

## What Factors Can Public Health Actors Consider to Facilitate the Borrowing of a Public Policy?

REPORT

2024



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The National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP) would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments on a preliminary version of this document. The reviewers were invited to comment on the pre-final version of this document and have therefore not reviewed or endorsed its final content.

The authors and reviewers have duly completed their declarations of interest, and no real, apparent or potential conflicts of interest were identified.

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## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

Tchatat, L., & Morestin, F. (2024). *What Factors Can Public Health Actors Consider to Facilitate the Borrowing of a Public Policy?* National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy.

*Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) through funding for the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP). The NCCHPP is hosted by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ), a leading centre for public health in Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the PHAC.*

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Legal Deposit – 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, 2024  
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec  
ISBN: 978-2-550-96720-0 (French PDF)  
ISBN: 978-2-550-96721-7 (PDF)

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## FOREWORD

This publication by the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP) is intended to inform public health actors of the factors to be analyzed when they are considering proposing the borrowing into their jurisdiction of public policies that have been implemented elsewhere. It was developed as part of the NCCHPP's regular scientific programming.

The NCCHPP is a hub of expertise and knowledge sharing in the area of healthy public policy. Its mandate is to support public health actors across Canada in their efforts to develop and promote healthy public policies. The NCCHPP fulfills this mandate by developing, synthesizing and sharing knowledge, by targeting research gaps and by fostering the development of networks connecting public health professionals, researchers and decision makers across Canada.

The NCCHPP is part of a network of six National Collaborating Centres for Public Health across Canada funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Its scientific programming is informed by analysis of Canada's public health actors' knowledge needs, and guided by a pan-Canadian advisory committee. The NCCHPP is hosted by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec.

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## SUMMARY

Given the interconnectedness of jurisdictions around the world, public policies adopted to solve a problem in one jurisdiction often inspire in another the development of policies intended to solve the same problem. When public health actors propose policy options for addressing public health problems, they may include in their proposals policies that have proven effective in other jurisdictions.

Thus, the aim of this report is to inform public health actors about the factors that facilitate the borrowing of public policies; that is, the adoption of policies from elsewhere into their own jurisdiction. Based on a review of the literature, we identified 20 factors that facilitate policy borrowing, and classified them into four categories:

- Catalysts;
- Externalizing potential of the policy;
- Decision making;
- Internalizing potential of the policy.

Based on these four categories of factors, we are proposing a four-pronged approach that public health actors can use to mobilize these factors when they consider proposing one or more external policies:

- Determine whether their jurisdiction presents an opportune situation which can serve as a springboard for the proposed policy;
- Determine whether the proposed policy has qualities that would justify its being borrowed;
- Determine whether the proposed policy resonates politically with policy makers in their jurisdiction;
- Determine whether the context lends itself to the successful implementation of the proposed policy.

This approach will enable public health actors to assess the relevance of proposing the borrowing of the external policies being considered, identify the factors that can be mobilized in the documents presenting these policy options, and develop their strategy for sharing knowledge with policy makers (i.e., when, how and with which partners these policy options would be presented).

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a review of the literature on the factors that facilitate the borrowing of public policies. Public policy borrowing occurs when policy makers examine policies adopted elsewhere in order to draw inspiration from them or copy them when developing public policies for their own jurisdictions. This practice has become increasingly common in a variety of public sectors. It can save time and energy, and help governments cope with constraints they face (Carroll & Common, 2013).

Public health actors also promote policy borrowing when they identify effective policies that other jurisdictions have implemented to address a public health problem, and decide to include these policies among the options they recommend. However, the effectiveness of a policy does not guarantee its adoption by policy makers; conditions and opportunities within a jurisdiction can prove central to the decision whether or not to borrow it (Kuhlee, 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2006). So, what factors can facilitate the borrowing of public policies?

The aim of this report is to produce a structured list of factors that promote the borrowing of public policies. It is intended to help public health actors choose which policies to propose, and to identify which elements to analyze and which to mobilize when presenting external policies to policy makers.

This report is organized as follows: we begin by defining our subject, namely policy borrowing. Next, we briefly describe the method used to carry out our literature review and the analytical framework used to organize the factors identified. We then describe the set of factors that promote the borrowing of public policies. We conclude by discussing the strengths and limitations of this literature review, and suggest ways in which public health actors can mobilize the factors identified.



## 2 WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY BORROWING?

Policy transfer is the field of public policy literature to which this report belongs. Policy transfer refers to “a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place” (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, p. 344). Two types of policy transfer are generally distinguished: coercive transfer and non-coercive or voluntary transfer.<sup>1</sup>

In discussing policy borrowing, we are referring to the non-coercive type of transfer, defined as the voluntary process of one jurisdiction adopting a policy similar to or inspired by that of another jurisdiction (Phillips & Ochs, 2004). In the literature, expressions such as “policy importation,” “policy copying” or “policy imitation,” etc., are also used to refer to this voluntary process<sup>2</sup>.

Policy borrowing, like any type of policy transfer, can be enacted to varying degrees (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Gavens et al., 2019):

- Copying: the direct and complete borrowing of an external policy;
- Emulation: the borrowing, not of the policy in its entirety, but of the general idea behind it, or of certain of its elements;
- Hybridization/combination: the blending of policies from several jurisdictions to develop a policy adapted to the local context;
- Inspiration: a policy implemented in one jurisdiction inspires policy change in another, without the end result necessarily resembling the original policy.

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<sup>1</sup> In the first type, the transfer of a policy is imposed on a jurisdiction by an external agent (e.g., an international organization). In the second type, faced with a problem, the jurisdiction voluntarily undertakes to look for and adopt policies formulated and implemented elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> In the literature consulted, we found no critical comparison of these different terms. Several authors use various terms as equivalents, and some even write explicitly that one should not attach too much importance to the terms (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Delpeuch, 2008). In the French version of this report, we have chosen to use the term “importation”, which emphasizes the perspective of the jurisdiction taking inspiration from an external policy, and which is fairly common in the literature in French. In the literature in English, on the other hand, “policy import” is rarely used, and there is a clear preponderance of the term “policy borrowing.” We therefore use the term “policy borrowing” in the English version of this report, to bring it into line with the literature on the subject in English.

**Box 1: A comment on the debates surrounding this subject in the literature**

It should be noted that the full-scale borrowing of a policy (copying) is a practice that is often contested. Contextual differences and the complexity of the problems to be solved are often reasons given for refusing this type of borrowing (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). For example, *wicked problems*,<sup>3</sup> which are common in public health, are characterized by their singularity. Consequently, the solutions applied to such problems are difficult to import into a different setting, especially without adapting them to the context (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

That said, this report is not intended to address existing scientific and political debates concerning the merits of policy transfer or borrowing. Nor is its aim to take a stance concerning which types of policies it may or may not be appropriate to borrow. Its objective is essentially to describe factors drawn from the literature that can assist public health actors wishing to prompt their jurisdiction to adopt policies from elsewhere that, according to the evidence, have proven to be effective and equitable approaches to solving a public health problem.

