Ideas and Policy Change: A Global Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a broad theoretical perspective on the role of ideas and frames in policy change. Drawing on the political science literature on ideas and the sociological scholarship on discourse and frames, this article makes three contributions to the social science scholarship on public policy. First, the article amends recent theories of policy change formulated by authors like Jacob Hacker and Kathleen Thelen. From this perspective, the study of agendas, frames, and policy paradigms is necessary for a fuller understanding of policy change. Second, in relation to the existing literature on ideas and frames, the article argues that a more systematic dialog between sociology and political science is necessary to capture the complex nature of ideational processes. Third, the article explores the relationship between globalization and ideational processes. This discussion stresses the role of think tanks, international organizations, and transnational policy networks in the global propagation of policy ideas. More importantly, the discussion unveils the little-studied tension between transnational policy ideas and the national cultural repertoires on which actors draw to legitimate the implementation of these ideas at the state and sub-state levels. Overall, this article sketches a new framework for a global analysis of ideas and policy change that recognizes the enduring role of national cultures and institutions.
Ideas and Policy Change: A Global Perspective

Over the last few decades, historical institutionalism has become one of the foremost approaches to policy development in advanced industrial countries (e.g. Pierson 1994; Pierson 2004; Skocpol 1992). For example, in his book *Dismantling the Welfare State?* Pierson demonstrated the enduring weight of policy legacies on the politics of the welfare state. In recent years, other historical institutionalist scholars have attempted to move the focus of research from institutional inertia to policy change (e.g. Campbell, 2004; Hacker 2004; Thelen 2004). This article seeks to enrich the historical institutionalist approach to policy change with a theoretical framework that points to the role of ideas and frames in institutional development.2 This framework emphasizes the relationship between ideas, perceived economic interests, and policy legacies. Such a framework bridges for the first time historical institutionalism, the political science literature on ideas, and the sociological literature on social movements and framing processes.3 More specifically, this framework fills three explanatory gaps of historical institutionalism, which concerns the particular content of policy proposals and reform agendas, the social construction of the “need to reform,” and finally, the perception of the interests and policy legacies that can weigh heavily on policy development. Consequently, as a response to these shortcomings, the present contribution focuses on the three main ways that ideas and frames can impact the policy process. First, ideas shape the content of reform proposals and

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2 One must note that the work of authors like Mark Blyth and Vivien Schmidt does not belong to historical institutionalism in the strict sense of the term but to an emerging approach Schmidt labels discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, forthcoming). To a certain extent, this article draws upon the work of these authors in order to enrich and amend historical institutionalism.

3 For another attempt to create a dialog between institutionalist research (in this case organization theory) and the social movement literature see Davies et al. 2005.
impact the policy agenda, notably by shifting the public’s attention in a specific direction, thus leaving aside some potentially important social and policy issues. Second, frames construct the “need to reform” in part by referring to and embellishing certain values and symbols embedded in a society’s cultural repertoire. Drawing on the social movement literature about framing, it is argued that value amplification is a central aspect of the social and political construction of policy issues. This is a significant contribution of the article, which is the first piece of scholarship to systematically bridge historical institutionalism, the political science literature on ideas, and the social movement scholarship on framing processes. Third, ideational processes affect the perception of economic interests and policy legacies that are often instrumental in gathering support for policy change.

The article shows that ideas have a major role in shaping policy change but that they do not constitute the only possible source of change. This is true because ideas only become a decisive causal factor under particular institutional and political conditions. Consequently, not only the lack of appropriate framing resources but the presence of institutional and political obstacles can undermine the capacity of political actors to promote concrete policy alternatives.

Throughout this article, the terms “institutional” and “institutions” essentially refer to public policies and political institutions. Such a definition of “institution” is consistent with the historical institutionalist perspective (Hall and Taylor 1996).

The last section of the article explores the tension between the transnational diffusion of policy ideas and the reproduction of national cultural repertoires and institutional legacies. Drawing on the work of John Campbell and other historical institutionalists, this section stresses the complex and understudied relationship between globalization and the politics of ideas, suggesting that the global diffusion of ideas takes the form of translation processes through which
global policy ideas are adapted to a particular national context. Such a discussion addresses possible ideational and institutional differences between developing and developed countries.

