies (Daviter, chapter 7; Fasois, chapter 4; Legrand, chapter 10; Maggetti and Choer Moraes, chapter 13; Vagionaki, chapter 9), comparison of individuals in policy networks (Stevens, chapter 5), comparative policy case studies (Rietig, chapter 3), comparison of subnational units in federal states (Bendaoud, chapter 8; Künzler, chapter 12), country comparisons (Helmdag and Kuitto, chapter 14), and the comparative analyses of policies nested in countries (Trein, chapter 11). Furthermore, the contributions demonstrate a broad variety of the methods that can be used to analyse data on policy learning. Most of the chapters use qualitative analysis to retrace learning, i.e. they base their arguments on the reading of documents and interviews. Nevertheless, some employ other methods such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (Künzler, chapter 12), statistical error correction models according to the standards of policy diffusion analyses (Helmdag and Kuitto, chapter 14), as well as network analysis, notably exponential random graph models (Stevens, chapter 5).

### **Empirical and theoretical connection to different strands of political science research**

Third, the edited volume provides the reader with a selection of different empirical examples that correspond to the examples researchers have employed for the study of policy learning in different countries. Furthermore, the chapters present the theoretically relevant literatures that refer – explicitly or implicitly – to learning in political analysis.



Regarding their empirical focus, some of the chapters focus on the literature on European studies and the reference to learning therein. Precisely, the chapters by Daviter (chapter 7) and Rietig (chapter 3) examine learning in the context of policymaking at the European level, namely regulation of biofuels and energy policy. Other chapters focus on vertical learning in the EU context, such as the connection between the European Semester and pension reforms in Belgium (Fasois, chapter 4), the Open Method of Coordination's influence on policymaking regarding poverty in Greece (Vagionaki, chapter 9), as well as on the feedback from domestic implementing agencies to the European level regarding the Common Agricultural Policy (Polman, chapter 6). The second broad empirical focus of papers stems from the fields of social policy and public health. The chapter by Helmdag and Kuitto (chapter 14) covers learning in the field of active labour market policy across OECD countries. In chapter 8, Bendaoud examines low income housing in Canada. Trein compares learning regarding welfare delivery, minimum wage policy and employment policies during the economic and financial crisis (chapter 11). Eventually, the analysis by Künzler analyses learning regarding tobacco advertising bans (chapter 12). The third broad empirical focus of the chapters extends to the transnational arena beyond the EU. Maggetti and Choer Moraes (chapter 13) demonstrate how learning affected the adoption of International Investment Treaties in Brazil and, in chapter 10, Legrand analyses the politics of regulating multinational corporations, in Australia.

From a theoretical perspective, chapters show readers to how different strands of the political science and public policy literature – in addition to the learning literature itself – have used learning as an analytical tool to understand dynamics of policy and politics.

1. To start, some of the chapters point to learning in the Europeanization context. Notably, the pieces uncover successful and unsuccessful learning in soft (Fasois, chapter 4; Vagionaki, chapter 9) and hard (Polman, chapter 6) policy tools in the Europeanization of national policies in European Union member states.
2. Second, two chapters refer to the comparative political economy and comparative politics literature and demonstrate the role of learning in the social policy reforms of the last decades, notably reforms related to containing costs and privatize services. Precisely, the pieces provide new empirical evidence (Bendaoud, chapter 8) as well as new theoretical insights concerning the way of how actors learn in these contexts (Trein, chapter 11).

3. Third, one chapter discusses learning in the context of the collaborative innovation literature (Ansell and Torfing, 2014). Precisely, the piece shows how individuals in a public administration network do (and do not) learn from one another (Stevens, chapter 5).
4. Fourth, one chapters points to learning in the policy diffusion context and introduces the reader to the policy diffusion literature and discusses and provides new empirical evidence for how learning can be analysed in a diffusion context (Kuitto and Helmdag, chapter 14).
5. Fifth, one chapter provides connects learning to the Multiple Streams Framework and demonstrates how learning can influence agenda setting in the context of tobacco control policy (Künzler, chapter 12).
6. Sixth, the chapter by Maggetti and Choer Moraes (chapter 13) points to delayed learning in the international political economy literature, notably concerning bilateral investment treaties.
7. Finally, the chapter by Legrand chapter 10) analyses learning in policy transfer – a literature that is historically related to learning – regarding Australian regulations on multinational corporations.

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<sup>i</sup> In the mid-2000s, Professor Sanderson moved from the Policy Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University to become director of the Scottish Government's Corporate Analytical Services Division.