

Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe

D6.1 Conceptual Framework for Empirical Research

Version 1.1

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Change control

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1.1				

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AES	Academia di Studii Economice din Bucuresti
AU	Aberystwyth University
AUEB	Athens University of Economics and Business
EBPM	Evidence Based Policymaking
EU	European Union
UH	Helsingin Yliopisto
HUA	Harokopio University
INRA	Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique
IGSO PAS	Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences
KMP	Knowledge Management for Policy
JCR	Joint Research Centre
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
RUG	Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
TNS	TNS Opinion
TUD	Technische Universität Dresden
Ud'A	Università degli Studi 'G d'Annunzio' Chieti-Pescara
UNIBAS	Universität Basel
UNIOVI	Universidad de Oviedo
UNISI	Università degli Studi di Siena
US	University of Stirling
WP	Work Package

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How to use evidence to identify, learn from, and transfer policy success

1. Summary

Governments share broadly similar policy problems, such as territorial inequalities, but address them in different ways and with varying levels of success. Ideally, they should learn from – and, if appropriate, share - each other’s success. Therefore, our overall aim is to identify, analyse, learn from, and help transfer policies that have reduced territorial inequalities.

Our **first objective** is to research and share lessons from the governments who *project* policy success in reducing inequalities in areas such as education attainment, drug-related punishment, and income. We will identify how they defined and sought to solve a policy problem, assess the evidence of their success, and show how another government can learn from it. We will use these initial case study analyses to inform policy learning, encourage policy transfer when appropriate, and refine a model for learning across the EU.

However, policy theories and empirical studies prompt us to manage our expectations about policy learning. They explain the relationship between (a) politics, (b) complex policymaking systems, and (c) the *lack* of ‘evidence-based’ policymaking, learning, and transfer. It is not feasible to propose a simple evidence-based model for learning, or seek to transfer policy solutions from one region to another without considering their political and policymaking contexts. Therefore, our **second objective** is to use our knowledge of policy processes to help produce pragmatic and innovative ways to foster the systematic use of evidence in policy transfer. We use three questions to ensure that insights from policy theory inform our study:

1. *What is the evidence that a government was successful in reducing inequalities?*
2. *What story do exporters/ importers of policy tell about the problem they seek to solve?*
3. *Do they have comparable political and policymaking systems?*

Our **third objective** is to make sure that we have sufficient knowledge of our audience to make an impact with this study. We will (a) produce new evidence on the technical feasibility of policy solutions, *and* (b) investigate the ways in which potential importing governments determine their political feasibility. We use an iterative process, to identify and generate initial attention for success stories, identify how the case study government defined the policy problem, work with actors in other systems to understand how they would interpret and use the evidence, and use this knowledge to inform our research.

This approach, to build stakeholder knowledge into research design, is important to the study of inequalities. To transfer policy requires high researcher-policymaker interaction, to understand policymakers’ aims and evaluate success from their perspective. Inequalities tend to be ill-defined, and ‘inequalities policy’ is really a collection of policies with direct and indirect effects. Therefore, to encourage learning, we need to know how policymakers make sense of territorial inequalities as a policy problem and relate solutions to their local context.

2. Introduction: theory-informed and pragmatic policy learning

Policy learning and transfer are profoundly important aims, but difficult to define and achieve in practice. Taken at face value, both seem desirable: acquire new knowledge and skills to inform policy and policymaking (learning); and, share knowledge of policy, or share specific solutions, between one place and another (transfer). The resultant process of innovation and emulation seems crucial to evidence-informed international policy change. Why wouldn't we want to learn from experience and, when appropriate, import lessons from other actors?

These aims are central to the IMAJINE project. As part of a large interdisciplinary team, we are seeking ways to identify evidence of policy success from which to learn, to help reduce territorial inequalities across the EU. The whole project provides quantitative and qualitative *data* on socio-economic inequalities across Europe, examines how EU, Member State, and subnational governments try to *define* territorial inequalities in relation to spatial justice, and encourages the spread of learning and good practice to help reduce inequalities. Our contribution is to generate detailed qualitative models to identify (a) examples of successful policy interventions, (b) the 'causal mechanisms' underpinning the interventions, and (c) how to transfer success from one context to another. We work on the basis that governments share *broadly* similar policy problems, such as territorial inequalities, but define and address them in different ways and with varying levels of success. Ideally, they should learn from – and, if appropriate, share - each other's success.

Our **first objective** is to research and share lessons from the governments who *project* a sense of policy success in reducing inequalities in specific areas. To do so, we need to identify how they defined and sought to solve a policy problem, generate evidence of their success, and show how another government can learn from it. Our proposed initial areas are education attainment (Ireland), drug-related punishment (Portugal), and income (Finland), largely because their governments have *described their own success* or developed a *reputation for innovation*. We will use these initial experiences to inform case studies of policy learning, encourage policy transfer when appropriate, and refine a general model for learning and transfer across the EU.

However, policy theories and empirical studies prompt us to manage our expectations during this process. They explain the relationship between (a) political dynamics, (b) complex policymaking systems, and (b) the *lack* of 'evidence-based' learning, and transfer. In that context, it is not sensible to propose a simple 'evidence based' model for learning, to transfer policy solutions from one region to another without considering the role of politics and context. Rather, our **second objective** is use knowledge of the policy process to help produce pragmatic ways to encourage the routine use of evidence in policy transfer.

We do so in the following ways. *First, we synthesise the broad theoretical insights from policy studies that underpin analyses of learning and transfer.* Policy theories can provide profound insights and practical lessons for policy actors (Weible and Cairney, 2018), largely by explaining the limits to government action. They provide cautionary tales, warning researchers and policymakers not to assume that policy learning or transfer are straightforward, and inviting pragmatic research and policy designs. *Second, we connect these insights to studies of transfer* to show that:

- Policy evaluation rarely has a direct impact on policy choice (Weiss, 1979)

- ‘Evidence-based’ policymaking is not a realistic aim, because policymakers must find ways to process information efficiently, and scientific evidence is one of many factors that they take into account (Cairney, 2016; 2018b; Oliver et al, 2014).
- Policy learning is a political process rather than the objective pursuit of new knowledge (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013; 2018). Policy actors engage in motivated reasoning and exercise power to promote policy aims. They learn how to win or negotiate political outcomes as much as improve policy outcomes (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018; Witting, 2017).

