Policy Learning in the Context of Wicked Policy Issues: A Case Study of Civic Integration Policy in Rotterdam

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Abstract

In a case study of the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* at the municipality of Rotterdam, this thesis explores the influence of wickedness on policy learning at meso-level public organisations. Special attention is paid to the particular and politicized character of integration governance. Learning from fellow municipalities as well as learning from internal resources were identified as the most common forms of learning. Despite the fact that earlier integration systems, primarily the *Deltaplan Inburgering,* appeared as a valuable source of learning from experience, this thesis found that cross-departmental learning was perceived as a more common form of learning. Wickedness-related characteristics such as non-repeatability and non-computability are helpful in explaining these patterns. Furthermore, the wickedness characteristic of social fragmentation appeared useful in illustrating the impact of internal as well as external fragmentation of integration governance on the processes of policy learning. However, the most important influence on learning appeared to be political influence by way of determining the organisational and financial capacity, and in turn, the very ability of the municipality to function as a learning organisation. Moreover, political influence determined the receptiveness of the municipality towards knowledge and information. Thus, although political influence is generally recognized as an influence on learning in public organisations, it is helpful to pay attention to the combined insights of wickedness theory and scholarship on integration governance to develop a better understanding of policy learning in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* and similar assignments in the future. This should contribute to the ability of the municipality, as an important actor in integration governance, to function as a learning organisation.

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1. Introduction

After approximately eight years of liberal, state-governed civic integration policies, the municipality of Rotterdam is preparing itself for the new civic integration law which will enter into force in July 2021. The 2021 civic integration law (In Dutch: Wet Inburgering 2021) will effectively transfer the responsibility for the coordination of civic integration trajectories as well as the provision of civic education offers for newcomers, back to Rotterdam and the other Dutch municipalities (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2019). This signals a move away from the current consumer market system in which newcomers themselves are responsible for selecting their integration course provider (Ibid, 2019). Amongst other ambitions, this new integration law-and policy change aims to make the integration chain more coherent, to stimulate higher language levels and to develop personalized civic integration and participation plans (in Dutch: Persoonlijk plan Inburgering en Participatie (pip)). This thesis explores this complex and layered assignment as a *wicked problem,* and, through an empirical case study, analyses how policy learning occurs as the municipality of Rotterdam is preparing itself for the task during the so-called *Veranderopgave Inburgering,* literally translated: the *civic integration policy transition assignment* (Norton, 2012).

Amongst several features that characterize wicked problems, wicked problems are seen as issues where policy learning is rare, if not impossible (Rittel & Webber, 1973). With reference to the literature on policy learning, wicked problems and the tension between them, this thesis analyses the tendencies of but also the influences on policy learning at the municipality during the *Veranderopgave*.

What makes this transition a particularly interesting subject of analysis is that these developments strongly resemble a return to an earlier phase in Dutch integration policy history, which lasted from 2009 until 2013 and was called the *Deltaplan Inburgering* (Ministerie van VROM, 2007). During this time, Dutch municipalities had similar responsibilities with similar objectives. It is interesting to explore how these past experiences inform decision-making in this preparatory phase as a source of policy learning.

Moreover, Rotterdam is an interesting case for analysis as it is one of the G4, a network of the four largest[1] cities in the Netherlands, but also because it is considered a 'superdiverse' city (Crul, Scholten, & Laar, 2019) (Vertovec, 2007).[2] This concept is useful in the context of

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[1] The G4 cities each have a population of at least 250,000 people.
[2] 'Superdiversity', a term coined by Steven Vertovec, refers to the growing complexity of diversity.

cities when existing assimilation and integration theories are no longer adequate because it is not possible speak of clear majorities or minorities, as is the case in Rotterdam (Crul, Scholten, & Laar, 2019). Rotterdam has also struggled to manage this diversity and pioneered restrictive policies towards newcomers (Ibid, 2019). Against this backdrop, it is interesting to explore the local dynamics of integration policymaking and how local politics impact learning. In order to examine this, this thesis poses the following research question: In what ways does policy learning take place at the municipality of Rotterdam during the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*, and how can this be explained?

The draft policy plans for the upcoming integration system produced in this preparatory phase, as well as related policy documents and evaluations from the former two integration systems, in combination with interviews with members of the 'core team' and other persons involved in the *Veranderopgave*, forms the empirical basis for this research.

1.1 Academic and societal relevance

This thesis contributes to a rich body of literature on wicked problems and policy learning, an empirical case study which analyses the practical implications of this tension between *wickedness* and learning applied to the contemporary case of Rotterdam. Although both wicked problems and policy learning separately are extensively discussed, scholarly works that analyse the tension between them are much scarcer even though wicked problems are increasingly commonplace. Furthermore, as Dunlop and Radaelli note, very little is known about the actual processes of learning in the real-world setting (2010, p. 601). There has been a stronger focus on the products of learning, with all its identification-related challenges, than on how policymakers learn. This thesis seeks to contribute insights into how policymakers and related actors experience and perceive the process of learning, using empirical research methods including semi-structured interviews with policymakers.

Another distinct feature of this research is that it combines scholarship regarding integration with literature from the discipline of policy science. This is important for several reasons. First, it helps to contextualize and more narrowly define key concepts such as *inburgering.* Second, the migration and integration scholarship explain the politicized nature of integration in Dutch society, which helps to understand why this is considered a complex policy field (Scholten, 2014). This thesis is, therefore, a valuable contribution to the literature from both disciplines, during a time where policymakers are increasingly confronted with the

'diversification of diversity' as well as challenges related to local integration policymaking. Furthermore, in a (European) context where policies are increasingly decentralized to sub-state levels of government, and migrant integration being no exception to this trend, it is important to analyse this process and the challenges this may entail at a more general level and specifically in integration governance where many different service areas come together (Hepburn & Zapata-Barrero, 2014). Lastly, this thesis reflects on the question of municipal autonomy; is the municipality only implementing the states (im)migrant integration agenda, or does the municipality have a lot of autonomy in policy development? With reference to the Rotterdam case study, this thesis also aims to shed more light on these questions.

1.2 Terminology

It is important to define *inburgering,* as there is no official English translation for the Dutch word. The term is unique to the Netherlands and its neighbouring country, Belgium. For reasons of practicality, I refer to *inburgering*-related policies as integration-related policies or, in more specific contexts, as civic integration policies. Literally translated, *inburgering* refers to citizenship and the process of being incorporated into the body of citizens, or society. The term was first used in Dutch social sciences literature in the late 1980s and then quickly grew into one of the most popular concepts in social sciences (Bovens, 1991). Today, *inburgering* is associated with a definition of citizenship which goes beyond just the recognition of citizen rights and obligations, but also hints at what is considered necessary for participation in society, namely civic integration (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2018). Civic integration is also the English term for *inburgering* most often used by the Dutch immigration service and government (IND, 2020).

2. Theoretical framework

In this section, I review the existing scholarship on wicked problems, policy learning, and the tension that exists between these two. Moreover, I review the relevant literature on integration and integration policymaking at the city level which sheds light on how theories of wickedness apply in this case. I will then seek to combine the insights from these two disciplines of policy science and migration studies and discuss how they have formed the theoretical framework of this thesis. Finally, I identify gaps in the literature which this thesis addresses.

2.1 Wicked problems

Wicked, 'untamed' or 'intractable' policy problems are generally understood as issues that are highly complex, ambiguous and often involve many different actors (Rittel & Webber, 1973). As this thesis explores how the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* fits within the definition of wicked problems, it is important to elaborate on its definition and how different scholars have contributed to the theorization of wicked problems. Rittel and Webber originally defined wicked problems by distinguishing them from 'tame' problems, with which they argued, science had been developed to deal (Rittel & Webber, 1973). By contrast, the conventional scientific approach was not adequate to deal with wicked problems. Rittel and Weber identified ten characteristics of wicked problems which have remained influential in the work of later scholars. An interpretative reiteration of these characteristics can be read below (Rittel & Webber, 1973, pp. 161-167):

1) The complexity of a wicked problem begins with the very definition of the problem itself. There is often no definitive or objective description of a wicked problem that enjoys consensus.

2) Wicked problems have no stopping rule. In other words, unlike in an experiment where you can control for the variables, you cannot step outside a wicked problem and stop it to contemplate the approach to it. Things are continuously changing as policymakers try to formulate a solution.

3) Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false but good-or-bad. There are no conventionalized criteria for objectively deciding whether the offered solution is 'correct or false'.

4) There is no immediate or ultimate test to see whether a 'solution' for a wicked problem has worked or will work.

5) Every solution to a wicked problem is a 'one-shot operation' because there is no opportunity to learn by trial-and-error, each intervention changes the problem in an irreversible way.

6) There is no end to the number of possible solution or approaches to a wicked problem.

7) Every wicked problem is essentially unique so that it is difficult to learn from previous similar problems in significant ways.

8) Every wicked problem can be considered a symptom of another problem so that incremental solutions run the risk of not addressing the underlying problem.

9) The existence of many (competing) perspectives towards the same wicked problem contributes to the fact that different solutions are envisioned which may each be justified from within one of the perspectives core values.

10) The planner, those who present solutions to the problem, has no right to be wrong. Unlike in mathematics, if a planner is wrong, they are liable for the consequences of the solutions they generate and which may cause great harm to people.

Other scholars have condensed these characteristics into more general categories or expanded on them. Norton (2012), applying Rittel and Webber's categorization to environmental problems, argues that wicked problem characteristics tend to cluster around several distinct themes. He divided the characteristics into four general subgroups, namely:

I.   Issues related to problem formulation (corresponds to no. 1,2, 3, and 9 in Rittel and Webber's list): Here the problem of value-laden problem formulations creates a situation where individuals and groups, seeking cross-cutting goals and with diverse values, do not see the same problem frame even though they may each be presented with the same body of descriptive data. In the *Veranderopgave* such conflicts may arise even more as a result of the politicization of integration.

II.   Non-computability of solutions (no. 2, 4, 6 and 9): this refers to the fact that due to conflicting values and inherent 'messiness', wicked problems are not susceptible to scientific solutions. In case of the *Veranderopgave* this relates to the fact that an objectively perfect integration policy might be difficult to realize due to the reliance on human-based processes and subjective experiences of policy instruments.

III.   Non-repeatability (5, 7 and 10): this refers to the fact that there is no 'one size fits all' solution due to the uniqueness of wicked problems in their specific context. Resolutions will therefore also be unique and are not transferable. In this context of the *Veranderopgave* this refers to the challenge of learning from previous integration systems and drawing lessons from other cities due to contextual differences.

IV.   Temporal open-endedness (2, 4 and 8): this refers to the fact that the full consequences of a solution cannot be appraised until all repercussions have completely run out, and there is no way of tracing them through all the affected lives ahead of time or within a limited time span (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p.163) (Norton, 2012, pp. 458-459). Similarly, in the Veranderopgave, it is difficult to see the long-term consequences of the 'solution'.

Norton identifies symptoms of underlying *value conflicts* as the core theme in all ten characteristics. As underlined by several scholars, this is the result of the fact that there is a 'multiplicity of frames, each emphasizing different aspects of a problem situation that are often contradictory' (Scholten, 2018, p. 388). An example of such as value-driven conflicts in the context of integration policy begins with the problem formulation and frame: state actors may emphasize different aspects of a problem situation regarding what integration policy should accomplish in a country, e.g. does integration primarily concern the policy objective of decreasing crime rates amongst newcomers and ensuring public safety, or does it primarily aim to ensure that newcomers can enter into the labour force as quickly as possible?

Helpful in this context is also the notion of fragmentation, introduced to the study of wicked problems by Conklin (2006). Fragmentation refers to the impact of having several actors with a share of policy ownership. Conklin argues that forces of fragmentation are obstacles to building up collective intelligence amongst different actors involved in a policy problem which, in turn, challenges collective collaboration. Conklin asserted that fragmentation processes are inherent to wicked problems because of the fact that information and knowledge are typically chaotic and scattered amongst a wide array of actors, which challenges the process of building up 'collective intelligence' and feelings of shared commitment to a common cause. Indeed, wicked problems often concern multi-level governance where responsibilities for making and implementing policies are shared between actors situated in one or more of the following levels: local, regional, national and international (Kolltveit, Askim, & Rose, 2014). Similarly, in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering,* language schools, as well as different municipal departments and other government agencies have a role in integration policy.

In his famous book, *Public Policy Analysis,* William Dunn emphasizes a constructivist perspective to the study wicked problems which he defines as confusing controversies that are largely *socially constructed* (Dunn, 2008). They are, partly because of this, subjective, value-driven and pluriform. As such, they change together with the ever-changing society and they are not isolated, but often intertwined and interdependent. For example, one society or part of a society may problematize integration policy more than another. In that way, what is constructed as a policy problem is ever-changing.

The understanding of wicked problems used in this thesis draws from the insights of these various scholars, combining the constructivist perspective of Dunn with the thematic approach by Norton, which was largely inspired by Rittel and Webber. The reason for this choice is that the thematic approach by Norton provides a more effective way of identifying the wicked problem, whilst Conklin importantly emphasizes the fragmentation and social complexity in the governance of such problems. This is relevant given the inherent multi-governance aspect of migrant integration policy where multiple actors and multiple topics come together. Finally, Dunn's constructivist perspective pays attention to how societies can construct a problem as wicked, which is important in the context of politicized issues as integration.

In summary, scholars generally describe wicked problems as a type of problem, that, because of its characteristic (social) complexity and everchanging nature, is resistant to policy learning and 'solutions' in general. It is precisely this tension between policy learning and the characteristics of wickedness reflected in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* that is the focus of this thesis. Therefore, the next section elaborates on the meaning of policy learning, the various

forms of policy learning that exist as well as the obstacles or facilitating factors for policy learning.

2.2 Policy learning

In 1992, Bennet and Howlett published an influential article on policy learning which aimed to reconcile the theories of policy learning and change (Bennet & Howlett 1992, p.289). They defined policy learning as 'the commonly described tendency for some policy decisions to be made based on knowledge of past experiences and knowledge-based judgments as to future expectations' (Ibid, p.278).

One of the scholars they sought to reconcile was Rose (1991). Rose identified policy learning as *lesson drawing*, which is about whether programs can transfer from one place to another (1991, p. 3). Policymakers can draw lessons by observing how their counterparts respond to similar problems. Under the right circumstances, Rose argues, this can lead to a policy transfer, with the necessary adaptations. Following this reasoning, in the *Veranderopgave,* it is to be expected that Rotterdam may draw lessons from a similarly big and cosmopolitan city such as Amsterdam rather than a smaller Dutch town such as Numansdorp.

Hall (1993) argued that policy learning could go beyond learning about policy instruments, which Rose arguably concentrated on, and identified three orders of policy learning which each correspond to central variables within the policy process. The first order concerns changes to the settings of policy instruments. These are 'incremental' changes (Hall 1993, p. 280). In the second-order, the policy instruments themselves are changed. This can also be called instrumental learning, and concerns learning about which (intervention) tools to use. In the third order, the whole policy paradigm is changed. This latter change is the most radical and means that the common interpretative framework of the policy is changed. These orders of policy change have also been used to distinguish between different levels of learning (Moyson & Scholten, 'Theories on policy learning: Existing approaches and future challenges', 2018).