IDEAS, INTERESTS, AND POLICY CHANGE

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM AND RECENT THEORIES OF POLICY CHANGE

Historical institutionalism is grounded in the assumption that a historically constructed set of institutional constraints and opportunities affect the behavior of political actors and interest groups involved in the policymaking process. According to Theda Skocpol, “This approach views the polity as the primary locus for action, yet understands political activities, whether carried by politicians or by social groups, as conditioned by institutional configurations of governments and political party systems.” (Skocpol 1992: 41) Such a structural approach of politics recognizes the autonomy of political actors while directly taking into account the effect of previously enacted measures on policy development (Immergut 1998; Orloff 1993; Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth 1992; Weaver and Rockman 1992). Overall, historical institutionalism focuses on asymmetrical power relations as well as the impact of long-term institutional legacies on policymaking (Hall and Taylor 1996).

In recent years, historical institutionalist scholars have offered comprehensive theoretical accounts on how policy institutions change over time (e.g. Campbell, 2004; Clemens and Cook 1999; Hacker 2004; Pierson 2004; Streeck and Thelen 2005; Thelen 2004). In How Institutions Evolve, for example, Kathleen Thelen (2004) sketches a systematic theory of policy change, where one of the most powerful aspects is a critique of the “punctuated equilibrium model” based on the assumption that long episodes of institutional inertia follow rare “critical junctures” during which exogenous shocks provoke massive, path departing institutional transformations. Although she does not reject the concepts of “critical junctures” and “path dependence,” Thelen
convincingly argues that most forms of policy change occur outside such episodes, and that they often take an incremental form.

Because it stresses the weight of previously enacted measures and the institutional mediation of economic interests, historical institutionalism offers a rather convincing theoretical perspective on the conditions of policy change. Yet, this approach leaves several questions unanswered, and one can stress three explanatory gaps that point to the potential impact of ideational processes on policymaking. First, as Daniel Béland and Jacob Hacker argue, historical institutionalism “is better at specifying the opportunities and constraints that political institutions create than at explaining the policy choices that occur within this ‘political opportunity structure.’” Political institutions embody the rules of the game that political actors follow as they seek their goals. They do not necessarily tell us what goals those actors have or what issues they deem important.” (Béland and Hacker 2004: 45) This issue is significant because it points to the content of policy proposals actors promote within a specific institutional framework. Purely institutionalist arguments can hardly explain such content by referring solely to policy legacies and formal political institutions (Lieberman 2002). Second, as some of the contributions cited below suggest, policy-making is not only about institutional legacies but also about the strategies political actors develop to convince interest groups and the population at large to support their policy alternatives. Although historical institutionalist scholars often pay attention to these issues in their empirical work, their theoretical framework seldom emphasizes their role in a systematic and coherent manner (Schmidt 2006). Third, although institutionalist scholarship points to the impact of vested interests and policy legacies on policy-making, little has been written within this
scholarly tradition about the ideological construction of such interests and legacies.⁴ These remarks stress the need for a more systematic discussion of the existing social science literature on ideas and frames.

**Bringing Ideas and Frames In**

A growing number of theoretically informed case studies have emphasized the central role of ideas and frames in political and policy processes (e.g. Berman 1998; Blyth 2002; Campbell 1998; Cox 2001; Dobbin 1994; Dobbin 2004; Edelman 1971; Hall 1993; Hansen and King 2001; Lakoff 2002; Lieberman 2002; Marx Ferree 2003; Parsons, 2003; Schmidt 2002a; Schmidt 2002b; Somers and Block 2005; Steensland 2006; Surel and Palier, 2005; Taylor-Gooby, 2005; Weir 1992). An appropriate way to structure ideational analysis is to distinguish the different ways ideas can explain significant aspects of policymaking and institutional development. I begin with a brief discussion of some of the political science scholarship on the role of ideas before drawing on the sociological literature on frames, especially the concept of value amplification.