Policies can be borrowed from and to different types of jurisdictions: from one country to another, from a higher level of government to the local level (e.g., from a provincial government to a municipality), or from the local level to a higher one (Turgeon et al., 2008). Policies may also be borrowed from and to different sectors (e.g., from education to health).

In Canada, policy borrowing is commonplace, whether at the federal level (Mazereeuw, 2022), the provincial level (Government of British Columbia, 2020) or the municipal level (Sancton, 2015). It also occurs between different levels of government. For example, when the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act* was passed in 2006, legislating a ban on smoking in the province's restaurants and bars, many Ontario municipalities had already adopted such a policy—the first being the City of Toronto in 1997 (Cabaj et al., 2022).

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<sup>3</sup> Problems referred to as “wicked” “are difficult to define, offer no apparent final solutions, potentially affect a vast array of other problems and have long been resistant to effective intervention. Oft-cited examples include climate change, obesity, and health inequalities” (Morrison, 2019, p. 1). See also Morrison (2013) for more on wicked problems.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

We conducted a review of the scientific literature. A keyword search on the concept of policy borrowing was carried out in seven databases. In addition, in order to not disregard the concept of policy transfer which, although more generic, is foundational in the political science literature, we went on to identify key texts on this concept using the snowball method.

After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria to the 448 articles identified, we selected 54 articles for analysis (see Appendix 1 for details on our methodological approach).

#### **Box 2: A few details regarding the identification of factors**

Few of the articles we obtained dealt *explicitly* with the factors that promote the borrowing of policies. We therefore relied mainly on interpretation to identify these factors.

The following is a recurring example: a certain country received a positive evaluation on its education system (from an independent external organization), as compared to another country which scored less well. As a result, the latter country decided to draw inspiration from the former's educational policies to improve its system. In such a case, we deduced that the evaluation carried out by the external organization promoted policy borrowing, and we considered this external evaluation to be a factor.

In addition, certain factors were found in the "literature review" or "theoretical framework" sections of the articles analyzed. By presenting previously completed work on the subject, the authors alerted us to important factors, even though they themselves did not specifically study these factors in their article.

After identifying the factors referenced in all of the articles selected, we organized them into categories.

## 4 AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANIZING FACTORS

To make the factors easier to understand and mobilize, we divided them into logical categories. We drew inspiration from a theoretical model cited in several of the documents we consulted: that of the policy borrowing process developed by David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs (2003).

This model describes four important phases through which policy borrowing takes place:

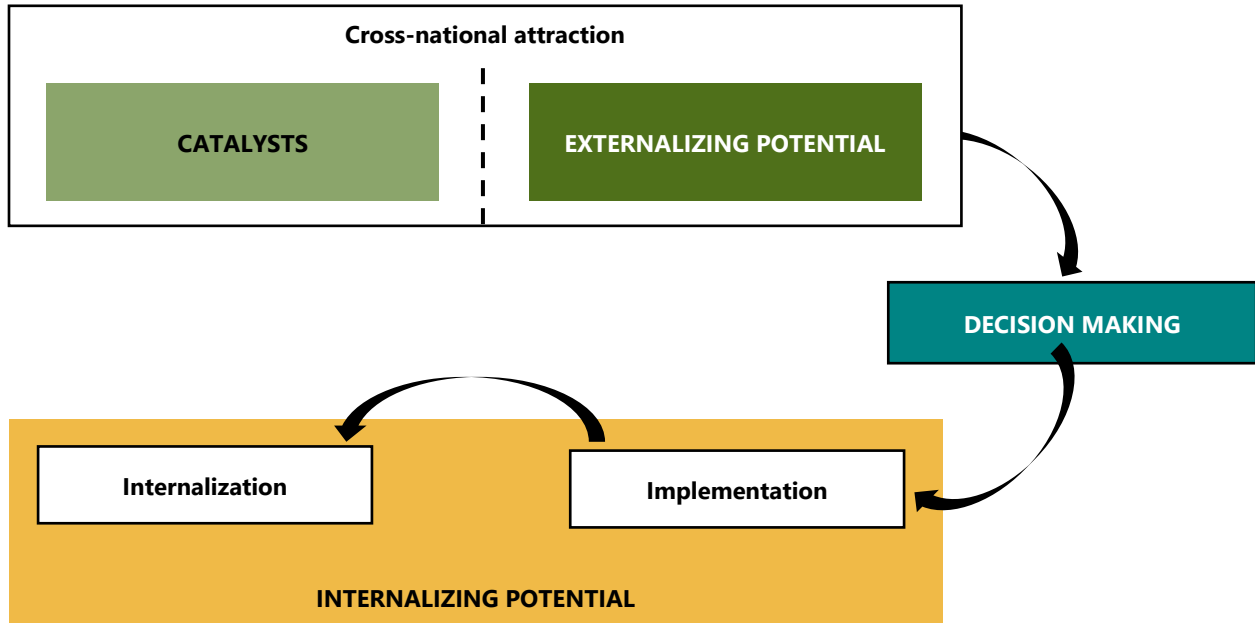
- Cross-national attraction, which requires the presence of two conditions:
  - Impulses for change,
  - Externalizing potential;
- Decision making;
- Policy implementation;
- Policy internalization.

Drawing on Phillips and Ochs' model, we devised four analytical categories under which we classified the factors identified in the literature:

- **Catalysts:** this category comprises circumstances or conditions within a jurisdiction that prompt the borrowing of external policies (what Phillips and Ochs call "impulses for change"). Here, we grouped the factors that promote the desire for change, and that prompt policy makers to look elsewhere for new policies. For example: internal dissatisfaction, receiving negative evaluations, etc.
- **Externalizing potential:** this category comprises the factors that make an external policy attractive. For example: effectiveness, simplicity, etc.
- **Decision making:** this category comprises those factors associated with the borrowing of a policy that relate directly to policy makers and to the political implications of a decision. Examples would be electoral pressures, or the ideological leanings of policy makers.
- **Internalizing potential:** this category combines the implementation and internalization phases of the Phillips and Ochs model, since both phases focus on contextual considerations related to policy reception and implementation. We included in this category factors related to the suitability of the borrowed policy to the context of the borrowing jurisdiction. Examples include the similarity between the context of the borrowing jurisdiction and that of the initiating jurisdiction (i.e., the jurisdiction which developed the policy), and the possibility of adapting the policy to another context.

Figure 1 presents a summary of our analytical categories.

