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BROKERS, ENTREPRENEURS AND LEADERS IN POLICY DYNAMICS: FROM INDIVIDUAL ACTORS TO TYPES OF AGENCY

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Abstract

Despite the importance of structures and constraints to the outcome of the policy-making process, agency emerges as a key aspect accounting for the nature of policy dynamics. Indeed, agency is a concept that may embrace various different components depending on its empirical reference (individual or collective) and its policy context. In policy studies, the concept of “broker” is used to describe the agency between different groups that represents a key factor for the equilibrium of a policy subsystem, while in institutional and organisational studies the terms “entrepreneurs” and “leaders” are used to identify prominent actors in the aforesaid process, and it is often difficult to distinguish between the three concepts. We assume that they represent different types of agency intrinsically embedded in all phases of the policy-making process, each with separate resources, activities, potential goals and outcomes. Hence, our paper proposes to review the use of these concepts, and aims to develop a functional perspective of entrepreneurship, brokerage and leadership in order to gain a better grasp of agency as a process pursuing either stability or change in policy making.

1. Introduction

As with structure and change, “agency” - meaning the capacity to act upon situations - is considered a key element in our understanding of social processes in different contexts and situations (Giddens 1984; Boudon 1986; Hay 1995; Marsh 1998; Sibeon 1999). As the focus of theories on both policy and change moved from the macro level of analysis, focused on socio-economic, political and institutional variables (Castles and McKinlay 1979; Hall 1986 and 1993; Weaver and Rockman 1993; Persson and Tabellini 1994; March and Olsen 1984) towards more endogenous accounts at the meso and micro levels of analysis (Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Weible and Sabatier 2009; Kingdon 1984; Zahariadis 2003), one can see that the role of agents in the policy process and in institutional dynamics is paramount to our understanding of coordination mechanisms (Scharpf 1997).

At the same time, theorizing about the role of agents and their interplay with structures, represents a conceptual and empirical challenge (Emirbayer and Mishe 1998; Lane 2002) given the varied character that agency may have and the frequent individualization of agency as the purposeful action of the “great man” (Grint 2011).

This paper aims to deal with such challenges by reflecting on the different ways in which agency may affect policy dynamics while taking account of both policy stability and change. Policy dynamics is the process and temporal dimension through which problems are defined and decisions are made and implemented, and in which individuals and institutional actors interact (either cooperating or clashing) (Cashore and Howlett 2007; Howlett 2009; Kay 2006; Daugbjerg 2009). Policy dynamics thus represent the multifaceted nature of policy-making, in an incredibly fascinating puzzle of which scholars are constantly striving to discover the basic elements and the reliable, regular patterns and drivers of stability and change (Capano and Howlett 2009).

We acknowledge that the world of policy dynamics is full of agency relations, that is, of a great number of actors trying to steer, innovate and mediate a series of complex processes. In order to grasp the agency dimension of policy dynamics in terms of either stability or change, political scientists and public policy scholars have focused on brokers, entrepreneurs and leaders (the latter two being often considered, wrongly, as interchangeable) as the specific actors participating in certain phases of the policy process. Thus, this paper will address the conceptual and empirical difficulties of analysing the policy process deriving from the individualist characterization of agency that seems to prevail in the fields of political science and public policy (Masciulli, Molkanov and Knight 2012; Ciulla 1998; Burns 1978).

Thus by borrowing from sociology, and from organization and management studies, this paper offers a different conceptualization of agency, which is perceived as

the sum of the different functional processes necessary in order to unravel the policy making puzzle.

By moving from a personalized, atomistic conception of agency towards a more functional one whereby potential individual actions are conceived to be components of specific types of collective interaction aimed at performing specific activities and pursuing specific goals, the concepts of brokerage, entrepreneurship and leadership will be linked to the activities of mediation, innovation and steering in the policy-making process. By focusing on the functional facet of agency, the different roles of leadership, entrepreneurship and brokerage will be illustrated not only for the purposes of agenda setting and formulation, but also for other phases of the process, such as those of adoption, implementation and evaluation.

Thanks to the proposed analysis, the paper aims to contribute to the literature on policy dynamics by considering agency in its different forms, that is, as a driver of either stability or change, and by focusing on the leadership function as a fundamental coordinating mechanism during all phases of the policy process.

The paper is organised as follows: in the second section, different studies will be used to present the concepts of leadership, entrepreneurship and brokerage. The third section will discuss the different features of the three agency functions, while the fourth section will explore said agency functions during the different phases of the policy process. The final section will look at the empirical form of the agency functions, and of leadership in particular, and will discuss a typology of different leadership networks.

2. Definitions of agency from exceptional individuals to collective functions: brokerage, entrepreneurship and leadership in the policy making process

2.1. Agency as a functional process

In the study of public policies and policy making, the attention on policy actors and networks has overlooked the fact that policy dynamics need to perform specific functions, in the case of either policy stability or change (Capano 2013). Moreover, the empirical study of policy dynamics shows that these functions can, and indeed are, mainly carried out by a plurality of individuals and organizations, rather than by any one individual endowed with extraordinary features, or by any one organisation (Cohen 2011; Galanti 2014).

Thus our proposal is to shift the focus of agency in policy making away from individual actors towards their functions, meaning the processes through which specific behaviours are designed and implemented over time. To do so, we adopt a specific definition of agency which, according to Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 970), is “the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the

temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problem posed by changing historical situations”. Agency is a functional process in which different individuals interact to affect reality; moreover, such interaction needs to be coordinated in order for their goals to be achieved.