According to political scientist Mark Blyth (2001; 2002), ideational politics takes three main forms. First, ideas serve as institutional blueprints that reduce uncertainty and provide political actors with a model for reform. Second, ideas can serve as “cognitive locks” that help reproduce existing institutions and policies over time. This role of ideas corresponds to Peter

⁴ A partial exception to this rule is the scholarship on policy learning (e.g. Hall 1993). Yet, this scholarship is often rooted in a technocratic and somewhat naïve vision of policy perceptions that pays scant attention to the symbolic struggles surrounding the construction of interests and policy lessons (King and Hansen 1999). This does not mean that it is impossible to formulate a constructivist approach to social learning compatible with the ideational framework formulated below (Béland, 2006).
Hall’s widely cited work of policy paradigms and degrees of policy change. For Hall, a policy paradigm is “a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing.” (Hall 1993: 279) Neo-liberalism is the perfect example of a policy paradigm that constitutes the structured intellectual and ideological background of major policy debates and blueprints. Third, following that logic, ideas constitute powerful ideological weapons that “allow agents to challenge existing institutional arrangements and the patterns of distribution that they enshrine.” (Blyth 2001: 4) These ideas constitute a public discourse that, through framing processes, seeks to convince decision-makers, interest groups, and the population at large that change is necessary. This is what Robert Cox labels “the social construction of the need to reform.” “In a political environment the advocates of reform need to employ strategies to overcome the skepticism of others and persuade them of the importance of reform. In other words, they must create a frame that changes the collective understanding of the welfare state, because doing so ‘shapes the path’ necessary to enact reform.” (Cox 2001: 475)

Although it is not obvious, Blyth’s typology is coherent with the three ways ideational processes impact policy change. First, the concepts of blueprints and policy paradigms point to the fact that ideas shape the content of both concrete reform proposals and the policy agenda itself. This is true because, by helping to construct the social and political reality, blueprints and paradigms may shift the policy attention in specific directions, which can in turn leave potentially

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5 A problem with the concept of paradigm is that it can give the illusion that policy ideas form a coherent system of beliefs, which is not always the case, especially in areas like social policy (Wincott, forthcoming).

6 The literature on social movements has made a crucial contribution to the sociological analysis of frames and repertoires (Benford and Snow 2000; see also Schneider 1997).

7 On the idea that reality is a social construction see Berger and Luckmann 1966.
significant social issues in the dark. As John Kingdon (1995) argues, the policy agenda is necessarily narrow (i.e. political actors, journalists and citizens cannot focus their attention on too many issues simultaneously), meaning that blueprints and paradigms perform the major task of helping actors select a limited number of social issues and policy alternatives they can deal with. Second, when promoting policy change, political actors must justify the “need to reform” through strategic frames drawing on a society’s cultural repertoire. The concept of repertoire refers to a relatively coherent set of cultural symbols and political representations mobilized during social and political debates to frame the issues and shape the public’s perceptions (Marx Ferree 2003). Because policy-makers must justify their political and technical choices, there is a need for “symbols and concepts with which to frame solutions to policy problems in normatively acceptable terms through transposition and bricolage.” (Campbell 1998: 394) From this perspective, the construction of the “need to reform” often takes the form of a strategic framing attempt that appeals to shared cultural understandings. Third, framers must convince other actors that it is in their interest to support their policy proposals. As suggested below, the cultural construction of the “need to reform” and such discourse about self-interest can mesh to legitimize policy change.

At this point, it is necessary to draw on framing theory and, more specifically, on the sociological literature about value amplification to explain further what the construction of the “need to reform” means. This is significant because value amplification, it is argued, is a major aspect of the political processes surrounding policy change.

