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Policy Learning

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Dunlop, C.A. and Radaelli, C.M. 'Policy Learning', in progress for Badie, B., Berg-Schlosser, D. and Morlino, L. (eds) *Sage Handbook of Political Science: A Global Perspective* London: Sage

Introduction

Learning is a fascinating topic for political science. Whether we look at comparative politics, public policy, or governance, we find that all these three main fields of political science are concerned with learning – but in different ways.

In comparative politics, the cross-national diffusion of institutions affects central banks, constitutions, forms of government, independent regulators, anti-corruption authorities, and so on. This raises a number of questions: do countries make a genuine effort to learn before they import models? How much do they edit and translate the templates they import to tailor them to the domestic context? Methodologically, the research questions are about indicators that un-ambiguously discriminate between learning and other mechanisms. An important distinction is made between cross-national adoption (of say, a Parliamentary form of government) and convergence in outcomes, and how to reduce bias in the measurement of convergence. At the roots of this methodological debate is the concept of spatial inter-dependence – that is, the fact that the choices made by country A depend on the choices made by other countries. Learning is one possible way to tackle these questions, but it seems to presuppose too many conditions that can be empirically absent in certain instances of spatial

inter-dependence. By way of illustration, a country may be spatially inter-dependent on another because of sanctions or conditions imposed by another country or an international donor. In these cases, the process of diffusion is not supported by mechanisms of learning.

Public policy analysis is also concerned with the explanation and measurement of policy convergence (Plümper and Schneider, 2009). But it has its additional research questions about how much policy makers learn from their experience with previous policy choices. Do they evaluate existing policies before they embark on new ones? Do they learn about what works in systematic, evidence-based ways? Or, is evidence-based policy severely constrained by the search for consensus and ambiguity in the policy process (Cairney, 2012)?

Finally, there is the question of whether different categories of actors in the policy process have the same motivation and approaches to policy learning (Radaelli, 2005). It is reasonable to assume that a politician is attracted to learning, above all, about features of a policy that increases popularity (including announcing new policy programs that will never be completed or policies that will not be sustainable beyond the short term). Instead, for a bureaucrat, it can be more attractive to learn about how to align reforms with standard operating procedures or with the goal of expanding the mission and budget of a particular office. In the end, we need to be explicit about the hypotheses we make about the preferences or interests of actors, and which actors matter the most in the policy process.

What about the connection between learning and governance? Here, learning can be theorized as mechanism of governance – but with important variations. Scholars working on reflexive or experimental governance (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010) point to deep-learning as mechanism leading to the modification of actors' preferences. Here 'deep' means that actors change their preferences through social interaction. They reflect on what they really want and adjust their interests on the basis of what they have learned. This approach is clearly

associated with major ontologies of international relations and comparative politics, above all, social constructivism.

Another way to assemble governance and learning has been spawned by at least a century of studies on technocracy (Radaelli, 1999) and, since the 1990s, epistemic communities (Haas, 1990; Haas, 1992). The normative implications of various analytical models based on actors that supposedly facilitate learning are different. In any case, they share a focus on a special category of actors who, because of their professional knowledge and/or scientific credentials (leaving aside theocracies who are a type of their own), have special legitimation in the policy process or in government. For some reasons of an 'epistemic' or 'technocratic' appeal, someone somewhere is listening to experts and the lessons they teach. In this model, the association between learning and governance does not hinge on a type of social interaction, but on the social certification of special actors.

We find a third connection between governance and learning in bargaining/exchange models of governance of all sorts, from Charles Lindblom (1965) to Elinor Ostrom (1990), where inter-dependent actors learn by playing together, by exchanging information, by reacting to the moves of other players, and so on. Governance as bargaining does not necessarily have positive properties – the players can keep on playing without finding the solution to their collective action problem. But bargaining is potentially a big engine of learning as a cognitive mechanism, no matter what the final policy outcome is.