In this sense, although individual actors clearly matter when behaving as leaders, entrepreneurs and brokers, we believe that the descriptions of agency in the political world may be seen as a list of idiosyncratic accounts of “heroic stories” that do not allow for a more comprehensive understanding of policy dynamics as a social phenomenon with unique regularities (Burns 1978; Grint 2011).

Thus, we assume that agency as a function can also be performed in a collective way, and that the different functions define different coordination criteria, and thus patterns of behaviour (Ostrom 1990). Therefore leadership, entrepreneurship and brokerage can be conceived as embedded functional processes through which agency is coordinated – vertically and/or horizontally – in order to reach a specific goal and thus to perform a specific function (Schneider, Teske and Mintrom 1995; Mintrom 2000; Marion and Uhl-Bien 2001; McCaffrey and Salerno 2011; Marion 2012). From this point of view, individuals play specific roles according to the functional processes they are involved in.

The emphasis on functions is not aimed at negating the role played by individuals or at contesting methodological individualism as a cornerstone of the social sciences (Parsons 1937; Alexander 1982). On the contrary, the depersonalization of agency and the focus on functions allows for a more realistic and promising analytical perspective from which to understand what leaders, entrepreneurs and brokers do, and how they behave, in the policy-making process. By defining agency as a functional process by which different goals and diverse types of collective coordination are pursued, we aim at building an analytical framework that can offer a better grasp of the relationship between structure and agents in different institutional contexts, and above all at different stages of policy dynamics.

Moreover, as we also assume that collective action dilemmas in institutions are even tougher to resolve in inter-organizational settings such as that of the policy-making process (Olson 1965; Ostrom 1990; Hanf and O’Toole 1992; Xiao and Tsui 2007), we have examined existing social science literature to try and understand what policy actors do when they actually engage in public policy, and how different key actors can be distinguished in terms of their specific activities. This review of existing studies has enabled us to identify the essence of the functional coordination activities of leadership, entrepreneurship and brokerage.

2.2. From brokers to brokerage: mediation as the connecting device of the policy process

By capitalizing on a lengthy tradition in organizational studies (Burt 1997; Bonacich 1987; Freeman 1979), the structural perspective of Social Networks Analysis defines brokers as people who bridge different components or groups within a network, allowing information and ideas to be divulged among actors (Burt, 2005; Soda, Usai and Zaheer 2004; Gould and Fernandez, 1989; Heaney, 2006).

However the term “broker” has been used differently in comparative politics respect to the way it is used in policy studies. In fact, the term “political” broker is used mainly to define those individual actors who are collectors of votes in highly clientelistic systems (Piattoni 2001; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013; Aspinall 2014).

In the public policy field, on the other hand, the concept has been adopted by the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and the term “policy” brokers refers to the capacity of specific actors to divulge information beyond the advocacy coalition and beyond the policy subsystem itself (Sabatier 1988 and 1998). According to this viewpoint, brokers are mostly individual actors of various kinds (such as elected officials, civil servants, courts, policy advisors) who are interested in stability within a policy subsystem, and who try to mediate among conflicting coalitions in order to achieve compromise solutions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Sabatier and Weible 2007; Ingold and Varone 2011; Christopoulos and Ingold 2015).

Therefore, viewed from a functional point of view, the brokerage function in comparative politics means the “self-interested” intermediation between political parties and potential voters, in which the goal is to ensure the correspondence between citizens’ search for specific benefits, and parties’ search for electoral support. From a policy perspective, brokerage seems to be more neutral, although individual brokers could reap their own benefits since brokerage is a means by which different interests and policy ideas can be balanced, thus guaranteeing that a solution (in terms of policy definition, decision or implementation) be found.

However, things are rather more complex than this. In fact, on the one hand, the ACF framework has developed by assuming that brokerage activity is substantially neutral and is committed to avoiding the politicization of the issue at stake, and thus any conflict within the advocacy coalition (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Weible, Sabatier, and McQueen 2009). On the other hand, recent research has shown how policy brokers may be more self-interested, and thus may pursue personal interests as well as the interests of any specific coalition of actors (Ingold and Varone, 2011; Christopoulos and Ingold 2015; Kope, Lombard, and Miller Stevens 2013). Thus they can mediate between interests not only by finding a way of constructing a shared solution in the case of clear-cut conflict, but also by avoiding the exercise of veto powers. At the same time they can either abandon their own preferences for the sake of a compromise, or try to have them prevail in the compromise solution agreed by the different interest groups.

However, the question of the neutrality or potential partisanship of brokers does not affect the main target of brokers' activity, namely to achieve a compromise among the actors involved (in order to maintain policy stability or to pursue policy change). Furthermore, those who have pointed out that neutrality is not necessarily a feature of brokers' behaviour, have emphasised the stability-seeking nuance of brokers as setting them apart from other actors, such as policy entrepreneurs (Ingold and Varone 2011, Christopoulos and Ingold 2015). We believe that brokers are more likely to act with a view to achieving "process-related" rather than "content-related" goals (Dente 2014, 54-59).

Thanks to the literature on policy brokers, therefore, we are able to define brokerage as the functional process by which mediation between different policy actors is performed. Mediation is a key function of the policy process, in relation to decision making and the implementation of policy, especially when different organisations and institutions are involved, conflicts arise and veto powers are employed.

2.3 From entrepreneurs to policy entrepreneurship: innovation as the creative destruction of the policy process

As we all know, political science and public policy studies have borrowed the concept of entrepreneur from the field of economics. According to economic entrepreneurial theory, entrepreneurship is an activity that: permits the discovery and mitigation of economic inefficiencies (Kirzner 1997); transforms turbulence into innovation, in order to foster the process of creative destruction which, in turn, creates added value for the enterprise; (Schumpeter, 1946); is capable of generating uncertainty, and thus of foreseeing future constellation of demands (Mc Caffrey and Salerno 2011).

