

Linking compliance and policy learning

The case of EU soft law in Greece and Spain

Thenia Vagionaki



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/irpp/2763>

DOI: 10.4000/irpp.2763

ISSN: 2706-6274

Publisher

International Public Policy Association

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 November 2022

Number of pages: 219-240

ISSN: 2679-3873

Electronic reference

Thenia Vagionaki, "Linking compliance and policy learning", *International Review of Public Policy* [Online], 4:2 | 2022, Online since 01 November 2022, connection on 22 February 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/irpp/2763> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/irpp.2763>



Creative Commons - Attribution 4.0 International - CC BY 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Linking compliance and policy learning

The case of EU soft law in Greece and Spain

Thenia Vagionaki

Université de Lausanne, Switzerland

Abstract

This article analyzes the link between compliance and policy learning. It argues that member states that tend to comply with EU regulations are also more prone to learn from EU soft law instruments, such as the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC). To empirically demonstrate this argument, the article offers evidence from two illustrative case studies, Greece and Spain, based on insights from semi-structured interviews conducted with EU and national experts. The evidence shows that in Greece, compliance is problematic and learning – via EU soft law – remains mostly blocked. In Spain, where compliance is stronger, learning is more instrumental and political in nature. By focusing on the critical period before and right after the 2008 financial crisis, the article explains the different trajectories of these two Southern European countries with respect to their EU obligations through the lens of policy learning.

Keywords

compliance, policy learning, EU soft law, Greece, Spain, EU

I would like to thank Martino Maggetti and Philipp Trein for their feedback on earlier versions of this article. I warmly thank the editors of the International Review of Public Policy and two anonymous referees for their valuable and very helpful comments.

Introduction

The manner in which compliance and learning are linked in public policy is crucial in understanding policymaking, especially in contexts where authority is distributed between different jurisdictions. This article explores the common boundaries between compliance and learning in the realm of EU soft modes of governance, notably with respect to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) (Heidenreich & Zeitlin, 2009). The article argues that member states that tend to comply with EU regulations are also more prone to learn from EU policies overall. To illustrate this argument, the article focuses on one of the most prominent studies in the field of EU compliance, the “worlds of compliance” (Falkner et al., 2005; Falkner & Treib, 2008; Falkner, 2010). This research groups together member states according to their degree of compliance with EU Directives. The level of compliance depends on member states’ administrative and politico-institutional features as well as on actors’ interests towards the transposition of EU Directives (Steunenberg, 2007; Thomson et al., 2007). The article demonstrates that similar domestic characteristics and actor interests also influence the depth of policy learning, with respect to EU soft law instruments at the national context.

For a long time now, scholars of EU compliance and policy learning alike have addressed the key role that domestic politics (Angelova et al., 2012) play in determining the level of compliance towards EU law (Börzel et al., 2007; Zhelyazkova & Yordanova, 2015) as well as that of policy learning (Goyal & Howlett, 2018(a)). Scholars of EU compliance have, for instance, explored the influence of domestic features on EU enlargement (Börzel & Sedelmeier, 2017) as well as on multi-level governance and problem solving (Thomann et al., 2019; Trein et al., 2019). Similarly, scholars of policy learning have argued that institutional arrangements (Busenberg, 2001), state traditions (Radaelli, 2008) and administrative organizational capacities (Howlett, 2009; Borrás, 2011) influence learning in some way. With respect to EU soft law instruments in particular, scholars have showed that administrative inefficiencies (i.e., limited horizontal coordination and monitoring mechanisms) can obstruct the transfer of expert knowledge via best practices and peer reviews at the national level (Casey & Gold, 2005; Kröger, 2009; Schout et al., 2010; Vagionaki, 2018). Furthermore, scholars have explained variations regarding the influence of the OMC on national social inclusion policies, based on institutional and politico-economic settings (Barcevičius et al., 2014).

Thus, politico-administrative settings significantly influence the degree of compliance as well as the depth of learning of member states. The puzzling question, however, is how these specific features impact compliance and learning in a similar way. To respond to this question, this article builds on the “worlds of compliance” literature and argues that countries with a high degree of compliance with EU regulation are also more receptive to learn from EU soft law instruments, such as the OMC. By using the “worlds of compliance” classification, the article demonstrates how variations in member states’ level of compliance (EU hard law) are linked to variations in learning (EU soft law).

To empirically examine this connection, the article builds on two illustrative case studies: Greece and Spain. According to the “worlds of compliance” literature, these two Southern European countries differ in their degree of compliance towards EU Directives¹. Greece is clustered in the so-called “world of transposition neglect” and displays a limited level of compliance towards EU regulation. Spain, however, belongs to the “world of domestic politics” and is characterized by a higher degree of compliance and transposition of EU Directives (Falkner et al., 2005). The article uses material based on 18 semi-structured interviews with experts in Brus-

1 – It should be noted here that the “worlds of compliance” research refers to the mid-2000s period.

sels and Athens. The experts selected have extensive knowledge of the impact of the OMC both at the EU and national level. The results of the empirical analysis show that in Greece, compliance is problematic and learning – via EU soft law – remains mostly blocked. On the contrary, compliance is stronger in Spain, and learning is more instrumental and political in nature.

By focusing on the period prior to the 2008 financial crisis and the first years into the Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) imposed in Greece by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, this article has broader implications for the understanding of the trajectories which these countries followed with respect to their EU obligations. The evidence presented in the article shows how differences in compliance and learning observed in Greece and Spain during the OMC essentially echo how each country dealt with EU policies and expert knowledge in the past. Specifically, the impact of EU multilevel governance and the use of expert knowledge had already been limited in Greece during the pre-OMC period (Featherstone et al., 2001; Petmesidou & Guillén, 2014). In Spain, however, EU policies and soft governance instruments, such as the European Employment Strategy in the late 1990s, have played a key role in shaping core beliefs about social policymaking and promoted policy learning (Guillén & Álvarez, 2004; Gerven et al., 2014). Hence, not only compliance towards, but also the cognitive impact of, Europeanization processes have always differed in these two countries. Therefore, the findings of this research have implications for learning in the context of current EU instruments, such as the European Semester. These are discussed in the concluding section of the article.

Theoretical framework

This article delimits the link between EU compliance and policy learning and thus engages in a “*genuine cross-fertilization*” (Dunlop et al., 2018; Goyal & Howlett, 2018(b)) of disciplines. In addition, it contributes to recent studies which combine research on both EU hard law and EU soft law (de la Porte & Stiller, 2020; Hartlapp & Hofmann, 2021). The article posits that countries that tend to comply with EU regulation are also more likely to learn from EU soft law instruments. To elaborate on this argument, the article discusses the influence of policy learning in Greece and Spain during the era of the OMC, and links it with the degree of compliance present in these countries towards EU regulation. In addition, the research places particular emphasis on the impact of learning in the field of poverty and social exclusion (Copeland & Daly, 2012; Sabato & Vanhercke, 2012) as a “testing ground”. To do so, the article uses key features of the “worlds of compliance” literature for each country as the explanatory factors of this research. In other words, it explores how the specific characteristics that impact the level of compliance in these countries also shape their capacity to learn.