Figure 1 Analytical categories



Black-framed boxes = Phillips and Ochs' model  
Coloured boxes = our four analytical categories

## 5 FACTORS THAT FACILITATE THE BORROWING OF POLICIES

The literature review led to the identification of twenty significant factors related to the borrowing of public policies. In Table 1, we list these and sort them into the four categories identified above. Within each category, we begin by listing the factor most frequently mentioned in the literature and continue on down to the least frequently mentioned factor; subsequently, we describe each factor individually. We conclude this section by illustrating how several of these factors influenced the decisions of municipalities in England as to whether or not to borrow alcohol control policies (Box 3).

Table 1. Summary of identified factors by analytical category

CATALYSTS	EXTERNALIZING POTENTIAL	DECISION MAKING	INTERNALIZING POTENTIAL
1. External pressures	7. Effectiveness	12. Quest for legitimacy	17. Contextual similarities
2. Internal dissatisfaction	8. Popularity of the initiating jurisdiction	13. Alignment of the policy with policy makers' agenda	18. Policy adaptability
3. Need for an immediate solution	9. Associated opportunities	14. Disagreement between interested parties	19. Past policies
4. Learning	10. Simplicity	15. Electoral pressures	20. Institutional feasibility
5. Lack of resources	11. Frequency of success	16. Arrival of more supportive policy makers	
6. Media discourse			

### 5.1 Catalysts

This category comprises factors that stimulate the desire for change and that prompt policy makers to look elsewhere for new policies.

1. **External pressures** (factor cited in 14 articles<sup>4</sup>): These can stem from external evaluations, the influence of international organizations, international competition, globalization, or the need to conform to international standards (Korem & Shapiro, 2006; Ruby & Li, 2020). A jurisdiction that receives a negative evaluation will want to rectify the situation by drawing inspiration from what other jurisdictions are doing. Faced with globalization and evolving practices, governments are impelled to imitate policies and practices adopted by others in order to remain up to date. In addition, sub-national governments may adopt policies because their central government encourages them to do so (Gavens et al., 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Only those articles that provide specific details about the factors are cited in the corresponding paragraphs. For a complete list of articles citing each factor, see Appendix 2.

2. **Internal dissatisfaction** (factor cited in 13 articles): When social groups (populations, the media, political elites, etc.) are no longer satisfied with the state of an internal situation (Bainbridge, 2021), particularly when the jurisdiction produces poorer results than similar jurisdictions in a given sector, policy makers search for new solutions, including by looking at what is being done elsewhere that may improve or complement what is being done internally (Hohmann, 2020; Winstanley, 2012).
3. **Need for an immediate solution** (factor cited in 7 articles): Faced with emerging or existing problems in their jurisdictions, particularly in times of crisis, policy makers have limited time to devote to finding the best solutions. It may therefore be simpler to adopt policies that have already been successfully tested elsewhere than to develop new ones (Randma-Liiv & Kruusenberg, 2012; Reid, 2011).
4. **Learning** (factor cited in 5 articles): “Policy tourism”, contact and dialogue at conferences, discussion forums or simply working meetings including policy makers, professionals or even individuals from civil society from different jurisdictions all lead to mutual learning. Actors participating in such exchanges gain an overall picture of the process of implementing certain external policies. Moreover, if they fully understand how a policy can be adapted to their context, they may be more favourably inclined to its adoption (Bainbridge, 2021; Parinandi, 2020).
5. **Lack of resources** (factor cited in 1 article): When a government organization lacks human resources with the requisite expertise, it is cheaper to borrow a policy that has already been formulated and implemented elsewhere. In a study of policy circulation among the 50 U.S. states, the authors demonstrate that legislatures that are less professional (i.e., whose budgets are too limited for them to maintain a sufficiently large and expert staff and to hold sessions long enough to permit the development of policies or bills) are more likely to copy policies (and even the verbatim text of bills), while more professional legislatures more frequently invent policies (Jansa et al., 2019).
6. **Media discourse** (factor cited in 1 article): The media have the power to make an external public policy attractive by publicizing it and highlighting its success. Davis and colleagues (2020) demonstrate that the manner in which Japanese, Australian and South Korean media presented Finland’s education policy made it attractive, which served as an incentive for policy makers in these countries.

## 5.2 Externalizing potential of the policy

This category includes the factors that make an external policy attractive.

7. **Effectiveness** (factor cited in 15 articles): The more successful a policy has been at solving the problems that led to its formulation, the more attractive it is and the more likely it is to be imitated (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Forestier & Crossley, 2015; You, 2017).
8. **Popularity of the initiating jurisdiction** (factor cited in 10 articles): The fact that a policy has been developed by a jurisdiction regarded as a model or leader can increase its legitimacy (Hansen et al., 2020; Winstanley, 2012).
9. **Associated opportunities** (factor cited in 3 articles): The likelihood that a policy will be borrowed can increase when doing so conveys advantages such as recognition by other governments, funding from international organizations or higher levels of government, or integration of the borrowing jurisdiction within a group of jurisdictions (this was the case in Estonia, where the introduction of probation measures<sup>5</sup> was motivated by the country's desire to be recognized by Western countries [Randma-Liiv & Kruusenberg, 2012]).
10. **Simplicity** (factor cited in 2 articles): The more complicated a policy is to implement, the less likely it is to be borrowed (Gavens et al., 2019). We can deduce inversely that a simple policy is more attractive.
11. **Frequency of success** (factor cited in 2 articles): A policy with a high frequency of success is one which has been successfully adopted by several jurisdictions: "The likelihood of adopting a reform from elsewhere is greater the more well-travelled that reform has been. [...] the travelling reform become[s], with every new adoption, reconfirmed as a 'best practice'—ultimately reaching the status of an 'international standard'" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014, p. 160). Conversely, a policy that has run up against difficulties in the jurisdictions that have borrowed it will be less attractive.

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<sup>5</sup> Probation measures are a set of restrictive rules to be respected by an accused person facing a potential prison sentence. They can replace or accompany the sentence, or be imposed pending the final judicial decision.



### 5.3 Decision making

This category comprises factors associated with the borrowing of a policy that relate to the political implications of decision making.