Basically, the original idea is that an entrepreneur is a person who shoulders the risks of the enterprise and who is capable of creating and triggering a process from scratch. Thus, economic entrepreneurs innovate in order to increase profits by changing the status quo.

Similarly, the political entrepreneur is the political actor who alters the equilibrium of the political market by introducing innovation and by gaining added value from such, often after building new political coalitions in order to challenge the status quo (Dahl 1961; Salisbury 1969; Schneider and Teske 1992).

In studies of institutional change, innovation is the key function of institutional entrepreneurship; already present in the work of Selznick (1957), it is also offered as a possible driver for endogenous change in DiMaggio (1988). In exploring the conditions favouring the innovation of institutional entrepreneurs, Leca et al (2008) examine the paradoxical relationship between structural constraints and agency, as they focus on the entrepreneurs' capacity to mobilize allies using discursive strategies and through the

mobilization of other kinds of resources (Eisenstadt 1980; DiMaggio and Powel 1991). Wijen and Ansari (2007) supplement institutional theory with their regime theory, in order to show how entrepreneurs construct a collective form of institutional entrepreneurship to overcome inaction, by intervening in power configurations, creating common grounds, mobilizing bandwagons, applying ethical guidelines, designing appropriate incentives and using implementation mechanisms.

In mainstream political science, political entrepreneurs are always seen as a specific form of a broader category. Thus they may be seen as institutional entrepreneurs when acting to change their political framework (Campbell 2004; Fligstein 2001; Beckert 1999; Weingast 2005; Mintrom 1997; Mintrom and Vergari 1996), whereby benefits are concentrated and costs are distributed (Wilson 1980); or they may be seen as public entrepreneurs, that is, politicians or bureaucrats who focus on changing the features of administrative structures/processes (Osborne and Gaebler 1993; Schneider, Teske and Mintrom 1995; Schnellenbach 2007). Or they can be considered as bearers of change within a specific realm of action: legislation (Weissert 1991; Lopez 2002; Braun 2009); bureaucracy (Teske and Scheneider 1994; Laffan 1997; Howard 2001; Sørensen 2007; Hauge, Jameson and Gentry 2008); governmental leaders when pursuing policy changes (Roberts and King 1991; Crow 2010; Cohen 2011); or individuals running for political office (Schneiders and Teske 1992; Wohlgemuth 2000; Sheingate 2003).

As we move from institutional theory and political science towards the theories of the policy process, the introduction of innovation as a “content-related” goal (Dente 2014) and represents the success of the situated action of the policy entrepreneur. Policy entrepreneurs are actors trying to promote their interests through the policy process, by taking advantage of the windows of opportunity for the matching of their ideas with the streams of policy and politics (Kingdon 1984). Policy entrepreneurs are actors who are capable of advocating new ideas and setting the agenda (Kingdon 1984), of identifying problems and finding solutions (Polsby 1984), of submitting new ideas to policy and political actors, and mobilizing public opinion (Eyestone 1978; Cobb and Elder 1983), of dealing with substantial policy uncertainty, and of solving the emergent problem of collective coordination (Mintrom and Vergari 1996). Policy entrepreneurs are catalysts for policy innovation (Roberts and King 1991); subjects who discover new avenues for policy-making (Baumgartner and Jones 1993).

Innovation, then, represents the bulk of entrepreneurship, and derives from the cognitive and strategic action of policy entrepreneurs aiming, respectively, to reframe policy action and to strategically build coalitions in order to divulge their ideas (Mintrom 1997; Mintrom, Salisbury, and Luetjens 2014). Hence, entrepreneurship can be divided into different roles, according to the prevalent orientation (cognitive or strategic) and to the type of legitimacy the actors rely on (formal or informal) (Giuliani 1998).

In the analysis of the policy process and of the actual influence of agency on policy outputs, Mintrom (1997) advocates the relevance of policy entrepreneurs as actors seeking to initiate a dynamic policy change by attempting to win support for ideas for policy innovation and to introduce them into the government's agenda. A closer observation of these activities reveals the variety of resources that policy entrepreneurs introduce into the policy process in the hope of a future return (Kingdon 1984; Mintrom and Vergari 1996), and the different attitudes of entrepreneurs who need to display social acuity, to define problems, to build teams and to lead by example (Mintrom and Norman 2009; Mintrom, Salisbury, and Luetjens 2014).

According to Watts, Holbrook and Smith (2015), policy entrepreneurs use creative destruction to introduce policy innovations, and this process actually begins with the identification of novel ideas in response to a policy challenge. Innovation in the policy process can be conceptualized as effectuation, intended as a model for the sequential and recursive action that involves different approaches to dealing with uncertainty (Sarasvathy 2008).

Hence, policy entrepreneurship emerges as the functional process in which policy change is catalysed, not only by advancing new ideas, but also by mobilizing supporters inside and outside political institutions, and by building trans-organizational teams (Mintrom, Salisbury, and Luetjens 2014; Watts, Holbrook and Smith 2015).

2.4 From leaders to policy leadership: steering as the guiding principle of the policy process

As with brokerage and entrepreneurship, leadership is a concept with a variety of meanings that are often difficult to employ for the purposes of empirical research (Bryman 2011). Although there are many theoretical lenses through which leadership may be analysed, it is generally understood that leadership is a particular form of agency whereby actors are coordinated in order to complete a common (political or policy) mission (Capano 2009).

