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Learning in Governance

Climate Policy Integration in the European Union

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6 Learning in European Agriculture Policy, 2003–2018

Following the close examination of learning between 1985 and 2003 with a focus on the 2002–2003 Fischler reforms/*Mid-Term Review* from chapter 5, this chapter continues with a longer-term analysis of learning in greening the CAP between 2003 and 2018. The focus is on the second major greening reform pursued by Cabinet/DG Agri for the 2014–2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of the EU adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU in June 2013. The chapter first analyzes key developments in further greening the CAP before discussing when, why, and under what conditions learning occurred and the extent to which it influenced the policy outcome. It finds that learning occurred in several but not all aspects, a group of policy entrepreneurs played a key role in pushing for a policy outcome, and this policy outcome was less the result of learning on the organizational level than the result of how the institutional machinery of the EU works.

Greening the Common Agricultural Policy, 2003–2018

2008 “Health Check”

The 2008 mini-reform termed Health Check first introduced the objective of addressing climate change into the CAP (European Council 2009). This marked the first instance of specific CPI. It coincided with the 20-20-20 Strategy set out in the Climate and Energy Package to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent (compared to 1990 by 2020), increase renewable energies to 20 percent of the total, and increase energy efficiency by 20 percent (EC 27; EC 2008a; European Council 2007), and paved the way for reframing EPI into CPI. Besides phasing out milk quotas, assisting some sectors with special problems, and improving intervention mechanisms, the Health Check 2008 further strengthened cross-compliance and

reduced red tape (i.e., bureaucracy) by simplifying the rules (European Council 2009). Overall, the Health Check recognized climate change as a challenge but did not address the issue via increased carbon sinks. It even took a step backward by abolishing the requirement that farmers set aside 10 percent of their arable land for ecological focus areas (European Council 2009).

Common Agricultural Policy 2014–2020

Greening the CAP (EC 2011b; 2011c) was one of the flagship initiatives of the climate mainstreaming approach (EC 2013) proposed by the European Commission in 2011 for the 2014–2020 MFF of the EU (EC 2011a). This CPI was applied to policies that do not automatically contribute to climate mitigation but require intervention through legislation, conditionality, and financial instruments (Rietig 2013). The major change for the first pillar was to dedicate 30 percent of direct payments to agricultural practices that are beneficial for the climate and the environment. The expected benefits for climate mitigation included enhanced carbon content of the soil (EC 20; EC 24). The second pillar facilitates rural development through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). A key objective of the second pillar on rural development was climate action through the sustainable management of natural resources, primarily by facilitating the shift toward a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy in agriculture (EC 2011c; European Council 2013). Thus, 25 percent of the total contribution from EAFRD was to be devoted to the rural development programs on climate mitigation, adaptation, and land management (European Council 2013).

These steps in themselves could be regarded both as CPI and EPI according to criteria set forth in the literature (Lafferty and Hovden 2003; Jordan and Lenschow 2010; Rietig 2013). They contribute to reducing emissions by increasing carbon sinks (e.g., through set-aside of land), adapting to negative climate impacts, and reducing the negative environmental impacts of agriculture. The actual CPI and environmental mitigation ambitions of the Commission's proposal (EC 2011b; EC 2011c) and the policy outcome (European Council 2013) were criticized by ENGOs as too small, focusing only on small political compromises:

Everybody agrees with greening because they need to justify the money that is behind it, but the problem is that, if you really go to, OK, and now we are talking serious, not big politics anymore, it's very difficult for them to really make it change. . . . The environment is very attractive to put a big green label on. (ENGO 2)

The three interest groups introduced in the previous chapter still existed in the 2014–2020 CAP negotiations. The ENGOs and Green Party representatives in the European Parliament called for ambitious reform, or otherwise radically reducing payments to farmers who are not serving the public good of environmental protection. The European Commission favored moderate reforms to maintain the CAP, and the agricultural industry worked to preserve the status quo. Most member states remained in support of the agricultural industry, including Germany:

What was quite obvious is that the influence of the agricultural lobby, the German and the European, decreased recently, at least on the Commission and the proposals that came from the Commission. The influence of the agricultural lobby on Germany is still immensely high, but Germany is only one player. The German minister for agriculture, Mrs [Ilse] Aigner, essentially represents the position of the agricultural lobby in Brussels. (MS 4)

The European Commission focused on its justification of the greening aspects, which can be seen as a continuation of the MacSharry 1992, Agenda 2000 and *Mid-Term Review* 2003 Fischler reforms, and on the need to listen to public opinion and the increasing criticism of the CAP. The CAP, however, is a fairly complex policy not featuring high in public opinion and drawing limited attention from the media (ENGO 3). This de facto limits the discussion to smaller circles—that is, “clearly when the politicians feel the heat from public opinion, then they take action. The big problem . . . [is that] the CAP is constructed in such an obscure and complex way . . . that there is very little public debate about it” (ENGO 3). As a result, “most citizens don’t have a clue, sorry, what is going on in Brussels and what agricultural policy is; there is only a very small percentage in the population [who knows and cares]” (MS 4).

Nevertheless, the food scares of the 1990s, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), resulted in an increasing interest of ENGOs, consumers, and the wider society in European agriculture. This group represents “the other 99 percent” (EC 21) of stakeholders, as agriculture has a profound impact on human health via food safety and environmental conditions. The policy outcome was a continuous adjustment of the CAP and a gradual shift toward the public goods model over a period of thirty years. This was both driven and supported by the changing public opinion on the CAP, the perception of which prompted policymakers to agree to adjustments in order to preserve the CAP overall in the period of 1985–2003. In particular, ENGOs were interpreted by key policymakers in the European Commission and the European Parliament as representatives of public opinion that could not be ignored in policymaking:

So I think you have this shift in public opinion, the shift in the positions of NGOs and as well the role of the academic debate, you see concepts coming into play in a way which I think is much more talking to the agricultural debate on greening. (EC 25)

Learning on the Individual Level

Learning on the individual level depends strongly on the preexisting knowledge of the involved individuals. The learning curve is very steep if the individual had only limited involvement with the policy field and takes in much new information within a short period of time (see chapter 2).