The most comprehensive attempt to understand framing processes comes from the sociological literature on social movements. Drawing in part on the seminal work of Erving Goffman (1974), sociologists working on social movements have studied framing processes in a systematic way in order to understand better the social and political construction of reality.
surrounding social mobilization. From this perspective, “movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers.” (Benford and Snow 2000: 613). Like other students of social movements, Benford and Snow stress the strategic nature of framing processes according to which movements actors pursue particular political and organizational goals. Yet, for them, cultural factors impact the appeal and mobilizing potency of framing processes. For example, “if the values or beliefs the movement seeks to promote or defend are of low hierarchical salience within the larger belief system, the mobilizing potential is weakened considerably and the task of political education of consciousness raising becomes more central but difficult.” (Snow and Benford 1988: 205) Inversely, references to a value or belief central to a society’s cultural repertoire increase the potential effectiveness of framing processes. Although this is not the only determinant of frame resonance, the relationship between these processes and value salience is crucial. But as suggested by Snow et al. (1986), actors involved in framing processes can do more than just refer to a value or a belief central to a society’s cultural repertoire. Through the value amplification logic, framers can actively promote and embellish a specific value to justify the actions proposed in its name. “Value amplification refers to the identification, idealization, and elevation of one or more values presumed basic to prospective constituents but which have not inspired collective action for any number of reasons.” (Snow et al. 1986: 469) For example, a value taken for granted or clichéd can be revivified through intense framing efforts depicting this value as morally essential and timeless. For example, this is exactly what Margaret Thatcher did in the late 1970s and early 1980s when she elevated free enterprise and private ownership as core values of what she called “popular capitalism.” From this angle, traditional capitalist values became the central piece of a reform discourse that aimed at bring comprehensive neo-liberal policy change in Britain (Béland, 2007) This well known example
suggests that elevating and idealizing certain values is a potentially powerful framing strategy than can help construct the “need to reform” and legitimize certain policy alternatives. This is especially true when value amplification is combined with a discourse about the economic interests that the triumph of a particular value could serve.

**Ideas, Historical Legacies, and Economic Interests**

Ideational and framing processes, like institutional ones, are embedded in long-term historical realities (Somers and Block 2005). The three types of ideas (i.e. blueprints, paradigms, and frames) discussed above can have a long history, and tracing their development often necessary to illuminate the role of ideas in policy change. For example, as a strategic tool mobilized by actors to advance their reform projects, frames are rooted in a cultural repertoire that is the product of long-term and frequently slow-moving historical processes. Representations about issues like equality, class relations, gender roles, economic efficiency, personal freedom and social solidarity change over time, and the repertoires to which they belong form relatively structured and stable orders that actors must draw upon to convince their fellow citizens, who have long assimilated such cultural representations (e.g. Marx Ferree 2003). Ironically, potentially radical reform proposals may require the mobilization of traditional representations about social and economic order. From this perspective, the case for change is made in reference to decades- or even centuries-old representations about social and economic order. The example of Thatcherism mentioned above provides ground to this claim (Béland, 2007). As the work of Robert Cox suggests, the ideological coherence and the historical embeddedness of framing processes facilitate policy change, as they help political actors make a stronger case for reform (Cox 2001). Other recent scholarship provides more ground to that claim (Schmidt 2002; Somers and Block 2005)
Although political actors can rework existing social and cultural representations to frame their proposals, the ideational legacies they draw upon are often as resilient as institutional ones. This means that, over a long period of time, actors have access to a limited range of legitimate ideas and values to justify policy change. Although the concrete meaning of these ideas and values can change over time, the existence of stable cultural repertoires creates ideational constraints and opportunities, and political actors must draw on a limited number of shared values and symbols to justify reform. In Sweden, for example, political actors generally feel compelled to make constant references to the idea of social democracy even when the policy proposals they support appear to contradict its traditional foundations (Cox, 2004). Policy legacies may also create enduring ideational constraints because framers have little choice but to refer to the language embedded in existing social and economic legislations (Pedriana and Stryker 1997). Yet, conversely, these legacies can help promote change when they embody a logic that reformers seek to expand.

