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DOES LEARNING MATTER FOR POLICY OUTCOMES? THE CASE OF INTEGRATING CLIMATE FINANCE INTO THE EU BUDGET

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Abstract

A considerable body of work has invoked learning in seeking to explain observed patterns of EU policy change. This paper scrutinizes the relevance of learning for understanding policy outcomes. We apply a consolidated framework based on factual, experiential and constructivist learning across the individual and organizational levels to examine the unlikely policy outcome of dedicating 20% of the EU 2014-2020 budget to climate action. Learning did play some role in the policy outcome, in that the belief that climate policy integration (CPI) was an appropriate instrument to address climate change was the result of constructivist learning over the preceding decade. However, this learning was restricted to a handful of policy entrepreneurs in the Cabinet/DG Clima, who largely “pushed” the policy through based on pre-existing convictions. Conversely, beyond some experiential learning, there is little evidence that learning was a significant feature of the policy process amongst actors in other European institutions.

Key words

Learning; Climate Change; European Union; Policymaking; Policy Entrepreneurs

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INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have witnessed growing interest in the role of learning in policy and politics – where learning is typically understood as a process of updating knowledge, understanding and beliefs. Learning has been invoked to explain changes in political agendas, the choice of policies and instruments, as well as the dynamics of organizational processes and strategies (Bomberg 2007; Feindt 2010; Kamkhaji and Radaelli 2016; Koch and Lindenthal 2011). Underlying this interest in learning is increased recognition of the role of knowledge, beliefs and ideas in policy processes (Dunlop and Radaelli 2013; Nye 1987; Radaelli 1995). The idea of learning is certainly a seductive, even convenient, one. It offers a positive model of human agency predicated on transformative change through information, critical reflection and value change. Moreover, learning provides scholars with a range of mechanisms to account for policy change, which cannot readily be explained by recourse to conventional explanations such as coercion (Radaelli 2009).

Yet the assumed role of learning in policy change has come in for growing criticism. Methodologically, critiques have focused on the tendency of researchers to privilege learning, as opposed to non-learning (avoiding to learn) or no learning in the policy process (Egan 2009; Radaelli 2009). They have also drawn attention to the difficulty of distinguishing learning from other possible explanations of change (Dunlop and Radaelli 2016; Zito and Schout 2009). The literature has also been criticized conceptually for its diverse, overlapping terminology. To this list, we would add two further critiques of our own. First, previous studies have not always adopted a very precise, or even demanding, definition of learning. The result is considerable analytical ambiguity as to what does, and does not, qualify as learning. Second, too much of the existing literature on learning has exclusively focused on policy processes or organizational change, leaving unanswered questions about the degree to which learning actually matters for policy outcomes.

This contribution addresses some of these shortcomings. First, we seek to bring analytical clarity to the literature on learning, adopting a more stringent definition of learning that goes beyond the mere act of accumulating new information. Additionally, departing from the various typologies dominating recent work (e.g. Heikkila and Gerlak 2013; Zito and Schout 2009), we draw on foundational concepts in the learning literature to distinguish between generic types and levels of learning. Second, we move beyond a simple focus on the incidence

of learning, to additionally examine the connection between learning and policy outcomes. A major question we ask is whether the concept of learning provides explanatory value, over and above other possible factors, in accounting for empirically observed patterns of policy change.

Empirically, we examine the case of mainstreaming climate finance into the European Union (EU) budget. This makes a good test case within the present context in that the literature frequently asserts that learning plays an important role in environmental and climate policy integration (EPI/CPI). Underlying its assumed significance is the idea that EPI/CPI is underpinned by new knowledge, and stronger forms of integration are likely to require changes in beliefs about the importance of climate change and/or the goals of policy intervention (Nilsson and Eckerberg 2007; Jordan and Lenschow 2010). Indeed, addressing climate change through a non-trivial allocation of the EU budget to CPI measures marked a significant departure from the status quo, suggesting an important role for learning in the reframing of policy objectives and the adoption of an innovative policy response. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. Section two reviews different ways in which learning has been conceptualized, while section three highlights some of the challenges involved in using the concept of learning to explain policy change. Our analytical framework is developed in section four and section five illustrates the role of learning in the case of integrating climate finance into the EU budget. Discussion and conclusions are presented in sections six and seven, respectively.