Members of the European Parliament

The codecision procedure for the CAP introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon (Craig 2010; Roederer-Rynning and Schimmelfenning 2012) broadens the factual and experiential learning to the MEPs. These were confronted with new information and more closely deliberated the 2014–2020 CAP reform than they did when the EU member state's ministers in the Agriculture Council previously decided on the CAP. Therefore, there was a considerable amount of factual and experiential learning among MEPs (EP 1; EP 2; EP 3; EP 5; EP 6; EP 7; EP 8). At the same time, the learning of individual MEPs also depended on their previous expertise in agricultural policy, which was heterogeneous throughout the Agricultural Committee in the European Parliament:

Some of the MEPs in [the Agricultural Committee in the European Parliament], they have a wealth of experience and expertise and other people—agriculture might only be their second or third committee and it's very much of minority interest, and you can tell from the sort of fairly superficial level of their questions and interventions that [their expertise is on a] rudimentary level, so we have a very great range [of expertise]. (EP 10)

MEPs are presented with a large number of studies, position papers, and requests to take the positions of interest groups into account. MEPs across different parties and from different member states pointed out that they listened to the input provided by the different interest groups, and then reflected on what input best mirrored their political objectives and their electorate's preferences (EP 1; EP 2; EP 4; EP 5). Thus, they filtered information based on its perceived usefulness with preexisting political objectives (EP 2; EP 3).

Experiential learning was stronger in the European Parliament than factual learning. The key reasons for this were constraints on the time and resources needed to closely engage with the studies and reports due to very

full working schedules and individual MEPs' involvements with many issue areas (EP 6; EP 7; EP 8). They reported that they lacked the time to reflect sufficiently on detailed factual knowledge, and thus tended to prefer personal conversations with experts and representatives of interest groups to ask them about the key facts they needed to know:

I have to be clear on that; a politician is only as good as his team. I am absolutely convinced of that. When I have 10, 14 appointments per day, . . . then I can't sit in the office and read [scientific studies] for hours. I simply can't. Okay, I can read a few things during meetings . . . , but I am also limited and need my six hours of sleep. . . . I have to rely on my assistants to analyze the flood of knowledge, but even that is not possible. I prefer to talk to scientists rather than reading their studies. (EP 2)

Engaging with stakeholders, lobbyists, and experts was a key method for MEPs to determine their preferences, gain factual knowledge, and form their own position:

They form their position [by] listening what other people think, and I mean . . . , they need to listen what their party says, they need to listen to what the national people say, so they have to follow the government, if they are in government or they have to follow the position. (ENGO 2)

The previous expertise and the quality of the advisors played a key role, given that MEPs relied on their previous knowledge and the policy briefs that they received from their advisors (EP 1; EP 2; EP 5; EP 10). The advisors, however, were frequently in a weak position to provide substantial technical advice, as they were predominantly preoccupied with administrative and organizational issues:

It's difficult for them. It's very difficult. [Advisors] only [gain expertise] if they really have a file that's their job to work on. Of course, you have certain people, certain of the chairs they have, advisers that work specifically on certain things [than] they have more capacity. But your average MEP assistant will have difficulties to follow things in depth, which is understandable, I mean I wouldn't want to go to their inbox everyday, they probably get like 200 or 300 emails that they have to deal with and they organize events. . . . A lot of them have to deal with all the logistics. . . . [They don't have a] specific secretary for that. (ENGO 2)

While advisors to MEPs frequently struggled to engage deeply in issues, given their administrative duties, the advisors of the parliamentary groups had more scope to gain expertise and participate in the debate as knowledgeable advisors:

I think it would be a fair generalization to say the MEPs assistants, they tend to be the youngest and the generalists. Then there is quite a large degree of influence and

within the political groups resting on the shoulders of the political group advisers and they do have that background and specialization and they are able to help the thinking and evolution of the policy positions amongst the political groups. (EP 10)

This time pressure hindered the development of in-depth expert knowledge during the CAP negotiations; however, experiential learning did occur because the meetings with stakeholders, interest groups, and discussions among MEPs in their political groups took up considerable time, and MEPs learned by being involved in the policymaking process. The setup of the European Parliament thus encouraged MEPs to specialize in an area where they can draw on previous expertise based on their education or professional work experience (EP 2; EP 3; EP 4; EP 5). The level of previous expertise also influenced how easily an MEP changed their policy design beliefs based on factual input. If an MEP knew little about the details of a policy proposal such as the CAP reform, they could be convinced by lobbyists more easily, as this environmental lobbyist points out:

Most of the time, you just convince people who don't know about an issue fully, which is part of the thing and then they will go check it, of course, and maybe they don't agree. (ENGO 2)

It is also important to acknowledge that only a few individuals, such as the rapporteur and the shadow rapporteur, were closely involved in the decision-making, drafting of legislation, and chairing of the committee meetings and negotiations with the European Commission and the Council. These individuals were already experts in the policy area as expertise, and personal affinity is a key self-selection criterion for engaging in certain committees and volunteering/being proposed to serve as a rapporteur (EP 4; EP 5; EP 10). A longtime observer of the CAP reform policy process concluded that

the standard of the debate in the Parliament is very poor. . . . They [the MEPs] are not really engaged, it's more like grand gestures, just irritating, somewhat they are discussing is more like a 1990s version of farmers' interests. . . . The lack of knowledge is a huge problem in the Parliament. They don't understand the policy; it's interests and politics. And we write reports to the Secretariat . . . and when you go to a public hearing, there a few of them, not a lot, including the chairman, that are very informed, but a lot of them just listen to their lobbyists. At the end of the day, its boring studying policies, there are thousands of studies, tedious regulations and details; it's hard work frankly. So they are not really motivated, you know, and because they never really had to do it in the past. So they are not really on top of it. (ENGO 5)

Therefore, experiential and factual learning did occur among MEPs, but it was also to be expected as a normal part of the codecision policymaking

process. Empirical findings strongly point to the key role of individuals in powerful coordination positions, such as the rapporteurs, who due to their high expertise had a less steep learning curve. As the European Parliament was involved in the codecision process for the CAP for the first time (Roederer-Rynning and Schimmelfenning 2012), it is to be expected that an increasing number of MEPs that were reelected to the European Parliament in the 2019 elections engaged in more factual learning and experiential learning as the negotiations for the 2021–2027 CAP reform and MFF went under way.

