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## Transnational communication and domestic environmental policy learning

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**Abstract:** This article seeks to provide patterns of how transnational communication may lead to domestic policy learning. Existing theories of policy learning, policy diffusion and policy convergence assume that transnational communication may lead to domestic policy learning and policy change, but do not suggest general, empirically investigated patterns. Two case studies on the policy of noise abatement around airports and the policy of contaminated land show that different venues in which transnational communication takes place may induce different types of policy change at the national level.

**Keywords:** transnational communication, policy learning, airport noise, contaminated land

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*Communication transnationale et apprentissage national de la politique  
environnementale*

**Résumé :** Cet article consiste à mettre en évidence comment la communication transnationale peut conduire à l'apprentissage politique national. Même si les théories de l'apprentissage politique, de la diffusion politique et de la convergence politique peuvent conduire à l'apprentissage politique national et au changement politique, elles ne proposent pas de modèles de recherche généraux, empiriques. Les deux études de cas, l'une sur la pollution sonore autour des aéroports, et l'autre sur les terres contaminées illustreront les diverses façons dont la communication transnationale tend à induire différentes formes de changement politique au niveau national.

**Mots-clés :** communication transnationale, apprentissage politique, pollution sonore autour des aéroports, terres contaminées

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### **Introduction**

Countries deal with similar types of environmental problems: for instance transportation disturbs the community living close by, neighbourhoods near the river are in danger of flooding during spring and contaminated soil has to be remediated. In order to respond to these problems, lessons can be learnt from other countries. As Bennett (1991a, p. 220) states: 'There is a natural tendency to look abroad, to see how other states have responded to similar pressures, to share ideas, to draw lessons and to bring foreign evidence to bear with domestic policy-making processes.' For example, political actors refer to policy goals or instruments from other countries in political debates, while private actors participate in importing knowledge from other countries (Robertson, 1991; Wolman 1992; Cairney, 2009; Veenman & Liefferink 2013; Jörgens, Lenschow & Liefferink et al., 2014).

Although there is evidence that policy makers and stakeholders examine experiences from other countries through international networks that in turn lead to policy change (Evans, 2004), it is not easy for national governments to effectively use knowledge from other countries. There are plenty of opportunities to share knowledge and to learn from each other's approaches and experiences, but it is difficult to find the way within what may be called the international knowledge infrastructure, i.e. the full range of opportunities – or 'venues' – available for transnational communication. It seems obvious that in different transnational venues, different topics are discussed, but a clear overview of the link between specific venues and the type of policy learning has been

absent so far. Thus, policy makers and stakeholders may find it difficult to make optimal use of the international infrastructure.

Not only practitioners, however, are uncertain as to where to extract that knowledge that is useful at a given place and a given point in time. Also analytically, the issue of transnational communication is fragmented, i.e. scattered among different policy fields. Different labels (policy learning, diffusion, policy transfer, etc.) are being used for partly overlapping, but also complementary analytical aspects of the same phenomenon (e.g. Rose, 1991; Haas, 1992; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; 2000; Busch & Jörgens, 2005; Holzinger, Arts & Knill, 2008; Veenman 2008; Liefferink, Jörgens & Lenschow, 2014). Apart from that, there is a lack of empirical research and, hence, of clearly established patterns concerning knowledge sharing. This paper takes up the challenge of filling part of this research gap.

This paper aims to create insight into the processes of transnational communication and domestic policy change in order to establish a link between what we call the venues within the international knowledge infrastructure in which transnational communication takes place. The paper aims to identify and explain which type of international venue is likely to lead to which type of domestic policy change. The research question therefore is: can patterns be identified with regard to the venue in which transnational communication takes place and the resulting domestic policy change? When these patterns are identified, it is possible to see the potential value of different types of international venues within the international knowledge infrastructure and to provide some guidance to policy makers in this regard.

In order to answer this question, an exploration of theoretical approaches of, first, the venues of transnational communication and, second, domestic policy learning is presented, followed by an elaboration of the methodology and the selection of the cases, i.e. the policy of noise abatement around airports and the policy of contaminated land. In the subsequent section and using the concepts derived from the theoretical overview, these cases are examined in some detail. The final section wraps up with the conclusions.