This discussion should not suggest that value amplification is the only major ideological weapon political actors can mobilize in order to construct the “need to reform.” In a recent article about welfare reform, for example, Margaret Somers and Fred Block analyze how conservatives like Charles Murray successfully mobilized the idea that the welfare state creates social problems instead of solving them in order to construct the need for conservative reforms like the 1996 American welfare legislation (Somers and Block 2005). Their analysis stresses the central role of what Albert Hirschman’s calls the “perversity thesis:” the discourse according to which state intervention generates perverse effects that are more detrimental to society than the consequences of laissez faire (Hirschman 1991).

Considering that a number of frames are available to them, why would political actors focus on value amplification? The answer: the need for actors to move beyond purely economic
and demographic arguments in order to make a strong ideological case for policy change. As evidenced in recent scholarship about the relationship between collective identity and social policy (McEwen 2002), public policy is frequently associated with values that help define group boundaries and identities (e.g. gender equality, ethnic solidarity and social citizenship). From this perspective, in addition to arguments about the efficiency and the unintended effects of existing programs, political actors may decide to publicly embrace a powerful value in order to make a strong cultural and ideological case for reform.

Arguing that ideas and frames help explain key policy episodes is not to say that ideas constitute the sole locus of policy change. Ideas become influential politically in part because they interact with powerful institutional forces and political actors (Hansen and King 2001). For that reason, the study of ideational forces must pay close attention to the political actors and institutions surrounding them. According to Hendrick Spruyt (1994), for example, ideas cannot triumph or even gain a significant status in the public arena without gaining support from powerful actors. Influential, high-profile actors such as elected officials, political parties or, in some contexts, social movements, are instrumental in the propagation of specific blueprints, paradigms, and frames that, in turn, can serve some of their strategic interests. Yet, as emphasized above, ideational processes help define what actors perceive as their interests in a certain historical and institutional context (Blyth, 2002; Hay, forthcoming; Steensland 2006; Weber 1946; Weir, 1992). As Colin Hay puts it, “Conceptions of self-interest provide a cognitive filter through which the actor orients herself towards her environment, providing one (of several) means by which an actor evaluates the relative merits of contending potential courses of action.”

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8 For example, the literature on social movements suggests that framing is influential in addition to other powerful forces (Cress and Snow 2000; McCammon et al. 2000).
(Hay, forthcoming: 24). Ironically, as they help construct self-interests, ideas are often more than pure instruments in the hands of powerful social and political actors. From this angle, ideas are not mere epiphenomena in part because they help construct the identity and goals of political actors (Campbell, 2004).

Recognizing that ideas are not purely epiphenomena should not hide the fact that even the most carefully designed framing campaigns do not always succeed.\(^9\) Four related factors can jeopardize the success of coherent blueprints and framing campaigns. First, in the policy arena, cultural values generally become politically influential when powerful actors make the strategic choice to amplify them.\(^10\) This means that politically weak actors have little chance to launch successful framing campaigns. Second, as historical institutionalism suggests (Pierson 1994), the fragmentation of political power and the presence of enduring policy legacies can become powerful obstacles to reform, even when reformers succeed in putting together a coherent framing strategy. Third, the mobilization of major constituencies such as business organizations and labor unions may jeopardize reform attempts. Fourth, actors opposing particular reform proposal may engage in counter-framing strategies that convince other actors and the public at large that privatization is unnecessary or dangerous. In such a context, value amplification drawing upon existing cultural repertoires can serve as a major counter-framing strategy.

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\(^9\) This discussion is partially inspired by Walsh 2000.

\(^10\) This strategic model of value amplification is consistent with the fact that cultural resources form a “tool kit” that social and political actors, including framers, can mobilize to elaborate their strategies (Swidler 1986). But as opposed to what Swidler (1986) argues, it would be problematic at best to exclude “values” from culture.
GLOBAL IDEAS, NATIONAL REPERTOIRES?

