Agency as a functional pattern? Leadership, entrepreneurship and brokerage in public policy

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Abstract:

Public policy analysis has been developing many theoretical frameworks, with distinct epistemological and empirical applications, to better understand the policy process. Most of these theories and approaches offer explanations for policy dynamics that are rooted in the structural dimension of politics, while others acknowledge that agency plays some role. This particular agency role is attributed to specific actors, especially entrepreneurs and brokers and sometimes leaders, but the activities of these agents are very often intended and defined in a very overlapping way. This state of things creates conceptual confusion and prevents the development of genuinely comparative research designs aimed at clarifying the different roles that agency can play in policy process, as well the different types of agency that can be considered necessary for policy dynamics and change. This paper critically reviews public policy theoretical frameworks to clarify of the role of agency as a set of functional patterns in public policy, paying particular attention to three types of patterns whose adoption can strengthen the main theoretical frameworks elaborated to explain policy dynamics and change: policy entrepreneurship, policy leadership and policy brokerage.

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1. Introduction

Public policy theorizations and frameworks are overcrowded by individual actors. Policy agents such as entrepreneurs, brokers, leaders, boundary spanners and workers, and policy advocates are variously distributed not only across the more structured theoretical framework but also across numerous descriptive empirical cases. At a certain point, individual actors jump into the policy process to do something that is considered relevant for understanding and explaining what is occurring. Individual actors seem to be relevant when connecting the different components of the policy process and pushing them towards some level of coordination or some specific goal. This type of relevance is not unexpected, if we note the observation of Lundvqist that "background factors don't do policies. Policy-makers do" (1980, XIII) and, in turn, that the role of agents in the policy process and institutional dynamics is paramount to our understanding of coordination mechanisms (Scharpf 1997).

However, the growing attention paid to the role of "agents", has characterized public policy in recent decades, has not been complemented by adequate attention on a better conceptualization these "agents". This theoretical gap maintains individual actors as a kind of randomly necessary intervening variable that is very often dealt with in a descriptive way: "this man/woman (e.g., a leader or an entrepreneur) is doing this, and then this happened".

This way of thinking is quite useful in producing an ad hoc explanation, but it does not serve to derive significant generalizations or to address theoretical expectations. In this paper, we will attempt to narrow this theoretical gap by analyzing how "agents" are conceptualized in public policy and by underlining the conceptual and empirical difficulties associated with analyzing the policy process derived from an individualistic 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). We have decided to focus on three types of "agents"—brokers, entrepreneurs and leaders—because they, above all, are the most used concepts in public policy for grasping the relevance of the roles played by individual actors[1]. We thus posit them as relevant examples of "agents" who are in search of embeddedness in a less vague theoretical landscape. Subsequently, we will propose a conceptual way of filling the gap and ambiguities that emerge in our review, based on a shift from "agents" to "functional

[1] Other labels can be included as subcategories in one of those three agent types, such as boundary spanners (Williams 2002), who can be considered a type of brokers. Policy advocates also can be considered to partially overlap with at least two of the three concepts (brokers and entrepreneurs) or, from another point of view, can be regarded as a type of agent who is part of a specific subsystem (e.g., a policy advisory system) and thus acts as a member of a specific institutionalized pattern. However, we assume that both these agents can be subject to the same theorizing of agency that we will present in this paper.

patterns" of agency and, more specifically, from brokers to brokerage, from entrepreneurs to entrepreneurship, from leaders to leadership.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the second section, we will summarize the features of the main public policy frameworks by focusing on how they position agency in their theoretical constructions. In the third section, we will examine how agency is handled in public policy, outside the commonly adopted theoretical frameworks. In the fourth section, our conceptual proposal will be outlined. The conclusions will address the most relevant questions for further research.

2. Agency in public policy theoretical frameworks

Scholars in political science and public policy often speculate about the relationship between institutions, intended as structural norms that constrain behaviors, and actors, seen as the individual or collective agents who shape policy practices. Different frameworks of the public policy process focus on policy dynamics (as they look at both policy stability and change), depict lists of variables that are relevant to policy outputs and outcomes, and offer different characterizations of policy change. However, they all face the dilemma between structure and agency. To see how and whether agency is addressed and how the role of "agents" have been theorized to understand and explain policy dynamics, we first need to review the main frameworks in public policy. The main goal of the analysis of the role of agency in these frameworks is to highlight the different attributes and activities of agents (either individual or collective). The original and the more recent theoretical developments of each framework will be considered to highlight if and how the conceptualization of agency has changed over time.

Each framework will be analyzed by considering different components of public policy (following the analytical approach of Capano 2009): the *main focus* of the framework; the *policy phase* of interest (e.g., agenda setting, formulation, decision making, and implementation); the main *drivers and mechanisms* at play (exogenous or endogenous); the conceptions of *actors*; and, most notably, the *role of agency* in the proposed explanation.

In so doing, we will consider if and how authors privilege structure over agency (or vice versa) to account for policy change or stability. We will also be able to describe the different roles that actors may play in the policy dynamics. In fact, it is important to highlight that *not all actors* play a proactive role in the policy dynamic; instead, agency has to be intended as *the set of activities of purposeful actors oriented toward the achievement of a policy goal*. This view of agency is meant to emphasize the different functional patterns that agency may play in the unravelling of public policy, seen here not only as an output of the political system but also as a political process.

For this kind of analysis, five frameworks of the policy process have been selected: the Institutional Analysis and Development[2] Framework (IAD), Historical and Discursive Institutionalisms[3], the Multiple Stream Approach (MSA), the Punctuated Equilibrium Framework (PET), and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). These frameworks represent the most frequently used heuristic lenses in the discipline (Sabatier and Weible 2007; Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014).

2.1 Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD): the rational agent as determined by institutions

The IAD is a framework developed by Vincent and Elinor Ostrom in the early 1970s as a systematic way of studying institutional arrangements and the provision of public goods (Ostrom and Ostrom 1977). The interest is in understanding how the interactions among rational actors in the action arena can solve collective action problems and provide shared benefits. This framework is thus particularly concerned with explaining multiple equilibria, and it focuses on policy design, decision-related outcomes and implementation. Thus, the IAD focuses on explaining the policy outcomes produced according to a theoretical model (Ostrom 2007, 254).