12. **Quest for legitimacy** (factor cited in 7 articles): This factor comes into play when policy makers are searching for a policy implemented elsewhere (usually in a jurisdiction considered credible) that is aligned with their own objectives, so as to create a framework of legitimacy that will help advance their own political agenda. In this case, the primary aim of policy makers is to increase their agenda's acceptability. If they opt to borrow an external policy, they do so for symbolic rather than for practical purposes (Kuhlee, 2017; You, 2017).
13. **Alignment of the policy with policy makers' agenda** (factor cited in 6 articles): A policy that is aligned with policy makers' objectives and action plans, and facilitates their achievement (the aim thus being practical), will have a greater likelihood of being adopted and implemented. For example, as Sever (2006) explains, it was possible to successfully borrow educational reform policies into Japan because the policies aligned with the Japanese government's fundamental and strategic objective, which was to transform Japan into a country on a par with the more advanced Western countries and to be recognized as such. Steiner-Khamsi (2014) argues that policy borrowing is deeply rooted in political, social and economic decisions, and will only occur if the policy under consideration is aligned with the agenda of the policy makers in power.
14. **Disagreement between interested parties** (factor cited in 4 articles): Borrowing a policy can reduce conflicts and disagreements among the various actors involved in decision making. Indeed, if it is perceived to be "neutral" because it is external to the positions put forward by internal actors, a policy may be more easily accepted (López-Guereñu, 2018).
15. **Electoral pressures** (factor cited in 3 articles): Elected officials and their staff have an interest in adopting policies that will increase voter satisfaction and trust. Consequently, policies that have already been tested elsewhere and have met with success may prove beneficial to them.
16. **Arrival of more supportive policy makers** (factor cited in 2 articles): A change in policy makers can bring a wind of change and a willingness to try out new practices and policies (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). According to Parinandi's (2020) comparative study of several American states, the ideology of policy makers weighs heavily in policy making. The more extremist their ideology, whether left or right leaning, the more likely they are to develop new policies (untested elsewhere). The more moderate they are, the more open they are to borrowing policies.

## 5.4 Internalizing potential of the policy

This category comprises factors related to the suitability of the borrowed policy to the context of the borrowing jurisdiction.

17. **Contextual similarities** (factor cited in 22 articles): Borrowing a policy requires analysis of the extent to which different contextual elements can affect its implementation and effectiveness. Examples of such elements include culture, language, values, institutions, ideology, and economic level. A policy may prove to be relevant only in a specific context. Thus, similarity between the contexts of the two jurisdictions (initiating and borrowing) could facilitate borrowing, while contextual distance would constitute an obstacle (Obinger et al., 2013; Williams, 2020).
18. **Policy adaptability** (factor cited in 8 articles): A policy may need to be reformulated to suit the particularities of the borrowing jurisdiction (the institutional, organizational and ideological context, the availability of resources, etc.). In view of this, it is necessary to examine whether the policy can be adapted to internal realities and still produce the expected results (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014, 2016).
19. **Past policies** (factor cited in 2 articles): The history of policies implemented in a jurisdiction can influence the likelihood of a policy being imported there. Gavens and colleagues (2019) observed that local authorities in England were reluctant to borrow a policy requiring that businesses selling alcohol be located at a certain distance from schools because the local authorities had never seen such requirements implemented elsewhere in the country (although they were authorized under national law).
20. **Institutional feasibility** (factor cited in 2 articles): This factor concerns sub-national governments in particular. Before borrowing an external policy, they must verify whether it conforms to the structural, legal and institutional framework established by higher levels of government (Gavens et al., 2019).

### Box 3—Borrowing alcohol harm reduction policies into localities in England

Gavens and colleagues (2019) explored the factors that influenced the decision of several local authorities in England whether or not to borrow alcohol policies from other local jurisdictions. Here is what they found.

#### Catalysts

- **External pressures:** The adoption of certain policies at the local level was encouraged by the national government.
- **Learning:** Discussions took place among actors from different municipalities (public health professionals, police, alcohol licensing departments, etc.) concerning the actions taken in their respective jurisdictions to control alcohol consumption. These exchanges took place not only during informal, one-off conversations, but also in settings devoted to sharing information about certain policies (e.g., meetings

between actors from two municipalities; conferences attended by actors from an entire region).

#### Externalizing potential of the policy

- **Effectiveness:** Policies having been tested in other jurisdictions informed policy makers about the possible outcomes of borrowing these policies for application in their own jurisdiction, and thus determined whether or not they were adopted. Effectiveness was assessed in various ways. In the absence of formal evaluation data, many actors simply relied on discussions with professionals from the initiating jurisdiction.
- **Frequency of success:** Difficulties associated with policies previously implemented or tried elsewhere acted as a brake on their adoption in other localities. Examples include a lawsuit against a municipality that had adopted a particular policy; the rejection by municipal councillors of a policy subjected to a vote.

#### Internalizing potential of the policy

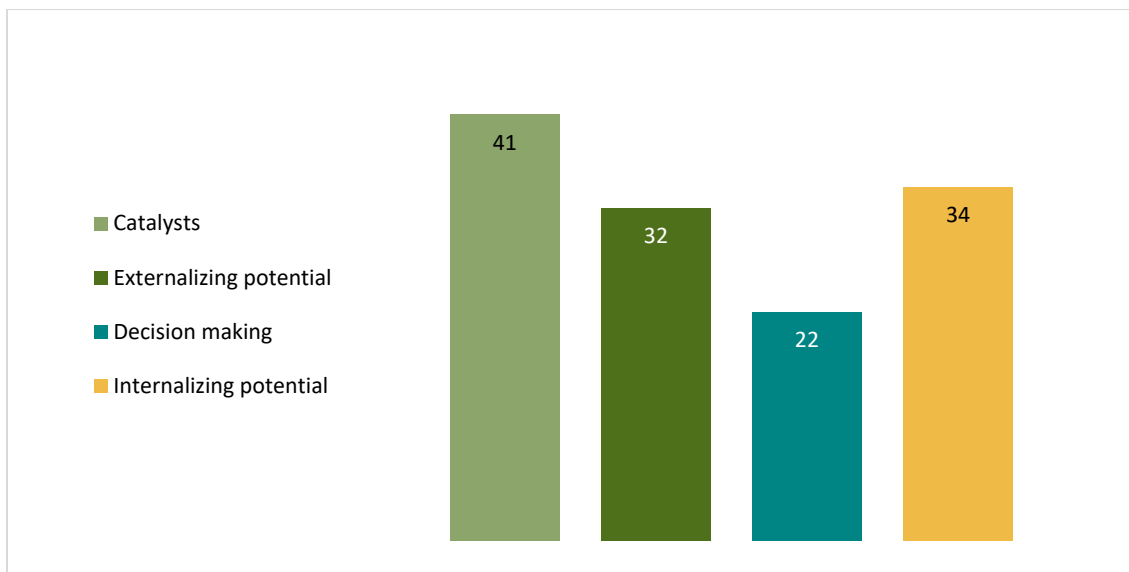
- **Contextual similarities and policy adaptability:** Differences in city size, financial resources or a population's consumption habits could discourage the borrowing of a policy. However, some obstacles could be surmounted if the policy was adaptable. For example, a policy promoting the responsible management of bars was adopted in several towns, with adaptations that took into account their size and the number of bars in operation.
- **Institutional feasibility:** The institutional framework established by the national government and that of the region in which a local authority was located also determined the range of policies it could adopt. This framework evolved as reforms were introduced.
- **Past policies:** As mentioned in the description of this factor, local policy makers were reluctant to require that a distance be maintained between bars and schools because they had never seen such a provision implemented in England before.