## **1. Transnational communication and domestic policy change**

In order to create a clear framework to investigate the link between the venues of transnational communication and domestic policy learning, this section first presents an outline of different types of venues in which transnational communication may take place, based on theories of international policy diffusion and network theories, among others. Then, a categorization of policy learning and policy change is outlined.

### 1.1. *Venues of transnational communication*

Transnational communication can be positioned at the ‘soft’ end of the range of cross-national mechanisms potentially leading to domestic policy learning and/or policy change (Holzinger & Knill 2005, 2008; Liefferink et al., 2014). First, in the case of imposition, governments are forced to carry through policy change through coercion or conditionality. Second, international harmonization depends on obligations to which states have jointly agreed, in the context of multilateral treaties or international organizations such as the European Union (EU). Third, regulatory competition is based on the mutual adjustment of national policies in view of economic competitiveness. For example divergent standards for motor vehicles may create competitive advantages or disadvantages for motor vehicle manufacturers, pressuring governments to alter national standards (Pesendorfer, 2014). Transnational communication, finally, concerns the voluntary exchange of knowledge and information.

Because transnational communication may take place in different forms and contexts, a characterisation of the international knowledge infrastructure must be made.

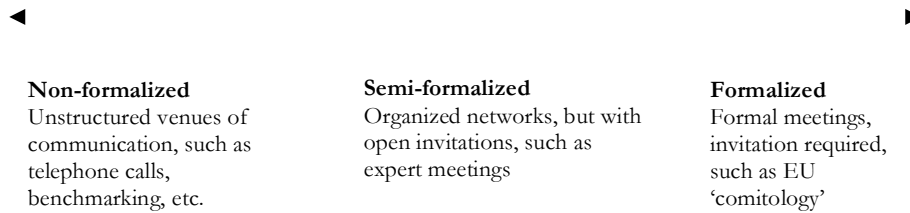
A start for the categorization of different types of transnational knowledge transfer may be derived from diffusion literature (Busch & Jörgens, 2005; Holzinger & Knill, 2005; Simmons *et. al.*, 2006), which focuses on the voluntary adoption of policy innovations. In these voluntary processes, the diffusion literature makes a distinction between ‘vertical’ and ‘non-formalized’ patterns of communication. In both cases, knowledge is shared voluntarily. The difference between the two categories is the presence (vertical) or absence (non-formalized) of an international organization (Kern, 1998; Tews, Busch & Jörgens, 2003; Levi-Faur, 2005; Tews, 2005; Elkins & Simmons, 2005). Apart from these two categories, Risse (2002) specifies a third category, referred to as ‘micro-mechanisms’. It entails interactions on a more individual basis, taking place between national actors on their own account. This category is mainly elaborated in transfer literature (Bennett, 1991b; Rose, 1991; Risse, 2002; James & Lodge, 2003; Evans, 2004).

The distinction, however, between the three categories is vague and hard to operationalise. There are large grey areas between them. An international network that is established under the umbrella of an international organization may in fact be characterized as either vertical or horizontal, the crucial difference lying in the role the international organization plays, that is, either staging and directing the process or primarily as a participant like the others. The classification, in other words, is not so

much linked to the presence or absence of an international institution as such, but rather to its precise role and the extent to which the venue is formalized.

These considerations give rise to a simple classification of formalized and non-formalized venues. However, rather than presenting a simple dichotomy, we prefer a continuum (see Figure 1). On the formal side of the continuum, the infrastructure consists of national level experts, policy makers or stakeholders, communicating in the context of formalized international meetings, set up for instance for the negotiation of international treaties and protocols, EU directives, or formal agreements (e.g. ‘round tables’) between private actors. On the very left of the continuum, the infrastructure is open, informal and non-authoritative.

Network theories (Rhodes, 1999; Van Waarden, 1992) point to various aspects that may help to place a given international network on the continuum, e.g. the involvement of different types of actors, the requirement of a formal invitation for participation, the public or private status of the meetings, the sharing of different types of resources, the involvement of international institutions and, if so, the extent to which the latter play an authoritative role.



