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Abstract:

This paper reviews the policy learning literature in political science. In recent years, the number of publications on learning in the political realm increased dramatically. Researchers have focused on how policymakers and administrators adapt policies based on learning processes or experiences. Thereby, learning has been discussed in very different ways. Authors have referred to learning in the context of ideas, understood as deeply held beliefs, and, as change and adaptation of policy instruments. Two other strands of literature have taken into consideration learning, namely the diffusion literature and research on transfer, which put forward learning to understand who learns from whom and what. Opposed to these views, political learning emphasizes the adaptation of new strategies by policymakers over the transfer of knowledge or broad ideas. In this approach, learning occurs due to the failure of existing policies, increasing problem pressure, scientific innovations, or a combination of these elements.

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1. Introduction

This paper reviews the policy learning literature in political science. In recent years, the number of publications on learning in the political realm increased dramatically. Researchers have focused on how policymakers and administrators adapt policies based on learning processes or experiences. Thereby, learning has been discussed in very different ways. Firstly, authors have referred to learning in the context of ideas, understood as deeply held beliefs and paradigms on how to make policies. Secondly, and closely related to this, another strand of literature has focused on policy learning as change and adaptation of policy instruments. Thirdly, the diffusion literature has put forward learning to understand who learns from whom and what. Fourth, and quite similar to the diffusion literature, works on policy transfer aim at better understanding how governments and administrators learn from one another, albeit based on more qualitative research designs. Opposed to the first four views, political learning emphasizes the adaptation of new strategies by policymakers over the transfer of knowledge or broad ideas. In this view, learning occurs due to the failure of existing policies, increasing problem pressure, scientific innovations, or a combination of these elements.

Learning has been a classical issue on the agenda of political analysts for a long time. For example Karl Deutsch (Deutsch, 1966), Herbert Simon (1947, 1957) as well as Hugh Heclo (1974) and Charles Lindblom (1959) made important contributions to the literature early on. At the same time, the interest in learning continues to be strong in the political science literature, all the more since mutual learning has become a cornerstone of European governance, with the creation of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2012, p. 600).

In this paper, we present a broad overview of the literature on policy learning, connecting

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different strands of political science research to policy learning. Specifically, we are going to present the literature on social learning and ideas, instrumental learning and policy learning, diffusion, policy transfer and political learning. Our intellectual starting points are the contributions by Peter Hall and Hugh Heclo. From the afore-mentioned historical literature on policy learning (before 1990), especially the contribution by Heclo has had a strong influence on the more recent literature on policy learning. Heclo's assertion that political elites are important for policy learning (Heclo, 1974, p. 319) is important for the conceptualization of social learning by Peter Hall. Opposed to Heclo, Hall insists that social learning is closely related to policy paradigms. These are ideational and cognitive constructs, which facilitate different degrees of policy change. According to Hall, they are more important for policy learning than political elites, because they entail information on past experiences (Hall, 1993, p. 278).

Consequently, different strands of literature on policy learning developed. On the one hand, the ideational literature embraced the idea of social learning understood as change of broad ideas and paradigms and subsequent impact on policies (Béland & Cox, 2011). On the other hand, the public policy literature adopted a more instrumentalist approach to policy learning, according to which policy learning entails the adaptation of existing policy instruments due to scientific innovations (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; May, 1992; Sabatier, 1988). Adoption of new policy instruments due to failure of existing policies or the promotions of innovative ideas has also been part of the literature on policy diffusion (Braun & Gilardi, 2006), as well as policy transfer and lesson-drawing (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Rose, 1991). In these strands of literature, authors specifically include a spatial dimension, focusing on learning and transfer from other countries or regions.

