### Theorizing Negative Cases of Policy Transfer and Diffusion through Policy Learning

Samuel Henderson, University of Toronto

# Abstract

Despite a growing literature on policy transfer and diffusion, research continues to focus on positive cases where policies or other objects have been adopted. Yet, there is much to learn from the study of negative cases. The existing literature provides little clarity or consensus on what exactly negative cases of transfer or diffusion are or how exactly they emerge. This paper begins by examining how negative cases of transfer and diffusion have been studied in the existing literature. It finds that there is great variation in how these cases are conceptualized and defined, and develops a more comprehensive, explicit definition. Then, focusing specifically on policy transfer and diffusion through the mechanism of policy learning, this paper provides a framework for explaining and studying negative cases of transfer and diffusion. It argues that this process can be constrained in three main ways that ultimately lead to negative cases: constraints on learning, constraints on the operationalization of lessons, and the application of negative lessons. To demonstrate the utility of this framework, this paper applies it to two cases: failed long-term care policy reforms in Poland and the failed spread of mandatory advanced metering policies among Australian states. While the latter half of the paper focuses on transfer and diffusion through policy learning, evidence suggests that this framework could be expanded to cover transfer and diffusion through other mechanisms as well.

**Key words:** Policy transfer, Policy diffusion, Policy learning, Negative cases, Policy transfer constraints, Negative lessons

For decades now, scholars of policy transfer and diffusion<sup>1</sup> have noted growing trends in the spread of policies and other objects across jurisdictions and other contexts and an evergrowing scholarly interest in studying this process (for example, see Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; Glaser et al., 2022; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). But despite this growth, our understanding of transfer and diffusion remain limited on several fronts (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). One area that remains particularly understudied is negative cases. Several scholars have called for an increased focus on negative cases to better understand policy transfer and diffusion and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Policy transfer refers to "the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system" (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 5). Policy diffusion, on the other hand, can be defined broadly as "a process through which policy choices in one country affect those made in a second country" (Marsh & Sharman, 2009, p. 275). There is, however, significant debate in the literature about the relationship between these two concepts (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). This paper treats transfer and diffusion as two distinct concepts, but ones that share important similarities. Despite different methodological approaches, these concepts and their associated literatures "share an overlapping conceptual core and a complementary interest in a related class of empirical phenomena" (Marsh & Sharman, 2009, p. 271), including common mechanisms. These similarities allow for a common conceptualization and definition of negative cases.

factors that facilitate and constrain them (Benson, 2009; Karch et al., 2016; Marsden & Stead, 2011; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). Yet, little has emerged in response to these calls. The existing literature provides little insight into how negative cases should be theorized and empirically studied. This has resulted in a fragmented body of literature and disagreement over what constitutes a negative case, limiting the potential benefits of studying them.

This paper represents the first comprehensive attempt at conceptualizing and theorizing negative cases of policy transfer and diffusion. It looks to answer two central research questions: (1) how have negative cases of transfer and diffusion been conceptualized and defined in the existing literature? And (2) how do negative cases of transfer and diffusion emerge? This paper finds that there is great variation in how negative cases of transfer and diffusion are conceptualized and defined in the existing literature. In many cases, the concept is only vaguely defined, or not defined at all, leading to inconsistencies in what constitutes a negative case. Given the lack of a consistent, explicit definition, this paper adapts Mahoney and Goertz's (2004) Possibility Principle to the context of transfer and diffusion can be understood as cases where the adoption of a specific policy or other object<sup>2</sup> is considered by transferring agents, but the process of transfer or diffusion either degenerates or results in the non-adoption of the policy under investigation. It stresses the importance of taking a contextual approach to studying negative cases, concentrating on the original goals and intentions of decision-makers in specific policy contexts and their ability to transfer policies or their components.

Focusing on policy transfer and diffusion through the mechanism of policy learning, this paper then proposes a framework for studying and explaining negative cases. It argues that negative cases emerge through three major pathways: constraints on learning, constraints on the operationalization of lessons, and the application of negative lessons learnt by transferring agents. This framework looks to expand on existing research on transfer constraints (Benson, 2009; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000), but takes a different approach to modeling transfer and diffusion that focuses on the distinction between these processes and their causal mechanisms--an important distinction that is not always respected. While this framework is specific to cases of

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  This paper recognizes that policies are not the only thing that can spread. As scholars including Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) have argued, a range of objects including policy goals, policy content, policy instruments, policy programs, institutions, ideologies, ideas and attitudes, and negative lessons can all be transferred.

transfer and diffusion through policy learning, evidence suggests that it could be adapted to study transfer and diffusion through other mechanisms.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five sections. The first provides an overview of the importance of studying negative cases and how they have been approached in the existing literature. The second section introduces the proposed framework to study these cases in the context of transfer and diffusion through policy learning. The third section then applies this framework to two cases from the existing literature: failed long-term care policy reforms in Poland and the failed diffusion of mandatory advanced metering policies across Australia. The fourth section discusses the relevance of this framework beyond the context of policy learning, while the final section concludes the paper with some brief remarks on future research.

