

Rethinking Policy Learning in Urban Policy Mobility

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Abstract

Since the 'mobility turn', urban researchers have made important contributions to our understanding of the contentious and relational nature of cross-border policy learning. Yet, seldom has extant research explored the contextual influence of local policymaking on the localization process of a traveling policy practice beyond the initial encounters of policy elites with its simplified narrative. To fill this gap, this article investigates the link between policy learning and policy outcome by disaggregating its complex interactive and iterative process into distinctive policy stages of urban policy mobility. The case of participatory budgeting in Vienna adds an empirical dimension to this approach. The findings reveal how multiple types of learned lessons, drawn from diverse sources of knowledge, become enmeshed, streamlined and articulated into the local formulation and implementation of an international 'best practice' in a context-bound policy space. It concludes by highlighting some analytical advantages of this policy-oriented approach for researching urban policy mobility and directions for future research.

Keywords: citizen participation; participatory budgeting; policy learning; policy mobility; urban governance

Introduction

The question of how policy learning affects the localization of globally circulating policies has been central to our understanding of urban policy mobility. Within the policy mobilities literature, scholars from various disciplines, ranging from anthropology to geography and sociology to urban planning (see Harris and Moore, 2013; Healey, 2012; McCann and Ward, 2013; McKenzie, 2017), have captured the interconnected urban processes and outcomes of global policy circulation, wherein policy elites learn and move policy ideas from place to place through global networks of policy communities. Combined with new communication technologies and logistical means in transnational flows of knowledge (see Ward, 2024), existing works consider that such cross-border relationships between actors, institutions, instruments and ideas enable not only spatial, but also temporal compression of traveling policy practices (Peck and Theodore, 2015), featuring 'ready-made, quick-fix, off-the-shelf policies from other jurisdictions or from private consultants' (McCann, 2011: 121).

From a policy perspective, however, the current use of policy learning within the policy mobilities literature has some limitations to fully grasp its multifaceted dimensions and their varying influences on the urban process and outcome of policy travel. Of course, there is no doubt about the role of globally connected policy actors, including epistemic communities (Haas, 1992), in promoting transnational exchange of policy knowledge and selective adoption of 'best practice' solutions in different cities (see Stone et al., 2020). Yet, this understanding of policy learning in urban policy mobility only partially describes the policymaking behaviors and learning activities of policy elites that primarily occur in the earliest moments of its overall experience. In practice, their localization will feature more complex adaptive dynamics and interactions, in which various learned lessons and their (uneven) deliberation flow constantly between its constitutive stages. In other words, the travel, mediation and mutation of traveling policy practices through policy learning is more than ideological predispositions of partisan or self-interested policymakers. Rather, it entails multiple forms of knowledge exchange between a diverse range of policy actors from different governance levels with varying capacities to influence specific policy components. Together, they will have a specific consequence for the localized process and outcome of urban policy mobility.

In this article, we explore diverse patterns of policy learning and their implications for policy outcome as an international 'best practice' not only travels to and arrives in a city, but also lives through multiple interrelated stages of its life cycle. The purpose is to highlight how multiple types of learned lessons, drawn from diverse sources of knowledge, become differently enmeshed, streamlined and articulated into the local formulation and implementation of a traveling policy practice, extending beyond the initial encounters of policy elites with its simplified narrative of success. It argues that the way in which the specific capacities of policy actors intersect with prevailing contextual circumstances at the local level will have a significant influence on the translation of

learned lessons into concrete substances for policy outcome. Indeed, there are growing considerations into the 'topological' influences of local policymaking on urban policy mobility (McKenzie et al., 2021). However, the link between policy learning and policy outcome, influenced by context-bound social and political interactions in the iterative process of local policymaking, remains underexplored in the current policy mobilities literature.

The case of participatory budgeting for climate change mitigation (*Wiener Klimateam*) from Vienna, Austria, illustrates this theoretical approach empirically. In recent years, the global circulation of participatory budgeting (PB) has gained considerable attention within the policy mobilities literature and beyond (see Bartocci et al., 2022; Lehtonen, 2022; Montero and Baiocchi, 2022; Peck and Theodore, 2015; Wampler et al., 2021). While these studies have identified their diverging characteristics in terms of background, objective and design, less has been said about the critical role of their interactive and iterative policy processes within which policy actors build knowledge to frame issues, choose instruments, implement solutions and evaluate their outcomes. In this light, the empirical findings presented below zoom the relationship between policy learning and policy outcome in *Wiener Klimateam* into five separate – yet interrelated – stages of its overall policy cycle: 1) issue-framing; 2) instrument selection; 3) participatory process; 4) output implementation; and 5) evaluation. The discussion of these findings will connect the recent theoretical advances in policy studies on policy learning with extant research on urban policy mobility.