## 6 A FEW OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE FACTORS IDENTIFIED

### Which factors are most frequently mentioned in the literature?

In terms of categories, the one most frequently referenced is the “catalysts” category, which is referenced in 41 articles; followed by the “internalizing potential” category, referenced in 34 articles; then the “externalizing potential” category, referenced in 32 articles; and finally, the “decision making” category, referenced in 22 articles (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Number of articles\* referencing each category of factors



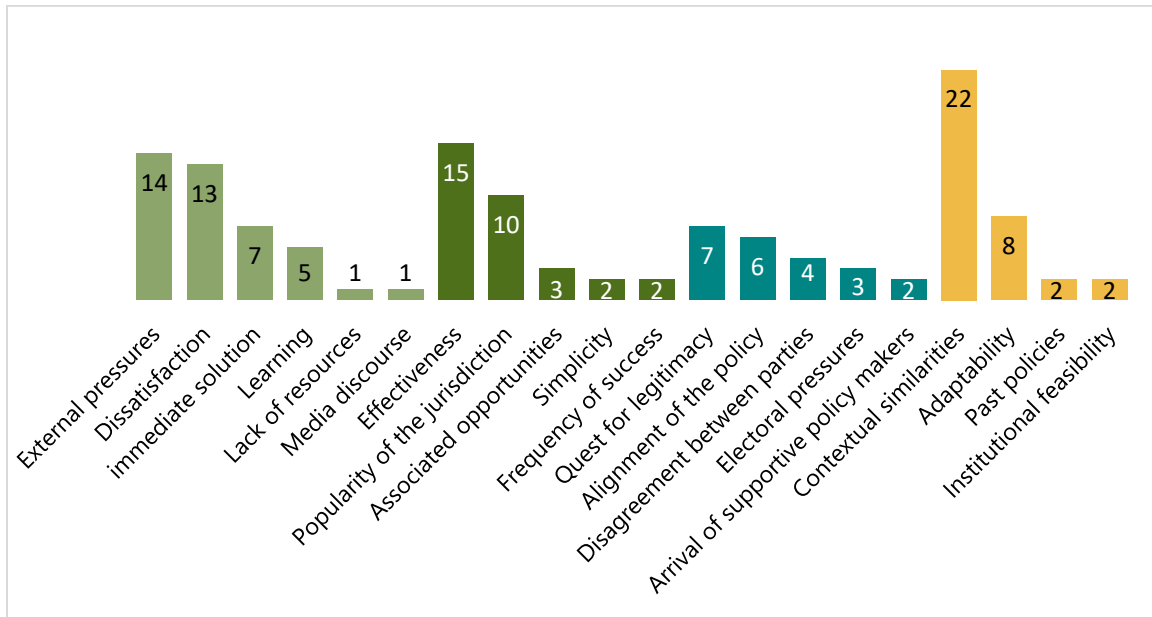
\* An article may discuss one or more factors in one or more categories.

The factors are also referenced with varying frequency (see Figure 3). The following five factors were most frequently mentioned in the articles we selected:

- Contextual similarities (in 22 articles);
- Effectiveness of the policy (in 15 articles);
- External pressures (in 14 articles);
- Internal dissatisfaction (in 13 articles);
- Popularity of the initiating jurisdiction (in 10 articles).

These differences might be explained by the fact that certain factors come into play more frequently and in more contexts involving policy borrowing than others. However, our study does not allow us to determine whether this is indeed the case, or whether these factors are more significant or relevant than those mentioned less frequently.

**Figure 3** Number of articles in our literature review referencing each factor



**Do the factors involved vary according to the policy sector involved?**

Just over half of the articles identified in our literature review concern education policies. However, we did not note any differences between the factors involved in borrowing these education policies and those involved in borrowing policies in other sectors referenced in our set of articles (namely the public health, health care, social security, sustainable mobility, renewable energy, and justice sectors).

**Do the factors involved vary according to the type of jurisdiction involved?**

As shown in the table in Appendix 3, we identified cases of the following types of inter-jurisdictional policy borrowing:

- between jurisdictions in the same country (e.g., between states in the United States);
- between jurisdictions at different levels (e.g., between London and Switzerland);
- between countries (e.g., between Australia and Finland).

We observed no major differences in the factors involved in these various cases of policy borrowing.

Thus, the factors identified appear to apply to a variety of contexts (i.e., in varying public policy sectors and types of jurisdiction).

## 7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS LITERATURE REVIEW

Although a great deal of work exists examining the factors that encourage policy *transfer*, few studies focus specifically on the factors that lead to policy *borrowing*. This literature review has enabled us to produce an ample list of factors that facilitate policy borrowing, and to group these factors into logical categories that facilitate their understanding and mobilization.

However, as explained in Box 2, many of the articles identified by this literature review only implicitly addressed these factors. It was therefore by interpreting these texts and the cases of policy borrowing they describe that we were able to formulate the list of factors.

Moreover, the data concerning the frequency of each factor's recurrence in the literature studied are interesting, but difficult to interpret. Are the factors mentioned most frequently the most decisive when policies are borrowed? Or are they mentioned more frequently because they are relevant to many public policy sectors, or even because they are easier to study? When in doubt, data concerning how frequently factors are mentioned in the literature should not overly influence the choice of factors to mobilize when proposing the borrowing of a public policy.

## 8 A FEW AVENUES OF USE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH ACTORS

Public health actors who are called upon to advise policy makers sometimes choose to propose a range of evidence-informed public policy options for addressing a public health problem. Others choose instead to advocate for the adoption of a specific policy. In either case, a proposed policy may already have been tested in other jurisdictions within the country or in another country.

As a public health actor, how can you mobilize the factors we've identified to assess a policy's suitability for borrowing into your jurisdiction and, if relevant, promote it to policy makers?

### 8.1 Some general comments

- Borrowing policies is a common practice in the public sector and has its advantages; however, with respect to certain types of problems, it may prove unfruitful. Caution is therefore advised:
  - First and foremost, the problem to be solved must be clearly identified and analyzed;
  - For some problems, it is best to avoid simply copying an external policy and instead to assess the degree to which it can be adopted by or adapted to your jurisdiction (emulation, hybridization/combination, inspiration);
  - In the case of highly complex problems that play out in a specific manner in your jurisdiction, it may be more appropriate to formulate a new policy that addresses the specific nature of the problem.
- If, after analyzing the problem, borrowing policies seems like a relevant option, the four-pronged approach we describe in section 7.2 could be used to move forward with this process.
- So far, we have discussed the factors identified in the literature as facilitators of policy borrowing. Conversely, the absence of these factors can be an obstacle. On the other hand, the presence of a factor supportive of a “competing” policy, one that is not the most appropriate from a public health point of view, represents another type of obstacle that can arise. For example, the media could be promoting a policy other than the one that is most effective according to the evidence. This aspect must be taken into account when analyzing the relevant factors.
- How can the various factors be investigated?
  - Usually, public health actors look for sources of evidence concerning the effectiveness and equity of a policy under consideration, as these two factors are crucial to public health. These sources often contain other relevant information. Examples include: the context in which the policy was initially implemented, the existence of prior examples of its having been borrowed in other jurisdictions, adaptations made during the borrowing processes and the results in terms of effectiveness and equity.