**Figure 1.** Venues of Transnational Communication: continuum ranging from not-formalized to formalized VTC

The category of ‘micro-mechanisms’, identified by Risse (2002), generally sits on the left, i.e. the non-formalized side of the continuum (see Figure 1). An example is provided by Wolman (1992) who emphasizes the importance of the private sector, including individuals and neighbourhoods. In this case, transnational communication between actors is usually unstructured, without formal invitations and at the participant’s own initiative. It can entail visits, but also telephone calls, reading papers or articles, benchmarking exercises, etc. The venue here is clearly non-formalized: actors are involved on an individual, often *ad hoc* basis and there is no formally established network in which they participate.

Somewhat more towards the center of the continuum, various transnational networks may be located in which there is no possibility to exert economic or political pressure on actors in order to stimulate policy change. These are for example organized expert meetings that are held regularly in the context of international treaties to discuss the latest insights and to revise implementation practices. In this context, different types of networks have been suggested in the literature. Epistemic Communities are networks in which experts participate (Haas, 1992), Transnational Advocacy Networks have a broader range of actors, including for instance churches and NGOs (Keck & Sikkink, 1998), whereas Global Public Policy Networks include an even broader range of actors (Reinicke, 1999).

Finally, networks for which participation is based on the participant's formal position or a formal invitation, which have a public status and/or formal competences over, for instance, the implementation or even establishment of rules or the division of resources reside on the formalized side of the continuum, i.e. the right side. Examples of the latter type are formalized treaty negotiations or the EU 'comitology' committees (Moury & Héritier 2012).

Working with such continuum, it should be noted that venues within the international knowledge infrastructure may evolve over time: a fully non-formalized venue may be imagined to gradually take on more and more formalized characteristics and eventually move towards complete formalization. 'De-formalization' in fact seems less likely, but should not be categorically excluded.

### *1.2. Policy learning and policy change*

When dealing with policy learning, one of the critical issues is how learning can be identified at all. Underlying this question is a conceptual discussion. Some authors equate policy-oriented learning with policy change, arguing that "learning that does not affect behavior is not useful (...)" (Jarosz & Nye, 1993, p. 180 in Levy, 1994, p. 290). Others, including Bennett and Howlett (1992) and Levy (1994), prefer to make a clear distinction between learning and policy change, arguing that there can in fact be policy change without policy-oriented learning, and policy-oriented learning without policy change.

Indeed, international processes such as imposition are likely to lead to policy change without any policy-oriented learning. Conversely, there may be processes such as negative lesson drawing, in which there has been policy-oriented learning but deliberately no policy change (Rose, 1991, 19). Taking these considerations into account, this paper considers policy-oriented learning from transnational communication

to have taken place when knowledge gained through transnational communication has led either to concrete policy change or to an identifiable domestic debate about this knowledge, even if the latter has not eventually had a concrete effect on policy. A compelling practical reason for this approach is that learning processes without debate or change are difficult, if not impossible, to trace.

Following the focus of this paper and in order to grasp different types of domestic policy learning and policy change, we follow Hall's distinction of three orders of policy change (Hall, 1993). The first order entails changes in the 'settings' of a policy, i.e. the 'calibration' of standards such as the level of emission standards or tax rates. The second order is changes in the instrumentation of the policy, i.e. the instruments or techniques used to reach the desired effect. One may think of regulation or voluntary agreements. The third order refers to changes in the policy goals. As well as the principles and paradigms that guides the policy, e.g. the objective to reduce the level of noise around airports or the Polluter Pays Principle (Veenman, 2008). Using Hall's words: "The process of first order change is likely to display the features of incrementalism, satisficing, and routinized decision making that we normally associate with the policy process. Second order change making and the development of new policy instruments may move one step beyond in the direction of strategic action. But third order change is more problematic: the literature provided far less guidance for modeling this sort of process" (Hall 1993, p. 280).

Where Hall focuses on the third order change, how such change is established, who is involved, etc., we would like to take stock and investigate the three types of learning, trying to link the orders of change to the different types of venues of transnational communication.