#### **Negative Cases in the Existing Literature**

Research by scholars of negative case methodology provides an important starting point for examining negative cases of transfer and diffusion. Emigh (1997) defines negative cases as cases where an outcome of interest can be predicted by theory but has not occurred in practice. Likewise, Mahoney and Goertz (2004) provide detailed guidelines with their Possibility Principle, a principle developed to guide researchers in selecting negative cases. They argue that negative cases are cases where the outcome of interest is possible; cases where the outcome is not possible should be excluded from analysis. The two constituent rules of the principle provide further guidelines for gauging whether cases are possible or not. The first is the rule of inclusion, which dictates that cases are relevant if their value on at least one independent variable is positively related to the outcome of interest. The second is the rule of exclusion which takes precedence over the rule of inclusion. It dictates that cases are irrelevant if their value on any eliminatory independent variable predicts the non-occurrence of the outcome of interest.

The value of studying negative cases has long been recognized (for example, see Collier & Mahoney, 1996; Emigh, 1997; Mahoney & Goertz, 2004; Thomas, 2005), even if this knowledge is not always applied in practice. Studying negative cases can help to expand existing theory in three important ways (Emigh, 1997). First, examining negative cases can help identify and separate irrelevant events, processes, structures, and patterns from relevant ones. If only positive cases of a phenomenon are examined, scholars may draw hasty conclusions about the factors that shape these phenomena based on their presence or absence in positive cases without

examining whether they are present or absent in negative ones. Second, the use of negative cases can help to uncover empirical anomalies which are necessary for rethinking and expanding existing theories. Third, negative cases help to address issues of bias. Using the example of postcolonial economic development, Emigh (1997) notes that a reliance on positive cases in the European context led to a stereotype that European economic development was inevitable--yet examining negative cases in the European context contradicts this.

The literature on policy transfer and diffusion has engaged with negative cases, but this engagement has been very limited. Major theoretical frameworks of policy transfer and diffusion, like the frameworks developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000), Evans and Davies (1999), and Stone (2001, 2019), provide little guidance for studying negative cases. For example, in their work, Dolowitz and Marsh note that "transfer is not an all-or-nothing process" (2000, p. 13), rather transfer occurs in degrees or gradations:

...copying, which involves direct and complete transfer; emulation, which involves transfer of the idea behind the policy or program; combinations, which involve mixtures of several different policies; and inspiration, where policy in another jurisdiction may inspire a policy change, but where the final outcome does not actually draw upon the original (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 13).

These different degrees of transfer provide scholars with a better understanding of the different ways that transfer can occur in practice. But, as noted below, Dolowitz and Marsh do not discuss negative cases in this continuum of transfer degrees.

The closest the literature has come to a detailed discussion of negative cases is the idea that transfer and diffusion can be constrained. Drawing on earlier work by Rose (1993) on lesson drawing constraints, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000) theorize that transfer can be constrained. They argue that it can be constrained by a range of factors including programme complexity; past policies; institutional and structural factors; political, bureaucratic, economic, and technological resources; and ideational factors, particularly government ideology. The subsequent literature has examined how these and other factors have constrained the transfer process (for an overview of some of this literature, see Benson & Jordan, 2011, pp. 372–373). Scholars including Evans (2009), Stone (1999), Bache and Taylor (2003), de Jong (2009), Bulmer and Padgett (2005), and Jordan and Liefferink (2004), have examined different

constraints or categories of constraints in greater detail, empirically demonstrating that transfer and diffusion can be constrained by many factors.

Building on this foundational work, Benson and Jordan (Benson, 2009; Benson & Jordan, 2011) have expanded on the idea that transfer and diffusion can be constrained by developing a framework for understanding this range of constraints. They argue that these constraints can be categorized based on the different positions in which they originate from, creating four broad categories of constraints: (1) demand-side constraints, factors impacting the demand for transfer within the importing jurisdiction; (2) programmatic constraints, factors specific to the policy or programme undergoing transfer; (3) contextual constraints, broader factors specific to the importing jurisdiction that complicate the transfer process, and (4) application or implementation constraints that would prevent the effective implementation of a given policy within the importing jurisdiction. Examples of various factors that fall into each of these categories are summarized in Table 1 below.

Category of Constraint	Examples of Constraining Factors
Demand-Side Constraints	Timing, political culture/openness to accepting policy innovations from beyond the jurisdiction, interests of transferring actors.
Programmatic Constraints	Uniqueness of the policy/programme, wider social and political context, and policy complexity including number of goals, complexity of the problem, directness of the relationship between problem and solution, number of side effects, clarity regarding how the solution operates, and the predictability of outcomes.
Contextual Constraints	Path dependency and policy layering, institutional and political structures in which lesson drawing takes place, politics and politicization of problems and/or solutions, ideology, political, bureaucratic, economic, and technological resources.

Application Constraints Necessity of institutional adjustment, scale of change required, and the necessity of programmatic adjustments.

Source: Author based on information from Benson (2009, 7–11).

