

PUBLIC POLICY AND IDEATIONAL INSTITUTIONALISM

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There is a great deal contributed towards understanding why particular public policy decisions are made. What is missing, however, are more universal approaches to policy sciences that can examine public policy decisions regardless of societal, political and socioeconomic conditions. Advances in the institutional perspective of last two-and-half decades have come to take a central place in understanding political decision-making. This has been loosely dubbed as new institutionalism. The ideational turn in neoinstitutionalist literature is by far the most recent and still an emerging scholarship. Earlier attempts to turn to ideas were more of a corrective nature and with an objective to fill-in theoretical gaps within new institutionalism. Lately, there have been assertions of giving ideational dimension a distinct identity and recognition of its own. The reason is the distinctiveness of ideational institutionalism in its ontological, analytical and methodological approaches. In this paper, the types and origin of ideas and the mechanism by which they affect policy outcomes are discussed in detail in order to advance the theoretical foundations of ideational institutionalism.

Theorizing Public Policy:

There is no scholarly consensus over the precise definition of the term ‘public policy.’ Thomas Dye, whose own widely cited definition of public policy “whatever governments choose to do or not to do,” argues that trying to find a precise definition of public policy can

“degenerate into a word game” which adds little to our understanding.¹ In this paper too rather than conforming to one particular definition, the term ‘public policy’ is seen from its defining characteristics. Public policy is understood as a purposeful course of action taken by the government that affects a segment of the society. It is in the form of a law, statute, regulation, rule or legislation and therefore follows a certain authority and coercion. Public policy is seen as forming a subset of ‘policy.’ Therefore, the notion that public policy also entails what government chooses not to do is understood as inaction or lack of definitive statement on part of any government and an evidence of an implicit policy than a public policy.

Harold Lasswell, attributed as the founder of the policy sciences, and early scholars saw policy sciences to be problem-oriented, multidisciplinary and normative. These characteristics are discernable in earlier theoretical contributions, i.e. “comprehensive rationality” or stages heuristic models. Such prescriptive approaches, however, were unable to explain why the policy process happens the way it does and served as a departure point for descriptive study of public policy. From ‘comprehensive rationality,’ the theories of incrementalism and ‘bounded rationality’ were introduced to describe how policy decisions reflect the ‘reality’ in which they are made. Among other limitations, these theoretical advancements fell short of explaining the process through which policy decisions are made or the role of interests in shaping such decision. The ‘policy typology’ also served as a standard conceptual tool. Based on the work of Theodore Lowi, who was interested in examining the different types of public policy and their effect on politics, the framework of ‘policy typology’ postulated that one could predict the type of politics to follow if the type of policy is determined. It was essentially a departure from Lasswellian approach to public policy, and

¹ Dye, Thomas R. *Understanding Public Policy* 13th ed. (New York, Prentice Hall, 2007): 19

² Collier, D., Laporte, J., and Seawright, J., “Typologies: Forming Concepts and Creating Categorical

an attempt to have predictive models of public policy. The ‘policy typology’ not only depicted the peculiarity of the regulatory environment of the US, but its categorization also failed to meet the basic analytical distinction of being mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive.² Nevertheless, policy analysis since then took an empirical orientation. Fisher et al argue that there has been “an emphasis on rigorous quantitative analysis...the limited framework becomes a policy science that would be able to develop generalizable rules applicable to a range of problems and contexts.”³ The ascendancy of economics and its positivist scientific methodologies has since then dominated the development of the field. Many rightly argue today that policy does not follow standardised procedures or routinized approaches that it can be validated in a technically scientific sense.⁴

The basic problem with public policy theories is their inability to adapt to the multifaceted characteristic of policy process. For this reason, there is no single unifying theory of public policy. In the last two-and-half decades, however, there have been a number of new theoretical frameworks of the policy process introduced that combines insights from a range of theoretical frameworks for greater applicability. But, by and large, they implicitly assume the basic features of American pluralism and, therefore, limited by their origins in high-income democratic settings with little or no relevance to low/middle income or less democratic settings. This points to a quandary that besets the policy sciences in the context of countries of the global south. Osman argues, “The structure of the political system greatly differs from the developed and developing countries. This makes the existing theories or models of public policy making derived from the developed countries inadequate to explain

² Collier, D., Laporte, J., and Seawright, J., “Typologies: Forming Concepts and Creating Categorical Variables,” in Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

³ Fischer, F., Miller, Gerald J., and Sidney, Mara S. (eds.), *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics and Methods* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2007): xix

⁴ McCool, Daniel C. *Public Policy, Theories, Models and Concepts: An Anthology* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995) 398

the policy making process of developing countries.”⁵ Lately, post-positivist, interpretivist, and social constructionist scholars have been defining the more recent development in the field of public policy. This paper combines this social constructionist view of social inquiry with the role of discourse and ideas in the shaping of social explanation and understanding.

The Three Established New Institutionalisms and the Ideational Turn:

New institutionalism lacks a unified body of thought. There is, however, some degree of consensus that the new institutionalism falls into three broad categories of rational choice, historical and sociological institutionalisms. The three schools-of-thought have developed quite independently to each other. But they all have in common their discontent with the behavioural perspectives of 60s and 70s. At the same time, while all three approaches agree that institutions matter but they disagree over the extent to which they matter. Rational-choice institutionalists, with Douglass C. North as one of their torchbearers, consider institutions to be only an intervening variable affecting individuals’ choices and actions while their strategic calculation remains the central pillar. They concede that institutions set parameters to individuals’ actions but they are also the creation of utility-maximising rationalists in order to overcome unpredictability.⁶ Rational-choice institutionalists, therefore, see institutions as a system of rules and incentives created by rational profit-maximisation decisions. Historical institutionalists consider institutions to have a determinant role in individuals’ actions as their preferences are formed by institutional context in which they calculate their interests. Interests, therefore, are the product of interaction among various groups, ideas, and institutional structures. Institutions, for historical institutionalists, are thus

⁵ Osman, Ferdous, A., “Public Policy Making: Theories and their Implications in Developing Countries,” *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2002): 38

⁶ Koelble, T., “The New Institutionalism in Political Science and Sociology,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1995): 232

continuities and path-dependence. For sociologists, individuals' interests are a product of a broader institutional setting where culture, society, and organisational identity are all a contributing factor and where even institutions themselves are dependent on society and culture. For sociologists, institutions are a web of interrelated formal and informal norms that shape parameters of choice and where actors are 'embedded' in a network of personal relationships which serves as an evaluation framework for their choices.⁷ This effectively translates, for all three established new institutionalisms, an ontological standpoint where institutions are seen in stable equilibria, whether with fixed rationalist preferences, self-reinforcing historical paths, or all-defining cultural norms, that serve as constraints on agents' actions. This deterministic view of institutions has led to difficulties for new institutionalists in explaining how do such institutions get changed.⁸ This predicament in new institutionalism explains the turn to ideas, applied as more of a corrective measure and even implying a tacit acknowledgement of their theoretical limitation in explaining institutional change.⁹ Blyth calls this initial interest in ideas among the new institutionalists as "an ad hoc attempt to account for theoretical problems,"¹⁰ This instrumental and functional treatment of ideas and an attempt to grapple with questions of institutional change served as an origin of a distinct body of scholarship within new institutionalism referred here as ideational institutionalism.¹¹ At around the same time when the three new institutionalisms come to be recognised, there started an increasing impetus on bringing these three established schools-of-thought under comparative lenses. Ideas, on the one hand, became the bridge amongst different schools-of-

