

# T01P01 / Great Minds, Ideas, Events and People: Ideational Scholarship, Empirical Analysis, and Behavior

**Topic :** T01 / POLICY PROCESS THEORIES

**Chair :** Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)

**Second Chair :** Jonathan Kamkhaji (European University Institute)

**Third Chair :** Femke Van Esch (Utrecht University)

## GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The ideational turn in policy analysis and comparative political economy has been so successful that today to argue that 'ideas matter' is almost a taken-for-granted proposition. Of course, there are many strands of ideational policy analysis (as shown by a recent special issue of *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23/3/2016; see also Cairney 2012; Goldstein & Keohane 1993; McNamara 1998), some connected with the theories of policy learning, others more concerned with the diffusion of economic policy paradigms such as 'austerity' (Béland and Cox 2009, Berman 2013; Blyth 2013; Helgadóttir 2016). The data show that the most prominent strand in terms of citation and popularity is the approach inaugurated by Peter Hall in the late 1980s and early 1990s with his seminal studies on the political power of economic ideas (Hall 1989; Hall 1993).

However, especially in the strand concerned with policy paradigms, the ideational scholarship has been less successful in finding rigorous answers to questions such as where do ideas come from, what are they exactly, and how do they contribute to policy learning and policy change? This is especially true if we consider the advances made in disciplines like cognitive psychology and experimental-evolutionary economics: how open has been ideational policy analysis to the findings of these disciplines? Or, more pertinently perhaps, how receptive should it be, how much cumulative progress should we seek?

One problem with some strands of ideational policy analysis is how close the literature developed within ideational political science has been so far to the findings of other disciplines. Another is that the mechanisms theorized by political scientists are intellectually attractive, they seem to make sense in terms of our understanding of the policy process. Yes when we try to corroborate them with the findings of approaches that look at how people behave in the real world, we do not find the same mechanisms, or we find the mechanisms with a different causal order among the variables (Kamkhaji and Radaelli 2017).

With this panel we seek to appraise and discuss research questions on the nature of 'ideas' (Parsons 2007), the relationship between ideational research and theories of the policy process (Weible et al 2009; Schmidt 2011), the microfoundations of ideational explanations, the link between paradigm formation and paradigm change (Princen and van Esch 2016), and the identification of explicit mechanisms that bring about policy change. Ideas are often evoked, but rarely approached rigorously in terms of concept formation and micro-foundations. On mechanisms, ideational scholarship points to learning, but it has not been conversant with the recent advances in behavioral sciences on how individuals and organizations really learn. Finally, we wish to discuss the boundaries between ideational and cognitive analysis (Jobert 1989, Muller 1995; 2000; 2005) and whether the latter offers a way forward to policy researchers interested in the role of ideas.

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## CALL FOR PAPERS

Eleanor Roosevelt is known for having said: "Great minds discuss ideas: average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people". With this panel we wish to connect ideational scholarship, empirical analysis, and behavior. The 'ideas school' in comparative political economy is indeed a precious edifice in the world of social sciences: with its concepts and propositions about power, ideas and policy change it has animated at least three waves of scholarship (Blyth 2016). Today we find references to policy paradigms, the levels of policy change, and the political power of economic ideas in textbooks used in foundational courses on policy analysis.

With this panel we aim to critically contribute to its appraisal and development in the following directions: the nature of 'ideas', the microfoundations of ideational explanations, and the identification of explicit mechanisms that bring about policy change. Ideas are often evoked, but rarely approached rigorously in terms of concept formation and micro-foundations. On mechanisms, the 'ideas school' point to learning, but it has not been conversant with the recent advances in behavioral sciences on how individuals and organizations really learn. Finally, we wish to discuss the boundaries between ideational and cognitive analysis.

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Session 1 Ideas, cognition and policy processes: Theoretical and empirical advancements

Friday, June 28th 08:00 to 10:00 (MB 2.435)

## Discussants

Trineke Palm (Utrecht University)

## Beware of Cheap Imitations: Tracing the role of Ideas, Heuristics, and Attention in Processes of Emulation.

Heather Millar (University of New Brunswick)

Matthew Lesch (University of York)