There has been much debate about the kind of effect learning can have on policies, and what order of policy change they may affect. The perspective on this relationship between policy learning and change depends on the theoretical perspective of academics or policymakers. Bekkers, Fenger, & Scholten, 2017 et al. identify four distinct theoretical

approaches to policy learning. These are: the rational perspective, the political perspective, the cultural perspective and the institutional perspective.

A rational view of the policy process sees policy learning as the most important motor of policy change. In this view, problems can always be 'measured', and solutions can be 'perfect.' Policy is determined on the basis of goal achievement, and knowledge and information, gathered through learning, are considered the driving factors in the cyclical policy processes (Bekkers, Fenger, & Scholten, 2017). Clearly, wicked policy issues, which were described as falling outside the scope of the scientific solutions, do not fit within a purely rational perspective. However, even within the rational perspective, some limits to policy learning are recognized. Simon's (1997) notion of 'bounded rationality' explains why the availability of knowledge and information is not always enough to create perfect policy. Policymakers have limited time to learn from all the available knowledge as they are not neutral receivers, but they receive information within the *boundaries* of their own rationality.

Scholars with a political perspective, such as Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) and Kingdon (1984) are more sceptical about the belief that learning can bring about policy change. They posit that learning only leads to changes in the 'secondary beliefs of policy actors', effecting only limited or *incremental* change. With reference to Hall's orders of learning, this is to say that policy learning can never bring about change in the third order. Kingdon is also sceptical about the influence of policy learning (1984). In this Multiple Streams Approach (MSA), he defines policy dynamics as 'organized anarchy' (Ibid, 1984). According to Kingdon, information and ideas are only one of several factors needed to effectuate policy change. Other factors include attention for a certain problem, a political motive and opportunity to turn it into policy and, lastly, a solution to the problem needs to be available. When all these factors, or *streams,* come together during a *window of opportunity* policy change *may occur* (Kingdon, 1984).

In a more constructivist view, discourses, rather than pure learning, contribute to policy change by influencing the selection of knowledge and information. Scholars with a social-constructivist perspective towards policy learning, such as Rein & Schön, stress the importance of sense-making and interaction (1995). They argue that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed and that there is an inherently selective and normative *framing* of policy problems. This process of framing is described as "selecting, organizing, interpreting and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading and acting" (Rein & Schön, 1995, p. 146). Policy frames generally consist of a problem definition or conceptualization, a causal theory or story and a normative perspective on action. An example

of framing is when, post-9/11, migration became (increasingly) framed in the context of a securitization frame. According to Rein & Schön such 'intractable policy controversies' are the result of different and competing policy frames (1995).

In this thesis, policy learning is studied from a combined political and constructivist perspective rather than a purely rational perspective. This is not to say that policy learning does not effectuate change, but rather that the role of politics is considered important for an understanding of how and when learning occurs. Moreover, the constructivist perspective considers the way in which policy issues or topics are *framed* as wicked (Schön & Rein, 1995).

Identifying Policy Learning

Just like there is a policy cycle which conceptualizes the policy process, there is also a learning cycle which conceptualizes the learning process. A common learning cycle in the public sector is where a policy problem involves a policy owner, the ministry in charge, a policy program with its objectives and policy instruments, and various implementers. After implementation, experiences may be gathered and disseminated as the program owner receives feedback about the effects of the program. This positive feedback may become the basis for a policy owner to adjust the program's contents. However, in the case of the *Veranderopgave,* this cycle looks differently as policy ownership changes from the national government to municipalities. During the *Veranderopgave,* the municipality has time to develop an implementation plan of which it will become the policy owner in the coming integration system. Within the contours of the law, and the given financial capacity, the municipality of Rotterdam can learn from the feedback of the current system, earlier integration systems including the *Deltaplan Inburgering*, pilot studies, other municipalities and other resources. Therefore, this preparatory period is considered an interesting case study to research policy learning tendencies.

Lastly, it is important to note that policy learning can be expressed in less visible forms than policy change. Policy learning can also contribute to policy stability when new information confirms policy actors they are right or it can increase the amount of policy information and knowledge that can be mobilized in a policy process (Montpetit & Lachapelle, 2015) (Crona & Parker, 2012) (Moyson & Scholten, 'Theories on policy learning: Existing approaches and future challenges', 2018). Not in the least because of this reason, measuring or identifying policy learning is often seen as a significant challenge (Rashman and Hartley 2002, p.529). More well-researched are the institutional settings and organizational practices that facilitate or prevent policy learning, which will therefore also be leading indicators in this thesis.

Obstacles and opportunities for policy learning

Indeed, besides the relationship between policy learning and policy change, the literature on policy learning pays attention to the various factors that influence, facilitate or hamper policy learning. First, it is important to establish the inherent tension between policy learning and wicked problems. Second, although most of the policy learning theory in the public sector concentrates on state-level learning, this section explores how sub-state public organizations, such as municipalities, can facilitate learning and what obstacles to policy learning exist at that level.

Prospects for learning are generally considered best when the following conditions pertain:

1) Well-known problem framing and clear policy objectives;

2) Well-known means-ends relationships;

3) Unitary actor and common interests;

4) A commitment to policy goals and improvement (Kolltveit, Askim, & Rose, 2014).

However, as has been discussed, the lack of these conditions is exactly what defines wicked problems which are characterized by the following corresponding traits:

1) The absence of a commonly accepted problem frame or definition as different perspectives see the problem differently due to underlying value conflicts;

2) Poorly understood means-ends relationships because there is uncertainty about which solutions would suit these complex problems;

3) Wicked problems are defined by social fragmentation and multi-level governance. Different policy owners typically coexist, and they may have different or even conflicting interests;

4) As detailed by Conklin, this social fragmentation of wicked problems forms an obstacle to common commitment and collaboration.

Obstacles and Opportunities for Policy Learning within Meso-Level Public Organizations

Given this tension between characteristics of wickedness and policy learning, it is important to look at how learning in organizations can, nevertheless, be facilitated highly complex policy issues. To navigate this literature, it is helpful to distinguish between levels of learning, such as the individual level, the meso-level approach, at the organizational level or the macro-level, which takes place at the system level (Moyson, Scholten, & Weible, Policy Learning and

Policy Change: Theorizing their Relations from Different Perspectives, 2017).[3] Municipal learning, which is analysed here, would be categorized as meso-level learning. Although there has long been an implicit focus on organizational learning in private organizations at the meso-level, a smaller body of literature on learning in public organizations has also been developed (Gilson, Dunleavy, & Tinkler, 2009).

Visser and Van der Togt criticize the division between business and public sector organizational learning theory which, they argue, has led to a uniform and uncritical application of theories to both types of organizations without considering profound differences between them (2015). For example, business organizations generally work under market conditions in which there are many clear-cut indicators, such as expenditure figures, which guide decision making and learning. By contrast, public organizations generally work under 'bureaucratic or hybrid conditions', in which 'departmental governance, political rules, regulations and conflicting pressures, sudden public events, annual budgets and public interdependences, constitute a fairly large set of relatively complex and ambiguous indicators guiding decision-making and learning' (Visser & Togt, 2015, p. 236). At the same time, this theoretical divide has led to separate learning theory development, with academics on the one side refusing to build on the advances from those on the other side (Visser & Togt, 2015)

Overcoming these limits, Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler (2009) bring together key insights from private sector literature and some specific features distinctive to the government sector to identify a model of organizational learning in the public sector.

According to Nonake and Takeuchi (1995) most learning in public organizations occurs at the individual level as the vast bulk of knowledge is 'informal' and locked in the minds and practices of members of the workforce. Individual learning can also become organizational learning when these lessons are institutionalized, making them available to other members (Mahler, 1997). Beyond individual learning, learning takes place at the organizational level which Netvis, DiBella and Gould (1995) describe as *the capacity or processes within an organization to maintain or improve performance based on experience.* According to Mahler, learning is concerned with how organizations monitor their operations, their results, their environment and their clients for clues to the adequacy of their performance (Mahler, 1997). Learning organizations embrace error and try to understand its sources.

As organisational culture informs the sense-making and interpretation of the kinds of ambiguities seen in puzzling data, problematic situations and obscure links between problems,

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[3] The system-level concerns, for example, studies on cross-government policy change.

Mahler identifies organisational culture as an underappreciated yet key influence on organisational learning in public agencies (1997). An important concept in her thesis is the notion of 'agency beliefs' which may spur the recognition of problems or justify the status quo. Beyond the availabilty of output data, this importantly depends on organisational culture, beliefs and professional identities (Mahler, 1997).

Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler identify political systems and human resource management as the most pervasive influences for policy learning at the public organization level (2009). Political influence is signficant for the following three reasons:

1) because problems facing the public domain often have no simple solution;

2) because public discourse on these topics is far more scrutinized than in debates within private sector firms;

3) because local public organizations often are constrained in their autonomous 'learning' by political guidance on values given by government actors (Ranson & Stewart, 1994).

Similar to Hall's order of change, Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler differentiate between single, double and triple, or strategic, loop learning. They argue that, because public organizations are constrained in their autonomous learning by political guidance on values given by government and ministers, double and triple loop learning are seen to be rare in public organizations (2009, p. 20).[4] Secondly, because much knowledge is stored within the minds of personnel, human resource management is seen as a very important influence on learning in public organizations. However, in the public service system transfer between departments are relatively frequent causing information to be dispersed within the organization (2009, p.28). In summary, besides the general conditions that stimulate learning, the following key influences on learning in public meso-level organisations have been highlighted:

1) Organizational culture (Mahler);

2) Political systems and leadership (Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler);

3) Human resource management (Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler).

Additionally, Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler define six main sources of learning within meso-level public organizations. These are:

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[4] Single-loop learning is more oriented towards process monitoring and asks "are we doing it right?", double-loop learning goes beyond process monitoring and asks "can we do it better?", while triple-loop learning asks more searching questions as "are we asking the right questions?" (Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler, 2009, p.19).

1) internal resources and *experience*, which refers to staff expertise and 'institutional memory';

2) citizens and customers, which includes learning form target group feedback;

3) partners, rival and comparators, this includes social network learning and learning from other service parties;

4) top-down direction and control includes learning from oversight bodies;

5) critiques, advice and media, which includes learning from media commentary or academic advice;

6) testing interactions, crises and review, which includes learning from evaluations (2009, pp. 29-31).

In this thesis, the various sources of organizational policy learning are aggregated in the following main forms of learning:

1) Learning from internal resources and experience such as learning from former *inburgering* systems and cross-departmental staff expertise;

2) Learning from partners and service comparators such as other municipalities or the Dutch Council of Refugees;

3) Learning from third parties including research organisations and media.

With reference to the identified influences on learning at public level organisations, this thesis explores how learning in these forms is possible in the case of wicked policy issues (Kolltveit, Askim, & Rose, 2014).

2.3 Making integration policy wicked

Migration scholars play a key role in illustrating the politicised dimension of integration in society and politics (Crul, Scholten, & Laar, 2019). As Norton defines *value conflicts* as the core element underpinning the characteristics that make policy problems wicked, an important element in understanding how local integration governance is *wicked* lies in an examination of the apparent value conflicts and contrasting frames that exist in this policy field. A second element of wickedness lies in the topic of integration governance more generally, which typically concerns multi-level governance and a tension between national and local government levels, thus linking to the wicked characteristic of fragmentation (Scholten, 2018).

First, the multilevel governance structures are said to be an inherent feature of integration governance because, generally, many different actors and organizations are

involved in the process of migrant reception and integration from the moment that a newcomer enters into a country until the time where he or she is allocated an address (Scholten, 2014). Moreover, as the policy field of migrant integration interacts with a lot of different related policy areas such as housing, health care and education that are often already decentralized at sub-state level, migrant integration policies are also increasingly decentralized to sub-state levels where policy implementation cuts across different departments (Hepburn & Zapata-Barrero, 2014).

These observations partly explain a trend in academia that is called 'the localization of migration studies', or the *local turn* (Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2009) (Schiller, 2018). This phenomenon refers to the increased scholarly interest in role of the city rather than the state as a host society and follows the argument that the city is an important sphere where immigrant integration is governed and where the implications of integration policies are felt (Penninx & Martiniello, 2004, p. 160) (Alexander, 2007). On the other hand, scholars such as Gebhardt and Emillsson, deny that cities have much autonomy over immigrant integration and observe a 'national turn' of integration policy (Emilsson, 2015) (Gebhardt, 2015). This debate is relevant here as the degree of autonomy that municipalities have in migrant integration governance is an important condition for autonomous policy learning.

In a relevant study on this debate, Poppelaars and Scholten study the relations between national and local governance levels in the Netherlands (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008). The authors argue that one of the reasons immigrant integration has become an 'intractable policy controversy' in the Netherlands is the way in which the topic has been differently framed by local and national government bodies (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008). Where national governments have formulated more of a 'citizenship approach', cities have focused on a more accommodative approach. The authors explain that, using their discretionary power, local government officials 'develop strategies and activities to *cope with the daily practice of immigrant integration* rather than to engage in high politics that characterize national problem framing.' (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008, p. 348).

One of the reasons for this tension between local and national migrant integration governance is related to the fact that migration integration invokes the question of national identity, a realm traditionally left to the central government. Once sub-state bodies such as municipalities increasingly receive an important role in migrant integration policies, they must also deal with this question of what is distinct about that community (Banting and Soroka, 2012). This may conflict with the national models, resulting in 'tensions over policy coordination and the framing of integration in different parts of a country' (Hepburn & Zapata-

Barrero, 2014). In reviewing the capacity for autonomous learning about integration policymaking at the municipal level, this thesis also explores tensions surrounding the municipality as an integration policy developer and the role of national government actors in limiting or facilitating this.

The second element of migrant integration policy that adds to its wickedness concerns the politicization of integration policies. There are a number of different, but often reconcilable, lines of argumentation that explain this. First of all, there is the historical argument that a number of developments or 'focus' events led to the negative frames that exist towards migration and integration today. There has been a Europeanization of migration policy following the abolition of internal border control. This has directly securitized migration by placing it into an internal security framework of *Fortress Europe.* A number of focus events, such as the Charlie Hebdo bombing in Paris, or the shooting of outspoken anti-immigrant politician Pim Fortuyn in Rotterdam, contributed to the securitization frame of migration in Europe and the Netherlands. In this context, *crimmigation* became a useful concept to refer to the increasing association of criminality with immigrants, especially from non-western origins. Another line of research considers party politics as an important accelerating factor of the politicization of immigrants and integration in (Western) Europe. Some argue that integration and migration are most intensely politicized by the increasingly popular right-wing populist parties across (western) Europe (Zaslove, 2007), but most scholars agree that the intensification of conflict over immigration follows a logic of party competition which includes but is not limited to right-wing populist parties (Grande, Schwarzbözl, & Fatke, 2018). Centrist and left-wing actors across the scheme are susceptible to the exploitation of anti-immigration sentiments for electoral gains (Schmidtke & Zaslove, 2014).