LEARNING, POLICY AND CAUSALITY

Recent work in political science has typically approached learning in one of two different ways.³ One is as a theoretical lens (or approach) to guide analysis of the policy process (e.g. Dunlop and Radaelli 2013; Dunlop and Radaelli 2016), while the other is as a largely empirical phenomenon where the emphasis is on analyzing the presence (or absence) of learning (e.g., by Nilsson 2005; Nilsson and Eckerberg 2007; Schout 2009). Our contribution in the present article resides within this latter set of studies although, as explained below, it advances beyond a simple binary analysis to interrogate the “quality” of learning.

The existing literature has, implicitly or explicitly, invoked learning in at least three

³ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this distinction.

different ways in seeking to understand policy change. First, learning has been deployed as a causal factor in policy outcomes. That is, it is assumed that, as a result of a process of learning, new (or revised) policies are demanded, searched for, adopted and possibly implemented (Schout 2009). In this sense, learning precedes policy change, and can be conceptualized as an explanatory variable in its own right. A second way in which learning has been invoked is as a conditioning (or intervening) variable. More specifically, learning is assumed to enable and/or facilitate policy change by changing the frames, processes and strategies through which individuals and organizations interpret information and policy challenges, and their responses to them (Braun 2009; Dunlop 2010; Farrell 2009; Koch and Lindenthal 2011; Zito and Schout 2009). Again, learning is causal, although its influence operates in conjunction with other explanatory variables. A third way learning has been invoked is as an intentional or unintentional consequence of policy change (e.g., by Nilsson 2005; Nilsson and Eckerberg 2007). In fact, learning may be one of the objectives of a policy, and therefore the relevant output from a particular policy change (e.g. Dunlop 2015).

In reality, the distinction between these three applications may be less clear cut and unidirectional than the above typology suggests. While learning may propel or facilitate policy change, policy change itself may lead to learning, with the result that learning and policy change can be seen as part of an iterative cycle. Still, the three-fold typology of learning as an independent/explanatory, intervening or dependent variable remains useful in seeking to empirically understand the relationship between policy change and learning, which has often been ambiguous in the literature. It is also useful in evaluating the significance of different forms of learning.

Regardless of whether learning is approached as a driver, an input or output, a common assumption is that learning is important (Bennett and Howlett 1992; Zito and Schout 2009). To begin with, learning is assumed to matter because the external or internal demands for change depend on whether and how actors conceive a particular issue as worthy of policy attention. Another way in which learning is believed to matter is by shaping the response to these demands, whether in terms of organizational behavior and strategy or policy outputs. Regarding the former, learning is conceptualized as influencing the routines, problem-solving capabilities and goal orientation of organizations (Heikkila and Gerlak 2013; March and Olsen 1975). The importance of learning for policy stems from its hypothesized role in influencing the potential choice set, appropriateness and selection of regulatory approaches, instruments and how these are articulated in practice (Nilsson and Eckerberg 2007; Radaelli

2009).

CAVEATS TO LEARNING

While learning has been widely invoked, there is a danger in exaggerating its incidence and substantive importance (Radaelli 2009; Zito and Schout 2009). One reason to be cautious is that there may be other explanations for policy change. Learning could be interpreted as the dominant causal explanation if it were primarily responsible for generating the impetus for a new or revised policy. Yet a particular outcome might have come about regardless of learning. A coalition of actors with similar pre-existing interests may arrive at a policy outcome, for example, by commanding the majority of votes in a parliament or committee. Likewise, a policy outcome could arise without learning where policy entrepreneurs (Béland and Cox 2015; Steinebach and Knill 2016) with established knowledge and beliefs ‘push things through’ (Bürgin 2015), using their energies, skills and acumen (Kingdon 1995). A second reason to be cautious is that actors simply may not learn. Although exposed to new information, ideas and values, they may choose to ignore these, and carry on as usual. This may occur where actors consciously engage in non-learning because it is not in their interests to change their beliefs and actions, or where they unconsciously engage in defensive avoidance by filtering out new information (Janis and Mann 1977; Koch and Lindenthal 2011; Lindblom 1979; May 1992).

Another caveat is that actors may well learn, but there is no guarantee that this will translate into substantive organizational change and/or policy outputs. Organizational barriers, embedded interests, past policy commitments and institutionalized routines can prevent individuals or organizations that have learnt from realizing their ambitions (Egan 2009). Parliaments, upper houses or actors such as lobbyists can ‘block’ proposals, inhibiting policy change in response to altered knowledge, understanding and beliefs. Indeed, the literature suggests that the ability of actors to achieve their ambitions, goals and values animated by learning processes depends on their authority, capabilities and opportunity structures. Policy entrepreneurs – actors who seek to affect significant policy change by actively developing, promoting and defending innovative policy ideas (Braun 2009; Mintrom 2013) – may play an important role within this context. Of particular relevance for learning, policy entrepreneurs can serve as ‘teachers’ (Bomberg 2007), contributing to changes in other actors’ knowledge, political skills and underlying beliefs through interaction, engagement and stimulating critical reflection.