- For certain factors of a more political nature (e.g., electoral pressures, disagreement between interested parties, the quest for legitimacy), it is advisable to consult policy analysts in the government body concerned (e.g., a ministerial department, a municipal department)<sup>6</sup> or other policy sector specialists.

## 8.2 A four-pronged approach to using the factors

We propose a four-pronged approach structured around each of the categories of factors established above. Not all the categories and factors described in this document will necessarily be applicable and relevant in all contexts. However, no category or factor should be disregarded a priori. This reflective process will be useful for:

- determining whether it would indeed be relevant to borrow into your jurisdiction the external policies that are among the policy options you are considering;
- determining which factors can be mobilized in your documents presenting these policy options;
- establishing your knowledge-sharing strategy (when, how and with which partners to present these policy options).

**First axis: Determine whether your jurisdiction presents an opportune context which can serve as a springboard for the proposed policy.**

In the public policy development process, the existence of a solution to a problem does not guarantee its adoption. Rather, it is the convincing demonstration that there is a problem that the policy is intended to solve that not only prompts policy makers to prioritize the problem, but also leads them to consider the proposed solution (Bendaoud, 2020). Considering each of the factors in the **Catalysts category** allows one to assess whether it is contextually relevant to propose borrowing a given policy.

CATALYSTS
1. External pressures
2. Internal dissatisfaction
3. Need for an immediate solution
4. Learning
5. Lack of resources
6. Media discourse

Some of the factors in this category fit well into a document describing proposed policy options. For example, you can include international or inter-provincial comparisons that show your jurisdiction is lagging behind others that have implemented a certain policy.

Other factors will mostly help you reflect on your knowledge-sharing strategy. For example, is it the right time to propose a certain policy? Do you see any way of overcoming unfavourable factors?

<sup>6</sup> For a better understanding of potential collaborations with analysts in government agencies, consult Morestin (2017); and, for the municipal environment specifically, Morestin (2020).



**Second axis: Determine whether the proposed policy has qualities that would justify borrowing it.**

As mentioned above, in the description of the factors, evidence demonstrating the qualities of a policy increases its attractiveness. Thus, the aim here is to determine which factors in the **externalizing potential category** are applicable.

It is part of the culture of public health actors to document the effectiveness and equity of interventions they are considering, and to propose only those that satisfy these criteria. What remains is to make a habit of also documenting a policy's frequency of success. Public health literature often contains data on this subject. All of these elements are appropriate to include in a document describing proposed policy options.

EXTERNALIZING POTENTIAL
7. Effectiveness
8. Popularity of the initiating jurisdiction
9. Associated opportunities
10. Simplicity
11. Frequency of success

Public servants in municipalities or ministerial departments are in a better position to assess the other factors in this category. For example, documenting the simplicity of a policy involves gathering information on how it was implemented in the initiating jurisdiction, determining the resources required, and then validating the availability of these resources and the approach that could potentially be taken by the borrowing jurisdiction.

If collaborating with public servants proves impossible, or if you would like to develop a preliminary understanding before approaching them, the framework for analyzing public policies developed by the NCCHPP (Morestin, 2012) is a tool that could facilitate your analysis of several factors in this category.<sup>7</sup>

**Third axis: Determine whether the proposed policy resonates politically with policy makers in your jurisdiction.**

DECISION MAKING
12. Quest for legitimacy
13. Alignment of the policy with policy makers' agenda
14. Disagreement between interested parties
15. Electoral pressures
16. Arrival of more supportive policy makers

The political and ideological interests of decision makers exert a major influence on public policy decision making. Therefore, the factors in the **decision-making category** that would apply in your context should be analyzed.

You can learn more about these factors by keeping abreast of the political and social news related to your work area. That said, for this category it would be advantageous to collaborate with others who are better equipped to perform this analysis (policy analysts inside or outside of government).

<sup>7</sup> Among other things, this framework facilitates analysis of the effectiveness of a public policy, which raises different issues than the analysis of the effectiveness of a simple intervention.

Analysis of these factors serves primarily to guide your thinking about how and when to propose a policy (for example, the arrival of supportive policy makers or the alignment of the policy with the agenda of policy makers represent windows of opportunity).

**Fourth axis: Determine whether your context lends itself to the successful implementation of the proposed policy.**

Even if it has proven effective elsewhere, it is essential to examine whether a policy can be adapted to the contextual realities of your jurisdiction. This is done by analyzing the factors in the **internalizing potential category**.

Public health actors often take into account contextual similarities in their evidence-seeking strategies (for example, they may limit a literature review to experiences conducted in similar countries). This factor should also be examined more closely when analyzing the data found. Indeed, if there are insurmountable differences between the initiating jurisdiction and your own, it may be appropriate to forego proposing a given policy.

**INTERNALIZING POTENTIAL**

- 17. Contextual similarities
- 18. Policy adaptability
- 19. Past policies
- 20. Institutional feasibility

In some cases, the proposed policy could be adapted to conform to the specific realities of your jurisdiction. When presenting the policy, you should specify as clearly as possible which elements of the policy are modifiable and which are not, if effectiveness and equity are to be preserved from a public health perspective.

Reflecting on institutional feasibility helps you identify the right actor to address: in your jurisdiction, which authority (government level and sector) would be responsible for the proposed public policies? This would not necessarily be the same government body as in the initiating jurisdiction.

## 9 CONCLUSION

This literature review led us to identify 20 factors that promote the borrowing of public policies, and to classify these into four categories: catalysts, externalizing potential of the policy, decision making and internalizing potential of the policy. In addition to contributing to the literature in the form of a comprehensive, structured list, this work can help public health actors and possibly those in other sectors to successfully propose the borrowing into their jurisdiction of public policies that have proven effective elsewhere.