Greece and Spain as part of different “worlds of compliance”

Since the mid-2000s, the “worlds of compliance” research remains one of the most influential studies in the field of EU compliance (Falkner et al., 2005; Falkner, 2010; Hartlapp & Leiber, 2010). Countries are grouped into different clusters according to their performance, with respect to the transposition of EU Directives. Their level of performance is shaped by domestic characteristics which impact their receptivity and overall implementation duties towards EU law. Such characteristics are linked to organizational structures (mainly related to the administration), institutional settings as well as government ideologies. For example, the presence of strong political opposition towards a specific Directive (i.e., due to economic costs of adaptation, ideological reasons), of various administrative inefficiencies (i.e., inter-ministerial competence conflicts, lack of coordination structures), and of political instability, can lead to transposition failure (Falkner et al., 2005).

Spain is part of the so-called “world of domestic politics”², while Greece is clustered in the “world of transposition neglect”³ (Falkner & Treib, 2008; Falkner, 2010).⁴ Member states which belong to the “world of domestic politics” are effective with regards to the transposition and implementation of EU law. When political resistance towards Europeanization is weak, transposition is usually on time (Falkner & Treib, 2008; Falkner, 2010). Furthermore, national administrations are on the whole efficient, which in turn minimizes the risk of potential unnecessary delays with respect to the transposition process. Also, monitoring and reporting agencies are successfully put in place which contributes to the effective dissemination of information at the national level. The strong presence of civil society members in policymaking and policy implementation at the domestic level also plays a role in this direction. Nevertheless, political conflicts at the national level might disturb the process of the transposition of EU Directives.

In the “world of transposition neglect”, however, transposition of EU Directives is often late, and enforcement obstructed. This is due to a series of bureaucratic drawbacks and delays. Examples of such drawbacks include high degrees of administrative fragmentation, poor coordination, and limited organizational capacity. In addition, the presence of monitoring agencies (mainly within the administration) in this group of countries is limited. Furthermore, political contestation with respect to the transposition of EU regulation is particularly strong in this cluster, and the presence of civil society is weak at the national level.

Policy learning types

Policy learning is mostly understood as “*the acquisition of new relevant information that permits the updating of beliefs about the effect of a new policy*” (Braun & Gilardi, 2006, p. 306). Scholars have long explored exactly how this updating of beliefs occurs and what it means for policymakers in a variety of contexts and policy processes (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, 2019; Vagionaki & Trein, 2020; Trein & Vagionaki, 2022). A more encompassing definition of policy learning views it as “*1) a collective process, which may include acquiring information through diverse actions (e.g. trial and error), assessing or translating information, and disseminating knowledge or opportunities across individuals in a collective, and 2) collective products that emerge from the process, such as new shared ideas, strategies, rules, or policies*” (Heikkilä & Gerlak, 2013, p. 486). In this article, learning is viewed as a process which spans from changing beliefs to changing policy outcomes.

Policy learning classifications are not new within the policy learning literature. Scholars have referred to such classifications – within different contexts – during the past couple of decades (May, 1992; Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Hall, 1993; Freeman, 2006; Zito & Schout, 2009; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013; Biegelbauer, 2016; Petridou, 2014; Zahariadis, 2016). The introduction of new modes of governance, especially of the OMC in the early 2000s (Heidenreich & Bischoff, 2008; Heidenreich & Zeitlin, 2009), revived interest in the research on policy learning types (Radaelli, 2009; Zito & Schout, 2009; Zito, 2015). There are three policy learning types under review in this article (Table 1).

2 – Countries included here are, apart from Spain, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, and the UK (which was during that period part of the EU).

3 – Countries included in this cluster are, apart from Greece, France, Luxembourg, and Portugal.

4 – According to the “worlds of compliance” classification, there are two other clusters: the “world of law observance” which includes member states characterized by a dutiful adaptation towards EU law and hence, transposition is on time, and the “world of dead letters” in which countries encounter difficulties especially when it comes to the enforcement and application process of EU law, which is often obstructed by shortcomings in their legal and/or administrative system.

- The first one is **blocked learning**, which refers to cognition occurring at the actor level but not at the organizational level (Zito & Schout, 2009; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013; Zito, 2015). This is because various administrative (e.g., an over-fragmented administration), institutional (e.g., a highly centralized state), and sociopolitical features (e.g., a highly politicized administration) obstruct the diffusion of the newly acquired information from being transferred to the organizational level (Goyal & Howlett, 2018(a); Vagionaki, 2018).
- The second type is **instrumental learning**, which deals with the redefinition of policy instruments (May, 1992; Zito & Schout, 2009). Instrumental learning is linked to program change (Zito & Schout, 2009) and to the remodification of policy instruments without, however, leading to major changes in policy objectives (Nilsson, 2005).
- The final learning type is **political learning**, which occurs when actors acquire knowledge related to political strategies to help them attain political goals (Hecl, 1974; May, 1992; Pierson, 2004; Ansell & Bartenberger, 2016). Political learning can either be *strategic* (learning about strategies to augment political influence), *substantiating* (learning about political strategies to implement policy goals) and/or *symbolic* (pretending to have learned about how to improve policies, but the hidden agenda of learning concerns only political goals of the learning actors).

Table 1: Policy learning types

Types of learning	Definitions	Aims of learning
Blocked learning	Learning occurs at the actor level but is not transferred into the organizational one	Individual actors (with often limited influence) learn
Instrumental learning	Learning about the redefinition of policy instruments	Changes in policy instruments
Political learning	Strategic/substantiating: Learning about strategies to augment political influence/ implement political goals	Changes in political strategies
	Symbolic: Using learning to promote political agenda at home.	Changes in political agendas

Source: The Author

The types of learning discussed above were selected because they represent the most important aspects of the policy learning process. Blocked learning allows us to analyze whether new policy ideas can be transferred from the individual to the organizational level, or, whether they fail to become embedded in the policy positions of the organization, such as a ministry or a political party (Radaelli & Dunlop, 2013; Vagionaki, 2018). Instrumental learning allows a better

understanding of whether new ideas lead to actual changes in policy instruments and improve the problem-solving capacity of public policies. Finally, by examining political learning, the empirical analysis can shed light on whether policymakers use ideas such as expert knowledge to gain political influence. This article thus distinguishes learning for problem-solving from learning for maximizing political influence and symbolic policymaking (Trein et al., 2019). The categories are partially complementary and partially exclusive. Blocked learning and political learning, as well as instrumental learning and political learning, can occur at the same time, whereas blocked learning and instrumental learning are mutually exclusive. If blocked learning and political learning occur together, we should observe symbolic political learning. However, when instrumental learning and political learning co-occur, we expect to find, above all, substantiating and strategic political learning. These types of learning can help us to understand the individual and the organizational levels of learning as well as its processes and results.

In the context of the OMC, blocked learning is observed when, for instance, a member state participates in peer review meetings, but the information learned by the national representatives cannot be incorporated into the operational workings of the organization (i.e., ministry). This is mainly due to administrative drawbacks or because the political cost of implementing a measure adopted elsewhere is too high (Trein, 2018), and so the newly received information is not incorporated into policy. Instrumental learning occurs when actors learn how to redefine policy instruments related to, for example, resource redistribution, financial incentives, and information diffusion to improve policies at home. Finally, political learning occurs when, for instance, actors learn about the use of policy strategies adopted elsewhere to promote policy reforms at home, within their parliaments and/or electorate bodies. In addition, political learning also occurs when actors use OMC objectives and best practices within their political discourses to indicate their willingness to comply with EU obligations.