A fourth reason to be cautious about learning is methodological (Radaelli 2009). It can be very challenging to disentangle the influence of learning from other factors. This is because several factors may act in combination to affect change. Yet it also reflects the possibility that learning processes that inform, guide and propel policy change may precede the decision to adopt a new or revised policy by a long time. This raises identification issues, both in the sense of identifying learning, which may have taken place historically, as well as attributing subsequent policy change to this learning. These identification issues are aggravated by the fact that any attempt to qualify the existence or relevance of learning requires a corresponding micro-level, socially-embodied approach, wherein the units of analysis comprise actors involved in policy change. Locating these individuals, and securing interviews with them, is not always straightforward. Moreover, uncovering learning and respondents' true motives for particular courses of action is fraught with problems, particularly because self-reported accounts of learning may be subject to bias (Radaelli 2009).

UNPACKING AND DETECTING LEARNING

Given these challenges, an essential starting point for any evaluation is a precise definition of learning, which can be operationalized to determine its empirical existence. To this end, we turn to foundational work, which places considerable emphasis on the essentially reflexive nature of learning. In particular, these contributions treat learning as an active process of change, rather than a passive one of incorporation (Argyris and Schön 1978; Janis and Mann 1977; March and Olsen 1975; Sabatier 1987). In order for learning to occur, we posit that the following must take place: (1) a *reflection and judgment* based on an input, experience or detection of error, which leads the individual to select a different view on (2) how things happen, i.e. the acquisition of knowledge or learning facts and (3) what course of action to take, i.e. the reflection on individual or collective experience or advice from others on such previous experiences (based on Argyris and Schön 1978; Bennett and Howlett 1992; May 1992). In adopting this definition, our work differs from a number of previous studies on learning, which have included in their conception of learning the simple act of acquiring information and experience, without any reflection or change in behavior.

Adopting this more stringent definition of learning is important for two reasons. One is that, in deciphering policy change, it reduces the risk of spurious causality. If learning is responsible for policy change, it is logical that actors should have altered their behavior, choices and actions in response to and reflecting on new information, experiences and insights, or sought to do so. A second reason is that a more discriminating definition and typology of learning renders the concept ultimately more useful. An over-inclusive definition and multitude of overlapping learning types potentially renders learning ubiquitous and, in certain cases, fairly meaningless as an analytic concept to explain policy change. Raising the bar of what constitutes learning (an active process) helps to analytically distinguish learning from other processes with more passive aspects.

We also depart from a number of typologies, which have come to dominate recent work in learning. Amongst others, these have drawn a distinction between political learning, social learning, policy learning, and instrumental learning (e.g. Bennett and Howlett 1992; Bomberg 2007; Braun 2009; Feindt 2010; May 1992; Sabatier 1987; Schout 2009). These learning types are useful in categorizing and analyzing learning in particular contexts, for example, learning focused on policy instruments and changing organizational strategies. However, in evaluating learning that shapes policy outcomes, we suggest that it is useful to distinguish between three different generic categories, which seek to capture what is learnt, and how: (1) factual learning; (2) experiential learning and (3) constructivist learning. An advantage of doing so is that it allows us to go beyond a simple preoccupation with documenting whether learning takes place or the ends it serves (e.g. changing political strategies or policy settings). Instead, by drawing a distinction between forms (or modes) of learning (e.g. Dunlop and Radaelli 2013), we are better able to say something about its nature and relevance for policy change. In particular, different forms of learning might be expected to play different roles in policy change, and potentially have greater or lesser impact in shaping outcomes.

Both *factual* and *experiential learning* fall into the category of what we could call 'normal' learning, which commonly takes place as a routine part of policymaking processes. *Factual learning* involves an increase in scientific, technical or policy/organizational knowledge, coupled with reflection on this knowledge (Argyris and Schön 1978; Haas and Haas 1995). *Experiential learning* takes place when actors reflect on their own working experience within the context of a particular activity or as part of an organization. A key aspect of experiential learning is learning how the policymaking system works and becoming skilled at

using tactics to influence policy. It is closely aligned with notions of ‘political learning’ (May 1992; Radaelli 2009) and ‘policy-oriented’ learning (Sabatier 1987). Many aspects of single-/double loop learning (Argyris and Schön 1978) also fall within the experiential learning category. *Constructivist learning* occurs when underlying beliefs change, resulting in a different view of how the individual or organization ‘sees things’, together with a (potentially) new normative understanding of how things ‘ought to be’ (Nye 1987). We categorize constructivist learning as a form of complex learning because it may contribute to more discontinuous policy shifts, as actors form different understandings of relevant problems, solutions and normative obligations.