## **2. Methodology**

When dealing with policy learning and transnational communication, it is important that other international mechanisms that trigger policy change may be expected to be as much as possible absent (Jørgens et al., 2014). For this reason, we selected two cases, noise around airports and contaminated land, where there is no international legislation aiming at harmonisation (yet) which could potentially interfere with processes of transnational communication. Also, both issues are not directly sensitive to economic competitiveness. In the case of airport noise, this was a reason for us to focus on day-time noise only. All airports deal with noise during day and night. Policies concerning noise during the night has a direct and profound impact on economic competitiveness, because the discussion is mainly on whether an airport closes down at night altogether.



For day-time noise, possible measures are primarily directed at limiting noise and therefore affect economic competitiveness to a much lesser extent.

The two selected cases are complementary as regards the degree of formalization of the international knowledge infrastructure. Thus, the comparison of the cases will enable us to highlight differences between more formalized and less formalized venues of transnational communication and the knowledge that is transferred from those. The field of airport noise shows several long-established international networks and organizations, providing opportunities especially for formalized venues of transnational communication. For example, only members are formally invited and international organizations play an authoritative role in the international networks. Intergovernmental organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) were founded in the years after the Second World War. They are complemented by private sector institutions, of which the International Aviation Transport Association (IATA) and Eurocontrol are best known, as well as international networks for local and regional authorities and for NGOs involved in aviation issues. Most of these organizations cover a broad range of issues related to aviation, including noise. Less formalized venues of transnational communication only emerged quite recently. A case in point is the establishment in 2005 of the international network 'Airport Noise – Non-Auditory' (ANNA), an epistemic community type of network (Haas 1992) in which experts from different national and international organizations participate. In ANNA, it was emphasized that non-acoustic factors may help to reduce noise annoyance, for example by involving the community in the noise policy and creating transparency.

The second case study deals with the remediation of contaminated land, an issue which emerged in most industrialized countries during the 1980s and 1990s. Particularly in the early years, most transnational communication in this area had an open and generally low profile, i.e. basically non-formalized character. Only in the course of the 1990s, contacts between governments and research institutes started to get somewhat more formalized. Hence, this case allows taking an in-depth look at more informal venues within the international knowledge infrastructure. An important network in this context is the EU Common Forum, a platform for government representatives established in 1994. Two temporary expert networks originated from it: the Concerted Action on Risk Assessment for Contaminated Sites in Europe (CARACAS, 1996-1998), and the Contaminated Land Rehabilitation Network for Environmental Technologies (CLARINET, 1998-2001). Operating in the context of a formalized international institution (the EU), but still in a relatively open, non-regulatory and non-authoritative way, the Common Forum and the two expert networks can be located somewhere in the middle of the continuum presented above. In 2006, the European Commission made a

formal proposal for a Soil Framework Directive, but at the time of writing this proposal is still pending.

As far as policy learning and policy change at the domestic level is concerned, this study focuses on four countries: the Netherlands, the UK, France and Hungary. The choice of the countries took place in the context of a broader research project (cf. Veenman 2008, 2014; Jörgens et al., 2014) and is linked to the different transnational venues in which the countries participate. The Netherlands, the UK and France are well represented in various formalized as well as non-formalized venues of transnational communication. Thus, they represent countries that are strongly embedded in different venues learn from the international knowledge infrastructure. Hungary, due to its history, entered the formalized arena only later. This helps to gain better insight into the impact of different transnational venues on policy learning.

A final methodological issue concerns the gathering of the data. To answer the research question, the paper draws on a longitudinal reconstruction and thus makes it possible to examine a specific policy area over time and to detect several instances of policy learning. The findings presented in this paper result from an analysis informed by three types of data, to ensure methodological triangulation. First, a comprehensive document analysis was carried out. Second, authoritative scholarly reconstructions of policy change based upon transnational communication in other policy fields were studied to find patterns and empirical evidence (Busch & Jörgens, 2005; Cairney, 2009, Jörgens et al., 2014). Third, between 2004 2007, about 80 interviews were held for each case with key participants, covering a wide variety of stakeholders in the policy-making process, such as airports, airlines, NGOs, governmental actors, consultancies, industry, etc. The interviews were semi-structured: the focus was on policy change due to knowledge exchange and policy learning, paying special attention to the venue of transnational communication.