Linking variations of compliance with learning

This article uses variations in the level of compliance towards EU hard law to explain differences in policy learning types among member states. Specifically, it argues that domestic features, which have an impact on the degree of compliance of member states towards EU regulation, significantly influence their learning behavior as well. According to the “worlds of compliance”, there are three groups of explanatory factors, which shape the divergent degrees of compliance in Greece and Spain (Table 2). These are: first, administrative features such as the degree of coordination of administrations as well as the use of monitoring and evaluation-based policies. Second, features of the political system, for instance, the presence of clientelist politics and the role of political interests. Lastly, the degree of participation of civil society representatives in the domestic policy processes. As this article demonstrates, these factors also impact learning in the above two countries, in the context of EU soft law instruments.

With respect to administrative features, high degrees of fragmentation, for instance, can obstruct learning. This is because in such an environment, bureaucrats may find it difficult to communicate and disseminate the information needed (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019). Hence, the acquired knowledge cannot be diffused at the organizational level, which in turn, may lead to blocked learning. By contrast, within efficient and well-coordinated administrations, it is easier for the information to be disseminated more effectively. This may contribute towards instrumental learning.

Regarding political conflicts, clientelist interests can lead to symbolic political learning in the “world of transposition neglect.” This is because in such cases, elected officials focus on pursuing their own political goals, often instrumentalizing knowledge (for example OMC in-

struments) as a means to indicate to their EU counterparts that they are respecting their EU obligations. Nevertheless, in these countries, engagement with policy ideas from European partners is not a political priority, which is why this article expects to find blocked learning but not instrumental learning. On the contrary, in the “world of domestic politics”, learning from other countries is assumed to be a political priority, and it is plausible to expect instrumental learning and substantiating political learning amongst policymakers. Nevertheless, domestic political conflicts might impede this learning process.

Finally, the degree of involvement of civil society members and interest groups in the political process at the national level also plays a role with respect to the diffusion of information. For example, poor participation of civil society representatives in the drafting of OMC national reports contributes to limited information exchange between civil society and the administration, which subsequently enhances the presence of blocked learning. However, when civil society is more actively engaged within national policymaking processes, instrumental and political learning are the most likely outcomes. In such cases both bureaucrats and government officials are interested in information exchange with civil society.

Table 2: The argument

	“World of transposition neglect” Greece	“World of domestic politics” Spain
Administrative system is...	Ineffective (fragmented, poorly-coordinated, limited monitoring agencies/mechanisms in place)	Efficient (well-organized, monitoring agencies/mechanisms in place, effective information dissemination)
Political system characterized by...	Often opposing political priorities (poles) with respect to certain EU Directives	Occasional conflicts between domestic political interests and EU Directives
Civil society/ interest groups have a....	Weak presence at the national level	Strong presence at the national level
Implications for policy learning related to EU soft law.	Politicians and advisors block learning of policy lessons. Political learning focuses on maintaining the status quo.	Politicians and bureaucrats learn from European soft law to improve policy instruments . Political learning focuses on how to implement lessons from EU soft law.

Source: adapted from Falkner et al 2005, Falkner 2010

This article formulates two expectations for each of the two Southern European countries under review with respect to learning.

E1: We expect to identify blocked learning only in Greece.

The administrations of the countries that are part of the “world of transposition neglect” are often ineffective, with limited monitoring mechanisms in place. Such features obstruct the dissemination of information to reach (ministerial) decision-making centers. Thus, it is difficult for policymakers to learn from the EU soft law instruments, for example, on how to upgrade the use of policy instruments to improve policies because information transfer is often obstructed. Hence, this article does not expect to identify instrumental learning in Greece. This is aggravated by the fact that the administration in Greece is highly hierarchical (Ladi, 2013) and bureaucratic (Featherstone, 2015; Sotiropoulos, 2015), which translates into the absence of flexibility and innovative solutions – as promoted by the OMC – within its *modus operandi*. Such an administrative system leaves limited room for maneuver for bureaucrats to coordinate and exchange information. The same goes for political learning (in a strategic and substantiating sense). Based on the “world of compliance” research, Greek elected officials do not view compliance with EU law as a goal (Hartlapp & Leiber, 2010). As such, it is unlikely to anticipate that they will view their EU soft law responsibilities in a different light by, for instance, learning about ideas and strategies to improve policies at home. Furthermore, the Greek administration is not free from the influence of political power. It is, to the contrary, over-politicized in nature (Pappas & Assimakopoulou, 2012). We can expect that this element makes the diffusion of knowledge towards the decision-making centers difficult in the case of soft law (Vagionaki, 2018).

E2: We expect to identify instrumental learning and political learning only in Spain.

According to the “worlds of compliance” literature, the administration in Spain is rather efficient in the transposition of EU Directives (in comparison to Greece). Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are often in place. In addition, elected officials view compliance with EU law as an aspiration per se, especially when there is no clash with domestic interests (Falkner et al., 2005). This contributes towards the diffusion of information originating from the EU, both within the administrations as well as within the political decision-making centers. As such, this article does not expect to identify evidence of blocked learning in Spain. It expects, however, to identify evidence of instrumental and political learning (of a strategic and substantiating type), since Spanish policymakers are more accepting of EU soft law policies (López-Santana, 2004). Thus, we expect that policymakers will be interested in learning about policy formulations and strategies to improve national policies. Nevertheless, domestic political conflicts might impede instrumental learning because some national political actors might oppose implementing ideas learned by other actors in the process of the OMC.

Research design and case selection

This article focuses on two Southern European countries, Greece and Spain. These countries serve an illustrative purpose (Eckstein, 1975; George & Bennet, 2005; Levy, 2008) and are both important cases studies to analyze the process of Europeanization. On the one hand, they are similar because they represent the Southern European welfare model (Matsaganis et al., 2003; Ferrera, 2005) and are part of the Napoleonic tradition in terms of their administrative systems (Peters, 2008; Ongaro, 2009; Featherstone, 2015; Orelli et al., 2016).⁵ In this context,

5 – Although, in the case of Spain the Napoleonic elements are less resilient compared to other countries (Bezes & Parrado, 2013).

it may be expected that they will deal with their EU obligations in a somewhat similar manner. On the other hand, however, based on the “worlds of compliance” research, these countries are clustered in separate groups because they differ in their degree of compliance and transposition towards EU law (Falkner et al., 2005; Falkner, 2010). This aspect makes the two countries a highly interesting choice to illustrate the link between compliance and learning.

Data collection

The empirical analysis is based on 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with experts in Brussels and Athens.⁶ Specifically, in Brussels three types of experts were interviewed: a) EU bureaucrats working for the European Commission, at the DG of Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion; b) Representatives of the European Anti-Poverty Network; and c) Members of the permanent representation of Greece at the EU. In Athens, the actors interviewed consisted of: a) Experts working at the National Center for Social Research, and b) Experts (such as university professors) who either had knowledge of the OMC or participated in the drafting of national reports. All experts were selected based on their professional experience, at the time⁷, with the OMC and extensive knowledge regarding its impact on social inclusion and protection policies, both at the EU and the national level. To preserve their anonymity, all interviewees appear in codes: from EU-1 to EU-9 for the experts interviewed in Brussels, and from GR1 to GR9 for the Greek experts.