Actors are conceived according to the theories of individual choice, such as game theory and neo-classical economic theory, where actors have fixed preferences and enjoy a bounded rationality under the condition of imperfect information (Ostrom, Cox, and Schlanger 2014, 270-273). In the relatively closed system depicted in the metaphor of the action arena, individual or collective action is shaped by many variables related to the institutional setting. Thus, actors do not alter the policy dynamics, but they are seen as one link in the chain that produces policy outcomes in a rather predictable way. Agency is the "engine that sets the action situation into motion (…) whether the analyst can predict the types of outcomes that people are likely to realize in a given action arena depends on its structure" (Ostrom, Cox and Schlanger 2014, 274). This quotation suggests that, in the IAD, agency can be seen as something determined by the structure defined by institutional arrangements rather than as a determinant of policy outcomes.

[2] The IAD has been selected as the most prominent policy approach in the field of rational theories (which includes rational institutionalism).

[3] Sociological institutionalism has not been included in our analysis, as it focuses strongly on structures and seems less important for public policy analysis (see Fioretos, Falleti and Sheingate 2015, 7). Furthermore, "pure" sociological institutionalism is not commonly adopted in public policy.

2.2 Historical and Discursive Institutionalisms: change agents involved in gradual change

Historical institutionalism does not view political outcomes as an inevitable response to the needs of the system. It focuses on policy arrangements between different groups of actors that somehow stabilize in norms and institutions at a given moment in time (Hall and Taylor 1996, 937). Political actors organize in accordance with shared rules and practices so that institutions can rely on multiple stable equilibria (March and Olsen 1996). The trajectory of institutions is described as path dependent, in the sense that preceding steps in institutional development prompt further movement in the same direction (Pierson 2000, 252). As actors are embedded in existing rules, radical change is often triggered by critical junctures and sudden external events. In this type of dynamic, contingency and sequencing matter more than individual agency (Mahoney 2000, 507-508).

Early historical institutionalists tended to focus on the stability of institutions. Taking on a more long-term perspective on both the process and the result of change (Thelen 2004, 4; Streeck and Thelen 2005, 9, 18), later historical institutionalism has advocated for the need to better theorize phenomena of gradual institutional change though modification and accumulation. In so doing, they show how this peculiar dynamic of stability and change is endogenous because change stems from the continuous contestation and re-interpretation of the norms that sustain existing institutions. The focus on the dynamic and on the slow-moving causal process of change enhances the role of agency over structure, as purposeful actors continuously "try to achieve advantage by interpreting or redirecting institutions in pursuit of their goals, or by subverting or circumventing rules that clash with their interests"; thus, "the aim must be to understand (…) the way actors cultivate change from within the context of existing opportunities and constraints" (Streeck and Thelen 2005, 19).

Hence, starting from the change-permitting properties of institutions, change agents become vehicles of a type of change that is inscribed on institutional structures, taking advantage of critical junctures and ambiguities in the interpretation of the norms, altering the trajectory and creatively transforming the ways in which institutions allocate power and authority (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 10).

Notwithstanding this peculiar attention to the role of agency as a purposeful action, we think that the historical institutionalist vision of agency remains bounded by the features of institutions. In fact, Mahoney and Thelen explain how the characteristics of the political context (the veto possibilities in the institutional setting) and the characteristics of the targeted institutions (the level of discretion in interpreting the norms) shape the type of institutional change (layering, drift, displacement, conversion), and, in turn, affect the strategies of the agents (subversives, symbionts, insurrectionaries, opportunists). Agency is thus defined just as the "intervening step" in the process of

gradual institutional change (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 28), whereby institutions are the enabling structures within which actors may exercise robust agency (Hall 2010, 217; Kay 2005).

The role of agency over structures is more strongly emphasized in the recent scholarship on discursive institutionalism, highlighting the subordination of agency (action) to structure (rules) as the key problem in historical, sociological and rational institutionalism (Schmidt 2008; Schmidt and Gualmini 2013; Schmidt 2014; Carstensen and Schmidt 2016). In fact, discursive institutionalism focuses explicitly on the role of ideas and discourse in policy dynamics. Institutions are intended to simultaneously be structures and constructs internal to agents with "background ideational abilities" and "foreground discursive abilities" (Schmidt 2008, 305). Different types of actors have a role in discourse as a transformative force in the public sphere. For example, the coordinate discourse in the policy sphere consists of the individuals and groups at the center of the policy design of programmatic ideas. This type of discourse is performed by epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, discourse coalitions, advocacy networks of international actors, or even by "entrepreneurs" and "mediators" "who serve as catalysts for change as they draw on and articulate the ideas of discursive communities and coalitions" (Schmidt 2008, 310). Still, political (and technocratic) leaders emerge as key agents of the communicative discourse in the political sphere, which consists of the individuals and groups involved in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of political ideas to the public through a mass process of public persuasion. In so doing, discursive institutionalism "puts the agency back into institutional change by explaining the dynamics of change in structures through constructive discourse about ideas" by "combining background ideational abilities with foreground discursive abilities" (Schmidt 2008, 316).

2.3. The Multiple Stream Approach (MSA): agency as policy entrepreneurship

The MSA stands in sharp contrast with the frameworks reviewed thus far. Defined as a lens that explains how the government makes policies under conditions of ambiguity (Zahariadis 2014, 25), this approach focuses on public policy as a combination of different processes (agenda setting, decision making, and implementation). Its origins are in the work of John Kingdon (1984, 2-3), who studied health and transport policies at the federal level in the US to understand the preconditions for the inclusion of a policy issue in the government agenda. Assuming human limitations in attention and information processing, the MSA describes the dynamics of the policy process by identifying three independent streams: the problem streams (composed of conditions that politicians want to address), the policy stream (built on the array of available solutions to problems floating in the "primeval soup" of ideas), and the political stream (composed of the national mood, interest groups pressures and administrative or legislative turnover).

Decisions are made when the three streams are combined or coupled at critical moments, labeled "policy windows", by some specific and purposeful actors—the "policy entrepreneurs", who combine the three streams into a unique package that is more likely to be adopted by policymakers (Zahariadis 2014, 26). Since then, scholars have explored the possibility of other streams in the process (Howlett, McConnell, and Perl 2015) and have attempted to better describe the role of different actors (Mukherjee and Howlett 2015), but the basic matching logic remains.