The proceeding sections are structured as follows. The second section outlines the current understanding of policy learning within the policy mobilities literature and identifies remaining issues and gaps. The third section sketches out the theoretical approach and the analytical framework of this article. The fourth section introduces the case study setting and describes the research methods used. The fifth section illustrates the varieties of policy learning and their implications for policy outcome in the localization experience of PB in Vienna. The sixth section discusses these results and their practical implications in reflection of recent studies on policy learning beyond the policy mobilities literature. It concludes by highlighting some analytical advantages of the presented approach to future studies of urban policy mobility.

Policy Learning in Urban Policy Mobility: Issues and Gaps

The current understanding of policy learning in urban policy mobility emerged from the call to rethink global policy circulation beyond simple cross-border emulation of policy solutions and to consider the power-laden process of their reproduction at the urban scale (see Cochrane and Ward, 2012; McCann, 2011; Peck, 2011). The conception of policy learning within the policy mobilities literature after this 'mobility turn' (Sheller and Urry, 2006) can be summarized as below.

First, powerful policymakers who strive to advance their political or personal agenda selectively choose and adopt from policies that circulate through growing transnational policy networks and exchange opportunities (see Baker et al., 2016; Peck and Theodore, 2015; Wood, 2015). In this process, policy experts beyond the immediate local policymaking circle, such as consultancies, think-tanks and universities as well as international, supranational and non-governmental organizations, play a crucial role in framing expert knowledge and promoting model practices across borders (see Andersson and Cook, 2019; González, 2011; Hudson and Kim, 2014). The underlying argument is that 'urban politics...is...global or international in a much deeper sense' (Ward, 2018: 279), invoking the mutually constituted and relational aspect of urban policy mobility.

Second, the change effect of policy learning on the actual process and outcome of local policymaking is therefore minimal. The content of policy learning that is drawn from policy expertise, designs and recommendations of epistemic communities is limited to 'success' narratives of abstract policy ideas rather than concrete institutional reform agenda and their specific policy mechanisms (see Montero and Baiocchi, 2022). Here, the selective definition of policy success becomes a rhetorical device to mobilize political support and resources for specific policy agenda, which may however falter amid various contextual constraints and – despite some generative effects (see Baker and McCann, 2020; Chang, 2017; Lauermaun, 2016) – fail to materialize anticipated outcomes (see Stein et al., 2017).

Third, existing contextual barriers for urban policy mobility imply that many aspects of mobile policies are in fact immobile and thus non-transferable beyond their places of origin.

While most obvious examples include institutional and physical infrastructures that are fixed in place, the policy mobilities literature has increasingly reflected upon deliberate attempts by policy actors to purposefully render undesired elements invisible from the policy success – or failure – stories (see Lovell, 2017; Nciri and Levenda, 2020; Webber, 2015).

Therefore, policy learning in urban policy mobility is constructed not only geographically and historically, but also 'through socially contextualized means' (Peck and Theodore, 2015: 28), discursively forming policy imaginaries and specific learning patterns (see also Temenos and McCann, 2012).

Issues and Gaps

The 'mobility turn' in these recent writings has generated some important scholarly contributions to our understanding of urban policy mobility regarding its much contentious nature. However, a few issues and gaps remain in the current use of policy learning in the policy mobilities literature, which limit a more systematic reflection on complex interactions and processes between actors, institutions, instruments and ideas in the real-world context of policymaking.

The first concern is the limited consideration into the path-shaping role of the broader circle of policy actors in urban policy mobility, such as citizens, civil society organizations and street-level bureaucrats, whose influence stretches beyond the mobilization of support for or against traveling policy practices. Certainly, there has been growing attention to the intermediary role of diverse non-elite policy actors and their expertise to shape the translation of mobile policies into the local context (see Baker et al., 2020; Lauermann and Vogelpohl, 2019; Temenos, 2017; Weller, 2017). Yet, most of the discussion has been restricted to their activities in advocacy for or resistance to policy adoption outside the policymaking arena, failing to situate their actual roles for contributing to concrete policy components within the overall policy cycle.