The questionnaire used in both sets of interviews included 10 to 12 questions that were tailor-made for each specific interviewee, and which served as a springboard for an open, in-depth discussion. In particular, the questionnaire used for the Brussels interviews covered topics such as the impact of the OMC in Greece and Spain with respect to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the level of actor participation, and the nature of domestic features which either enhance or impede the transfer of knowledge via OMC instruments (i.e., peer reviews, national reports) at the national level. The questions used for the Greek interviews targeted issues such as the role which the Greek bureaucracy and other administrative drawbacks played with respect to the transfer of information from the EU to the national level, which OMC initiatives, if any, were adopted within national social policies, and the impact of the MoUs vis-à-vis the manner in which actors dealt with EU soft law instruments.

Data analysis

The interviews were analyzed based on thematic content analysis (Weber, 1990; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 2019), which is a “*method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Specific “themes”, corresponding to indications regarding the different types of learning analyzed, were identified within the data sources. For instance, in the case of blocked learning, such “themes” included administrative fragmentation and poor coordination which can act as obstacles for the dissemination of information. The adoption of policy instruments related to, for example, resource redistribution measures regarding poverty and social exclusion were viewed as indicators of instrumental learning. Finally, the adoption of political strategies – influenced by the OMC – to increase support for policies implemented at home or to promote elected officials’ political agendas, were regarded as indicators of political learning.

6 – The interviews in Brussels were conducted from May to June 2013, and those in Athens in December 2013. The full list of the interview partners is available on the online Appendix.

7 – All experts were in place during the period of the OMC, prior to 2010, and up to the first years after the introduction of the MoUs in Greece.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted in the following manner: first, the interviews were transcribed.⁸ Second, the specific “themes” identified within the texts were coded according to whether they corresponded to a) one of the three learning types under review and/or to b) features of the administrative and political system in Greece and Spain that impact the diffusion of information via the OMC. Third, the selected indicators were recorded in two distinct tables, one with the indicators relating to learning and the other with those relating to domestic features. The analytical steps above allowed us to compare the variations of learning both within and across the two countries analyzed.

Empirical analysis

The empirical analysis of our two illustrative case studies (Greece and Spain) reveals variations between the two countries in terms of policy learning. These are illustrated in the table below (Table 3).

Table 3: Policy learning variations between Greece and Spain

Policy learning types	Greece	Spain
Blocked learning	+	-
Instrumental learning	-	+
Political learning	+(symbolic)	-(strategic/substantiating)

(+) = this type of learning is present, (-) = this type of learning is not present

Source: The Author

Policy learning in Greece

At the time when the interviews for this research were conducted, Greece was under strict conditionality expressed in the MoUs. The country was faced with unprecedented high unemployment rates (Mitrakos, 2014; Matsaganis, 2019) which had detrimental consequences for pensions as well as income inequality conditions (Matsaganis, 2011; Koutsogeorgopoulou et al., 2014). The severe austerity measures imposed strained considerably Greece’s social policy and left limited room for flexibility on behalf of the Greek government (EU-4). These conditions significantly impacted Greece’s involvement with the OMC (EU-2, EU-4, EU-5, and EU-7). The analysis shows the presence of the following two types of learning in the country.

Blocked learning

Blocked learning has a strong presence in Greece (Vagionaki, 2018). This is manifested in the fact that although individual bureaucrats⁹ have learned from their participation in OMC processes, it has been difficult for the acquired knowledge to be disseminated within the admin-

8 – Specifically, out of the nine interviews conducted in Brussels, eight were recorded and fully transcribed and one was based on notes taken during the interview meeting. All interviews held in Athens were recorded and fully transcribed.

9 – Mainly those working at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the national organization responsible for Greece’s OMC obligations.

istration (EU-3, EU-6, GR1, GR2, GR3 and GR5). This is due to various organizational drawbacks and inefficiencies (EU-4 and EU-9) present in the Greek public sector (Matsaganis, 2005; Featherstone & Papadimitriou, 2008). These include the high level of fragmentation and poor coordination (Linos, 2007) which acts as a barrier to the exchange of information between various inter-ministerial departments (EU-6, GR1 and GR3). Furthermore, the hierarchical and top-down organization of the Greek public administration (Ladi, 2014; Sotiropoulos, 2015) also hinders the transfer of information via the OMC. This is because, in this particular type of administration, the political hierarchy shows little interest in investing in EU soft law instruments, leaving bureaucrats with little room for taking initiative and disseminating relevant information (EU-3, EU-4, and EU-9). As one interviewee stated, *“from the moment politicians do not want to implement certain things these remain on paper”* (GR4). This lack of political determination and *“conviction that we can all gain from such an experience [the OMC]”* (GR5), characterized how Greek elected officials dealt with EU soft law instruments overall. During the period of the MoUs, an additional obstacle appeared which further aggravated the pre-existing difficulties observed at the administrative level; several experienced civil servants – who had previously been working in ministerial departments dealing with OMC instruments – were transferred, or even forced into early retirement. This led to the positioning within these departments of bureaucrats transferred from other sectors of the public service who often lacked the knowledge and/or experience to deal effectively with EU soft law tools (EU-3, EU-4, EU-5, and EU-9).

The absence of a structured civil dialogue also impedes learning via the OMC in Greece (EU-2, Petmesidou & Glatzer, 2015), mainly due to limited political commitment (Karamessini, 2008). There are two negative consequences of such an absence with regards to how EU soft law instruments are addressed. First, this impacts the level of participation of NGOs and stakeholders in the OMC processes (EU-3 and EU-6), which, in turn, hinders the dissemination of information. According to an interviewee, the Greek branch of the European Antipoverty Network (EAPN) found it difficult to actively engage in the exchange of information within the network, precisely because of the absence of such structured social dialogue (EU-2). Second, Greek elected officials often do not consult with NGOs on OMC processes (i.e., prior to the drafting of national reports), because they are under no obligation to do so. According to an expert, ministerial committees *“often forget that they must meet [with NGO representatives] and when they do finally meet to discuss a topic, it is not ready. Thus, there is actually no consultation going on”* (GR1). This further obstructs the transfer of information at the national level (EU-2 and EU-5).

Political learning

In the case of the OMC, political learning in Greece is more symbolic rather than concerned with learning about strategies to improve policies. EU soft law instruments serve a twofold purpose for Greek elected officials. First, they aim at promoting political goals at home (EU-6). Insights from OMC initiatives regarding measures to combat poverty and social exclusion are used by Greek politicians when they serve their own political agendas regardless of their effectiveness (GR7, GR8). Second, Greek politicians use EU soft law tools to indicate to their EU counterparts their willingness to be consistent with their EU obligations (EU-3, EU-6). In such a context, participation in the OMC has a limited instrumental learning impact on national policies, although Greek official reports refer to various measures taken to fight poverty and social exclusion in accordance with OMC objectives (GR7, GR8). Greek politicians have always shown more interest in investing in funding schemes related to EU Structural Funds (Sakellapoulos, 2007), rather than in soft law instruments and mutual learning practices (GR5). This

tendency on behalf of the Greek political hierarchy has been observed since the early 2000s when, during the period of the European Employment Strategy (EES), policy changes took place only after the European Social Fund (ESF) programs were introduced (Zartaloudis, 2014). In recent years, the MoUs shifted even further away the priorities of Greek elected officials from such voluntary processes (EU-3 and EU-6) because there was a lot of pressure to take measures and carry out policy reforms in a short time. The urgent and binding character of the MoUs, left no room for EU soft law initiatives to have any impact on policy making processes at the time (GR1, GR3 and GR9). This finding is consistent with the insights from the literature which suggest that policy learning in Greece happened after the OMC and under the pressure of the MoU (e.g., Zahariadis, 2016; Spanou, 2020).