With the MSA, agency suddenly became the core of the theory, while institutions mattered because of their ambiguity more than because of their structuring abilities. Policy entrepreneurs are those who couple the streams. They are the advocates who willing to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, money—to promote an idea in return for an anticipated future gain. They are not identified with a formal position in the political system: they can be found inside or outside political institutions, but they must show some attributes, including access to policymakers, technical expertise and negotiating skills, persistency and sheer tenacity (Kingdon 1984, 188-191). Most notably, the policy entrepreneur "performs *the function for the system*[4] of coupling the previously separate streams. Policy entrepreneurs hook solutions to problems, proposals to political momentum, and political events to policy problems. (…) The window opens because of some factors beyond the realm of the individual entrepreneur, but the individual takes advantage of the opportunity" (ibidem 191). Kingdon notes two different activities of policy entrepreneurs: advocacy of ideas and solutions by defining the problem and softening up processes and brokerage through the negotiations among people, which allows the critical coupling (ibidem 192-194).

Other scholars have developed these insights on agency. Some have concentrated on the predictability of the policy windows (Howlett 1998, 506) and the role of policy entrepreneurs in fostering the opening of such windows (Natali 2004, 1084). This idea also highlights the importance of entrepreneurial action as political manipulation that intends to control ambiguity by clarifying the meanings: successful entrepreneurs are those who have greater access to policymakers and more resources and those who are able to employ different manipulating strategies (e.g., framing, salami tactics, symbols, priming) (Zahariadis 2014, 29-36). Some recent applications in the EU context emphasized the usefulness of the concept of policy entrepreneurship (PE) as a process that includes different activities involving both institutional and non-institutional actors (Ackrill and Kay 2011, 74). This conceptualization of PE distinguishes two distinct types of coupling: policy entrepreneurship, whereby external actors sell ideas to policymakers, and policy commissioning, whereby the coupling is realized by the intentional selection of policymakers in the EU commission, who select the most appropriate ideas for a policy window (Ackrill and Kay 2011, 78; Copeland and James 2014, 5, 13). Moreover, the type

[4] The emphasis (in italics) is not in the original text, but we have added it to highlight the use of the term "function".

of policy entrepreneurship and the temporal extension of the windows of opportunity may shape the features of policy change under conditions of institutional ambiguity. Saurugger and Terpan (2016, 40) argue that the more coherent the message shared by a powerful coalition of policy entrepreneurs is, the more likely they will be to push for certain types of norms.

Some conceptual confusion has arisen in recent studies that consider the possibility of "decoupling" during the implementation phase (Zahariadis and Exadactilos 2016). In this view, policy entrepreneurs can be successful in securing the coalitions established during the agenda and formulation phase, not only because of their individual attributes but also because of the use of different strategies, which is what allows agency to be linked with the context (Zahariadis and Exadactilos 2016, 62-63). However, the description of the strategies for the implementation phase implies activities that differ from pure entrepreneurial efforts. While *issue linkages and framing* are pure discursive strategies focused on ideas, problems and solutions, the network managing activities involved in the *institutional manipulation* strategies seem more managerial and bureaucratic, while *side payments* to sustain winning coalitions seem to require ample inflation of the authority's resources typically provided by the members of the political governing coalition.

Some conceptual confusion also emerges when considering the role of political leaders. Emphasizing the role of political leadership in emotional endowment, Zahariadis (2016a) defines national leaders as a "subset of policy entrepreneurs" but then attributes them special characteristics that seem to go beyond policy entrepreneurship. In fact, "successful leaders use stories, images and other symbols to rouse passion, capturing public attention, building support, and undermining oppositions to their preferred policy (…) leaders are more ambitious and capable of steering policy during open policy windows" (Zahariadis 2016a, 147). Moreover, "their institutional 'bully pulpit' gives them access beyond what ordinary entrepreneurs can muster", as they have unique resources at their disposal (Zahariadis 2016a, 149).

In sum, the MSA highly values agency as a causal driver of policy change and as a proper function in the policy process, considering agenda setting, formulation, adoption and, recently, implementation (Howlett, McConnell, and Perl 2015). Hence, MSA scholarship emphasizes the conceptualization of PE as a broader process that not only focuses on the idiosyncratic actions of individuals (Ackrill, Kay, and Zahariadis 2013) but also values the conditions for success by examining attributes and strategies in relation to the context.

Nonetheless, the latest reflections on MSA suggest the consideration of policy entrepreneurship in relation to other—indeed more structural—aspects, for example, the environment (Cairney and Jones 2016), the institutions (Zahariadis 2016b), and the internal coherence of reform coalitions (Saurugger and Terpan 2016). Finally, the attention paid to entrepreneurial strategies emphasizes the various activities used to foster

successful coupling, but this approach also is subject to conceptual overstretching, as it refers to a range of activities that are very different in their nature, such as invention, brokerage, management and side payment activities, as "entrepreneurial".

2.4 Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET): political actors and venue shopping

PET focuses on the agenda-setting phase and answers the critique that pluralism accounts only for incremental policies and stability. Baumgartner and Jones (1991) argue that the political order is a unique "punctuated equilibrium" process that can explain periods of long stability and moments of rapid change. This process involves the interaction of beliefs and values concerning a particular policy—termed the policy image—with an existing set of political institutions—the venues of policy action. The interaction between image and venue is the causal mechanism that leads to the rapid creation, destruction or alteration of the policy subsystem, a dynamic of competition among groups known as conflict expansion (Baumgartner and Jones 1991, 1045). Thus, an external shock or a focusing event (Birkland 2007) suddenly trigger this process of rapid change from one equilibrium to the next (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 18), but political actors may then play an active role in altering both the policy image and the policy venue.

In particular, "political actors" may employ a dual strategy: trying to control the prevailing image of the policy problem by using rhetoric and policy analysis and trying to alter the roster of participants by appealing either to other elites or to the public or by seeking out the most favorable institutional venue for the image they promote. Hence, both the institutional structures and the individual strategies of policy entrepreneurs play a role in subsystem change (Baumgartner and Jones 1991, 1063). Thus, a common strategy of strategically minded political actors involves promoting a different policy image through "venue shopping" by searching for a venue that is more receptive of their preferred image (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 36). Venue shopping means that policymakers seek a venue by redefining the issue in a way that facilitates the movement of the issue from one policy area to another (e.g., from fisheries to competition policy) or even from one institutional level to another, (e.g., from the EU to the global level) (Princen 2013, 862). These actors are referred to as "policy" or "bureaucratic" entrepreneurs, and they may also be located outside institutions: for example, they may be scientists whose complaints about technical issues enjoy special legitimacy (Baumgartner and Jones 1991, 1057).