To the contrary, political learning follows a different logic. Harkening back to Heclo's argument that elites are important, some authors underline the importance of politics in learning. Specifically, they argue that learning is above all strategic adaptation of political elites' behavior in order to avoid electoral punishment. Learning, understood as innovation driven substantial political reforms, is of secondary importance and occurs "by stealth" under the radar of the electorate and special interest groups, which might become target groups for new policies (P. Pierson, 1994). What is more, knowledge might even be used

strategically to increase legitimacy of special political interests rather than to solve a common problem in the interest of the entire population (Boswell, 2009).

In the remainder of this report, we are going to discuss these different strands of literature with regard to policy learning. To begin with, we are going to focus on social learning and discuss ideational as well as technical and instrumental aspects of policy learning. Chapter three focuses on the spatial dimension, emphasizing diffusion and policy transfer. In the fourth section, we shed light on the idea of political learning and show how this concept differs from the other accounts that focus more on instrumental (in the technical sense) and ideational aspects of learning. Conclusions follow.

2. Ideational and technical aspects of policy learning

The literature on social and policy learning has always emphasized that learning is related to change. Particularly, learning is understood in the sense that policymakers acquire new ideas, which they use to change policies. Basically, ideas can take two forms. On the one hand, they can be new values or beliefs on how policy should be made. On the other hand, they can take the form of rather technical knowledge, such as new policy instruments. Thereby, instrumental learning aims at designers and implementers of policy, whereas the social learning refers to the more general construction of a given policy problem (May, 1992).

2.1 Social learning and ideas

The main reference of social learning in the political science literature is the work by Peter Hall (Hall, 1993, 2013, 1989). In opposition to the work of Hugh Heclo, who emphasized the dimension of political learning (Heclo, 1974), Hall makes the point that the degree of policy change depends on social learning, namely on how much policymakers change their ideas and interpretation of the policy problem (Hall, 1993, pp. 278-279). Then, according to Hall, three degrees of policy change are possible: First order changes, which entail the adaptation of existing instruments, second order changes that entail the adaptation of new policy instruments and third order changes, which comprise of a change in the hierarchy of policy instruments. Thereby, third order changes are similar to changes of the policy paradigm

(Hall, 1993, p. 278), which is the basic framework of ideas and standards according to which a social problem is interpreted and the policy made (Hall, 1993, p. 279). Although policy instruments are being addressed, the focus of Hall clearly is on the ideational and paradigmatic part of social learning.

Following Peter Hall's work a literature evolved, which stressed the importance of ideas[3] and social learning for policy change. These works entail general accounts of ideas and public policy (Braun & Busch, 1999), including accounts on the connection of social learning and paradigms, such as institutional learning (Hemerijck & van Kersbergen, 1999). This view follows the understanding of learning in the context of broad ideas and paradigms. Solutions to social problems are analyzed as a process of rather broad ideas, such as norms, beliefs or cognitive frameworks, which provide the context (Hall, 1993) or the cause (Parsons, 2002) for fundamental policy changes. Ideas and social learning manifest in very different contexts, as for instance policy networks (Knoepfel & Kissling-Naf, 1998).

On a more implicit account, social learning is connected to the general literature on policy and ideas (Béland & Cox, 2011), as well as policy paradigms (Béland & Cox, 2013). The empirical application of ideas and social learning has been studied with regard to a variety of policy fields. Most notably health care reforms (Béland, 2005, 2007; Greener, 2002) as well as ideas and health care research (Beland, 2010). Other examples for the explicit application of social learning are environmental policy (Brummel, Nelson, Souter, Jakes, & Williams, 2010; Fiorino, 2001; Steyaert & Jiggins, 2007), energy policy (Darby, 2006), water policy (Blackmore, Ison, & Jiggins, 2007), economic policy (Arifovic, Bullard, & Kostyshyna, 2013; Pemberton, 2000), European integration (Checkel, 2001), as well as foreign policy (Levy, 1994; Parsons, 2002).

These are just some examples for the research on social learning. Of course, there is much more research, which applies the concept of social learning and ideas. For the purpose of this paper, they are sufficient to show the thematic scope of the literature on ideas and social learning.