Policy learning in Spain

Spain has always been actively engaged in EU soft law instruments, such as the OMC and its predecessor the EES (Gonzalez-Calvet, 2002; Mailand, 2009; EU-4). These processes have had an overall positive impact on Spain's policymaking system in terms of cohesion and structure (López-Santana, 2009). Even during the financial crisis of 2008, the degree of participation of the country in EU soft law instruments did not diminish (EU-2). On the contrary, despite being faced with high unemployment rates and radical budgetary cuts of its welfare policies (Carballo-Cruz, 2011; Verd et al., 2019), Spain saw its commitment towards the OMC as an opportunity for improvement and learning (EU-5). For instance, in early 2010, Spain was among the leading EU member states to contribute to the drafting of the EUROPE 2020 Strategy (EU-2). Specifically, its participation was crucial for the formulation of the five new headline targets of the strategy, one of which dealt with the reduction of poverty in times of crisis. Two policy learning types are identified in the case of Spain for the period under review.

Instrumental learning

Spanish national actors view their participation in the OMC as an opportunity to learn from their EU peers about how to redefine or adopt new policy instruments (EU-4, EU-7). For example, via peer review meetings, Spanish national representatives had the opportunity to learn about policy instruments with respect to the fight against child poverty. Such measures were then successfully diffused (EU-2, EU-4, EU-6, and EU-8) within their administrations and effectively integrated and turned into national policies (EU-1, EU-2, EU-4, EU-7, and EU-8). According to experts, "*Spain has worked a lot through [as a consequence of] the peer reviews on finding specific [improved] models or tools for child polices*" (EU-7) and is open to "*internalizing (...) whatever sort of interaction, policy messages and policy suggestions that come out of the dialogue*" (EU-4). In addition, Spain has also been active in organizing peer reviews to share its best practices with other member states regarding social inclusion and protection issues (EU-2, EU-7). Between 2004-2010 it was among the top three countries which hosted the most peer review meetings in the context of the OMC (EU-COM 2011). In 2007, for instance, Spain hosted a peer review meeting regarding the promotion of active inclusion measures to combat regional discrimination and, in 2008, another one focused on integrating ethnic minorities.

Political learning

In Spain, political learning takes the form of strategic as well as substantiating learning. According to most interviewees, Spanish actors participate in the OMC with the aim of learning about new political strategies to implement social policy goals at home (EU-2, EU-5, and EU-6). A key reason for this is that Spanish politicians recognized quite early the learning opportunity which arose from OMC instruments and processes in terms of social inclusion policies. This

mentality also extends to the way its national administration dealt with the OMC overall. For instance, regarding the drafting of the National Strategy Reports (NSRs), an interviewee argued that *“Spain will make a good bureaucratic report but with the aim of application on the ground”* (EU-5). Thus, national bureaucrats who took part in the OMC understood its policy learning potential and hence viewed the task of drafting the reports as more than a mere administrative duty (EU-8). This commitment is reflected in the fact that in the mist of the crisis, in 2012–2013, Spain organized two peer review meetings with the aim of learning from its EU peers about specific social inclusion policies and strategies (EU-6). Secondary literature confirms this assessment. According to López-Santana, the NSRs represent *“a national strategic plan to set national policy objectives and budgets, which provides a reference point for policymaking and evaluation across levels of government”* (López-Santana, 2009, p. 9).

A key lesson which Spain learned from participating in EU soft law processes is how to collaborate more effectively at the national, regional, and local levels. Spain is characterized by a strong regional decentralization (Kickert, 2011) that strengthened the collaborative approach which the country adopted to deal with its social inclusion policies (EU-7). EU soft law instruments have contributed to further promoting the decentralization of policy initiatives, such as active labor market policies (López-Santana, 2009, p. 9). An example of this is the decentralized manner in which the Spanish EAPN local strand operates and closely collaborates with public regional authorities on social inclusion issues (EU-2). As a result, Spain performed well in terms of action plans taken within the OMC framework at both the national and regional levels (EU-2 and EU-8).¹⁰ In addition, the fact that the national administration maintains an open dialogue with civil society further contributes to such a decentralized approach. For example, Spanish NGOs are often consulted during the drafting of the National Action Plans (NAPs) (EU-1 and EU-8). According to an interview partner, in Spain *“there is the willingness to work with stakeholders (...) poverty is a huge problem it is not an easy one to tackle (...) in Spain [they] have some clear indication [how] to manage and to implement from the policy level [right down] to the administrative level (...) with all the other actors”* (EU-5).

Discussion of empirical illustrations

This article argues that the countries that comply with EU regulations are also more prone to learn from EU soft law instruments. To support this argument, it presents empirical evidence based on two illustrative case studies – Greece and Spain – in the context of the OMC. The article demonstrates how these two countries – which differ in their compliance towards EU regulation – also differ in their learning behavior. Specifically, we expected to observe blocked learning in Greece, and instrumental and political learning in Spain. Based on the evidence, these expectations were partially confirmed because in the case of Greece, symbolic political learning was also observed.

According to the “worlds of compliance” literature, Greece is part of the “world of transposition neglect”. In this cluster, the transposition of EU Directives is problematic due to administrative drawbacks. This article shows how the latter also impede policy learning in Greece. Specifically, high levels of administrative fragmentation, limited coordination and the absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms contribute to the presence of blocked learning. In addition, the limited participation of civil society representatives (such as NGOs) in OMC processes at the national level also obstructs the dissemination of information. In this cluster, elected officials often opt for political “non-action” when they are not particularly interested in the transpo-

10 – An example of this are the “Regional Reform Programs” adopted in Spain, in alignment with the National Action Plans.

sition of a directive. In the case of the OMC, such an approach is reflected in some form of symbolic political learning in Greece. Elected officials are interested in EU soft law instruments mainly when the latter promote or coincide with their political agenda.

In countries that are part of the “world of domestic politics”, such as Spain, transposition and enforcement processes of EU Directives are generally effective. Political hierarchies (at the national, regional, and local levels) show a strong interest in complying with EU regulation. These features create a favorable environment for learning since it is easy for the newly acquired information to be transferred from the EU level to the national one. Furthermore, the empirical evidence discussed above shows that this dissemination is enhanced by the fact that civil society representatives are actively involved – together with public authorities – in OMC processes. Spanish actors participate in the OMC with the aim of learning about policy instruments and political strategies to improve their social inclusion policies at home.

Conclusions

This article offers new insights into the link between compliance and policy learning. The evidence presented here has implications not only for these two topics, but also for the study of EU governance overall. The article argues that member states that tend to comply more with EU hard law are also more prone to learn from EU soft law instruments. To illustrate this argument the article analyzed learning, in the context of the OMC, in two Southern European countries: Greece and Spain. The empirical analysis is based on 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with experts from Brussels and Athens. The data originating from these interviews was complemented with secondary literature. Regarding the Spanish case in particular, this complementary data was deemed valuable to counterbalance the absence of interviews with Spanish experts. Although, the latter would have enriched the empirical analysis, the information collected for Spain based on the data sources used produced interesting empirical findings. Future empirical research would benefit from the inclusion of additional interviews with national actors from both case studies.