Second, the diversity of policy actors who are – although unevenly – present across various moments of the policy process indicates that policy learning in urban policy mobility can occur in diverse forms about different aspects of policymaking with diverging effects that will be drawn from multiple sources of information. Recognizing the multiplicity of the sources, contents and timing of policy learning thus has an important implication for understanding the deliberate policy choices to select information from a vast amount of emerging knowledge, transform those lessons into policy instruments and utilize them in specific policy stages. Much is indeed said about how piecemeal learning about policy ideas and narratives frames and moves – or fails – traveling policy practices as a whole (see Bok and Coe, 2017; Borén and Young, 2021; Pitton and McKenzie, 2022). However, seldom has the literature touched upon the link between policy learning and the actual policy actions that puts together policy elements and implements them into effect.

Third, the localization of traveling policy practices, spanning from their initial encounter, selective lesson-drawing and instrument choice to final implementation, occurs in a context-bound policy space, which features place-specific – and varying – capacities and constraints for different policy actors within and across multiple governance levels. In policymaking, context refers not only to the geographical, institutional and social embeddedness of urban policy mobility within the relational politics of scale-making (see McKenzie and Aikens, 2021; Prince, 2017; Robinson, 2015; Savage, 2020). Also, and more importantly, it entails sets of multifaceted competences (skills) and capabilities (resources) that challenge the practical ability of policy actors to understand burgeoning social problems, formulate their policy solutions and put those decisions into action (see Wu et al., 2015; see also McLean and Borén, 2015). So far, the contextual understanding of urban policy mobility has revealed less about the political, organizational and technical conditions of local policymaking that may facilitate or obstruct the effective translation of learned lessons into the unfolding policy process.

Situating Policy Learning in the Local Policymaking Context

The main tenets of the policy mobilities literature draw from the limits of the earlier political science concepts for policy learning, namely policy transfer and diffusion (see Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Rose, 1991; Stone, 1999). Since then, however, a much wider literature on its multidimensional characteristics has emerged, aiming to decipher the ambiguous relationship between their contributing factors and generative effects for policy change (see Dunlop et al., 2018).

Contrary to the common assumption behind the innate capacity of policy actors to learn, these writings provide a more nuanced understanding of its diverse patterns and their implications for local outcomes of urban policy mobility along the following analytical elements: *actors*; *sources*; *types* and *effects*.

Actors of Learning

Broadly speaking, policy actors refer to all possible individuals, groups, organizations and networks who make both direct and indirect contributions to policymaking activities at any point in time (Howlett et al., 2020: 92). As the policy process moves forward, however, only a smaller number of them will be able to frame problems, make alternative solutions and convert them into outputs, each of whom will have a specific level of policy capacity to undertake their roles and tasks (Kingdon, 2011). As such, epistemic communities comprise an important issue-framing subset of the policymaking circle in cross-border policy learning (Dunlop, 2009).

Yet, their epistemic authority may not always extend to the rest of the key activities in urban policy mobility. Instrument selection, decision-making or output implementation – and their evaluation – require different sets of skills and resources to navigate through the political and technical complexities of policymaking at a collective level (see Capano et al., 2024). Furthermore, the increasing collaborative nature of urban policies points to the important relevance of citizens and civil society organizations and their deliberative power in knowledge production across multiple decision points in the policy process.

Sources of Learning

While not always rational, policymaking inevitably involves a deliberate act of decision-makers to process some kind of knowledge that will in one way or another influence the succeeding policy pathway (Chindarkar et al., 2017). Despite being an important one, international 'best practices' are not the only source of evidence and information in this process. As modern policy studies have already acknowledged, policy learning does not take place in a historical vacuum (see Hall, 1993). It occurs in a context-bound policy space with established actors, institutions, instruments and ideas, all of which feature significant enduring legacies, prompting decision-makers to utilize available knowledge about existing policy elements from their past actions (see Dussauge-Laguna, 2012).

This iterative nature of policymaking implies that policy learning in urban policy mobility is not a one-time event that is isolated from other stages of the policy process. As traveling policy practices become formulated into and implemented as local policies, decision-makers deal with a variety of new information about on-the-ground policy experiences through monitoring and evaluation of adopted, ongoing or finished interventions (Vedung, 2010). Although challenging, such a reflexive feature of policymaking can provide them a knowledge base from which to make in-process assessments, in-flight adjustments and *ex-post* changes to the next round of the policy process (see Nair and Howlett, 2016).

Types of Learning

Understanding how acquired knowledge becomes utilized across the policy process ultimately begs the question of how policy learning takes place by whom in what learning capacity. While 'learners' in policy learning are typically considered as those who hold decision-making power at any stage of the policy process (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013: 606), a long line of research has theorized diverse types of policy learning that different 'learners' may undertake to varying extents (see Bennett and Howlett, 1992; May, 1992; Sabatier, 1988).