But the constraints literature is limited in two important ways. First, the focus on examining constraints provides only a partial picture of how transfer and diffusion break down and why it does not occur. Constraints are not the only factor that can lead to these results. As discussed below, transfer can fail to occur or become more challenging because of other factors, particularly through the learning of negative lessons about policies elsewhere (Brownbill, 2015; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; Dunlop, 2009; James & Lodge, 2003; Ladi, 2000; Lovell, 2017; Rose, 1993; Starke, 2013; Stone, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2012). These constraints tend to focus on factors that problematize the operationalization of lessons drawn from elsewhere and largely ignore constraints on causal mechanisms like policy learning, with some exceptions in the demand-side category. Focusing on the broader concept of negative cases rather than constraints can help us to better understand these different pathways that result in non-adoption.

Second, related to the point above, the literature does not always adequately consider the distinction between causal mechanisms and the broader transfer and diffusion processes. This issue has been noted by scholars including Glaser et al. (2022) in the case of transfer through learning in the area of transport policy. In their review of this literature, they observe that scholars often fail to adequately differentiate between constraints on learning and constraints on the operationalization of lessons. Some scholars speak solely of mediating factors influencing the learning process, while others examine factors mediating the translation or adoption process (Glaser et al. 2022). In other cases, these categories are purposefully blended, or no distinction is made (Glaser et al. 2022). This again makes it challenging to get a complete picture of negative transfer cases.

A handful of studies have focused more broadly on negative cases of transfer and diffusion. They have covered a wide range of policy areas including the failed transfer of mandatory advanced metering in Australia (Lovell, 2017), long-term care reforms in Poland (Safuta, 2021), no-fault motor accident compensation within Australia (Brownbill, 2015), and health technology assessment (HTA) agencies in Czechia (Löblová, 2018; Rusu & Löblová,

2019). Notably, there is a strong bias toward cases in Europe and the Western world. While this body of literature is quite small, its findings demonstrate the importance of including negative cases in studies of transfer and diffusion. For example, Löblová (2018), who focuses on the role of epistemic communities in the transfer of HTAs in Eastern Europe, finds that looking only at positive cases overestimates epistemic communities' influence in the process. Her inclusion of the negative Czech case demonstrates that these communities can be limited by political factors. Similarly, Karch, Nicholson-Crotty, and Bowman (2016) explicitly examine the pro-innovation bias in the policy diffusion literature using the case of interstate compacts in the United States. They find that the tendency to focus on positive cases of policy adoption leads scholars to systematically overestimate the impact of geographic diffusion pressures and policy attributes while underestimating the importance of professional associations and learning from previous cases.

Yet there are major inconsistencies in how these studies define negative cases. Some studies simply define negative cases as cases of non-transfer (Brownbill, 2015), although little elaboration is given on what exactly 'non-transfer' means. Lovell (2017) states that the cases of non-transfer she observes are negative cases because the program failed, other governments learnt these lessons, and ultimately decided not to adopt it, tying the definition of negative cases to policy failure and the learning of negative lessons. But, as examined in detail below, policy failure and the application of negative lessons are not necessary for negative cases of transfer or diffusion. Steinbacher (2019), in her work on renewable energy leadership, argues that cases where transferred knowledge is used selectively, policies are adapted to the context of the importing jurisdiction, policies from multiple sources are mixed, and cases where policymakers use negative lessons from other jurisdictions are all considered to be cases of 'non-transfer' in the broader literature. She, however, considers them to be positive cases of transfer (Steinbacher, 2019, p. 15). Other scholars simply do not define negative cases of transfer or diffusion at all even when they explicitly use these terms.

Given the lack of a clear, universal definition of negative cases of transfer and diffusion in the existing literature, this paper adapts the Possibility Principle to the context of transfer and diffusion to develop a comprehensive definition. The theoretical guidelines developed by scholars like Emigh (1997) and Mahoney and Goertz (2004) are relevant to defining these cases, particularly for excluding irrelevant negative cases from analysis. Negative cases should be restricted to those where the transfer or diffusion of the policy under consideration is possible. If a factor is present that would prevent a policy from being adopted or significantly complicate its adoption, it should be excluded. However determining whether transfer or diffusion is possible in a given case may prove challenging given the number of factors that can shape these processes. Sorting relevant negative cases from irrelevant ones may require a great deal of knowledge of the policy area under study but also political, social, and institutional contexts in different cases.

This paper defines negative cases of transfer and diffusion as cases where the adoption of a specific policy or other object is considered by transferring agents, but the process of transfer or diffusion either degenerates or results in the non-adoption of the policy under investigation. This includes cases where policies or other entities are not copied in their entirety. Transfer and diffusion are not all-or-nothing processes (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000). While actors can and do transfer whole policies developed by other contexts, this is not always the case. Actors can also transfer the ideas behind a given policy without transferring the policy itself, they can mix elements of different policies (for example, by transferring an overarching policy goal but not the specific instruments used in other cases), or can simply draw on policies as inspiration for policy change, as outlined in the previous section (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000).