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[3] The concept of ideas had already been around before, especially in the study of foreign policy. However, this literature did not connect it explicitly to policy learning and social learning.

2.2 Policy and instrumental learning

A second strand of literature refers to policy learning in the sense of adapting new policy instruments. Other than the works that focus on social learning in the ideational sense, there is another strand of literature that emphasizes the instrumental side of policy learning. Specifically, this literature underlines that governments or members of the political administration learn by adopting new policy instruments or change existing policy programs (Bennett & Howlett, 1992, p. 289).

Paul A. Sabatier has already emphasized this dimension of policy learning in his work on advocacy coalitions. As Hall, he refers to the work by Hugh Heclo, who analyzed policy learning as a combination of social, political and economic contextual changes as well as strategic interaction of actors competing for power (Heclo, 1974). Yet, at the same time, Sabatier also underlines the importance of knowledge-based approaches to solve a policy problem. According to Sabatier, he "…expands [Heclo's] interest into the effect of policy-oriented learning on the broader process of policy changes by analyzing the manner in which elites from different advocacy coalitions gradually alter their belief systems over time, partially as a result of formal policy analysis and trial and error learning" (Sabatier, 1988, p. 130). Sabatier shifted the focus of learning to policy instruments, in the sense of single programs or regulations and their adaptation. Although he mentions policy learning, it rests just a part in the entire framework of advocacy coalitions, which has become crucial for public policy analysis (Sabatier, 1993; Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009), but he has not been very specific about different types of learning.

However, for the understanding of policy learning we want to develop in this paper, it is nonetheless important, because it paved the way for an understanding of policy learning as evaluation of policy instruments, changes of policy designs based on experiences that were made during implementation, experiments or pilot studies for instance (May, 1992, p. 336). This notion of policy learning has been widely referred to in the public policy literature, either as "policy learning" or "instrumental learning" whereas the latter is the more precise term, because policy learning often also entails social learning. In the above-presented distinction by Peter Hall, instrumental learning is to first and second order change, namely the adaptation of existing instruments or the change of policy instruments, but in the

context of the same overarching ideas understood as the preference order of the respective policy instruments (Hall, 1993).

The political science and public administration literature has frequently adapted the idea of instrumental and policy learning. This can be a general account of policy learning in an entire country, as for instance the UK (Pemberton, 2000; Sanderson, 2002), or at the European level, especially in the context of the EU (Radaelli, 2008). In the European Union the concept of policy learning has taken a special role. Since the possibilities to legislate Europe-wide is limited for the EU, especially in the field of social policies, the idea of policy harmonization through learning and soft governance has become a key component in European governance. The establishment of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) attempts to make mutual policy and instrumental learning as a key component of European politics (Borrás & Jacobsson, 2004; de La Porte & Pochet, 2002). Although the OMC's success has been limited (Zito & Schout, 2009, pp. 1112-1114), research on the OMC and policy learning has been flourishing in the last years (Kerber & Eckardt, 2007; Kröger, 2009; Montpetit, 2009; Radaelli, 2004, 2008; Schäfer, 2006) and the topic continues to be of great interest to scholars and politicians alike, because it outlines the possibilities and limits of soft forms of governance.

Apart from its institutionalization in the EU context, policy learning has been a often used tool to analyze change in a variety of policy fields. For example, these are environmental policy (Fiorino, 2001), tobacco control policy (Grüning, Strünck, & Gilmore, 2008; Studlar, 2006), research policy (Mytelka & Smith, 2002), regional policy (Benz & Fürst, 2002), health care policy (Helderman, Schut, van der Grinten, & van de Ven, 2005), energy policy (Nilsson, 2005), or education (Lingard, 2010). Again, this is just a selection from the most cited articles in google scholar rather than a complete account of works that have been employing the concept of political learning. These articles have in common that they analyze policy learning in a specific field, mostly based on case study research. The authors show how policymakers updated their knowledge and changed existing policy instruments respectively.