⁷ Nee, V. and Ingram, P., "Embeddedness and Beyond: Institutions, Exchange, and Social Structure," in Marcy C. Brinton and Victor Nee (eds.) *The New Institutionalism in Sociology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998): 40

⁸ Bell, S., "Do We Really Need a New 'Constructivist Institutionalism' to Explain Institutional Change?" *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2011): 883

⁹ Schmidt, Vivien A., "Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11 (2008): 884

¹⁰ Blyth, Mark M., "Any More Bright Ideas? The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1997): 229

¹¹ See: Schmidt, Vivien A., "Institutionalism and the State," in C. Hay, M. Lister, and D. Marsh (eds.) *The State: Theories and Issues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006)

thought within new institutionalism through which they sought commonalities and, on the other hand resulted in erecting a distinct theoretical body – ideational institutionalism – in its own right.

For rational choice institutionalists, individual's instrumental calculus remains at the centre so as to maximise the attainment from a fixed set of preferences, and ideas shaped by a particular institutional environment are the explanation behind why actors move towards one outcome when there are multiple equilibriums, or more than one preferred choices.¹²

Historical institutionalists, on the other hand, have been more open to converge to ideas in explaining public-policy process and change. Peter Hall, in his seminal work, writes “policymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing.”¹³ For sociological institutionalists ideas have always been at the basis of the norms, cognitive frames and meaning systems that guide human action and constitute forms and procedures of organisational life.¹⁴ For rational choice institutionalists, ideas are seen linked to acceptable range of choices and in determination of perceived payoffs. In the perspective of historical institutionalism, Daniel Béland considers ideas to have a crucial role in the analysis of policy change and see them as “specific policy alternatives as well as the organised principles and causal beliefs in which these proposals are embedded.”¹⁵ Nee and Ingram see ideas in sociological institutionalism as evaluation frameworks of rewards and punishment that are

¹² Garrett, G. and Weingast, B., “Ideas, Interest and Institutions: Constructing the European Community's Internal Market,” in Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane (eds.) *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1993): 173 – 206

¹³ Hall, Peter A., “Policy Paradigm, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain,” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 25 No. 3 (1993): p. 279

¹⁴ Schmidt, Vivien A., “Taking Ideas and Discourse Seriously: Explaining Change through Discursive Institutionalism as the Forth “New Institutionalism,” *European Political Science Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2010): 11

¹⁵ Béland, D., “Ideas and Social Policy: An Institutional Perspective,” *Social Policy & Administration*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2005): 2

based on social approval or disapproval and characterised by norms, relationships, and networks.¹⁶ The treatment of ideas, therefore, varies in the three schools-of-thought.

Initially, the study of ideas in the work of new institutionalism was seen less optimistically. Subsequent work on the role of ideas in explaining political change in the context of new institutionalism is now dubbed as the “fourth new institutionalism,” and in some latest compendiums on new institutionalist scholarship the ideational school is now given a distinct space and recognition. The importance of ideational process in policymaking and to the understanding of institutional change and continuity has formed a distinct identity of its own. Different adjectives have been used to distinct it from the three established new institutionalism, i.e. ideational, discursive, and constructivist institutionalism. Here, the term ideational is preferred over other adjectives as the focus is on the role of ideas rather than the means, i.e. interpretive or interactive processes, through which institutions are created, sustained and changed and policies are influenced, contested and shaped. However, regardless of the use of any adjective, what is common is the interest in the role of ideas and ontologically considering policymaking a more dynamic process than a result of an equilibrium-focused outcome in a static institutional setting. Its origination is in the desire to capture, describe and interrogate institutional disequilibrium. Before an attempt could be made to define ‘institution’ within the ambit of ideational institutionalism, it is essential to first delineate what is meant by ‘ideas.’

Defining Ideas:

¹⁶ Nee, V. and Ingram, P., “Embeddedness and Beyond: Institutions, Exchange, and Social Structure,” in Marcy C. Brinton and Victor Nee (eds.) *The New Institutionalism in Sociology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998): p. 40

In the institutional literature, there seems to be no general convergence among authors on what ideas is and what does it constitute. Understanding of ideas is greatly influenced by one's ontological standpoint. For instance, the rational-choice institutionalists ascribe to the understanding where they see ideas secondary to interests and as justification, rationalisation, and instrument of persuasion.¹⁷ Those who subscribe to historical institutionalism consider ideas to be purposes and projects defining roles of individuals in relation to their institutional environment and constitutive of the self, and also of the concepts of rationality, preferences, and interests.¹⁸ More recent definitions of ideas, however, are tending to be minimalist in their application. Such as of Lieberman who considers ideas to be a “medium by which people can imagine...and such imaginings spur them to act to try and make changes.”¹⁹ Similarly, Hay understands ideas as perceptions comprising desires, preferences and motivations that reflect a normative orientation.²⁰ These various conceptions of ideas stem from a particular ontological standpoint and explore the concept from within the limits of their school-of-thought, except, to some degree, for the advancements undertaken by John Campbell and Vivien Schmidt.

Building upon the work of Peter Hall on policy paradigms, Campbell gives, for the first time, an elaborate conception of ideas as providing specific solutions to policy problems, constraining the cognitive and normative range of solutions that policymakers are likely to consider, and constituting symbols and concepts that enable actors to construct frames with which to legitimise their policy proposals.²¹ Campbell here considers ideas to be serving as

¹⁷ See: Fiorina, M., “Rational Choice and the New (?) Institutionalism,” *Polity*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1995): 107 - 115

¹⁸ Smith, Rogers, M., “Ideas, Institutions, and Strategic Choices,” *Polity*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1995): 136

¹⁹ Lieberman, Robert C., “Ideas, Institutions and Political Order: Explaining Political Change,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (2002): 698

²⁰ Hay, C., “Constructivist Institutionalism,” (56 – 74) in R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah A. Binder and Bert A. Rockman (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 63