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## APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY

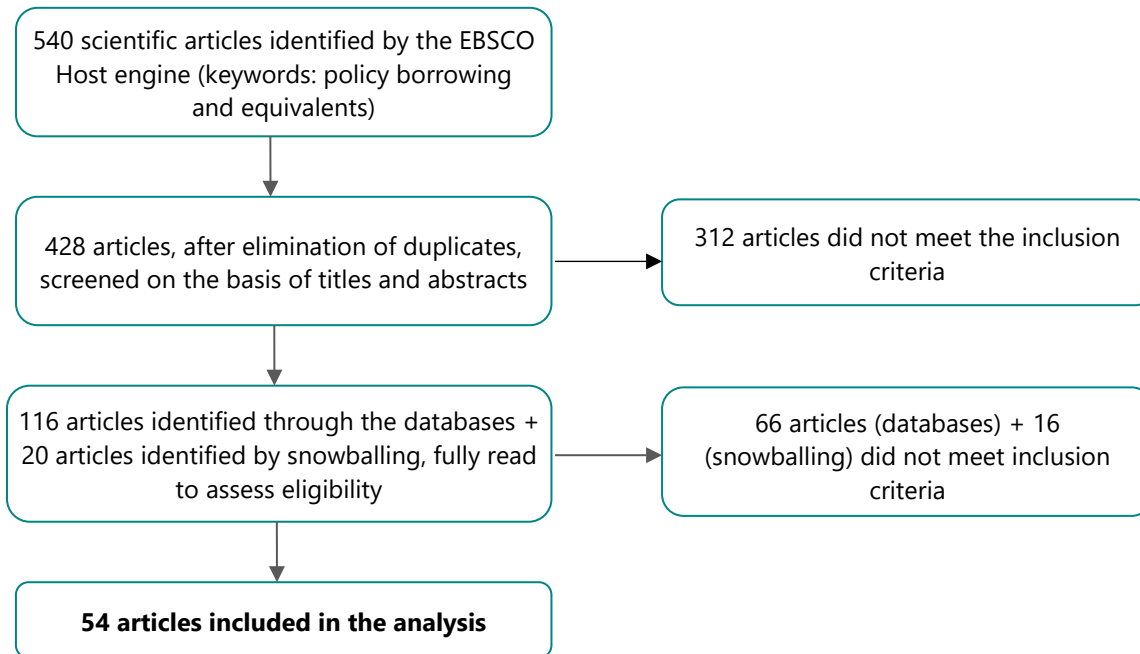
Seven databases were consulted on October 22, 2021, in EBSCO: MEDLINE, ERIC, Health Policy Reference Center, Political Science Complete, Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection, Public Affairs Index, SocINDEX. The keywords searched in the databases were: *policy import*, *policy borrowing*, *policy copying*, *policy imitation*, *policy adaptation*. Results were limited to the years 2000 to 2021, to OECD countries, and to English and French. This search strategy produced 428 results (after elimination of duplicates), to which we applied inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

- **Subject of the document:** It had to focus on the borrowing (or one of the keywords listed above) of public policies by a government body. We therefore excluded articles on:
  - other forms of borrowing (borrowing money, for example)
  - other aspects of policy transfer, such as policy diffusion;
  - policy borrowing from and to private or non-governmental institutions such as businesses or schools.
- **Factors relating to policy borrowing:** We excluded articles that examined policy borrowing, but did not discuss the associated factors.
- **Policy sector:** We included all sectors in which public policies can be developed (health, economy, education, etc.), since we were more focused on the factors that facilitate borrowing than on the policies themselves.
- **Type of document:** Any relevant article on the subject was included in the analysis, from case studies to more conceptual texts and literature reviews.

On the basis of titles and abstracts, 116 articles met the inclusion criteria. After a full reading of these articles, 50 remained. Based on the 116 articles read in their entirety, a further 20 articles were identified through snowballing. A full reading of these 20 articles led to 4 of them being selected. Thus, this report is based on the analysis of 54 articles (see flowchart in Figure 5).

**Figure 4 Article selection process**



## Extraction grid

In an extraction grid, we collected the following information for each of the 54 articles selected for the final analysis:

- Article reference (title);
- Year of publication;
- Factors mentioned in the article (yes/no);
- List of factors mentioned;
- Mechanism explaining the relationship between the factor mentioned and policy borrowing;
- Borrowed policies given as examples;
- Policy sector;
- Borrowing into Canada (yes/no);
- Borrowing from and to jurisdictions within the same country (yes/no);
- Name of borrowing jurisdiction;
- Name of initiating jurisdiction;
- Type of borrowing jurisdiction;
- Type of initiating jurisdiction;
- Borrowing from and to jurisdictions of different levels (yes/no).



## APPENDIX 2 LIST OF ARTICLES MENTIONING EACH FACTOR

Table 2. List of factors and numeric key to articles where they are found

Factors	Number of mentions	Article numbers (see Appendix 4 for full references)
<b>CATALYSTS</b>		
External pressures	14	9; 12; 14; 27; 29; 33; 36; 41; 42; 43; 46; 48; 49; 53
Internal dissatisfaction	13	1; 6; 7; 25; 26; 27; 29; 36; 40; 44; 49; 52; 54
Need for an immediate solution	7	28; 33; 35; 39; 45; 49; 52
Learning	5	12; 16; 34; 38; 54
Lack of resources	1	13
Media discourse	1	2
<b>EXTERNALIZING POTENTIAL</b>		
Effectiveness	15	1; 7; 11; 12; 17; 21; 22; 25; 31; 32; 33; 42; 43; 44; 49
Popularity of the initiating jurisdiction	10	1; 4; 20; 24; 28; 35; 37; 42; 52; 54
Associated opportunities	3	19; 27; 36
Simplicity	2	12; 53
Frequency of success	2	28; 12
<b>DECISION MAKING</b>		
Quest for legitimacy	7	16; 20; 22; 31; 33; 36; 46
Alignment of the policy with policy makers' agenda	6	1; 17; 24; 28; 43; 49
Disagreement between interested parties	4	16; 24; 37; 51
Electoral pressures	3	7; 8; 49
Arrival of more supportive policy makers	2	8; 49
<b>INTERNALIZING POTENTIAL</b>		
Contextual similarities	22	3; 4; 5; 7; 10; 12; 13; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 23; 33; 44; 45; 47; 49; 50; 51; 52; 54
Policy adaptability	8	1; 12; 24; 28; 30; 49; 50; 51
Past policies	2	12; 53
Institutional feasibility	2	12; 53

## APPENDIX 3 TYPES OF JURISDICTIONS INVOLVED

Table 3. Types of jurisdictions involved

<b>Types of jurisdictions involved</b>	<b>Number of articles</b>	<b>Article numbers* (see Appendix 4 for full references)</b>
<b>Borrowing from and to jurisdictions within the same country**</b>	6	8; 12; 13; 15; 40; 54
<b>Borrowing from and to jurisdictions of different levels</b>	11	11; 16; 20; 25; 26; 27; 30; 31; 32; 35; 46
<b>Borrowing from and to jurisdictions of the same level (for example: state-state; municipality-municipality)</b>	16	1; 2; 3; 5; 7; 8; 10; 13; 22; 33; 34; 37; 39; 41; 44; 48
<b>Borrowing from and to countries</b>	14	1; 2; 10; 11; 22; 26; 33; 34; 37; 39; 41; 42; 44; 48

\* Articles that do not provide information on the jurisdictions involved are not included.

\*\* In the articles analyzed, these include states and municipalities in the United States, and municipalities in England.