Cultural repertoires are not homogeneous entities that reflect only one political and social tradition. In part because such repertoires are not ideologically homogeneous, political actors from opposite camps can refer to the very same symbols to legitimize their decisions and seek popular support. What is essential here is that the discourse they frame can resonate in the mind of social actors who have assimilated the symbols and ideas that comprise the cultural repertoire of their society. Considering all this, the argument that frames rooted in a shared cultural repertoire can have a political impact and shape the “need to reform” is not identical to the traditional arguments about the close relationship between “national values” and policy outcomes (Hartz 1955; Lipset 1996; Lubove 1986; Steensland, 2006). Because national cultures are never ideologically cohesive, the idea that “national values” create unilateral and unmovable obstacles—or incentives—to reform does not hold sway (Quadagno and Street 2005). Besides this remark, however, differences between national cultural repertoires can matter a great deal. For example, possessive individualism is more entrenched in the United States than in countries like France, where the discourse of solidarity embedded in the labor culture and the Republican tradition (Lamont, 2000) makes it more difficult to sell explicitly neo-liberal ideas to the public (Béland and Hansen, 2000).

This being said, under specific circumstances, policy-makers can impose neo-liberal policies upon a country where possessive individualism and the idea of personal ownership are not well entrenched in the existing national repertoire. In the developing world in particular, neo-liberal policy ideas disseminated by the World Bank and other international organizations were frequently imposed on countries where the liberal tradition had long been weak and ideologically vulnerable. Consequently, in many developing countries, neo-liberal policies were mainly framed in terms of economic necessity, not value amplification. In Latin American countries, for
example, this situation exacerbated the growing social and political tensions neo-liberal policies may create. This is particularly true in countries where dictatorships or semi-authoritarian regimes imposed the neo-liberal creed through repressive means. The problem there, as in other regions of the world, is that rulers “are frequently criticized for being truly liberal only in the economic sense, and illiberal, intolerant, authoritarian and traditionalist where politics, values and morality are concerned.” (Larrain, 2000: 174) Beyond the negative material consequences of neo-liberal policies in terms of poverty and social inequality, the discrepancy between these policies, existing cultural repertoires, and the illiberal and anti-democratic behavior of political elites is a major yet understudied aspect of the politics of neo-liberalism in developing countries. Such a discrepancy helps populist and nationalist leaders like Hugo Chavez frame neo-liberalism as an imperialist tool of global domination that “the people” must fight in the name of a vision of social justice embedded in their own history and culture. This is why Chavez constantly refers to Simón Bolívar, the founder of modern Venezuela and the alleged inspiration of Chavez’s so-called “revolution” (Gott, 2005) At the era of neo-liberalism and economic globalization, this national symbol is particularly useful for Chavez, as Bolivar is a respected historical figure across Latin America, a terrain where Chavez seeks to increase his prestige and influence. The example of Bolivar suggests that national cultural repertoires and identities can overlap, as it is the case in Latin America (Larrain, 2000).  

11 The overlap between national repertoires is also common in the Anglo-American world, where the liberal tradition has long been influential, if not hegemonic (Béland, 2007). Furthermore, structural cultural sociologists like Philip Smith suggest that there is something like a global symbolic repertoire featuring a number of basic oppositions featured in social and political discourse (Smith, 2005). Far more research is needed to assess the validity of this claim.
More generally, these remarks point to the complex relationship between policy ideas, cultural repertoires, and what is known as globalization.\textsuperscript{12} On the one hand, there is evidence that policy ideas regularly cross national borders through the transnational actions and discourses of academics, international organizations, and think tanks. Broad policy paradigms like neoliberalism and concrete policy alternatives like “zero tolerance” largely transcend national borders, and international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank help diffuse them (Chwieroth, 2007; Merrien, 2001; Wacquant, 1999). Since the 1990s, transnational \textit{regional} policy networks and institutions like the European Union have played a growing role in these processes of ideational diffusion (Moreno and Palier, 2005).\textsuperscript{13} On the other hand, as the best historical institutionalist scholarship suggests, national boundaries and institutions remain central aspects of the politics of ideas. First, the production of expertise is heavily constrained through national “knowledge regimes” embedded in particular political institutions and policy legacies. For example, private think tanks play a much greater role in the United States than in France, where the state remains the most central source of policy expertise.