Leadership has long been a highly institutionalized field of research for organization and management studies, while in the field of political science, leadership has evolved mainly as the study of leaders in institutions (Blondel 1987), with particular attention given to the personal characteristics of politicians at the apex of government, both at national and local level (Hartley and Benington 2012; Masciulli, Molkanov and Knight 2012). Substantially, political leadership has followed the traditional perspective of the “great man” and of the “trait” theory, and thus studies of leadership have leaned towards personalization, as they have mainly focused on the actions of individual leaders within given institutional contexts (Burns 1978, Grint 2000 and 2005).

For instance, Blondel (1987) characterizes leadership in terms of both the personal features of leaders, and the institutional constraints imposed on their actions, adopting an approach capable of comparing leaders across countries. Similarly, the interactionist approach of Elgie (1999) focuses on the goals and styles of leaders that are shaped by the institutional context and the rules influencing the exercise of formal authority and decisional powers. More recently, the study of political leadership has focused on the one hand on values and ethics (Burns 1978; Northouse 2004; Kellerman 2004), and on the other hand on a comparative analysis of leaders' attitudes, behaviour and performance. For example, Bennister et al. (2015) responded to the empirical challenges of comparison with the elaboration of the Leadership Capital Index. Building on Bordieu's reflections, the authors define the relevant capital needed by leaders already in office in order to transform the political realm according to their skills, their relations and their reputation, meaning the credibility they gain by shaping policy platforms and by being effective in their parliamentary actions. At the local level, studies of political leadership stress the ability of leaders to promote visions of change and to coordinate the different actors of local governance (Schenider and Teske 1992; Lowndes and Leach 2004; Leach and Wilson 2002; John 2010; Steyvers 2013), with a particular focus on the concept of facilitative leadership and network management (Kickert et al. 1997; Agranoff and McGuire 2001 Mouritzen and Svava 2002; Ansell and Gash 2008; Gains et al. 2009; Svava 2009; Bussu and Bartels 2014).

Another stream of literature in political science deals with the problems encountered when exercising political leadership (meaning the role of political leader) in contemporary Western democracies, where the public's faith in politics is waning, while problems are becoming more complex and wicked (Rittel and Webber 1973; Grint 2005; Wren 2007).

So, political scientific studies of leadership seem to be characterized by a personalized definition of political leadership, given their specific focus on individuals.

On the other hand, organizational and management sciences offer a more varied perspective of leadership as a social activity (Avolio et al. 2009). Their focus is not only on the behaviour of individual leaders, but also, thanks to the concepts of strategic, distributed and integrated leadership (Suchman 1987; Gronn 2002; Thorpe et al. 2011; Yukl 2002; Fernandez et al. 2010), on the relational aspect of the concept, and they strongly suggest that leadership ought to be perceived as a collective activity, that is, an interactive process within groups designed to achieve organizational goals (Bolden 2011). Leadership is thus seen as an activity performed by a variety of actors both within and outside the organizational field, regardless of the actual control of authoritative resources.

The relevance of leadership in groups of people also emerges in studies in administrative sciences and public sector management, where the main focus is on the functioning of administrations far removed from traditional hierarchies, in closed

bureaucratic settings (Van Wart 2013; Orazi Turrini and Valotti 2013; Currie et al. 2011; Bobbio et al. 2012).

The pluralistic nature of leadership has long been acknowledged by organization and management studies. Hodgson, Levinson and Zelenzik (1965), studying the management of firms, proposed that the term “leadership role constellation” be used to express the pluralistic nature of the executive leadership function and the need for a division of roles and responsibilities within a leading group. Nancy Roberts pointed out that empirical findings regarding the reform of American schools have shown that ‘energy’ is a fundamental resource for radical, effective re-organization, and that ‘collective leadership’ is needed in order to produce that energy (Roberts 1985).

From this point of view, the concept of “collective leadership” in organization and management sciences would seem to imply that “leaderistic” actions are needed at different moments of the coordinating processes (at different institutional and organizational levels and at different stages of the policy process). As Bryman (1986, p. 8) pointed out it: “leadership is a social influence process through which the members of a group are steered towards a goal”. Thanks to the leadership process, it is possible to make sense of what people are doing together (Drath & Palus, 1994); leadership is a powerful means by which collective viewpoints are articulated, shared values are embodied and environments are shaped to accomplish specific aims.

In the field of public policy, the concept of policy leadership has remained substantially undeveloped, probably due to the overlapping concept of entrepreneurship, particularly in terms of the coalition-building character of leadership. Some scholars have emphasized the role of ideational leadership as a driver of policy change, with an emphasis on the communicative and relational skills required for consensus building, and the personal propensity of leaders to be more “policy- rather than power-oriented” (Stiller 2009). Indeed, such a role is shaped upon the structures and the culture of each policy subsystem, so that the prevalent activities of leadership vary from one case to the next (Meijerink and Stillers 2013).

Other scholars, capitalizing on the aforementioned organizational and management studies, have emphasized how policy leadership should be a kind of collective endeavour aimed at problem solving, at least when policy change is being pursued. For example, Wallis and Dollery (1999) use the concept of “leadership networks”, which refer to the fact that in order to produce effective reforms and to institutionalize them, a collective effort is required; in other words, “a network of policy leaders must be formed which seeks to place its own members in positions of leverage over the agenda-setting, formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation stages of the reform process” (p.116). This aspect recalls the relevance for effective leadership of its relationship with the followers as a distinctive feature of the process (Uhl-Biel 2006). Thus, policy leadership implies the steering of the policy

process, which needs to be tailored to potential followers, to the decisional situations, to policy legacies and to cultural aspects. Policy leadership can be seen as a functional and collective process whereby several individuals coordinate their actions in order to achieve shared policy goals (Capano 2009).