There is a fourth and final association in governance models based on hierarchy, rule-bound behavior and compliance. There is hierarchical governance in every society, because rules, courts, and limits are essential to governance. Where is learning here? Learning lies in the mechanisms that allow actors to gain information about what compliance is, how often it is detected, and whether it is fueled by norms or by the fear of sanctions.

To sum up, then, comparative politics, public policy, and governance present some partially overlapping lenses and research questions that revolve around learning – more precisely, for the scope and ambition of this chapter, policy learning. It's not just policy analysts that are interested in policy learning. Given this wide audience, we need to explain what policy learning is, how it is studied empirically, and whether its normative properties are desirable or not. We will do that following an analytical and historiographical path through the scholarship and conclude with the state of play with current research, issues of measurement and methods, and the questions that will most likely dominate research in the near future.

The classics

To capture policy learning, we need to be clear on definitional issues, causal mechanisms, and outcomes. Comprehensive reviews include Dunlop and Radaelli (2013), Dunlop et al. (2018), Freeman (2006), Heikkila and Gerlak (2013), and Moyson and Scholten (2018). We have to assemble causality systematically, in terms of micro-foundations, learning in organizations, and how group learning becomes policy learning and, sometimes, social learning (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2017). On outcomes, the literature has often associated processes of learning with policy change (Moyson et al., 2017). Yet, there are many more possible outcomes, for example, constellations of actors can learn but their policy choice does not necessarily change, and some involve normative issues that haven't always been prominent in the field.

Glancing at literature with a historical perspective, we find immediately different conceptual approaches to learning. True, most authors seem to converge on the basic definition of policy learning as updating an of knowledge and beliefs about public policy (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013). In turn, updating is either the result of social interaction amongst policy actors, personal-organizational experience, or the provision of new or

different evidence. Of course, it can also result from various combinations of the three. Yet, over the decades, political scientists have approached this broad notion of learning with substantive differences. It suffices to recall the contributions of John Dewey, Harold Lasswell, Karl Deutsch, Charles Lindblom, Herbert Simon, and, in the 1970s, Hugh Heclo.

Historically, the foundations of policy learning were grounded in pragmatism. Dewey's pragmatism was not just about 'what works'. It provided insights into an evolutionary perspective on learning. In turn, this perspective leads to a vision of governance. In fact, Dewey's pragmatism provided political scientists with three generative conditions for evolutionary learning (Ansell, 2011: 11–12). The first is the problem-driven perspective, where both evidence and our priors are probed, subjecting both knowledge and values to continuous revision. Hence, this definition of learning as problem-solving is not mechanistic. It is extremely open, creative, and oriented to discovery. The second condition is reflexivity. It digs deep into the creative component of problem-solving by showing how problem-solving itself generates blocks of knowledge and competences for more sophisticated approaches to the collective problems of the future. To achieve that, constellations of actors must be capable of reflecting on the meaning and trajectory of their experience (Ansell, 2011: 11). Thirdly, in pragmatism, learning is also deliberation. Key to this third dimension is communication (Ansell, 2011: 12). Taken together, problem-solving, reflexivity, and communication produce evolutionary learning in recursive social processes. The emphasis on communication led Dewey, in his 1927 classic *The Public and its Problems*, reprinted in 2012, to argue for the re-connection of 'the public' with collective problem-solving. This was for him the essence of a society based on communication – Dewey wanted to turn the Great Society into the Great Community (Dewey, 2012: 141). To achieve this, he envisioned 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).

This ambitious approach, engaged with fundamental normative and empirical issues of governance, is of course appealing to comparative politics as well as policy analysts working on individual policy sectors. A similar ambition is found in Harold Lasswell: '[O]ne thing Lasswell learned from the pragmatists, and Dewey in particular, was that inquiry requires community' (Torgerson, 1992: 231). Here, the definitional aspect of learning stresses inquiry as a collective, society-wide process of search and improvement.