The limited capacity for factual learning on the individual level due to lack of resources and overwhelming time pressure also became a relevant hindering factor for the European Parliament's overall effective participation in the trilogue, as a member of the European Commission concluded after the negotiations:

It was a problem of the proposals from the very beginning that they tackled too many things at once. . . . Especially the Parliament was kind of overwhelmed. They did not have enough staff. They always felt unfairly treated when the Commission appeared with twenty people and the Council appeared with twenty people and they were sitting there with one rapporteur with one or two assistants and five shadows . . . so they were complaining about this lack of in-depth knowledge and discussions about these things. (EC 19)

The deeper beliefs of individuals also matter, particularly as a baseline to determine whether constructivist learning occurred. These deeper beliefs were frequently formed early, but they do not necessarily determine the professional pathway into a green political party or environmental ministry. Individuals can hold deeper beliefs in favor of environmental protection and climate action while working in environmentally unrelated areas, such as this MEP in the agriculture committee of the European Parliament, who was not a member of a green party:

I have always been someone who is particularly mindful of the environment. I come from the antinuclear movement . . . and was leading every demonstration. . . . No, I did not change in this regard; I was already actively supporting the environmental cause as a young person. (EP 2)

Learning among Key Actors in the European Commission

For policy proposals to succeed through the various stages of the hierarchy, individual policymakers needed to convince their colleagues at the European Commission of the proposals' economic soundness and political feasibility, and their personal reputation is also on the line:

If it is scientifically sound, also in terms of experience, [individuals can push policy proposals to the higher levels of the European Commission hierarchy]. But if you realize a proposal is not received well, in terms of expertise or politically, then you won't let the colleague make the proposal alone or you motivate the colleague that he checks with the other [units or DGs]. . . . This is a learning process. If your proposal is received well, then you know you have the right message. . . . There are constant checks and balances. (EC 22)

They emphasize their constant reflection on their own working experience and the input they received from experts both inside and outside the Commission:

I critically examine new input; I try to include the new input from my daily work into discussions, as well as to test ideas and their validity. In these discussions, many new thoughts and aspects emerge. This is essentially a combination of new insights, new links, especially in empirical work, plus a consolidation and reconstruction of experience and expertise. This needs to be redeveloped within new framework conditions of fact-based parameters. (EC 21)

This individual reflection process also widened toward reflection and knowledge gains on the intraorganizational level within the European Commission:

[Permanent reflection] is of course something that is not communicated to the outside. . . . [The Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development] had a very intensive phase throughout the first six months. I can show you how many hundred thousands of pages have been exchanged [between the Commission and the Council presidency]. (EC 22)

Reflection on the input primarily resulted in changed policy detail beliefs, while deeper beliefs and policy design beliefs were more difficult to change. Interviewees emphasized that it was important to continuously repeat the key message and to keep presenting evidence in order to convince individuals that were members of an opposing coalition (e.g., EC 15; EC 22; EC 23; EC 24; ENGO 3; EP 1; EP 2; EP 5; Industry 1; Industry 4; Industry 5). Several individuals changed their policy design beliefs (i.e., about the overall direction and continued existence of the CAP) when dialogues with stakeholders widened their perspective to take into account aspects that were previously not part of their thinking, and therefore decision-making (ENGO 3; EP 5). ENGOs especially addressed this more emotional level when they facilitated policymakers' experiential learning by trying to make policymakers better understand the potential and real impacts:

Part of it is emotional, moral issues. Picturing the things. One thing that makes a lot of difference with officials is if they see things, if you are able to take them to a countryside, or if you are able to talk to them about a place they know in their

home country and you say, “Think about that region, and that other region, this is because this has happened here and that has happened there.” Then sometimes it clicks and you get through. So there is a more rational knowledge part, and there is a more if you want emotional identification thing because as long as something is a statistic it does not really talk to you, but if you in your summer house you spend the summer holidays and you know there is “Ah yes, there is always this beautiful grassland with lots of flowers, but now they have plowed it up and the flowers are gone.” It often helps people to actually open up to the facts because the facts on their own don’t really turn around people. (ENGO 3)

Factual and experiential learning also occurred when policymakers were exposed to potential unintended consequences. Dialogues with stakeholders such as ENGOs and consumer groups equipped them with new perspectives that were outside their usual sources. This exposure to new aspects of policy that had not been a considerable factor in previous decision-making to date triggered learning via shifting policy design beliefs when individuals not only reflected on the input, but as a consequence also changed these beliefs and adapted them to the new frame. In particular, repeating the same message proved successful (EC 22; EC 24; EC 25; ENGO 5) at getting individual policymakers to change their fundamental position on the policy in the long term and to take into account environmental considerations:

You keep talking to people and slowly, slowly it sinks. Some people turn around and we have seen some officials in DG Agri that over the years have come from not even knowing what the environment is to at least understanding that they have a role to play and caring about it, trying to make a difference. With other people, you never get through. (ENGO 3)

In the CAP negotiations, individuals working for the Commission also engaged in experiential learning when they reflected on their experiences throughout the policymaking process and arrived at conclusions that are relevant for the next negotiation round:

I would say we need to much more look into simplifying the complex scientific basics because just stating something like “Permanent grassland is good” . . . [was] taken apart by lobbyists and the people briefed, they couldn’t counter specific arguments because they didn’t have the background knowledge so the information then needs to be much more relayed, transferred, explained. The Parliament [was] . . . lacking a lot of technical explanations, so that’s where we tried to come in. (EC 19)

In consequence, how much individuals learned in the policymaking process depended on their existing knowledge, experience, and beliefs. Overall, the learning curve of individuals at the European Commission was less

steep than the learning curve of the MEPs who were first involved in the CAP reform, except those individuals who were new to CAP negotiations. By continuously being involved in the CAP reform process over decades, and by beginning to prepare the next CAP reform once the previous one had been decided, the civil servants at DG Agri accumulated more experience in reforming the CAP, but they added only marginally to their already vast experience, and especially expertise. In particular, CAP reform toward a public goods model remains the domain of a handful of experts inside the European Commission's DG Agri. By integrating climate considerations, the circle of experts widened; however, the key individuals in other directorate generals involved with CAP aspects moved from key positions within DG Agri to their current posts (e.g., EC 20; EC 22; EC 25). The European commissioner, Dacian Cioloș, held strong deeper and policy design beliefs before his specific involvement began (EC 2010):

That is clearly his personal conviction that this is necessary and needed for the European farm industry. It is his absolutely deep conviction. Yes, I think he probably always had this kind of conviction. It's just the reality. He is a great expert in agriculture, he is an agronomist, so he knows about agriculture as a professional, and I think he also sees the reality out there that some elements of our policy have led to situations, which are hardly explainable. And we spent a lot of money for problems that we are having, so we need the instrument of the CAP, which is a very powerful instrument because of the money, to change direction. (EC 24)

Thus, few actors changed or formed their underlying beliefs during the drafting and negotiations of the proposal; rather, they acted in line with their preexisting beliefs as policy entrepreneurs in order to align the policy outcome with their own underlying beliefs.