Subsequent applications of PET present it as a more general theory of policymaking that focuses on the allocation of attention and disproportionate information processing as the key explanatory variables (Princen 2013, 855). In any instance, what seems to matter more with regard to policy dynamics is the number of institutional venues, which determines the role of individual and collective policy entrepreneurs, such

as political parties (Walgrave and Varone 2008, 367). Hence, the causal mechanism is triggered by external events, and it remains strongly affected by the institutional arrangement that structurally defines the number of policy venues and the concrete possibility of different policy images being included in the agenda. In other words, PET uses the lexicon of the MSA to account for the role of actors, but it proposes a vision of change that is even more focused on the structure of the policy subsystem rather than on the purposeful agency of individuals or groups.

2.5 The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF): the fading of policy brokers in the shadow of advocacy coalitions

The ACF was developed by Sabatier (1998) and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) from Heclo's intuition about the importance of cognitive factors in explaining coalition dynamics. Policy subsystems are the basic unit of analysis for a dynamic that involves two or more "advocacy coalitions" as the main characters. Advocacy coalitions are composed of actors from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system and show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity (Sabatier 1988, 140). Major and minor policy changes basically involve an alternation of the belief system of the elites in the advocacy coalition, which can be affected by cognitive and non-cognitive processes (ibidem, 130-133). The ACF also describes four types of policy change (Weible, Sabatier and McQueen 2009). The first two types are driven by shocks external or internal to the policy subsystem, leading to major policy change and a sharp redistribution of the resources within the opposing advocacy coalitions. The other two drivers of minor policy change are *policy-oriented learning* across coalitions and *negotiated agreements* between coalitions. The two main agency roles emerge in these processes of minor change and in the management of conflict and negotiations inside and among coalitions.

The first and clearer role is that of the *policy brokers*. When conflicting strategies between coalitions emerge, in the case of either slow, "enlightening" policy-oriented learning or "hurting stalemates", where professional forums should provide an institutional setting to safely negotiate an agreement (Sabatier and Weible 2007, 206), policy brokers are the actors (external or internal to the coalition) whose principal concern is to find a reasonable compromise to reduce conflict: they act as mediators between opposing coalitions (Sabatier 1988, 133). This attitude towards mediation is reflected in their central position inside a coalition's network: this position is crucial when they join an institutional venue (such as a central administrative agency), which is reputed to be professional and neutral and is thus recognized by other actors in the subsystem (Ingold 2011, 449). These actors ultimately seek stability and act as facilitators of compromise and even learning across coalitions (Ingold and Varone 2012). This view of policy brokers has been further developed by conducting social network analysis to test the actors'

relational attributes, showing that policy brokers are more central to the network than policy entrepreneurs, who actually act in their personal interest (Christopoulos and Ingold 2015).

The second agency role that emerges from the latest development of the ACF relates to the importance of skillful "leadership" and policy "entrepreneurship" as coalition resources, on the one hand, and among the nine conditions affecting negotiated agreements, on the other hand. According to Sabatier and Weible (2007, 206), effective leadership in professional fora enhances negotiations, as it guarantees neutrality; at the same time, the presence of "skillful leadership" is described as a crucial coalition resource, as it can "create an attractive vision for a coalition, strategically use resources efficiently, and attract new resources to a coalition" (ibidem, 206). In addition, ACF scholars view agency as a condition for policy change: indeed, external shocks create a disposition to policy change, but "skillful entrepreneurs" are needed to realize actual changes in policy. Here, we can see how the ACF has been influenced by a concept borrowed from other scholars (Kingdon in this case), even though the overlap between "leaders" and "entrepreneurs" has not been further theorized or tested (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014, 207).

In a sense, "leadership" seems to be considered a fundamental resource with which to build new coalitions and to drive the process through the hurdles of the implementation phase rather than being regarded as a proper function in the unravelling of the policy process. In fact, the importance of authority as a coalition resource and the need for its theorization emerges in the latest account of the ACF (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014, 205). For example, in the study of nascent subsystems in a European setting, Ingold, Fischer, and Cairney (2016) propose that actors' reputations as leaders are crucial because in those nascent situations, some people follow the lead of actors with scientific knowledge or decision-making powers.

In sum, the most recent ACF studies see agency either as an attribute or as a "pre"-condition of major and minor policy change, but they still frame agency in terms of the actions of exceptional individuals. Empirical applications then—and not by chance—largely overlook the use of this type of framing. The structural arguments that guide the social network applications of the ACF (e.g., Ingold 2011, Christopoulos and Ingold 2015) do not help theorize agency as a set of distinct activities in the dynamics of the process. All in all, the causal mechanisms explicitly listed by the ACF to account for major policy change (e.g., attention, agenda change, redistribution of coalition resources) remain exogenous in nature.

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the analyzed frameworks, as well the types of actors and the role of agency that they adopt.