Another way to think about learning, bearing in mind society and governance, is Deutsch's – in this case learning is defined as a cybernetic issue. In cybernetic systems, the capabilities of core institutions are key. 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: 41). A learning system possesses 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. Learning is about assembling resources when something changes and about managing 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: 88). Therefore, learning does not take actors 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 – where the rabbit re-adjusts direction continuously as new changes and opportunities arise. Applied to public policy, this is a definition of learning as on-going improvement. Learning is

about adapting and transforming policies to follow the search for a new equilibria of a zig-zagging, open society. Yet again, we find in Deutsch a macro orientation that is concerned with both empirical and normative issues, with policy as well as governance. There is a touch of utopian vision that is characteristic of these giants in the field.

Turning to Charles Lindblom, his conceptual approach is more empirical, especially in terms of dissecting organizational behavior (Lindblom, 1959, 1965). His approach is not utopian although it is still a vision. It is not utopian because the essence of the policy process is bargaining amongst partisan actors. These actors mutually adjust and learn how to cooperate thanks to bargaining. Here communication fuels bargaining, instead of being a property of deliberation, like in Dewey. Through bargaining, actors reveal their preferences. They learn about the strategies, intentions, volitions, and preferences of other actors. In processes of exchange that mimic the market, actors accumulate usable knowledge (Lindblom and Cohen, 1979). This conceptual approach chimes with Herbert Simon's proposition that actors have limited rationality and pursue 'satisficing' solutions instead of utility maximization (Simon, 1947; see also March and Simon, 1958). Simon opened the door to the world of heuristics, biases, framing, and nudging. These concepts provide a realistic account of how partisan mutual adjustment ends up in functional and desirable forms of learning. The Lindblom-Simon approach has indeed paved the way for today's interest in cognitive psychology and experimental social sciences. The legacy of Lindblom and Simon is also a vision: partisan mutual adjustment is, in fact, also 'the' model of a pluralist, open democracy. It comes close to Popper's open society because it does not pre-determine the public good. The latter is not fixed by intellectual cogitation. Instead, it results from conflict, different opinions, and, ultimately, governance-as-exchange.

In our historical excursus we can now jump to the 1970s to find another fundamental way to connect policy learning with governance. This time the connection with governance

comes for the dualism between powering and puzzling. Hugh Heclo identified learning as the polar opposite of power mechanisms. More precisely, learning is the mechanism of social problem-solving under conditions of uncertainty. Powering is simply impossible if actors cannot calculate the likely payoffs of alternative courses of action because of uncertainty. We are still somewhat in Deutsch's zigzagging territory. In fact, for Heclo, learning as puzzling is a process that takes place in a maze. But – he carries on – 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: 308).

The evolution of the field in the 1990s

Although our periodization of the literature is inevitably idiosyncratic, in the 1990s there was a turning point. These approaches are definitively conversant with contemporary political science, for example, institutionalism and theories of the policy process. They are less utopian and less visionary than the ones we have just discussed, although they gain in granularity and precision. The normative tension of the early phase is perhaps not lost, but it appears muted, often implicit, and, in some cases, absent.

In short, the late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed the production of *fundamental* articles on policy learning. These are the articles that are still used in class today to introduce students to this topic. Accordingly, to report on their core propositions is not just an exercise in the intellectual history of the discipline. Let us start from a fascinating feature of the first article we review in this section, by Paul A. Sabatier (1987). In capturing the essence of the (then) last 15 years of scholarship, Sabatier talks about the whole of policy analysis and its

utilization as a colossal social exercise in collective learning. For Sabatier, policy analysis is about producing knowledge and using evidence to support policy change. However, he found that this was a simplistic, perhaps romantic, way to think about how policy analysis is used and how learning happens. He noted that knowledge is not deployed in policy arenas like in university classes. It is produced, mobilized, evoked, but not necessarily with the intention of listening to policy analysts 'speaking the truth to power' (Wildavsky, 1979). The utilization of policy analysis is instead filtered by the dynamics of contemporary, adversarial politics: 'policy analysis is often used in an advocacy fashion to justify organizational positions and interests' (Sabatier 1987: 650). We could not be further from utopia.