The first learning type concerns the acquisition of problem-centered knowledge to frame policy issues at stake and set corresponding objectives (*Problem Learning*), which can be sourced from diverse types of experts within epistemic communities (see Dunlop, 2010). The second type concerns learning about the means-ends connection between policy instruments and their anticipated outcomes (*Instrumental Learning*), gaining knowledge about technical details of policy tools from instrument experts (see Simons and Voß, 2018). The third type concerns accumulating lessons about the political complexities of the policy steering process (*Political Learning*) that pertain to the working relationships between relevant governmental actors toward effective policy delivery (see Howlett et al., 2015). The last type concerns the more fundamental form of learning that results from multi-stakeholder communication within the broader policy universe (*Social Learning*), influencing decision-makers' political-ideological frame of reference to make transformative changes (see Siddiki et al., 2017).

Effects of Learning

Regarding the complexity of translating learned lessons into policy outcomes, the policy mobilities literature has shown the negative and unintended results of policy learning in urban policy mobility, such as policy failure (see Temenos and Lauermaun, 2020). Yet, a more detailed look at its entire process reveals more substantive effects of policy learning, which can occur at different levels of abstraction, influence various aspects of policymaking and thus go beyond the discursive framing of success or failure (see Howlett and Cashore, 2009; see also Moyson et al., 2017).

One, and the most typical, effect of policy learning is minor adjustments to existing policy instruments as well as their real-life use without modifying the policy objectives on the agenda (*Incremental Change*), struggling to move beyond the established mode of operation (see Baek et al., 2018). Another typical effect is major modifications to key policy instruments and specific program contents that are utilized to achieve existing policy objectives (*Program Change*), which, however, do not influence the overall policy goals and the belief system of decision-makers (see Voorberg et al., 2017). Lastly, although rare, policy learning can also generate a more systematic shift in the policy paradigm that fundamentally alters the main ideas, preferences and priorities of policymaking (*Paradigmatic Change*), resulting in radical changes to the decision makers' way of doing policy work (see Zaki et al., 2023).

Case Study Setting and Methods

Wiener Klimateam is Vienna's first citywide PB. It was launched as a pilot project of the city's energy planning department (MA20) in six districts between 2022 and 2023. It was developed through the collaboration between an international NGO and the City of Vienna within the EU's climate innovation initiative (EIT Climate-KIC). It shares a few design features that are common across the recent examples of PB in European cities, in terms of objective (democratic awareness-building/governance innovation), tool (digital participation) and resource (strong government support) (see Wampler et al., 2021). The participating districts in the annual budgeting cycle divide the budget of 6.5 million EUR depending on their respective population size, which are spent on citizen projects that are developed through the following stages: a) on-/offline idea submission; b) expert screening; c) co-creation workshop; and d) citizens' jury. Once the final projects are selected, the districts – based on the recommendations from the co-creation workshop – have the responsibility to reach out to the municipal departments with relevant jurisdiction to implement them, which are to be realized within two years.

The analysis below illustrates the link between policy learning and policy outcome in the localization experience of PB in Vienna, focusing on one of the first *Wiener Klimateam* pilot districts: Margareten. It highlights the interconnections and relationships between different actors, sources, types and effects of policy learning within and across its five core policy stages: 1) issue-framing; 2) instrument selection; 3) participatory process; 4) output implementation; and 5) evaluation (see Figure 1). The use of tailored methods reflects this stage approach: i) a qualitative content analysis of 13 expert interviews with the key stakeholders from the issue-framing and instrument selection stages; ii) participant observation of the co-creation activities and their systematic analysis along theory-driven process evaluation criteria; iii) two stakeholder workshops and 10 additional expert interviews with the district office and the municipal departments who are responsible for the implementation of the final projects; and iv) a comparative analysis of the participatory designs of the pilot and the current *Wiener Klimateam*, using the evidence from its internal evaluation, to assess the longer-term feedback effects.