The strategic features of policy leadership emerge in the policy process as the iterative exchange of resources by different leaders in order to overcome resistance. Thus regardless of whether a policy actor is a politician, a bureaucrat or a private citizen, he/she may become a leader by guiding change through the management of strategic resources in order to obtain support. In this sense, ‘steering’ means ‘translating’ the innovations introduced by a policy entrepreneur into strategic resources, and the leader-follower relationship can be seen as the exchange of these resources in the attempt to guide policy actors towards a shared goal (Galanti 2014, 154-155), as well as the local ‘implementation’ of a specific strategy designed by leaders at the national level.

3. Differences among the three functional processes of agency in policy dynamics

What emerges from the preceding review is that brokerage, entrepreneurship and leadership represent cases of individual causation in social and political processes, but are at the same time also collective processes through which specific functional activities linked to the promotion of mediation, innovation and steering are pursued in policy dynamics.

The shift from individualization to functional processes highlights the fact that to be successful, brokerage, entrepreneurship and leadership actions need to be shared, collectivized and distributed: this means that many individual actors act as brokers, leaders or entrepreneurs on the same issue at the same time, at different institutional levels or during different phases of the policy process.

The functional distinction can help explain what actors are really doing, and thus clarify their prevalent role. For example, it shows that the same actor (whether an individual or an organization) may behave differently during different phases of the policy process, depending on the needs in question. Hence some leaders, as we shall see, can act as brokers or as entrepreneurs, depending on the specific problems and issues they have to deal with.

By distinguishing mediation from innovation and from steering, it is possible to focus on the pursued task and thus to better understand which kind of action has been completed. For example, the risk of superimposing the meaning of leadership with that of entrepreneurship, that is, the risk of using them as if they were synonymous, may be avoided. Although entrepreneurs possess certain characteristics usually associated with leaders (in particular, the capacity to identify new solutions, and above all to convince others to adopt new ideas), they do not possess all the necessary resources with which to

control, and thus lead, the process; and in particular, they do not possess the basic means with which to effectively lead, namely power intended as a political and legal resource (Czarniawska- Joerges and Wolff 1991; Vecchio 2003). Thus, entrepreneurs can be conceived as “cognitive” leaders with insufficient power (Roberts and King 1991).

We can get a better understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour if we consider its most important dimension, that is, its ability to focus attention on new ways of perceiving reality; however, it is not enough to simply consider it as a sufficient or necessary precondition for change. Entrepreneurial actions and goals need to be included in the steering process, that is, in the process of leadership.

Moreover, the three functions and the three types of agency also differ in other ways.

Firstly, it is plausible that brokers pursue mainly “process-related” goals because they are interested in stability, whereas policy entrepreneurs act mainly on “content-related” goals as they are interested in policy change. Leaders, on the other hand, pursue both process-related and content-related goals, depending on the contingent steering requirements, because they act in a coordinated manner not only to drive policy change but also to maintain stability. In a sense, steering as coordination among leaders also aims at the institutionalisation of specific values and interests in the policy subsystem, meaning the inter-organizational setting.

Secondly, what permits the actual choice and implementation of a policy is a specific type of function that somehow adds something to brokerage and entrepreneurship, since it guides both mediation and innovation towards problem solving, that is, the achievement of a more general goal. In this sense, leadership can be seen as the most all-encompassing function within policy dynamics. Leaders participating in the process rely heavily on authority and on the exercise of decisional power, albeit accompanied by other resources typical of different functions of the policy process, such as mediation and innovation. Leadership can capitalize on both of the other two functional activities.

4. Three types of functional agency in the policy process: goals, resources and outcomes

Brokerage, entrepreneurship and leadership are pervasive functional processes developed during all phases of the policy process. However, the various different stages of the policy process are not the same in terms of what different actors can do and, from our perspective, how the functional activities of brokers, entrepreneurs and leaders can be carried out. This means that for each type of agency, the kinds of resource available (political, economic, legal and cognitive, following the classification by Dente (2014)

and relational and communicative, drawing on the organizational studies on embeddedness (Granovetter 1983) needs to be established, together with the kind of actions they perform and the type of outcome they can achieve. Table 1 presents these characteristics drawn from the literature.

Table 1 Agency types, functions, sources, actions and expected outcomes

Agency type	<i>Functional need/goal</i>	<i>Prevalent resource according to the related function</i>	<i>Main activities in policy dynamics</i>	<i>expected outcome</i>
brokerage	Mediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational • Communicative • Legal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bridging • negotiation • brokering information • gatekeeping 	<p>If successful: agreement among the actors in question is reached</p> <p>Otherwise: stalemate or conflict</p>
entrepreneurship	Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive • Communicative • Economic (private resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk-taking • Generating and spreading new ideas • Pressurising the media to influence agenda setting • Cooperating with Elites and important individual actors • Cultivating relationships with promoters and bureaucrats • Raising support among politicians • Establishing lobby groups / advocacy coalitions 	<p>If successful: effective change in a policy component (considering both process and content types of innovation)</p> <p>Otherwise: policy failure in the form of the enduring status quo</p>
leadership	Steering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political • Legal • Relational • Communicative • Cognitive • Economic (public resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing shared goals related to problem solving. • Vision building. • Diffusing new ideas or consolidating existing idea sets. • Coalition building in political institutions and team building among different institutions and organizations. • Generating trust and support. • Gate-keeping. • Decision-making. • Powering and puzzling. • Rewarding in the form of selective and collective incentives. • Coping with emergencies and unexpected consequences. • Sense-making. 	<p>If successful: depending on the leadership goal, either stability or change is achieved. Leadership credibility and authority confirmed.</p> <p>Otherwise: leadership credibility and authority are undermined.</p>

Sources: Kingdon 1995; French and Raven 1959; Ingold and Varone 2011; Granovetter 1983; Dente 2014; Morgenson et al. 2010; Watts et al. 2015.