A last relevant line of argumentation is to focus on the link between (liberal) nationalism and integration. For example, Suvarierol argues that the recent surge of 'new' nationalism is largely a response to the influx of newcomers and in fact defines its national identity not against that of other states, but against the identity of citizens of migrant origin (Suvarierol, 2011). Integration policies thus emerge as central areas where the discourses of this new nationalism take place.

In sum, there are several coexisting and complementary explanations for the wickedness of local integration governance. First of all, integration governance is inherently a multilevel governance issue as migrant integration policies intersect with policy areas such as housing, language, social welfare, but it also involves the role of many different organisations and actors (Conklin, 2006).

Second of all, migrant integration is politicized as a result of party politics and a number of historical developments and focus events which contributed to politicized frames of integration. This relates to the wickedness characteristics relating to value-driven conflicts (Norton, 2012). Lastly, integration governance invokes questions of (national) identity. As these are traditionally questions for national governments, there may be friction caused by conflicting frames or approaches towards this issue at national and sub-state levels. All these elements contribute to the alleged wickedness of local integration governance.

2.4 Gaps in the literature

This thesis identifies and responds to several gaps in the literature. First, this thesis responds to the scarce empirical literature on the local dynamics of integration policymaking (Schiller, 2018). Second, it identifies a lack of empirical research on policy learning at the municipal level as private organizations are (still) overrepresented. Third, this thesis contributes to a scarce body of literature on the nexus between policy learning and wicked policy problems. However, this thesis is most valuable in addressing two increasingly important, yet scarcely researched, areas of convergence; namely policy learning at the meso-level and local integration politics. It does so by studying, amongst other relations, how the politics surrounding integration relate to policy learning and contribute to the *wickedness* of this policy issue at the municipal level.

2.5 Expectations of study

On the basis of the theoretical framework, the following expectations are formulated: First, considering the difficulty of learning from prior experience in the context of wicked problems, as well as Rose's theory on lesson drawing (1991), it is expected that policy learning occurs primarily by learning from the actions and experiences of other municipalities, primarily with members of the G4 network as these cities share important contextual characteristics which allow for lesson drawing (Rose, 1991). Second, it is expected that learning from the past is more limited to some specific persons who have experienced earlier systems, due to bounded rationality of policymakers and the organizational structure of the municipality as explained by Gilson, Dunleavy & Tinkler (2009)(Simon, 1997). Thirdly, it is expected that characteristics of wickedness such as social complexity and fragmentation, which are recognized within the *Veranderopgave Inburgering,* are important influences on policy learning, which is exacerbated by the deeply politicized nature of integration (Conklin, 2005).

3. Research design

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the research question that is posed and the research that has been conducted in order to answer it. First, I will restate the research question and the various sub-questions that it implies. Second, I will operationalize the most important variables addressed in the theoretical framework so that they can be researched in an empirical research setting. Third, the research design and the specific research methods that are used to analyse the data are elaborated, as well as the specific case to which they are applied, namely the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*.

3.1 Research question and sub-questions

This thesis aims to answer the following research question: In what ways does policy learning take place at the municipality of Rotterdam during the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*, and how can this be explained? The necessary descriptive element of this research is written through the following related questions:

1) First, what policy change is the municipality of Rotterdam preparing for, how does this relate to previous integration systems and how can this assignment be identified as a wicked policy issue?

2) Second, based on empirical data gathered through interviews and policy document analysis, in what ways does policy learning take place during this preparatory phase and how does it build on previous integration policy such as the *Deltaplan Inburgering*?

3) Third, with reference to the literature on influences on policy learning at meso-level public organizations, how can these observations be explained, what limitations do they reflect and what does this say about learning in the context of wicked policy problems?

4) Finally, to develop recommendations, the last section addresses the question: in what ways could policy learning be of more value in this specific issue setting and how could this be facilitated more?

3.2 Operationalisation

To operationalize this research question, it is important to identify the dependent and independent variables of this study and the respective indicators. The research question consists

of two main elements. The first element seeks to identify practices of learning while the second seeks to explains these findings. The dependent variable are, therefore, practices of policy learning identified as the hands of numerous indicators detailed below. The second element of the research question seeks to explain these findings; how come this type of learning occurs? To answer this, I have analysed what influences on the policy learning led to this outcome, and how characteristics of wickedness play a role in this. The independent variables are therefore the various influences on policy learning at meso-level public organizations as defined in the theoretical framework and adapted during the process of abductive coding and informed by policy background (Gilson, Dunleavy, & Tinkler, 2009). On the basis of the theoretical framework and in accordance with abductive coding, the following three categories of influences on policy learning were defined:

1) Political influence and top-down direction; and
2) Internal organization and culture; including the notion of agency and organizational structures;
3) Policy-specific characteristics including multi-level governance and (external) fragmentation.

It is important to note that elements of these key influences, such as policy fragmentation, are characteristic of wicked policy problems. This thesis explores how these elements of wickedness intersect with common influences on policy learning to influence the policy learning process during the *Veranderopgave Inburgering.*

The dependent variable

Following the literature on policy learning in public organizations, three main forms of policy learning were identified.

1) Learning from partners and service comparators such as other municipalities, the Dutch Council of Refugees (VWN) or language schools

As Rotterdam is one of the G4 and G40[5], an expected form of policy learning would be through such networks of (large) Dutch cities, in the form of social network learning at the organizational level. This purpose of learning and close collaboration within the G4 network is clearly and officially stated (CBS, 2020). This could be identified through interviews, policy documents as well as organizational practices such as meetings or events with policymakers in those cities where good practices and lessons learned were exchanged. Furthermore, learning

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[5] The G40 city network is a partnership of 40 medium-sized Dutch municipalities.

from service comparators such as the Dutch Council for Refugees and language schools, which each have an important role in the current civic integration system could be expected.

2) Learning from internal resources and experience such as learning from former *inburgering* systems

This form of policy learning concerns learning from the past policies and experiences as well as learning from relevant experience of other departments or teams within the municipality, such as persons whom have dealt with prior decentralization assignments. Learning from past civic integration systems is especially relevant because the municipality is being relegated a similar task they had during the *Deltaplan Inburgering* as well. Interviews with policy makes are the most important sources here, but also policy documents which may give an indication of the extent to which learning from evaluations occurs through references.

3) Learning from third parties including research organisations and media

The third type of learning is learning through other actors such as the media, academics or research organizations like the *Verwey Jonker foundation* or the municipal research organization *Research and Business Intelligence* (Onderzoek en Business Intelligence (OBI). This type of learning is also identified through interviews with policymakers and by exploring organizational practices.

Indicators of study

Some examples of policy learning indicators are listed above and include the presence of city networks as well as implicit or explicit references to the past by respondents or in policy documents. A more comprehensive table on the corresponding indicators of the forms of policy learning can be found in the appendix (appendix ii). It is important to note that, in accordance with abductive coding, the most common forms of learning were adapted along the coding process. The updated tables of indicators can also be found in the appendix.

Conceptual model

The conceptual model, pictured below, illustrates the dominant forms of policy learning as well as the key influences as derived from data analysis and identified in accordance with abductive coding. The original conceptual model can be found in the appendix.

Policy learning in the

Veranderopgave Inburgering

DOMINANT INFLUENCES ON POLICY LEARNING

1) Political influence and top-down direction

2) Internal organisation and culture

3) Policy-specific characteristics including multi-level governance and (external) fragmentation

POLICY LEARNING IN THE *VERANDERPOGPAVE INBURGERING*

I. Learning from other municipalities and city networks

II. Learning from internal resources and experience

III. Learning from third parties including research organisations and language schools

Figure 1 Conceptual model

3.3 Methods of analysis

This thesis employs a qualitative case study research. This is appropriate because the research objective asks 'how' and 'why' questions, namely: *how* does policy learning occur during the *Veranderopgave* and *why* is this the case? (Yin, 2003). To answer the research question, interview and policy document content were analysed using abductive coding.

Data collection

Data has been collected by analysing interview transcripts and through policy document analysis. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with key persons employed at the municipality. This initially included members of the core team (in Dutch: kernteam), tasked with a coordinating role over one of the processes (in Dutch: proceseigenaar) in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*. This could be an element of responsibility over a key aspect of the new integration system such as the personalized integration plans or one of the three main

civic integration trajectories (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2019). In total, there were 6 process owners and one person tasked with the coordination of the core team. Besides this list of predetermined key respondents, a snowballing approach allowed for respondents to suggest additional candidates for a variety of reasons, such as that they have prior experience with the topic (Boeije, 2005). From this activity, 6 more respondents were identified. In total, 13 persons were interviewed (N=13).[6]

For the structure of the interview questions, a topic list was developed that corresponds with various forms of and influences on policy learning described in the theoretical framework as well as the topic of integration policy more generally. When new topics arose during previous interviews, they could be added to the topic list. In that way, earlier observations from one interviewee could be cross-checked by the next interviewees (Boeije, 2015). The full list of topics and examples of questions can be found in the appendix. It is important to note that, because of this style of interviewing, interviews were always slightly different, focusing on other perspectives or themes related to the main topics.

The general purpose of these interviews was to gather an understanding of the *perceptions* of how policy learning occurs during the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* (King, 2004)*.* However, as Silverman writes, interviewees are not 'dopes', which is to say that their answers may not reflect their 'internal views' but they are conditioned by the context and who is asking the questions (Silverman, 2011). For example, interviewees may not take a very critical position fearing that this may reflect negatively on their organization or professional skills. This has been taken into consideration during the formulation of questions, by asking primarily non-normative questions and asking for practical examples of perceptions.

Furthermore, as previously indicated, interview data is not the sole source of information. The findings drawn from this dataset have been cross-checked with findings from the policy document analysis. The most important source for policy document analysis is the draft implementation plan that has been developed in preparation for the new 'integration system'. As defined in the operationalization table, particular attention was paid to implicit and explicit references to a) earlier integration systems, b) internal and external research reports, and c) references to the practices from other partners from within social networks such as other municipalities.

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[6] For a full list of the respondents, please see the appendix.

Abductive coding

This research employs an abductive research approach towards data analysis. Abduction is a research logic defined by Reischertz in the context of Grounded Theory (GT) (Straus & Corbin 1990, 73). According to Reischertz, abduction removes the unfortunate disjunction between contexts of discovery and contexts of justification and addresses the weaknesses of deductive and inductive approaches (Reischertz, 2007). Within the abductive approach it is possible to move between the inductive and more open-ended research settings. The research process begins with a 'puzzle' or surprising fact. In this case, a surprising fact was the observation that policy learning did occur even though this policy problem seemed to be qualified as wicked, and according to the wicked problem theory, policy learning would therefore not be possible. Consequently, policy learning could not be explained by existing theories and an abductive approach was deemed appropriate.

Coding process

In accordance with an abductive research approach, I moved between open and axial coding throughout the process. Axial codes were established to produce sub-categories and components of the main higher levels codes drawn from the theoretical framework such as the different forms of policy learning, whereas open coding was used to identify new information and indicators of forms of or influences on learning from the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this way, new information and indicators of forms of learning emerged from the text, such as the use of pilot studies as a form of learning from research.

3.4 Case selection

As previously motivated, this thesis focusses specifically on the preparatory work conducted by the municipality of Rotterdam as part of the *Veranderopgave Inburgering.* This law change was first announced in a letter to the House of Representatives on 2 July 2018, following the publication of a critical evaluation report of the *Wet Inburgering 2013* (Significant, 2018). In this letter, the Minister of Social Affairs, Wouter Koolmees, presents his core thinking and main objectives for the improvement of the civic integration policy (Ministerie van Sociale en Werkgelegenheid, 2018). The most important element of the change being that municipalities will once again become coordinators of the civic education trajectories and regain responsibility for the offer of language education courses through tendering or subsidies. Towards the end of March 2020, the Minister announced that the date of entry of the new integration law has been moved to the first of July 2021.

The data collection process took place from the first of March 2020 until June 2020, however the total period of the *Veranderopgave* lasts beyond June 2020. Therefore, one limitation of this research is that it does not cover the full period of preparation for the new law, but it rather presents a 'snapshot' of the ways in which learning occurs during the *Veranderopgave* at the municipality of Rotterdam. Besides the upcoming integration system, I will also be referring to the current and former integration law system(s) in the context of the policy background and learning from evaluation. As previously mentioned, the *Deltaplan Inburgering*, which preceded the current integration law and was launched in 2007, is considered especially relevant in the context of learning from evaluation because of the similarity in structure and aims.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Each respondent was asked to sign an informed consent form. Due to unforeseen developments surrounding the spread of Covid19, interviews were conducted through skype or by telephone. The conversations were recorded using a digital sound recorder. Respondents were made aware of the fact that the conversations were recorded, and recordings were securely stored on an encrypted USB-stick. A second important ethical consideration was the question of a potential normative or political bias. As this thesis analyses the practices of policy learning in areas relating to integration in my home city, my own political orientation could cloud my judgment.

However, in the formulation of the research questions, I have avoided exploring the topic of integration policy in a normative way. The aim of this thesis was not to normatively judge the quality of policy learning, or distinguish between good and bad practices, but to assess the general tendencies of learning and to map potential limitations with reference to theories of wicked problems and integration governance literature.

4. Identifying the policy issue and context

In this chapter, the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* is placed in the historical context of Dutch and Rotterdam integration policy. This is important insofar as it forms the policy background of Dutch integration policy which is helpful to understand the state of integration today and the particular elements of complexity associated with the *Veranderopgave Inburgering.*

4.1 A brief history of civic integration policy

Since 1998, there have been ten ministers for integration and integration policy has come to fall under six different ministries. Each consecutive cabinet has left their own mark on integration policy and in 2021 the Dutch government will formally adopt its fourth national integration law (Kloosterboer, 2015). Clearly, Dutch integration policy has known a very dynamic history. A full account of this history is both beyond the scope of this thesis and already well-documented by scholars such as (Entzinger, 1984), (Lucassen & Penninx, 1997) and (Driouichi, 2007). For a brief history for the period from 1998, when the first Dutch integration was adopted, until the period leading up to the second integration law in 2007, see the appendix (appendix iv).

The second integration law: Wet Inburgering 2007
In 2003, Rita Verdonk entered the Dutch government as a new and tougher type of minister of Alien Affairs and Integration (Michalowski, 2009, pp. 259-260). Verdonk, a member of the liberal-right party VVD, entered the integration governance field at a time of high politicization of immigration and integration in the Netherlands. At this time, the dominant view was that previous integration policies had failed and social cohesion in society was endangered (Callejo, Garcés-Mascareñas, Penninx, & Scholten, 2007). In line with her time, Verdonk emphasized sanctions and the individual responsibility of newcomers for their own integration. The new integration law that was adopted in 2007, *Wet Inburgering 2007* (WI2007), was an expression of this. The most important difference to the former integration law (*Wet Inburgering 1988*) was that it introduced compulsory civic integration exams on top of existing integration

courses. The integration exam consisted of two parts: a language exam and an exam about knowledge of Dutch society and core values.[7]

The introduction of the 2007 Deltaplan

At the national level, it soon became clear that WI2007 was unsuccessful in reaching its objectives. This law centralized individual responsibility of newcomers without installing any real punitive consequences for those who failed to successfully pass the civic integration examinations (Gelderbos, Huijnk, & Dagevos, 2012)[8]. In response to disappointing results, the cabinet Balkenende IV introduced the *Deltaplan* (Ministerie van VROM, 2007). This plan introduced financial penalties for those who failed to pass the integration courses within a given time period, and it made the municipality responsible for the provision of integration courses for all newcomers (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017). The other most important features of this plan are listed below.