3. Learning from others - diffusion and transfer

Another strand of literature that focuses on policy learning is the work on policy diffusion

and transfer. These works are very much related to the literature on policy and instrumental learning that I discussed in the previous section. However, there is one important distinction, namely the diffusion and transfer literature focuses on learning from others, such as other countries or subnational governments and on factors that empower and impede this process. In the following, I will first discuss the literature on policy diffusion, and then contributions on policy transfer.

3.1 Diffusion and Learning

Learning has played an important role in the literature on policy diffusion. Emanating from the seminal article by Walker on the diffusion of innovation amongst states in the US, a large literature has focused on the study of policy diffusion (Walker, 1969). As a consequence, in the international relations and public policy literature, researchers have been focusing on diffusion effects. Broadly defined, diffusion refers to the interdependence of states and/or regions and its effects on policy adoption (for a more in depth overview of the diffusion literature: Braun & Gilardi, 2006; Dobbin, Simmons, & Garrett, 2007; Gilardi, 2013; Graham, Shipan, & Volden, 2013; Maggetti & Gilardi, forthcoming; Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2006). From a general perspective, authors distinguish four forms of policy diffusion. These are coercion, competition, learning and emulation. Oftentimes, it is possible to tease out and compare these mechanisms in the course of empirical analyses (Dobbin et al., 2007; Gilardi, 2013; Shipan & Volden, 2006, 2008). For instance, Shipan and Volden show how coercion, imitation, learning and competition affect the diffusion of tobacco control policies from US cities to the states (Shipan & Volden, 2008). Other analyses have especially emphasized learning effects (Füglister, 2012; Gilardi, 2010; Gilardi & Füglister, 2008; Gilardi, Füglister, & Luyet, 2009; Meseguer, 2004, 2005; Shipan & Volden, 2014).

In the original article on diffusion by Walker, the author specifically speaks of competition and emulation, whereas he includes learning only implicitly, since expert knowledge and evidence, which are indicators of policy learning, play an important role in his model (Walker, 1969, p. 898). Later on, in the literature on policy diffusion, learning has been defined more specifically. Due to new information, theories or beliefs (Simmons et al., 2006, p. 795) that are based on their own or others' experiences, policy makers might be a cause to change existing policy instruments. Precisely, we have to distinguish two ways in which

updating might occur. Firstly, as purely rational learning in the Bayesian sense that policymakers update their knowledge based on experiences with a policy program, either at home or abroad (Braun & Gilardi, 2006, p. 306; Meseguer, 2004, 2005). Secondly, learning can be bounded, because actor's information is imperfect and they have to rely on cognitive shortcuts (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; McDermott, 2001; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Braun and Gilardi argue that we need to take into consideration the beliefs about the effectiveness of a policy rather than objective effectiveness, in order to understand whether and how actors are learning (Braun & Gilardi, 2006, pp. 306-308).

Empirically, the diffusion literature has researched learning in a variety of policy fields. Notably, these are lottery adoption (Berry & Berry, 1990), Indian gaming (Boehmke & Witmer, 2004), privatization policies (Meseguer, 2004), hospital reforms (Gilardi et al., 2009), health insurance contributions and benefits (Füglister, 2012; Gilardi & Füglister, 2008; Volden, 2006), smoking bans (Shipan & Volden, 2006, 2008, 2014), as well as unemployment benefits (Gilardi, 2010). In the empirical analyses of learning, authors have modeled the success of policies (Gilardi et al., 2009, p. 559), to understand whether the performance of policies in other countries has an impact on adoption abroad or in neighboring states. However, it is not always possible to empirically implement this approach, and the strategies of operationalizing learning vary greatly in the literature, which questions somehow the comparability of the empirical results concerning learning in the diffusion literature (Maggetti & Gilardi, forthcoming). For example, some authors model learning as success using an objective indicator for this, such as changes of health care expenditure after policy reform (Gilardi et al., 2009, p. 559). Others however use only the proportion of the state population already covered by a policy (Shipan & Volden, 2008, p. 846).[4]