²¹ Campbell, John L., “Institutional Analysis and the Role of Ideas in Political Economy,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1998): 398

constraining structures on actors, in line with the argument of the three established new institutionalisms. In a later article, Campbell gives a more wholesome definition of ideas calling them “theories, conceptual models, norms, world views frames, principled beliefs and the like, rather than self-interests, affect policy making.”²² In this case, Campbell clearly distinguishes ideas from interests and treats them as two distinctive concepts. Vivien Schmidt is the most revolutionary of ideational institutionalists and is among the forerunners of giving this particular offshoot in institutionalist debate a distinct identity. She writes of ideas as of “simultaneously constraining structures and enabling constructs of meaning which are internal to ‘sentient’ (thinking and speaking) agents whose “background ideational abilities” explain how they create and maintain institutions at the same time that their “foreground discursive abilities” enable them to communicate critically about those institutions, to change (or maintain) them.”²³ Schmidt, while tallying different definitions and conceptions of ideas, also provides a functional understanding and distinguishes ideas as per its level of generality, i.e. specific to a particular policy, encompassing a wider program or constituting an underlying philosophy, and in terms of its appeal, i.e. cognitive for constituting interests and normative to appeal to values and norms.²⁴ Rather than bridging gaps and aiming to build a more holistic understanding of the term in order to connect different schools-of-thought in new institutionalism, Schmidt, as she herself states, believes in the distinctiveness of ideas.²⁵ The understanding of ideas constructed by Schmidt in contrast to that of Campbell is revolutionary on two accounts. First, Schmidt does not consider ideas and interests to be two distinct concepts but rather the former constituting the later. Second, ideas for Schmidt are both constraining structures as well as enabling constructs, and thereby she implies a much more dynamic understanding of the term than of Campbell. However, Schmidt’s

²² Campbell, John L., “Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 28 (2002): 21

²³ Schmidt, Vivien A., 2010: 3

²⁴ Schmidt, Vivien A., 2008: 321

²⁵ Ibid, 304

understanding of ideas as cognitive [what is and what to do] and normative [what is good or bad in light of what one ought to do] falls short of fully appreciating the subjective dimension of constituting interests [what is ones gain or loss in view of what is], though she herself infers “interests are subjective and norm-driven.”²⁶ The notion of ideas as frames is comparatively a more wholesome conception then, which merits potential with its ability to link cognition to norms and understanding to action.²⁷

In a 1989 essay, Bruno Jobert talks of ideas as in “frame of reference” and links it to the cognitive, instrumental and normative dimensions of policymaking.²⁸ He explains cognitive dimension as a “common intellectual interpretative framework” through which policymakers evaluate probable effects of their actions. Instrumental dimension provides “set of recipes” or the policy instruments available to carryout intended action, and he describes the normative dimension comprising political culture and values.²⁹ Together with Surel, Muller further elaborates this understanding of referential as “arrangements of intellectual, normative or cognitive frames that simultaneously determine the tools through which societies can work on themselves and the arena of meaning within which social groups will interact.”³⁰ Jobert and Muller also use the term of ‘mediator,’ somewhat similar to the concept of ‘epistemic community’ of Hass or of ‘advocacy coalition framework’ of Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith but more broad-based in its membership, that produces the referential and comprises “the actor, as a group or an individual...considered as the truth at a specific moment.”³¹ This implies cognitive frames as constructions from outside that are then used as

²⁶ Ibid, 306 and 318

²⁷ Gooby-Taylor, P., “Ideas and Policy Change,” (1 – 11) in Peter Taylor-Gooby (ed.) *Ideas and Welfare State Reform in Western Europe* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 4

²⁸ Jobert, B., “The Normative Framework of Public Policy,” *Political Studies*, Vol. 37 (1989): 377

²⁹ Ibid, 377-78

³⁰ Muller, P. and Surel, Y. *L’analyse des Politiques Publiques* (Paris: Editions Montchrestien, 1998): 11

³¹ Jobert, B. and Muller, P., *L’Etat en Action* (Paris: PUF, 1987); Haas describes ‘epistemic community’ compose of experts that produce shared understanding on how problems are perceived and their solutions are

intellectual and normative references by the policymaker to determine tools for problem solving. For this, they need access to the political agenda and be diffused in policy circles to become a reference for actions. This comprehension carries two limitations. First, it becomes overtly prescriptive focusing less on the creations and change of institutions and more on the instrumental dimension of ideas. Second, it shuts itself from the possibility of policy behaviours of an individual or a group of individuals acting in pursuit of their own interests using ideas to build incentive structures and to reduce uncertainties.

Nevertheless, understanding ideas as a “frame of reference” takes distinction over other conceptions of the term in the three established new institutionalisms as, on the one hand, it not only constrains actors’ decisions making but also becomes “a tool to shape and modify reality.”³² It also differs in a sense that it implies a reciprocal relationship between ideas and public policy influencing the construction of each other than the univocal relationship as described in rational-choice, historical or sociological institutionalisms.³³ Seeing ideas as a “frame of reference” to a public-policy outcome is particularly useful considering policymakers usually operate at various levels, cognitive, normative and subjective interpretations of interests, for evaluation of their decisions. It is in this context the term ‘ideas’ is conceived as the basis for policy decisions, central to how policymakers conceive and evaluate their options and how and what they decide. Its construction is the result of exogenous factors, i.e. culture, norms, or scripts, or endogenous to organisation, i.e. rule-like qualities, structure action and regularised practices, or internal to actors as in subjective

considered in: Hass, P. “Do Regimes Matter? Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution Control,” *International Organization*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1989): 377 – 403

³² Simoulin, V., “Emission, médiation, réception... Les opérations constitutives d’une réforme par imprégnation,” *Revue Française de Science Politique*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2000): 334

³³ Musselin, C., “The role of Ideas in the Emergence of Convergent Higher Education Policies in Europe: The Case of France,” *Working Paper Series No. 73, Center for European Studies* (2000): 22

calculus of interests, intellectual determination of optimal course of action or assumptions of public sentiments, or a mix of thereof.

Institutions in Ideational Institutionalism:

In ideational institutionalism literature, there have been only a handful of attempts to define institutions and its relationship with ideas and even that gives alternative accounts of what institutions are and what do they constitute. Schmidt, who is among the pioneers of brining ideational dimension in new institutionalism, defines institution as “meaning structures and constructs” that are “internal to agents whose “background ideational abilities” and “foreground discursive abilities” make for a dynamic, agent-centered approach to institutional change.”³⁴ In ideational context, and as Schmidt elaborates, “institutions are therefore internal to the actors, serving both as structures that constrain actors and as constructs created and changed by those actors.”³⁵ Schmidt further explains that in ideational institutionalism, “Agents’ background ideational abilities [what goes on in individuals’ minds as they come up with new ideas] enable them to act in any given meaning context to create and maintain institutions while their foreground discursive abilities [to reason, debate] enable them to communicate critically about those institutions and so to change or maintain them.”³⁶ This is why Schmidt prefers to call this as discursive institutionalism, instead of ideational or constructivist, where ideas serve as substantive content of discourse and discourse is needed for an interactive process to convey ideas. She argues that in ideational context, institutions are not only given but are also contingent upon agents and therefore they are “internal to the

³⁴ Schmidt, Vivien A., “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11 (2008): pp. 303 – 26

