
Review Article

Policy ideas through the prism of knowledge regimes and framing

John L. Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen

The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark

Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2014, 424 pp., \$29.95

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Falk Daviter

Policy Framing in the European Union

Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 208 pp., \$100.00

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Policymakers are often confronted with problems that involve ambiguity and uncertainty (Zahariadis, 2003). In order to make sense of such problems and to identify possible solutions, they are on the lookout for policy ideas. Those are defined as general information, scientific or expert knowledge, cognitive frames, representations and moral values used by various stakeholders in order to justify collective choices for public policies. More specifically, they help those stakeholders to analyse and identify policy problems and define policy solutions that can be incorporated in the public agenda (Nay, 2012). To date, scholars have had a number of takes on how policy ideas are generated and delivered to policymakers. For example, Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams approach explains how and why some ideas move onto the policy-making agenda, while others do not. The extensive agenda-setting literature addresses the question of the saliency of policy ideas – that is, why some ideas are important and others not – and how varying levels of salience shape the public agenda (see, for example, McCombs and Shaw, 1972). And, policy communities' studies explored the question of idea generation and delivery through means of stable networks of policymakers, interest groups and experts (see, for example, Rhodes, 1986).

Two books make interesting contributions to this scholarly debate. They focus on *knowledge regimes* and *framing* as two ways in which policy ideas can be generated and delivered to policymakers. Jointly, these books advance research on policy ideas by addressing questions about: Where do ideas come from? How do ideas change? And how do these patterns vary across different policy arenas? The authors do not

focus on how ideas matter and why policymakers choose one idea over another, but they rather look at the organizational and institutional machinery by which these ideas are produced and ways in which policy framing affects their processing and further influences policymaking. These are complementary contributions to the well-established theories of agenda-setting.

Campbell and Pedersen's book, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas*, argues that policy ideas emerge from knowledge regimes, defined as 'fields of policy research organizations and the institutions that govern them' (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014, p. 3). The regimes are important because they contribute data, research, theories, policy recommendations and other ideas that influence public policy (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014, pp. 1–4). This book focuses on comparative analysis of knowledge regimes and institutions that govern them in four countries: the United States, France, Germany and Denmark. Daviter starts *Policy Framing in the European Union* with the premise that the framing of policy ideas affects how those ideas are processed by policymakers and later on implemented in policy choices. The book introduces the conceptual element of framing analysis and shows how this analytical lens can offer a unique perspective on current issues in the study of EU legislative politics and policymaking. Daviter draws on empirical investigation of legislative initiatives from two decades of EU biotechnology policymaking. The investigation highlights how conflict over the framing of policy ideas restructured the policy field and eventually led to the adoption of a revised and expanded regulatory framework at the EU level, contrary to the European Commission's original policy objectives.

Both texts agree that institutional context influences the generation of policy ideas. The overarching argument of *The National Origins of Policy Ideas* is that there are persistent national differences in how policy ideas are created, with a distinction made between countries that do so in continuous, politically partisan ways (for example, the United States) and others that are cooperative and consensus oriented (for example, Denmark). While there are convergence tendencies between regimes, the outcomes are shaped strongly by national contexts. *Policy Framing in the European Union* concludes that the multilevel, changeable character of the EU political system, with its competing constituencies and contested competencies, generates a larger number of policy ideas than national level institutions (Daviter, 2011, p. 171). Similar conclusions were reached by other authors (that is, Surel, 2000; Stone Sweet *et al*, 2001), thus the ingenuity of this observation can be contested. However, the authors of both publications concur that a formal institutional level analysis is insufficient to predict how policy problems and different preferences for their solutions, which jointly constitute policy ideas, will play out. A more encompassing view has to move beyond the inter- and intra-institutional focus and look at other actors taking part in the policy ideas' formulation.

Campbell and Pedersen argue that knowledge regimes and advice they generate help political leaders in policymaking. While they make sense and propose solutions



to problems, they improve national economic performance. However, authors also recognize that knowledge regimes are not independent and fully objective, as they are partisan and their proposed policy ideas often fit with party goals (especially in the United States and France; for similar conclusion, see Krugman, 2007). In contrast, Daviter shows that the EU supranational system, characterized by weak institutional structures, does not provide similar restraints. There, knowledge regimes and interest groups are much less dependent on the partisan affiliations and policy perception and policy ideas shift systematically (Daviter, 2011, p. 168). More elaborate and extensive analysis, including interviews with a larger number of stakeholders, is necessary to fully grasp the generation and delivery of policy ideas.

When focusing on knowledge regimes, Campbell and Pedersen distinguish between four general types of research institutions: private scholarly research organizations, private advocacy research organizations, party research organizations and state research organizations. Interest groups, so characteristic to the US and EU political system (Mahoney, 2008), are explicitly excluded from the categorization above. Campbell and Pedersen argue that the preoccupation with pushing ideas on behalf of individual paying clients and the lack of reliable policy research diminishes their reliability and role in knowledge regimes (2014, p. 30). One reason for Campbell and Pedersen's conclusion is their focus on research organizations and their exclusion of interest groups, narrowly defined. This approach runs contrary to arguments developed by other authors who claim that many interest groups resemble private advocacy research organizations (for example, Coghlan and Brannick, 2014) or that the overall set of interest groups includes these types of organizations directly (for example, Weiss, 1991; Terry *et al.*, 2007). In contrast, Daviter shows that knowledge regimes in EU policymaking are ineffective, their role in the identification of policy idea is only minor and interest groups dominate definition and redefinition of policy ideas. He argues that the specificity of the EU political system, where multiple actors compete to define policy ideas in multilevel policy-making processes, requires organized forms of representation in response. His argument implies that knowledge regimes are ineffective mostly because of their lack of flexibility and fast adaptability. Campbell and Pedersen contend that knowledge regimes can adapt, but the time span that they consider measures decades. Daviter shows that interest groups adjust much faster and quickly expand internal expertise, making them more suitable to provide adequate policy ideas resonating with different levels and stages of the policy-making process.