Referring to one of the most well-known studies in EU literature, the “worlds of compliance” (Falkner et al., 2005; Falkner, 2010), this article posits that differences in politico-administrative features as well as in the role of agency and interests, not only influences the degree of compliance between member states, but also the depth of their learning. Specifically, it demonstrates that in Greece, learning remains to a significant extent blocked due to administrative drawbacks which obstruct the knowledge acquired via the OMC to be disseminated to the organizational level. Furthermore, symbolic political learning was also detected in Greece because elected officials resort to EU soft law objectives to promote their own political agendas. On the contrary, learning in Spain is instrumental as well as political, in the strategic sense. In this country, actors are interested in learning about policy tools and strategies to improve social policies at home. The fact that Greece is a centralized state whereas Spain is a decentralized one may be an additional plausible explanation with regards to the above-mentioned differences in the learning behavior of these two countries. However, this factor is not explicitly addressed in the article.

The article extends the “worlds of compliance” framework and applies it to explain variations in policy learning (types). It specifically shows that although EU soft law modes of governance, such as the OMC, are more flexible and voluntary in nature compared to EU hard law, similar conditions nonetheless explain both learning and compliance at the national level. To determine whether the “worlds of compliance” framework can explain differences in learning

beyond these two cases, there is a need for more targeted studies. Such studies could focus, for instance, on whether Belgium or the Netherlands, which are part of the “world of domestic politics”, and France or Portugal, which belong to the “world of transposition neglect”, demonstrate similar learning behaviors as Spain and Greece, respectively. Empirical evidence regarding Portugal shows that EU soft law tools have had a strong impact on national policies, but not through policy learning (Zartaloudis, 2014). To some extent, this finding is in line with the empirical results of this article for the Greek case, suggesting that the EU’s impact on national public policies was a consequence of compliance rather than of learning.

The evidence discussed in the article also reflects a broader continuum of compliance and learning traditions in both Greece and Spain, with respect to EU policies. Compliance and the use of expertise has always been problematic in Greece, even prior to the OMC. Political constraints and the pursuit of financial resources undermined the role of expert knowledge within Greek policymaking (Featherstone et al., 2001; Spanou, 2020), a pattern that continued throughout the OMC era, with the presence of blocked learning and political symbolic learning. The financial crisis of 2008 acted as a catalyst for change (Petmesidou & Guillén, 2014). However, this change was brought about by coercive policy transfer rather than voluntary learning (Spanou, 2020), in the context of strict economic adjustment programs. During the past couple of years since Greece began to fully participate in the European Semester, problems related to administrative weaknesses (EU-COM, 2019(a), p. 55) persist. Furthermore, the risk of poverty and social exclusion remains one of the highest in the EU (EU-COM, 2020(a), p. 6). More targeted research is needed to determine whether in the long run, policy learning may be observed following periods of change, in Greece (Kamkhaji & Radaelli, 2017), or, whether, with the relaxation of external pressure (Spanou, 2020, p. 21), deeply-rooted mentalities and organizational shortcomings will continue to obstruct learning in the context of the European Semester.

Spain’s pro-European tradition of learning has always contributed towards compliance (Gerven et al., 2014) with respect to EU policies. This is not the case with the OMC alone, but also with the projects funded by the European Social Fund in the early 1990s, or later with the European Employment Strategy. Participation in EU soft governance instruments promoted mutual learning via coordination and information exchange in Spain, both at the national and regional levels (Gonzalez-Calvet, 2002; López-Santana, 2009). During the first years after the outbreak of the crisis, Spain was pressured to comply with EU targets due to economic difficulties. Based on the implementation of the Country Specific Recommendations, the Commission approved the reforms that were undertaken, because they aligned with the Commission’s and the Council’s suggestions. Thus, the soft influence of EU recommendations has had a critical impact on the country’s social policies (Guillén & Álvarez, 2004). Given that Spain has made progress with respect to the targets set by Europe 2020 (EU-COM, 2019(b); EU-COM, 2020(b)), it can be expected that it will continue to learn from EU policies and recommendations in the context of the European Semester. Hence, in Spain, compliance with, and learning from, EU policies have gone hand in hand, whilst in Greece, learning has rather been a byproduct of external coercion.

This article paves the path for new research to connect compliance and learning. The evidence presented here has broader implications for future research regarding current EU modes of governance, such as the European Semester. Such research could contribute to our understanding of how changes in the EU socio-economic and political environment, after the financial crisis of 2008, triggered or averted differences in learning between member states. In addition, this article has implications for EU regulation studies in general. The arguments developed

here can be applied to issues such as data protection, public health, and environmental policy, which also concern different forms of compliance and information exchange among member states, EU institutions, and agencies. This research could further analyze the connection between compliance and learning in a variety of policies.

Bibliography

- Angelova, M., Dannwolf, T., & König, T. (2012). How robust are compliance findings? A research synthesis. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 19(8), 1269-1291.
- Ansell, C. K., & Bartenberger, M. (2016). Varieties of experimentalism. *Ecological Economics*, 130, 64-73.
- Barcevičius, E., Weishaupt J. T., & Zeitlin, J. (2014). Tracing the Social OMC from Its Origins to Europe 2020. In E. Barcevičius, J. T. Weishaupt & J. Zeitlin, (Eds.), *Assessing the Open Method of Coordination. Work and Welfare in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bennett, C. J., & Howlett, M. (1992). The lessons of learning: Reconciling theories of policy learning and policy change. *Policy sciences*, 25(3), 275-294.
- Bezes, P., & Parrado, S. (2013). Trajectories of Administrative Reform: Institutions, Timing and Choices in France and Spain. *West European Politics*, 36(1), 22-50.
- Biegelbauer, P. (2016). How different forms of policy learning influence each other: case studies from Austrian innovation policy-making. *Policy Studies*, 37(2), 129-146.
- Borrás, S. (2011). Policy learning and organizational capacities in innovation policies. *Science and Public Policy*, 38(9), 725-734.
- Börzel, T. A., Dudziak, M., Hofmann, T., Panke, D., & Sprungk, C. (2007). Recalcitrance, Inefficiency, and Support for European Integration: Why Member States Do (Not) Comply with European Law. *CES Working Paper 151*. Harvard University.
- Börzel, T. A., & Sedelmeier, U., (2017). Larger and more law abiding? The impact of enlargement on compliance in the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(2), 197-215.
- Braun, D., & Gilardi, F. (2006). Taking 'Galton's problem' seriously: Towards a theory of policy diffusion. *Journal of theoretical politics*, 18(3), 298-322.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Busenberg, G. J. (2001). Learning in organizations and public policy. *Journal of public policy*, 21(2), 173-189.
- Carballo-Cruz, F. (2011). Causes and consequences of the Spanish economic crisis: Why the recovery is taken so long? *Panoeconomicus*, 58(3), 309-328.
- Casey, B. H., & Gold, M. (2005). Peer review of labor market programs in the European Union: what can countries really learn from one another? *Journal of European public policy*, 12(1), 23-43.
- Copeland, P., & Daly, M. (2012). Varieties of poverty reduction: Inserting the poverty and social exclusion target into Europe 2020. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 22(3), 273-287.