Learning among Representatives of Member States

The civil servants and politicians negotiating on behalf of their member states via the Council working groups could be seen as similar experts to those in the European Commission, with the limitation of national capacities and career structures. Some countries have a generalist civil service structure that encourages frequent rotations between policy fields and making the development of a specialist culture difficult. The majority of the interviewed negotiators, however, had a similar track record of involvement with agriculture policy as the civil servants at the European Commission. The key difference was the member state representatives' specific expertise on the particularities of their home countries' agricultural sectors and their

understanding of the likely positive or negative economic impacts of the European Commission's proposals. Their knowledge on other countries' agricultural sectors tended to be limited. Much learning among member state representatives in the Council was factual learning regarding the agricultural sectors in other countries:

So I think some of the arguments from those member states did influence our opinion because you get to learn a bit more about exactly how different types of agriculture work in other member states and therefore can see how some of the provisions might impact them in a way we wouldn't have instinctively known about because we don't really understand how agriculture in those member states works. So it certainly was a bit of learning to that extent. (MS 10)

As with industry lobbyists, the representatives of member states had to continue to represent their countries' positions in the negotiation regardless of whether their personal underlying beliefs were aligned with their countries' position. Thus, it is not possible to determine whether the individual beliefs of any of the negotiators changed.

Learning on the Organizational Level

Individuals did learn while being involved in reforming the CAP, whereby their learning was predominantly experiential and factual. Beliefs changed over longer time periods, together with the shifts in the sociopolitical landscape, but these belief changes toward greening can also be understood as strategic response to maintain the CAP. In this section, I examine the organizational level, which is crucial for learning to be reflected in the policy outcome, and the links between learning on the individual and organizational levels.

Links between Learning on the Individual and Organizational Levels

As outlined in chapter 2, the key forum for learning to be transmitted from the individual level to the organizational level are committee meetings and other opportunities for exchanging views, forming common positions, and attempting to convince the other side of a proposal. In the CAP reforms, there are several areas where learning on the organizational level occurred, including forming a common point of view among individuals working within one unit or directorate within DG Agri or between the Cabinet of the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development and his directorate general, as well as between different directorate generals of the European Commission. It furthermore refers to changes in knowledge, experience,

and beliefs resulting from the interaction between representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament and Council, as well as nonnational stakeholder groups such as ENGOs and agricultural lobbying organizations. The organizational learning literature focuses on factual and especially experiential learning that can be transferred from the individual to the organization (e.g., Kim 1993; March and Olsen 1975), and even result in changed goals when the previous goal is judged to be inadequate upon reflection, which is referred to as double-loop learning (Argyris 1976; Argyris and Schön 1978).

The third aspect presented in the section on learning levels in chapter 2 was constructivist learning on the organizational level, which would be evidenced by changes in the negotiation position of a governmental organization or NGO as the result of a change in beliefs, particularly normative beliefs related to an overall policy objective or the design of a specific policy instrument. The prerequisite is that the organization reflected on new input (e.g., in the form of scientific studies), such as the European Commission in standardized reflection processes:

Those colleagues [of the European Commission] who are working on relevant aspects prepare and sometimes participate in the Council working groups. This is supported so that the Commission receives feedback [from the member states]. In the current phase this does not result in changes to the proposal, but it results in a constant reflection process in which we reconsider whether the proposal is realistic, whether we have to talk to our hierarchy to adapt it and so on. This is a permanent reflection process, permanently. This is of course something that doesn't leak to the outside. But we had a very intensive reflection phase during the first six months. I can show you how many hundred thousand pages were exchanged. (EC 22)

The European Commission, and particularly the EU member states, came to the conclusion during various CAP reform negotiation processes that it was in their interest to adapt their position in the light of new evidence:

We observed regularly that those positions originally taken by the member states resulted in legal problems and explained to them why and how their position results in legal and administrative obstacles. This usually resulted in a change in the member states' negotiation position. Furthermore, when the Commission pointed towards practical difficulties in implementing the amendment, those who proposed it usually withdrew it subsequently. (EC 23)

Such changes in negotiation positions among the member states in the Council were frequently a result of factual learning as opposed to constructivist learning when they gained new information and concluded that their core interests were better served by changing the negotiation position.

Learning in the trilogues among the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission remained predominantly factual and experiential. Constructivist learning, evidenced by changes in negotiation positions based on reflection on arguments and key actors' accounts of changed beliefs due to convincing arguments, could not be detected on the organizational level. In particular, a change in the negotiation position could be evidence for factual, experiential, or constructivist learning on the organizational level, depending on the reasons for this change. If the organization reflected on other negotiation parties' arguments and came to change underlying beliefs, this shift in negotiation position could be regarded as constructivist learning. If, however, the change in the negotiation position were the result of reflection on new information and adjustment of the position still with the goal of achieving preset goals (i.e., correction of an error), it would be factual learning. If the shift were based on the reflection on previous experience (e.g., with a policy in a member state), it would be experiential learning on the organizational level. Negotiators involved in the CAP emphasized the importance of trust and knowing each other facilitating a reflection on the arguments of the negotiation counterparts from other member states:

We get to know them very well. . . . It can either make you think, "Oh they've actually got a point. I understand why they want that." I'm more likely to agree with them now. Sometimes it can work the other way and you can understand why . . . it's really important to them and think "well okay, that's fine, but I'm going to want something," but actually that doesn't make any difference [to us] . . . whether they get it or not. But if we're to agree with them, I'm going to want something in return. I think it's always, talking to other member states and to colleagues, you can learn a lot, which will help in negotiations. Sometimes it can actually hinder them, but you have to be careful you don't say too much or make it seem . . . too important because sometimes I think it can potentially lead to other member states thinking, "Well if it's so important to them, I understand why, but I'm going to want something in return for agreeing to it." It can work both ways. Sometimes it helps a lot. Sometimes it leads to a bit of playing games. (MS 10)

This kind of learning can be understood as factual learning on the organizational level (i.e., among member states about one another's positions). The individual negotiators used this knowledge to determine other member-states' negotiation margins on issues that they might be able to agree on if the others made certain concessions. This strategizing, however, falls into the category of political learning described by Radaelli (2009) and May (1992) on how to use information and gain experience to better maneuver through the negotiation process in order to achieve preset objectives. The learning described by the member state negotiator interviewed in

MS 10, however, was limited to gathering information about the other side's negotiation margin, and thus it falls into the category of factual learning.