3.2 Policy Transfer and Lesson Drawing

The exchange of knowledge between states and territories has also been subject to another strand of literature, which can also be linked to the text by Walter (1969), as it is concerned with interdependence between states and regions and subsequent policy change. Other

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[4] Empirically, the diffusion literature is of course much broader and extends also to other subfields of the discipline, such as IR. However, at this point, I am only focusing on a very small part of this literature, because the goal of this paper is to place the diffusion literature as on representative of policy learning. For a more complete review of the diffusion literature and its empirical depth, see for instance (Graham et al., 2013).

than the mentioned diffusion literature, which focuses on cognitive concepts, such as learning or emulation, the policy transfer literature takes into consideration how policies are transferred from one country or region to another, by focusing also on agents who are responsible for the transfer as well as elements that enable and constrain policy learning (Benson & Jordan, 2011).

Specifically, the literature on policy transfer refers to Richard Rose's article on "lesson-drawing", which criticizes the transfer literature and claims that researchers need to focus more on the process of lesson-drawing, which leads to policy transfer from one state or government to another. For Rose, lesson-drawing is above all the search for new knowledge in order to improve the situation within a country. If there is a demand for change, policy makers will search for solutions. This process depends on "a subjective definition of proximity, upon epistemic communities, which link experts together, functional interdependence between governments, and the authority of intergovernmental institutions" (Rose, 1991, pp. 5-6). At the same time, the political implementation of the newly acquired ideas is however a highly political process (Rose, 1993).

The concept of lesson drawing found its place in the literature. Especially Dolowitz and Marsh incorporate it? in their seminal articles on policy transfer, where they take into consideration voluntary and coercive forms entailing the transfer of new ideas (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, p. 344). Other than the diffusion literature, which focuses on cognitive concepts, such as learning, competition or coercion, the policy transfer literature focuses more on a micro perspective. Notably, it accommodates an actor and a process perspective. In a later paper, Dolowitz and Marsh are very specific about the entire process of policy transfer, focusing on the following questions: "Why do actors engage in policy transfer? Who are the key actors involved in the policy transfers process? What is transferred? From where are the lessons drawn? What are the different degrees of transfer?" (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 6). What is more, the policy transfer literature is specific about the causality. Following Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) and Rose (1991), the policy transfer literature came up with a number of elements that impact on policy transfer. Specifically, these are path dependencies, institutional constraints, ideological differences between countries as well as technological, economic, bureaucratic and political factors that might constrain or enable

the transfer of policies (Benson & Jordan, 2011, p. 367).

Researchers applied the model by Dolowitz and Marsh in many policy fields, amongst them social and welfare policy (Dolowitz, Hulme, Nellis, & O'Neal, 2000; C. Pierson, 2003), development assistances (Stone, 2004), public education (Bache & Taylor, 2003), environmental policies (Holzinger & Knill, 2008), as well as family policy (Blum, 2014). Empirical examples of the analyzed policy fields entail many countries, such as the UK and the US, well as a selection of supranational actors, as for instance the EU (For a more encompassing discussion of the problems policy transfer has been applied to, see: Benson & Jordan, 2011, p. 367).

The policy transfer literature resembles the diffusion literature, because both refer to the adoption of innovations based on learning from others. Yet, the main difference between these approaches is that the diffusion literature focuses on different kinds of interaction, whereas the policy transfer literature takes an approach focusing on the process of policy transfer including actor constellations and institutional obstacles to learning. This micro-focus has implications for the research design, in the sense that analyses of policy transfer often have qualitative research designs that focus on single or comparative case studies.