The table clearly shows how the three types of agency possess quite distinctive characteristics. As far as regards resources, it shows how leadership is the only one to which coercive power may be attributed. Very often in the literature on brokers, entrepreneurs and leadership, this point is missing.

The policy-making process requires new ideas and solutions, as well as conciliation and agreement among actors; however, in the end these activities need to be channelled into decisions (either confirming the existing nature of policies or changing it). This represents the strategic role of leadership, which is the pivotal function in policy dynamics. Leadership holds political power (meaning both formal policy-making powers and also substantive powers), and thus the other two types of agency need to influence leadership (in the case of entrepreneurship) or constantly interact with it (in the case of brokerage) to be effective.

However, it is clear that leaders can also be entrepreneurs, or brokers, whereas entrepreneurs and brokers cannot be leaders, although they can support or influence the leadership process.

The variety of goals, resources and actions can be easily seen through the analysis of the policy cycle. In fact, each phase of the policy process is characterized by specific activities and complex organizational settings that actually shape the interaction of policy actors. The behaviour of a policy actor is thus influenced not only by the organization he/she belongs to (government, parliament, the bureaucracy, an independent agency, the media, an interest group or political party), but also by the agency function he/she performs.

By discussing the specificities of each phase, we aim to put agency into its political and inter-organizational context in order to show which activities may stem from mediation, innovation or steering in the context of public policy. Said context is indeed radically different from that of a single institution, given its blurred boundaries and the role that external shocks and institutional timing play in shaping the content and the actors in question. Moreover, as said before, a longitudinal view of agency functions may help us to differentiate among them and to see policy brokers, entrepreneurs and leaders where we do not expect them to be. To discuss the agency types in the unravelling of the policy process, we consider five different steps: agenda setting, formulation, adoption, implementation and evaluation (Howlett et al. 2009; Araral et al. 2012).

4.1. Agenda Setting

In *agenda setting*, the main focus is on the recognition of a policy issue as problematic, and on its introduction as an item on the decision-making agenda (Jann

and Wegrich 2007). These two steps are basically influenced by the definition of the problem, causal history and target populations (Cobb et al. 1976; Stone 1989; Schneider e Ingram 1993) and by access to the different types of agenda, ranging from that of public debate to those of institutions where the formal agenda generally consists of a limited number of issues (Baumgartner and Jones 1991). The definition of the problem is often the starting point for the introduction of an innovation into the policy process. The elaboration of a different interpretation of a policy problem allows the policy entrepreneur to foster his/her ideas and preferences, and as such represents the first move towards policy change as a window of opportunity occurs and the coupling of streams is possible (Kingdon 1984). To promote innovation in the institutional agenda, policy entrepreneurs act for the diffusion of their definition of the policy problem using persuasive discourse strategies (Mintron 1997). Moreover, they need to display social acuity (Mintrom and Norman 2009) as they try to build collective entrepreneurship as a network of innovators both within and outside institutions (Meijering and Huitema 2010). Finally, they endeavour to capture the attention of policy-makers through the manipulation of the ambiguity associated with the cognitive limitation of actors (Zahariadis 2007, 69).

Thus, even though the pro-active role of policy entrepreneurship in innovation is the most evident, mediation and steering also play their part in the agenda-setting phase. For example, brokerage entails mediation as the circulation of information and of problem definitions beyond the boundaries of a given policy subsystem as well (Christopoulos and Ingold 2015).

Steering activity is also of crucial importance for agenda setting. Depending on the strategy of the policy leadership, steering translates into gatekeeping, through the promotion of the innovation when leadership is interested in policy change, or through the exclusion of certain issues from serious consideration and through strategies in favour of non-decisions (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; see also Crenson, 1971). Moreover, the promotion of a policy issue may be purely instrumental to the steering of another policy process: media management and similar techniques may serve to distract attention from intractable issues.

4.2. Formulation

Innovation, mediation and steering are also witnessed in the formulation phase. In this phase, specific policy options are elaborated within government according to an explicit or implicit theory on the functioning of the policy; thus the range of possible options is narrowed by excluding unfeasible ones (Howlett and Geist 2012). Therefore, the focus of action gradually moves from society as a whole towards political institutions, and in particular towards the subset of the members of policy networks who

interact within more formalized procedures (Coleman and Skogstad 1990; Marin and Mayntz 1991; Pross 1992).

The nature and the configuration of the policy network affects the formulation phase. In particular, the number of actors and the type of “idea sets” influence the likelihood that the ideas included in the agenda are stated in the form of more detailed policy options.

The interaction of actors within and outside institutions becomes crucial to the refinement of the government’s policy options, as they deal with the ability of ideas to determine the evaluation of feasible options (Carstesten 2011). Brokerage may thus serve to reaffirm “idea sets” in the policy subsystem, by promoting mediation between group so as to avoid conflict and to stabilize the policy subsystem (Sabatier and Jenkins 1993). Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, plays a disruptive function designed to force the innovation through. The policy entrepreneur acts to alter the size and the idea sets of the policy network, on the basis of different strategies depending on the intensity of the pursued change (radical, incremental or even symbolic). Innovation entails the proposal of a different theory of the relationship between ends and means, and the engagement of entrepreneurs in policy networks is key to the success of the innovation (Mintrom and Vergari 1996).