- Dual trajectories were introduced whereby the *inburgeraar* was to combine civic integration courses with participation in society. The reasoning was that participation would increase the success rate of the civic integration examination. Participation in society could refer to education, work or volunteering.

- Following the *Deltaplan*, civic education courses were meant to be *tailored* to the specific needs of the newcomer. The *Deltaplan* distinguished between different types of *inburgeraars* depending on which level of education they had attained and how long they had been in the Netherlands.

- The plan introduced shared responsibility between the government, municipalities, societal organizations and the newcomer him or herself. Municipalities gained responsibility for important aspects of policy implementation. They would, for example, conduct intakes with each newcomer to determine what civic education course would best fit their needs. A public tender was held for civic education courses offered by various organizations.

In total, 460 million euros were made available for the municipalities to implement this plan during the years 2008 until 2011 (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017). A specific budget was made

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[7] With the introduction of this law, the Netherlands became the first country in the world to make rights of residence conditional on the passing of civic integration exams (Michalowski, 2009). This became a very controversial topic in international media, as the exam questions were found to be highly normative.
[8] Status holders were an exception to this. In this case, the municipalities were responsible for the provision of integration courses.

available for participation and the government allowed municipalities autonomy in combining this with education and civic integration in the form of dual trajectories.

However, in the Annual Budget of 2011, the fourth Balkenende cabinet (2007-10) announced financial cuts following dissatisfaction with the results of the *Deltaplan* which would affect the civic integration policy drastically (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017) (NOS Nieuws, 2010). This restrictive financial policy was later taken over by the first, right-wing, Rutte cabinet (2010-12) and the second (2012-17). The function of the municipalities as stipulated in the *Deltaplan* was minimalized and finally replaced with the introduction of the *Wet Inburgering 2013* (WI2013). This law change went forward despite criticism of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) amongst many other actors including the Dutch Council for Refugees and political parties such as the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA). In a report on this, the G4 described this as being a "too drastic change with the existing, and by now, successful implementation of the civic integration policy" (VNG, 2012). The expertise and knowledge built up within municipalities during the preceding years as well as the infrastructure built up around this role were largely lost in this new system which returned coordination of integration policy towards the national political level.

Introduction of Wet Inburgering 2013

The WI2013 focused on non-European immigrants, aged 16-64, mostly status holders and family migrants. Most importantly, this law placed the responsibility over civic integration entirely in the hands of the newcomer his or herself (Significant, 2018). Public funding of civic education courses was replaced by a financial scheme whereby newcomers themselves were responsible for financing their examination and courses through a loan of 10,000 euros from DUO, the Dutch organization also responsible for student loans. [9] Largely because of this, the law and policy change, was supposed to save 333 million euros of integration-related costs from 2014 onwards (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017, p. 5). Status holders who manage to pass their civic integration exams within the term of three years, do not have to pay back the DUO loan. However, if they fail to do so, they risk financial sanctions and their residence rights may be uncertain (Wet Inburgering, 2013).

During the time this Wi2013 was adopted, the right-wing party, *Leefbaar Rotterdam,* once again became the biggest party in the Rotterdam council, and led the 2014-2018

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[9] DUO is an executive organization that falls under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

coalition (Dekker & Breugel, 2019). Therefore, unlike its counterparts in Amsterdam, the local political leadership in Rotterdam welcomed the Wi2013, the hands-off approach that it symbolized as well as the focus on individual responsibility of the newcomers. Integration was framed as a process that predominantly requires 'hard work by the immigrant' (Integratie010, 2015, p.2). One respondent explained that all the knowledge of the target group developed over the years disappeared along with this law and policy change as all the *inburgeraars* were spread amongst the caseload of regular work consultants (in Dutch: werkconsulenten) (R05).

Criticism towards the current integration system

Over the years since 2013, numerous reports have been published which criticize the current integration system and show how this policy has failed to achieve its policy objectives, namely to increase the rate of the successful civic integration examinations within the given term (Wet Inburgering, 2013). Beyond this, the current integration system has been widely criticized for a variety of reasons in numerous reports. Perhaps the most influential of such report was the Wi2013 evaluation study conducted by the research organization *Significant* and presented to the House of Representatives on the 27th of June 2018.

To sum up, the criticism revolves around five central points. The first criticism is related to the fact that the municipalities' tender of the civic integration courses was replaced by a competitive language school market in which newcomers were themselves responsible for selecting their school, in the case of status holders they could use their 10,000 euro loan for this. As many critics have found, it was often not realistic to expect a newcomer, at this early stage, to act as a critical, well-informed consumer, especially in a market environment where schools try to attract more clients by offering laptops or other perverse incentives (Significant, 2018) (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017). Institutions took advantage of the opportunities offered within the system and many cases of fraud and corruption have been brought to light (Stoffelen, Zwaan, & Uffelen, 2020). Because of this, there is a significant group of persons who have run out of their DUO-loan but not yet passed the civic integration exams. These are called 'end-loan-still-obliged-to-pass-civic-integration exams-persons' (In Dutch: ELIP'ers, Eind-Lening-nog-InburgeringsPlichtig). In many cases, this is the result of fraudulent and/or poor-quality language schools or even bankruptcy. A related point of criticism here is directed towards the organization responsible for providing accreditation marks to language schools: Blik op Werk. This organization is criticized for being largely unsuccessful in its ability to realize this task (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2017).

The second point of criticism is that the Wi2013 insufficiently contributes to the integration of newcomers and does not stimulate newcomers to reach their highest potential. This is largely related to the consumer market environment. Even though there are plenty of schools, there are little or no programs that are tailored to the need of a particular group, such as persons who wish to acquire a higher language level than what is minimally required. Due to the financial sanctions and term of three years, newcomers may shy away from reaching their highest potential, fearing the consequences if it does not go as planned.

The third criticism is that there is no or limited flexibility in the current policy. For example, when newcomers find job opportunities and thus require evening school, this is often not possible within the current system. All of this contributes to a fourth point of criticism. Namely that the link between civic integration and participation is insufficiently made (Significant, 2018). Unlike in the *Deltaplan Inburgering*, dual trajectories combining language learning with participation are insufficiently stimulated. Lastly, the civic integration trajectory is seen as insufficiently coherent. For example, the connection between the early integration program in the reception centres and that in the municipalities is not sufficiently made and the policy chain lacks clear coordination. Also internally, the policy is fragmented across different municipal clusters which add to the complexity of the current system. This fragmentation and complex policy network are also depicted in the image below, which illustrates the relationships between the many actors involved in the WI2013 integration policy chain.
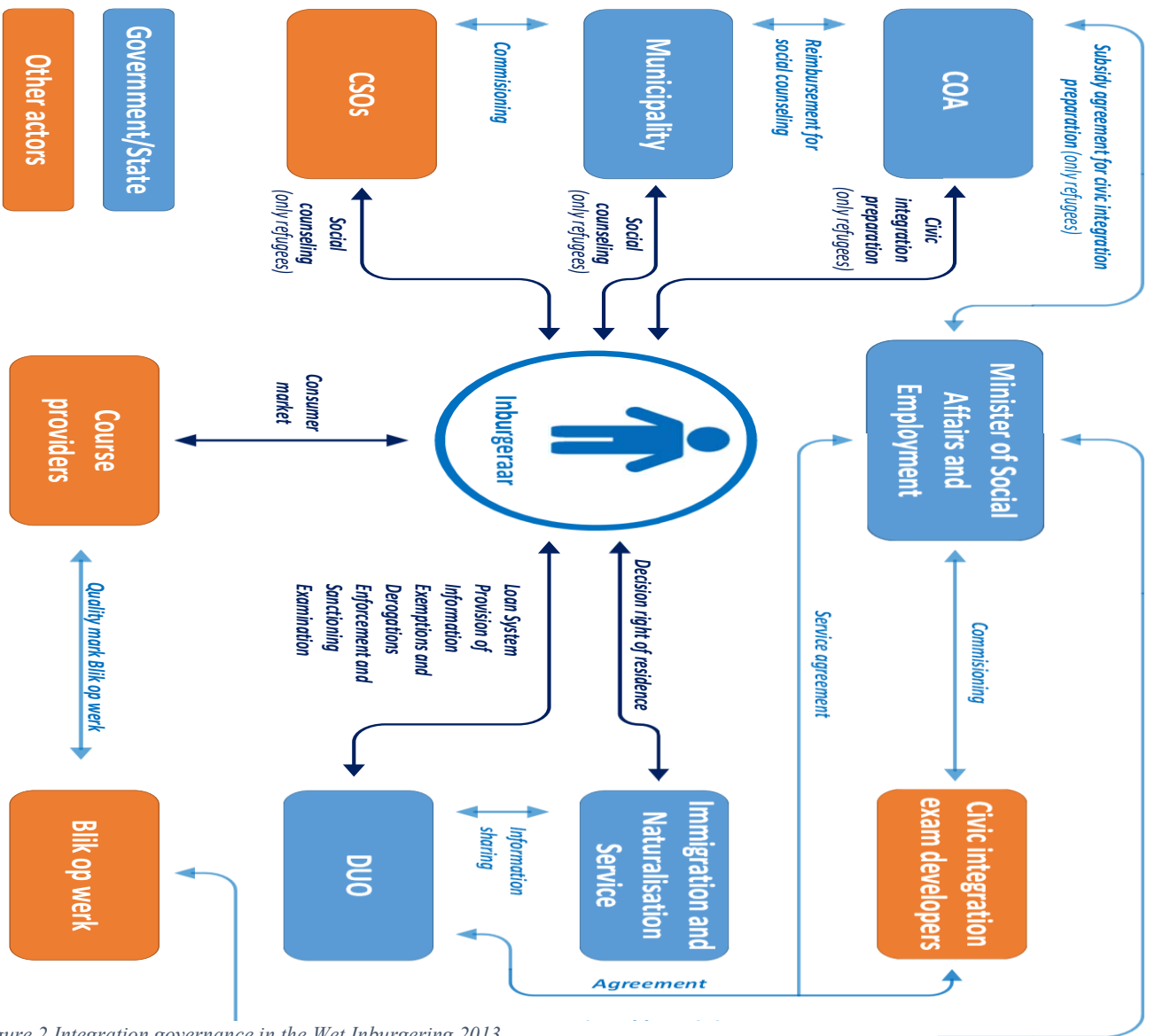
Figure 2 Integration governance in the Wet Inburgering 2013

Legend:
- Government/State
- Other actors

Actors and relations shown:
- **COA**
- **Municipality**
- **CSOs**
- **Course providers**
- **Blik op werk**
- **DUO**
- **Immigration and Naturalisation Service**
- **Minister of Social Affairs and Employment**
- **Civic integration exam developers**
- **Inburgeraar**

Relations:
- Commisioning (Municipality – CSOs)
- Reimbursement for social counseling (COA – Municipality)
- Subsidy agreement for civic integration preparation (only refugees)
- Civic integration preparation (only refugees)
- Social counseling (only refugees)
- Social counseling (only refugees)
- Consumer market
- Quality mark Blik op werk
- Loan System / Provision of Information / Exemptions and Derogations / Enforcement and Sanctioning / Examination
- Decision right of residence
- Information sharing
- Service agreement
- Commisioning
- Agreement

4.2 Veranderopgave Inburgering

Announcement of the Wet Inburgering 2021

In 2018, following evaluation studies and mounting positive feedback of the WI2013, the minister of Integration and Social Affairs decided that the integration law must be revised (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2018). The following key changes were presented: the municipalities will once again become responsible for coordination of the civic integration programs as well as the civic integration offer in their respective cities. They will also be responsible for developing the personalized integration and participation plans where there will be room for tailor-made programs for persons with different needs. This is also reflected in the fact that there will be three main learning routes with their own learning objectives.[10] Furthermore, there will be a so-called *broad intake,* where already in the reception centres, COA will be responsible for objectively and uniformly identifying the profile and potential of a newcomer. This should contribute to a more coherent policy. Lastly, the general language level will be changed from A2 to the higher level of B1.

The most important similarities and differences with the previous integration laws described here are listed below. The graph shows that the upcoming integration law is roughly similar to the *Deltaplan Inburgering* in terms of the following features: structure of authority, responsibility over the civic integration trajectory, offer of civic education plans, objectives and vision.

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[10] These are the education route, which is for persons wishing to continue their education in the Netherlands; the regular route, for persons who aim to and are thought capable of completing the B1 civic integration exams; and the z-route, which concentrates on participation.

Table 1 Similarities and differences with previous integration laws

	WI 2007	WI 2013	WI 2021*
Structure of authority	State is responsible, municipalities have oversight	State is responsible and has oversight	State is responsible, municipalities have oversight
Responsibility over individual *inburgering* trajectories	Responsibility is shared between client and municipality	Client** is entirely responsible for this own *inburgering* trajectory and receives a 10,000-euro loan from DUO	Responsibility is shared between client and municipality
Governance of inburgeringstrajecten/ civic integration plans* offers	Municipality tenders services from selected organizations	Consumer market	Municipality tenders services from selected organizations
Level of language to be achieved	A2	A2	B1
Objectives	Focus on language and participation in dual trajectories	Focus on language	Focus on language and participation in dual trajectories
Vision integration	Shared responsibility state and newcomer	Own responsibility	Shared responsibility state and newcomer

*These are estimations based on the draft policy documents of the municipality

**Client is more appropriate than status holder or newcomer because in WI2021, it will also be obligatory for communities with Turkish citizenship to take the civic integration exams

*** This refers to the governance of organizations that offer integration courses

Chapter conclusion

In summary, civic integration law and policy have undergone significant changes over the years, and policy ownership changed between the national government and municipal level. The politicization of integration, both at the local and the government level, has played a key role in this, and has been expressed in top-down financial decisions. The current integration system (2013-2021) was installed in the context of financial cutbacks and based on the reasoning that newcomers should be held individually responsible for their own integration process. However, over time, it became clear that this system failed to produce the desired results and that it contained perverse incentives for language schools to maximize profits at the cost of the *inburgeringsplichtige*. These disappointing results, as well as the fact that a new minister of the social-liberal D66, Wouter Koolmees, became responsible for integration policy, contributed to upcoming policy and law change which is planned to formally take place in July 2021.

As shown in the table above, there are many ways in which the main contours of this new law, the decentralization of civic integration policies and the ideology behind it are similar to the *Deltaplan Inburgering*. This, therefore, presents a relevant opportunity to learning from previous experience. Not only is the turbulent history symptomatic of the politicization of integration governance, it also has direct implications for the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*, as it produced groups of people that still fall under previous legislation who, in the upcoming 2021 integration system, should be treated in accordance with their rights and obligations under the previous system(s). In the context of wickedness and policy learning in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering,* this presents an additional policy-specific element of complexity.