We conceptualize these different learning types as occurring on two levels: the *individual level* and the *organizational level*. The former refers to learning by individual actors (e.g. specific officials), whilst the latter relates to learning at the level of organizations (e.g. national government ministry). The organizational level begins when learning becomes collective in nature and is progressively institutionalized into the cognitive, operational and normative fabric, behaviors and roles of a particular organization. Within the present context, organizational learning may be evident once a particular policy or agenda – promoted by particular individuals – becomes part of an organization’s goals, official position and/or negotiating stance. The individual and organizational levels are interdependent and influenced by wider societal developments. The activities of individual policy entrepreneurs can influence learning on the organizational level or even animate entrepreneurial activities by organizations (Braun 2009).

Table 1 summarizes our typology and highlights key criteria to identify the different learning types in an empirical setting.

Table 1. Criteria for identifying learning in the policy process. Source: Authors.

	Factual learning	Experiential learning	Constructivist learning
Individual level	Individual actors have acquired (e.g. from studies) and reflected on new information; increased knowledge and expertise deployed by actors in their task environment.	Active engagement with particular issue through direct experience and reflecting on successes and failures to enhance actors' existing political or bureaucratic practices and competencies.	Changed personal norms, values or policy beliefs; underpins new and/or reinforced personal commitments and actions.
Organizational level	New knowledge is acquired by and transmitted through an organization; reflection, incorporation and use of knowledge in organizational activities and/or to inform organizational position.	Critical reflection on existing practices and performances within context of existing organizational goals; the accompanying development and/or refinement of new organizational processes, strategies and behaviors.	Change in organizational beliefs and values over time; institutionalization of normative beliefs, the reframing of organizational goals and discontinuous organizational action.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to evaluate the influence of learning on policy change, we apply the framework introduced above to the empirical case of integrating climate finance into the EU 2014-2020 Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) budget by dedicating 20 per cent to climate-related expenditures. The time frame of analysis is a decade between 2003 and 2013. The analysis is based on 35 interviews with key actors at the European Commission (7 from the Directorate General [DG]/Cabinet Climate Action [Clima], 3 from DG Environment, 7 from DG/Cabinet Energy and 6 from DG/Cabinet Agriculture and Rural Development), the European Parliament (Members of the European Parliament [MEPs]) and from EU member states (civil servants at the Permanent Representations of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK). The sampling strategy involved locating actors who played an important role in initiating, drafting, negotiating and voting on the legislative proposal. Interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed according to the conceptual framework.

Our reasoning for believing that learning might be a central explanatory variable in the policy innovation of mainstreaming climate finance is two-fold. The first is that mainstreaming represented a major policy shift and, moreover, one likely to have required significant

changes in individual and collective understandings of policy challenges and solutions. Previous work has ascribed an important role for learning in accounting for such paradigm shifts in policy (Hall 1993; Feindt 2010). A second is existing scholarship on CPI/EPI. In particular, it is suggested that stronger forms of integration demand new understandings of and normative commitments towards climate/environmental protection, pointing to a need for not only normal forms of learning, but also more complex, constructivist modes (Nilsson and Eckerberg 2007; Jordan and Lenschow 2010).

INTEGRATING CLIMATE FINANCE INTO THE EU BUDGET

In the wake of the EU MFF 2014-2020 negotiations, DG Clima introduced a proposal to dedicate 20 per cent of the EU budget to CPI measures (European Commission 2011). This marked a novel ‘mainstreaming’ approach to focus on co-benefits of climate protection and sustainable economic growth in the area of climate finance. It was based on the concept of EPI used in the Cardiff Process in the early 2000s and was motivated by the ‘public money for public goods’ rationale of linking public funds to addressing pressing challenges such as climate change (Interview EC⁴14; EC18; EC23). The public goods rationale was also a driving factor of the parallel reform proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

One interpretation of the ‘20 per cent’ policy innovation in the 2014-2020 budget could have been learning. Indeed, evidence from the interviews provided some support for the idea that learning played a role in the mainstreaming of climate considerations within the EU budget, including constructivist learning. Two distinct types of constructivist learning were important in this respect. The first was constructivist learning on climate change wherein individuals working for the European institutions (Commission, Parliament and Council) formed beliefs about the existence of climate change and recognized it as a policy problem which needed to be addressed. This learning took place amongst different sets of actors at different times. Many individuals, especially at Cabinet/DG Clima, formed normative “green” beliefs regarding the importance of environmental protection and climate mitigation decades ago, e.g. by growing up in the countryside or being active in environmental movements (EC13; EC14; EC15; EC17; MEP2; MS⁵3). Another set of individuals engaged in constructivist learning on climate change during the 1990s and 2000s through their involvement in de-