At the formulation stage, leadership acts to simplify the policy options, as it ultimately establishes the exclusion of policy options given the existing economic, political and procedural constraints. Steering thus means translating policy ideas related to the “outside world” into more institutionalized organizational goals, through the use of appropriate language and embarking on a sort of “sensemaking” process to justify the need to act (Weick 1995; Morgenson et al. 2010). Just as the entrepreneur tries to shape the policy network, so does the leadership, although the latter selects a more restricted “team” composed of people who share the same policy goals (Jann and Weighrich 2007), to be taken as a point of reference also for public opinion makers who challenge government.

4.3. Decision

This activation of leadership heralds the adoption of a policy decision, where the authoritative resources of leadership within institutions, together with the legitimacy it may enjoy on the outside, become of fundamental importance for coalition building and for the approval of bills, laws and regulations. The different models used to describe rationality in the decision-making process point out that regardless of the type of rationality and the goal of actors (change or stability), steering is the key factor when a decision is ultimately taken (Simon 1957; Lindblom 1959; March and Olsen 1984). Steering means here using power and relations to complete strategic exchanges with veto players, with the final goal of coalition building inside institutions, which can also

be seen as representing the management of “team boundaries” (Ancona 1990; Morgenson et al. 2010). Finally, the action of leadership aims at synchronizing policy with the institutional timing of both policy adoption and implementation, considering the “anatomy of delays” as the instrumental use of procedural constraints that the leadership may use in order to speed up or slow down the pace of the policy process (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973).

The role of policy entrepreneurship seems less relevant here, since the entrepreneur often does not have access to the decisional arenas, except when entrepreneurship and leadership overlaps. Instead, the intermediation of policy brokers can constitute a strategic asset in coalition building and in bargaining over the content of decisions (Ingold and Varone 2011). In any case, the role of entrepreneurs and brokers varies depending on the overall complexity of the policy subsystem during the decision-making phase. Thus the need for innovation and intermediation may plausibly be higher, the more multi-levelled and veto-exposed an institutional setting is (Tsebelis 2002), and the more technological and sophisticated the policy sector is (Mayntz 2009; Prontera 2013).

4.4. Implementation and Evaluation

The roles of the three types of agency, in terms of implementation and evaluation, have been underestimated. There are very few studies of entrepreneurship in implementation (Braun 2009), while little attention has been paid to leadership or brokerage. Instead, the need for mediation and steering is even stronger during this phase, when administrative structures, agencies and local governments become the main settings of the policy process. In particular, steering helps deal with intra- and inter-organizational coordination problems that may also spread as a result of the interaction of field agencies with the target group (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Howlett and Geist 2012).

Moreover, the failure of policy programs, innovative or otherwise, may lie in problems in the policy design. In fact, the design of policy mixes may suffer from the mismatch between policy tools and the capacity of the administration to implement policy, or from the specific policy styles combining such instruments within a particular sector (Kagan 1991; Knill 1998; Howlett 2009; Howlett 2011). Hence, the selection of policy tools (regulatory, financial, informational and organizational, see Hood 1983; Mayntz 1979; Vedung 1998; Salomon 2002), also on the basis of organizational culture and capacity, is a key task for policy leadership (Hogwood and Gunn 1984; Bressers and O’Toole 1998).

At the same time, the choice of policy tools can be of strategic importance for the steering of the administration, also in order to deal with any ambiguity and conflict affecting implementation (Matland 1995). In fact, the steering of implementation entails

the use of authority to shape administrative agencies, by creating new organizations or by appointing servants who share the problem-solving orientation of the leadership. These activities should be combined with the cooperation fostered by “network management” (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997), which entails facilitative leadership mediating, empowering actors, fostering cooperation and building up trust (Ansell and Gash 2008; Gage and Mandell 1990; Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Huxham and Vangen 2005).

The steering of implementation also implies understanding the importance of communication and of relations with mediatized society, especially considering the target populations that are directly affected by the enforcement of policy tools and the related re-distribution of resources. This is particularly true in the era of mediatized and personalized political leadership (Fischer 2003; Klijn 2014).

This brings the policy entrepreneur back into the implementation game, as he/she will try to secure innovation by assessing the coherence of the policy instrument in the light of the expected changes, especially when ensuring that the adopted solutions are interpreted in the right way and not according to routine procedure or to pre-existing vested interests. The monitoring of the steps of implementation could also follow, to determine whether the policy leadership is capable of providing the necessary resources to policy, and of coping with unexpected problems (Morgenson et al. 2010).

Finally, during the evaluation phase leadership is present also in order to foster organizational learning in line with the initial policy goal, while entrepreneurship may be present, to monitor the results of evaluation, to discuss whether they are not in keeping with expectations (thus contesting the parameters of evaluation adopted) or to capitalize on any positive assessment. The role of brokerage seems less evident here, since evaluation does not involve coalition building inside or outside the policy subsystem.

5. The dynamics of the types of functional agency in the policy process: the collective/distributed dimension

As we have seen, brokerage, entrepreneurship and leadership can be deemed present at all stages of the policy process. These activities continuously interact, following cooperative or conflictive patterns. Indeed, the analysis of the policy process also sheds light on the collective features of these activities, since they are rarely carried out by one individual alone. Thus, a question may be raised as to how to empirically track these actors and their links, in order to see if a specific constellation of actors sharing the same agency role and policy goal is present.

Following the extensive literature on leadership in organizations, and especially in education policy (Meier and O’Toole 2007), we may assume that successful

entrepreneurs and leaders need to build and manage their own social, institutional and political networks, as a subset of the wider policy network over a specific issue in a country, whereas brokers seems to act in isolation. In other words, policy entrepreneurship, and most of all policy leadership, should cope with the complexity of governance thanks to network management activities (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997). Especially when it comes to leadership, these activities also involve the interactions with their followers.