Moving beyond the simple notion that “ideas matter,” policy process scholarship has begun to interrogate the causal mechanisms through which ideational elements influence policy change (Carstensen and Matthijs 2017; Moyson, Scholten, and Weible 2017; Béland, Carstensen, and Seabrooke 2016). Ideas can be broadly defined as factors that influence actors’ interpretation of their position in the environment, often through particular and contingent means (Parsons 2007). Beyond the depth of scholarship on the influence of economic ideas on policy change (Hall 1993; Blyth 2002; Schmidt 2008), researchers using the advocacy coalition framework have specified the influence of epistemic knowledge on processes of learning in climate and environmental policy (Rietig 2018; Weible 2008), while policy feedback scholars have examined the role of interpretive effects in shaping how the public define their interests and identities over time vis-à-vis social policy (Campbell 2012; Pierson 1993; Patashnik 2003). Yet often the micro foundational model underpinning these causal processes is under-defined (Cairney and Weible 2017), as is clarification of the conditions under which different modes of decision making might occur (Millar, Lesch, and White 2018). In this paper, we ask: do changes in knowledge always prompt actors’ to update their beliefs, as is assumed in much of the literature on instrumental policy learning (Dunlop and Radaelli 2013; May 1992)? Or, do policy elites respond to changing norms and narratives in more emotive and less intendedly rational ways, as is evident among mass publics (Mettler and Soss 2004; Campbell 2012)?

This paper contributes to the research questions posed by the ICPP panel on Ideational Scholarship, Empirical Analysis, and Behaviour (T01P01), focusing on causal processes linking ideas to policy change. We do so by examining the micro-foundational roots of policy emulation. Although emulation has been long identified in the policy diffusion literature as a mechanism of policy change, both the microfoundational assumptions of the mechanism and its empirical measurement have overlapped significantly with policy learning, positioning emulation as learning’s sad cousin, left to mop up the residuals (Maggetti and Gilardi 2016; Rose 1993; Benson and Jordan 2011; Gilardi and Wasserfallen 2018). We propose that a way forward is to theorize how ideas may influence decision makers’ behaviour in ways not captured by the revision of causal beliefs. Drawing on work on emotive processes and heuristics (Kahneman 2013; Weyland 2005; Taber 2003; Wilson 2011) we propose that emulation is better understood as a rapid and instinctive process undergone by policy elites, often arising under conditions of high ideational salience. Building on recent work on ideas and crises (Kamkhaji and Radaelli 2017), we propose that elucidating the microfoundations of emulation will also bring greater attention to the role of uncertainty and salience in triggering this ideational mechanism. This approach can also help scholars develop more nuanced empirical measurement. This paper probes the plausibility of this approach to several cases of Canadian energy and tax policy, generating a new research agenda on ideas, emulation, and policy change in policy process scholarship.

## **Turning ideas into action? Using cognitive maps to explain leaders' European economic policy-decisions.**

Femke Van Esch (Utrecht University)

With the ideational turn in policy analysis and political science, many studies on the nature and role of ideas have appeared in recent years. However, outside the domain of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) few of these focus on the beliefs of political leaders. Moreover, progress in answering the question of how, when and to what extent ideas translate into policy making and policy change has been slow. One of the reasons may be because there are few methods to study beliefs in a structured comparative manner that are suitable for non-foreign policy domains.

This paper will address both issues by exploring to what extent leaders' ideas guide their policy behaviour in the economic policy domain using the cognitive mapping (CM) technique. This technique allows scholars to determine what policy-goals and instruments are deemed most important by leaders and why. Moreover, in contrast to other methods, CM is suitable to use for non-foreign policy issues and enables the qualitative and quantitative analysis of ideas. Finally, CM has been used successfully in the past to explain and predict foreign policy decisions and violent behaviour.

The paper uses (pre-existing) cognitive maps of Dutch and European leaders regarding the Eurozone crisis to derive expectations about their preferred policy-instruments and compares those with their behaviour during the crisis-management process. In this way, it establishes the extent to which leaders drew upon their ideas when the time came to make decisions and which of their ideas they drew upon.

## **From emergence to output. Ideas in politics and the policy process**

Philipp Trein (University of Lausanne)

Thenia Vagionaki

In the last decades, scholars have successfully outlined the importance of ideas, learning, and policy advice for the political process. This paper contributes to the literature on public policy and politics in mapping how ideas travel in the policy process and end up in policy outputs. To achieve this goal, we proceed in two steps. Firstly, based on original data from a comparative European research project and secondary literature, we develop a map of the policy learning infrastructure, to determine places where policy ideas can originate, such as governmental research units, political parties, but also universities and other independent research institutes. The policy learning infrastructure is similar to policy advisory systems but has a more inclusive meaning as it includes also private actors and international organizations. Secondly, based on a systematic review of the theories of the policy process (notably the Multiple Streams Framework, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, Policy Feedback Theory, Advocacy Coalition Framework, The Narrative Policy Framework, the Institutional Analysis and Development and the Social-Ecological Systems Frameworks, and the Innovation and Diffusion Models), we discuss systematically how ideas i.) emerge, and ii.) how they are moderated during the policy process. Our paper contributes to the public policy literature by providing a more precise way of how to conceptualize, utilize and capture the transformation of ideas in the policy process.