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 314

³⁶ *ibid*, p. 322

actors.”³⁷ On the other hand, Schmidt does not rule out the possibility of “agents to think, speak, and act outside their institutions even as they are inside them, to deliberate about institutional rules even as they use them, and to persuade one another to change those institutions or to maintain them.”³⁸ Schmidt continues to make the case for the necessity of ‘discourse’ for an ideational understanding to hold that “an interactive process is what enables agent to change institutions, because the deliberative nature of discourse allows them to conceive of and talk about institutions as objects at a distance, and to dissociate themselves from them even as they continue to use them.”³⁹

Colin Hay, who prefers to call himself a constructivist institutionalist, argues somewhat on similar lines as Schmidt but does not talk of institutions as internal and rather considers them to be “codified systems of ideas and the practices they sustain.”⁴⁰ Hay, in contrast to historical institutionalism, talks of ‘ideational path dependence’ whereby he argues “it is not just institutions, but the very ideas on which they are predicated and which inform their design and development, that exert constraints on political autonomy.” He continues that actors “perception about what is feasible, legitimate, possible and desirable are shaped both by the institutional environment in which they find themselves and by existing policy paradigms and world-views. It is through such cognitive filters that strategic conduct is conceptualized and ultimately assessed.”⁴¹

Mark Blyth, also among the influential ideational institutionalists, is mainly interested in the role of ideas in determining policy choice and those too especially in crisis situation with a

³⁷ *ibid*, p. 314

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 316

⁴⁰ Hay, C., “Constructivist Institutionalism,” (56 – 74) in R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah A. Binder and Bert A. Rockman (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): p. 58

⁴¹ *ibid*, p. 65

goal to decipher relationship between institutions, interest and ideas. For Blyth, ideas serve as blueprints for the design of new institutions and “to reduce uncertainty, propose a particular solution to a moment of crisis and empower agents to resolve that crisis by constructing new institutions in line with these new ideas [emphasis added].”⁴² While Blyth does not subscribe to any particular adjective to distinguish himself, he is quite critical of instrumental and functional treatment of ideas in the three established new institutionalisms and contends “ideas have to be taken as more than an addendum to institutions,” he writes and continues, “they must be conceptualized apart from pre-existing categories and epistemological commitments and treated as an object of investigation in their own right.”⁴³

While still maturing, ideational scholarship is not without criticism, which is inflicted from theorists inside as well as from outside institutionalist scholarship. The most formidable of this comes from a fellow neo-institutionalist Stephen Bell, who sums up differences in ideational discourse as varying “from postmodern accounts, where ideas, inter-subjective meanings and discourse are primitive and wholly define or constitute social and institutional life, to more ontological realist accounts, which admit that institutions and wider structures can have real effects.”⁴⁴ Bell argues that Schmidt in her thesis “perceives only one dimension of the two-way dialectical interaction between agents and institutions,” the latter he argues is “ontologically prior to the individuals who populate them at any given time.”⁴⁵ Bell is right in pointing out the weakness in Schmidt’s analysis but therein also highlights the key difference between ideational institutionalism and the three established new institutionalisms. In ideational institutionalism, it is neither institution nor ideas that are conceived ontologically

⁴² Blyth, Mark M., *Great Transformation: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002): pp. 10 – 11

⁴³ Blyth, Mark M., “Any More Bright Ideas? The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1997): p. 246

⁴⁴ Bell, S., “Do We Really Need a New ‘Constructivist Institutionalism’ to Explain Institutional Change?” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2011): p. 889

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 891

prior to one or another rather the design and development of institutions is based on ideas which once developed effect their subsequent development as well as actors' perceptions about what is feasible, legitimate, possible and desirable. In his defense of historical institutionalism, Bell conceives agents, institutions, structures and ideas to be mutually constitutive in a dialectical manner. In ideational institutionalism, however, ideas are the blueprint of a dialectical relationship among agents in a manner of becoming their cognitive filters to interpret environmental signals, institutions being built upon ideational foundation and structures serving as constraints shaping options and strategies once formed but yet dependent on agent for its sustenance and continuity. Bell's third criticism is on the mechanism and origin of ideas in ideational scholarship as he writes, "ideas do not operate in a vacuum but are instead 'embedded in a historical context and need institutional support to be effective.'"⁴⁶ This criticism holds ground in a sense that there is only scanty written material either on the origin or the mechanism of ideas through which they operate, a subject taken in more detail in subsequent section. Though limited in number, substantial work does exist in discourse analysis on which origin and mechanism of ideas can be operationalized.

How are we then to define institutions in ideational institutionalism? The answer may lie in looking for commonalities among ideational theorists. With slightly differing accounts, the main commonalities among ideational institutionalists and their divergences from the three established new institutionalisms are primarily three. Firstly, ideational institutionalists imply a dynamic understanding of the relationship between institutions and agents in contrast to what Schmidt calls "sticky" definition of the same by the three established new institutionalisms with its deterministic influence either through fixed rationalist preferences, self-reinforcing historical paths or all defining cultural norms. Secondly, and related to the

⁴⁶ *ibid*

first difference, the three established new institutionalisms treat institutions as given within which agents actions are dictated and therefore they serve mainly a constraining role conforming to a rule-following logic. One of the main reasons why the three established schools in new institutionalism have been better able to explain continuity but run into trouble in explaining policy change and resort to explanation of exogenous shocks, dramatic events or crises situation. In ideational understanding, and as Schmidt argues, institutions are not only constraining structures but also enabling constructs. Furthermore and as Hay elaborates, “institutions are built on ideational foundations which exert an independent path dependent effect on their subsequent development.”⁴⁷ Finally, actors in ideational understanding are both strategic and socialized making their actions more flexible as their desires, preferences and motivations are not a contextually given fact rather ideational towards the context in which they are to be realized. In the words of Blyth then it is ‘ideas’ that makes interests actionable. Or as Schmidt argues that interests neither objective nor material as they are subjective ideas. Within this context, institutions are thus defined as an interrelated collection of ideational constructs that is itself affected by its institutional environment for its subsequent design and development. Such constructs are internal to sentient agents that enable them to evolve, adopt and innovate but together they constitute external structures serving primarily as constraints. For example, they may be thought to embed history and political thought and to reflect, therefore, a set of traditions and practices, whether written or unwritten. Institutions thus can be interpreted as reflecting habits and norms, more likely to be evolved than to be created. But institutions also may be seen as architecture and as rules that determine opportunities and incentives for behavior, inclusion and exclusion of potential players, and structuring the relative ease or difficulty of inducing change, and the mechanisms through which change may be facilitated or denied. In contrast

⁴⁷ Hay, C., 2006: 65

with rational-choice institutionalism where rational actors pursue preferences following a ‘logic of calculation,’ or in historical institutionalism in which regularized patterns and routines are the result of agents acting according to ‘logic of path-dependence,’ or in sociological institutionalism where actions are response to socially constituted and culturally framed actions as outcomes of ‘logic of appropriateness,’ agents in ideational institutionalism are salient and socialized who devise, deliberate and legitimize their actions according to the ‘logic of discourse.’ With this understanding, the next section fills existing theoretical gaps in ideational institutionalism on typology of ideas.