It is important to analytically distinguish between an adjustment in the negotiation position based on the realization that the previous position was based on incomplete information, normal negotiation behavior, and a genuine change in beliefs, which goes beyond an interest-based rationalization via the incorporation of new values in the area of deeper beliefs. A key example would be the forming of a consensus within DG Agri that it is important to consider climate objectives in the future reform rounds of the CAP. In the negotiations between the European Commission and the European Parliament and Council, however, constructivist learning remained rare and changes in negotiation positions could be understood as bargaining in negotiations based on predetermined interests:

Partly the Commission succeeds in convincing its negotiation partners why the Commission proposal makes sense. In other areas this was not successful. . . . [The reason is that] the member states or the Parliament simply did not understand the value added of the proposal, or if you want to interpret it this way, the Commission did not succeed in illustrating the value added. This is often the case in areas where there is existing legislation and it's more advantageous for member states to reject the Commission proposal and to maintain the status quo. (EC 23)

This was confirmed by a key member state negotiator:

I think at the beginning of a negotiation like that on greening, everybody's got very strong principles and everybody thinks, "No, we need greening that is meaningful, that delivers real environmental benefit." To be honest, towards the end of the negotiations, then people [member states] accept things they just would not have done twelve months ago. In the end, I think, all member states accepted things that other member states wanted, ultimately in return for getting the flexibility they needed. So there were some things that were agreed I think as part of greening that we would argue from an environmental point of view, they don't make a huge amount of sense, and I think early in the negotiations we fought quite hard against them. Ultimately, when it comes to the end, you prioritize what's important in your own member-state and are more willing to accept things that other member-states will do that you don't necessarily agree with. So positions change quite a lot over the course of negotiations. People do become a little bit more flexible the further on we got, as long as they get what they feel they need in their own member-states. (MS 10)

Changes in the negotiation positions within the trilogue on CAP reform within the 2014–2020 EU budget, however, could be linked to alternative explanations instead of learning, and thus could be regarded as part of the negotiation process. In particular, informal methods of arriving at an agreement relatively quickly could be mistaken for constructivist learning:

Someone in the Commission writes a compromise proposal, which officially does not exist. The Council Presidency presents that text as proposal of the Council Presidency. Where it has been written is officially not known. . . . The presidency knows it, the advisors in the Parliament; this is an informal procedure in the trilogues. Then there is the trilogue meeting in the Parliament, where the Commission representatives arrive with their official negotiation mandate. The Commission representatives can change their position, but this requires approval by the College of Commissioners. . . . Informal negotiations to find a compromise position also strongly depend on the level of trust between the negotiators. (EC 23)

As in the drafting process, policy entrepreneurs also played an important role in the 2014–2020 negotiations. In particular, the setup of the trilogue negotiations that included only a very limited number of negotiators was well suited to knowledgeable policy entrepreneurs determined to achieve their objectives. The representative of the Council presidency was seen as such an individual, especially due to his background as a former MEP:

He has a strong capacity to convince people. As a minister he tries to convince personally. He is very much personally involved in the negotiations. I noticed how he was with the fisheries, working until four o'clock in the morning, running around, and discussing with colleague ministers. He is very much involved. He shows a deep involvement and that it is in combination with [his experience as] . . . a member of European Parliament. . . . The Irish have a very good capacity to be very practical, to be very open, honest, and very pragmatic. They bring with them a culture of wheeling and dealing, so I think they very much have the capacity to come up with a deal and what I said about [the lead negotiator] . . . , he is I think the only minister in the Agricultural Council from the twenty-seven member states who has a life experience in European Parliament, and he knows the ways of how these guys operate. He knows them personally, so that gives him in my view an extra capacity to work with them and to come up with a deal. (MS 4)

Learning was not necessarily transferred from the individual level to the organizational level due to psychological hindering factors, especially the fear of making mistakes. There were indications that this may have resulted in the tendency in some cases to place following orders and bureaucratic path dependencies over reflection on the feasibility of measures such as sacrificing animal welfare over compliance with identification requirements. This was exacerbated by the 2008–2013 economic and eurozone crises:

The Commission is very terrorized by [the fear of making mistakes]. And they are getting, they get of course auditors and they can have a better audit, they can't have an error rate beyond the certain percentage and all of these things are making them really afraid of doing something because they are in a financial crisis and the Euro is going to fall up but also tells them probably every day that if . . . something

goes wrong, it's another reason to kill the European Union, you know, UK will go out and Greece will go out and they can't have it. So they need to make sure that everything goes well, no bad press, no problems. But in all of that, they lose basically the creativity and the possibility for them to make a real difference. (ENGO 2)

In conclusion, reflection occurred on the organizational level, which is crucial for the progress of the negotiations between the policymaking organizations and the policy outcome. However, factual and experiential learning remained dominant in the CAP negotiations, whereby it could also be mistaken for constructivist learning if the reasons for changing the negotiation positions are not explored sufficiently:

I think people involved in the negotiations [from the Commission side] generally learn from each other. They do reflect, they go to the meetings, we certainly learn, we think, but there is also a lot of defending either the status quo, which we understand, or national interests, that's very, very powerful. (ENGO 5)

Reinforcing Policy Design and Policy Detail Beliefs on the Public Goods Rationale to Preserve the Common Agricultural Policy

Similar to previous rationales for preserving the CAP by responding to the public money for public goods demands by increasing greening measures (see chapter 5 on a more detailed analysis on the origin of the public goods rationale between 1985 and 2003). The next major CAP reform for the 2014–2020 MFF continued on this greening pathway to maintain public support for subsidizing European agriculture. Key policy entrepreneurs recognized the need for further reforms:

What we have to do in the CAP is, yes, we have to change, this is what we believe in if this policy is to have a future, yes it will have to adapt. The question is always do you want to sit in the driving seat with the industry, do we want to do it ourselves as being responsible for the policy, or do we wait until the public pressure and the pressure from climate change, and environment, until every soil is destroyed in Europe, do we wait until then until we are forced to do these changes? And the choice the Commission has made is let's take the initiative as long as we had the right to take the initiative. (EC 24)

Based on this rationale, Commissioner Ciolos emphasized the link between greening and CPI in a key statement sketching out the path of the next CAP reform, while also asking for input on a multitude of questions related to sustainable agriculture in a wide public consultation (EC 2010):

The first communication of our Commissioner Ciolos when he came in the Commission in 2010, he made this speech on I think April 12, 2010, in the European Parliament in which he said societal justification of the huge amount of money which is spent yearly on the CAP is something we need and that was for him to

signal the greening policy. . . . That is a major step towards bringing in line the CAP with societal desires and bringing in the concept of societal justification of the money spent on the agricultural policy. (MS 4)

The shared underlying belief that the CAP needs to be preserved has become a conviction and central motivation for the 2014–2020 CAP reform, as a key actor pointed out:

The public consultation supported this, but it were clearly two ideas: one is it is needed for the environment, for the soils, biodiversity, carbon leakage; it is needed for other environmental challenges. It is needed, this is our conviction, A. And B, it is needed because the public asks for goods by farmers that go beyond the food production. (EC 24)

Like in previous reforms, the European Commission did not observe as a neutral actor once its reform proposal was published. Rather, it influenced the negotiations using its expertise and acumen in steering the decision-making process:

My understanding of [the European Commission's activities] through the trilogue process certainly is that they were very much negotiating as well and had their own negotiating strategy, had their own tactics for getting the things that really mattered to them. I mean there is a period in the negotiations where they sit back a little bit more and let member states argue it out amongst themselves, but I think ultimately it was very clearly they had their own negotiating priorities as well. . . . At the beginning, they were very defensive about their proposals, and it took a long time before they were willing to really discuss changes. It may have even been as much as a year before they explained their proposals in working groups but weren't really willing to consider any changes. In the end, they became much more flexible because they frankly just had to be. (MS 10)

Motivated by the objective to maintain the CAP as Europe's largest subsidy program, Commissioner Ciolos and his cabinet initiated a public consultation process with the intention of demonstrating the overwhelming public support for strengthening the greening and CPI components, and thus further greening the CAP. The public consultation reduced the influence of the agricultural industry lobby, as it opened a space for ENGOs and other actors in favor of more greening. Thus, it confirmed the preexisting position that more greening and CPI were needed:

The Commission's position coincides since several years rather with our position. I know the head of the Agriculture Cabinet, I don't want to say well, but we met several times and I know reliably that the Commission wants to go into this direction. Because of that there are also the ecological focus areas, which the Commission itself proposed. (MS 4)

Commissioner Ciolos and His Team as Policy Entrepreneurs

The European Commission not only acts on behalf of shifting public opinion and overall societal consensus, but it also takes an active role in manufacturing this very public consensus as a justification for its policy proposals and as a tactic to convince the member state's ministers in the Council.

The negotiation dynamics regarding the 2014–2020 CAP reform were fairly similar to the Fischler CAP reform. The civil servants involved in this reform were predominantly the same individuals who had already contributed to the Agenda 2000 and Fischler reforms, with some involvement even dating to the 1992 MacSharry reforms (EC 21; EC 22; EC 24; EC 25). Ciolos, the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, was the Romanian minister of agriculture, and he acted based on his deeper beliefs and policy design beliefs that greening and CPI are crucial to maintain the CAP and used them to contribute to sustainable development, as discussed in the previous section. He decided to capture the sociopolitical consensus for strengthening the public goods model of the CAP in the next reform, with a wide-reaching public consultation that received more than 6,000 submissions from all kinds of civil society and consumer organizations, ENGOs, and farm lobbyists.

What is a new approach we have chosen in this reform, it all started with a big political debate and a big conference where we invited all the stakeholders, and not only the farmers, and this process has been ongoing now for two years. . . . We are not doing anything else than just translating the reality out there into policy. So it's very difficult for a politician, for a minister, in any given member state to say, "I am against greening. I am against the fact that farmers should deliver more public goods. I am against better standards for biodiversity. I am against better quality of soils I am against better quality of water." It's very difficult to say that for any politician at the moment in Europe. And we are not doing anything else. (EC 24)

Participants in the 2014–2020 CAP reform suggested that the public consultation was a strategic move by the Agriculture Cabinet to demonstrate the far-reaching public support for their greening objectives:

Oh, I think that the head of cabinet is the thinker behind the Commissioner, but that the Commissioner sketched out the direction. There was, this was tactically very skilled by the Cabinet, this relatively early integration of all groups in this stakeholder process, where was asked before any proposals were made by the Commission, what society expects from agriculture policy. . . . Then there was a big conference in Brussels around March 2010 where everyone had another opportunity to make a statement. Then they analyzed the contributions and it was cleverly orchestrated in this case that they were able to develop their ideas out of the question catalog and set their mandate. Yes, the overwhelming majority

of the European citizens, associations, and organizations would like to see a shift in agriculture policy towards nature, climate, and environmental protection. So, there is a demand for greening agriculture policy. This is what [the Agriculture Cabinet] concluded from this huge stakeholder process. And this was of course done very sophisticatedly. Therefore, because you asked me about who had more influence, I think it was both, but the head of cabinet, when you talk to him, you notice that he has thought things through. He is really fascinating. And since he is from Austria, I think this comes not at a surprise, as the Austrians have always been the most progressive in implementing agri-environmental measures. (MS 4)

This strategy facilitated the negotiations with the EU member states and the opposing status quo coalition, consisting of the agricultural industry lobby and some member states. The CAP reform coalition within the European Commission thus demonstrated that there is a sociopolitical consensus in the wider public, collected the evidence for this via conferences, workshops, and stakeholder consultations, and summarized it in its policy proposal (EC 2011b, 2011c). Representatives of the European Commission thus acted again as policy entrepreneurs to orchestrate convergence on a common position that was as close as possible to their original proposal.