### **3. Analysing policy learning from transnational communication**

This section will focus on domestic policy change based upon policy learning from transnational communication, referring to the venues of transnational communication outlined in the previous section. The three levels of policy learning identified above will provide the structure of the section.

### 3.1. *Third order learning*

Noise contours are the principal policy goal in the field of airport noise, as they are meant to keep the overall noise within certain pre-established limits – or contours. Noise contours are nowadays used around many airports.

France and the UK showed third order learning through transnational communication, by adjusting their policy goal upon inspiration by Dutch experiences. To understand the changes both countries made in their policy goal, it is necessary to know some about the previous Dutch noise contour. The peculiarity of the Dutch noise contour cap, which existed until 2013, the idea of which was already established in the 1960s, was the strict and geographically fixed character. It was conceived as a ‘red line’ on the map, beyond which the annual average noise level should not be more than what was defined as ‘acceptable’. This noise contour cap is based on measurements and calculations. In order to make the cap legally enforceable, however, it is firmly established in national legislation. Due to this, it is not allowed for the contour to shift location. The legally confirmed geographical position makes the Dutch noise contour cap a very complicated and obdurate system, giving rise to serious and protracted domestic controversy (Veenman, 2008) – in fact up to the present day. The Netherlands had a noise policy goal for a long time and did not change its goal upon very recently (2012). As we will explain below, it turned out to be a ‘worst case lesson’ for the other countries.

In France, an overall framework to reduce airport noise was put in place in 1997 on the basis of lessons learnt via transnational communication. First, during official meetings of the ICAO and its Committee on Aviation and Environmental Protection (CEAP), the staff of *Airports de Paris* (AdP) learnt that the perspective of aircrafts becoming more quiet due to technological development could be conveniently linked to the use of noise contours. In fact, if planes were to produce less noise in the future, noise contours would not increase even with an increase in air traffic. This prospect inspired AdP, in cooperation with the French Civil Aviation Authority (DGAC), to establish a framework for reducing noise based on the idea of noise contours. The contour cap for day noise in 1997 was set at 100% and it was established that the total surface area affected by noise from 2000 onwards should not exceed that of 1997 (Personal communication, AdP, 2007; Personal communication, DGAC, 2007).

Thus, the international exchange of the technical ins and outs of establishing and calculating contour caps discussed in the formal networks of ICAO and CEAP lay at the basis of changing the French policy goal. However, knowledge exchanged in ad hoc circumstances, i.e. at the very left of the continuum (see Figure 1), also played a role in

this process of third order learning. While formulating noise contours, the French authorities became interested in the Dutch framework to reduce noise. During a conference of the Airport Council International and afterwards, the international trade association of airports, AdP and DGAC heard bilaterally from a Dutch governmental employee about the complications of the Dutch policy, i.e. legal problems with the geographically fixed noise contour cap around Amsterdam Airport Schiphol. The Dutch delegate advised his French colleagues not to create a similar framework to reduce noise (Personal communication, AdP, 2007). As a result, DGAC formulated the maximum noise contour without fixing it geographically by law: the area affected should not surpass that of 1997, but the exact location of the contours was kept flexible (Personal communication, AdP, 2007; Personal communication, DGAC, 2007).

The UK case shows a similar pattern regarding third order policy learning through transnational communication. Also in the UK knowledge was gained via two venues of transnational communication. The staff of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) developed a model-based noise contour cap in addition to the existing noise limitations for individual descending and arriving aircrafts. As in France, knowledge about the decrease of the noise contours was gathered in ICAO-CEAP as well as in ECAC's Group of Experts on the Abatement of Nuisances Caused by Air Transport (ANCAT). Both networks sit on the left side of the continuum (see Figure 1). In addition, also the UK created a noise contour cap deliberately not similar to the Dutch contour cap, based upon knowledge concerning the Dutch situation. The CAA gathered this knowledge on an individual, ad hoc basis, i.e. at the very left of the continuum (see figure 1) (Personal communication, CAA, 2007; Personal communication, Department for Transport, 2007). Both situations show that in the change of the policy goal, crucial information was shared in non-formalized venues of the international knowledge infrastructure.