Typology of Ideas:

One of the key problems that beset the ideational analysis is the conceptual confusion about different types of ideas. Ideationalists generally trace their origins to historical institutionalism and, most noticeably, in the work of Peter Hall. In his 1993 seminal work on ‘policy paradigms,’ Hall turns to ideas to understand the policy process beyond a response to societal pressures as identified by pluralist analysis or defined purely by the pursuit of the ‘rational interest’. He sets the foundation of his theoretical framework on the concept of ‘social learning’ that emphasizes on the role of ideas as central to policymaking. He recognizes that who use this concept “have yet to develop an overarching image of the way in which ideas fits into policy process.”⁴⁸ For Hall, policymaking essentially revolves around three central variables of “the overarching goals that guide policy in a particular field, the techniques or policy instruments used to attain those goals, and the precise settings of these instruments.”⁴⁹ He then links ideas to policymaking as frameworks in which policymakers work and which specifies for them “the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can

⁴⁸ Hall, Peter A., 1993: p. 276

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 278

be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing.”⁵⁰ Hall uses Thomas Kuhn’s analogy of ‘scientific paradigms’ to make the case of three orders of change in policymaking. A first-order change is where only the levels of basic instruments are altered and the second-order change is when the techniques being used to attain the overarching goals are changed. Hall relates the first- and second-order changes to Kuhn’s ‘normal science’ in which the overall policy paradigm remains unchallenged. In contrast, a third-order change where all three components of policy are changed, the instrument setting, the instruments themselves and the hierarchy of goals behind policy, to which Hall relates to ‘paradigm shift.’

The work on ‘policy paradigm’ introduced by Peter Hall is crucial for the application of ideational institutionalism to the field of policymaking for several reasons. Most importantly it provides, for the first time, a dynamic and elaborated framework of policymaking where ideas takes a central place in new institutionalism than a mere filler to its theoretical gaps. It also attempts to bridge the gap between the two contending models based either on public or private interests and sees policymaking as a process where power in the former and ideas in the latter could go together. It sees ideas as both ‘constraining structures’ where they condition policymaking to a particular routine of what can and should be done but they also become ‘enabling constructs’ that “bolster or induce changes in institutional routine.” Hall also highlights political discourse as a means through which ideas flow from society to the state lending “legitimacy to some social interests more than others, delineates the accepted boundaries of state action, associates contemporary political developments with particular interpretations of national history, and defines the context in which many issues will be understood.” However, as Hall himself admits, his analysis fall short of a more “refined

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 279

appreciation of the role of ideas in politics.”⁵¹ His analyses are incompatible with endogenous institutionalist account of the mechanism and determinants of institutional change. While Hall does not elucidate on different types of ideas and provides only its functional understanding at different levels of policymaking, his analysis have been widely used in subsequent ideational literature.

John Campbell has made important advancements in studying the effects of ideas on policymaking outcomes. In his first major publication on the subject, Campbell sharpens the concept of ideas and their effect on policymaking building upon the work of Peter Hall.⁵² He compares existing insights on ideas in historical institutionalism and organizational institutionalism to create a typology of ideas based on structural dimensions of normative and cognitive levels, which he considers operate both explicitly in the foreground and as underlying assumptions in the background of policy debates. Campbell’s typology consists of four distinct types of ideas, namely programs operating at the foreground and paradigms, in contrast, functioning in the background at the cognitive level and frames in the foreground as apposed to public sentiments in the background at the normative level of public-policy making. Campbell defines programmatic ideas, which locate at the foreground of policy debates, as concrete solutions “that specify cause-and-effect relationships and prescribe course of policy action.”⁵³ Ideas as paradigms, which also operate at the cognitive level, reside in the background of policy debate and are the “underlying theoretical and ontological assumptions about how the world works.”⁵⁴ At the normative level of the policy debate, ideas as public sentiment “consists of broad-based attitudes and normative assumptions about what

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 292

⁵² Campbell, John L., “Institutional Analysis and the Role of Ideas in Political Economy,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1998): pp. 377 – 409

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 386

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 389

is desirable or not,” that work at the background.⁵⁵ Ideas as frames are “symbols and concepts” also normative in their orientation but residing at the foreground of the policy debate through which policymakers “appropriate and manipulate public sentiments for their own purpose.”⁵⁶ Through empirical cases from the United States, Campbell then makes a case that different types of ideas, as identified by their structural features, have different effects on policymaking.

Campbell’s work provides a passionate analysis of what do we mean by ideas and how they affect policymaking outcomes. It also advances the argument that ideas, as apposed to historical institutionalism, are not just constraints on actors limiting their possibilities for action but are also enabling factors that generate solutions for problems. Campbell also advances historical institutionalism in its approach of treating ideas through normative lenses only and brings insights from the organizational institutionalism to add a cognitive dimension offering a more dynamic theory of action. Importantly and in contrast to Peter Hall and more generally to new institutionalism’s inability to appreciate agency [who said what to whom] over structures [what is said, or where and how], Campbell has put considerable credence to actors, as is the case in ideational institutionalism, and their ability to “self-consciously devise solutions to their problems by deliberately manipulating explicit, culturally given concepts that reside in the cognitive foreground. However, Campbell sees ideas and interests distinctively and is interested in the interaction of the two rather than seeing one shaping the other. More recently, Campbell agrees, “Interests are just another type of idea,” which is “rooted in people’s perceptions of their material situations.”⁵⁷ This is an important concession and one that constructivists have been emphasizing in their ideational analysis. Hay writes,

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 392

⁵⁶ *ibid*, p. 394

⁵⁷ Campbell, John L., “What do we Know – Or Not – About Ideas or Politics?” (157-76) in Peter Nedergaard and John L. Campbell (eds.) *Politics and Institutions* (Copenhagen: DJOEF, 2008): 159

“[Actors] desires, preferences, and motivations are not a contextually given fact – a reflection of material or even social circumstances – but are irredeemably ideational, reflecting a normative orientation towards the context in which they will have to be realized.”⁵⁸ Interests therefore, whether public or private, are social constructions. This is the line of argument that Kathryn Sikkink takes in her book *Ideas and Institutions*. She writes, “Ideas are lens, without which no understanding of interests is possible. Ideas transform perceptions of interest, shaping actors’ self understanding of their own interest.”⁵⁹ Lieberman defines ideas as constituting “much of the substantive raw material upon which institutional theory feeds – the goals and desires that people bring to the political world and, hence, the ways they define and express their interests; the meanings, interpretation, and judgments they attach to events and conditions; and their beliefs about cause-and-effect relationships in the political world and, hence, their expectations about how others will respond to their own behavior.”⁶⁰ This subjective comprehension and articulation of interests is not only internal to sentient agents. As Béland writes, “ideational process can help actors make sense of their perceived interests,” but also help in convincing “the general public and specific interest group that the existing state of affairs is inherently flawed, and that major reforms are necessary to solve the perceived problems of the day, which are largely ideational constructions themselves.”⁶¹ Parsons also defines ideas to be “subjective claim about descriptions of the world, causal relationships, or the normative legitimacy of certain actions,” and therefore they also depict social and political constructions of legitimate policy actions that put constraints on policymakers.⁶²