There is no such thing as a straightforward policy transfer process in which a small group of policymakers in one government learn extensively from another before deciding how best to import a clearly defined package of measures. Rather, there are many policy actors spread across many governments, sharing ideas, and importing elements of each other’s experiences in many different ways. The results can include:

1. Some governments feel obliged to mimic others, and they often do so without really knowing what they did, why, if they were actually successful, and if they can transfer success (Berry and Berry, 2007; Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013). If so, policy transfer is uninformed and incomplete (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Berry and Berry, 2007),
2. Some governments import only a broad idea, then transform the policy solution to fit local circumstances (Stone, 2017). If so, transfer is a small part of the story.

These general findings are important. They help researchers identify obstacles to analysing policy success in one government and providing lessons for another. They encourage researchers to (a) think about the context in which they gather and share evidence, and (b) propose feasible policy solutions. To determine feasibility, they must incorporate into policy analysis an understanding of:

1. *Policymaker psychology*. How do actors prioritise information and ignore the rest?
2. *Complex policymaking environments*. Who makes and influences policy, and how much control do they have over the policy process?

Third, we create a theory-informed and practical model for policy learning. We develop a research design to:

- Build on existing models of policy learning and transfer (Rose, 2005)
- Incorporate the broad factors - such as the psychology of choice and policymaking context – that are indispensable to policy process research (Cairney and Weible, 2017)
- Take a ‘realist’ inspired approach in which we consider what caused policy success, why, and under what conditions (Pawson, 2006). By identifying the conditions under which a policy was successful in one context, we can establish if those conditions are - or could be - present in another.

This approach allows us to produce a model to understand the alleged success of a policy initiative in one region and generate comparable and transferable lessons for another. We use three questions to ensure that insights from policy theory inform our method:

1. *What is the evidence that a government was successful in reducing inequalities?* Governments face strong electoral imperatives to declare major and quick success. Importing governments

need more independent, detailed, and longer-term evidence of key choices, their effects, and their likely effects elsewhere.

2. *What story do exporters/ importers of policy tell about the problem they seek to solve?* Exporting and importing governments have different ways to (a) understand issues as problems, (b) identify feasible solutions, and (c) determine what policy success looks like. Rich descriptive stories help us understand the extent to which governments will be in a position to import broad ideas or specific programmes.
3. *Do they have comparable political and policymaking systems?* Comparability relates partly to the nature of *political* systems, including their formal rules and divisions of power. We also focus strongly on *policymaking* systems: the actors, institutions, networks, ideas, and socioeconomic conditions that influence how policymakers define policy problems and the technical and political feasibility of solutions.

Our **third objective** is to generate wider attention for success stories, to help the experience of one government make an ‘impact’ on others. We explore how best to work with policy actors in multiple political systems to understand how they would interpret and use the evidence. It requires us to combine a consideration of these factors:

- how actors in each system try to define inequalities as policy problems, and which policy tools or instruments they would consider to be the most feasible responses
- how policymakers in each system have produced ‘inequalities policy’ - the collection of intentions, policy instruments designed to reduce inequalities, and policies with a less direct effect – in the past, providing the context for current choices
- the link between policy and outcomes, such as by establishing the causal effect of specific policy interventions (using scientific measures to evaluate and report success)
- how to describe policy success in a way that (a) is relevant to potentially importing governments, and (b) contributes to a discussion of political feasibility in different policymaking contexts.

We will use an iterative process, to identify and generate initial attention for success stories, work with actors in other systems to understand how they would interpret and use the evidence, and use this knowledge to guide our research. This approach is often described, rather broadly, as the ‘co-production’ of research to make it more useful to particular aims, such as to increase its policy relevance (Durose et al, 2017; Flinders et al, 2016; Cairney and Oliver, 2017). For example, it allows researchers to frame their analysis with reference to the ways in which policymakers frame policy problems.

This approach is particularly important to the study of inequalities policy in multiple policymaking systems. Territorial inequality is a nebulous problem that policymakers in each system can define in very different ways, based on their own beliefs and the context in which they operate. Without some form of co-production, we will struggle to (a) make enough sense of the experience of one actor to establish its relevance to another, and (b) generate the level of attention required to sustain their interest in new evidence that might inform policy change. Our aim is not to *recommend* specific policy changes, but to provide new knowledge and analysis in a way that helps inform continuous discussion.

3. Structure of the paper

We use the following broad statements to guide each element of the conceptual framework. First, respond to the limits to ‘evidence based policymaking’ by understanding how policymakers define policy-relevant evidence, prioritise evidence, and operate within a policy process over which they have limited control. Second, understand key categories of policy learning, including learning from experts, learning via dialogue, and bargaining. Third, identify how learning informs policy transfer, which can range from complete mimicry to taking inspiration from a broad idea (or rejecting policy transfer). We use these insights to identify:

1. the implications for evidence-informed policy transfer
2. the broad principles of a feasible policy learning strategy
3. a preliminary research design, to be developed following consultation and testing.