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## Session 2 Cumulative progress in ideational approaches to the policy process: Meta-analyses and large-n studies

Friday, June 28th 10:30 to 12:30 (MB 2.435)

### Discussants

Claire Dunlop (University of Exeter)

### **The importance of a good reputation: How do policy actors assess the credibility of policy research?**

Vincent Caby (Sciences Po Grenoble)

Ideational analysis theorizes the processes by and through which ideas are produced, distributed and become influential (Béland et al., 2016). In a literature review, Parsons conceptualized four types of process (2015). Actors convinced of an idea may come to power, an idea may empower actors, an idea may trigger a new coalition, it may shape the prevailing institution. Each of these types requires some actors to make an idea their own. In this process, Lachapelle et al. suggest that the extent to which an actor is convinced by an information depends on his perception of the information source (Lachapelle & Montpetit, 2017; Lachapelle et al., 2014). In other terms, source credibility plays a role in the production and distribution of influential ideas. However, Bédard (2017) suggests that policy actors attribute credibility to policy research on the basis of its source's overall reputation rather than of a thorough assessment of its methodological quality – which raises the following question: how do policy actors assess the credibility of policy research?

To address this question, we investigated the credibility attributed to policy research, focusing on seven meta-analyses of existing academic research. The meta-analyses dealt with seven topics (stress in the workplace, harm reduction, psychotherapies, conduct disorders, eating behaviors, animal pain, consumption of fruits and vegetables). They were produced by two French research institutes (one specializing in public health, the other in agronomy) on behalf of three public organizations (the Ministry of Health, one body in the field of social protection, the Ministry of Agriculture).

An online survey and semi-structured interviews conducted with 107 individuals (21 policymakers, 81 researchers, 5 stakeholders) involved in the production of the seven reports were analyzed with descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and hierarchical clustering in order to pinpoint the factors of credibility assessments.

Consistent with Doberstein – who showed that policy research attributed to university academics was deemed by policy analysts more credible than policy research attributed to think tanks, regardless of the actual content of the research (2016) – we find that policy actors use the source's overall reputation as a criterion when assessing the credibility of meta-analyses. However, they also grant importance to the overall method upon which the meta-analyses rest. This may prevent them from proceeding to a thorough examination of the methodological quality of the meta-analyses. The decision-makers who order the production of meta-analyses, in particular, also value the independency of their production process and their undisputed findings. They constitute a distinctive group regarding the way they assess the credibility of policy research. In contrast, the researchers do not use the source's or the method's reputation as a criterion when assessing the credibility of the meta-analyses. Overall, these findings bring a nuanced and critical perspective on the assessment of policy evidence by policy actors. We conclude with several important implications of these findings for evidence-based policymaking – which assumes that decision-makers are capable of a thorough examination of the methodological quality of evidence – as well

as an agenda for future research.

## **How does policy analysis drive a major policy change in an authoritarian regime? The case of national birth control policy in China (1980–2015)**

Wei Li (Huazhong University of Science and Technology)

Using a longitudinal study of how policy analysis drives a major change in China's national birth control policy, we find that politics of coalition matters for policymakers' learning and belief change. Analysis and argumentation by the dominant coalition were found to be more influential because of the coalition's control over power and resources, which hindered policymakers' learning and belief change. New ideas and alternative policy analysis were able to impact policy decisions after their advocates managed to facilitate both social learning and learning by the governing party. In authoritarian China, while policy analysts recently have had more public space to advocate their alternative policy ideas, learning by the governing party is still constrained by relatively closed and centralized institutional settings. Both political framing of technical analysis and access decision-making venues by policy analysts are important for their alternative policy ideas to drive policy change.

## **Don't think it is a good idea. A critical analysis of the ideas school**

Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)

Jonathan Kamkhaji (European University Institute)

Today, the 'ideas school' is a model for social scientists because of its explanatory achievements, empirical plasticity and traction across the fields of political economy, comparative politics and policy analysis. So much so that it has now become uncontroversial to claim that ideas matter, or, more precisely, have explanatory leverage in the analysis of policy change. And yet, to make the case for ideational explanations, we must be clear on the nature of ideas, where they come from, what do they consist of, and how they change over time.