⁴ European Commission

⁵ Member state

veloping and negotiating climate change policies at the national and/or European level – while working, for example, for national environment ministries or DG Environment (EC3; EC6; EC8; EC16). A further group of individuals based across the European institutions who was involved in negotiating the MFF mostly engaged in constructivist learning on climate change in the mid-2000s in line with wider society when climate change entered the public debate. Amongst others, the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, Al Gore’s documentary ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ and the 2007 4th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) were all influential in prompting individuals to reflect on this input and subsequently form new personal commitments to support action on climate change (EC3; EC18; EC19; EC20).

Constructivist learning on climate change also manifested itself on the organizational level of the European Commission in the form of normative policy goals and official negotiating positions. Since the early 1990s, the European Commission incorporated knowledge on climate change, which subsequently informed its organizational strategies. Over time, the European Commission formed the normative belief that climate change needs to be addressed. This was institutionalized in the form of a Climate Directorate inside DG Environment with the organizational mission of developing and promoting climate policies. The Climate Directorate was upgraded in 2009 to DG Clima with a dedicated European Commissioner. It is important to note that constructivist learning on climate change predominantly occurred between the 1970s and 2000s, that is, before the policy process of integrating climate objectives into the EU budget.

A second aspect of constructivist learning directly linked with climate mainstreaming in the EU budget was constructivist learning on CPI itself. A new commitment and belief emerged that CPI was an appropriate policy instrument to address climate change. This policy innovation was pioneered by a small number of individuals working at Cabinet/DG Clima. They were motivated by strong personal convictions, i.e. previously formed climate change-related beliefs, and supported Cabinet/DG Clima’s organizational objective to address climate change (EC14; EC15; EC20). There are three reasons why these individuals, and the Cabinet/DG itself, focused on CPI as a favored policy solution. Economic austerity measures in response to the Eurozone crisis reduced political willingness to support strong climate policies (EC12; EC17). This made transferring individual beliefs on addressing climate change and achieving Cabinet/DG Clima’s organizational objectives difficult. In search of opportunities to advance Cabinet/DG Clima’s organizational objectives, a small group of individuals re-

flected on their involvement in the Cardiff process on EPI in the early 2000s, therefore engaging in constructivist learning. They concluded that mainstreaming environmental objectives could serve as a blueprint to integrate climate change measures into other policy areas (EC13; EC18). Following a process of convincing key individuals within Cabinet/DG Clima, this belief was institutionalized. Cabinet/DG Clima recognized the MFF as an opportunity for advancing its organizational objective and hence, “the best vehicle we could find for mainstreaming into other policies (...). [It] was a really big thing. Because it sets the parameters for the EU’s spending programmes until 2020” (EC15).

Co-ordination and co-operation with other Cabinets/DGs was crucial as CPI in the MFF was not a policy proposal in its own right, but consisted of interventions into other Cabinet/DGs’ domains, frequently resulting in resistance at the policy drafting stages (EC14; EC15). These issues were not resolved, but carried ‘up the hierarchy’ into the European Commissioners meeting (College of Commissioners). There was insufficient opportunity for actors outside Cabinet/DG Clima to engage with and reflect on the CPI aspects of the MFF proposal. Cabinet/DG Clima representatives used negotiation tactics to include wording on dedicating 20 per cent of the MFF budget to measures co-benefitting climate action. They acted as passionate policy entrepreneurs, pushing “it through because we saw the political opportunity that this budget could look different if it had a headline target that sold it as a green, more modern, innovation-based EU budget (...). Given that we had a 2020 [climate] target (...), we had to reflect that into the budget otherwise there was a disconnect” (EC15). The decision in the College of Commissioners emerged because the Commissioner for Climate Action can be regarded as policy entrepreneur. She built political momentum, “was very persuasive” (EC15) and convinced other decision-makers using a combination of experience, expertise and political acumen (EC16).