4. The policymaking context: why policy is not ‘evidence based’

We present this framework during high uncertainty and political upheaval across the EU, prompting many scientists to express a fear of ‘post truth politics’ in which people do not trust evidence or experts (Jasanoff and Simmet, 2017) and evidence-informed policy learning would seem impossible. However, policy theories provide a longer term perspective. Policymakers have always used the research process for many different purposes, from short-term problem-solving and long-term enlightenment, to putting off decisions or using evidence to support an existing policy (Weiss, 1979; Boswell, 2009). They have done so within a policy process over which they have limited control. Indeed, a general contribution of policy theories is to provide broad insights (summarised in Cairney, 2012; 2015; [2018a](#); 2019) to sum up these limits:

- *Limited choice*. Policymakers inherit organisations, rules, and choices. Most rules are ‘path dependent’ and ‘new’ choices are revisions of the old (Rose, 1990; Pierson, 2000; Hogwood and Peters, 1983).
- *Limited attention*. Policymakers must ignore almost all of the policy problems for which they are formally responsible. They pay attention to some, and delegate most responsibility to civil servants. Bureaucrats rely on other actors for information and advice, and they build relationships on trust and information exchange (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jordan and Cairney, 2013).
- *Limited central control*. Policy may *appear* to be made at the ‘top’ or in the ‘centre’, but *in practice* policymaking responsibility is spread across many levels and types of government (many ‘centres’) and shared by many actors. For example, actors often make policy as they deliver, and policy outcomes appear to ‘emerge’ locally despite central government attempts to control their fate (Ostrom, 2007; Lipsky, 1980; Geyer and Cairney, 2015).
- *Limited policy change*. Most policy change is minor, made and influenced by actors who interpret new evidence through the lens of their beliefs. Well-established beliefs limit the opportunities of new solutions. Governments tend to rely on trial-and-error, based on previous agreements, rather than radical policy change based on a new agenda. New solutions succeed only during brief and infrequent windows of opportunity (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Lindblom, 1979; Kingdon, 1984).

Table 1 identifies the general responses that policy actors might have to these constraints. They include to: engage for the long term to understand the ‘rules of the game’ and how new ideas fit with existing practices; and, tell a convincing story about a policy problem, to prompt major policy change, but with some realism about how much policymakers will respond.

Insights	Issues	Responses
Limited choice	Policymakers inherit organisations, rules, and choices.	Consider the fit between existing arrangements and new ideas.
Limited attention	Policymakers must ignore or delegate responsibility for most problems.	Tell a story of an important, urgent and solvable problem
	Bureaucrats rely on their networks for information and advice.	Engage for the long term to form relationships with many types of policy maker and influencer.
Limited central control	Policymaking is shared across many types of government.	Understand the local rules and context in which any new measure would be introduced.
	Policy outcomes often seem to ‘emerge’ locally.	
Limited policy change	Most policy change is minor, based on existing beliefs and trial and error.	Build incremental strategies into recommendations.
	A ‘window of opportunity’ for major change is infrequent and unpredictable.	Be ready to propose ambitious but feasible solutions.

Table 1: Practical lessons from policy theories: insights, issues, and pragmatic responses

In that context, it is impractical to identify too-simple aims for ‘evidence based policymaking’ (EBPM) and declare any departure as ‘policy based evidence’ (Cairney, 2018a). Instead, identify the ever-present limits to EBPM, and consider how to respond pragmatically. These limits have three main features:

1. *Policymakers have a broader view about what counts as good evidence*

Few policymakers use the criteria developed by some scientists to describe a hierarchy of scientific evidence. For some scientists, at the top of this hierarchy is the systematic review of randomised control trials, partly because RCTs often provide a systematic way to isolate and measure the effect of a policy intervention (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006; Dunlop, 2016). Other forms of knowledge – derived from scientific expertise, practitioner experience, and service user feedback – are nearer the bottom (Oliver et al, 2014a; 2014b; Oliver and Pearce, 2017; Parkhurst, 2017).

Most policymakers prefer a wider range of information sources (Nutley et al, 2013). They approach evidence-gathering as a form of consultation, and combine their own experience with information that may include peer reviewed scientific evidence, the ‘grey’ literature, public opinion data, and interest group feedback (Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Lomas and Brown, 2009; Nilsson et al, 2008; Davidson, 2017). Further, there are many policymakers spread across many levels and types of government, producing different evidence searches, and causing the same evidence to have different impacts in different parts of government (Cairney, 2016).

2. *Policymakers have to ignore almost all evidence*

Many scientists describe their hopes for EBPM in a way that is reminiscent of ‘comprehensive’ rationality (Botterill and Hindmoor 2012). Yet, ‘comprehensive’ is an *ideal-type*, used to describe what cannot happen. The ideal-type involves a core group of elected policymakers at the ‘centre’ (or ‘top’),

using their values to identify problems to solve, and translating their policies into action to maximise benefits to society, aided by neutral organisations gathering all the evidence necessary to produce solutions (John, 1998: 33). In practice, they are unable to: separate values from facts in a meaningful way; rank policy aims in a logical and consistent manner; gather information comprehensively, or possess the cognitive ability to process it (Simon, 1976; Lindblom, 1959; Cairney, 2012: 96-7). Instead, Simon (1976: xxviii) described policymakers and organisations addressing ‘bounded rationality’ by using ‘rules of thumb’ or standard operating procedures to limit analysis and produce ‘good enough’ decisions.

In other words, policymakers must use cognitive shortcuts, combining cognition and emotion to prioritise evidence and free up time to make choices (Cairney and Kwiatkowski, 2017). Modern discussions focus on the ‘rational’ short cuts that policymakers use to identify good enough sources of information, combined with the ‘irrational’ ways in which they use their beliefs, emotions, habits, and familiarity with issues to identify policy problems and solutions (Kahneman, 2012; Haidt, 2001; Lewis, 2013; Cairney and Kwiatkowski, 2017; Lodge and Wegrich, 2016).

3. *Policymakers do not control the policy process (in the way that a policy cycle suggests)*

Many actors like the idea of a ‘policy cycle’ because it offers a simple and appealing model, giving clear advice on how to engage at each stage: provide evidence on the scale of the problem, and the likely effectiveness of solutions, before using evidence to evaluate the chosen solution (Cairney and Oliver, 2018). However, researchers will not find an orderly process with a clearly defined debate on problem definition, a single moment of authoritative choice, and a clear chance to use scientific evidence to evaluate success. Rather, they will engage with a complex policymaking system of which policymakers have limited knowledge and even less control, and in which ‘success’ is determined politically rather than through objective evaluation (Jones and Thomas, 2017; McConnell, 2010; Compton and ‘t Hart, 2019).