A further motivation of both commissioners Fischler and Ciolos was to leave a legacy by putting their mark on the CAP with the reforms that would be named after them. Fischler commented on the motivation of leaving a legacy at a meeting of European agricultural economists:

Franz Fischler was there and he described, paraphrasing, the [2014–2020 Ciolos] reform as a “compromise of a compromise, and if you get too many alterations of that compromise process, then it does get certainly into the danger of being too wishy washy and insignificant, and he [Ciolos] must be mindful of the importance of a commissioner’s legacy, and I am sure Ciolos would want to leave his mark on the process of CAP reform, and there is a big potential in greening, and there is also the beginning of the budgetary conversion process, and I guess his legacy would be partially dependent on the performance of these two negotiations.” (EP 10)

Overall, the 2014–2020 Ciolos Reform of the CAP was not as successful in its greening components as many key actors had hoped, particularly due to the dominant role of the member states in their calls for flexibility:

You might criticize the Commission from an environmental perspective that the proposals were not going far enough. DG Agri had a very clear approach to say “This is our approach. We have a very sensitive balancing of everything,” and maybe that might have been the mistake. It’s also my personal opinion and observation that the Commission went in with too little negotiation material concerning the greening. If you had put a 10 percent clause for example or 10 percent requirement on focus area, maybe they would have cut out not so much.

If you had put some more cross-compliance requirements, they would have cut it down, but not everything, but it was only a few additional ones so almost none remained. This might have also been a reason but maybe or maybe not, because as I said, it was mainly the [Multiannual Financial Framework] problem with having much less money to spend and other much more important political issues like internal-external convergences, which were basically overriding any in-depth discussion or more in-depth political fighting about the greening, and this is also how it turned out. (EC 19)

One reason why learning that took place during the drafting and negotiation processes was not necessarily reflected in the policy outcome was the lack of a window of opportunity, which would be comparable to the perfect storm (Swinnen 2008a) that the 2003 Fischler-Reform benefited from:

2001 was the Swedish presidency, the Göthenburg Summit, and Sustainable Development Strategy, so that had already been in the making for three years so 1998, 1999, 2000. . . . So almost the zeitgeist at that time was moving in these directions, and obviously you'll have read that Sustainable Development Strategy in 2001, and there were parts of that that were quite modern. In 2002 we had the ten-year anniversary of the Rio Summit in Johannesburg. The climate then was quite a lot of business and industry was coming for the first time towards the sustainable development agenda. . . . There were signs, genuine signs, of concern at climate change, at resource issues. The beginnings of them at least, and then the [re was the] five-year review of [the] Sustainable Development Strategy . . . [overseen by the] Austrian presidency [in] 2006, so the Austrians took sustainable development pretty seriously. I think the other thing is that it's a lot easier when you're 12 members or 15 members than when you're 25, 27, or 28 member countries and I think that's made a lot of difference in terms of effective change, leadership change. I don't think Ciolos could do today as easily at what Fischler could have done with a smaller group of member states. (ENGO 9)

Leadership by the Commissioner for Climate Action on the 20 Percent Climate Mainstreaming Decision

In parallel to the CAP reform, the DG Clima also introduced the proposal to dedicate 20 percent of the EU 2014–2020 budget to CPI measures (EC 2011a). This decision in the College of Commissioners came about because Connie Hedegaard, the Commissioner for Climate Action, can also be regarded as a key policy entrepreneur who built political momentum and convinced other decision-makers with a combination of expertise, experience, and passionate rhetoric:

Oh, she is a very strong person, with her own views and a lot of self-confidence, as most politicians have. . . . she is very clever and hard-working and very

energetic, . . . and she has integrity, has a drive, and she has political communication skills. (EC 16)

The circle of individuals involved in the CAP CPI components within the European Commission was fairly small. Across all levels of the hierarchy, they were very dedicated; they possessed high expertise and long-standing experience in agriculture, climate issues, and EPI; and they actively promoted the introduction of climate objectives into agriculture and the overall EU budget by using and extending their existing networks with their relevant counterparts within the European Commission (EC 14; EC 15; EC 16; EC 17; EC 20). Coordination and cooperation were crucial, as CPI was not a policy proposal in its own right, but rather consisted of interventions in other directorate generals' resorts, which frequently results in resistance on the policy-drafting level (EC 14; EC 15). If these are not resolved, they are carried "up the hierarchy" (EC 14) into the College of Commissioners meeting without much opportunity for other policymakers to reflect on the input and engage with the context:

But we just pushed it through because we saw the political opportunity that this budget could look different if it had a headline target that sold it as a green, more modern, innovation-based EU budget. It would sell well with the public, and I think Barroso understood that. So we were talking more political than analytical. It was the best vehicle we could find for mainstreaming into other policies. . . . But the budget was a really big thing. Because it sets the parameters for the EU's spending programs until 2020. And given that we had a 2020 target and a 2020 strategy, we had to put that, we had to reflect that into the budget; otherwise there was a disconnect. So these were the sorts of arguments we were using. And then, [the European Commissioner for Climate Action] was persuasive in the College [of Commissioners], we got a lot of nervousness in the end whether they had put it in, but they did. But it was literally in the college meeting where it was decided. (EC 15)

Consequently, the EU 2014–2020 budget was seen as an opportunity for CPI by the directorate general who is in charge of this issue area and who consequently used negotiation tactics to achieve their objectives with the help of passionate policy entrepreneurs. These policy entrepreneurs were crucial for policy outcomes to emerge, but in the negotiation process, they were not necessarily teaching the other policymakers about the importance of their proposal. Instead, they used bargaining tactics, rhetoric, and their own passion and expertise to push their proposal through (EC 14; EC 15; EC 16; EC 24; EC 25; Moehler 2008; Pirzio-Biroli 2008). This demonstrates that leadership by policy entrepreneurs and path dependencies of the institutional machinery can also result in policy outcomes. The learning may have happened before such a policymaking process and can reach back

decades when the policy entrepreneur formed their deeper and policy design beliefs, which motivated the leadership in the current policymaking process. The institutional machinery created a certain path dependency in carrying policy proposals through the decision-making process initiated by policy entrepreneurs, partly through following orders and partly through the personal convictions of individuals.