- de la Porte, C., & Stiller, S. (2020). Lessons about the 'harder' elements of OMC governance for the EU Energy Union. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 22(6), 830-842.
- Dunlop, C. A., & Radaelli, C. M. (2013). Systematizing policy learning: From monolith to dimensions. *Political studies*, 61(3), 599-619.
- Dunlop, C. A., Radaelli, C. M., & Trein, P. (2018). *Learning in Public Policy: Analysis, Modes and Outcomes*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dunlop, C. A., & Radaelli, C. M. (2019). Policy Instruments, Policy Learning and Politics: Impact Assessment in the European Union. In G. Capano, *Making Policies Work: First-and Second-order Mechanisms in Policy Design*. Edward Elgar.
- Eckstein, H. (1975). Case studies and theory in political science. In F. Greenstein, F., & N. Polsby (Eds.), *Handbook of political science*, vol. 7, (pp.79-138). Addison-Wesley.
- EU-COM (European Commission) (2011). *Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme*. European Commission.
- EU-COM(a) (2019). *Country Report Greece 2019. Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances* (SWD (2019)1007 final). European Commission.
- EU-COM(b) (2019). *Country Report Spain 2020. Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances* (SWD (2019) 1008 final). European Commission.
- EU-COM(a) (2020). *Country Report Greece 2020. 2020 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011* (SWD (2020) 507 final). European Commission.
- EU-COM(b) (2020). *Country Report Spain 2020. 2020 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011* (SWD (2020) 508 final). European Commission.
- Falkner, G., Treib, O., Hartlapp, M., & Leiber, S. (2005). *Complying with Europe: EU harmonization and soft law in the member states*. Cambridge University Press.
- Falkner, G., & Treib, O. (2008). Three worlds of compliance or four? The EU-15 compared to new member states. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46(2), 293-313.
- Falkner, G. (2010). *Compliance with EU social policies in old and new member states: different worlds, different remedies* (No. 6). Institute for European integration research (EIF).
- Featherstone, K., Kazamias, G., & Papadimitriou, D. (2001). The limits of external empowerment: EMU, technocracy and reform of the Greek pension system. *Political Studies*, 49(3), 462-480.
- Featherstone, K., & Papadimitriou, D. (2008). *The limits of Europeanization: reform capacity and policy conflict in Greece*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Featherstone, K. (2015). External conditionality and the debt crisis: the 'Troika' and public administration reform in Greece. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22(3), 295-314.
- Ferrera, M. (Ed.) (2005). *Welfare state reform in southern Europe: fighting poverty and social exclusion in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal* (Vol. 6). Routledge.
- Freeman, R. (2006). Learning in public policy. In R.E. Goodin, M. Moran & M. Rein, (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of public policy*, (Vol. 6), (pp.367-388). Oxford University Press.
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press.

- Gerven, M. V., Vanhercke, B., & Gürocak, S. (2014). Policy learning, aid conditionality or domestic politics? The Europeanization of Dutch and Spanish activation policies through the European Social Fund. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 21(4), 509-527.
- Gonzalez-Calvet, J. (2002). Employment policies in Spain: from flexibilisation to the European Employment Strategy. In C. de la Porte & P. Pochet, *Building social Europe through the Open-Method of Co-ordination*. Lang.
- Goyal, N., & Howlett, M. (2018)(a). Framework or metaphor? Analyzing the status of policy learning in the policy sciences. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 1-17.
- Goyal, N., & Howlett, M. (2018)(b). Lessons learned and not learned: Bibliometric analysis of policy learning. In C. A. Dunlop, C. M. Radaelli & P. Trein (Eds.), *Learning in Public Policy* (pp.27-49). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Guillén, A. M., & Álvarez, S. (2004). The EU's impact on the Spanish welfare state: the role of cognitive Europeanization. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 14(3), 285-299.
- Hall, P. A. (1993). Policy paradigms, social learning, and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain. *Comparative politics*, 275-296.
- Hartlapp, M., & Leiber, S. (2010). The implementation of EU social policy: the 'Southern Problem' revisited. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 17(4), 468-486.
- Hartlapp, M., & Hofmann, A. (2021). The use of EU soft law by national courts and bureaucrats: how relation to hard law and policy maturity matter. *West European Politics*, 44(1), 134-154.
- Hecló, H. (1974). *Modern social politics: From relief to income maintenance in Britain and Sweden*. Yale University Press.
- Heidenreich, M., & Bischoff, G. (2008). The open method of co-ordination: a way to the Europeanization of social and employment policies? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46(3), 497-532.
- Heidenreich, M., & Zeitlin, J. (Eds.) (2009). *Changing European employment and welfare regimes: The influence of the open method of coordination on national reforms*. Routledge.
- Heikkilä, T., & Gerlak, A. K. (2013). Building a conceptual approach to collective learning: Lessons for public policy scholars. *Policy Studies Journal*, 41(3), 484-512.
- Howlett, M. (2009). Policy analytical capacity and evidence-based policy-making: Lessons from Canada. *Canadian public administration*, 52(2), 153-175.
- Kamkhaji, J. C. & Radaelli, C. M. (2017). Crisis, learning and policy change in the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(5), 714-734.
- Karamessini, M. (2008). Still a distinctive southern European employment model? *Industrial Relations Journal*, 39(6), 510-531.
- Kickert, W. (2011). Distinctiveness of administrative reform in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Common characteristics of context, administrations, and reforms. *Public Administration*, 89(3), 801-818.
- Koutsogeorgopoulou, V., Matsaganis, M., Leventi, C., & Schneider, J.D. (2014). Fairly sharing the social impact of the crisis in Greece. *OECD Economics Department Working Papers*, No. 1106. OECD Publishing.
- Krippendorff, K. (2019). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

- Kröger, S. (2009). The effectiveness of soft governance in the field of European anti-poverty policy: operationalization and empirical evidence. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, 11(2), 197-211.
- Kuhlmann, S., & Wollmann, H. (2019). *Introduction to comparative public administration: Administrative systems and reforms in Europe*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ladi, S. (2013). Evidence-Based Policy Making in Greece. In P. Sklias & N. Tzifakis (Eds.), *Greece's Horizons. Reflecting on the country's Assets and Capabilities* (pp.71-78). Springer.
- Ladi, S. (2014). Austerity politics and administrative reform: The Eurozone crisis and its impact upon Greek public administration. *Comparative European Politics*, 12(2), 184-208.
- Levy, J. S. (2008). Case studies: Types, designs, and logics of inference. *Conflict management and peace science*, 25(1), 1-18.
- Linos, K. (2007). How can international organizations shape national welfare states? Evidence from compliance with European Union directives. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(5), 547-570.
- López-Santana, M. (2004). *How soft pressure from above affects the bottom: Europeanization, employment policy and policy (re)formulation (the Spanish case)*. Paper presented at the eighth CGES Conference, Georgetown University, USA.
- López-Santana, M. (2009). Having a Say and Acting: Assessing the effectiveness of the European Employment Strategy as an intra-governmental coordinative instrument. *European Integration on-line Papers (EIoP)*, 13,1-17.
- Mailand, M. (2009). North, South, East, West: The implementation of the European Employment Strategy in Denmark, the UK, Spain, and Poland. In M. Heidenreich & J. Zeitlin, (Eds.), *Changing European Employment and Welfare Regimes: The Influence of the Open Method of Coordination on National Reforms* (pp.154-172). Routledge.
- Matsaganis, M., Ferrera, M., Capucha, L., & Moreno, L. (2003). Mending Nets in the South: Anti-poverty Policies in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. *Social Policy & Administration*, 37(6), 639-655.
- Matsaganis, M. (2005). Greece—fighting with hands tied behind the back. In M. Ferrera (Ed.), *Welfare state reform in southern Europe: fighting poverty and social exclusion in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal* (Vol. 6) (pp.24-64). Routledge.
- Matsaganis, M. (2011). The welfare state and the crisis: the case of Greece. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 21(5), 501-512.
- Matsaganis, M. (2019). The Crisis, Austerity, and the Transformation. In S. Ólafsson, M. Daly, O. Kangas & J. Palme, (Eds.), *Welfare and the Great Recession: A Comparative Study* (pp.83-96). Oxford University Press.
- May, P. J. (1992). Policy learning and failure. *Journal of public policy*, 12(4), 331-354.
- Mitrakos, T. M. (2014). Inequality, Poverty and Social Welfare in Greece: Distributional Effects of Austerity. *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, 22(1), 65-94.
- Nilsson, M. (2005). The role of assessments and institutions for policy learning: A study on Swedish climate and nuclear policy formation. *Policy Sciences*, 38(4), 225-249.
- Ongaro, E. (2009). *Public Management Reform and Modernization: Trajectories of Administrative Change in Italy, France, Greece, Portugal, and Spain*. Edward Elgar.
- Orelli, R. L., Padovani, E., & Katsikas, E. (2016). NPM Reforms in Napoleonic Countries: A Comparative Study of Management Accounting Innovations in Greek and Italian Municipalities. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 39(10), 778-789.