This realistic approach to how information, evidence, and, ultimately, policy analysis are metabolized by adversarial politics led Sabatier to develop a theory of the policy process – the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) – based on the following propositions: policy sectors are defined by the competition between different advocacy coalitions (in stable sectors there may be just one coalition, otherwise there are two or more); these coalitions cannot be reduced to political parties, instead they assemble different actors, including media, civil society organizations, pressure groups, experts, and politicians; the coalitions are kept together by their beliefs; these beliefs follow a structure, from the higher level, deep core normative beliefs down to policy core beliefs and secondary policy beliefs; the normative core is impermeable to evidence.

Where is learning, then? Learning occurs when there are moderate levels of conflict between coalitions, and actors such as think tanks provide a forum where the different coalitions can probe their policy beliefs and change them over time. Yet, the impact of these lessons is restricted to the adaptation of the secondary aspects of their belief systems – policy instruments and their settings (in Hall's terms, see below). More fundamental paradigmatic changes in belief systems cannot happen through coalition interaction alone. Rather, this deep

policy-oriented learning is possible only when there is a shock from outside the policy sectors, for example a big electoral change or a global economic crisis.

With Sabatier, we find the first explicit conceptual approach that sheds light on both learning and the conditions that affects its depth. In terms of research design, his advocacy coalition framework is robust because it does not censor an important dimension of learning, that is the absence of deep learning. The 'zero value' of the variable (absence of learning) is as important as the others. Sabatier's original ACF article is a turning point for another reason. It makes a powerful case emphasizing beliefs rather than interests. This framework uses belief systems, rather than 'interests', as its focus because beliefs are more inclusive and more verifiable. Interest models must still identify a set of means and performance indicators for goal attainment; this set of interests/goals, perceived causal relationships, and perceived parameter states constitute a 'belief system' (Sabatier, 1987: 663). In a sense, Sabatier carries on and refines Heclo's (1974) intuition that power does not tell the full story of policy change. But instead of juxtaposing powering to puzzling, he draws on the dualism of interests and beliefs, and chooses the latter.

Sabatier's emphasis on beliefs takes us into the field of ideational politics. It is revealing that the author who is closely associated with the study of ideas in politics, Peter Hall, wrote his most important articles on the topic of policy learning (Hall, 1986, 1993). With Hall, policy learning becomes a cornerstone of historical institutionalism, thus situating this concept at the core of contemporary political science. Hall starts from the dependent variable: policy change. He argues that there are three types of policy change (Hall, 1986). First-order change involves changes of the setting of policy instruments, for example a regulatory standard on a chemical product is raised. The second-order change occurs when policy-makers turn from one instrument to another, for example from command-and-control regulation of chemicals to regulation via the disclosure of information about emissions. In

rare but historically very important moments, societies can change the ideational foundations of their policies, and therefore switch the overall goals of policy, not just the instrumentation. This is the third-order change. For Hall this third level of paradigmatic change (dependent variable) is explained by society-wide policy learning. Hence, the third-level change is only possible when learning involves audiences and actors beyond the bureaucracies, the elected politicians in charge of a given sector, and the experts that provide knowledge and advice. It is a phenomenon that involves the whole policy worldview in a given society. The examples made by Hall are taken from economic policy, specifically the change from a Keynesian way of thinking about state intervention in the economy to monetarism.

Sabatier would object to Hall's argument that intellectual change in public policy is not a process of one paradigm taking the place of another. There may be a contest of two paradigms operating in a society at the same time, with the support of advocacy coalitions that compete. Another difference is that, for Sabatier, the scope of learning as determinant of policy change is limited to shocks external to the policy sectors and to a situation with a moderate level of conflict with policy fora, whilst for Hall, social learning is the main explanatory factor that takes a society from one paradigm to another.