Similar to the negotiations in the College of Commissioners, Cabinet/DG Clima representatives were not necessarily ‘teaching’ (Bomberg 2007) other policymakers about CPI in the MFF during their negotiations with the Council and Parliament. First, there was limited opportunity, as other Cabinets/DGs with their own organizational priorities dominated the MFF negotiations. The CPI issue was crowded-out and ignored due to more pressing economic priorities and remained relatively untouched by the negotiations with the Parliament and Council (EC8; EC9). Second, where Cabinet/DG Clima was involved, its representatives used bargaining tactics, their own passion and expertise to defend the proposal (EC14; EC15; EC16). For belief changes, and thus constructivist learning to occur, a wider discussion, de-

bate and exchange of ideas would have been necessary among the different European Commission Cabinets/DGs, member states and the Parliament. Yet this discussion did not occur. As one member state representative noted, the proposal to dedicate 20 per cent of the EU budget to measures with co-benefits for climate action, “didn’t have a huge amount [of attention in the MFF negotiations. It] (...) was not regularly cited by many member states at all as a driving factor or an important reason behind one of their policy positions. (...) DG Agriculture didn’t refer to it that widely” (MS1; also pointed out by EC2; EC18; EC19; MS2).

Constructivist learning on CPI in the form of valuing CPI as an appropriate policy instrument to address climate change would have necessitated a reflection process among member states on how climate objectives could be mainstreamed into national budgets. This, in turn, would have required the member states to form a position on the issue by reflecting on their national interests. However, there was no reflection process among member state representatives on the CPI aspects of the proposal in the form of discussions on CPI during the negotiations. As a consequence, the wider process of updating beliefs on the appropriateness of mainstreaming climate objectives into public budgets among member states and MEPs was not initiated. Rather, negotiation tactics, political interests and coalition building remained dominant. One central actor recalled, “I didn’t see much learning to be honest. (...) You go into negotiations with maximum wishes and then you start trading wishes and you come out with some results” (EC17). At the same time, policy entrepreneurs did not make use of opportunities to actively seek to ‘teach’ other actors about the importance of integrating climate objectives into public finances by offering information and convincing arguments to encourage reflection among MEPs and member state representatives. On the contrary, CPI received little attention in the negotiations, and rather “slipped through the cracks” (EC17).

It is important to note that most individual policy entrepreneurs (Commissioner on Climate Action, key members of Cabinet/DG Clima and Cabinet/DG Agriculture) had changed or formed their normative beliefs on the importance of addressing climate change before being involved in the MFF negotiations (EC3; EC9; EC11; EC14; EC18; EC19; MS1; MEP2). Individuals across the European institutions who were actively involved in the MFF negotiations did engage in experiential learning on how to play political tactics more successfully to achieve their objectives (EC17; EC18; EC20; EC21). This was evidenced by the parallel negotiations on the EU budget and the CAP reform which, for the first time, involved the European Parliament in a trilogue process (Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood 2015) to achieve agreement among a small number of representatives from the European institutions.

Actors pointed out that “this is the first big co-decision thing, so the learning was more on ‘how can we do the co-decision process on such a big file’” (EC17). Cabinet/DG Clima and its representatives engaged in factual learning on CPI by expanding their expertise on CPI as policy instrument. However, given the limited attention to the climate-mainstreaming proposal in the negotiations within the European Commission and between the European institutions, there was little opportunity for reflection and thus factual learning on CPI outside Cabinet/DG Clima. Factual learning on CPI and policy-related facts on the individual and organizational level was also constrained by a lack of time and resources. Interviewees noted that, “especially the Parliament was kind of overwhelmed. They did not have enough staff (...), [and] they were complaining about this lack of in-depth knowledge” (EC19). Despite these challenges, the Parliament engaged in experiential learning in the trilogues by developing new organizational practices on participating in such negotiations. These practices were embedded in the organizational memory for future MFF negotiations well after individual MEPs left the Parliament.

DISCUSSION ON LEARNING IN POLICYMAKING

Our findings (summarized in Table 2) suggest that learning did indeed play a role in the policy outcome. Yet this learning was highly uneven, took place over different time-scales and its actual influence was highly contingent. Much of the learning which took place during the MFF negotiations could be predominantly characterized as ‘normal’. In particular, it largely comprised experiential learning (as discussed e.g. by Argyris and Schön 1978; May 1992), and was the result of individuals’ involvement in the policymaking process. Especially those closely involved in the trilogue negotiations actively debated the policy details of the MFF. They also reflected on the successes and failures of the negotiation process, which resulted in enhanced bureaucratic competencies, and improved negotiation capabilities. Some of the learning related to the trilogues was also institutionalized in the organizational practices of the Parliament.