5. How to respond to the limits to EBPM

These three factors help explain why policymakers will pay minimal attention to unsolicited scientific reports or new academic articles even when researchers declare the issue to be important and the evidence to be the best available. Evidence *supply* is more effective when connected to policymaker *demand*, such as when: policymakers are already consulting on the issue, and the evidence can be tailored to the ways in which policymakers have presented the policy problem. Effectively tailored evidence requires researchers to respond primarily to the difference between uncertainty and ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2007):

- *Uncertainty describes a lack of information or low confidence in one’s knowledge about a policy problem.* Researchers can help resolve uncertainty by providing more information to policymakers, to help them know more about the problem they have already defined and the likely effect of the solution they would like to take.
- *Ambiguity describes the ability to support more than one interpretation of a policy problem.* To resolve ambiguity is to define a policy problem in a particular way (Cairney et al, 2016). Policy actors exercise power to generate attention and support for one interpretation of a problem at the expense of most others. Successful actors ‘frame’ the problem to which they would like

policymakers to pay attention and seek to solve; they limit our focus to one simple ‘image’ of a complex issue (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). They do not rely on the relatively passive process of providing information as if the evidence could speak for itself.

Further, effective action in complex policymaking environments requires researchers to adapt to their key components (John, 2003: 488; Cairney and Heikkila, 2014: 364-6; Ostrom, 2007):

1. Many actors making and influencing choices at many levels of government. Researchers compete to present evidence and secure a policymaker audience. There are many authoritative audiences or ‘venues’ spread across policymaking systems.
2. A proliferation of ‘institutions’, or the rules and norms maintained by policymaking organisations. Some rules are formal and well understood. Others are informal, unwritten, and difficult to grasp (Ostrom, 2007). They include the rules of evidence gathering: who leads the consultation; and, how they prioritise evidence.
3. The pervasiveness of networks, or relationships between policymakers and influencers, many of which develop in ‘subsystems’ and contain small groups of specialists.
4. A tendency for well-established ‘ideas’ – the ‘core beliefs’ of policymakers or ‘paradigms’ in which they operate - to dominate discussion (Hall, 1993; Cairney and Weible, 2015). They provide context for policymaking, influencing levels of receptivity to new policy solutions proposed to policymakers (Kingdon, 1984).
5. Policy conditions and events reinforce stability or prompt policymaker attention to shift. Social or economic ‘crises’ or ‘focusing events’ (Birkland, 1997) prompt lurches of attention from one issue to another.

Insights	Issues	Responses
‘Evidence based policymaking’ is not a realistic aim	Policymakers have a broad view about what counts as good, policy-relevant evidence	Produce rich descriptions of problems and solutions based on many forms of knowledge
	Policymakers have to ignore almost all evidence	Adapt to the cognitive shortcuts of policymakers: minimise the cognitive load of information, frame evidence to help interpret a problem, and reduce uncertainty about the likely effect of solutions.
	Policy evaluation has an indirect impact on choice	
The policymaking environment: respond to many actors, institutions, ideas, networks, socioeconomic factors and events	There are many policymakers and influencers spread across government	Identify the key venues for authoritative choices.
	Each venue has its own ‘institutions’; the formal and informal rules of policymaking	Learn the written/ unwritten rules of each venue in which you engage
	Each venue is guided by a fundamental set of ideas to determine the nature of problems and feasibility of solutions	Learn the language that actors use to frame problems and consider solutions
	Each venue has its own relationships between policy makers and influencers	Build trust and form alliances within networks
	Policymaker attention is driven by changes in socioeconomic factors and events	Present solutions during periods of high attention to problems

Table 2: Respond to the absence of EBPM in complex policymaking environments

Table 2 describes key responses to these limits to EBPM. It highlights the role of communicating with policymakers, such as via storytelling techniques. It identifies the ways in which policy actors invest their time to understand the rules and language of policymaking, engage in networks, and remain prepared to exploit the ‘windows of opportunity’ to present policy solutions during heightened attention to a policy problem. In doing so, it exposes the limits to likely researcher impact, since it describes a series of tasks that may be, for example, beyond the scope of a time-limited research project (Cairney and Oliver, 2018).

6. Pragmatic ways to encourage policy learning

We should reject the temptation to equate policy learning with a simplistic process that we might associate with teachers transmitting facts to children. Nor should we assume that adults simply change their beliefs when faced with new evidence. Rather, policy learning is a political process. Actors combine cognition and emotion to produce heuristics to understand, for example: how to exercise power to secure their political and policy aims; the nature of policy problems; and, how to import policy lessons (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013; 2018; Witting, 2017). Therefore, when we explore policy learning, we need clarity on questions such as: *who* learns, *what* do they learn, *how* do they learn, and what is the impact of learning on policy change (Moyson et al, 2017: 166; Moyson and Scholten, 2018)?

For example, learning takes place at different levels (Moyson et al, 2017: 163-4). *Individuals* combine cognition and emotion to process information, but do it collectively, in

- *organisations*, with norms of behaviour and modes of socialisation that influence their motive and ability to learn
- *‘advocacy coalitions’*, in which people learn through the lens of their beliefs
- *systems*, in which many groups of actors cooperate and compete to establish the rules of evidence gathering and analysis, or
- *environments* that constrain or facilitate their action (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Dunlop and Radaelli, 2017).

Further, policy actors do not simply learn by *receiving* clear information; they *generate* learning by engaging with information (Freeman, 2006: 379). Individuals share knowledge within groups, such as by telling stories of what they learned and how it affects the aims of group. In some cases, such learning helps produce *cognitive or behavioural change* (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013: 488-92). However, such change relies on a far wider set of factors, including the *rules of collective action*, producing decentralised and dialogue-driven or centralised and authority-driven learning, *social dynamics*, such as levels of trust or conflict among actors sharing information, and *external factors*, such as the political pressures or crises that prompt actors to learn more or less urgently (2013: 496-500). Consequently, we should not assume that policy change associated with learning produces new and improved policy or policymaking (2013: 492).