- Pappas, T. S., & Assimakopoulou, Z. (2012). Party patronage in Greece: Political entrepreneurship in a party patronage democracy. In P. Kopecký, P. Mair & M. Spirova (Eds.), *Party patronage and party government in European democracies* (pp.144-162). Oxford University Press.
- Peters, B. G. (2008). The Napoleonic tradition. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 21(2), 118-132.
- Petmesidou, M., & Guillén, A. M. (2014). Can the Welfare State as We Know It Survive? A View from the Crisis-Ridden South European Periphery. *South European Society and Politics*, 19(3), 295-307.
- Petmesidou, M., & Glatzer, A. M. (2015). The crisis imperative, reform dynamics and rescaling in Greece and Portugal. *European Journal of Social Security*, 17(2), 158-181.
- Petridou, E. (2014). Theories of the policy process: contemporary scholarship and future directions. *Policy Studies Journal*, 42(S1), S12-S32.
- Pierson, P. (2004). *Politics in time. History, institutions, and social analysis*. Princeton University Press.
- Radaelli, C. M. (2008). Europeanization, policy learning, and new modes of governance. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, 10(3), 239-254.
- Radaelli, C. M. (2009). Measuring policy learning: regulatory impact assessment in Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(8),1145-1164.
- Radaelli, C. M., & Dunlop, C. A. (2013). Learning in the European Union: Theoretical lenses and meta-theory. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(6), 923-940.
- Sabato, S., & Vanhercke, B. (2012). *Analysis and follow-up of mutual learning in the context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme (Executive Summary)*. European Social Observatory (OSE) and Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI).
- Sakellariopoulos, T., (2007). Greece: The Quest for National Welfare Expansion Through More Social Europe. In J. Kvis, & J. Saari (Eds.), *The Europeanisation of Social Protection* (pp. 211-228). Bristol Policy Press.
- Schout, A., Jordan, A., & Twena, M. (2010). From 'old' to 'new' governance in the EU: Explaining a diagnostic deficit. *West European Politics*, 33(1),154-170.
- Sotiropoulos, D. (2015). Southern European governments and public bureaucracies in the context of economic crisis. *European Journal of Social Security*, 17(2), 226-245.
- Spanou, C. (2020). Between Domestic Learning and External Coercion: Budgeting and Fiscal Management Reform in Greece. *South European Society and Politics*, 25(1), 1-26.
- Steunenberg, B. (2007). A policy solution to the European Union's transposition puzzle: Interaction of interests in different domestic arenas. *West European Politics*, 30(1), 23-49.
- Thomann, E., Trein, P., & Maggetti, M. (2019). What's the problem? Multilevel governance and problem-solving. *European Policy Analysis*, 5(1), 37-57.
- Thomson, R., Torenviold, R., & Arregui, J. (2007). The paradox of compliance: Infringements and delays in transposing European Union directives. *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(4), 685-709.
- Trein, P. (2018). Median problem pressure and policy learning: an exploratory analysis of European countries. In C. A. Dunlop, C. M. Radaelli, & P. Trein (Eds.), *Learning in Public Policy* (pp. 243-266). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Trein, P., Thomann, E., & Maggetti, M. (2019). Integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel governance. *Public Administration*, 97(2), 339-354.

Trein, P., & Vagionaki, T. (2022). Learning Heuristics, Issue Salience and Polarization in the Policy Process. *West European Politics*, 45(4), 906-929.

Vagionaki, T (2018). Blocked Learning in Greece: The Case of Soft-Governance. In C. A. Dunlop, C. M. Radaelli & P. Trein (Eds.), *Learning in Public Policy* (pp. 191-214). Palgrave Macmillan.

Vagionaki, T., & Trein, P. (2020). Learning in Political Analysis. *Political Studies Review*, 18(2), 304-319.

Verd, J. M., Barranco, O., & Bolívar, M. (2019). Youth unemployment and employment trajectories in Spain during the Great Recession: what are the determinants? *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 53(1), 1-20.

Weber, R. P. (1990). *Basic content analysis* (No. 49). Sage Publications Ltd.

Zahariadis, N. (2016). Powering over puzzling? Downsizing the public sector during the Greek sovereign debt crisis. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 18(5), 464-478.

Zartaloudis, S. (2014). *The Impact of European Employment Strategy in Greece and Portugal: Europeanization in a World of Neglect*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Zito, A. R., & Schout, A. (2009). Learning theory reconsidered: EU integration theories and learning. *Journal of European public policy*, 16(8), 1103-1123.

Zito, A. R. (2015). Multi-level governance, EU public policy and the evasive dependent variable. In E. Ongaro (Ed.), *Multi-Level Governance: The Missing Linkages (Critical Perspectives on International Public Sector Management, Vol. 4)*, (pp. 15-39). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Zhelyazkova, A., & Yordanova, N. (2015). Signaling 'compliance': The link between notified EU directive implementation and infringement cases. *European Union Politics*, 16(3), 408-428

List of interview partners (Brussels)

EU-1. Policy officer at the DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. European Commission, Brussels. (May 2013)

EU-2. Policy coordinator at the European Antipoverty Network (EAPN), Brussels. (May 2013)

EU-3. Counselor at the Permanent Representation of Greece to the EU, Brussels. (May 2013)

EU-4. Policy analyst at the DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. European Commission, Brussels. (May 2013)

EU-5. Policy coordinator at the DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. European Commission, Brussels. (May 2013)

EU-6. Policy coordinator at the DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. European Commission, Brussels. (May 2013)

EU-7. Policy officer at the DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. European Commission, Brussels. (June 2013)

EU-8. Adviser at the DG Strategy, International Affairs and Research. European Commission, Brussels. (June 2013)

EU-9. Head of Unit at the DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion. European Commission, Brussels. (June 2013)

List of interview partners (Athens)

GR1. Expert. National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), Athens. (December 2013)

- GR2.** University professor. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. *(December 2013)*
- GR3.** Expert. National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), Athens. *(December 2013)*
- GR4.** University professor. Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens. *(December 2013)*
- GR5.** University professor. Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens. *(December 2013)*
- GR6.** University professor. Economic University of Athens. *(December 2013)*
- GR7.** University professor. University of Piraeus. *(December 2013)*
- GR8.** Financial Expert. Ministry of Finance, Athens. *(December 2013)*
- GR9.** University professor. National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. *(December 2013)*