It is important to note that this is not an entirely novel definition. Some scholars have been using similar definitions in their own work, although this is often done implicitly (for examples in the constraints literature, see Benson, 2009; for practical applications, see Lovell, 2017; Safuta, 2021, also discussed below). But this represents the most comprehensive definition of negative cases of transfer and diffusion and includes important contextual details on how exactly these cases emerge. Ultimately, this definition represents an adaptation of the Possibility Principle and other previous work on negative case methodology to the context of transfer and diffusion with additional details about the paths that lead to negative cases. But this definition building is necessary to provide clarity given variation in definitions in the existing literature.

A central component of this understanding of negative cases of transfer and diffusion is that there must be substantial evidence that the policy or other object has been considered a viable option by transferring agents. What constitutes evidence that an option has been considered may vary from case to case, but government policy documents and other materials are key sources. The literature on policy formulation has widely demonstrated that bureaucrats are important independent actors in the policy process given their roles in problem identification and the formulation of alternative solutions in particular (for example, see Howlett & Mukherjee, 2017; especially Nekola & Kohoutek, 2017; Fischer & Miller, 2017; especially Sidney, 2017). They are heavily involved in conducting and compiling policy research and converting this research into usable policy advice through the production of "research reports, journal articles and other materials and shaping the knowledge obtained into the texts of public policy documents such as position papers, briefing notes or white and green papers (Evans & Wellstead, 2013)" (Nekola & Kohoutek, 2017, p. 43). Instruments like jurisdictional scans, decision-making tools that survey how problems in other jurisdictions have been framed, compare and evaluate different alternatives used, and cover implementation considerations, may be of particular use to those studying transfer and diffusion given their comparative orientation (Kilian et al., 2016). Beyond the bureaucracy, materials like reports and other documents tied to legislative committees and other organizations may also constitute evidence of consideration by government, but this would require proof that they have influenced decision-making.

Clearly, there is a need for guidelines on defining and studying negative cases of transfer and diffusion. Major theoretical frameworks developed to examine policy transfer and diffusion fail to provide scholars with the tools necessary to study negative cases of these processes. Existing studies on constraints do not examine the full range of factors that cause transfer and diffusion to degenerate or not occur, and the limited literature available on negative cases is fragmented and a great deal of variation exists in how negative cases are defined. This provides little clarity for those wishing to examine other negative cases and engage with existing studies.

# How do Negative Cases of Transfer and Diffusion Emerge? The Case of Transfer and Diffusion through Policy Learning

This paper proposes a framework for studying negative cases of transfer and diffusion through policy learning to better study how negative cases of these processes emerge and provide a more comprehensive tool for future research in this area. In the study of transfer and diffusion, mechanisms have become an important focus. A range of typologies outlining the different causal mechanisms through which transfer and diffusion occur have been developed (for an overview, see Kuhlman, 2021). But, there are generally understood to be four main mechanisms through which transfer and diffusion occur: learning, competition, coercion, and mimicry (Kuhlman, 2021; Marsh & Sharman, 2009; Obinger et al., 2013; Shipan & Volden, 2008; Simmons et al., 2006). Each of these mechanisms is outlined in Table 2 below. While all four mechanisms are applicable to both transfer and diffusion, learning tends to receive more attention in the transfer literature and the other three more common in the diffusion literature (Marsh & Sharman, 2009).

Mechanism	Description
Learning	The 'rational' decision to copy policies based on the ability to produce more efficient and effective outcomes than alternatives.
Competition	The decision to adopt policies to become more investor friendly.
Coercion	The decision to adopt policies due to direct or indirect influence from powerful states, international organizations, corporations, pressure groups, or other actors.
Mimicry	The process of copying policies for symbolic or normative reasons.

Source: Author using information from Marsh and Sharman (2009, pp. 271-272) and Dolowitz and Marsh (2000).

Much of the literature uses policy learning in a simple, mechanistic manner that does not incorporate the broader policy learning literature developed over the past three decades (Dolowitz, 2021). As a result, we have a limited understanding of how learning occurs during transfer and diffusion (Dolowitz, 2021; Glaser et al., 2022; Marsden & Stead, 2011). Scholars working on the concept of policy learning, such as Dunlop and Radaelli (Dunlop, 2013, 2014, 2017; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2022; Radaelli, 1995, 2008, 2009) and others (for example, see reviews by Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Dolowitz, 2021; Glaser et al., 2022; Grin & Loeber, 2017) have expanded our understanding of the concept significantly. Policy learning is a complex, dynamic process that can come in different forms and can involve different actors in different environments. Yet, studies of transfer through learning do not always incorporate this into their accounts.