Table - Agency in policy process theories

Framework or theory	**Main focus**	**Phase of the policy process**	**Main driver of change**	**Type of actors**	**Role of agency**
Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) (Ostrom 1977)	Institutional arrangements for the provision of public goods	Formulation/Design, Decision, Implementation	Exogenous	Rational actors seeking equilibria	**No purposeful agency**. Rational actors' preferences are exogenous; they react to incentives, and their behavior is determined by the action arena and situation.
Historical Institutionalism (Streek and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010)	Institutions shape actors' goals and preferences	Decision	Endogenous	Coalitions within institutions	**Agency is important for gradual change**. However, change agents are defined in generic terms, as they are activated by different institutional features and interpret norms.
Discursive Institutionalism (Schmidt 2008; 2014)	Ideas and discourse as transformative in policy dynamics	Agenda setting, Decision	Endogenous	Entrepreneurs and mediators Political leaders	**Entrepreneurs, mediators and political leadership are involved in discourse** Entrepreneurs and mediators draw on and articulate the ideas of discursive communities and coalitions. Political leadership uses rhetoric and ideas as coalition magnets.
Multiple Stream Approach (Kindgon 1984; 1995; Natali 2004; Ackrill and Kay 2011; Zachariadis 2014; 2016a; 2016b)	The dynamics of independent streams account for the dynamics of policymaking and attention	Agenda setting, Decision, Implementation	Endogenous	Policy entrepreneurs Policymakers	**Policy entrepreneurs matter for change.** Policy entrepreneurs take advantage of the windows of opportunity to couple the streams of problems, politics and policy. Policymakers select appropriate ideas to match with the opportunity (e.g., policy commissioning)
Punctuated Equilibrium Approach (Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Princen 2013; Praelle 2003)	Long-term stability punctuated by periods of change	Agenda setting	Exogenous	Policy entrepreneurs	**Policy entrepreneurs matter for change**. Policy entrepreneurs alter the policy image to reshuffle coalitions and may use venue shopping to find a receptive audience.
Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier 1988; 1998; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Sabatier and Weible 2007)	Cognitive factors help explain coalition dynamics	Implementation, formulation	Exogenous or endogenous	Brokers Entrepreneurs Skillful leaders/entrepreneurs	**Brokers, entrepreneurs and leaders are seen resources in the policy dynamics.** Policy brokers bridge coalitions seeking stability. Policy entrepreneurs advocate for change in the advocacy coalition. Skillful leaders are a coalition resource used to foster policy change.

Table 1 and the discussion of the role of actors in the main frameworks of the policy process show that the space for agency is quite restricted. Most scholars start from a structural perspective to account for policy dynamics, whereby the institutional arrangements and the composition of coalitions determine the features of the process and its result. The prevalence of structure over agency emphasizes the importance of external shocks as drivers of policy dynamics and tends to treat agency as a residual aspect in accounting for unexpected developments. Actors are seen as cogwheels in a rational model of service provision or as an intervening step in the incremental transformation of institutions, but they do not seem to perform distinct set of activities. The interaction between structure and agency is more visible when scholars concentrate on the reconstruction of the policy process, such as in the MSA or in the later neo-institutionalists. Nonetheless, even when purposeful agents are regarded as drivers in the policy process, agency is conceptualized in a residual way, as a complement of structural features rather than as a as component of alternative causal mechanisms.

In particular, most scholars concentrate on policy entrepreneurship, while very few refer to the existence of leadership (as in discursive institutionalism and the ACF), which is often framed only in positional terms or by emphasizing the individualistic nature of the agency and its randomness. Given the importance that all these frameworks attribute to authoritative resources and to coalition dynamics, the absence of the explicit theorization of the role of leadership is quite striking. In fact, while studies on gradual institutional change and discourse and applications of MSA and PET tentatively talk about "policymakers" as people with authoritative positions at some point, the ACF conflates leaders with entrepreneurs[5] and scientists[6].

[5] When dealing with coalition resources, Sabatier and Weible (2007, 203) tend to use leadership and entrepreneurs as synonyms: "E. *Skillful leadership*: The literature on *policy entrepreneurs* demonstrates how *skillful leaders* can create an attractive vision for a coalition, strategically use resources efficiently, and attract new resources to a coalition (…) *skillful entrepreneurs* are needed to bring about actual changes in policy (italics have been added to the original text)".

[6] When describing alternative paths and negotiated agreements, Sabatier and Weible (2007, 206) recall the importance of leadership as a prescription concerning the design of institutions and the importance of professional fora: "Leadership: Sabatier and Zafonte argue that the chair of the professional forum called to resolve disputes among scientists from competing coalitions should be a respected 'neutral' whose role is to remind participants of professional norms".

3. The role of agency outside the main theoretical frameworks

Despite the ambiguous and often residual presence of agency in the main theoretical frameworks adopted in public policy, other public policy scholars have developed a more careful description of different types of agency, often starting from the description of the activities of actors according to their formal roles. In this section, we will refer to this literature to solve some of the problems resulting from the residual treatment of agency in the frameworks.

We aim to see how agency is described in this strand of the public policy literature and to see whether it is theorized as a specific type of agency that can be used to refine our understanding of the policy process. As we will see, this analysis may help solve part of the problems resulting from the "structural" bias in the policy dynamics frameworks (by defining a more precise set of activities as agency roles); however, this analysis might also introduce some conceptual confusion, as it describes agency roles in an inductive way, as a collection of activities that overlap with formal positions and substantial functions in the policy process (and thus introducing conceptual overstretching and confusion).

The work of Mintrom on policy entrepreneurship is a good example of how policy entrepreneurship has been described and theorized in public policy. Mintrom sees entrepreneurship in relation to the diffusion of innovative ideas and the promotion of radical policy change (Mintrom and Norman 2009, 649), clarifying one of its defining characteristics. Entrepreneurs are "people who seek to initiate dynamic policy change, by attempting to win support for ideas of policy innovation" (Mintrom 1997). His work discusses the different activities and strategies of policy entrepreneurship to promote change, emphasizing the importance of micro-level political activities in fostering change by packaging ideas and coalitions (Mintrom and Vergari 1996, 431). The list of activities of policy entrepreneurship slightly changed through time and research applications. In bringing disruptive change to the fore by paying attention to contextual and individual factors, Mintrom and Norman (2009, 651) emphasize four characteristics: displaying social acuity, defining policy problems, building teams and leading by example (by showing the workability of their proposed policy solutions). In later studies on new states, the main activities are the articulation of new narratives, the ability to work in teams, the engagement in evidence-based discussion, and the use of widespread communication to reach out to new groups (Mintrom, Salisbury, and Luetjens 2014). Finally, in the case of stem cell research in Europe, the importance of competences and the characteristics of the authorizing context are seen to be relevant in shaping the four main activities of policy entrepreneurship: defining and framing problems, building powerful teams that have relevant knowledge networks, amassing evidence to demonstrate the workability of their proposals, and creating strong coalitions of diverse supporters (Mintrom 2013, 443).