⁵⁸ Hay, C., “Constructivist Institutionalism,” (56 – 74) in R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah A. Binder and Bert A. Rockman (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 64

⁵⁹ Sikkink, K. *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1991): p. 243

⁶⁰ Lieberman, Robert C., “Ideas, Institutions and Political Order: Explaining Political Change,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (2002): p. 697

⁶¹ Béland, D., “The Idea of Power and Role of Ideas,” *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2010): p. 148

⁶² Parsons, C., “Showing Ideas as Causes: The Origins of the European Union,” *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2002): p. 48

While constructing discursive institutionalism, Vivien Schmidt combines the work of Peter Hall and John Campbell and sees ideas to exist at three levels – policies, programs and philosophies – and categories them, at each level, into two types of ideas – cognitive [constitutive of interests] and normative [which appeal to values].⁶³ She does not ascribe to particular titles for the two types of ideas at three levels and, rather, provides their descriptive understanding. She talks of cognitive ideas at policy level to offer solutions to the problem at hand, at the programmatic level to define the problem to be solved and identify the methods by which to solve them and finally at the philosophical level to mesh solution and definition of problems with deeper core of principles and norms of relevant scientific disciplines or technical practice. Similarly, normative ideas at the policy and program levels meet the aspiration and ideals of the general public and at the philosophical level resonate with a deeper core of principles and norms of public life. Instead of seeing ideas in the background of policy debates or located in the foreground as Campbell distinguishes them in his typology, Schmidt instead talks of “background ideational abilities” that are internal to agents for creating and maintaining institutions and “foreground discursive abilities” for communicating to change or persist with those institutions. The synthesis provided by Schmidt on different types and levels of ideas combines distinctions that are rarely contested in study of ideas and their effect on public policy outcomes. More so, Schmidt’s typology does not discount the role of interests as she sees agent’s ideas also as response to “material (and not so material) realities, which affect them including material events and pressures.”⁶⁴ Rather than making a distinction between the two, Schmidt’s typology mixes the instrumental and material dimensions of ideas and writes cognitive ideas to “provide the recipes,

⁶³ Schmidt, Vivien A., “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11 (2008): pp. 303 – 326

⁶⁴ Schmidt, Vivian A., “Discursive Institutionalism,” in Frank Fischer and Herbert Gottweis (eds.) *The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice* (Durham: Duke University press, 2012): 86–7

guidelines, and maps for political action and serve to justify policies and programs by speaking to their interest-based logic and necessity.” This does little in bringing clarity to different types of ideas when cognitive ideas are seen to “provide robust solutions” as well as be “constitutive of interests.” This essentially implies advancing the agenda beyond its typical distinction between normative and cognitive ideas and clearly distinguishing instrumental, material and values dimensions of ideas from one and other.

Referring back to Campbell’s typology with this belief that ideas create interests, a material dimension could be added in addition to the two levels of normative and cognitive ideas. Campbell’s first dimension consists of cognitive ideas that specify causal relationships and the second dimension is of normative ideas, which specifies how things ought to be. The second dimension composed of locus of the debate, whether it is at the foreground or in the background of the policy debate. Campbell concedes that there is slippage between cognitive and normative ideas and between foreground and background ideas and those in the background may shift into the foreground over time.⁶⁵ He further argues, “The two dimensions from which the four types are derived are probably more akin to continua than to rigid dichotomies.”⁶⁶ Building on these lines, another dimension – material – is added to Campbell’s typology. The material level at the foreground of the policy debate will be composed of ‘contested interests’ as social and political constructions, which give legitimacy to certain actions over others, and constituted of ‘private interests’ in the background, which are conceptions of self-interests when policies are conceived and decided upon (see table).

The third dimension added to Campbell’s typology is composed of material considerations that are equally at the forefront and in the background of the policy debates and consists of

⁶⁵ Campbell, John L., 2008: 167

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 168

contest-interested ideas or self-interested ideas. Contest-interested ideas are at the foreground of the policy debates and result from competition and bargaining of interest groups for favorable public-policy outcomes. Interest groups that are able to muster sufficient support and mobilization of resources have the results to their favor. As in the interest group theory of politics, actors play the role of brokers but while they consider different public-policy options they also seek to maximize their own material interests, i.e. re-election, which themselves are shaped by the wrangling of different interest groups. Contest-interested ideas put constraint on actors and resultant public-policy outcomes are beneficial to some but harmful to others.

Table: Types of <i>Ideas</i> and their Effect on Policy Making		
	<i>Types of Ideas in the foreground of the policy formulation</i>	<i>Types of Ideas in the background of the policy formulation</i>
<i>Cognitive level</i>	<i>Programmatic Ideas:</i> <i>Ideas as elite policy prescriptions that help policymakers to chart a clear and specific course of policy action</i>	<i>Paradigmatic ideas:</i> <i>Ideas as elite assumptions that constrain the cognitive range of useful solutions available to policy makers</i>
<i>Normative level</i>	<i>Public notions:</i> <i>Ideas as public notions of ideal public policy solutions that specify policy actions for policy makers or on the basis of which they legitimise proposed policy action</i>	<i>Public sentiments:</i> <i>Ideas as assumptions of public sentiments that constrain the normative range of legitimate solutions available to policy makers</i>
<i>Material level</i>	<i>Contest-interested ideas:</i> <i>Ideas as outcomes of politics of interests between contending interest groups</i>	<i>Self-interested ideas:</i> <i>Ideas as subjective interpretation of self-interest by which policy makers evaluates the relative merits of contending potential course of actions</i>
<i>Reformulation of Campbell's typology of ideas⁶⁷</i>		

⁶⁷ Campbell, John L., 1998: 385

Ideas as self-interest are the results of actor's subjective interpretation of their material realities. In contrast with contested interest, ideas as self-interests are shaped and reside in the background of the policy debates and herein actor's prime objective is pursuit of selfish objectives. Similarly, while in contested interests citizenry can still influence public-policy outcomes being members and representatives of different interests groups, self-interested ideas offer no meaningful place for citizens and communities. Policies that are made out of self-interested ideas place instrumental dimension second to the material dimension and, therefore policy outcomes may not represent viable or best-suited solutions available to policymaker. However, self-interested ideas may also overlap with public sentiments or the paradigmatic ideas and where public or elite assumptions of useful solutions are also in the best interest of the policymaker.