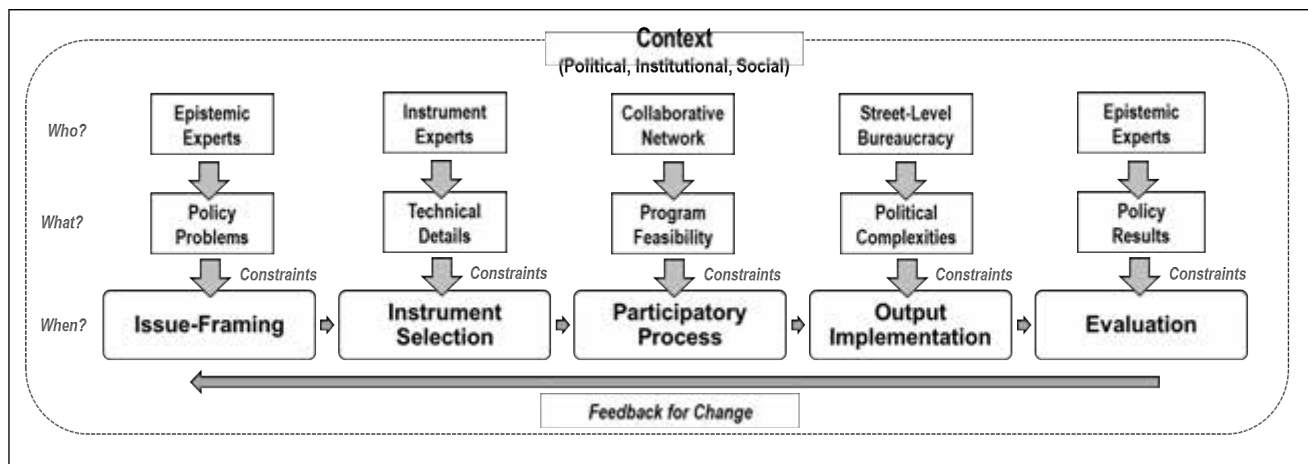


Figure 1. A Heuristic Model: The Flow of Knowledge in Policy Learning within Wiener KlimateamSource: Authors' own elaboration after Dunlop et al. (2024); Goyal and Howlett (2024); and Howlett et al. (2017).

Varieties of Policy Learning in Urban Policy Mobility

The collaboration between the City of Vienna and the partners of EIT Climate-KIC was a crucial milestone for *Wiener Klimateam*, resulting in a broad policy concept to mainstream citizen participation into climate budgeting in Vienna. One fundamental contribution was the new working relationship with an international NGO with multiple consulting experiences in other European PB projects, who was later commissioned to steer the formulation process of a concrete policy program. As we will see, however, the learning processes that shaped the core components of *Wiener Klimateam* and influenced their outcomes varied and occurred far beyond this cross-border partnership.

Policy Learning in Issue-Framing

For framing the issues to be resolved through PB, another set of policy actors with a different type of knowledge entered the preparatory phase of *Wiener Klimateam*. This comprised a group of local civil society organizations, scientific and public-sector experts who were mobilized by MA20 as an advisory board. Their main task was to guide the identification of the vulnerable social groups in the city's decision-making process and the strategies to activate their participation as well as the formulation of the key *Wiener Klimateam* objectives (climate protection; democratic awareness-building; governance innovation; and social justice).

The acquisition of expert knowledge on Vienna's social and environmental issues was accompanied by existing scientific evidence and past policy experiences among the members of the advisory group, whose expertise was related to specific local issues. On the one hand, the quantitative indicators that were developed in prior studies were used to identify the city's districts that are most affected by Vienna's socio-spatial inequalities. On the other hand, the district offices who had previously experimented with similar budgeting projects provided qualitative inputs about some practical criticalities, including the low participation rate of vulnerable social groups and the street-level implementation of participatory outputs (see Ahn et al., 2023).

The utilization of the acquired knowledge took place in two concrete ways. First, the varying levels of socio-spatial inequalities across the city's 23 districts were used to select the first *Wiener Klimateam* pilot districts with one of the highest vulnerability scores based on heat island effect, socio-economic inequalities, life satisfaction, and green infrastructure. Second, the perceived failures of the previous budgeting projects were used to set greater inclusion targets in an open-to-all participatory process as one of the main agendas, resulting in the additional selection of civil society organizations and public institutions to act as local multipliers. These decisions to expand the representativeness of the wider public based on district-level inequalities marked the key difference with the democratic objectives of earlier PB cases, which had explicit rules for targeted participation of the urban poor at the neighborhood level (see Fung, 2006).

Policy Learning in Instrument Selection

The actual role of the international NGO, in contrast, was limited to developing the participatory instruments for *Wiener Klimateam* and informing the key program stakeholders, such as the municipal departments, the district offices and the local multipliers, about their practical use to achieve the set agenda. This knowledge exchange drew from their prior experiences with similar instruments in the PB projects in Antwerp, Lisbon and Paris, which were, however, modified through stakeholder processes and brought in line with the main policy priorities of the City of Vienna and the program objectives of *Wiener Klimateam*.