This issue appears to be part of a larger problem within the transfer and diffusion literature where the lines between the causal mechanisms and these broader processes are not clear. In the case of learning, scholars have documented this concern for over a decade (Dolowitz, 2021; Glaser et al., 2022; Marsden & Stead, 2011). Learning and transfer are often depicted as entangled concepts, making it challenging to distinguish between the two (Glaser et al., 2022). However, there are important distinctions between these two concepts. Models of the learning process that the policy learning literature is based on, including Heikkila and Gerlak's model, clearly differentiate between the learning process, the acquisition, translation, and dissemination of knowledge, information, and experience, and the potential behavioural products that can come from the cognitive updating that follows learning such as the development of new strategies and policies (Dolowitz, 2021; Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). This distinction between learning and transfer or diffusion is made clearer when considering that policy learning can occur without transfer or diffusion (Dolowitz, 2021). Actors can learn and draw lessons from other contexts, but these lessons are not always translated into public policy. Learning is therefore a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for transfer or diffusion. This distinction between transfer and diffusion and their causal mechanisms is crucial for understanding the variety of ways in which negative cases of these processes emerge.



Figure 1 – Negative Cases of Transfer and Diffusion through Policy Learning

Source: Author.

Figure 1 above illustrates the proposed framework for studying and explaining how negative cases of transfer and diffusion through policy learning emerge. This framework suggests that these cases emerge through three main pathways: constraints on the policy learning, constraints on the operationalization of lessons, and the application of negative lessons learnt by transferring agents. In the first stage of this framework, a reason for transfer or diffusion emerges. As noted above, this can come in different forms, including the emergence of a new policy problem, dissatisfaction with a response to an existing problem, or the success of a policy in another setting (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000).

The second stage focuses on the policy learning process and constraints on this mechanism that may emerge and result in a negative case. Policy learning occurs to fill gaps in policy makers' knowledge about this problem and potential solutions. This learning can take different forms depending on the problem, following the framework established by Dunlop and Radaelli (Dunlop, 2017; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2022). Through this process, different kinds of lessons can be drawn from the experiences of other contexts, including positive lessons about the effectiveness of solutions, details of policies necessary for policy formulation and design, and factors necessary for the successful implementation of solutions. But transferring agents may also learn negative lessons regarding the experiences of others including those related to failed attempts to address the problem and the costs associated with adopting a given solution (Benson, 2009; Benson & Jordan, 2011; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; Grin & Loeber, 2017; Steinbacher, 2019).

Learning can be constrained by a range of factors contributing to negative cases. A large body of scholarship has examined constraints on the learning process (Glaser et al., 2022). The ability to learn can be shaped by ideological, sociological, and contextual factors (Dolowitz, 2021), which can either cause the degeneration of learning or prevent it from occurring. For example, several scholars have noted that ideological blinders and cognitive shortcuts shape what is seen and heard by learners or potential learners (Benson, 2009; Benson & Jordan, 2011; Dolowitz, 2021; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Dolowitz & Medearis, 2009; Glaser et al., 2022; May, 2015). The learning culture of a given jurisdiction or institution can shape the receptiveness of actors to outside ideas and policies (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; May, 2015). For example, scholars have found that in the case of the United States, institutional and cultural structures generally predispose policymakers against learning from abroad and using this information to inform policy making (Dolowitz, 2021; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Dolowitz & Medearis, 2009). Learning can also be constrained by the characteristics of actors who facilitate learning. The work of Stone (2001, 2019), for example, illustrates how different networks or actors involved in transnational policy transfer have different characteristics that ultimately lead to differences in levels of power, authority, and capacity. These characteristics can shape the relationship that these actors have with government and the ability and willingness of government to learn from these groups (Stone, 2001, 2019). Other factors including the setting of learning and its characteristics, inter-actor relations, organizational factors including structure, capacity, and resources, and leadership have also been known to constrain learning (Glaser et al., 2022).

The third stage of the framework focuses on the operationalization of lessons, or the incorporation of the policy or other object into the importing context. At this stage, the lessons learned from other contexts, including both positive and negative lessons, are actually applied and translated into policy. Transfer and diffusion can be constrained at this point as well. This can stem from a wide range of factors including the wider social, political, and economic context, political, bureaucratic, economic, and technological resources, and the necessity of institutional adjustment required for change, as discussed in the previous section's discussion on the constraints literature (Benson, 2009; Benson & Jordan, 2011). These constraints can also come in the form of missing factors that prevent learning or the operationalization of lessons from occurring.

The final stage of the framework focuses on the overall outcome of the transfer and diffusion processes. Unconstrained, these processes can lead to positive cases where the object or objects of transfer and diffusion are copied, either wholly or adapted to fit local contexts (Benson, 2009; Benson & Jordan, 2011; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; Steinbacher, 2019; Stone, 2001). But even unconstrained, negative cases of policy transfer can emerge. For example, policymakers may learn negative lessons about the costs of developing and adopting a policy which may lead them to seek other alternative solutions, including the existing status quo (Brownbill, 2015; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; Dunlop, 2009; James & Lodge, 2003; Ladi, 2000; Lovell, 2017; Rose, 1993; Starke, 2013; Stone, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2012). It is important to note that this final pathway will be more relevant in certain cases than others, namely in cases where the degree of agency involved in transfer and diffusion is greater (Stone, 2012).