5. Policy learning in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*

The previous chapter described the policy background and context in which the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* takes place. Building on this, the next two chapters describe the findings regarding the research question: In what ways does policy learning take place at the municipality of Rotterdam during the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*, and how can this be explained? This chapter presents the findings regarding the processes of policy learning.

The identified forms of policy learning are discussed according to the categorizations described in the theoretical framework, although slightly augmented throughout the process of data analysis as unforeseen indicators and forms of learning emerged in accordance with the abductive coding process. Learning from social networks was changed more specifically to learning from other municipalities and city networks as this emerged as a separate pattern from learning from service comparators such as the Dutch Council for Refugees (VWN). Learning from such partner organizations but also from language schools thus became part of the broadened category of learning from third parties.[11] The adapted most common categories of learning are as follows, and as reflected in the updated conceptual model:

I.   Learning from other municipalities and city networks;

II. Learning from internal resources and experience such as learning from former *inburgering* systems but also cross-departmental cooperation;

III. Learning from third parties including research organisations and the media, but also organisations involved in the current civic integration system, such as language schools.

5.1 Learning from other municipalities and city networks

Learning from social networks and particularly other cities or city networks such as the G4 and G40 was identified as an important source of information and knowledge sharing between different municipalities by the vast majority of respondents (R01-R12). Both the G4 and G40 city networks were regularly mentioned and generally described in very positive terms as effective systems of information sharing.

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[11] The final list of corresponding indicators can be found in the appendix.

Respondents described the process and initiation of social network learning from other municipalities in different ways. While some respondents primarily discussed this as benefiting from existing infrastructure, such as the *Global Cities Network* (R02), others explained this as a process in which they themselves took the initiative of 'calling Amsterdam' or taking a leading role in G4 or G40 cooperation (R01, R03 & R04). A respondent leading the core team was especially positive about this form of learning, and he explicitly referred to the 'positive' atmosphere in these city networks (R12). Concrete references to practices of other municipalities mostly concerned G4 members such as Amsterdam or Utrecht, cities of similar size (R01, R03, R04, R08 & R09).

This focus on fellow members of the G4 was explained as interviewees described the limits of learning from other municipalities (R04. R07 & R08). Two interviewees explained that, because Rotterdam is a large city, there is a lot of 'offer' in terms of language schools and civil society, unlike many smaller municipalities which may have only one or two different organizations offering language courses. Therefore, the lessons or practices of those smaller cities are often not directly relevant for them whereas G4 cities are in more similar circumstances. However, another interviewee was more critical of policy learning from similar size such as Amsterdam, as she explained that you can represent figures or numbers in all kinds of ways, suggesting that this information may not always be reliable or relatable. She described learning from other cities as 'comparing apples with pears' (R07). Similarly, another interviewee explained that while it was great to exchange information and experience between different municipalities, "[…] *often the approaches are rooted in local conditions, so it is very difficult to really draw any concrete lessons from the practices of other municipalities, like a blueprint*" (R04).

Besides the local conditions in which lessons are rooted, another limit to this form of learning mentioned by respondents concerns the different political orientation of the governing city councils, which in turn, affect organizational and financial capacity and receptiveness for certain pieces of information (R02, R04 & R07). A commonly mentioned example was during that Amsterdam had been able to 'learn' and develop expertise for a longer period of time during the current integration system whereas the attitude in the more right-wing oriented city council in Rotterdam at the time, had long been more of a 'hands-off' approach. Meaning that even if theoretically Rotterdam could draw lessons from Amsterdam, it was less receptive to them. In the context of mounting criticism towards the current integration system, one interview explained the political influence on learning as follows: "*Following criticism, you can say 'I will look at this system, evaluate it and finetune it so that it improves,' but the*

political wind was not like this, so they did the opposite" (R01). The next chapter on policy influences will elaborate on this in more detail.

Two other members of the core term also felt that there could have been *more* nationwide cooperation in some areas so that not every municipality had to 'reinvent the wheel'(R04). One of them explained that following the current path, every municipality was going to be developing a slightly different *pip*: an abbreviation for the personalized integration plans that will be developed for the group of persons for whom the civic education exams are mandatory in the coming integration system. He explained: "*Currently, 150 different pips are going to be developed. This costs money… just make one uniform pip for everyone. Each municipality can divert from this locally-fine- but just have it as a blueprint […]*" (R09).

However, as the interviewee explained, municipalities also attach a lot of value to their autonomy in developing this process. This is a barrier to more nationwide cooperation on certain areas (R12). This same observation was made by other interviewees in a different context (R01 & R13). There appeared to be a simultaneous emphasis on learning through city networks and information sharing but also on allowing for each municipality to maintain its much-valued autonomy in the process of policy development.

Overall, learning from networks was commonly mentioned by interviewees in the form of inter-city networks and information sharing, primarily with cities of similar size. However, despite the generally positive tone in this respect, limits to this form of learning were also mentioned, primarily that it was difficult to draw lessons in this form of learning.

5.2 Learning from internal experience

Besides learning from different municipalities and city networks, the next most common form of policy learning mentioned by all members of the *core team* was learning from *internal experience*, mostly in the form of cross-departmental information and experience sharing but also from experience with early civic integration policy embedded in the minds of colleagues. This form of learning may also have been emphasized to a lesser extent than learning from social networks because interviewees considered it a less conscious act of policy learning but more as 'standard procedure'. The way in which this form of learning was mentioned was primarily in response to the question of how the decision-making processes looked during this *Veranderopgave,* and what sources of information where consulted in this process. It was

without exception that respondents described involving persons from other departments within the municipality or with prior experience in their *working group* or during appointments.

In most cases, interviewees would describe forming a working group (R02, R03, R04 & R09). Into this group they would invite people from different departments, often people who have experience with the target group, but also people from procurement (in Dutch: inkoop*)* who may have relevant knowledge in the field of tendering (R04). For example, one interviewee explained this process as follows: *"I held a number of working group sessions. I involved policymakers, team managers, work consultants, so really from policy to implementation to management, all kinds of professions. We thought, okay, what do we find important? How do we see the ideal picture? We had a couple of sessions where I made reports, and then I summarized what I think it should become. Then I share that with a smaller group of people, who are responsible for the different learning routes, and some people from procurement…then I shared it with the kern team (core team), and said, 'so, these are our main objectives, do you agree?' In that sense, I just kept collecting and returning information and ideas."* (R04)

Regarding the extent to which this form of cross-departmental or cross-cluster cooperation and information sharing was practised and stimulated, interviewees had varying perceptions although all valued this kind of internal cooperation. Some interviewees believed that this often happened by individual effort rather than organisation-wide efforts, which meant that it is very important to have a good internal network (R03). One interviewee explained how, in some cases, it is not possible to involve everyone with relevant knowledge on the topic: ''*In all honesty, I would say I have built up a reasonable network over the year, but there are still countless people who might also be interesting to sit with but I don't know them yet, or not very well, or they might not see a role for themselves in this process. An example is with Education department, they are withholding a bit […]"* (R03)

In general, there was more emphasis amongst the respondents on learning from cross-departmental experience and knowledge, then specifically, learning from persons who had been involved with the early civic integration system.

When it comes to learning from history a very clear pattern that emerged from the data was that interviewees described this process as learning directly from persons who had experience with the current or previous integration system (*Deltaplan Inburgering)* (R01- R05 & R07- R12). Most members of the core team, however, did not have such prior experience. They explained they knew about this from 'hearsay' or from co-workers with prior experience

directly (R02). As such, having a good network was also important if you wanted to involve and learn from persons who had experienced earlier integration policy systems.

The groups defined as bearers of historical lessons were persons who had been in a policy advisor or related role for multiple years and had accumulated experience in that way, and secondly, the persons who-in the current system- had been on the implementation side of the policy, primarily the *werkconsulenten*. These are the people who were in direct contact with the status holders in the current and/or previous system. One interviewee specifically explained the role of human resource management in this and the importance of maintaining several persons who had experienced the *Deltaplan Inburgering (emphasis mine):*

Q: So, these people with all those years of experience, do they typically stay involved?

R: No, she has a very different job now.

Q: Is that a shame?

R: *Yes, that's why I tried so hard to keep her involved during the Veranderopgave. Specifically, because I think her knowledge from the previous system, the registration systems with DUO, for example, is so important. To some extent she has been able to transfer her knowledge to the new team… But, yes, I think it is very valuable to preserve that kind of knowledge*. (R03)

With the exception of one interview where I specifically inquired about this, respondents did not mention any internal evaluation reports and to the question of internal information storing it appeared interviewees did not refer to such sources or were not aware of their existence (R02). External evaluation reports were mentioned as sources of information, but only when specifically inquired about them. Interviewees generally described limited time and the preference from learning from contemporary experience as reasons that these reports were not considered one of the most important sources of information for them during this *Veranderopgave.*

5.3. Learning from third parties

Learning from language schools, media, research organisations and service comparators
The third form of policy learning, namely learning from third parties such as the media or external other organizations, also took on a different meaning in the context of the *Veranderopgave.* This is because third parties such as language schools and employers have played and will play crucial roles in the success or failure of civic integration policy (Integraal

Plan, p. 2). Specifically, the language schools have been responsible for the provision of the language courses, in preparation for the mandatory civic integration exams. In this role they have also gained important experience with the civic integration policy target group over the past years in the current system (2013-2021). Therefore, a majority of the core team mentioned the importance of involving these schools in the policy development phase.[12] However, more than the language schools' experience with the target group, interviewees mentioned the importance of involving the schools in the context of the experiences of the language schools themselves. Dominant in the interview data is a focus on the negative lessons drawn from the experience of corruption in language school's industry and how to prevent a repetition of events (R01, R03 & R04). The most important lesson drawn from this was that the municipality should be able to more closely monitor the practices of language schools and focus on ensuring a healthy and cooperative relationship between them (R01 & R02). However, as elaborated in the next section, the presence of such knowledge or experience cannot meaningfully contribute to policy development when constrained by limited organizational or financial capacity.

Market consultation

Emerging as an important practice inductively from the empirical materials, several interviewees referred to market consultations as a practice of learning from third parties such as language schools and employers. The municipality had organized a market consultation in December 2019 and, at the time of the interviews, was planning to do so again in digital form in June, this year, 2020 (Integraal Plan, p.2) (R03 & R04). The objective of these consultations was to collect information and gather experiences from these various organizations with a stake in the migrant integration process, but also to update stakeholders on the recent developments.

One member of the core team also specifically explained he was responsible for building relationships with the language schools, to create bonds of trust with but also between them as this was considered an important precondition for a well-functioning civic integration policy (R01). This is a good example of a direct lesson from experience, but it also indicates the specific challenge the municipality faces in its role as being responsible for the civic integration policy. In this trajectory, there are many different actors and organizations which can determine whether the policy is successful. One of the main challenges interviewees

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[12] It is important to note that during the period of preparations for the tender (in Dutch aanbesteding) the municipality was also constricted by the fact that they could not share too much information with the language school and that all parties had to receive the same information so as to prevent unfair competition.

therefore described was indeed this tender of third-party services, and the question of how to ensure quality control of the schools, with limited financial means.

An important partner and service comparator for civic integration policy is the Dutch Council for Refugees (VWN). The perspective of a contact person at the partner organization and that of the respondents working at the municipality were both sought out. In general, the respondent from the VWN spoke positively about the extent to which they had been involved during the *Veranderopgave.* The respondent explained that they had a very healthy relationship with the municipality of Rotterdam, especially in comparison to some of the other Dutch municipalities (R13). When asked about the extent to which VWN was an important partner for policy learning interviewees generally confirmed this positive relationship, but they also explained that this had not always been the case. Years earlier, before the political shift, the information and advice given by the VWN was rooted in a 'different cultural perspective', whereas the municipality did not have the political will or capacity to implement that approach (R02). This again underlines the impact of local political influence on policy learning which emerges as a core trend throughout the data analysis, but it also returns to the notion of different frames of understanding. In this case, VWN approached this policy from a different frame than the municipality.

Learning from media and research organizations

Learning from the media was mentioned only when specifically inquired, and even then, it was more seen as 'something we have to deal with' than a source of information (R04). Interviewees explained that (critical) reports are acknowledged but they do not drive the policy development process, but only contribute to the higher-level political debates on this topic (R01). Furthermore, learning from external research papers was only mentioned when specifically asked about the role of research reports by third parties. Some interviewees then referred to research reports by organizations such as *Significant* or the *Verwey Jonker institute*, but most also acknowledged that they had limited time and could not say that had read all or most of the reports fully, but rather focused on reading the headlines or main takeaways (R03). Interviewees also stated that they felt that the current context and information sources in the present were considered more relevant than research reports from third parties (R04). Furthermore, the general mood was that there are also far too many different sources of information about the subject of civic integration for the policymakers to meaningfully interact with all of them (R03).

In the 2021 concept plan, the most frequently cited sources are research reports or data developed at and for the national level, and a progress report published by DUO. Other sources, such as a research report by the healthcare organization *Pharos*, as well as a *Statistics Netherlands* (in Dutch: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS)) are cited once.

The internal research department at the municipality, Research and Business intelligence (in Dutch: Onderzoek en Business Intelligence (OBI)) was not seen to have played an important role during the recent civic integration policy programs until very recently. It was not mentioned by any of the interviews. The respondent from OBI explained they had not been involved in the current civic integration policy previously and it was only very recently that they were being asked to sit at the table and play a role in the *Veranderopgave*: "*And then you notice that they are slowly realizing we do more than just collect numbers…So now we are getting more questions about data-driven work: 'what can we do with this?'*" (R06). This was confirmed by one respondent from the core team. When specifically inquiring about how they were now being involved he said, *"They are involved in many ways; it is about knowledge-driven work, and policy objectives, are those measurable? Also, policy evaluation, what can you learn?"* In other words, prior to the *Veranderopgave,* OBI had not been able to function as an internal control mechanism. They are being involved at the preparatory stage now with the aim of fulfilling this function, which would contribute significantly to the prospects of policy learning.

The last form of learning which arose during the interviews was *learning from pilot studies*. Although Rotterdam had not been granted the opportunity to run its own pilot, following a selection process for pilot funding at the national level, interviewees mentioned that pilots conducted in other cities would be a useful source of information. Such studies are also 'rare' opportunities to conduct a 'trial run' or test and review certain policy instruments. Although, at the time, the pilots were still running, interviewees were hopeful about the usefulness of such studies, even though they would take place in a different context.

Chapter conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter sought to illustrate the findings regarding the question of how policy learning occurs during the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*. It was found that learning from other municipalities or city networks as well as learning from internal experience are perceived to be the most common forms of learning. However, interviewees had varying opinions about the direct relevance of lessons taken from within a different context. This relates to the wickedness characteristic of non-repeatability. Within the spectrum of learning from internal experience,

the emphasis was more on cross-departmental information sharing than on learning from experience. When learning from experience occurs it is often through involving individuals with prior experience rather than consulting evaluation reports. However, also in this context, interviewees described the different reality in which the *Veranderopgave* was taking place. In part because of this, respondents prioritized cross-departmental learning.