Another difference between the two books is that *The National Origins of Policy Ideas* sees actors (members of knowledge regimes) as responsible for the generation of policy ideas. In contrast, *Policy Framing in the European Union*, following earlier scholars Schattschneider (1960) and Riker (1986), clearly reverses the order. It is not only actors who influence the definition of policy ideas, but the definition of problems also influences which stakeholders will be involved in the debate. Daviter calls this a 'reverse logic of influence' (Daviter, 2011, p. 19). This particular

argument helps to amend a common pitfall of research focused on knowledge regimes. Those studies that focus on knowledge and expertise with only peripheral interest in political power structures ignore the fact that expertise only enters the policy process if it is compatible with a prevailing problem perception (Radaelli, 1995). Consequently, how policy ideas are structured, and how their framing evokes certain policy dynamics rather than others, can thus be understood to precede rather than follow the organization and alignment of actors and interests.

Both books also address those factors that influence changes in the functioning of knowledge regimes and interest group organization. Campbell and Pedersen contend that challenges and changes to policy-making regimes often cause changes in knowledge regimes. They point to the end of the Golden Age and the advent of globalization (at the end of 1970s and beginning of 1980s) as two major external factors that induced change. In each case, the institutional complementarities that knowledge regimes had once afforded countries during the Golden Age appeared to have deteriorated: 'And as people began to realize that their knowledge regimes no longer provided the analysis and advice necessary to make sense of the new set of political-economic problems they moved to change them' (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014, p. 25). As change to the policy-making regime is insufficient, however, they point out that it has to be supplemented by an actual perception that there is a problem with the usefulness and functionality of the knowledge regime (Campbell and Pedersen, 2014, pp. 215–216). Daviter provides empirical examples, which illustrate Campbell and Pedersen's argument about change. He demonstrates that the biotechnological and science industries were sluggish and insufficiently cohesive to respond to proposed legislation and new regulations. However, after initial defeat, the biotechnology industry soon regrouped and founded *The European Biotechnology Co-ordination Group* (EBCG) as an umbrella organization of sectoral associations to improve coordination and the exchange of information.

The National Origins of Policy Ideas and *Policy Framing in the European Union* are both based on extensive interviews and rely strongly on comparative historical analysis. While this choice is extremely useful to point at detailed nuances of concrete policy-making processes, the authors of both books clearly see its shortcomings. *The National Origins of Policy Ideas* addresses a very pressing question of how to measure the influence of individual policy research organizations. The authors find that for methodological reasons it is enormously difficult to determine which policy research organizations were influential (2014, p. 28, p. 278). They argue that evidence provided by the organizations themselves, based on qualitative (invites to do presentations for policymakers) as well as quantitative assessments (citation rates by other actors), is often circumstantial at best. Their adjusted methodology consists of a comparative text analysis based on a scaled down sample of documents. While the small number of documents analysed is motivated by a lack of resources to analyse a more ambitious sample, it raises questions about the external validity of their results. Daviter operationalised his case study through similar means and his results exhibit the same



weakness. While his process tracing and comparative text analysis is based on a larger sample of documents than the other authors, the approach still depends mostly on comprehensive comparative research focusing on a small number of case studies. In trading analytical breadth in exchange for depth, the generalizability of the findings is more limited than we might hope for.

The largest contribution of Campbell and Pedersen's book, although not fully explored in the book itself, is the suggestion that, because of differences in the institutional configuration of production and policy-making regimes, private money holds sway over knowledge regime activities more in the United States than in Europe and, especially, in France. Daviter's book (and the 2009 article it elaborates on) is one of the first studies of policy framing in the EU (for earlier papers, see also Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Baumgartner and Mahoney, 2008). His conceptualisation of the EU policy process from a framing lens produces relevant insights that supplement traditional EU research which is much more focused on formal institutional analysis. Since his 2009 publication, the experience of Daviter's empirical exercises was adopted and further refined in some other studies (Klüver, 2009; Boräng *et al.*, 2014; Eising *et al.*, 2015).

The suggestion that policy ideas can be researched through the lens of knowledge regimes and framing brings an interesting perspective to the debate on policy ideas. While not everything in these contributions is extremely original and similar conclusions can be identified in other sources, their application to the different case studies (France, Germany, Denmark, the United States and EU in general) brings a bit of freshness to the debate and builds cumulatively on previous research. While knowledge regimes are much more present in the United States, France, Germany and Denmark than in the EU, Campbell and Pedersen could borrow from Daviter and consider whether success (defined as the entry of policy ideas into policymaking) depends on the compatibility of ideas with the prevailing problem perception. How would that affect the workings of the knowledge regimes that they study? Are policy ideas adjusted accordingly? Daviter should on the other hand consider the role of knowledge regimes in the production of policy ideas. While he discredited the importance of the scientific community, his empirical evidence clearly points to existing input production regimes including a broad set of stakeholders and interest groups. Could these be identified as knowledge regimes? Is the regime identical in other policy areas? Future research that builds on these two books is certainly promising.

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Patrycja Rozbicka
Aston University, Birmingham, UK
p.rozbicka@aston.ac.uk