Importantly, this framework does not touch on whether the outcomes of the transfer or diffusion process are successful in meeting the objectives set by transferring agents. As scholars have noted, the policies or other objects adopted through these processes are not always effective or successful at meeting these goals even when the process is unconstrained (for example, see Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). Factors like uninformed transferring agents, incomplete transfer, and inappropriate transfer can lead to negative results (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). It is entirely possible for agents to learn the wrong lessons when attempting to learn from the experiences of others or from past experiences in the same setting (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Dunlop, 2017; Matthijs & Blyth, 2018). When these lessons serve as the foundation for transfer or diffusion, even unconstrained these processes may not be successful at achieving the goals of policymakers.

#### **Application of Framework**

To demonstrate the utility of this framework, this section briefly applies the framework to two negative cases from the existing literature: the failed attempts of long-term care (LTC) reforms in Poland, based primarily on the work of Safuta (2021), and the failed spread of mandatory advanced metering policies across Australia, based primarily on the work of Lovell (2017). These two cases were selected because they demonstrate the utility of the framework for analyzing transfer and diffusion across different policy areas (social versus energy policy), jurisdictions, and levels of analysis (interstate versus intrastate transfer/diffusion). They also meet the definition of a negative case of transfer and diffusion introduced above. In both cases, transferring agents have explicitly considered the adoption of specific policy options as evident through primary government policy documents. But the spread of these policies has broken down over time due to different factors, namely a combination of constraints on policy learning and operationalization in the first case and the application of negative lessons in the second case.

# Long-term Care Reforms in Poland

Research by Safuta (2021) on the transfer of LTC policies to Poland focuses on several failed attempts to adopt LTC policies based on the German model (as well as other EU countries like Belgium, France, and Finland, to a lesser extent). It covers a period from the mid-2000s to 2019. While the research is grounded in the literature on policy entrepreneurs, epistemic

communities, and their role in the policy process, it clearly constitutes a case of policy transfer through policy learning, specifically epistemic learning, which takes place when technical uncertainty is high and decision-makers need authoritative advice from experts (Dunlop, 2014; Haas, 1992). A summary of this case is illustrated in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 - Negative Case of Long-term Care Policies in Poland

Source: Author using information from Safuta (2021).

The need for transfer in this case stems from a combination of shifting demographic and socioeconomic factors. In Poland, the burden of LTC has traditionally been left to families, predominantly women (Barvíková & Österle, 2013), and regarded as a private matter with little government involvement (Safuta, 2021), much like other countries in central-eastern and south-eastern Europe (Barvíková & Österle, 2013; Österle, 2010). Yet Poland has been facing rapid population ageing resulting from low fertility rates and longer life expectancy similar to many Western countries, albeit more delayed, comparable to other countries in central-eastern and south-eastern Europe (Safuta, 2021; see also Barvíková & Österle, 2013; Österle, 2010). Unlike Western countries, Poland has also been facing intense outmigration which is reducing the number of family caregivers and tax and contribution revenues used to invest in the LTC system (Barvíková & Österle, 2013; Österle, 2010; Safuta, 2021). Combined, this has posed a threat to the capacity of the Polish LTC system.

To address these concerns, governments during the twenty-first century have attempted to initiate reforms of the LTC system. Proposed reforms have largely been based on the successful German LTC model as well as those adopted in other EU countries including Belgium, France, and Finland (Safuta, 2021), representing an ongoing case of transfer. Transfer occurred through the causal mechanism of policy learning, particularly epistemic learning, through domestic policy entrepreneurs like formal expert working groups under the Minister of Health (mainly consisting of academics and civil servants) and partisan working groups (consisting of parliamentarians, ministry representatives, and other experts) who worked with transnational entities, including the World Bank, and foreign actors including German federal ministries (namely the Ministry of Health and the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth), local authorities and healthcare insurance funds, and German academics, civil servants, third sector workers, and practitioners (Safuta, 2021). Two main pushes for reforms occurred over the period examined with an initial proposal made in 2007 followed by a second proposal in 2015.

Both of these attempts to introduce reforms from abroad failed due to a combination of constraints on policy learning and constraints on the operationalization of lessons drawn from the German case. Regarding the former, the learning process appears to have broken down over time due to a decline in the influence of foreign policy models and transnational expertise (Safuta, 2021, pp. 1107–1108). Prior to these attempts at reform, there had been a consensus among parties that Poland needed to depart from policies associated with the country's communist past, including the government's delegation of LTC policies to the private sphere, and mimic policies adopted in the West. But this consensus began to be challenged by some political parties who began to advocate for a distinctly Polish approach. This pushed decision-makers away from the German model advocated by policy entrepreneurs and toward other options, preventing transfer from occurring.

In terms of operationalization constraints, several factors constrained the ability of Polish decision-makers to put the lessons learned from the German model and achieve policy change. A major constraint was a lack of inter-partisan cooperation on LTC reform, particularly between the two dominant political parties of the time, the Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO) parties (Safuta, 2021, pp. 1106–1107). Over the period examined, the Polish system evolved toward a more bipartisan system preventing cooperation between these two main parties (see p.