Learning may have a *cooperative purpose*, to acquire new knowledge and skills to solve a policy problem, with the help of an ‘informed, vigilant democratic public’, or a *competitive purpose*, to enhance knowledge on how to defeat our opponents in debate and dominate the policy process (Dunlop et al, 2018: 6; Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018: 256). Actors can learn how to ‘make policy more efficient, legitimate, democratic’, or ‘win consensus, to promote one’s strategy, to humiliate the

opposition – without necessarily improving on efficiency or effectiveness’ (2018: 256). In that context, Dunlop and Radaelli’s (2013; 2018) systematic review of the literature describes four different categories of policy learning which relate partly to (a) general levels of knowledge and uncertainty about a policy problem or its solution, and (b) the power and status of specific actors such as policymakers and experts:

1. *Learning epistemically*. In this scenario, there is high uncertainty, and there exists an ‘authoritative body of knowledge and experts who are willing and able to interact with policy-makers and take a proper role in the policy process’. This learning is the closest to EBPM. It requires the scientific and ‘soft’ skills of researchers and the willingness and ability of policymakers to acquire new knowledge (2018: 259).
2. *Learning from reflection*. Uncertainty is high, but we cannot rely on expert authority, or ‘there is a predisposition to listen to what the others have to say and to re-consider one’s preferences’. Learning is closer to open dialogue in which people use deliberative techniques to (a) combine their diverse forms of knowledge and (b) encourage cooperation by agreeing on the social norms that guide their dialogue (2018: 260).
3. *Learning as by-product of bargaining*. There is low uncertainty because policy actors have ‘a repertoire of solutions, algorithms, or ways of doing things’. Many ‘interdependent’ actors – including ‘decision-makers, interest groups and civil society organisations’ - focus on how to bargain effectively (2018: 261). They learn (a) each other’s preferences, (b) which strategies work best, and (c) the cost of disagreement.
4. *Learning in hierarchies*. Uncertainty is low and the authority of some actors is high. Subordinate actors learn that they are subject to the ‘shadow of hierarchy’, in which rules and norms appear to limit their options. Powerful actors learn about the levels of compliance they can achieve, or likely adherence to international norms (2018: 263).

Since there are many different categories, there are also many factors that can facilitate or hinder learning. Facilitators include: the routine consultation of experts (epistemic); the conditions for open, non-hierarchical, and transparent dialogue in which individuals are willing to change their minds (reflexive); mutual adjustment, by making trade-offs among a large bundle of issues, agreeing on the venues and procedures for negotiation, and engaging in many negotiations (bargaining); and, trust in a clearly defined authority (hierarchy). Hindrances include: unproductive debates among experts (epistemic); the ability to stifle dissent and unwillingness to compromise (reflexive); one-shot negotiations in which there is limited trust (bargaining); and, too many ‘veto players’ or ‘joint-decision traps’ (2018: 263-6; Tsebelis, 2002; Scharpf, 1998). Learning can be ‘dysfunctional’ if actors are dogmatic, subject to ‘groupthink’, unreflective, and learning how to win arguments rather than solve problems (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018: 265-6; Dunlop, 2017a; 2017b).

These categories suggest that *researchers will soon become disheartened and ineffective if they assume that policy learning is epistemic* (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2016). In low salience issues, researchers can become respected brokers encouraging people with different beliefs to learn together (Ingold and Gschwend, 2014). However, in high salience issues, advocacy coalitions romanticise their own cause and demonise their opponents (Sabatier et al, 1987). Therefore, scientists operating in epistemic mode may be unprepared to learn about how to communicate and form wider networks within a political system characterised by bargaining (Dunlop, 2017c). We should not assume that ‘policy learning’ describes an apolitical process in which the most knowledgeable researchers are the most powerful participants. Rather, actors are learning how to make policy and get what they want, and new

knowledge is one of many key factors relevant to that process. Therefore, our research strategy must take into account the wider political and policymaking context in which policy learning takes place.

7. Parallels with insights from policy transfer

Policy transfer could describe:

1. the *processes* of policy learning that contribute to the sharing of policy from one government to another, and/or
2. the *products* of that process, such as the import and export of policy *ideas* or *programmes* containing regulations, resources and organisations (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 5; 1996: 344; Rose, 2005; Dussauge-Laguna, 2012: 317; Heichel et al, 2005; Benson and Jordan, 2011).

The transfer literature contains several approaches. First, Rose's (1991: 4; 1993; 2005) lesson-drawing approach asks: 'Under what circumstances and to what extent would a programme now in effect elsewhere also work here'? He describes policymakers seeking to (a) learn from their own experiences, and (b) take lessons from successful countries before calculating what it would require to import that success.

Second, *policy diffusion* studies explain why some governments innovate and others emulate. Innovating states tend to be wealthier and have more policymaking resources, greater population diversity and electoral competition, and more urgent or severe problems to solve (Walker, 1969: 881-7; Berry and Berry, 2018: 269). Others emulate when the policy is seen as successful or popular, they are encouraged to do so by federal or supranational governments or interest groups, they have something in common (such as similarities in geography or ideology), or the innovation has a knock-on effect such as an economic 'spillover' (Berry and Berry 2018: 269-70).

Third, *convergence* studies suggest that policies in different countries become closer following: *emulation*, in which the model adopted by one country 'serves as a blueprint that pushes a general idea on to the political agenda' of another, the *exchange of ideas* between international policy networks, *interdependence* which prompts governments to search for ways to cooperate and 'mitigate the unintended external consequences of domestic policy' or *penetration*, in which the actions of one or more countries (or organizations) puts pressure on others to follow (Bennett, 1991a: 221-6).