The attention to competence and knowledge as a feature of policy entrepreneurs also emerges in other works on policy reform. Policy entrepreneurs act on the cognitive

and strategic levels to refine the policy discourse and overcome traditional cleavages among policy domains and coalitions. Giuliani (1998, 367) also considers the prevailing source of the legitimacy of policy entrepreneurs along with their cognitive or strategic attitudes, by defining four subtypes of policy entrepreneurs (leaders, innovators, brokers, and promoters). The emphasis on innovation and risk taking as the main goals of policy entrepreneurship also emerges from recent studies on policy entrepreneurship (Watts, Holbrook and Smith 2015).

Works on policy entrepreneurship are multiplying in the public policy literature, but most of them now consider very different types of activities to account for the success of policy change. For example, some works have considered water reforms around the globe. In a comprehensive comparative work on several countries, Meijerink and Huitema (2010) show how entrepreneurship can be conceived as a collective activity, and they list a number of strategies, such as coalition building, the manipulation of decision-making fora, and the strategic framing of issues and windows. The attentive consideration to entrepreneurship as a typical behavior also emerges from the work of Brouwer and Biermann (2011), who describe four strategies: (1) attention- and support-seeking strategies to demonstrate the significance of a problem and to convince a wide range of participants about the preferred policy; (2) linking strategies to connect with other parties, projects, ideas, and policy games; (3) relational management strategies to manage the relational factor in policy-change trajectories; and (4) arena strategies to influence when and where decisions are made). These strategies meld elements of pure entrepreneurship (e.g., knowledge and innovation) with other activities that may correspond to other agency types (e.g., relational linkages and political manipulation).

Indeed, some of the networking activities of public policy entrepreneurs seem to correspond to the typical activity of another type of agent, the policy broker (Knäggard 2016). For example, the structural perspective of Social Network Analysis defines brokers as people who bridge different components or groups within a network, allowing information and ideas to be shared among actors (see for example Heaney 2006). Another characterization of brokers has been developed in the literature on "boundary spanners" (Williams 2002; 2013). The "boundary spanners" are actors who create collaborations through network management, acting in different ways (as reticulists, entrepreneurs/innovators, those able to connect with other people, builders of trust, individuals with their own personalities, and leaders) (Williams 2002, 109-113). This literature emphasizes the importance of collaboration within a network to effectively manage a "wicked problem", but it does not distinguish between brokerage activities and more managerial ones.

Finally, the other concept recently theorized in public policy is that of leadership, which emerged more broadly in studies on education, welfare, and the public services (Gronn 2002; Chapman et al. 2015). Relatively ignored as a concept in public policy for a long time (Wallis and Dollery 1997), leadership has recently caught the attention of

public policy scholars (Stiller 2009; Gleeson et al. 2011; Meijerink and Stiller 2013). For example, in health reform studies, "policy leadership" is not conceived as an attribute of individual or collective political leaders; instead, it is a "process" that describes the characteristics and behaviors of mid- and senior-level bureaucrats who help improve organizational policy capacity (Gleeson 2009). In the description of reform, policy leadership is seen as a component of the overall organizational capacity of the health system; in particular, the organizational culture should provide a forward-looking type of leadership, which is described as the coherent overall direction and definition of coherent policy frameworks (Gleeson et al. 2011, 241). Managerial practices are very much emphasized here, but the visioning activities typical of leadership are specifically attributed to political actors (ibidem, 255), while the management of the tensions inherent in policy work requires the development of leadership at the middle and senior levels of the organization (ibidem, 259).

Other conceptualizations of leadership in the policy process emphasize the importance of ideas. Wallis and Dollery (1997, 2) describe "autonomous policy leaders" as resembling the policy entrepreneur, but they former are more ambitious and manage larger windows of opportunity[7]. Sabine Stiller (2009) describes ideational leadership as a driver of policy change, emphasizing the communicative and relational skills required for consensus building and the personal propensity of leaders to be "policy- rather than power-oriented". Since then, Meijerink and Stiller (2013, 244) have theorized leadership as an important component in the policy process grappling with climate adaptation issues, as leadership enhances connectivity, coalition building and capacity through different roles, objectives, styles and tasks, thus showing potential overlap with the concept of policy entrepreneurship. Along the same line of reasoning, Nancy Roberts noted that "energy" is a fundamental resource for radical, effective re-organization in the reform of American schools and that "collective leadership" is needed to produce that energy (Roberts 1985). Thus, as in the case of entrepreneurship, leadership can be conceived as a specific set of activities that are carried out individually or collectively.

In sum, this review of agency in public policy exposes some important conceptual flaws. First, agency roles are not generally conceived in terms of patterns that are relevant to the policy process; instead, they are conceived as traits of specific policy actors, which often play an idiosyncratic role in policy dynamics. Second, even when agency is conceptualized as an activity performed by more than one actor, authors attribute the same activity to different categories of actors.

[7] Wallis and Dollery (1997, 2) argue that public policy scholars "have all distinguished leadership from other forms of behaviour exercised by office holders according to the strength of political will and the strength of policymaking capacity required to political leaders to make significant impact on the direction of policymaking in their countries. These writers are essentially concerned with the qualities leaders must exercise in order to steer a policy process in a direction which is broadly consistent with their intentions".

4. Redefining agency in policymaking: from roles to functional patterns?

4.1. Agency as a functional pattern

As we have seen, the main theoretical frameworks and other conceptualizations of the role of agency consider agency to be significantly complex—a kind of "relevant" residual variable. Actors matter when they play specific roles (entrepreneurs, brokers, leaders), but their behaviors seem to be linked to specific individual characteristics and show themselves based on chance, simple individual preferences or attitudes. All in all, agency is not considered to be intrinsically needed for the development of policymaking dynamics. This treatment of agency as a residual factor does not facilitate an understanding of the interplay with the structure, on the one hand, and exposes itself to the risk of conceptual overstretching in the use of agency types, on the other hand. Thus, our proposal is to shift the focus of agency in policymaking away from individual actors towards their "functions", meaning *the processes through which specific behaviors 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". According to this perspective, agency can be considered *a functional pattern* in which different individuals or groups interact to affect reality; moreover, such interactions need to be coordinated to achieve their goals, thus describing some typical patterns of activities. This definition makes the analytical perspective shift from the role of actors (individual or collective) to specific patterns of behaviors that perform specific functions in the policymaking process. The shift from agency as a list of attributes to agency as a distinctive pattern also means shifting the analysis from the individual to the function: from brokers to *brokerage*, from entrepreneurs to *entrepreneurship*, and from leaders to *leadership*.