Learning from third parties was also perceived to take place, albeit to a lesser extent. Within this category, institutions with a role in the civic education policy were considered most important, in particular language schools. When inquired, learning from academic research was mentioned by some interviewees, but less so than learning from internal experience and city networks. Institutions like *Verwey Jonker* institute were mentioned as examples, but the concept policy plan predominantly cited research reports at the national level. The municipal internal research organization, OBI, was not mentioned by any of the members of the core team. It had not really been involved until the *Veranderopgave Inburgering.* Lastly, media sources were not considered an important source of information or knowledge.

6. Influences on policy learning in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*

Although the previous chapter already referred to some influences on specific forms of policy learning, such as contextual differences as a limit on learning from other cities, this chapter discusses in more detail the general influences on policy learning identified from the data. The inspiration for the categories of influences was drawn from the theoretical framework on meso-level learning but adapted along the process of data collection. The following main categories of influences emerged in this process:

- political influence, top-down direction, which includes local and national political steering and control from oversight bodies; and
- internal organization and culture, which includes human resource management;
- policy specific conditions, which includes multi-level governance and (external) fragmentation.

It is important to bear in mind that these various influences on policy learning are often intricately related and sometimes overlap in effect. For example, political influence is often expressed in the form of top-down decisions relating to financial and organizational capacity. Moreover, financial and organizational capacity tend to overlap because for the organizational capacity to increase there is generally a need for financial capacity to recruit more persons and thus increase the organizational capacity. This code was therefore identified as: the capacity within the organization to execute and develop policy. Lastly, political influence both plays a role in top-down coordination of integration policy but also as a policy specific condition, the politicization of integration governance is an important underlying factor.

6.1 Political influence and top-down direction

National political influence and top-down direction
There are three important ways in which the influence of national political influence was mentioned by respondents. Firstly, *party politics* was seen to play an important role in the complex policy history of Rotterdam civic integration policy, adding to the complexity of the *Veranderopgave* today (R02, R04 & R11). However, interviewees generally saw this as an external factor, noting that the very politicized matters related to integration and migration were discussed at the national level and did not directly affect their work but only ever their communication about it towards their audiences.

Secondly, decisions made at the state-level also define *the framework* within which municipalities can develop their role in civic integration policy. Some of these decisions hamper policy learning or directly counteract lessons drawn from experience. One respondent described the introduction of performance-based funding as an example of this (R12). He explained that, from experience, it is known that such policies tend to become perverse incentives which distract municipalities from focusing on ensuring high-quality personalized programs for status holders while encouraging them to focus only on reaching set targets, prioritizing quantity over quality. In another example, with reference to learning from evaluation, an interviewee explained this influence as follows: "*You take some of the input of people with experience of the previous integration system from before 2013, but I also think we are in a different situation with a different financial capacity and choices made by the ministry which presents a different reality.*" (R05)

Thirdly, decisions at the state-level also determine the *financial and organizational capacity* that municipalities have for policy development and implementation. In that sense, the national government could restrict the autonomy of municipalities and their ability to facilitate policy learning and policy development, in accordance with the framework of Gilson, Dunleavy, & Tinkler (2009). As discussed in the chapter on policy background, this has happened at several times before. An important element in this *Veranderopgave* and in similar decentralisation assignments is, therefore, the question of whether the municipalities will receive enough funds. This may not only hamper the ability to implement previous lessons such as closely monitoring the quality of language schools, which some interviewees voiced as a concern but also to install in turn, to have to organizational capacity to effectively monitor and correct errors in the future (R08).

Municipal political influence and autonomy

In this context, is important to note that there is not just a top-down coordination. Municipal autonomy, interaction with other municipalities and city networks also play a role in decision-making. The second form of political influence therefore is municipal political influence and autonomy. In accordance with expectations based on the literature, interviewees generally explained that Rotterdam has 'close links' to the government and, as one of the G4, it has a significant degree of autonomy (R12) (Crul, Scholten, & Laar, 2019). In general, respondents also spoke positively about the efforts of city networks, in which Rotterdam plays a leading role, to raise attention to their needs in the context of debates over decisions regarding the *Veranderopgave*. However, at the same time, the perception was that ultimately, especially

because this was such as political topic, key decisions *would* be made at state-level (R09 & R11). In other words, even though civic integration policy was being decentralised, the state sought to maintain a degree of control over the system. One example of this concerned the decision to maintain DUO as the organization responsible for giving out loans and potential financial penalties to persons obliged to pass civic education exams. This adds yet another layer to the chain of organizations involved in the civic integration policy. This also corresponds with the notion that migrant integration policies fall within the domain of national politics and decentralisation may cause friction between local and national government bodies (Hepburn & Zapata-Barrero, 2014).

Beyond this, and as discussed in the previous chapter, local political influence emerged as an influence primarily in the context of (political) receptiveness to certain lessons and in the form of countering top-down financial decisions impacting organizational and financial capacity. In this case, the municipality may make additional investments in policy implementation to compensate for such top-down decisions. In particular, respondents described the city coalition change in 2018 in Rotterdam as a key moment of opportunity in their ability to increase organizational capacity, develop expertise as well as draw and implement lessons from the previous integration system, although the national integration law remained unchanged: "*The situation is very different, because we have Wijbenga[13] now. He is much more flexible and accommodative; he recognizes the problems which enables us to respond more socially.*" (R01) In general, respondents explained that it mattered greatly whether the city council prioritized integration policy (R01, R02 & R04).

In summary, political influence and top-down direction are important in how they define the framework and 'space' for policy implementation and learning during the *Veranderopgave*. The politicization of integration policy at the state-level was also mentioned as an influence in the context of party politics and a complex and turbulent integration policy history. Local political influence was mostly discussed in terms of the influence of local political leadership on receptiveness towards certain lessons and approaches.

The most important way in which political influence and top-down direction, both at the national and sub-state level, were mentioned was in terms of determining the organizational and financial capacity of the municipality to implement the *Veranderopgave* (R04 & R07). In general, interviewees did not so much describe a lack of knowledge or understanding, but rather their concerns for a lack of means to properly implement the assignment.

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[13] Since July 2018, Bert Wijbenga is the Rotterdam Alderman responsible for integration, amongst other topics.

6.2 Internal organisation and culture

Internal organisational structure and fragmentation

This refers to the way in which responsibility for a policy is structured at the municipality, how do different clusters work together and how does this impact policy learning? Five interviewees mentioned internal organisational structure and fragmentation as a key logistical challenge to policy learning and development. The patterns that emerged correspond to the theory that migrant integration is inherently a multi-level governance field as many different areas of policy-making come together in it (Scholten, 2013).

At present, three different municipal clusters are involved in the *Veranderopgave* for the new civic integration law. These are: Labour & Income (In Dutch: Werk & Inkomen), Societal Development (Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling), and Governance & Organisational Support (Bestuurs- en Concernondersteuning). This fragmentation also occurs within the target group: status holders above the age of 18 and under the age of 27 fall under the responsibility of the youth desk department (in Dutch: jongerenloket) whereas all older status holders fall under the responsibility of the Labour & Income department. Lastly, two different and coexisting laws are currently in place which each have different objectives for the group of individuals that fall under the civic integration law, namely the participation and civic integration law. Restructuring the organisation so that the responsibilities from the coming law, as well as those from the current and previous integration system, can be optimally implemented was also described a 'complex assignment' in the concept implementation plan (Integraal Plan, p. 2).

Participation and integration

In this context, interviewees specifically mentioned the tension between the objectives of the participation law (in Dutch: participatiewet) and civic integration law (in Dutch: inburgeringswet), which each fall under different clusters with different directors and respective budgets. The consequences of this included concerns amongst respondents that:

1) competing vision and approaches emerge from competing leadership (R03;

2) the whole process is less efficient if not centralized (R09); and

3) different, and sometimes incompatible, objectives are pursued (R03).

One respondent described the tension that arose from these coexisting laws and objectives as follows: *"On the one hand, we want people to integrate and on the other hand we want people*

to participate in the labour market as soon as possible, and not enter into welfare. We need to find balance… because we want people to have sustainable jobs, and on the other hand, we have a city council which wants to focus on minimizing unemployment benefits…so how does that relate?" (R03).

In this context, respondents also discussed the importance of leadership and coordination over civic integration policy for effective policy learning and policy development. One interviewee described this as follows: *"I think it is very important that a single individual is ultimately responsible. What you have now is that the participation law is part of the labour department and integration law is part of social development. In practice, two different directors are responsible for the implementation of these two laws. How great would it be if these were no longer separate departments but just become one… then the problem is solved"* (R09).

Interviewees were generally hopeful about the prospect of civic integration policy falling under the responsibility of one single director in the coming integration system (2021>). As one interviewee explained: *"I do think that they are currently looking, and someone is going to be appointed as the responsible person. I think that is very important to resolve this tension. You can't have one person calling for more civic integration and the other calling for reducing benefits"* (R03*).* These findings correspond with Conklin's theory of fragmentation in complex policy problems, which in turn, can lead to a lack of shared vision and therefore hamper effective collaboration (Conklin J., 2005).

Interviewees had different perspectives on the degree of internal cooperation more generally, with some interviewees being more critical than others. One of the interviewees explained that when he was first assigned a role related to civic integration policy at the municipality, his co-workers advised him that working together across clusters would be impossible (R09). At the time, civic integration policy was entirely concentrated at the language department and did not have the element of labour participation. Over time, he explained, it was possible to establish this system wherein different departments work together (R09). However, he explained that the organisational *culture* of a municipality, in general, was more adversary to inter-departmental learning, even though he reasoned that more coherent forms of collaboration and less internal fragmentation would positively impact the process (R09). According to this respondent, this was also not atypical for municipalities across the board, and he drew the contrast between these processes in municipalities versus in private companies.

Other respondents were initially more positive about internal cooperation but did refer to the systematic fragmentation of this policy field as a challenge for effective policy learning as knowledge as well as responsibility are *splintered* across different teams and clusters (R03). It is therefore not surprising that one of the main objectives described in the implementation plan as the goal of designing a 'coherent, and cluster-overarching approach' (p.2).

Individual efforts and human resource management

This influence refers to the organisational culture, the individual motivation of the team members as well as the way in which individual knowledge and expertise is 'managed'. It concentrates on the organisational environment and the way in which this impacts 'agency' to learn (Mahler, 1997). In this context, interviewees often mentioned the 'dedicated' spirit or the team or specific individuals, who worked to achieve the best possible options, despite the 'obstacles' of top-down restrictions or limited capacity. An example is the situation when in the current integration system, although no official specific integration policy could be organised by municipalities, interviewees explained that they introduced certain programs which manoeuvred in such a way that they were still able to offer some specific programs for newcomers (R03).

However, the most common way in which this topic of dedication came up was in the context of learning from experience. As observed by different interviewees, persons with prior experience with earlier integration policy, were more than willing to share their experience in the context of the *Veranderopgave,* even as they were no longer personally responsible or members of that team. This allowed for evaluation knowledge to contribute to policy development despite a lack of formal institutionalization processes. Three of such persons with this previous experience but who did not have a role in the *Veranderopgave* were suggested as interview candidates (R05, R08 & R11). All three of them had indeed experienced the *Deltaplan Inburgering*. One of the respondents explained that she experienced the policy change towards the current system (WI2013) as a real waste of experience and knowledge and sought some distance from the topic after this event. However, she was happy that her colleagues were approaching her now, to pitch in during the *Veranderopgave* (R05).

A second important element is the question of human resource management, where theoretical premise holds that a high overturn of staff may hamper the possibility of accumulating or institutionalising individual knowledge (Gilson, Dunleavy, & Tinkler, 2009) (Mahler, 1997). Although the high overturn of staff which causes information to be dispersed within the organisation was recognized by interviewees, they explained people often stay with

the municipality for a long period of their professional life. This also necessitated a good overview of who did what as well as the beforementioned individual dedication of such persons to be able to benefit from their expertise in the current *Veranderopgave* (R02 & R05).

In conclusion, internal fragmentation of integration policy was seen as an important influence on learning by the majority of interviewees. In this context, the need for individual leadership and non-competitive policy objectives was emphasized. Furthermore, informal practices of learning from experience and other departments underlined the need for a good internal network. Lastly, human resource management was not seen as a considerable influence on learning, and the findings here reaffirmed the importance of a good internal network.

6.3 Policy specific conditions including multi-level governance and (external) fragmentation

Beyond the challenges regarding internal organisation, external fragmentation and multi-level governance emerged as an important influence as policy learning, together with other policy-specific characteristics such as the inherent human-based process. Given the fact that some of these features characterize wicked problems as well as integration governance more generally, it is not surprising that these characteristics emerged as important influences here as well.

Many different external organisations and actors have a stake in the implementation of the new civic integration policy law, with the municipality being primarily responsible for the coordination, as stipulated in the draft 2021 integration law. As listed in the draft policy plan, the external organisations that are involved in the *Veranderopgave* include: The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Association of Dutch municipalities (VNG), Divosa, COA/Asylum Seeker Reception Centre (AZC), Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND), DUO, language schools, civil society organisations, welfare organisations, education institutions and fellow municipalities (Integraal Plan, 8.1).

The fact that so many organisations had a stake in the 'civic integration chain' and the required multi-level governance was seen as a challenge by some of the interviewees. In this context, collaboration was seen as an important objective in the draft policy plan. This influence primarily complicated the following three aims, namely to:

1) coordinate and create a coherent policy across different actors and organizations;

2) ensure that all relevant information is shared with different organisations such as COA (Integraal Plan, 8.3);

3) ensure that each actor fulfils its role in the desired way or according to a shared vision or priority, with a focus on language schools (R03).

The specific position of language schools as external partners in integration policy serves as a relevant example. Interviewees mentioned the challenge of regulating the schools and installing a cost-effective mechanism that could ensure the objective quality of the education provided (R01). The first concern was related to the fact that extensive forms of control where the municipality would play a significant role were seen to be costlier, returning again to the influence of financial capacity. Secondly, interviewees noted the schools were also separate institutions with their own objective in the policy chain and were primarily operating under market conditions (R01, R08 & R09). Thirdly, interviewees noted that quality of teaching was not something that could be identified in a list of objective quality requirements. In this context, interviewees referred to the idea that implementation was a very 'human-based' process (R03 & R08). One interviewee explained this as follows: "*A very important question is, and that was also a challenge in the current system, how are you going to define the criteria for language school teachers…because I have just seen that the people who are good with this target group are not necessarily the people that have been certified…but more people with a certain charisma*" (R08). With reference to the literature on wicked problems, this can be interpreted as an indication of non-computability of solutions, meaning that it is difficult to define an objectively perfect solution.