If the analytical time-frame is extended beyond the period of the MFF negotiations (2010-2013), it is apparent that prior constructivist learning regarding climate change played a role, in that it placed the issue on the agenda of policy actors. Yet much of this learning occurred before the mid-2000s – and therefore lay outside the ten-year period typically considered relevant for analyzing the influence of learning (Radaelli 2009). Hence most individuals

at the European Commission (and to a lesser extent in the Parliament and Council) formed normative beliefs that climate change needed to be addressed long before the MFF process. This belief subsequently became institutionalized into their respective organizations, for example, as evidenced by the creation of Cabinet/DG Clima.

Constructivist learning, which led to beliefs that CPI was the most appropriate policy instrument to address climate change, was also important in shaping the policy outcome. Unlike normative beliefs regarding climate change, learning on CPI itself was more recent, taking place around 2009/10. However, there is little evidence that actors outside of Cabinet/DG Clima, including those from other Cabinets/DGs, the Parliament and Council, engaged in this form of constructivist learning. Such learning on CPI would have occurred if they had reflected on the climate finance proposal and formed beliefs on the value of integrating climate objectives into budgets as an appropriate policy instrument to achieve co-benefits for climate action and economic recovery. Instead, constructivist learning was restricted to a handful of individuals within Cabinet/DG Clima, and this learning was subsequently incorporated into the official position of the organization (i.e. learning on the organizational level).

Indeed, pivotal to the mainstreaming of climate objectives into the EU budget was the fact that key individuals within Cabinet/DG Clima were dedicated policy entrepreneurs, together with the absence of strong opposition to the climate finance target as evidenced by a lack of discussion on the issue. The particular role of policy entrepreneurs in the present context suggests that only a handful of people may have to engage in learning to achieve a particular policy goal. If these people have the necessary power, political acumen and knowledge to act as policy entrepreneurs (e.g. as in cases illustrated by Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2010; Braun 2009; Mintrom 2013) Braun 2009; Mintrom 2013), they can ‘push their proposal through’ the decision-making process without detailed debate and nurturing learning amongst other actors. This finding departs from an often-made assumption that policy change, including on CPI (e.g. Nilsson 2005), comes about when multiple actors involved in policymaking processes engage in mutual learning and change their beliefs and actions accordingly.

The findings that factual and constructivist learning on CPI outside Cabinet/DG Clima were fairly limited have implications for subsequent policy developments. The lack of discussion, debate and deliberation on the CPI proposal among member state representatives and MEPs could be understood as a missed opportunity to reflect upon information about integrating climate objectives into national budgets. A discussion among member states and in the Parliament, including the provision of information and evidence via the European Commis-

sion, might have resulted in multiplying effects of learning for policy outcomes: the EU budget could have served as pilot-case from which lessons could be drawn (Rose 1993) and national policies adapted. It could have also strengthened normative beliefs regarding the importance of climate mitigation and integration measures.

Table 2. Overview of learning aspects in the policymaking process for climate mainstreaming into the EU budget. Compiled by authors.

	Explanations other than learning	Factual learning	Experiential learning	Constructivist learning
Individual level	Key actors at Cabinet/DG Clima pushed their proposals through relevant decision-making bodies using entrepreneurial strategies. The climate mainstreaming proposal was not discussed in detail by other individuals within relevant European institutions.	Individuals were presented with some information on CPI. Yet limited reflection because it did not play a central role in debates and MFF negotiations.	Evidence of learning-by-doing amongst actors in the European Commission, combined with existing experience in EPI. Learning involved how to manage trilogues as a complex negotiation process.	Individuals in Cabinet/DG Clima formed beliefs on the need to address climate change before mid-2000s and developed beliefs on CPI as useful policy instrument in 2009/10. Yet there was a lack of opportunity to reflect on CPI policy innovation among individuals outside Cabinet/DG Clima, thus no CPI-related beliefs were formed based on MFF negotiations. These actors formed beliefs on necessity to act on climate change prior to or around the mid-2000s.
Organizational level	Policy entrepreneurs used conventional negotiation tactics to achieve their desired policy outcome. Yet they did not make explicit efforts to 'teach' and convince other actors of the need for and benefits of CPI. Limited reflection occurred amongst member states on the climate finance proposal to consider inclusion into national budgets, not least because they were pre-occupied with more pressing economic issues in MFF negotiations.	Increased expertise on CPI and evaluation tools at Cabinet/DG Clima. Limited additional knowledge at other Cabinets/DGs/member states/Parliament as knowledge on CPI was not transferred to them during MFF negotiations.	Parliament developed and refined trilogue negotiation tactics and institutionalized trilogue experience into organizational practices to remain available after individual MEPs left the Parliament.	Beliefs on the need to address climate change were institutionalized when the Commission recognized that climate change is a policy problem requiring institutional capacity and subsequently set-up the Climate Directorate with the organizational objective to propose climate policies. Cabinet/DG Clima interpreted this as a mandate to integrate climate objectives into other policy areas (CPI) and formed belief that CPI is an appropriate policy instrument to address climate change. Other actors (Parliament, member states, other Cabinets/DGs) had little opportunity to reflect on CPI and thus to form and institutionalize beliefs on usefulness of CPI.