In particular, we assume that this kind of relationship is crucial for the success of policy leadership, because the networks of leaders and followers become the ‘pro-active agents’ after the initial phase (which often depends on the ability of individual leaders). Furthermore, it should be noted that successful steering needs to be developed throughout the entire policy process. From this collective perspective, therefore, the leader-followers relationship is present and distributed in space and time. This means that for the success of the leadership function, the followers need to act as followers of the leadership network and as “local” leaders in the wider policy subsystem. The relationship between the leaders and followers is based on a strong degree of interdependence, and becomes bi-univocal as it creates a reciprocal commitment to coordinated action in the policy process, in a circular process of motivation and power exchange (Wildavsky 2006; Blondel 1987, Nye 2008, Uhl-Biel 2006).

As different types of policy networks exist, we may assume that successful steering for either stability or change is also affected by the type of policy network on a given issue. As the type of network may vary consistently, from iron triangles to issue networks (Heclo 1974), we may also assume that the configurations of actors in leaders-followers relations are affected by the type of network (Howlett 2002). Thus, the features of the specific sub-network of leaders and followers should depend on the prevailing method of conflict recognition and resolution present in the policy. In general terms, we may also hypothesize that the structure of the leader-followers relationship is shaped on the institutional/internal environment, on the one hand, and on the societal/external environment on the other hand; this is because the success of steering requires both the creation of trust among political actors of different coalitions, and of legitimacy among different stakeholders and interests. In fact, we can assume that, on one hand, given the coordinating mechanism of network (Thompson et al. 1991), trust is necessary to tackle strategic uncertainty deriving from the self -interested behaviour of politicians (Provan Huag and Millward 2009) and to coordinate fragmented group of actors, mainly within institutions. On the other hand, we can see that legitimacy spreads from the provision, to the leadership, of the support from experts and the from society as a whole, that is necessary to avoid external conflicts with stakeholders during the policy process.

Thus, empirical and theoretical research should investigate how policy leadership, with its followers, can be structured in order to achieve shared policy goals

(either of change or stability) thanks to the creation of both trust among institutional actors and legitimacy among stakeholders.

Given the relevance of leader-followers relationships for the creation of trust within institutions, and for the recognition of policies' legitimacy outside of the same institutions, we may also suggest that the fragmentation of the institutional setting (intended as a multi-level structure – federal or unitary Tsebelis 2002 - of the political institutions in a given country and of the policy design itself – decentralised or centralised) and the complexity of the policy issue itself (Gormley 1986) may affect the structure of the leadership network, creating distinctive types of leadership processes that link leaders with followers and that can be seen the ways through which the steering function is enforced.

Indeed, leader-followers networks may differ in the number of members or components, given the potential number of veto points inside institutions and the decentralisation of the policy design: an effective leader should thus be able to get his/her followers at different institutional levels to act as local leaders, and thus to communicate the vision to all other political actors. In a sense, this sort of top-down diffusion of general goals from the centre to the peripheries was a typical function of political parties in Western democracies (Tarrow 1991). Furthermore, leader-followers configurations may also be shaped by the level of complexity of the policy issue: the recognition mechanisms and external legitimacy that are necessary for the leadership function are influenced by the specialisation of expertise on the issue, and by the organisation of interests regarding a given issue in a given country. For example, in network industries, a highly specialised, organised policy network would recognise the legitimacy of steering if leaders and followers are recognised as competent actors. Similarly, in sectors like pensions and fiscal policy, where societal policy actors are somewhat dispersed, legitimacy and support would spread from the capacity of the leadership to be credible and representative of wider interests and visions of the world.

Table 2 puts together the dimensions decentralization/centralization of policy setting and high/low technical complexity and shows the resulting leadership types.

Table 2 - Types of Leadership processes

	Technical complexity HIGH	Technical Complexity LOW
DECENTRALIZED policy setting	<p>Pluralist policy leadership</p> <p><i>It aims at building trust through a wide and cohesive leaders-followers network.</i></p>	<p>Dispersed policy leadership</p> <p><i>It aims at building trust through a wide and non-cohesive leaders-followers network.</i></p>
CENTRALIZED policy setting	<p>Elitist policy leadership</p> <p><i>It aims at obtaining legitimacy through a narrow and cohesive leaders-followers network.</i></p>	<p>Punctuated policy leadership</p> <p><i>It aims at obtaining legitimacy through a narrow and non-cohesive leaders-followers network.</i></p>

Following this line of thinking, future research could further investigate the types of leader-followers networks for trust and legitimacy, which may vary from more elitist, centred configurations to more pluralist, dispersed ones.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we have re-read the vast quantity of multi-disciplinary literature on brokers, entrepreneurs and leaders, and have drawn the necessary inspiration to propose a shift from the personalized, atomistic conception of these actors as offered by political science and public policy, towards a more functional perspective. Thus we wish to propose that brokerage, entrepreneurship, and leadership be seen as three types of specific functional process which develop different activities and pursue different goals in the policy process, and thus different types of targeted coordination. We have then shown how these three types of agency matter at all stages of the policy process, and

thus how the different series of actions can influence agenda setting, the formulation and adoption of a decision, and its implementation and evaluation. This proposal offers a better understanding of policy dynamics, while a more theoretically driven analysis of the role of individuals is suggested. Finally we have focused on the collective features of the steering function performed by the leadership agency, to show how it develops through the entire policy process, depending on the specific features of the policy field.

Our proposal, then, is to take the role of brokers, entrepreneurs, and leaders seriously, and to overcome the temptation to link their actions simply to chance, random processes, or to individual characteristics. On the contrary, their individual actions are embedded in clear functional processes in which they do not operate alone.

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