However, even if actors took on the role of teachers in the negotiation process, that does not necessarily mean that they succeed and the counterpart learned by being convinced, or at least gaining more knowledge. Not all actors accepted the rationale used by the European Commission that society required the CAP financial resources to support public goods such as the environment:

It didn't convince much of the people actually. Of course, it was farm ministries in the Council. We always were pointing out that the big bill comes in the end in 2020 whether there's a real justification. It didn't impress so much, and especially some MEPs in the conservative party said, "What you're saying, public money for public goods, I don't know where you got it from. Maybe from some green NGOs but my people who elect me have a different opinion and I follow that opinion of the people which elect me" which is rural area farmers for most of them. So very clearly it didn't impress very much. (EC 19)

The situation was similar in the Council:

It's so many different . . . issues, on some [the European Commission] persuaded member states a bit, but actually, if member states were unwilling to agree on changes to the status quo, that would mean any additional burden, any additional financial cost, and I think even on issues where the Commission argued quite long and fiercely that this wouldn't make much of a change to member states. Some of the new financial rules under the horizontal regulation, the member states weren't convinced. Certainly on some things. I mean it's just a whole mixed bag on some things the Commission's argued on, but I think actually in the end, less than I thought might be the case. (MS 10)

Overall Learning in the 2014–2020 Common Agricultural Policy Reform

In this and the previous chapter, I have drawn a complex and detailed picture of the different types of learning that occurred across the individual and organizational levels over three decades. I showed how learning on one level could coincide with policy outcomes, but these outcomes are not necessarily a result of learning. I also demonstrated the importance of individuals who act as policy entrepreneurs based on their underlying beliefs, thus becoming agents of change and influencing the policymaking process toward a policy outcome. Yet again, other explanations besides learning,

such as lobbying, power politics, and bargaining in negotiations also partly explain the policy outcome. Constructivist learning via changes in beliefs among the actors occurred in terms of aligning policy design and policy detail beliefs to the unchanged deeper belief of preserving the CAP overall.

The changes predominantly occurred in the form of policymakers recognizing shifting preferences in the sociopolitical landscape and, within individuals, in the form of increasing knowledge and gaining work experience with CAP reforms, while the main motivation was to adapt the CAP via greening to maintain it—and thus adapt policy design and policy detail beliefs to the stable central deeper belief about the priority to subsidize European farmers. The mainstreaming and greening proposal of the 2014–2020 CAP reform appears as a policy innovation. This is not the case when the *modus operandi* of thirty years of CAP reform is taken into consideration. Then the latest CAP reform emerges as a logical next step toward a strong public goods model in a long line of marginal adjustments of policy detail beliefs. The greening aspects of the CAP are built on developments dating to the 1980s. CPI in the CAP is a further development from greening the CAP through the MacSharry (1992) and Fischler (2000–2003) reforms in order to increase the legitimacy of the subsidies paid to farmers (suggested by Feindt 2010; Swinnen 2008a). It was reframed as public money for public goods narrative, of which climate action and environmental protection are key elements.

Which type of learning occurred on the individual and organizational levels depended on several factors. The key issues were the interplay of long-term learning in the form of shifting beliefs among the wider society that set the political framework parameters. It also depended on whether individuals found the time to reflect on new input and were subsequently able to convince their organizations of its importance and the resulting necessity to change the organization's negotiation position. The key drivers for policy change were policy entrepreneurs in key positions who had the opportunity, knowledge, and personal drive (as well as conviction) to steer the political process into their desired direction using predominantly conventional negotiation tactics to outsmart the other coalitions, mostly using conventional political maneuvering.

Experts involved in developing a policy proposal did reflect on information presented to them by external experts and stakeholders, but in many cases, they were already familiar with the information. By the same token, most experts involved in greening the CAP already held beliefs favoring environmental protection and increasing climate action, and this did not change by being involved in reforming the CAP or the wider mainstreaming of climate objectives into the 2014–2020 MFF. Table 6.1 provides an overview on the research findings for learning in integrating

Table 6.1
Learning in the 2014–2020 CAP reform

	Factual Learning	Experiential Learning	Constructivist Learning
Individual level	Yes but limited: Some MEPs through stake-holders; experts reflect on new scientific input	Yes: MEPs (first involvement); marginal for experts due to iterative process; experts learn from experience with past round of reforms	Deeper beliefs Policy design beliefs Policy detail beliefs
Organizational level	Yes: Increase in knowledge due to reflection on emerging scientific consensus on negative environmental impacts of the CAP; influence of climate change debate as policy frame	Yes but limited: Iterative process (policy reform)	No change: Farmers, member states, European Commission, MEPs Yes: Change over longer term in moderate-reform coalition through acceptance that environmental protection matters to public; the CAP needs to adapt to maintain public acceptability Yes: Change over long-term in line with deeper beliefs; Limited change in short-term No change Yes: Longer term in moderate-reform coalition through acceptance that environmental protection matters to public; the CAP needs to adapt to maintain public acceptability; limited change in short term Yes: Change over long term in line with deeper beliefs; limited short-term change

climate policy while designing and negotiating the legislative proposal for the 2014–2020 CAP.

The data indicates that some learning occurred, especially factual and experiential learning through reflection on scientific evidence and involvement in policymaking. However, constructivist learning in the form of changes in underlying beliefs occurred only via the sociopolitical landscape over the long term, with the change in policy design and policy detail beliefs that the CAP must also serve environmental and climate concerns with a public money for public goods rationale that was adopted by key individuals as an argument to preserve the CAP. Thus, these beliefs on the wider CAP objective changed among actors in the moderate-reform coalition on the individual level in a long-term perspective to reflect the overall societal consensus for a public goods model. From the individual level, they were transferred to the organizational level, which represents the policymaking machinery between the directorate generals of the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the EU.

For many actors, however, it served the primary function of justifying the continued existence of the CAP as Europe's largest subsidy program, and thus the public goods narrative also points toward other explanations than constructivist learning, which influenced the organizational level. These include political interests, lobbying, and bargaining in negotiations. Policy entrepreneurs who formed their deeper beliefs before being involved in the CAP reform process played crucial roles in the negotiations for the success of the policy proposal. They used conventional negotiation tactics and strategies. The findings regarding the sociopolitical landscape indicate that it can be a driver for learning when a long time frame is chosen for the analysis, such as reaching back three decades.