Classic policy transfer questions include:

- *Who does it?* Most actors involved in transfer are the regular participants in domestic policy processes (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 345). Further actors include: supranational organisations like the EU and OECD, the 'entrepreneurs' selling policies internationally, members of 'epistemic communities' sharing expert knowledge, multi-national corporations seeking harmonised regulations, and national or subnational governments providing inspiration or pressure to follow their lead (Benson and Jordan, 2011; Stone, 2010; Haas, 1992; Holzinger and Knill, 2005; McCann and Ward, 2012; Keating and Cairney, 2012).
- *Is it voluntary?* Transfer can range from voluntary to *coercive*, in which international obligations or a need to keep up with larger neighbours provides internal or external pressure (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 348-9; Benson and Jordan, 2011: 370).

- *What exactly is transferred?* Transfer can range from a decision, based on long-term analysis, to import completely the substantive aims and institutions associated with a major policy change, to the quick decision to pursue little more than a vague idea (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; Page, 2018: vii).

Such variations reflect the fact that policy transfer is a political process embedded in domestic policymaking (Page, 2000: 4). Indeed, we could explain the demand for new ideas in relation to the power dynamics described in well-established policy theories. For example, punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Koski and Workman, 2018) identifies positive and negative feedback, in which disproportionately low or high attention to new ideas relates primarily to the ways in which governments process information, not the ideas themselves. Further, multiple streams analysis (Kingdon, 1984; Cairney, 2018) suggests that major policy transfer will take place only during a window of opportunity in which: there is high attention to a problem, a feasible solution available, and policymakers have the motive and opportunity to select it.

Consequently, it is difficult to identify, explain, and pursue *successful* policy transfer when the motivation to act, and the scale of activity, can vary so much. There are several ways to describe policy transfer and identify success. For example, Rose's (1993: 132) conditions for lesson-drawing success relate strongly to the factors associated with successful policy implementation:

1. The policy is not unique or dependent on inimitable organizations.
2. There are few resource constraints to implement policy.
3. The policy is simple with a clear cause-and-effect.
4. There is adequate information available about what the policy is and how it works.
5. The new policy does not mark a radical departure from the importer's original policy.

However, this process takes place within the wider context of a competition to declare *policy success*, which includes a focus on process issues (including if the process was straightforward, or if it was seen as legitimate by stakeholders) and the effect of policy transfer on the popularity of government (McConnell, 2010; Compton and 't Hart, 2019)? Further, much of our earlier discussion suggests that it is difficult to think of transfer in terms of a successful exporter or motivated importer of a specific programme (Stone, 2017: 55). Rather, governments often take broad inspiration or translate policy into something different. This process prompts us to focus more on the ways in which importing policymakers make sense of policy in local contexts (Stone, 2017: 64-5; Freeman, 2009; Stone, 2012; Park et al, 2014; McCann and Ward, 2012: 326-7; 2013: 10). If so, transfer success may be a small part of an overall conversation on policy success.

Overall, a focus on policy learning and transfer suggests that new knowledge is one key part of a wider political process in which policymakers *may* seek new policy solutions, but only at particular times, and with reference to existing ideas and policy programmes. This context warns us against the assumption that a lesson from one government has direct and immediate applications to the policy agenda of another. Rather, to achieve a meaningful impact with new research on the *exporting* government, we may have to invest as much time to understand the policymaking context of the *importing* government.

Table 3 sums up the practical implications, many of which relate strongly to insights from the wider literature: identify whose learning is important, understand the rules and context in which they learn, and tell a non-technical story about what worked, why, and how another government could replicate that success.

Insights	Issues	Responses
Policy learning	Individuals combine cognition and emotion to gain knowledge, and cooperate or compete to prioritise that knowledge in policy	Ask: <i>who</i> learns, <i>what</i> do they learn, <i>how</i> , and what is the likely impact on policy change?
	Learning is individual and collective, via organisations, coalitions, systems and environments that constrain action	Learn the rules of collective action, social dynamics, and external/ political factors key to learning
	Categories of learning include: epistemic, reflective, bargaining, hierarchical.	Learn how experts relate to: open dialogue, politically salient debates, and actors in authority.
Policy transfer	Levels of transfer vary from duplication to broad inspiration	Tell a precise story of success: does it relate to an idea or programme?
	Transfer ranges from voluntary to coercive	Identify what drives policymakers and influences their learning
	Transfer can be uninformed, incomplete, or inappropriate	Analyse what worked, why, and under what conditions. Ask if those conditions could be replicated.
	Policy success incorporates electoral, process, and long term societal outcomes	Avoid overly-technical analyses of success. Other conditions include political circumstances and governance arrangements.

Table 3: Responding to policy learning and transfer

8. Implications for connecting research to evidence informed learning and transfer

Tables 1-3 summarise insights from policy theory to describe key insights and some possible responses. Described *individually*, the insights may seem useful and feasible, but they *combine* to suggest that research impact requires an almost overwhelming set of instructions. There are two positive elements to this complex story. First, it provides a valuable contrast to unrealistic hopes for evidence based policy transfer. It reminds us that policymakers will draw on an eclectic mix of sources to generate evidence of another government's policy success. This generation of lessons is political: actors exercise power to define policy problems and determine the policy-relevance of evaluation evidence. They may import policy solutions without knowing if, and why, they were successful. Further, policy transfer is not separate from the policy process; evidence of international experience competes with many other sources of ideas.

Second, it places normative and political issues at the heart of policy learning research. For example, epistemic forms of learning may seem desirable, but prove to be less realistic than bargaining and no more defensible than a reflexive process in which many actors learn through dialogue (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018: 261). Experts describing new evidence from the experience of other governments can

be useful, but only as part of a wider process in which policymakers learn from their own experience in their own context.