In the field of contaminated land, one of the fundamental choices to be made is the remediation goal. There are two basic options: the soil may either be cleaned up in such a way that any future use of land remains possible, i.e. multi-functionality, or it may be cleaned up as far as required for a specific future use, i.e. the fitness-for-use approach. In order to make a well-considered choice, the governments of France and Hungary turned out to be eager to learn from experiences made in countries that had been pioneers in the field, such as Germany, the Netherlands and the USA.

Starting with France, around 1993, the French Environment Ministry, together with the governmental Institute of Geological and Mining Research (BRGM), investigated remediation policies in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, USA and Canada by way of informal visits and bilateral contacts with the respective national research institutes. At the Dutch Environment Ministry and its Institute for Public Health and the Environment,

for instance, they learnt that the Netherlands claimed to apply the multifunctional approach, but in practice mostly applied the exceptions to this approach. For example, already in 1985, many Dutch municipalities succeeded in incorporating the specific future use of the site in the remediation goal, using the ‘multifunctional, unless this is not feasible’ loophole creatively. The French eventually decided in favour of the fitness-for-use approach (Personal communication, BRGM, 2005; Personal communication, French Environment Ministry, 2005).

Also the Hungarian government actively searched for foreign experiences. In 1996, it had become aware of the problem of contaminated land after the Russian Army had abandoned its military sites. The Hungarians particularly investigated the Dutch policy goal of multifunctionality and the German fitness-for-use approach – and eventually choose a mixture of the two approaches (KVVM, 1997; Deseo, 1999; Personal communication, Hungarian Environment Ministry, 2005). Both the Hungarian and the French cases of contaminated land showed learning regarding the policy goal in non-formalized venues of transnational communication, i.e. again at the left side of the continuum.

### 3.2. *Second order learning*

In the case of noise around airports, two countries made second order changes in their domestic policies based upon transnational communication: the UK introduced additional measures to reduce noise annoyance, and Budapest airport made several changes in the policy instruments applied in this field. Concerning contaminated land, three countries made second order changes in the policy based upon internationally gained knowledge: France, the UK and the Dutch.

Starting with airport noise, Budapest Airport Ferihegy was in fact the first in our sample to learn from transnational communication in relation to second order policy change. In 1997, employees of the Hungarian Ministry of Economy and Transport visited Zürich and Munich Airports. During these visits, the governmental employees learnt that Munich had legally established a Noise Committee to consult the public and that this committee had proven useful in the relationship between the community and the airport authorities and thus reduced noise perception. The Hungarian Ministry, inspired by this ‘best practice’, decided to do the same. From 2005 onwards, i.e. still before the other airports had instigated benchmark studies for gathering contextual knowledge systematically, Budapest Airport again engaged in a non-formalized venue of transnational communication. Looking abroad was facilitated by the privatization of Ferihegy in the same period. The airport came into the hands of BAA and the German company Hochtief successively. Both owners made ample use of knowledge gained at

other airports operated by them. This involved, among other things, the introduction of the Continuous Descent Approach, based upon experiences at London Heathrow, and the establishment of a noise insulation scheme benefited from experiences in Hamburg.

In the UK, BAA used to be involved in all kinds of formalized venues of transnational communication located at the right hand side of the continuum. In the mid-2000s, additionally, it conducted a benchmark study, thus moving to the left in the continuum, to learn from noise measures in other countries (Personal communication, BAA Corporate, 2007). Following that, changes to the measures were carried through, such as taking non-acoustic factors into account, which were discussed in the semi-formal network ANNA.

In the Hungarian and the British cases, apparently, knowledge was not, or not sufficiently, shared in the more formalized venues and it was considered useful to complement it with knowledge gained in more informal contexts.

In the case of contaminated land, there is evidence of more second order learning based upon transnational communication. During travels abroad, for instance, the French learnt about the policy instrument of the 'financial guarantee', making it legally impossible to close an industry without remediation, and introduced it at home (INERIS, *email comm.*, 2007).