Therefore, the transfer of expert knowledge by the international NGO focused not only on the successful instrument use in the 'best practice' examples of PB. Through multiple stakeholder workshops, involving some 70 local policy actors in total, the instrument selection process also kicked-off mutual learning about the applicability of the proposed participatory tools to the local governance environment and their compatibility with the specific needs of the program stakeholders. As such, the selection of the *Wiener Klimateam* instruments built on merging both international and local knowledge bases with the instrumental thinking of the knowledge holders about how the instruments could work in a practical setting and advance the anticipated program objectives.

The resulting effects of such two-way knowledge transfer can be traced in the application of new participatory instruments that set *Wiener Klimateam* apart from the 'best practice' examples considered. The first of these elements is the use of methodological toolboxes that were distributed to offline participants. These contained information about the environmental conditions and existing policy programs in the participating districts as well as interactive learning tools to facilitate their effective participation in the budgeting process. Second, greater emphasis was laid on face-to-face deliberation of citizens in the formulation of concrete participatory outputs through co-creation and their final selection by citizens' juries. This priority for real-time collaboration between citizens, scientific and public-sector experts in the participatory process showed a contrast with the strong reliance on online tools in other European PBs (Wampler et al., 2021).

Policy Learning in Participatory Process

The participatory process of *Wiener Klimateam* aimed at generating place-based climate actions from the bottom up. They were first gathered through on-/offline idea submission, which were then screened and selected by the municipal departments and the district offices according to their topical relevance and technical feasibility. The co-creation workshops were intended to refine these ideas into implementable projects based on the collaboration between the citizens whose ideas were selected in the screening phase, practitioners from the municipal departments and the officials from the participating districts.

While the main source of knowledge in the collaborative process originated from the citizen ideas in the initial submission phase, the importance of guiding information from MA20 must be acknowledged. The participating citizens and the public-sector experts of the co-creation workshops were given scores (from high to low) for the foreseen feasibility of each of the successfully screened citizen ideas based on the *Wiener Klimateam* selection criteria¹. Based on this knowledge, they could voluntarily choose any submission of their preference, combine related ideas and provide new information about the content, location, tasks, cost estimates, anticipated climate and social benefits for the final projects.

The core contribution of the collaborative network was the creation of new policy outputs (five in Margareten), which were yet framed by the co-creation design based on the priorities of Vienna's existing climate policy framework. The effect of collaborative learning in the presence of strong public stewardship was thus connecting expert-led solutions from the expert-identified problems to the expert-formulated objectives. In turn, the participating citizens were given little structured guidelines and relevant information to make independent decisions for co-creation outputs based on previously identified climate needs and challenges from the bottom-up.

Policy Learning in Output Implementation

The five final *Wiener Klimateam* projects pertained to small-scale circular economy, urban greening and climate awareness-building measures: a) Repair Café; b) Superblock; c) Car-free Saturday; d) Street Greening; and e) Façade Greening. Since MA20, in charge of developing energy concepts and strategies, has no administrative

¹ 1) climate impact; 2) community orientation; 3) time feasibility; 4) legal feasibility; 5) cost feasibility; 6) maintenance feasibility; and 7) jurisdiction.

responsibility for such activities, these were first transferred to the district office of Margareten, which was tasked to contact the competent municipal departments and to steer their implementation. As the implementing agencies, the selected municipal departments on the other hand had a great level of freedom to reinterpret and redesign the final projects based on their own interests, competences and capabilities.

Once the implementation began, however, the different municipal departments faced a multitude of constraints to carry out the final projects as intended by the participants in the co-creation process. The first of these constraints was their ambitious and sometimes ambiguously formulated objectives and content, which made their realistic operation in the actual implementation setting difficult. Second, multiple municipal departments were assigned to jointly undertake the final projects without sufficient coordination mechanisms to oversee their effective communication and collaboration. They were left to self-determine their roles and responsibilities in the implementation process. Third, the incentives from taking on the implementation task were considered by the implementing departments as “minimal” both in political and financial terms. Moreover, they were competing with their running programs and putting an extra burden on their limited human resources.

The major lessons that were generated through the implementation activities therefore referred to the political complexities behind translating citizen ideas into actionable solutions. While the key actors within MA20 maintained informal communication with the implementing departments, the utilization of this new knowledge became highly restrained by the lack of their continuous involvement to monitor *Wiener Klimateam* beyond the participatory process and make *ad hoc* adjustments to the unforeseen challenges of implementation. As a result, several changes were made to all final projects, in terms of their designs and objectives as well as target groups and areas. This followed substantial negotiations between the district office and the implementing municipal departments, causing serious delays to the initial implementation plan. While the official *Wiener Klimateam* process in Margareten ended as of December 2024, only two of the final projects (Repair Café and Car-free Saturday) were fully implemented.