1107). This was combined with other constraints including the principle of legislative discontinuation, which closes all pending affairs at the end of each legislature, and budgetary pressures (Safuta, 2021, pp. 1107–1109).

### Mandatory Advanced Metering Policy Diffusion in Australia

Lovell's (2017) work on the diffusion of mandatory advanced metering policies across Australia focuses largely on the failure of the AMI Program, the State of Victoria's specific initiative in this area, and how this failure led other states and territories to adopt alternative policies. It largely focuses on the period from 2009 to 2013. The research is grounded in the literature on policy mobility, policy failure, and, unlike the Safuta case above, the policy transfer literature, particularly the concept of negative lesson drawing. A summary of the case can be found below in Figure 3.





Source: Author based on information from Lovell (2017).

Here, the rationale for diffusion was to address the problem of increased energy consumption, its harmful effects on the environment, and the inability of the existing energy grid to effectively monitor energy supply and demand (Lovell, 2017; see also Marimuthu et al., 2018). Part of the solution to this problem is to replace traditional meters, which in some cases provide only a running total of the electricity used at a given site, with advanced or 'smart' meters, "a new type of digital communications-enabled electricity meter that produce detailed, fine-grained data on energy use," which "can be transmitted to electronic devices within the

home or business that display consumption in real-time" (Lovell, 2017, pp. 316–317; for a broader discussion of this shift, see also Essential Services Commission, 2004; Department of Primary Industries, 2007). They also provide information about the supply of electricity. The move to replace dated meters with advanced meters within the Australian electricity industry is part of a broader, ongoing effort among the federal, state, and territorial governments to establish an interconnected, efficient, and comprehensive national market for electricity consumption (Department of Primary Industries, 2007).

In light of these problems, the State of Victoria and other state governments developed advanced metering transition policies. The AMI Program, Victoria's own version of such policies, was a mandatory program meant to replace traditional spinning disc meters with an accelerated rollout--the first policy of its kind adopted by an Australian government (Lovell, 2017). The program was managed by utility companies but overseen by government. From 2009 to 2013, 2.8 million advanced meters were installed through the program covering 93% of homes and small businesses in the state. Initial optimism about the impact of the program led other state governments to consider the adoption of their own mandatory installation programs based on the AMI Program (Lovell, 2017).

Unlike the case of LTC policy transfer above, the spread of mandatory advanced metering policies occurred through the mechanism of learning through hierarchy, where learning takes place due to pressure from actors like international organizations, domestic institutions and networks creating pressure to learn or through a delegation chain (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). Here, decision-making was shaped by learning passed down to governments through other authorities, structured by both the rules of the bureaucracy and federalism and intergovernmental relations in Australia. Independent regulatory agencies, like the Victorian Essential Services Commission (ESC), and specialized government departments, like the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, began conducting studies and recommending the adoption of advanced metering policies to government (Lovell, 2017). At the same time, state governments were learning through ongoing efforts by the federal government, through bodies like the Coalition of Australian Governments' (COAG) Energy Council and National Electricity Market (NEM), who were working on developing a national policy. As described by Lovell,

Although smart metering policy in Australia has largely been developed at a national, federal level through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Energy Council

and the organisations governing the NEM, under the Australian federal system of government, the individual states and territories have considerable discretion and their own policymaking powers. And so it was that the State of Victoria was pursuing its own mandatory smart metering installation program – the AMI – in advance of a 2007 COAG agreement on a national approach (2017, p. 317).

Combined, learning was pushed onto state governments through other authorities in the bureaucracy and through intergovernmental relations within the Australian federation.

Yet, mandatory advanced metering policies like the AMI Program did not ultimately spread beyond Victoria, representing a set of negative cases of diffusion. Despite initial optimism, the program quickly became recognized as a failure. Issues emerged including cost overruns and higher bills for consumers, concerns regarding privacy and health, and the poor governance of the program which caused public backlash (Lovell, 2017). Unconstrained by learning or operationalization constraints, these negative cases emerged instead due to the application of negative lessons learned by governments based on this failure. These issues were explicitly cited by several other state governments including those in Queensland, New South Wales, and Tasmania as well as the federal government as the reason for shifting away from adopting mandatory replacement policies (Lovell, 2017, p. 324).

#### **Discussion: Framework Applicability Beyond Policy Learning**

The proposed framework provides a stronger tool for studying negative cases of transfer and diffusion through policy learning compared to what is available in the existing literature. But a major question is whether it can be generalized and applied to cases of transfer and diffusion through other mechanisms. While further research is necessary to do this, as discussed below, a preliminary version applicable to transfer and diffusion more broadly is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Existing research on various case studies of transfer and diffusion suggests that this framework may be useful for studying negative cases involving other mechanisms as well. For example, research on more coercive forms of transfer and diffusion in the EU using directives and recommendations, including environmental policy (Jordan & Liefferink, 2004), tobacco control policy (Studlar et al., 2011), and utilities policies (Bulmer et al., 2007), has found that domestic political factors have resulted in variation in national policies despite a common standard. While domestic political factors could represent constraints on operationalization that

result in negative cases, it is also possible that these cases arise because of limitations on the power of instruments like EU directives and instruments, which would constitute a constraint on the causal mechanism itself. It is also possible that both are applicable in this case.