The most striking difference between the diffusion and transfer literature on the one hand and the before mentioned work on ideas and instrumental learning on the other is that the former focuses on learning from other states and units, whereas the "policy and instrumental learning" literature specifically includes learning from own experiences or new technologies. However, in the diffusion literature, learning from scientists plays a minor role, and the impact of international organizations is often referred to as (soft)coercion (Dobbin et al., 2007; Simmons et al., 2006). Yet, concerning research designs, the broader policy learning literature tends to use qualitative and case study designs, and resembles in this sense more the work on policy transfer.

So far, this article has reviewed four groups of literature that take slightly different approaches to learning in the analysis of policies. The critical reader might object that this review over-emphasizes the differences between these literatures. Nonetheless, we argue that the separation of these strands of research is useful to understand different nuances of

how learning has been used as an analytical concept. Especially, the difference between learning as paradigmatic changes on the one hand, and technical and instrumental policy solutions on the other hand is important. A third important perspective is the directional dimension underlined by the diffusion and transfer literature, which focus on the direction of learning and factors enabling and blocking learning processes.

4. Political and organizational learning

There is another dimension in the learning literature, which differs from social learning and instrumental learning on the one hand and the diffusion and transfer literature on the other hand. Learning might not only be related to problem solving and beliefs about to make policies best for the common good, but government and administrations also learn about politics, namely on how to adapt their strategies in order to maintain, gain or even increase their personal or organizational power. This type of learning refers to the general adaptation of political strategies based on experiences. With regard to expert knowledge, political learning means that decision-makers might use scientific results in order to legitimize their policies rather than finding the best solution for a policy field.

The term of "political learning" has been defined to distinguish it from policy learning and social learning. In the words of Peter May, "Political learning entails policy advocates learning about strategies for advocating policy ideas or drawing attention to policy problems. The foci are judgments about the political feasibility of policy proposals and understandings of the policy process within a given policy domain" (May, 1992, p. 339). Authors who figure prominently in the learning literature have also emphasized this dimension of learning. For instance, Hugh Heclo's seminal work on social policy, which has been at the core of Peter Hall's conception of social learning, emphasizes the importance of political elites for learning (Heclo, 1974, p. 319). Hall rejects this view and claims that social learning is rather a pluralist process, which takes into consideration societal and economic factors, including scientific reports that build on past experiences (Hall, 1993, p. 278). Although he does not mention it explicitly, Heclo characterizes learning as political learning in the sense as it has been defined above.

The rationale behind the idea of political learning is that organizations are interested in

maximizing their legitimacy. This logic has also been spelled out in the works on organizational institutionalism, which seek to explain in which contexts organizations try to improve their legitimacy. According to DiMaggio and Powell, organizations particularly strive to improve their legitimacy in unstable environments (DiMaggio, 1991, pp. 30-31). From a similar perspective, May, Bennett and Howlett refer to political learning as governmental learning, in the sense that state officials learn how to improve the political process in order to improve organizational behavior, for instance the executive or other political organizations and collective actors learn new strategies to attain their political goals (Bennett & Howlett, 1992, p. 289).

Paul Sabatier, which we have cited before to illustrate the dimension of instrumental learning, has also emphasized the importance of political learning. In addition to policy learning, he refers to learning within coalitions with regard to actors improving their strategies to advocate policies based on prior experiences (Sabatier, 1988). To observe policy observation, one possibility is what Wildavsky has called "strategic retreats," meaning that policymakers back off from a policy goal, because it is politically too costly to obtain (Wildavsky, 1979, pp. 385-406).

Empirically, political learning has been subject to political science studies. In its seminal work on retrenchment of social policies, Paul Pierson holds that in order to implement welfare state reforms, political actors had to adapt and learn new strategies on how to implement such policies without suffering devastating electoral costs. Specifically, in the UK and the US, after attempting to close down and privatize pension schemes, both governments adapted their strategies to make reform policies viable without too high electoral costs (P. Pierson, 1994). Subsequent research confirmed these developments. For example, David Natali's study of pension reforms in France and Italy show that in both countries policymakers learned from policy failure, proposed less radical reforms and negotiated with interest groups to achieve reforms. In both cases, retrenchment of welfare policies remains hidden in rather complex formulas in order to hide them from fierce public opposition (Natali, 2002).