We highlight four critical issues about the nature of ideas, the micro-foundations of the school, the theoretical anchors of ideational explanations, and the difference between ideational and cognitive analysis. We find that ideas are often evoked, but rarely approached rigorously in terms of micro-foundations. Another problem is that the concept of ideas has been stretched to include a number of concepts and phenomena, to the point that it becomes impossible to provide a finite list of the properties of what is 'ideational' and what is not. The third problem is about the identification of explicit, theorized mechanisms – here our review of the 'ideas school' point to learning. The fourth problem lies in the dividing line between ideational and cognitive analysis.

We conclude that to make progress with the four issues it is useful to turn to disciplines other than political science (mainly cognitive psychology and behavioral economics). We should cross-fertilize political science's concepts of ideas with the findings of these disciplines. Ideas as such do not exist in these disciplines. However, these disciplines offer a number of concepts with solid micro-foundations: together, they define the scope for a strong cognitive (albeit not necessarily ideational) approach. Our conclusions point to new pathways to causality once we take micro-foundations and theory seriously.

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## Session 3 Close up: Tracing the role of ideas in policy sectors

Friday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (MB 2.435)

### Discussants

Vincent Caby (Sciences Po Grenoble)

### What Cultural Theory Tells Us About Health and Safety Myths and How to Change Them

Claire Dunlop (University of Exeter)

We use cultural theory and action research to explore a curious phenomenon in UK health and safety regulation – the regulatory myth. Despite having one of the lowest levels of workplace deaths in the world, and a health and safety regulator that commands the respect of its regulatees and duty holders, health and safety in Britain has become a by-word for over-regulation and triviality. Indeed, in the last decade, public scepticism is such that the expression ‘health and safety gone mad’ has entered common parlance to express exasperation about almost any rule – real or fictitious – that citizens think an unnecessary intrusion. This mirrors what citizens encounter on a regular basis; it is almost accepted practice by businesses and local authorities to refuse goods and services accompanied by the excuse that a non-existent health and safety regulation prevents the transaction or assistance.

Examples of health and safety myths abound. In one of the best known instances, a local authority banned hanging baskets due to health and safety concerns (see a fuller account from Almond, 2009). How can we explain the exercise of such regulatory imagination by individual service providers? The use of health and safety myths is commonly dismissed as, at best, driven by a compensation culture and media hype surrounding accidents and, at worst, simply dissembling and cynical behaviour on the part of individuals. But, such accounts may obscure more than they illuminate. Empirical evidence suggests the citation of fictitious health and safety rules is widespread and certainly not limited to situations where compensation could be extracted as the result of a hazardous event or media-friendly issues (Dunlop, 2015b). We explore an alternative analytical strategy that combines Douglas and Wildavsky’s cultural theory of risk (1982, Swedlow, 2011) with Argyris and Schön’s action approach to individual interactions (1974) to explain the UK phenomenon of health and safety myths. The analysis is guided by the need to understand how the macro context conditions and is re-made at the micro-level by everyday interactions of service providers with citizens. Section one uses cultural theory to uncover the origins of health and safety myths. In section two, we come down to the micro-level. We are interested here individuals’ behaviour on the ground, what leads a headteacher to ban frilly socks on health and safety grounds? Action theory illuminates the (re-)production of myths as a function of the ‘theories-in-use’ we use to maintain control of potentially hostile or uncomfortable social situations. In section three, we enter the empirics. Using examples from the government database of health and safety myths, we see that citing non-existent health and safety rules offers a simple and effective way to help people avoid blame, loss of profits or being shown up as ignorant or unskilled. Gaps in human and organisational capacity – administrative, analytical and communicative – condition our responses. We finish by exploring how and if myths can ever be busted for good.