## APPENDIX 4 LIST OF ARTICLES ANALYZED

Table 4. Numbered list of articles analyzed

Number	Title	Authors	Year
1	Alluring ideas: Cherry picking policy from around the world	Winstanley, C.	2012
2	Another slice of PISA: An interrogation of educational cross-national attraction in Australia, Finland, Japan and South Korea	Davis, E. R., Wilson, R., & Dalton, B.	2020
3	Beyond “context matters”: Context and external validity in impact evaluation	Williams, M. J.	2020
4	Moving landscapes of Nordic basic education: Approaching shifting international influences through the narratives of educational experts	Hansen, P., Wallenius, T., Juvonen, S., & Varjo, J.	2020
5	Transferring sustainable urban mobility policies: An institutional perspective	Canitez, F.	2020
6	Found in translation: An analytical framework to explore national and regional early childhood education and care systems	Hohmann, U.	2020
7	Police and crime commissioners: New agents of crime and justice policy transfer?	Bainbridge, L.	2021
8	Policy inventing and borrowing among state legislatures	Parinandi, S. C.	2020
9	The mobility of education in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century: Lessons from other fields	Ruby, A., & Li, A.	2020
10	Language nests on the move: The case of Võro pre-primary education in Estonia	Brown, K. D., & Fester, M.	2019
11	PISA and policy-borrowing: A philosophical perspective on their interplay in mathematics education	Cantley, I.	2019
12	Processes of local alcohol policy-making in England: Does the theory of policy transfer provide useful insights into public health decision-making?	Gavens, L., Holmes, J., Buykx, P., de Vocht, F., Egan, M., Grace, D., Lock, K., Mooney, J. D., & Brennan, A.	2019
13	Copy and paste lawmaking: Legislative professionalism and policy reinvention in the states	Jansa, J. M., Hansen, E. R., & Gray, V. H.	2019
14	Neither a borrower nor a lender be: Exploring “teaching for mastery” policy borrowing	Clapham, A., & Vickers, R.	2018
15	Bridging divides—Social science, educational policy and the improvement of education and training systems: An appreciation of the contribution of David Raffe (1950-2015)	Howieson, C., Spours, K., & Young, M.	2017
16	Exploring vet policy making: The policy borrowing and learning nexus in relation to plurinational states—the Basque case	López-Guereñu, N.	2018
17	Closing the attainment gap — A realistic proposition or an elusive pipe-dream?	Mowat, J. G.	2018

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>
18	Travelling policies and contextual considerations: On threshold criteria	Nir, A., Kondakci, Y., & Emil, S.	2018
19	Does exposure to other cultures affect the impact of economic globalization on gender equality?	Ben-Nun Bloom, P., Gilad, S., & Freedman, M.	2017
20	The impact of the Bologna reform on teacher education in Germany: An empirical case study on policy borrowing in education	Kuhlee, D.	2017
21	Governing schooling through “what works”: The OECD’s PISA for schools	Lewis, S.	2017
22	Comparing school accountability in England and its East Asian sources of “borrowing”	You, Y.	2017
23	Qualified to Lead? A comparative, contextual and cultural view of educational policy borrowing	Harris, A., Jones, M., & Adams, D.	2016
24	New directions in policy borrowing research	Steiner-Khamsi, G.	2016
25	International education policy transfer—borrowing both ways: The Hong Kong and England experience	Forestier, K., & Crossley, M.	2015
26	Lessons from Albion: Can Australia learn from England’s approach to primary healthcare funding?	Norman, R., & Robinson, S.	2015
27	EU—global interactions: Policy export, import, promotion and protection	Müller, P., Kudrna, Z., & Falkner, G.	2014
28	Cross-national policy borrowing: Understanding reception and translation	Steiner-Khamsi, G.	2014
29	Silent and explicit borrowing of international policy discourses. The case of the Swedish teacher education reforms of 2001 and 2011	Wermke, W., & Höstfält, G.	2014
30	Incredible Years parent and teacher programmes: Emerging themes and issues	Wetherall, M.	2014
31	Lessons from elsewhere? The evolution of the Labour academy school concept, 1997-2010	Fenwick-Sehl, L.	2013
32	The rise and fall of the MTL: An example of European policy borrowing	Chung, J., Atkin, C., & Moore, J.	2012
33	Policy transfer in immature policy environments: Motives, scope, role models and agents	Randma-Liiv, T., & Krusenberg, R.	2012
34	Hybrid courses and online policy dialogues: A transborder distance learning collaboration	Pollock, K. E., & Winton, S. M.	2011
35	Policy borrowing will not “close the achievement gap”	Reid, A.	2011
36	On being a “boundary person”: Mediating between the local and the global in career guidance policy learning	Sultana, R. G.	2011
37	Cultivating borrowed futures: The politics of neoliberal loanwords in South Korean cross-national policy borrowing	Sung, Y.-K.	2011
38	Policy borrowing, policy learning: Testing times in Australian schooling	Lingard, B.	2010

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>
39	Sickness and disability benefit programmes: What is driving policy convergence?	Prinz, C., & Tompson, W.	2009
40	How the West was won: An inside view of the SEIU's strategies and tactics for organizing home care workers in Oregon	Mareschal, P. M.	2007
41	A national educational cultural reform model: Professionalizing the principalship to reform a nation's educational system	Korem, A., & Shapiro, A.	2006
42	Investigating policy attraction in education	Phillips, D.	2006
43	Educational policy borrowing: Historical perspectives	Sever, R.	2006
44	Researching policy borrowing: Some methodological challenges in comparative education	Phillips, D., & Ochs, K.	2004
45	Policy borrowing: Lessons from European attempts to transfer training practices	Turbin, J.	2001
46	Cross-national policy borrowing and educational innovation: Improving achievement in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham	Ochs, K.	2006
47	Youth policy borrowing across language divides	Bynner, J.	2017
48	Is the grass always greener? The effect of the PISA results on education debates in Sweden and Germany	Ringarp, J., & Rothland, M.	2010
49	Processes of policy borrowing in education: Some explanatory and analytical devices	Phillips, D., & Ochs, K.	2003
50	International learning communities: What can be learned across national boundaries?	Peterson, A., & Mehta, J.D.	2019
51	Policy transfer routes: An evidence-based conceptual model to explain policy adoption	Minkman, E., van Buuren, M. W., & Bekkers, V. J. J. M.	2018
52	Policy diffusion and policy transfer in comparative welfare state research	Obinger, H., Schmitt, C., & Starke, P.	2013
53	Learning from abroad: The role of policy transfer in contemporary policy-making	Dolowitz, D. P., & Marsh, D.	2000
54	Executive leadership, policy tourism, and policy diffusion among local governments	Yi, H., & Liu, I.	2022





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Centre de collaboration nationale  
sur les politiques publiques et la santé  
National Collaborating Centre  
for Healthy Public Policy