Figure 4 – Negative Cases of Policy Transfer and Diffusion

Source: Author.

Looking at transfer and diffusion through emulation, this framework also looks to be applicable. Krenjova and Raudla (2018), for example, examine the spread of participatory budgeting across local governments in Estonia. Participatory budgeting was adopted by several governments, but universal adoption did not occur. They find that financial capacity was a major constraint on the adoption of the practice in smaller jurisdictions despite a desire by governments to emulate participatory budgeting, representing a constraint on operationalization.

But, more research into negative cases of transfer and diffusion through these other mechanisms is necessary to develop a more comprehensive framework that captures the nuances specific to transfer and diffusion through coercion, emulation, and competition. As noted above, the literature on transfer and diffusion has a strong focus on positive cases where policies or other objects are successfully adopted (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). A large body of literature on policy learning in particular has provided at least some negative cases to examine, but even fewer seem to exist in the literature focusing on the other mechanisms (for example, see Bulmer et al., 2007; Jordan & Liefferink, 2004; Krenjova & Raudla, 2018; Studlar et al., 2011). Without

these empirical cases, it is difficult to develop a more comprehensive framework applicable to all forms to transfer and diffusion.

In particular, greater attention needs to be paid to constraints specific to each mechanism, including in the case of transfer and diffusion through learning. While many of the cases examined above highlight the impact of operationalization constraints like domestic political factors, there were few examples of negative cases emerging from constraints on the causal mechanism under investigation, especially outside of the case of learning. Is it possible, for example, for transfer or diffusion through coercion to be constrained by shifts or disputes regarding the power of organizations, norms, or other entities? Can changes in socioeconomic conditions alter transfer and diffusion through competition? Does shifting relations between jurisdictions lead to negative cases in transfer and diffusion through emulation? These are theoretically possible, but finding clear cases of these in the existing literature proves challenging at best. Tailoring this framework to these different mechanisms requires greater knowledge of these mechanisms in various cases.

#### Conclusion

The value of studying negative cases has long been recognized from a methodological standpoint (for example, see Collier & Mahoney, 1996; Emigh, 1997; Mahoney & Goertz, 2004; Thomas, 2005). In the study of transfer and diffusion, several scholars have pushed for greater attention to negative cases to better understand the factors that constrain and enable these processes (Benson, 2009; Karch et al., 2016; Marsden & Stead, 2011; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). Yet, little has emerged in response to these calls, leaving a major gap in our understanding of transfer and diffusion that has resulted in misrepresentations of the impact of certain factors (for example, see Karch et al., 2016; Löblová, 2018). As it stands, the existing literature provides only limited tools for studying negative cases.

To address this gap, this paper set out to examine how negative cases of transfer and diffusion have been conceptualized and defined in the existing literature and build on this existing work to develop a comprehensive framework to study and explain these cases. It found that there is great variation in how this is done, necessitating the development of a more comprehensive, explicit definition grounded in the existing literature and adapted from research by negative case methodology scholars. It stresses the importance of taking a contextual

approach to studying these cases, concentrating on the original goals and intentions of decisionmakers which can be traced through primary policy documents and oral sources from those involved in the policy process. This paper then proposed a framework for studying and explaining negative cases to transfer and diffusion, specifically through the mechanism of policy learning, an important tool missing from the existing literature. It argues that negative cases emerge through three pathways: constraints on learning, constraints on the operationalization of lessons, and through the application of negative lessons learnt by transferring agents.

Applying this framework to the cases of LTC policy reforms in Poland and the failed spread of mandatory advanced metering policy across Australia illustrates several important points. First, these cases demonstrate that there are a variety of causes of negative cases of transfer and diffusion and these cases can be examined using a common framework. This provides important comparative insights into the factors that enable and constrain transfer and diffusion. Second, this application demonstrates that this framework can be used across different studies of transfer and diffusion regardless of policy area, jurisdiction, or level of analysis, a necessary feature given the diversity of transfer and diffusion studies. While the framework and these cases are limited to the context of transfer and diffusion through the mechanism of policy learning, evidence suggests that it could be expanded to cover transfer and diffusion through other mechanisms, albeit with alterations.

Yet, more research is required to better understand negative cases of transfer and diffusion, even with these new tools. There is a need to focus more closely on causal mechanisms and how they can be constrained through these processes. It is not uncommon for these causal mechanisms to be conflated with the processes of transfer and diffusion themselves (Dolowitz, 2021; Glaser et al., 2022; Marsden & Stead, 2011), which poses a major barrier to understanding how these processes can be enabled and constrained. More negative case studies are needed, especially those where transfer and diffusion occur through the mechanisms of coercion, competition, and emulation, but also in the case of learning where a large body of literature exists. This research is crucial for expanding our understanding of transfer and diffusion and the factors that constrain and enable these processes.

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