### Shifting from “conditions” to “problems”: agenda-setting, ideas carriers and new actors ‘constellations in European Education policy

Marina Cino Pagliarello (European University Institute)

A new approach has gained ground on the European agenda for education. In this approach, economic

concerns are the core justification for the EU's educational policy, with education intended as a key requirement for fostering growth and economic competitiveness in Europe. These assumptions, which subordinate the educational discourse to the economic one, have defeated the traditional purposes of education for broader personal development and social inclusion. Despite a growing body of literature investigating these new trends and their effects in terms of impact on Member States' educational policies, little attention has been paid on the input side of this policy process: namely, what ideas have been influential and by which actors have certain specific solutions been advocated? By drawing from the literature on EU agenda-setting and the most recent scholarship on ideas, the paper sets out theoretical propositions about how conditions are defined as problems and how a winning problem definition impacts on the policy debate. It argues that, once a condition has been successfully defined as problem, it impacts on the political landscape in two respects. First, new groups that accept and share the dominant definition of a problem are formed. Second, actors who have successfully defined a specific problem are more likely to be empowered to speak in the policy debate. Further, the paper applies these propositions to the case of European education policy and specifically examines how a specific idea – competitiveness – entered the European arena and which actors' constellations have prevailed in the European political arena. The paper draws on qualitative data derived from original and primary archival research, confidential documents and in depth elite interviews.

### **The policy change through social deliberation: the case of Dutch policy on gas**

Beata Kviatek (Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen)

What is the role of ideas in the policy change and what is the mechanism behind? According to Hall (1993), the policy changes when policy-makers, engaged in the process of social learning, adjust their cognitive understanding about a political situation and change or modify policy, relying on what was learned about alternative policy solutions. In other words, new policy ideas may replace the old ones as a result of a social learning.

Though there are different interpretations in the scholarly literature of what a social learning is: whether it is an individual, organisational, or collective process. For example, Freeman (2007), in his study on policy change in the public health sector, conceptualised collective learning of public officials as a process of epistemological bricolage. In his interpretation, the new policy ideas are the result of this bricolage process, when the "acquired second-hand" ideas are transformed into "something new".

The literature on (democratic) governance points opens another perspective to the policy change, emphasising the importance of public engagement in the policy-making process. Following this school of thought the new policy is the result of a deliberative act that involves different participants. In other words, the ideas about policy are not borrowed, but are born in social deliberation. Combining the insights gained from both literatures – social learning and governance – the policy change is interpreted, as a result of a broad social interaction process, which is also the social learning for all participants.

The paper will focus on further development of the conceptualisation of policy change through social deliberation and social learning and will attempt to define the involved micro mechanisms. The exploratory case study of policy change that was preceded by a broad public debate will help to describe and establish the mechanisms. Specifically, the paper will focus on the decision of the Dutch government to cease the exploration of natural gas from the Groningen gas field. The radical change in national policy regarding gas exploration is seen as a result of a broader public debate, which was an act of social deliberation and social learning at the same time.

### **How Normative Power got lost: policy change in the EU's Security & Defence Policy**

Trineke Palm (Utrecht University)

How to explain policy change in the EU's Security & Defence Policy?

The EU's Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) reflects a continuing battle of ideas over the character of the EU as a security actor. While the EU's use of military force, as witnessed in the launch of over 10 military operations in the past 15 years, has often been presented as part of promoting the EU's peace project beyond its borders, this idea of the EU as a "force for good" has been fiercely criticized as well.

Based on the empirical analysis of the mandate of the EU's military operations, my paper shows how the CSDP has changed on two dimensions: 1) justification (from value-based to utility-based), 2) embeddedness (from low embeddedness of the military instrument to higher embeddedness of the military instrument).

To explain this change in the EU's CSDP, this paper breaks new ground by conceptualizing the EU's CSDP

as “just another” policy process. It conceives of CSDP as consisting of competing advocacy coalitions that share a common strategic culture (i.e. belief system): Global Power EU, Euro-Atlanticists, Human Security and the Bystanders. This approach combines a focus on ideas with sensitivity to the wider institutional setting.

Moreover, against well-known mechanisms of policy change such as hard bargaining (i.e. external shocks changing actor constellations) and learning (i.e. a change of ideas based on common experiences), this paper introduces the mechanism of cooperative bargaining (i.e. actors do not change their ideas, but are willing to compromise)(see also, Thomas 2009).

Tracing the policy process of three military operations (EUFOR Althea, EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EUNAVFOR Sophia) this paper shows, based on policy documents, media accounts, diplomatic cables and over 50 interviews, how cooperative bargaining has been critical to the loss of “normative power” in the EU’s Security and Defence Policy.

With this case study on the EU’s CSDP, this paper makes a twofold contribution. First, it reflects on the nature of “ideas” in a policy domain that is often conceived of in terms of “interests.” Second, it examines a mechanism of policy change (i.e. cooperative bargaining) that is understudied in studies on the policy process.