We use the key example of ‘scaling up’ policy success to show how such research evidence and governance choices combine during processes of policy learning. Tabel 4 identifies three ideal-type models to describe the ways in which governments could select sources of evidence and decide how to centralise or localise policymaking when they seek to spread policy interventions across a whole political system:

	Model 1 Implementation science	Model 2 Story telling	Model 3 Improvement method
The main story	Interventions are highly regarded when backed by empirical data from international randomised control trials (RCTs). The approach has relatively high status in health departments, often while addressing issues of health, social care, and social work.	Practitioners tell stories of policy experiences, and invite other people to learn from them. Policy is driven by governance principles based on co-producing policy with service users.	Central governments identify promising evidence, train practitioners to use the improvement method, and experiment with local interventions. Discussion about how to ‘scale up’ policy combines personal reflection and empirical evidence of success.
How should you gather evidence of effectiveness and best practice?	With reference to a hierarchy of evidence and evidence gathering, generally with systematic reviews and RCTs at the top.	With reference to principles of good practice, and practitioner and service user testimony. No hierarchy of evidence.	Identify promising interventions, based on a mix of evidence. Encourage trained practitioners to adapt interventions to their area, and gather comparable data on their experience.
How should you ‘scale up’ from evidence of best practice?	Introduce the same model in each area. Require fidelity, to administer the correct dosage, and allow you to measure its effectiveness using RCTs.	Tell stories based on your experience, and invite other people to learn from them.	A simple message to practitioners: if your practice is working, keep doing it; if it is working better elsewhere, consider learning from their experience.
What aim should you prioritise?	To ensure the correct administration of the same active ingredient.	To foster key principles, such as localism and respect for service user experiences.	To train then allow local practitioners to experiment and decide how best to turn evidence into practice.

Tabel 4: Three consistent approaches to 'scale up' evidence-informed policy learning

Source: Cairney (2016b)

For example, the roll out of uniform policy interventions, driven by evidence from ‘gold standard’ randomised control trials (RCTs), would be consistent with centrally driven and hierarchical policy learning (Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Dunlop, 2016). Alternatively, attempts to share knowledge via storytelling would be consistent with reflexive learning and the choice to delegate policymaking to local communities, service users, and practitioners (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018). Within these two extremes are many possibilities to combine evidence and policy, including compromise models to combine pragmatic delegation with centrally-driven training to encourage the systematic use of evidence. For example, the improvement method arose with reference to the limitations of a uniform approach built primarily on RCT evidence, and provides an intellectually consistent way to combine knowledge and policymaking (Cairney and Oliver, 2017). However, governments may also choose to mix-and-match evidence sources and governance principles, taking us away from these three ideal types, and requiring us to engage heavily in background research to track their choices.

9. Three broad principles of a policy learning strategy

We draw on three principles when producing a more detailed research design. First, draw continuously on the insights from policy theory described in tables 1-3. Second, learn from and adapt established learning techniques. Most notably, Rose’s (2005) ‘ten steps’ guide to lesson-drawing are:

1. Learn Rose’s language of lesson-drawing, including what ‘programme’ and ‘lesson’ mean.
2. ‘Catch the attention of policymakers’.
3. Do some preliminary work to identify ‘where to look for lessons’.
4. ‘Learn by going abroad’.
5. Produce a model to describe how and why a programme works.
6. ‘Turn the model into a lesson fitting your own national context’.
7. ‘Decide whether the lesson should be adopted’.
8. ‘Decide whether the lesson can be applied’.
9. Simplify the lesson and its application to increase its chance of success.
10. Evaluate the success of your lesson-drawing process.

Third, learn how to maximise the impact of research for policy learning. In particular, the IMAJINE is working with the EU Joint Research Centre to encourage ‘knowledge management for policy’. Cairney co-produced with the JRC a journal article which identifies eight skills to address eight challenges associated with the gap between the supply of evidence and a policymaking response (Topp et al, 2018: 2):

1. *Synthesising research*. There is an over-supply of information to policymakers, compared to the limited ‘bandwidth’ of policymakers, producing the need to synthesise and prioritise the most robust and relevant knowledge.
2. *Managing expert communities*. Policy problems are complex and inter-dependent, calling for cooperation between disciplines and ‘joining up’ a wide range of policies.
3. *Understanding policy and science*. The policy process is better understood as an eco-system than a policy cycle with linear stages, prompting new ways to understand the link between evidence and policy.

4. *Interpersonal skills.* We need to overcome a lack of mutual respect, understanding, and empathy between scientists and policymakers, and reflect on our behavioural biases which produce hubristic behaviour.
5. *Engaging with citizens and stakeholders.* Evidence-informed policy should be more informed by citizen and stakeholder views. Scientists should not exacerbate stakeholder exclusion by presenting issues as only technical.
6. *Communicating scientific knowledge.* Policymakers often do not pay attention to evidence on problems or have enough awareness of evidence-informed solutions.
7. *Monitoring and evaluation.* We need to ensure the routine monitoring of policy, partly to use evidence to evaluate success and hold policymakers to account (and monitor the success of KMP initiatives).
8. *Advising policymakers.* We should close the gap in expected behaviour between policymakers seeking evidence-informed recommendations and researchers trying to draw the line between the 'honest broker' and 'issue advocate'.

The IMAJINE team is working with the JRC to operationalise this agenda, to develop key KMP skills while conducting and communicating research.

10. Preliminary research design

This combination of principles requires us to go beyond 'how to do it' guides, to incorporate modern insights on EBPM and learning, and build 'impact' into research design by engaging with stakeholders throughout the research process. However, it also provides an overwhelming list of tasks to achieve, including dozens of insights from tables 1-3, eight skills for impact, and ten steps to lesson drawing. We need some way to simplify and refine these tasks to make them manageable and incorporate them into a model for research activity.

In that context, we outline an investigative model whose three steps relate strongly to the three aspects of limited EBPM: (1) how policymakers gather evidence of policy success (2) the story they tell about what they are doing and why, and (3) the extent to which the policymaking systems of each government are conducive to meaningful systematic comparison. We use these questions to provide structure to our case study approach, which combines new empirical analysis with stakeholder engagement, to think through their incentives and ability to learn from each other and us.