The UK made two second order changes. First, as early as 1989, the UK House of Commons Select Committee instigated a comprehensive inquiry into the policy of contaminated land. It visited the Netherlands and the USA and collected knowledge concerning remediation policies in relation to the national situation in these countries. Among other things, experiences with the US 'Superfund' instrument were gathered. It led to the conclusion that this financial measure could not be implemented in the UK due to differences in the tax system. Second, through the Common Forum, employees of the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) learnt that detailed regulation was necessary in order to organize liability properly. More specifically, these employees learnt practical examples of how *not* to handle it. Solutions of other countries to allocating liability were considered inappropriate for England, considering its legal context (Personal communication, DEFRA, 2007).

In the Netherlands, the change in instrumentation gradually shifted from the use of state budget for remediation to the liability approach, partly due to knowledge gathered in semi-formalized international networks, sitting in the middle of the continuum. The then Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM, now renamed Infrastructure and Environment) argued that this shift had been mainly due to

domestic circumstances, but that it had been seen also in other countries through the international CLARINET network (Personal communication, VROM, 2006).

### 3.3. *First order learning*

Change in the settings of noise policy based upon transnational communication could be observed in the UK. The field of contaminated land showed changes in policy settings that could be related to transnational communication in France, the UK and Hungary.

In the UK, in 1988, the DfT decided to change the noise index of Heathrow from a noise index (NNI) to the internationally more common index of aircraft noise. This change was proposed by experts of the CAA who had been involved in formal international networks of the World Health Organization (Brooker, 2004). Later on, local authorities and pressure groups adjusted the setting by introducing the so-called N-70 model into the debate around Heathrow through their engagement in the ANNA network (Personal communication, Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise, 2007; Personal communication, Local Authority, 2007). This is a new model for calculating noise annoyance, used in Sydney and based not only upon acoustic parameters, but also related to the communities perception of the annoyance. The knowledge was gathered within the semi-formalized ANNA network focusing on non-acoustic factors.

In the case of contaminated land, the French twice changed settings of their domestic policy inspired by transnational communication in non-formalized venues i.e. at the left side of the continuum. In 1999, the French National Institute for the Environment and Risk Assessment (INERIS) developed a set of values or intervention criteria to judge whether the soil is contaminated or not, gathered via literature concerning similar values in the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden (Personal communication, INERIS, 2005). Later it calculated French values for some components, based on scenarios and models inspired by the Dutch system and available through publications (Personal communication, INERIS, 2005). A similar type of information was gathered by the French BRGM (see above). It did so by visiting representatives of the Environment Protection Agency in the USA, and through meetings with employees of the Dutch Institute for Public Health and the Environment (Personal communication, BRGM, 2005).

During the preparation of an official guidance on how to deal with contaminated land, employees from the UK Environment Agency gathered knowledge, e.g. regarding

data to be used in calibrating models, by looking at different international approaches, (Bardos, 2002; Personal communication, Environment Agency, 2007).

Through participation in the semi-formalized CARACAS network (see above), the Hungarian government learnt about the settings used in risk assessments related to remediation activities. This knowledge was subsequently introduced in the national legislation (Prokop, 2000; Personal communication, Hungarian Environment Ministry, 2007).

In sum, the cases of both airport noise and contaminated land showed first order learning on the basis of transnational communication in both more and less formalized contexts.

### **Conclusions**

This paper has sought to explore whether patterns can be identified between the venue of transnational communication and domestic policy learning. The evidence collected suggests that first order learning may take place on the basis of knowledge gained in international venues with varying degrees of formalization. When second and third order learning based upon transnational communication was evident, however, knowledge gained in formal transnational contexts might be used, but in addition to that the incorporation of knowledge gained in less formalized venues of transnational communication appeared as a highly important, if not an essential pre-condition.

This is probably not a coincidence. The *raison d'être* of most formalized venues in which transnational communication takes place tends to go beyond transnational communication as such: in most cases, these venues are directed either towards economic cooperation, for instance through regulating markets or formulating economic guidelines, or towards discussing political problems. They are usually situated within a broader, institutionalized context, such as most prominently the EU, and there are (political and economic) resources and interests at stake. In economically oriented international organizations, transnational communication takes place in a competitive context.

