

T01W09 / The causes and effects of policy learning: Building an interdisciplinary theory

Topic : T01 / Policy Process , Policy & Politics, Policymaking, Policy implementation

Chair : Claire Dunlop (University of Exeter)

Second Chair : Stéphane Moyson (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Third Chair : Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Learning is essential to public policy. The policy process is also a process where knowledge is created, assimilated, assembled, and diffused across time and space. Recently, we have made considerable progress on the causes and consequences of policy learning, hence this is a good moment in the development of the field to be bold and attend to the construction of a theory of policy learning. Basically, the foundations of such a theory invite us to reflect and sharpen our tools for the explanation of the emergence of policy learning and the political consequences of learning. At the outset, we have challenging questions raised by the causality of learning: why does learning happen this way or another way, or does not happen at all? Can we design the policy process so that learning mechanisms take place in desirable ways?

We know that learning is not a monolith: actors process knowledge in different learning modes, and each of these modes requires its own explanation. At the same time, we need to be more precise, open and systematic in dissecting the normative dimension of learning.

Looking at the consequences, learning about policy is not always functional. It depends on what is learned exactly, by whom and in what context. Learning can increase power asymmetries and reduce the legitimacy of public policy – ‘learning for whom’?. Or we can learn the wrong lesson, from the wrong teachers, with skewed diffusion of beliefs, with consequences that decrease the quality of public policy. Thinking of outcomes, we need to tackle questions about the process which leads actors to select a different view of how things happen (‘learning that’) and what courses of action should be taken (‘learning how’). The field has to open up to questions of legitimacy and democratic quality, then re-connecting power and learning research agendas.

Any strong discipline, framework, or theory emerged from the right articulation of existing bodies of work and their application to new questions and/or new contexts. Recent studies have relied on various theoretical foundations to look at policy learning and contribute to the emergence of policy learning as an autonomous theory of the policy process. Others have made progress on learning within existing theories of the policy process, such as the advocacy coalitions framework, spatial models of diffusion, and the narrative policy framework. Most interestingly, we have seen political scientists getting increasingly curious and able to use the findings of cognitive psychology and evolutionary-experimental economics to explain some key variables at work in learning processes. The same applies to the input provided by different strands of sociology, adult education theories, ethnography and other fields in the social sciences.

In short, the establishment of policy learning as a theory, i.e. a privileged lens to explain policy processes, decisions and outcomes, is very exciting at this moment in time, but it is still work in progress. And we need help from disciplines other than political science.

Any strong framework, or lens, or theory emerges from the right articulation of existing bodies of work and their application to new questions and/or new contexts. For this workshop we welcome political science-inspired papers on the micro-foundations of learning, its organizational dimensions, and the macro consequences of learning, in single policy domains or across countries and policies. But we also warmly invite submissions from colleagues willing to open up their analytical vision to the cognitive and behavioral sciences, as well as sociology and other social sciences. We do not privilege any type of methods or approach, although we obviously care about sound methodology, transparency in reporting findings, and the quality of research design. The papers will be both empirical and conceptual, the important element being that they contribute to cross-fertilization and to the construction of policy learning theory.

ABSTRACT

Learning is essential to public policy. The policy process is also a process where knowledge is created, assimilated, assembled, and diffused across time and space. This does not necessarily mean that learning

is always functional, or hasn't got undesirable consequences in terms of power and inequalities. Controlling ideas means controlling uncertainty and meanings. In other words, we need to answer questions about the process which leads actors to select a different view of how things happen ('learning that') and what courses of action should be taken ('learning how').

Equally challenging is the set of questions raised by the causality of learning: why does learning happen this way or another way, or does not happen at all? Can we design the policy process so that learning takes place in desirable ways? Finally, learning is not a monolith: actors process knowledge in different learning modes, and each of these modes requires its own explanation.

The establishment of policy learning as a theory, i.e. a privileged lens to explain policy processes, decisions and outcomes, is still work in progress. Any strong theoretical framework emerges from the right articulation of existing bodies of work and their application to new questions and/or new contexts. For this workshop we welcome political science-inspired papers on the micro-foundations of learning, its organizational dimensions, and the macro consequences of learning, in single policy domains or across countries and policies. But we also warmly invite submissions from colleagues willing to open up their analytical vision to the cognitive and behavioral sciences, as well as sociology and other social sciences. We do not privilege any type of methods or approach, although we obviously care about sound methodology, transparency in reporting findings, and the quality of research design. The papers will be both empirical and conceptual, the important element being that they contribute to cross-fertilization and to the construction of policy learning theory.

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Session 1 Introduction & Measurement of policy learning (1/2)

Tuesday, June 26th 10:15 to 12:15 (Posvar Hall - 3701)

Modes of policy learning as causal mechanisms: coming up with a “policy learning measuring instrument” for qualitative research

Jonathan Kamkhaji (European University Institute)

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Session 2 Measurement of policy learning (2/2) & Micro to micro conditions of policy learning

Tuesday, June 26th 13:45 to 17:00 (Posvar Hall - 3701)

Policy learning: A systematic review of measurement practices and a research agenda

Pierre Squevin (University of Oslo)

Stéphane Moyson (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Policy learning in collaborative networks: the role of social embeddedness

Cécile Riche (Université catholique de Louvain)

LEARNING AND FOUR CHAINS OF BUREAUCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Claire Dunlop (University of Exeter)

Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)

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Session 3 Macro to micro conditions of policy learning

Wednesday, June 27th 09:00 to 12:15 (Posvar Hall - 3701)

Learning about Pathway Mixes: Improving Policy Implementation Through A Multi-stakeholder Forward Looking Problem Oriented Protocol

Benjamin Cashore (National University of Singapore)

Iben Nathan (University of Copenhagen)

Building Capacity for Policy Learning: Experimenting, Evaluating and Engaging

Susana Borrás (Copenhagen Business School)

Learning “That” or Learning “How”: theorizing processes of policy and political learning in Canadian provincial energy policy 2006-2016.

Heather Millar (University of New Brunswick)

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Session 4 International dimension of policy learning

Wednesday, June 27th 13:45 to 17:00 (Posvar Hall - 3701)

Learning in Multilevel and Transnational Climate Governance

Katharine Rietig (Newcastle University)

Revisiting policy learning and transfer with insights from the South

Osmany Porto de Oliveira (Universidade Federal de São Paulo)

National “Infertility Awareness” Campaigns and the Moral Dimensions of Policymaking on Procreative Knowledge

Shelley Grant (Planned Parenthood of the Great Northwest and Hawaii, Univ. of Wash. Seattle)

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Session 5 Success and failure in/of policy learning

Thursday, June 28th 09:00 to 12:15 (Posvar Hall - 3701)

Is there a right place for policy learning? Evidences from the implementation of two 'ICT based' programs in Italy

Giancarlo Vecchi (Politecnico di Milano)

Marco Di Giulio (Università degli Studi di Genova)

Does the evaluative perspective support policy learning?

Mita Marra (University of Naples)

The Policy Learner's Gaze: Between the Mirror and the Horizon

Amanda Wolf (Victoria University of Wellington)

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Session 6 General discussion: Key lessons of the workshop and avenues for future research

Thursday, June 28th 13:45 to 16:00 (Posvar Hall - 3701)

Conclusion

Claire Dunlop (University of Exeter)

Stéphane Moyson (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)