Therefore, leadership, entrepreneurship and brokerage can be conceived as the embedded patterns through which agency is developed and coordinated—vertically and/or horizontally—to perform specific functions and to thus reach specific policy goals (Schneider, Teske and Mintrom 1995; Mintrom 2000; Marion and Uhl-Bien 2001; McCaffrey and Salerno 2011; Marion 2012).

The emphasis on functional patterns does not aim to negate the role played by individuals or to contest methodological individualism as a cornerstone of the social sciences (Weber 1949; Parsons 1937; Alexander 1987). By contrast, the depersonalization of agency and the focus on functional patterns allows for a more realistic and promising analytical perspective from which to understand what leaders, entrepreneurs and brokers do and how they behave during the policymaking process.

4.2 Policy brokerage, policy entrepreneurship and policy leadership as functional patterns of the policy process

In this session, we propose three main definitions of agency in functional terms by focusing on the agency roles that rose to prominence through the analysis of the frameworks and the reform processes in public policy: the brokerage function, the entrepreneurship function and the leadership function.

In the analysis of the literature, brokers emerge as mediators between different stakeholders. They can bridge different components or groups within an organizational network, allowing information and ideas to be shared among actors (Burt, 2005; Soda, Usai and Zaheer 2004; Gould and Fernandez, 1989; Heaney, 2006); in highly clientelistic systems, they can be the point of intermediation and collect votes (Piattoni 2001; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, and Brusco 2013; Aspinall 2014); they can try to find a stable point of equilibrium among conflicting coalitions to achieve compromises (Sabatier and Weible 2007; Ingold and Varone 2012; Christopoulos and Ingold 2015). The context in which brokers act (organizational, policy, political) does not matter: because of their specificity, brokers are mediators, even when they have self-interested preferences, who seek to achieve "process-related" rather than "content-related" goals (Dente 2014, 54-59). Thus, "policy brokerage" can be defined as the functional pattern 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 organizations and institutions are involved, conflicts arise and veto powers are employed.

Entrepreneurs are innovators. They discover and mitigate economic inefficiencies (Kirzner 1997); they can transform turbulence into innovation to foster the process of creative destruction, which, in turn, creates added value for the enterprise; (Schumpeter 1946); they can alter the equilibrium of the political market by introducing innovation and by gaining added value by doing so, often after developing new political coalitions to challenge the status quo (Dahl 1961; Salisbury 1969; Schneider and Teske 1992); they can be a driver of endogenous institutional change (Selznick 1957; DiMaggio 1988); they can act to change the political landscape; they can be real drivers of change in different fields such as legislation (Weissert 1991; Braun 2009) and bureaucracy (Teske and Scheneider 1994; Laffan 1997; Howard 2001; Sørensen 2007; Hauge, Jameson and Gentry 2008); they are capable of advocating new ideas and setting the agenda (Kingdom 1984), identifying problems and finding solutions (Polsby 1984), submitting new ideas to policymakers and political actors and mobilizing public opinion (Eyestone 1978; Cobb and Elder 1983), dealing with substantial policy uncertainty, and solving the emergent problem of collective coordination (Mintrom and Vergari 1996); they are subjects who discover new avenues for policymaking (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). The

context in which entrepreneurs act does not matter: they are catalysts of innovation. Then, "policy entrepreneurship" emerges as a functional pattern in which change is at stake, not only through the advancement of new ideas but also through the mobilization of supporters inside and outside political institutions and the development of trans-organizational teams. Policy entrepreneurship is thus a functional pattern for policy change.

Leaders steer processes. They can steer political systems (Blondel 1987). They can actively oppose change within institutions, or they can promote visions of change and use discourse to foster actual policy change (Schmidt 2008; 2014). This aspect is also quite visible in studies of local governments, where (mostly political) leaders exert their agency to coordinate the efforts of different actors in local governance (Schenider and Teske 1992; Lowndes Leach 2004; John 2010; Steyvers 2016). Leaders of different types (political, bureaucratic, civic, collaborative, or facilitative) emerge in the policy sphere and at the managerial level, especially when the elites' commitment to a change proposal is considered crucial for the success of the process. For example, Tummers and Knies (2016) stress the importance of public leaders developing four different roles, with a particular focus on their relationships with employees. *Accountability leadership* occurs when leaders encourage employees to justify their actions to stakeholders; *rule-following leadership* refers to when leaders push employees to act in accordance with government rules and regulations; *political loyalty leadership* serves to motivate employees to align their actions with the interests of political principals; and *network governance leadership* occurs when leaders encourage employees to actively connect with relevant stakeholders. Beyond labels and characterizations, we can see how leaders use ideas and discourse (Stiller 2009) or authority and other resources (Galanti 2014; Bennister, T'Hart, and Worthy 2015) to steer the policy process during the different phases. The context in which leaders act does not matter: they steer the policy process during its different stages. Therefore, "policy leadership" can be defined in terms of the functional patterns through which policy processes are steered, which aim to achieve specific goals (not necessarily change but stability). As Bryman (1986, p. 8) noted, "leadership is a social influence process through which the members of a group are steered towards a goal". Notably, the conception of leadership as a collective function has been well studied and emphasized in other social sciences. In organizational and management sciences, the focus is not only on the behavior of individual leaders but also on the concepts of strategic, distributed and integrated leadership (Suchman 1987; Gronn 2002; Thorpe, Gold and Lawler 2011; Yukl 2002; Fernandez Cho, and Perry 2010). Hodgson, Levinson and Zalenzik (1965), studying the management of firms, proposed that "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 noted 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 to produce that energy (Roberts 1985).

4.3. The features of the functional patterns of agency and their potential utility in filling the gap

Seen through the lens of functional patterns, some relevant differences in agency during the policy process can be outlined (for an initial exploration of this issue, see Capano and Galanti 2015).

First, we can see some differences in the main goal of purposeful agents involved in the policy process. While brokerage is a function that mediates the process (to stabilize the policy subsystem under the pressure of advocates, interest groups, etc.) and leadership steers the process towards a goal (to coordinate the actions of many actors at multiple levels towards a common goal), entrepreneurship is more akin to the promotion of innovation (to promote a new policy solution in the hope for future returns).