CONCLUSION

This contribution critically examined the role of learning in EU policy change. Drawing on recent critiques and empirical applications (e.g. Heikkila and Gerlak 2013; May 1992; Radaelli and Dunlop 2013; Zito and Schout 2009), together with foundational contributions on learning (in particular Argyris and Schön 1978; Janis and Mann 1977; March and Olsen 1975; Nye 1987; Sabatier 1987), we developed a consolidated, analytical framework of learning. We illustrated this framework based on factual, experiential and constructivist learning across the individual and organizational level by applying it to a case of European climate finance where learning might have been expected to have played an important role.

Our findings suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of learning in policymaking – one that does not deny its role, but acknowledges that learning is multifaceted, and occurs unevenly amongst different actors involved in policy processes. Moreover, our findings suggest that what matters for the policy outcome is who learns, and whether these actors have the necessary skills, energies and opportunities to realize their policy ambitions. Within the present case-study, most actors formed beliefs on the importance to act on climate change by the mid-2000s, i.e. prior to the MFF reform. Experiential learning on participating in trilogue negotiations did take place during the policy process. However, this form of ‘normal’ learning was relatively inconsequential in terms of propelling the integration of climate objectives. Factual and constructivist learning on CPI as appropriate policy instrument remained limited to Cabinet/DG Clima. The main factor underpinning this particular policy outcome was the activities of policy entrepreneurs at Cabinet/DG Clima. These individuals successfully used various tactics to realize their policy preferences on CPI, which were formed as result of constructivist learning in 2009/10. CPI was rarely discussed during the MFF negotiations. This resulted in a lack of opportunity for non-Cabinet/DG Clima actors on the individual level and among the European institutions to reflect on this policy innovation and thus to engage in factual or constructivist learning on CPI.

Inevitably, our findings need to be qualified. They derive from a single case-study of policy change in which CPI was championed by a handful of influential, committed and politically skilled actors. Furthermore, as with any policy change, deciphering causality within a context where the outcome was potentially influenced by multiple factors remains complicated. Still, with these caveats in mind, our findings have a number of wider implications. One is for debates surrounding the explanatory value of learning. Certainly, the concept of learning

enhances our understanding of policy processes and outcomes. Without learning, it would be difficult to account for how bureaucratic and political actors gain policy expertise in a particular field and use this knowledge to formulate advice, advocacy and new or revised policies. It would also be difficult to account for how actors become more adept in achieving their objectives, for example, adjusting strategies in response to past failures. Learning may additionally help to explain why policy actors select certain policy instruments over others. Indeed, on the reading of the present case-study, the value-added of learning would appear to lie in better accounting for how actors gain new knowledge, policy ideas and political strategies. In this sense, and returning to the typology outlined earlier, learning can be understood as an intervening variable, which facilitates policy change and the realization of underlying political goals. Where the value of learning is less easily discernible is in shaping these goals, at least over the time-scales typically considered in policy analysis. Learning may well determine the instruments selected to achieve goals. Yet caution is needed in unambiguously situating learning as an explanatory variable for policy change in its own right, not least because the impetus may come from underlying shifts in values and beliefs which take place over much longer time periods.

In drawing these conclusions, our study also highlights the value of disaggregating learning into factual, experiential and constructivist categories, acknowledging that learning is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Our typology provides a framework for empirically documenting the incidence of different forms of learning, which precedes and accompanies policy change, across three analytically distinct categories. Moreover, disaggregation also better allows us to determine what sorts of learning matter (or do not matter) for the policy outcome, and moreover how they matter (or otherwise). Another implication of our findings is that the extent of learning can be constrained by the very political dynamics of policy change. The literature on CPI places considerable store on interaction (e.g. Nilsson 2005; Nilsson and Eckerberg 2007). Yet underpinning this model of learning is the assumption that actors already engaged with a particular policy agenda and associated set of beliefs “teach” others (Bomberg 2007). This did not occur in our case study, such that integrating climate finance into the EU (and potentially national) budget(s) could be regarded as a missed opportunity for transferring previously occurred individual factual and constructivist learning to the organizational level. Instead, where expediency trumps deliberation, the scope for learning may remain constrained.

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