Chapter conclusion

In conclusion, the following interrelated influences appeared as the dominant influences on policy learning in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering:* political influence, top-down direction and control; internal organisation and culture; as well as policy-specific conditions, which includes (external) fragmentation but also previously mentioned characteristics such as non-computability and non-repeatability of solutions. An important pattern that arose was that respondents did not so much experience a lack of understanding or knowledge as the main challenge but rather the limitations imposed by top-down direction in terms of financial and organisational capacity in implementation of those lessons. Organisational culture was particularly mentioned in the context of individual and team-based 'dedication' which facilitated ongoing policy learning from experience, whether it be from evaluation or cross-department. Besides this, it is important to note also the relevance of Conklin's theory of social fragmentation as an impediment to successful policy learning across the board of different internal and external stakeholders (2005).

7. Discussion

This chapter reflects on the research findings and explains how they fit into the existing body of research. This chapter concludes with six suggestions for future research, as well as for policymakers and related actors.

The central research was as follows: how does policy learning occur in the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* and how can this be explained? Based on the theoretical framework and policy background, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- First, it was expected that policy learning occurs primarily by learning from the actions and experiences of other municipalities, primarily with members of the G4 network as these cities share important contextual characteristics which allow for more effective lesson drawing (Rose, 1991).

The findings of the interview data and document analysis support the hypothesis that learning through city networks was one of the main avenues of information sharing and gathering during the *Veranderopgave*. Interview data also confirmed that learning from cities of similar 'size' indeed has the preference so that lessons can be more directly applicable in the Rotterdam context. Following Rose's theory on lesson drawing, this affirms the premise that contextual conditions need to be accommodative for effective lesson drawing to take place (1991). However, in accordance with the wickedness characteristic of non-repeatability, interviewees also remained critical of the direct applicability of these lessons, as even in similar cities, there were grave contextual differences so that it is difficult to learn from similar or earlier problems. As such, there is a lack of effective learning from other cities or history, despite a wealth of experience. Moreover, unlike what was hypothesized, the findings do not confirm that learning from city networks is the most common form of learning. Although the data cannot be directly quantified, findings suggest that learning from internal experience was considered at least as important as learning from other municipalities. However, the process of learning from internal experience by organizing a working group, and collecting relevant expertise and knowledge internally, seemed to be a more naturalized practice so that it was less often seen as an explicit form of policy learning.

- Secondly, it was hypothesized that learning from the past would be more limited to specific persons who have experienced earlier integration systems due to human resource management and limited time and capacity of policymakers.

When it comes to learning from internal experience, cross-departmental learning appeared to be more common than learning from experience with previous integration systems. However, the data does support the second hypothesis in the sense that, when learning from evaluation occurred, it was primarily through individuals who had experienced previous civic integration systems rather than through organisation-wide efforts of systematic evaluation or the reading of evaluation reports. Although human resource management did play a role in this, the perception was that people generally stay employed by the municipality of Rotterdam for a long time, even though they often switch between different responsibilities and departments. As a result, interviewees described that it was possible to approach people informally and involve them in the process. A level of dedication amongst employees and a good internal network were often mentioned as important factors in this context. Limited time and capacity did play a role in the fact that many respondents declared not having read all or many evaluation reports relevant to the *Veranderopgave.* This is also supported by the fact that many were not familiar with the previous integration system or the *Deltaplan Inburgering.* One explanation for this was also that learning from evaluation was seen as less relevant as respondents explained the environment in which the *Veranderopgave* is taking place is very different from before. This is again in accordance with the wickedness characteristic of non-repeatability.

- Thirdly, it was hypothesized that wicked problem-related characteristics such as social complexity and fragmentation would form an important challenge to policy learning, furthered by the politicized nature of integration.

It was indeed found that social complexity and fragmentation played an important role in influencing policy learning. To some degree, this was related to the nature of the assignment: namely a decentralization assignment. Hence, many interviewees were hesitant to say that this was somehow more 'complex' than similar decentralization assignments. In the *Veranderopgave,* social complexity and fragmentation were often seen as both an internal and external challenge. As explained by Scholten (2018), integration is often inherently a multi-level governance issue as it touches upon many different service areas of local government. Interviewees indeed explained that the organisational structure that had developed, wherein civic integration policy was fragmented amongst different departments, falling under the

responsibility of different directors with different corresponding budgets, complicated the process.

In terms of external fragmentation, interviewees explained that the long chain of involved organizations could pose a challenge to forming a coherent policy in unison with the many different actors and organisations. At the same time, respondents noted the importance of a cohesive policy in which they coordinated all the different aspects. It was found that in many such instances there was not so much a lack of knowledge or ideas, but a lack of capacity or political space for knowledge and information to be translated into policy learning and development.

The second element of the third hypothesis suggests that the politicization of integration played a significant role in influencing policy learning at the municipality. The findings do not support the notion that politicization of integration as a topic in society and the media directly plays a significant role in how respondents conduct their work. Interviewees generally mentioned that critical reports from the media or societal sentiments do not influence the content, but only ever the communication about their work. In accordance with the observations of Poppelaars and Scholten (2018), municipal employees generally saw their role as developing the best possible civic integration policy within a given space, rather than seeing their work as inherently political or being influenced by this politicization.

However, this 'given space' was influenced by the politicization of integration governance in two important ways. First, the political influence was often expressed in top-down financial policy which impacts the municipalities financial and organizational capacity to implement the assignment as well as for policy learning and development. In all forms of learning, this was considered the most fundamental influence or outcome of other influences on policy learning during the V*eranderopgave*. Value-driven conflicts and changing problem definitions underlying political policy are important in determining this influence. The second common theme that emerged in the context of political influence was that political 'colour' greatly impacted the receptiveness of the municipality towards certain information or 'lessons'.

Indeed, while Gilson, Dunleavy and Tinkler (2009) already posit that contextual features such as political influence, budgeting limitations and top-down coordination may limit public organization's learning in general, this was often found to be more so the case in the context of integration governance where the political character of this topic contributed to a complex policy history, influencing the value attached to policy ownership, and which as a topic is characterized by multi-level governance. It was found that characteristics of integration governance overlap with features of wickedness and exacerbate their complexity.

Learning in the context of wickedness

What does this research say about the possibilities of learning in the context of wickedness more generally? This case study contributes to a scarce body of literature on the processes of policy learning in complex policy problems in meso-level public organizations. It has shown that learning can take place in many ways despite the existence of conditions not accommodative to policy learning, including characteristics of wickedness such as fragmentation, but also political influence and top-down direction.

When following the purely rational perspective towards policy learning, one may conclude that learning has not been very effective in the *Veranderopgave* thus far, and in forming integration policy in the Netherlands more generally. However, from a constructivist or political perspective, learning is never a purely rational process and the political influence is key to the possibility of policy change.

This thesis has shown that the political influence plays a key role in determining the ability to gather knowledge and information, and to learn, in the first place by providing or not providing the organizational or financial capacity necessary to do so, but also in more indirect ways, by contributing to factors seen as unfavourable to a learning climate. As sub-state organizations such as the municipality increasingly handle multifaceted and complex topics such as integration governance, scholars of wickedness and meso-level learning in public organizations can benefit from combining the strengths of these two perspectives to provide a framework for understanding how these processes take place.

Limitations of this study

It should be clear that this is an exploratory research and this thesis has by no means been able to capture all different dynamics that play a role in policy learning at the municipality. Rather, this thesis specifically has sought to explore how learning occurs in a context of wicked policy problems at this level. Further studies could further develop the specifics ways in which top-down direction influences policymaking in a comparative study with a city with a different political orientation such as Amsterdam.

Given the dominant reliance on interviews and thus perceptions, these findings should also be read critically, and a potential bias can have played in role in the answers given to some of the questions. To avoid a reproduction of bias, this thesis has refrained from taking a normative stance or asking normative questions. However, it is important to note that this method has therefore focused more on measuring perceived influence than real influence.

Furthermore, as previously indicated, this thesis does not capture the whole preparatory period of the *Veranderopgave* and should, therefore, be read as an impression of learning tendencies. Bearing those limitations in mind, this thesis has sought to provide a case study of meso-level policy learning in the context of wickedness, and specifically within the field of integration governance.

Recommendations

Following the discussion, this section presents some recommendations to improve and further facilitate policy learning in the context of complex policy problems. In order to facilitate learning from evaluation and to institutionalize existing knowledge, it is recommended to adopt a platform where persons can list their prior experience with this topic so that they may be approached for future questions or advise by persons working on similar issues at a later stage.

In order to effectively facilitate (ongoing) policy learning from research, the internal research organization, OBI, should be involved in the process of policy development at the very early stage. In this way, it will be possible for them to effectively and autonomously monitor progress and detect errors at the municipal level, which will allow for policy learning during later stages of the policy cycle.

As a pioneering city in the field of migrant integration policy, the municipality could consider playing a more proactive role in the city network cooperation on specific fields of the *Veranderopgave* such as the development of the personalized integration plans.[14] In this way information sharing is facilitated and a more coherent approach across different cities can be safeguarded.

For national policymakers, the main takeaway from this thesis research should be that their governance style significantly impacts the opportunities for policy learning at sub-state levels. A recommendation would be to involve city networks at earlier stages of such decentralization projects and to consciously facilitate the conditions necessary for policy learning, mostly in terms of financial and organizational capacity. The return on such early investments will likely be significant as more knowledge-based and carefully developed policies are more likely to meet their policy goals.

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[14] Personalized integration plans refer to the specific integration trajectories developed by the municipality in collaboration with the newcomer in the coming integration system, also abbreviated as PIP.

For universities, research institutions and think tanks, this thesis has shown that their research may sometimes only fulfil a limited role in steering the policy cycle in the context of this case study. To optimize their impact, careful attention should be paid to presenting relevant research highlights effectively. Furthermore, this thesis also recommends proactive exchanges between researchers and municipalities to ensure that, through dialogue, researchers that seek to play a fruitful role in policy learning and development can more effectively respond to the questions and conditions of the municipalities.

Lastly, as an important condition for learning is active inter-departmental and intra-organizational dialogue, this thesis recommends holding meetings on a structural basis to reassess the shared vision, cooperation and understanding of roles between different departments and involved organizations. Other organizations that have a stake in integration policy could also be important parties in detecting errors in the policy implementation process.

8. Conclusion

This thesis explored how policy learning takes place in the context of a complex policy problem, namely the decentralization of integration governance from the state-level towards the municipality. It has done so through a case study of the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* at the municipality of Rotterdam. On the basis of empirical research methods, this thesis found that, despite existing challenges, policy learning happens through several avenues: primarily city networks and internal resources. Learning from internal resources includes cross-departmental learning and-to a more limited extent- learning from evaluation. Learning from evaluation mostly occurs through informal interactions with individuals who have experienced earlier integration systems, including the *Deltaplan Inburgering*. Learning from third parties also took place, albeit to a lesser extent, primarily from policy partners such as language schools, whilst learning from research organisations was more limited.

The following interrelated key influences on policy learning emerged from data analysis: political influence, top-down direction and control, which includes local and national political steering; internal organisation and culture; and policy specific conditions, which includes multi-level governance and (external) fragmentation as well as wickedness-related characteristics as non-repeatability and non-computability of solutions (Norton, 2012). In particular, the notion of social fragmentation emerged as an important influence on learning in the *Veranderopgave,* where several internal actors and a wealth of external partners fulfil important roles in a newcomer's civic integration path (Conklin J. , 2005). This compounds the challenge for the municipality to materialize the several lessons into practice across the board and to ensure a shared vision. Furthermore, the notion of non-repeatability and non-computability associated with wicked problems help explain the tendencies in learning from cities and learning from history as well as the obstacles in doing so more effectively.

In addition, it is important to note that, although politicization of integration did not seem to play an important role for respondents directly, it emerged as an important underlying factor to other influences. Most importantly, political influence from and politicization of integration as a topic at the state-level largely determines top-down decision-making and in turn, the financial and organizational capacity of the municipality. In other words, not just policy change but also policy learning itself can only effectively take place within the boundaries of the space provided for and frames defined by local and national political coordination.

However, there were also positive influences on learning. This study revealed that within the politically defined margins, such influences allowed respondents involved in policy making directly to create the 'best possible policy'. Positive influences on learning included organisational culture, with a special focus on individual dedication which allowed for learning from evaluation, as well as existing city networks and relationships with partners such as the Dutch Council for Refugees.

Lastly, this thesis concludes with the note that labelling local migrant integration policies as *wicked* alone is not enough. There is a need to combine the insights from the scholarship on learning in the context of wicked problems with integration governance scholarship to develop a more coherent understanding of how learning can occur during the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* and similar cases. This will facilitate more knowledge-based interventions and policy learning in the policy field of local integration governance. Furthermore, more (comparative) research should be done on the factors that complicate and facilitate policy learning in these circumstances in the realm of integration governance and beyond.

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Appendices

(See English version below)

The topic list (in bold) used during interview can be found below. The associated interview questions give an indication of the kinds of questions that were asked.

Introductie en functie binnen Veranderopgave Inburgering

1a) Wat is uw functie binnen de context van de Veranderopgave Inburgering?

1b) Hoe lang werkt u al bij de gemeente Rotterdam, en/of hoe lang bent u al betrokken bij het onderwerp inburgering?

1c) Vanuit deze functie, wat is de kern van de verandering? Welke (nieuwe) taken passen daarbij?

Achtergrond Veranderopgave Inburgering

2) (Waarom) was deze verandering van de Wet inburgering volgens u nodig? (In het kort)

3a) Wat zijn de kernuitdagingen en mogelijkheden binnen de Veranderopgave in het algemeen en vanuit uw specifieke functie?

3b) Kunt u de organisatiestructuur waarvan uit aan deze opdracht gewerkt wordt omschrijven?

Algemeen beeld leren en beleid

4) Welke ervaringen of kennis zijn belangrijk in het maken van beslissingen in het kader van dit proces?

Leren van andere steden

5a) In hoeverre kijkt u naar de aanpak van andere steden (bijv. Amsterdam)? Of andere partners?

5b) Kunt u hiervan inzichten toepassen? Waarom is deze wel/niet?

5c) Op welke manier komen uitwisselingen tot stand?

Leren van derden

6a) Zijn er daarnaast nog informatie bronnen, zoals academici of de media?

6b) Wat voor impact hebben kritische artikelen?

6c) Wat zijn de obstakels of kansen die hier liggen?

Leren van de geschiedenis

7a) Als u deze veranderopgave vergelijk met eerdere stelsels, ziet u dan gelijkenissen of verschillen? Bijvoorbeeld het Deltaplan inburgering?

7b) Spelen de evaluaties van vorige stelsels een belangrijke rol in de huidige situatie? Op welke manier?

7c) Waarom wel/niet? Wat zijn eventuele belemmeringen in het leren van de geschiedenis?

7d) Hoe werkt dit proces? Op welke manieren wordt dit gestimuleerd? Op eigen initiatief of vanuit de organisatie?

Context van de beleidsverandering

8) Wat typeert de huidige (politieke en sociaaleconomische) context waarbinnen deze verandering plaats vindt? Binnen Rotterdam, en landelijk?

Complexiteit Veranderopgave

9a) Is het maken van inburgeringsbeleid lastiger of uitdagender dan andere onderwerpen, en zo ja, waar komt dit volgens u door?

9b) Wat is het doel van inburgering?