The typology of ideas brings together the instrumental, value and material dimensions of policymaking together in one analytical framework. It rejects the analytical distinction drawn between ideas and interests as determinants of policy, but rather considers ones desires, preferences and motivations as ideational articulation. It has the potential of cross-fertilization between the rational-choice theory that implies actors operate according to a self-interested cost-benefit analysis and those theoretical perspectives questioning this assumption. By further refining the concept of ideas and their affect on policymaking, it also has the ability to bring out the new institutionalist scholarship from its quagmire of being seen merely as a theory of constraint, limiting the range of possible solutions for policymakers, but also as the one where it has the explanatory power for institutional change and offers as well the theory of action.

Origin of Ideas:

In new institutionalism, three sets of theories can be broadly traced that describe how ideas originate albeit their respective limitations. The foremost is concept of *social learning*, originated in the work of Albert Bandura. It points to the process through which policymakers learn and adjust their *ideas* and practices to changes in their environment, which also manifest in their policymaking. This is also the basis of Peter Hall's work on *policy paradigms*. A seminal study conducted by Hage Heclo in 1974 suggests that 'political learning' is a governmental response to some kind of social and environmental stimulus.⁶⁸ Also originating from *historical institutionalism*, political process has been described as *path dependent*. Pierson defines *path dependency* as a "social process grounded in a dynamic of increasing returns."⁶⁹ These and similar concepts, though, have made important contribution towards advancing the scholarship but are plagued from criticism generally abhorred on *historical institutionalism*.

In political science and in comparative policy studies, the concept of *policy convergence* is becoming increasingly popular, which suggests a "tendency of societies to grow more alike to develop similarities in structures, processes and performances."⁷⁰ A similar concept of *policy diffusion* also conjectures a process "through which ideas spread across time and space...mediated by a broad range of mechanisms and channels of influence between countries, varying from the imposition of policies, international binding norms and regulatory harmonisation, to voluntary adoption of foreign policy models."⁷¹ A similar concept but

⁶⁸ Heclo, H. *Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974): 305 – 6

⁶⁹ Pierson, P., "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 2 (2000): 251

⁷⁰ Kerr, C., *The Future of Industrial Societies: Convergence or Continuing Diversity?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983): 3

⁷¹ Carafa, L., "When the Birds Fly Together. A Framework for Analysing International and Domestic Factors Behind Policy Diffusion and Convergence," paper presented at the *Italian Political Science Association Twenty-third Annual Conference, Rome, Italy, 17 – 19 September 2009*

implying intentional activity is of *policy framing* whereby policy actors, when confronted with a problem, create understand and make sense of the situation and then act according to the prescription.⁷² This particular set of theories, no doubt, is an important advancement to the study of *institutionalism* whose static and linear assumptions could not account for the profound political changes of the last decade of the twentieth century. But to fully function these theories rely on the demand side's perceived need for change and the supply side's availability of viable solution, for an institutional change to occur.⁷³ Moreover and besides several demand- and supply-side constraints with which the process of *policy transfer* may not fully mature, these theories are nonstarter in cases where policies originate locally or have indigenous roots and also in subject matters whose orientation is innovative or unique.⁷⁴ It is then the subject of analysis whether policy transference has occurred or not and if it has and as Evans comes to the conclusion that "one might then determine the degree of transfer – copying, emulation, hybridisation, or inspiration."⁷⁵

The third set of theoretical models has in common in their analysis a more central and elevated position given to agency than in either the *organisational* or *historical institutionalisms*. As a result, it is argued, that such models provide a more "balanced assessment of the ideational foundations of action and constraint."⁷⁶ The theory of *agenda setting*, as presented by John Kingdon, is one such actor-centred theory that looks into the impact of *ideas* on policy outcomes. Kingdon describes the concept of agenda as "the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time,"

⁷² Béland, D., "Ideas and Social Policy: An Institutional Perspective," *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2005): 11

⁷³ Weyland, K., "Toward a New Theory of Institutional Change," *World Politics*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (2008): 284

⁷⁴ Evans, M., *Policy Transfer in Global Perspective* (Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2004): 40

⁷⁵ Ibid, 41

⁷⁶ Campbell, John L., 1998: 399

and where the list also contains “policy options available to solve these problems”.⁷⁷ A related concept is of *epistemic communities*, refined by Peter Hass, which refers to a network of policy experts that exercise influence by interpreting complex problems and recommend possible response to policymakers due to their authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge and experience.⁷⁸ Theories such as *epistemic community* and *agenda setting* pay more attention to how actors are involved in originating *ideas* and give more credence to agency. They also portray a more dynamic understanding of institutional scholarship where, importantly, they are not only seen as constraining structures limiting the range of choices available to actors but also as enabling factors to which actors use to achieve their objectives.⁷⁹ This set of models, however, depicts a multilayer and messy political process linked strongly to the US separation of power and holds little strength in centralised parliamentary systems or closed policymaking networks.⁸⁰ They reject rational-choice theory altogether.

In contrast to the three established *new institutionalisms* and their various extensions, agents in *ideational* understanding are sentient who not just operate or adapt to existing institutions but can also create and maintain new institutions through their ideational abilities.⁸¹ These sentient agents use *ideas* and discursive frames to legitimise the need to reform existing policies and institutions. Hall, referring to these discursive frames as political discourse, writes, “Politicians, officials, the spokesmen for social interests, and policy experts all operate within the terms of political discourse.”⁸² For Schmidt also, *ideas* are conveyed interactively through discourse where the former becomes the substantive core of the later.

⁷⁷ Kingdon, John W., *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (New York: HarperCollins. 1995): 3 – 4

⁷⁸ Hass, Peter M., “Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992): 2 – 3

⁷⁹ Campbell, John L., 2010: 108

⁸⁰ Cairney, P., 2012: 240

⁸¹ Schmidt, Vivien A., 2008: 314

⁸² Hall, Peter A., 1993: p. 289

She identifies two forms of discourse, the coordinative discourse among policy actors and the communicative discourse between political actors and the public. Schmidt, in *ideational* setting, describes discourse as “not just ideas or “text” (what is said) but also context (where, when, how, and why it was said).” *Ideas*, however, are not only the substantive core of a discourse or its context during an interactive process. They also function as cognitive filters, as Hay writes, “Through which actors come to interpret environmental signals...and conceptualise and assess their strategic conduct.”⁸³ Béland concurs with Hay and argues, “cognitive filter’ concerns both self-perceptions and the framing processes that actors use to convince others that it is in their interest to mobilise with them in order to reach shared goals and have an impact on outcomes.”⁸⁴ Discourse is not merely an instrumental intentional means of information exchange. It also has constructive and interpretive abilities central to development and sustenance of shared meanings and common identity and an agent’s own interpretations and actions within particular institutional setting.⁸⁵ Discourse analysis would also enable a better understanding on how some *ideas* become prominent over others and how do they cohere or collide.⁸⁶ In policy studies, the methodological approach of ‘policy as discourse’ centres on the same lines and focuses on the discursive construction of policy problems and proposals and on the effects of the policies that accompany particular constructions.⁸⁷

Policy as Discourse:

⁸³ Hay, C., 2006: 65

⁸⁴ Béland, D., “The Idea of Power and Role of Ideas,” *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2010): 148

⁸⁵ Heracleous, L. *Images of Discourse: Interpretive, Functional, Critical and Structural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 11

⁸⁶ Lieberman, Robert C., 2002: 700

⁸⁷ Bacchi, Carol L., *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems* (London: Sage, 1999): 48

By mid 1990s, there were already a number of theorists and researchers who essentially described ‘policy as discourse.’⁸⁸ Carol Bacchi, one of the frontrunners to have taken up this approach to policy analysis, asserts that with such an understanding the implication is “that no one stands outside discourse.”⁸⁹ This particular viewpoint is based on the rejection of neo-positivist and realist explanation that correspond to objective realities ‘out there’ in the world.⁹⁰ The roots of the approach ‘policy-as-discourse’ are connected with post-empiricism, whose own theoretical development has been outside of policy studies, in particular social constructionism, critical theory, and post-structuralism.⁹¹ Its premise is based on the understanding, as Bacchi explains, that “problems are ‘created’ or ‘given shape’ in the very policy proposal that are offered as ‘responses.’”⁹² The approach ‘policy-as-discourse’ starts from the assumption, writes Goodwin, that “all actions, objects and practices are socially meaningful and that the interpretation of meaning is shaped by the social and political struggle in specific socio-political context.”⁹³ Thus, both the policy process and its outcomes are cultural products and context specific. Theorists who subscribe to analysing ‘policy-as-discourse’ draw on the work of Michel Foucault on the conceptualisation of discourse and apply it to policy.⁹⁴ In Foucault’s conception, discourse entails “practices that systematically

⁸⁸ Ball, S. J., *Politics and Policy Making in Education: Exploration in Policy Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Ball, S. J., “What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes,” *Discourse*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1993): 9 – 17; Goodwin, N., “Governmentality in the Queensland Department of Education: Policies and the Management of Schools,” *Discourse*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1996): 65 – 74; Phillips S. D., “Discourse, Identity and Voice,” *Feminist Contributions to Policy Studies*, in L. Dobuzinskis, M. Howlett and D. Laycock (eds.) *Policy Studies in Canada: The State of the Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Torgerson, D., “Power and Insight in Policy Discourse: Post-positivism and Problem Definition,” in L. Dobuzinskis, M. Howlett and D. Laycock (eds.) *Policy Studies in Canada: The State of the Art* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996); and Watts, R., “Government and Modernity: An Essay in Thinking Governmentality,” *Arena Journal*, Vol. 2 (1993/94): 103 – 157

⁸⁹ Bacchi, C., “Policy as Discourse: What does it mean? Where does it get us?” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2000): 45

⁹⁰ Fischer, F., *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 21

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 21

⁹² Bacchi, C., 2000: 48

⁹³ Goodwin, S., “Women, Policy and Politics: Recasting Policy Studies,” in Angelique Bletsas, Chris Beasley (eds.) *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic Interventions and Exchanges* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2012): 29

⁹⁴ Grebe, C., *Reconciliation Policy in Germany 1998-2008: Constructing the Problem of the*

form the objects of which they speak; they do not justify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention.”⁹⁵ The approach of ‘policy as discourse’ goes beyond ‘language’ and draws attention to both the power of discourse and the power to make discourse.⁹⁶ It maintains that policy is a strategic and political process where no social actor stands outside the process and where there is deeper reflection on the contours of a particular policy discussion, the shape assigned to a particular problem.⁹⁷

In policy studies, the aim of discourse analysis is to show how actions and objects come to be socially constructed and what they mean for social organisation and interaction.⁹⁸ A ‘policy-as-discourse’ approach explains the means by which social processes and interactions shape different realities.⁹⁹ As Shaw argues it “offers opportunities for those with a vested interest in policy to reach the parts that other theories and methods can’t reach.”¹⁰⁰ Analytic focus on ‘policy as discourse’ can “enable deconstruction of the apparent neutrality and objectivity of the stories that sustain policies and the explicit or implicit rules that validate them.”¹⁰¹ To view ‘policy as discourse’, as Phoenix argues, “highlights how policies are interlinked with *ideas* [emphasis added] about what is say-able and thinkable in particular contexts, which can have material effects on, for example, the distribution of resources.”¹⁰² The work of Hajer further highlights this interconnectivity between discourse and *ideas* when he conceives the former as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is

⁹⁵ Foucault, M., *The archaeology of knowledge*, A. M. Sheridan-Smith, (trans.) (London: Tavistock, 1972): 49

⁹⁶ Bacchi, Carol L., 1999: 41

⁹⁷ Bacchi, Carol L., 1999: 49 – 50

⁹⁸ Fischer F., 2003: 73

⁹⁹ Shaw, Sara E., “Reaching the Parts that other Theories and Methods Can’t Reach: How and Why a Policy-as-Discourse Approach Can Inform Health-related Policy,” *Health* Vol. 14, No. 2 (2010): 200

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 196

¹⁰¹ Phoenix, A., “Enabling Research? Silencing and recognition in social research,” in Jerome Satterthwaite, Heather Piper and Pat Sikes (eds.) *Power in the Academy* (London: Trentham Books, 2009): 65

¹⁰² *Ibid*

given to physical and social realities.”¹⁰³ If *ideas* are understood as the basis for policy decisions, they themselves are the product of discourse, which also serves as the communicative and coordinative vehicle for framing particular set of policy solutions above others. The distinctive aspect of ‘policy-as-discourse’ approach is that it can both be understood as a research method and a political activity.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion:

Public policy outcomes are the result of complex interplay of various institutional variables, at times even in the most internalised of political systems. As a result, existing theories of public policy present only some of the facets, but not all, of this process and its outcomes. Smith and Katikireddi arrive at a conclusion while developing a glossary of theories for understanding policymaking that “no single [public policy] theory offers a comprehensive description of the policy process and all are limited by their origins in high-income, democratic settings.” This is an astounding statement for a discipline that grew out in 1940s and early 1950s, credited to the work of Harold D. Lasswell, but can be traced almost as far back as the beginning of human civilisation.¹⁰⁵ While there have been theoretical advancements, policy theory has neglected *ideas* due to its general theoretical shortcomings. The typology and origin of ideas and the methodological approach of policy-as-discourse discussed in this paper can help overcoming these fundamental theoretical shortcomings.

¹⁰³ Hajer, Maarten A., *The Politics of Environmental Discourse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995): 44

¹⁰⁴ Goodwin, S., “Analysing Policy as Discourse: Methodological Advances in Policy Analysis,” in Lina Markauskaite, Peter Freebody and Jude Irwin (eds.) *Methodological Choice and Design: Scholarship, Policy and Practice in Social and Educational Research* (London: Springer, 2011): 168

¹⁰⁵ Miyakawa, T. (ed.), *The Science of Public Policy: Essential Readings in Policy Sciences*, pt. 1 (London: Routledge, 1999): 9