Policy Learning in Evaluation

The participatory activities of *Wiener Klimateam* were accompanied by an internal monitoring and evaluation process. In the first pilot year, 2022, a research team from a local university was commissioned by MA20 to develop evaluation indicators, which were used by a public agency of the City of Vienna to observe and review the next budgeting cycle in 2023. Focus groups, participant observation and participant feedback were used to elicit evaluation data.

Given the evaluation methods used and the type of questions asked, the acquired information about the operation of *Wiener Klimateam* was strictly limited to the perceived quality of the participatory process based on subjective assessment rather than the effectiveness and impact of the overall program against the set objectives. The qualitative indicators, such as informedness, satisfaction and willingness to participate in similar events, were less adequate to reveal the critical challenges to *Wiener Klimateam* that went much beyond the participatory process itself. As a result, for instance, it was not possible to verify if their activation strategies were indeed able to involve those who are most affected by climate hazards and democratic deficits. Similarly, the process evaluation, only involving the participating citizens, proved to be difficult in identifying the critical barriers that the implementing departments faced in order to implement the results of the participatory process at the street level.

Based on the evaluation results, the most recent *Wiener Klimateam* from September 2024 pays special attention to facilitate transparent and simple communication for potential citizen participants. One resulting change to the participatory design is the addition of open-to-all citizen participation at the screening stage, who now co-select citizen ideas for the co-creation workshops with public-sector experts. The feedback effect of learning from monitoring and evaluation therefore pertained to the minor modification of the participatory process that was deemed more open and inclusive. Consequently, there were no major changes to existing activation strategies and participatory instruments toward enabling explicit recruitment of disadvantaged social groups in climate change mitigation nor sustained engagement of most relevant policy actors throughout the whole budgeting cycle.

Discussion

The localization experience of PB in Vienna suggests that urban policy mobility is a complex multifaceted process. It involves more than just policy elites' selective reproduction of traveling policy practices based on professional know-how of transnational policy communities. Although globally circulating expert knowledge plays a significant role in this process, it is not the only source of inspiration for local policymaking. Rather, as shown, key decision-makers uproot various types of policy input from a diverse range of sources and actors throughout different stages of the policy cycle. Consequently, policy learning can take multiple forms according to who learns from whom, about what, and at what time. The specific type of learning that emerges will have a distinct effect on the overall policy process, contingent on the decision-makers' capacity and willingness to apply the lessons learned.

Table 1. Multistage Policy Learning and Outcome in *Wiener Klimateam*

Stage	Issue-Framing	Instrument Selection	Participatory Process	Output Implementation	Evaluation
Actors	Scientific/ Public	International NGO	Citizens/ Public	Street-Level Bu- reaucrats	Scientific/ Public
Source	Past Practice	Best Practice	Co-creation Pro- cess	On-the-Ground Experience	Internal Eval- uation
Content	<i>Problems/ Failure</i>	<i>Instruments/ Practicality</i>	<i>Solutions/ Feasibility</i>	<i>Barriers/ Conflicts</i>	<i>Perception/ Success</i>
Type	Problem	Instrumental	Instrumental	Political	Political
Constraints	Admin.	Design	Operational	Admin.	Design
Effect	Program Change	Program Change	Program Change	No Change	Incremental Change

Source: Authors' own elaboration. See also Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) and Wu et al. (2015).

Table 1 summarizes the complex dynamics of such multistage policy learning and its link with concrete policy outcomes in *Wiener Klimateam*. The key decision-makers of *Wiener Klimateam* engaged in epistemic learning, where specialist knowledge is used to define uncertain problems and guide the selection of appropriate instruments (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013: 609). This process, however, extended beyond abstract policy concepts and 'best practice' tools offered by international experts. They drew significant lessons from locally sourced evidence and information, which were crucial in framing specific policy issues and tailoring policy instruments to the local context. Continuous internal learning took place as *Wiener Klimateam* advanced through each stage. This learning emerged from ongoing interactions between decision-makers and local policy actors facilitated through stakeholder engagement, public-citizen collaboration, and process evaluation. Each actor contributed specialized knowledge based on their unique roles and responsibilities within the evolving policy process.