\textsuperscript{12} The concept of globalization is hard to define. Most definitions of globalization available in the literature are not insightful because they simply put old wine in a new bottle; that is, they reduce globalization to well-known processes such as internationalization and Westernization. Instead a good definition of globalization should generate new insights about the world in which we live. One can define this concept as “the spread of transplanetary (...) connections between people. From this perspective, globalization involves reductions in barriers to transworld contacts.” (Scholte, 2002: 14-15; Scholte, 2005). These contacts include global migrations, financial flows, civil society organizations, and communication networks like the Internet that help create “one world.” Globalization is not a recent process but it has accelerated in recent decades (Giddens, 1990; Osterhammel and Petersson, 2005).

\textsuperscript{13} Among others, students of “policy transfer” examine the transnational diffusion of policy ideas, lessons, and proposals (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). For a critique of this problematic concept see James and Lodge, 2003. For a different perspective on policy diffusion drawing on cognitive psychology see Weyland, 2005.
Second, as Vivien Schmidt argues, national institutions largely shape the types of policy discourse political actors can adopt in order to frame reform imperatives successfully. According to her, single-actor systems such as Britain, in which politicians take the main policy decisions, favor the domination of “communicative discourse” (aimed at convincing the population to support reform) over “coordinative discourse” (aimed at convincing “social partners” to support reform). Inversely, multi-actor institutional systems like Germany, in which politicians must seek agreements with “social partners,” favor the domination of “coordinative discourse” over “communicative discourse” as state officials must convince business and labor officials to recognize the “need to reform” (Schmidt, 2002a; Schmidt, 2002b).

Third, policy alternatives like workfare diffused through transnational networks are implemented at the national level through processes of symbolic and institutional translation. According to John Campbell, symbolic translation “involves the combination of new externally given elements received through diffusion as well as old locally given ones inherited from the past.” (Campbell, 2004: 80) The old elements to which Campbell refers consist of existing institutional and ideational legacies, including what is described above as a cultural repertoire. Drawing on this repertoire, reformers and political actors must frame the policy alternatives they put forward, including those diffused through transnational policy networks, in order to sell them to the public and to key interest groups. Overall, the global diffusion of policy ideas is related to translation processes through which policy alternatives are adapted to a particular symbolic and institutional national context. In other words, as Campbell and a growing number of historical institutionalist scholars have argued, globalization has not favored a strong decline of the national state, as territorially-bounded institutions and cultural repertoires help filter and translate global trends, including ideational ones (Béland, 2007; Campbell, 2004; Paul, Ikenberry and Hall, 2003; Urmetzer, 2005). National states and cultural repertoires are enduring aspects of the
contemporary world existing alongside—and interacting with—global and regional trends, economic and otherwise.\textsuperscript{14} National boundaries and territorial logics remain central economic and political factors despite the expansion of transnational processes (Harvey, 2003; Helliwell, 2002). This general remark should not hide potentially major variations in institutional and ideological autonomy from a country to another as well as the fact that developing countries are probably more vulnerable on average than developed ones to global economic and political pressures. For example, international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank have a greater capacity to influence policy outcomes in poorer countries that depend extensively on their loans. The recognition that national institutions and repertoires remain influential should not hide this reality, which is related to well known forms of global economic, social, and political inequality (Hurrell and Woods, 1999).

A question future scholarship on the relationship between the transnational diffusion of ideas, on the one hand, and the resilience of national institutions and repertoires, on the other hand, concerns the nature and scope of symbolic and institutional translation in developing countries. Concerning this issue, factors that may create significant differences between developing and developed countries include the above mentioned greater dependency on international organizations as well as the lasting influence of colonial legacies, both at the

\textsuperscript{14} This does not mean that state power cannot decline, nor that globalization is necessarily the main factor behind such a decline. In many former socialist countries, for example, the departure from economic planning, widespread neo-liberal reforms, and the expansion of organized crime and the informal economic sector have temporarily reduced the state’s capacity to extract fiscal resources and protect citizens. As in the past, declining or insufficient state protection and growing collective insecurity tend to stimulate the development of alternative providers of protection like militias and criminal organizations. This is what happened in Russia before and immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (e.g. Volkov, 2000).
symbolic and the institutional levels. Comparative research is necessary to explore these crucial issues.\textsuperscript{15}