This aspect suggests that brokerage and leadership can be functional for both policy stability and change, while entrepreneurship is mostly involved in policy change. Similarly, mediation in brokerage seems quite neutral to ideas, whereas innovation in entrepreneurship and steering in leadership are often value-loaded activities. Although the three functions involve the use of an array of resources, some types of resources seem more fitting for specific patterns: relational resources for brokerage, economic and cognitive resources for entrepreneurship, and legal-authoritative resources for leadership.

Moreover, the three agency functions can be proposed to generally perform different types of activities and be more present in certain phases of the policy process, thus showing distinctive patterns of behavior. Activities such as negotiating, bridging and gatekeeping facilitates brokerage in terms of creating links among actors, especially during the formulation phase, when ambiguity is high and the different actors are developing their preferences. Instead, generating and spreading ideas and innovative policy solutions, pressuring policymakers for attention, raising support among different elites and fostering opportunities to promote their views are typical entrepreneurial activities, which are more prominent in the agenda setting, the formulation and the design and during the decision-making phases. Finally, developing shared goals related to problem solving, not only the infusion of values but also coalition building in political institutions and team building among different institutions and organizations (providing rewards in the form of selective and collective incentives) seem to be typical leadership activities throughout the policy process.

Obviously, this is a roughly sketched list of properties of each of these three patterns—which will require further in-depth conceptualization based on the different theoretical policy framework adopted—but it shows how the concept of functional patterns can be very fruitful in clarifying the type of agency actions, their roles, content

and goals. In this way, recurrent overlapping of meanings can be avoided, and the real impact of agency can be grasped. Furthermore, conceptualizing agency as functional pattern allows a broader perspective of agency to emerge; thus, a more fine-grained path for analyzing the relevance of individual actors throughout the policy process is introduced. In fact, if conceptualized as functional patterns, agency can be considered as a necessary element for understanding and explaining policy dynamics. Therefore, we should expect that many individuals can perform this pattern, whereas the individual characteristics should be considered a relevant driver of the potential effectiveness of the agency itself rather than the cause of the emergence of a specific pattern. Thus, reasoning in terms of functional patterns pays more theoretical attention to the expected role that these patterns may have in a specific theoretical framework designed to explain policy dynamics and then to focus on the specific conditions that can allow the functional pattern to perform as expected.

Finally, reasoning in terms of functional patterns aims to theoretical assume and then empirically prove that the actions in question can be effectively performed by more than one individual. Therefore, research should focus not only on the "big" man who is capable of behaving as an entrepreneur, leader, and broker but also those—some of them "small"—who are capable of collectively performing the expected activities in terms of innovation, mediation and steering.

5. Conclusions: filling the gap in public policy theories?

By shifting the perspective from a description of sparse activities to a set of functional patterns, the identification of more specific agency functions can be used to better explain the role of agency in frameworks that address policy dynamics or to render them less "serendipitous" at the very least.

For example, in the ACF, focusing on the characteristics of brokerage—and thus on the conditions that structure brokerage performance and, in turn, the ways in which "mediation" is spread through the policy process—help better account for the long periods of stability and minor adaptations. At the same time, the characterization of policy entrepreneurship as a pattern through which innovation is promoted facilitates a better understanding of failures and successes in policy changes at different levels of abstraction. Above all, searching for the conditions that push some people to behave as entrepreneurs in that specific context is important.

In the MSA, reasoning in terms of patterns of entrepreneurship and thus searching for those who behave as entrepreneurs at different levels and in different streams rather than for the unique entrepreneur—and maybe through implicit coordination—can better explain why the opening of a policy window can be more or less conducive to change.

The identification of leadership as a functional pattern through which steering is produced helps mitigate the conceptual confusion between "skillful leadership" and

"entrepreneurship" in the ACF and between policy entrepreneurs and political leaders in the late MSA. As leadership is characterized as a pattern for steering, the role that leadership may play in exogenous or endogenous change involving values and beliefs in the ACF is clarified: leaders steer the process by diffusing visions of change and by institutionalizing change into the policy instruments or into institutional reform. Instead, entrepreneurship requires the use of knowledge and a risk-taking attitude as a sine-qua-non condition for the promotion of innovation.

Regarding discursive institutionalism, reasoning in terms of functional patterns of agency can be quite useful in clarifying how discourses are constructed, promoted and potentially prevail or fail. For example, how brokerage and entrepreneurship are structured and how they function in a specific context can help facilitate an understanding of how and why a new discourse will prevail or not. Since the brokerage function is designed to maintain discursive stability, its strength (to be assessed) may explain why a new discourse cannot achieve adequate sharing in the presence of significant entrepreneurial activity and efforts by political leaders.

In addition, PET may benefit from considering this perspective to better understand how policy entrepreneurship really works when reshuffling images or shopping for venues. In fact, according to this framework, policy entrepreneurs' actions are (dis)favored by the institutional arrangement, while a focus on functional patterns may reveal potential links among the different institutional arenas and actors and thus consider entrepreneurship as a process more than as an effect of institutional constraints. Furthermore, PET may also include brokerage to better understand the possible counter-force that can keep the doors of venue shopping closed due to its mediation activity.

Obviously, seeing room for the functional patterns of agency is more difficult both for IAD and for historical institutionalism because of their theoretical assumptions, which consider agency as structurally or institutionally determined and the substantial absence of any reference to specific types of actions in their theorization. However, how patterns of agency can improve their analytically and explanatory strength can also be considered. For example, minimal attention to patterns of agency can be useful in better understanding, from an IAD perspective, how common-pool resources are managed and why, in presence of ostensibly similar institutional conditions, the outcome is different. In addition, historical institutionalism may include the functional patterns of agency to better understand the links between institutional arrangements and institutional changes, whereas the different types of gradual change (such as layering, conversion, and drift displacement) may depend on the prevalence of a specific pattern of agency rather than being only directly driven by the institutional conditions.

However, the abovementioned consideration only constitutes a promising starting for potentially filling the agency theoretical gap in public policy theory.

By defining agency as a functional pattern through which different goals and diverse types of collective coordination are pursued, we aim to create an analytical

conceptualization that can better capture the relationship between structure and agents in different institutional contexts and, above all, at different stages of policy dynamics; in addition, if not integrated into the main public policy theoretical frameworks, this conceptualization can at least represent a stimulus to fill the actual gap with respect to the role of agency.

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