9c) Is het mogelijk om de kwaliteit van het inburgeringssstelsel te 'meten'? Zo ja, hoe zou dat eruit zien?

Introduction and role within Veranderopgave

1a) What is your position in the context of the *Veranderopgave Inburgering*?

1b) How long have you been working at the municipality of Rotterdam, and how long have you been involved with *inburgering?*

1c) From the perspective of your specific position what are the main characteristics of the change?

Reason for Veranderopgave Inburgering

2) (Why) was this policy change necessary according to you?

3a) What are the main challenges or opportunities that come with this policy change?

3b) Can you describe the organisational structure in responding to this policy assignment?

General idea of policy learning

4) What experiences or information do you consider when it comes to decision-making for this process within the Veranderopgave Inburgering?

Learning from other cities

5a) What role does the approach of other cities, like the G4 or service comparators play when making decisions relating to the *Veranderopgave Inburgering?*

5b) How useful are such insights?

5c) How do these exchanges materialize?

Learning from other actors

6a) Are there other sources of information that are considered, such as academic research or the media?

6b) For example, how do critical articles about the previous system influence impact your work?

6c) What are the opportunities and obstacles here?

Learning from history

7a) If you compare this coming system to earlier ones, do you see any similarities? What about the Deltaplan Inburgering?

7b) How do evaluations of earlier integration systems play a role in contemporary decision-making? In what way? Can you give an example?

7c) Why (not)? What are obstacles to learning from history?

7d) How does this process work? (In what way) is this stimulated? Own initiative or organisation-wide?

Environment of policy change

8) What would you say characterizes the environment, politically and socio-culturally, in which this policy change is taking place? In Rotterdam and nationally?

Complexity of Inburgering

9a) Would you say this policy problem is more complex than others, if so why?

9b) What is the purpose of integration policy?

9c) Do you think there are objective ways to measure the quality of an integration system? How?

Table 2 Variable i. Policy learning through social networks

	Vi. Learning from social networks including other municipalities	**Sources**	**Indicators**
Individual level	Individual efforts seeking information exchange from social networks	**Interview questions**	4, 5a-c
	Individual efforts seeking to learn from to benefit from social networks	**Interview questions**	4, 5a-c
Organizational level	Organisation-wide organized information exchange efforts through and from other municipalities or city networks	**Interview question**	5c
		Organizational practices	Meetings or structures aimed at information sharing with other municipalities/ G4/40
		Policy documents	References to practices of other cities/social networks
	Organisation-wide efforts seeking to learn from social networks	**Interview question**	5c
		Organizational practices	Establishment of networks with other organisations and maintenance of contact with service comparators
		Policy documents	References to practices of service comparators

Table 3 Variable ii. Policy Learning from internal resources and experience

	Vii. Learning from internal resources and experience	**Sources**	**Indicators**
Individual level	Individual efforts at cross-department information sharing or seeking	**Interview question**	4
	Individual efforts seeking to learn from existing evaluation reports or other peoples' experiences	**Interview questions**	7a-d
Organizational level	Organizational efforts aimed at preserving staff knowledge	**Interview question**	7d
		Organizational practices	Effective existence of evaluation reports and reference to them in new reports/meetings
		Policy documents	Explicit and implicit references to practices or data gained from of earlier integration systems.
	Organization-wide efforts at consistently developing evaluation reports, learning from feedback and stimulating cross-departmental cooperation.	**Interview questions**	7b-d
		Organizational practices	HR/Organizational practices related to maintaining staff expertise gained from experience, organization of information sharing across departments and existence of effective internal research organization(s)/practices
		Policy documents	References to earlier practices, evaluations and/or other internal experience

Table 4 Variable iii. Learning from third parties

	V3: Learning from third parties, including media and research organizations	Sources	Indicators
Individual level	Individual efforts seeking to learn from alternative information sources such as media or academic research	**Interview questions**	4, 6a-c
	Individual efforts seeking to learn from target group evaluations or other external audiences	**Interview questions**	4. 6a-c
Organizational level	Organisation-wide efforts at learning from third party actors such as (unaffiliated) research organizations or the media	**Interview questions**	6a-c
		Organizational practices	Meetings/affiliations with third party organizations or research networks as well as events to this purpose
		Policy documents	References to information/research reports provided by other actors

Table 5 Variable i. Policy learning from municipalities and city networks

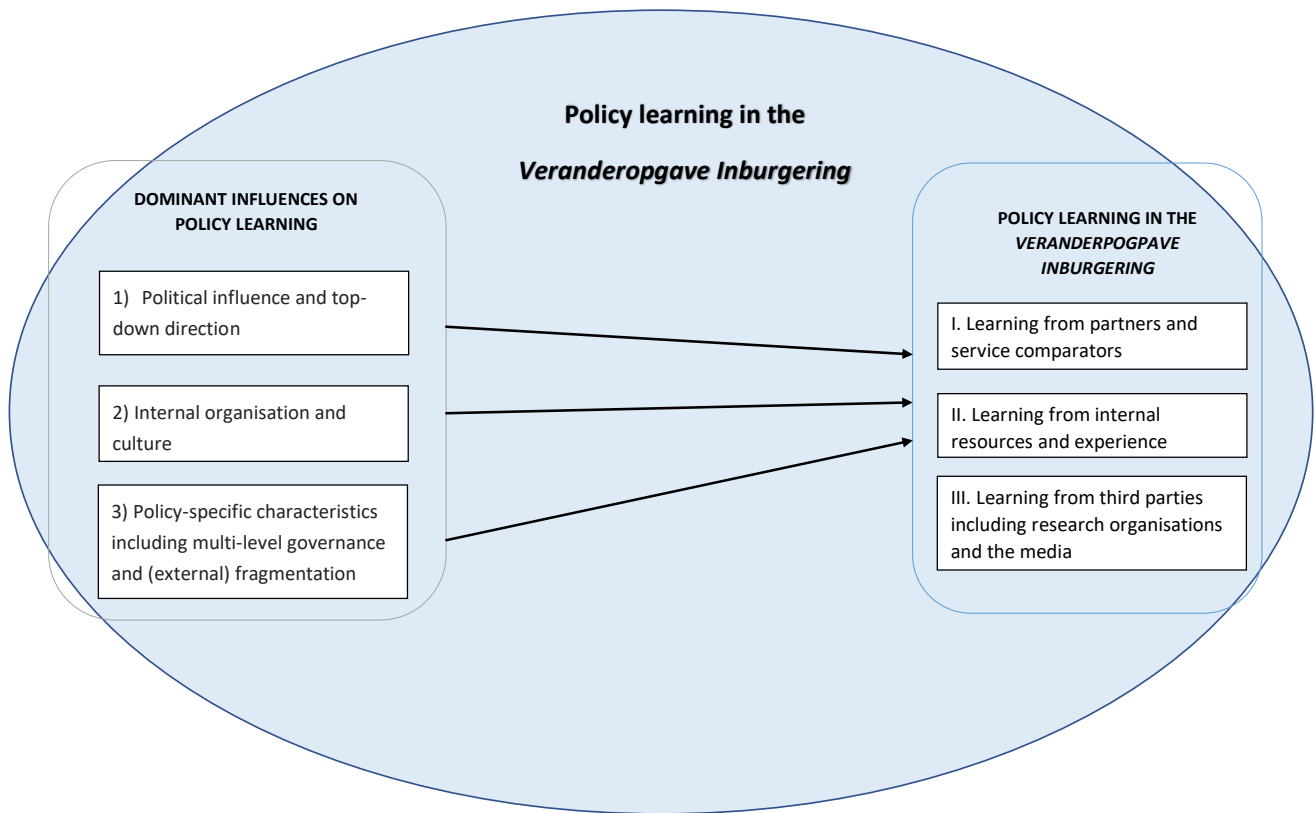|	**Vi. Learning from other municipalities and city networks**	**Sources**	**Indicators**
Individual level	Individual efforts seeking information exchange from other municipalities	**Interview questions**	4, 5a-c
	Individual efforts seeking to learn from to benefit from city networks such as the G4	**Interview questions**	4, 5a-c
Organizational level	Organisation-wide information exchange efforts through and from other municipalities	**Interview question**	5c
		Organizational practices	Meetings or structures aimed at information sharing with other municipalities/ G4/40
		Policy documents	References to practices of other cities
	Organisation-wide efforts to learn from city networks	**Interview question**	5c
		Organizational practices	References to events or conferences with this aim
		Policy documents	References to city networks such as G4, G40 or Global Cities Network

Table 6 Variable ii. Policy learning from internal resources and experience

	Vii. Learning from internal resources and experience	Sources	Indicators
Individual level	Individual efforts at cross-department information sharing or seeking	**Interview questions**	7a-d
	Individual efforts seeking to learn from existing evaluation reports or other peoples' experiences	**Interview questions**	7a-d
Organizational level	Organizational efforts aimed at preserving staff knowledge	**Interview questions**	7b-d
		Organizational practices	Effective existence of evaluation reports and reference to them in new reports/meetings
		Policy documents	Explicit and implicit references to practices or knowledge gained from of earlier integration systems
	Organisation-wide efforts at consistently developing evaluation reports, learning from feedback and stimulating cross-departmental cooperation.	**Interview questions**	7b-d
		Organizational practices	HR/Organizational practices related to maintaining staff expertise gained from experience, organization of information sharing across departments and existence of effective internal research organization(s)/practices
		Policy documents	References to earlier practices, evaluations and/or other internal experience

Table 7 Variable iii. Learning from third parties

	Viii. Learning from third parties, including media and research organizations	**Sources**	**Indicators**
Individual level	Individual efforts seeking to learn from alternative information sources such as media or academic research	**Interview questions**	6a-c
	Individual efforts seeking to learn from policy partners such as language schools or the Dutch council of Refugees	**Interview questions**	4, 6a-c
Organisational level	Organisation-wide efforts at learning from third party actors such as unaffiliated research organisations but also policy partners such as language schools	**Interview questions**	6a-c
		Organisational practices	Meetings/affiliations with third party organisations, research networks or service comparators
		Policy documents	References to information/research reports provided by other actors

Appendix IV. Original conceptual model

Policy learning in the

Veranderopgave Inburgering

DOMINANT INFLUENCES ON POLICY LEARNING

1) Political influence and top-down direction

2) Internal organisation and culture

3) Policy-specific characteristics including multi-level governance and (external) fragmentation

POLICY LEARNING IN THE
VERANDERPOGPAVE INBURGERING

I. Learning from partners and service comparators

II. Learning from internal resources and experience

III. Learning from third parties including research organisations and the media

Figure 3 Original conceptual model

Appendix V. List of respondents

Table 8 List of respondents

List of respondents	
Respondent Number	**Task within the *Veranderopgave Inburgering* or related**
R01	Relations Coordinator Language Course Providers
R02	Participation Declaration (in Dutch: Participatieverklaring), Module Labour Market & Participation and Knowledge of Dutch Society (In Dutch: (Module Arbeidsmarkt & Participatie (MAP) en Kennis Nederlandse Maatschappij (KNM))
R03	Learning Route: Z-Route & Participation Declaration, Module Social Counseling (in Dutch: Maatschappelijke Begeleiding)
R04	Learning Route: Regular Route
R05	Coordinator *civic integration* (in Dutch: inburgering) at the municipality of Rotterdam
R06	Researcher at the Municipal *Research and Business Intelligence organisation* (in Dutch: Onderzoek en Business Intelligence (OBI))
R07	Learning Route: Education Route
R08	Policymaker with previous experience Deltaplan Inburgering
R09	Personalized Integration and Participations Plans (in Dutch: Persoonlijk plan Inburgering en Participatie (PIP))
R10	Broad intake (in Dutch: brede intake) & Financial aspects (in Dutch: financieel ontzorgen)
R11	Policymaker with previous experience Deltaplan Inburgering
R12	Assignment manager of the Civic Integration Law
R13	District manager Dutch Council for Refugees (VWN)

In 1998, the Dutch government introduced the first national law on the incorporation of newcomers called the *Wet Inburgering 1998* (Wi1998). This law established a mandatory civic education program for accepted immigrants and refugees and contained courses in Dutch language as well as Dutch culture and institutions (Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers, 1998). Municipalities were made responsible for ensuring the quality of *civic* integration courses, and in exchange the newcomer was expected to take advantage of these resources. This program sought to prepare newcomers for *participation* in Dutch society. Similarly, in 1998, Rotterdam published a Memorandum 'Effective Policy on Minorities' (In Dutch: *Kadernota Effectief Allochtonenbeleid*) which acknowledged that Rotterdam no longer consisted of a homogenous Dutch population, but an ethnically homogenous one. This arguably required 'specific arrangements' to ensure that the socioeconomic and educational position of persons with a migrant background would improve over the years as these groups were still seen to be 'lagging behind' the non-migrant population (Crul, Scholten, & Laar, 2019, p. 114) (Rotterdam, 1998, p. 2). To that end, persons with a migrant background were encouraged to take advantage of existing opportunities and initiatives in the city through affirmative action-like programs.

However, in 2000s there was the so-called *assimilationist turn* in Rotterdam and Dutch integration polices more generally. In Rotterdam, multicultural policies implemented by the – until then- long dominant Labour party (*PVDA)*, were replaced by a stricter integration and immigration approach. An important focus event which changed the integration policy frame in Rotterdam was the political rise and murder of Pim Fortuyn, leader of the centre-right populist political party, "Liveable Rotterdam" (In Dutch: Leefbaar Rotterdam) (van Ostaaijen, 2019)(van Ostaaijen, 2019). Although crime rates were not rising, the perception wherein migrant integration was associated with Islam and issues relating to social decline, crime and radicalism grew more salient during this time (Crul, Scholten, & Laar, 2019, p. 116). In a stark contrast with the past, targeted measures for ethnic minorities were deemed politically undesirable amongst the right-wing coalition (Dekker & Breugel, 2019). In this context, integration policy became a deeply politicized topic of which parties profited if they 'yelled for more restrictive policies the loudest' (Kamerman & Boon, 2018).

Also at the national level, the societal debate on integration stirred up and took on a focus on identity and a critical reflection on the former multiculturalist policies: to what extent did newcomers have to assimilate or adapt to Dutch identity? (Kamerman & Boon, 2018). In this context, inquiries into the effectiveness of integration policy were conducted but an

evaluation study published by Commission-Blok (In Dutch: Commissie-Blok), which drew relative positive conclusions, did not satisfy the critical political parties at the time (Significant, 2010). In 2004, the cabinet drafted a 'Revision of the Civic Integration System' (In Dutch: Herziening van het Inburgeringsstelsel), in which it presented the outlines for a new and (allegedly) improved civic integration system.

In 2006 Rotterdam, the Labour party returned as the leading party in the coalition after the rise and fall of the right-wing party Leefbaar Rotterdam. From the period 2006 until roughly 2014, specific integration policies were largely replaced by 'participation policy' and rephrased in more general terms of socio-economic and legal-political participation (Dekker & Breugel, 2019). At the municipality itself, immigration policy disappeared as a separate policy field altogether and was placed under the responsibility of the municipal cluster 'Societal Development' (In Dutch: Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling) (Dekker & Breugel, 2019, p. 115).