Another issue future research on ideas and policy change could explore is the status of globalization as a discourse and, therefore, a potential framing tool. For example, in Western Europe, political actors have drawn on the idea that globalization creates inescapable economic imperatives to legitimize comprehensive policy reforms, especially neo-liberal ones (Hay and Rosamond, 2002). More research is needed about the discourse on globalization as a framing device aimed at constructing the “need to reform.” This research could assess whether the globalization discourse varies from one country to another, perhaps in relationship to existing cultural repertoires. Such ambitious comparative research could deal with both developed and developing countries.

CONCLUSION

This article stresses the role of ideas and frames in the construction of reform imperatives. Ideas and frames constitute key political and cultural resources for political actors, they help put together coherent reform proposals, and they participate in the social construction of the “need to reform” and the perceived economic interests surrounding it. Such ideational forces are embedded in long-term historical processes that shape cultural repertoires that actors must draw upon in order to convince the public to support their proposals. Moreover, as suggested above, ideational analysis would gain much from bridging the political science literature on ideas and

\textsuperscript{15} A significant challenge this type of research could face is the limited availability of exhaustive public opinion data in many developing countries. Empirical research on framing processes and cultural repertoires sometimes relies extensively on such data, which helps scholars make causal claims about the impact of framing processes on policy outcomes (e.g. Somers and Block, 2005).
the sociological literature on framing processes. For example, this article exemplifies the central role of value amplification in framing and policy processes. Value amplification is a major ideational construction that political scientists and sociologists interested in policymaking must take seriously.

All things considered, ideational analysis enriches historical institutionalism by filling significant explanatory gaps regarding the content of policy agendas and alternatives, the construction of the “need to reform,” and the perception of interests and institutional legacies that can influence policy development. Consequently, the main argument of the article regarding the central role of ideational processes is not that ideas and frames constitute the only possible origin of policy change, as there is evidence that ideas and frames only become influential under specific institutional and political conditions (Walsh 2000).

Overall, what this article suggests is that taking these processes seriously can help explain the content of, the cultural meaning of, and the perceived economic rationale for policy change. More precisely, this article has stressed the three main ways in which ideational processes can affect policy outcomes. First, these processes in part determine the content of reform proposals and policy agendas, notably by focusing the policy attention on some issues at the expense of others. Second, frames participate in the construction of reform imperatives partially through the logic of value amplification analyzed in the social movement literature. Third, ideas and frames help shape the perception of self-interests that can legitimize particular forms of policy change.

This article calls for the beginning of a more direct dialogue between historical institutionalism and ideational analysis, both in sociology and in political science. Such a dialogue has already begun (Campbell 2004; Schmidt 2006), and the above discussion shows how the study of ideas and frames can complement the insight of historical institutionalism without challenging this approach’s core assumptions about the structuring impact of policy
legacies and formal political institutions. Although recent theories of policy change improve our understanding of public policy restructuring, such theories would gain from paying greater attention to ideas and frames. Ideational processes give sense to the perceived economic interests and the institutional processes surrounding policymaking, which provide a rationale for policy change. For this reason, neglecting ideational processes could leave many significant mechanisms of policy change in the dark.

As for the relationship between ideas, globalization, and policy change, it is both complex and understudied. Although a number of scholars have stressed the role of international organizations in the politics of ideas, more work is necessary to capture the processes of symbolic and institutional translation that are central to the global diffusions and adaptation of policy ideas. In the politics of ideas and policy change as elsewhere, national boundaries, institutions, and repertoires remain major forces that interact with global and regional ones rather than simply declining at the expense of them.

As suggested above, more comparative research is necessary to grasp the changing nature of the politics of ideas and policy change in developed and developing countries alike. Although major differences exist between countries and regions of the world, the above framework could enrich the global scholarly debate on ideas and policy change. Taking into account global inequalities and enduring national and regional differences could help researchers apply and, perhaps, translate this framework to their particular research settings.
REFERENCES