Neither in Hall nor in Sabatier do we find an explicit normative proposition about learning. Judging from their examples, policy learning (including paradigmatic learning) is not necessarily leading to a more efficient set of policies or to social improvement. Similarly, policy learning may lead or not lead to a degradation of democratic standards. Out are the normative propositions of their predecessors – in is an analysis that is value-neutral.

Other articles defined the intellectual status of policy learning in the 1990s, but this time from with the ambition of dissecting learning. This is a switch to learning as the object of inquiry, or dependent variable. Essential in this switch is the aim to unpack the dependent variable and find ways to measure it. A common way to unpack a concept before measuring it

is to think about types. Unsurprisingly then, the 1990s were also a decade of studies on types of learning. Peter May (1992) assembled a large amount of the literature available at that time to theorize about three types of learning: instrumental, social, and political. Instrumental learning is about evidence on the performance of policy problems, the viability of policy interventions, and how to design implementation. Social learning allows policy-makers to categorize a policy programme or the problem it is supposed to handle in novel ways. It often involves changing expectations about problems and changing policy goals. Political learning is about the political feasibility of certain reforms. It leads to a more sophisticated advocacy of a policy reform, based on the political awareness of political prospects.

Bennett and Howlett (1992) distinguish between government learning, lesson-drawing, and social learning. Their reasoning is powerful: a major problem with learning is measurement. How do we know that an actor or an organization has learned? Yet, progress in measurement has been hindered by conceptual confusion, not by the objective difficulty of the task at hand. Hence, we need to increase conceptual prevision. They carry on with these observations: '…the all-encompassing term 'policy learning' as it is often used at present can be seen to actually embrace three highly complex processes: learning about organizations, learning about programs, and learning about policies. This is one of the major reasons why this concept has resisted operationalization. For these reasons, we urge the re-conception of the three concepts of government learning, lesson-drawing and social learning to more accurately describe this complex process of collective puzzlement which is public policy-making' (Bennett and Howlett, 1992: 289).

Social learning is very much influenced by Hall's approach to policy paradigms. It is a mechanism of ideational shift that brings a society from one paradigm to another. Instead, government learning is not a wide social process. It is the more mundane process of governmental officers learning about policy processes and programs. Its outcome is

organizational change, not paradigmatic shift. The third type of change is about learning lessons from other countries. We have already introduced the concept of spatial interdependence in the introduction. In the 1990s, the main reference to lesson drawing was a set of studies carried out by Richard Rose (1991). As Rose (1991: 4) put it: 'confronted with common problems, policy-makers in cities, regional governments, and nations can learn from how their counterparts elsewhere respond. More than that, it raises the possibility that policy-makers can draw lessons that will help them deal better with their own problems'.

Rose went on to identify the scope of the conditions for the kind of lesson-drawing that genuinely improves on public policy, connecting with the normative dimension of the analysis. His focus on spatial inter-dependence is echoed by the broad range of studies on policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996) and policy diffusion (Dobbin et al., 2007; Simmons and Elkins, 2004; Shipan and Volden 2008; for a review see Graham et al., 2013). At the risk of over-simplification, we can say that policy transfer is concerned with qualitative studies of the transfer of one policy from one country or international organization to another country, whilst policy diffusion scholars tend to prefer large-n quantitative approaches (see also Marsh and Sharman, 2009 on the complementarity of the two). Transfer scholars have followed the trend in the study of learning to unpack concepts in types. Indeed, transfer has been unpacked as entirely voluntary, voluntary but driven by perceived necessity, supported by conditionality, or coercive (for the textbook treatment of policy transfer see chapter 12 of Cairney, 2012). They have provided evidence on the behavior of transfer agents like independent research institutes (Stone, 2017; Stone and Ladi, 2017), epistemic communities (Dunlop, 2009), and on the limited success, or in some cases failure, of policy transfer.