The effects of policy learning revealed many constraints on the *Wiener Klimateam*'s ability to acquire and use policy-oriented knowledge effectively in real-world policymaking (see also Ahn and Kazepov, 2024). The first of these constraints was *administrative*. Without explicit competence, MA20 was unable to effectively oversee and control the implementation activities, which otherwise would have been considered to breach the administrative autonomy of the implementing departments. This lack of competence provided the implementing departments with some discretionary power at the street level, for instance, by allowing them to make substantial modifications to the original participatory outputs. The second constraint pertained to *design*. The open-to-all participatory approach was inadequate to enhance the involvement of vulnerable groups experiencing climate vulnerability and a democratic deficit, which were the original objectives of *Wiener Klimateam*. Despite the genuine innovative outreach effort through local multipliers, their working areas and target audience had less connection to the identified target vulnerabilities from the issue-framing stage. This led for instance to a spatial concentration of the submissions around the local multipliers and offline events rather than the most needed areas with disadvantaged individuals and communities. Detection of such limitations was made difficult by the design of its monitoring and evaluation framework that was geared toward highlighting the subjective success factors of

the participatory process. Another critical constraint was *operational*. The lack of a clear collaborative structure in the co-creation workshop made it difficult for the participating citizens to deliberate their needs and interests from the bottom up to co-develop actionable solutions with public-sector experts. Many of the participants were not the ones who submitted the selected ideas and were not provided with sufficient knowledge about the practicalities around their implementation to make informed decisions based on group deliberation and collaboration. This resulted in highly unfocused participation dynamics that were dominated by individual expert participants who mostly created workshop outputs based on single citizen ideas.

Conclusions

Since the 'mobility turn', the policy mobilities literature has shed light on the highly politicized nature of urban policy mobility. Scholars in this debate argue that interest-driven policy actors selectively – and limitedly – draw lessons from international 'best practices' and modify them in line with prevailing economic pressures and anticipated political gains. Departing from the earlier positivist idea that lesson-drawing follows instrumental thinking of rational policy actors, they lay special emphasis on power-laden policymaking behaviors that frame particular narratives, contents and objectives of policy learning at the urban scale. So far, however, less effort has been made to consider the contextual influence of local policymaking on diverse patterns of policy learning and their varying implications for place-specific policy outcome by looking at the entirety of the policy process. This article, in contrast, links the dynamic process of policy learning with the actual learning effect on the policy process by disaggregating its complex relationship into the five core stages of the policy cycle. This analytical approach enabled a detailed assessment of the concrete learning processes and the flow of the acquired knowledge that together shaped the course of urban policy mobility in its truer local form. The results have illustrated that policy learning in urban policy mobility can occur in multiple forms and involve a diverse range of policy actors at different stages of its life cycle. However, the effects of this learning can vary depending on existing political, operational and analytical capacity constraints in policymaking.

Our policy-oriented approach, and the framework that we have put forward, presents a few analytical advantages over the current use of policy learning in the policy mobilities literature in the following ways. First, it captures the implications of the diverse roles and responsibilities, skills and resources of policy actors throughout the entire localization process of a traveling policy practice. This allows to disentangle the multiple objects of policy learning in urban policy mobility that emerge from their specific characteristics. Second, it locates multiple sources of policy learning and their movement across different stages of the policy process. This reveals the capacity and willingness of decision-makers to selectively extract lessons from emerging information, thereby determining the type of learning that ensues. Third, it helps to distinguish different types of learning and their generative effects on policy outcomes. It elucidates which policy outputs originate from specific learning activities at different levels of abstraction, as well as its political (in)ability to influence broader policymaking in the long run. Together, these elements enable a more systematic assessment of the expected policy effects from different types of policy learning under various policy circumstances. So far, this relationship remains elusive in existing research on urban policy mobility.

Within the policy mobilities literature, the interpretative lens on policy learning in urban policy mobility is considered to have been shaped by the 'discipline-specific specialization' of urban researchers, which differs from a more diagnostic approach in policy studies (Temenos and Lauermaun, 2020: 1114). Yet, both strands of literature share a common ground: to uncover the complex social and political interactions that determine who teaches and who learns, which ideas become mobile and which ones remain immobile, and which lessons localize and which ones do not. What separates urban studies on policy mobility from other disciplines, however, is the strong thematic focus on urban policies that feature specific learning characteristics compared to national policies. These increasingly include, among others, learning from collaborative knowledge production through community-based participatory instruments within non-hierarchical network-based governance arrangements. Together, they can generate more complex patterns and processes of policy learning that do not always follow the traditional policymaking steps in a clear-cut fashion. Future research then may consider the policy-specific factors and effects of policy learning that shape the localization process of mobile 'urban' policies.

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