Q1. What is the evidence for success, and from where does it come?

Policy actors debate what counts as good evidence, draw on an eclectic mix of evidence sources, and use evidence to support their beliefs about the value of a policy choice. The policy transfer process may accentuate these practices, partly because the exporting government - and supporters of its policy - has an incentive to declare early and strong evidence of success (Cairney, 2018b). Therefore, first, importing governments should rely on a combination of sources, including government-commissioned but independent evaluations, international benchmarks, and independent scientific reviews subject to peer review. These evaluations should use a range of methods, from the routine use of evaluations of the measure, to counterfactual comparisons to ask if another solution would have been more

successful. Second, we should identify a clear way to describe success. We may be identifying 'Good practice' based on positive experience, 'Promising approaches' but unsystematic findings, 'Research-based' or 'sound theory informed by a growing body of empirical research', or 'Evidence-based', when 'the programme or practice has been rigorously evaluated and has consistently been shown to work' (Perkins 2010, in Nutley et al, 2013: 9)

Q2. What story do exporters/importers of policy tell about the problem they seek to solve?

We need to know more about the agenda setting process that leads policymakers to narrow their range of choices, and the ways in which new policy instruments reinforce or contradict existing policies. This step is crucial to comparability, since the exporting/ importing government may have very different ways to (a) understand issues as problems, (b) identify feasible solutions, and (c) determine what policy success looks like.

Q3. Do they have comparable political and policymaking systems?

Comparability relates partly to the nature of *political* systems, including their formal rules, divisions of power, and the role of political parties, multiple levels of government, and the courts. We also focus strongly on *policymaking* systems: the actors, institutions, networks, ideas, and socioeconomic conditions that influence how policymakers define policy problems and the technical and political feasibility of solutions. We can use the constituent parts of 'policymaking environments' to think systematically about elements of comparability:

- *Actors*. Compare the spread of policymakers and influencers across many venues: which levels or types of government are responsible for this policy?
- *Institutions*. Compare the formal and informal rules of those venues: which rules matter?
- *Networks*. Compare the relationships between policy makers and influencers: what role do these networks play in making and delivering this policy?
- *Ideas*. Compare the paradigms within which new solutions are considered: do policymakers in the exporting and importing governments have the same *fundamental* beliefs about the nature of policy problems and feasible solutions?
- *Socioeconomic context and events*. Compare the drivers for policy change: are both governments responding to crisis or routine events? Do they share similar reference points, including aspects of economic performance or social attitudes and behaviour?

Theme	Issue/ Key concept	Guiding question
Identifying the evidence for policy success	Exporting governments are incentivised to declare success	Use a range of sources to help identify, define, measure and contextualise success
	It is unclear how long to wait to declare success	Clarify success, from promising new strategies to programmes that have worked as intended when implemented.
	Evidence choices relate strongly to governance choices	Identify the relationship between key sources of evidence (such as RCTs or storytelling) and the governance principles underpinning delivery (such as centralism or coproduction)
Telling success stories	Policymakers in exporting/importing governments may define the policy problem, identify what is a feasible response, and gauge success in different ways.	Identify how policy actors define the issue as a policy problem.
		Identify how they limit their focus to policy solutions.
		Ask key actors what policy success would look like.
Comparability: 1. Political systems	Identify the relevance of key features of each system, including: federal or unitary; presidential or parliamentary; uni- or bi-cameral; the role of the judiciary; the role of direct democracy; electoral and party systems; group-government relations; bureaucratic structures.	
2. Policymaking systems	Actors	Who is responsible for this policy?
	Institutions	What are the rules in each authoritative venue?
	Networks	What are the key relationships between policymakers and influencers?
	Ideas	What beliefs underpin attention to problems and solutions?
	Socioeconomic context	To what conditions are policymakers responding?

Table 5: Guiding questions for case study analysis

We combine multiple forms of qualitative analysis to answer these questions. We conduct expert, stakeholder, and policymaker interviews to establish how each government defined policy problems, identified solutions, and evaluated success. We use published evaluations and benchmark analyses to provide a wider evaluation of policy success. We use the secondary literature to identify key variations in political systems, combined with new interview data on how key actors form networks and share information.

11. Next steps: Case Study Development

Since our process is iterative, we describe this initial deliverable as a living document to be amended throughout the research process. Our next steps are as follows:

1. To share and seek feedback on this document, primarily through our advisory group, before developing specific parts of the research design (such as draft semi-structured interview schedules).
2. To develop case studies for further development, based on initial descriptions including:
 - Ireland. Key members of the Irish government have described, in stakeholder meetings, policy success in reducing education attainment inequalities. There is considerable OECD benchmarking evidence to support key aspects of this claim.

- Portugal. The Portuguese government has a reputation for drugs policy innovation, to treat drug use primarily as a public health issue and medical treatment issue, and reduce inequalities in criminal penalties.
 - Finland. The Finnish government initiated a major trial of 'universal basic income' interventions to reduce income-based inequalities.
 - Tuscany. The regional council has developed new ways to integrate social services, health and active labour market policy
 - Basque Country. The regional government pioneered a regional minimum income scheme and has sought to integrate social policies around inclusion.
 - Wales. The Welsh Assembly passed the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act in 2015 to statutorily oblige the public sector to mainstream 'sustainability' and 'well-being' across all policies and services.
3. To combine initial background analysis with the development of stakeholder networks. For example, we have good links with the Scottish Government, which we can use to gauge demand for new case study knowledge. We have also made initial contact with key bodies in each case study: the Centre for Effective Services (education); the COPOLAD network (drugs policy, public health and criminal justice); and, the Finnish Government (universal basic income trials).
 4. Developing innovative ways to discuss and share this new knowledge, such as via WP8's participatory scenario-building exercises.

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