Diffusion scholars are interested in phenomena of global or clustered convergence (that means convergence amongst a family of countries with the same institutions or in a geographical area). Some qualitative studies have shown that diffusion is filtered by domestic

institutions, hence it does not lead to convergence (Radaelli, 2004). But as we said this field is predominantly quantitative. Indeed. quantitative studies of diffusion are particularly important for methods and research design (Gilardi, 2016). The judicious way to approach the field is to start from the concept of spatial inter-dependence, not convergence. In fact, units can be spatially inter-dependent even if the overall degree of convergence diminishes. Country A can respond to policies of country B, and therefore is influenced by the latter, by doing exactly the opposite of what B has done. In terms of designing causality, spatial inter-dependence sheds light on Galton's problem: the first person to open an umbrella when it rains does so because it is raining. The others may open the umbrella either because they emulate behavior or because they have felt the rain. In one case we have learning from evidence, in another emulation or herding.

This problem has implications for countries' response to economic crisis, earthquakes, and environmental problems – a similar response is not necessarily caused by diffusion as each unit may have come independently to the same policy response. The way to address this and other problems of causality in establishing the causes of diffusion has led to sophisticated approaches to measurement, including dyadic data and arguments pro and against fixed unit effects in estimation (Neumayer and Plümper, 2012; Plümper and Neumayer, 2010). Given the scope of our chapter, we mention that the approach of spatial inter-dependence has allowed political scientists to empirically separate policy learning from political learning. Gilardi (2010), in particular, has shown that policy-makers may be more attracted to features of policy reform that increase their probability of electoral success or popularity rather than to features that genuinely improve on policy performance. With a directed dyadic approach and multi-level methods applied to unemployment benefit retrenchment, Gilardi reveals the presence of conditional learning: policy makers learning selectively from the experience of

others, for example, ideology and party-political preferences make a difference in the way governments learn from each other.

Recent trends and perspectives

Since 2009, we found six journal special issues on policy learning – two on learning and transfer (Dolowitz, 2009; Evans, 2009), a third on learning at the organizational 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 et al., 2017), and a sixth volume exploring the nexus of policy learning and policy failure (Dunlop, 2017). With Philipp Trein, we edited a collection on the state of play in 2018 (Dunlop et al., 2018). What is the current excitement about, and what are the issues that policy learning scholars should address in future research?

First, these efforts in the field have been explicitly theory-oriented. This is a path where future research should definitively carry on. On the one hand, there has been work integrating the analysis of learning within Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework, hence focused on beliefs and the dynamics of policy change (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017: 151–154). Another theory of the policy process is the narrative policy framework. Within this framework, the efforts are directed towards the explanation of narrative learning (O'Bryan et al, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2017: 201–202). On the other hand, political scientists have drilled down on the causality of learning processes directly, without necessarily looking at learning with the aim of perfecting existing theories of the policy process. In an article in *Policy Studies Journal*, we have made the case for considering policy learning a theory of, or lens on, the policy process, rather than a component of the existing theories (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018a). The future will tell us about the value of this claim.

What is the causality of this learning theory, then? Heikkila and Gerlak (2013) design the causal mechanisms from individual to collective learning – taking into account both cognitive and behavioral features of the mechanisms at work. In Dunlop and Radaelli (2017), we draw on James Coleman's bath-tub to re-construct learning from the individual level, then discuss the individual-to-individual relationships, and finally aggregate from micro to macro. This work is important for the micro-foundations of learning – researchers should in the future embrace the findings of behavioral public policy. By way of illustration, Kamkhaji and Radaelli (2017) draw on cognitive psychology and experimental economics to explore the causality of learning and policy change in the Euro-crisis by making explicit assumptions in terms of micro-foundations. Under conditions of surprise and crisis, it is behavioral change that causes learning, instead of the inferential process of learning from evidence causing change in behavior. First actors change behavior by responding in novel ways to stimuli, then, when the right feedback conditions appear, they make sense of what they have done, hence they learn afterwards. It is a completely reversed order of the causal chain imagined by the classic studies on policy learning and change of the 1990s that we have reviewed above: instead of learning leading to change, we find change leading to learning. This suggests that the conjectures of political scientists on learning and change should always be checked empirically, by taking into consideration the results of experiments on how individuals behave in the real world.