Overall however, contrary to social learning and policy/instrumental learning, political learning has received less attention in political science literature. According to Christina Boswell, the policy and instrumental approach to learning has a very prominent role,

whereas the fact that actors use knowledge in a strategic manner (for their own good) has been insufficiently analyzed (Boswell, 2009, pp. 4-6). In her research, Boswell holds that in order to create legitimacy, organizations might use knowledge. The way in which they use this knowledge depends on the organization that uses it, namely whether it is an action organization or a political organization. Thereby, action organizations need to legitimize their existence with the impact of their social interventions, whereas political organizations receive legitimacy from deliberation. Drawing also on the research by Radaelli, she holds that, consequently, action organizations use knowledge to improve policy outputs, whereas political organizations use it in order to show their own legitimacy and therefore in a more strategic way (Boswell, 2008, p. 474; Radaelli, 1999). Based on empirical research in the field of immigration policy, she shows how policymakers use knowledge in an instrumental way to justify their position and achieve political outputs, which serve their personal interest (Boswell, 2009). Although the example is different from welfare retrenchment policy, the learning type is similar in the sense that it underlines that learning entails changed behavior by policymakers due to new knowledge rather than changes in policy as a consequence of new scientific ideas.

The fact that political learning is important has also been emphasized by Timo Fleckenstein's recent work on labor market reforms, in Germany. Just as Christina Boswell, he criticizes the main literature on policy learning for being too instrumentalist and focused only on the implementation of new ideas without sufficiently accounting for political elements. According to Fleckenstein, learning needs to be mediated by two factors. On the one hand, veto players might reduce the degree to which new knowledge can be inserted into a new policy. On the other hand, the generation of knowledge can be politically driven. For instance if parliament or government rely on research that has been done by a parliamentary research service, or an organization that has been directly funded by government, there is a chance that already the production of knowledge is under political influence as well as the following policy reform that will be based on exactly this research program (Fleckenstein, 2011, p. 195).

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have sketched out different strands of literature that are concerned with policy learning. Our goal was to present the different strands of literature and show how they are intellectually connected. Learning is a recurrent and important topic in the political science literature. Essentially, it seeks to explain dynamics in politics as well as the political outcomes. Particularly the latter dimension has received a lot of attention by researchers, all the more because it is important to outline practical relevance of political science research, for instance in the context of the OMC.

As a result of our review, we would like to point the reader to the following conclusions concerning the literature on policy learning:

1. The main focus of research on learning is in the dimensions of policy/instrumental learning. Especially, it refers to governments' and administrations' experiences with policy instruments and their adaptation or renewal, mostly based on own experiences or input by other actors, such as international organizations or the scientific community. This understanding of learning is also dominant in the literature on policy diffusion and transfer. However, this perspective focuses especially on learning from other governments or regions and its impact on policy change.

2. Research focusing on ideas refers to learning more implicitly and understands it as learning in the sense of changing paradigms, i.e. the entire preference order of instruments in a policy field. Another dimension is that paradigms impact on how actors learn and perceive new information. In other words social learning in this sense entails the dynamic of "core beliefs" as well as their possible impact on the adoption of new information. On the other hand, political learning also differs from policy/instrumental learning, because it takes into consideration that learning also occurs as an adaptation of strategies by governments or parties. In this understanding of learning, innovations and knowledge take a secondary role, and it is regarded as instrumental to personal or organizational goals of political actors.

3. A third point refers to the research design and the methods that are used to study learning in political science. The majority of the papers and books that we have

reviewed in this report are based on single or comparative case studies and qualitative methods. However, there are also comparative analyses with larger case numbers that use quantitative methods. Especially the literature on policy diffusion has employed this perspective and methods to better understand policy learning.

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