Borrowing Fritz Scharpf's (1988, 1997) terms, participants in formalized venues are likely to interact in a bargaining mode rather than a problem-solving mode. If actors provide insight into their specific problems and lay bare their strategies, this may be an advantage to competitors, who are actually sitting at the same table. Similarly, in a political context, actors try to establish political commitment to compel countries to



undertake certain actions. For strategic reasons, it can be unwise to give others too much insight into domestic problems or preferences.

The nature of such more formalized venues, in short, sets constraints to the issues that public as well as private actors may want to discuss. The policy settings involved in first order learning entail relatively straightforward issues, e.g. how much lead in soil can be allowed, which model is used to calculate a certain standard, etc. This is relatively neutral territory, not directly touching upon more sensitive aspects of the national situation, domestic interests or underlying policy goals.

Discussions in formalized international venues are thus likely to centre on relatively 'safe' matters. Although knowledge about policy settings may also contain political and/or economically sensitive information, for example about energy stocks, energy use or other statistics useful for competitive or even military purposes, the numerical adjustment of policies or the fine-tuning of instruments and measures – or what we may call technicalities – is likely to dominate.

For second and third order learning, more profound insight into the respective domestic contexts appears to be essential. Policy instruments and policy goals are embedded in a national regulatory tradition and legislative framework; policy goals are embedded in the national culture and history, and constrained by geographical and economic circumstances. Learning regarding these matters requires a certain amount of 'translation' from one national context to another. Therefore, more detailed knowledge about the country must be shared in order to be able to achieve second or third order learning.

The cases suggest that this type of knowledge cannot or not sufficiently be gained in a formalized, often strategically oriented context. Instead, it can be gained in more informal venues within the international knowledge infrastructure, e.g. by carrying out benchmark studies, through bilateral contacts or in the form of site visits to other countries.

In less formalized venues of transnational communication, policy makers or experts are relatively free to talk with like-minded colleagues. They communicate with each other in a transnational, depoliticized context, i.e. relatively detached from national political and economic interests. Hence, they are likely to interact in a problem-solving mode rather than a bargaining mode (Scharpf, 1988, 1997). This way, it may be expected to be sufficiently 'safe' to share knowledge that requires insight into national conditions, strategies, instruments and processes. Such knowledge, we argue, is highly important for second or third order learning and policy change.

This pattern suggests that certain venues of transnational communication stimulate or hinder different types of learning. Put somewhat bluntly, our findings might lead to the claim that involvement in a predominantly formalized international infrastructure for transnational communication tends to prevent the exchange of knowledge about instruments and goals. The case of Budapest Airport, only gradually getting involved in various formalized organizations and networks after the collapse of the Soviet Union but actively learning from other countries about policy instruments in the 1990s, supports this point. Such learning requires long, exhaustive talks about domestic experiences and best and worst practices, which are not likely to be held in more formalized venues.

Going one step further, it may be suspected that in issue areas dominated by strongly formalized cooperation between states, discussions may get limited to policy settings and, therefore, to first order learning at the expense of more fundamental aspects of the policy. In order not to lose opportunities for second or third order learning, more non-formalized venues for transnational communication should be fostered. This is all the more so, since there seems to be a tendency for non-formalized venues to become more formalized over time. In 2006, for instance, the European Commission's Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection (CEC, 2006) and a formal proposal for a Soil Framework Directive were published. As mentioned earlier, the Directive is still pending in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. Nevertheless, with the emergence of various gremia involved in preparing formal legislation, bilateral contact was gradually replaced by more formalized contacts between experts and civil servants. So, in these circumstances, it requires conscious efforts on the part of those involved in formalized networks, to deliberately create new, less formalized venues for transnational communication. In this vein, the wish to make use of second or third order learning on the basis of transnational communication when revising domestic policies in the UK, among others, seems to have helped breaking the near-monopoly of formalized international knowledge infrastructure in the case of noise around airports, notably through the emergence of the considerably less formalized ANNA network and some systematic benchmarking efforts.

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