Of course, the interest in micro-foundations is not entirely new. In the late-1980s, Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram (1988) re-discovered Herbert Simon in their article, 'Systematically Pinching Ideas', on heuristics (Schneider and Ingram, 1988). In the last 15 years or so, heuristics have featured yet again in studies of how coalitions relate to each other and the (in)consistency of learning. The original intuition of 'Pinching Ideas' is also featured

in the sub-field on policy design, which is explicit about the aim of drawing on explanations of policy learning to design governance architectures (Howlett, 2010).

A second strand has made progress on the nature of policy learning types or modes of learning. Instead of designing types in an ad hoc fashion, in our own work we derived the modes of learning from explanatory typologies (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013). Our argument is that the learning modes differ greatly depending on whether the policy process is epistemic, hierarchical, bargaining-oriented, or reflexive. The four-fold typology also allows us to explore what can go wrong with learning – as mentioned above, learning failures and the paradoxes of learning are an emerging theme in recent scholarship (Dunlop, 2017). Actors have to align their behavior to the prevalent characteristics of the learning type they are engaging with – otherwise there will be frustration and limited learning. To illustrate: 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 classic intuitions, such as Lindblom's partisan mutual adjustment, with more recent developments on the policy process, such as experimentalist governance (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2008). Ansell (2011) contributed to this thread by connecting learning to governance. Yet another way to explore learning and governance is via organizational theory. Susana Borrás (2011) links learning types to organizational capacity. Silvia Gherardi (1999) raised her 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.

Third, as mentioned above, there is interest in the failures of learning, in rejection of the assumption that policy learning is generally benevolent or in line with democratic governance

and its standards. Further, at the organizational level, learning can be dysfunctional.[1] Normative implications are fundamental for turning from empirical analysis to policy design.

Indeed, can policy-makers, societies and governments design policy learning architectures? This is certainly what Dewey had in mind, and what international organizations are after, with ambitious governance architectures like the Millennium Development Goals. Can institutions avoid 'bad learning' or 'learning the wrong lesson'? In our work, we made proposals that are preliminary to this step of design. We argued that learning mechanisms come with a set of hindrances and triggers. Hence, designers should consider both triggers, to facilitate learning, and the possible hindrances or blockages to the process (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018b). For example, Lindblomian learning through bargaining requires triggers such as 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 present. At the same time, there are specific hindrances. Learning through bargaining stops when the winners are always the same, and scientific skepticism will dilute the work of experts in governmental bodies.

A suite of important research questions is now available for further research. First, the causality of policy change and learning is today a field where discussions are informed by interdisciplinary theoretical claims and supporting evidence. No final proposition has gained prominence yet because learning and change are causally connected in different ways, depending on whether we experiment with conditions of acute political and economic crisis or more stable conditions. Second, although we have made progress with conditional learning

[1] On these issues, see the *Policy and Politics* special issue on policy learning and policy failure (Dunlop, 2017).

and learning types, there is still uncertainty on how to measure learning. We observe phenomena that one can plausibly explain with learning, but we do not know how to exclude other alternative rival mechanisms on the basis of un-ambiguous evidence. The step from concept formation to operationalization and indicators of learning will most likely require a focused approach, depending on the specific research questions of the sub-field or whether we are talking about diffusion across countries or learning in a given bureaucracy. It is equally possible that others will find the search for measurement at least, in part, elusive and will move into other ways of corroborating claims and arguments, for example, following social epistemologies of interpretivism and critical realism (see Freeman, 2006, 2007). Third, the whole set of normative and design questions can now be tackled by connecting policy learning to theories of governance and public philosophy.

Notes

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