Policy Ideas, Discourses and Debates in the Globalisation Process
Have Developing Countries a chance to compete?

Eve Fouilleux, CNRS-CRAPE
Centre de Recherches sur l’Action Politique en Europe, Rennes, France
eve.fouilleux@rennes.iep.fr

Bruno Jobert, CNRS, PACTE-CERAT
Centre de Recherche sur l’Action Politique et le Territoire, Grenoble, France
bruno.jobert@upmf-grenoble.fr

Outline of the topic and relation to existing research

The increasingly important research stream focusing on the role of ideas, knowledge, discourses, narratives in public policy-making (in addition to interests and institutions) mainly deals with policy resilience and innovation in western developed countries (Jobert and Muller, 1987; Sabatier et Jenkins-Smith 1993; Hall, 1989, 1993; Haas, 1992; Jobert, 1994; Sabatier, 1999; Schmidt, 2002). If seminal works in the field were mainly focused at the national level, more recent literature has been developed dealing with the European Union and europeanisation processes (Mac Namara, 1998; Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004). At the international level, the importance of arguing behaviours in international interactions (Risse, 1998), the role of think tanks and global knowledge networks (Stone, 2004; Stone and Maxwell, 2004) have been underlined.

In non-OECD contexts, a number of works have described the diffusion of standards and policy receipts by international organisations in various fields and their influence on national policy-making (Mkandawire, 1994; Finnemore, 1996; Ruggie, 1998; Hibou, 2000; Deacon 2004). But no systematic survey or synthetic work is available yet regarding the relevance of the « cognitive », « ideational, or « discursive » approaches to the study of public policies in developing countries. Efforts are still to be made to work out the necessary theoretical deepening and conceptual innovation to extend the use of these cognitive tools to political settings that are different than the ones they were initially created to apply to. It is the aim of such a workshop to beginning bridging this gap, by raising the issue of non-OECD countries’ participation to the production of international discourses and policy frames. In this order, we propose a core hypothesis and two inter-related questions. Our core hypothesis is that states are unequally able to promote their views on international arenas and influence policy receipts and norms that are produced there. The first question is: to which extent, and depending on which variables, some states (or groups or categories of elite in a state) are able to contribute
and influence the nature of the debate and its outputs on specific international arenas dealing with specific policy issues? The second question is: to which extent, and depending on which variables, some states have the ability to reinterpret and readapt fully or partially these norms and receipts and make them ‘fit’ with their national context?

The literature dealing with developing countries often emphasises the political weakness of such countries in the international arena, as well as their vulnerability and subordination to powerful international institutions and developed countries’ hegemony. Following Meyer, Boli, et al. (1997), who consider the nation-state as a worldwide institution constructed by worldwide cultural and associational processes, these countries would be supposed to inexorably tend to adopting international structures and standards, with no room for the maintaining of their own “natural” and endogenous characteristics. In a situation of increasing internationalisation at stake, these countries may be even more exposed to world cognitive and ideational hegemony. In this workshop however, we propose to raise the issue of non-OECD countries capacity to react, influence and readapt mainstream international frames and policy receipts. Without neglecting power balances and tendency towards hegemony at the world level, we would like to assess such a capacity in different cases and contexts, and to analyse some attempts made in that sense by countries or groups of countries in possibly various fields of public action. The aim is also to find out some possible explaining variables to the expected huge variability of situations from a developing country to the other, as cultural values, type of political regime, economic and financial stakes, state organisation and type of administrative structure involved, etc.

On this background, we propose to explore three subsets of issues, under the following headings:

i. Building and diffusion processes of international normative frames and policy receipts;
ii. National cognitive capacities and the reception and reinterpretation of international frames at the domestic level;
iii. The paradox of participation: internationalisation of the policy process versus national structuration of the public sphere.

As a first set of issues, the workshop will address the building of international normative frames and its peculiar combination of theoretical arguments and best/good practices selection in various sectors of public action. The crucial role of various actors (national and international agencies) in the production of normative frames and policy receipts and the potential competition at stake among them will be explored. Regarding international agencies, the focus shall be put on the intense debates that may be at stake both between different agencies and inside the same given agency, and on their impacts on the nature of the programmes, discourses and narratives produced by these organisations in any sector or field of public action applying to developing countries. But beside the mainstreaming activities of international agencies (and in particular the IFIs) in the international production of policy
norms and receipts, we propose to have a look to the efforts made by some nations - or group of nations - in order to promote and advocate frames differing from the mainstream (like the Malaysian refusal of the IMF policy in the context of the Asiatic financial crisis, the CEPAL models of development in Latino America (Sikkin, 1991), the arguments for an Asian concept of human rights for example) and to the reasons of their successes and failures. Analysing stakes, issues and explaining strategies and positions of the G20, the group of developing countries leaded by Brazil and India in the Doha round of the WTO, could also be an interesting example. Indeed, as broadly underlined by Page (2003), the role of developing countries international negotiations seems to have been evolving importantly in the recent period.

For a country or a group of countries, advocating its own visions, policy frames and receipts in the international debate means having the capacity to be present, active and taken into consideration by the other actors involved in the arguing and bargaining processes. In other words, that means having available well-educated and efficient intellectual resources as well as a properly-organised administration in the field of policy analysis, able to contribute significantly to the international design of programmes, tools and theories (i.e. analysis and forward looking units, served by staff with right skills and expertise -‘right’ meaning here able to adapt their policy discourse to the dominant ideational frames and language of the concerned epistemic communities) and to the debates animating related internationalised epistemic communities (Fouilleux, 2004). That also means having good diplomats to argue and bargain on international arenas. Even more broadly, that means having institutional capacities, i.e. a state machinery in position to design and implement complex policies and coordinate action at different governance levels (national, regional, international). All developing countries are not homogeneous at all in this regard (Brazil or India are obviously not comparable with Zimbabwe or Burkina Faso for example), and it would be interesting to have contrasting cases analysed during the workshop.

The second set of issues we would like to address regards the reception of these international models in the countries, and the way policy actors use - or do not use- and adapt this variety of contending frames in national political and policy debates. In this context, we make the following hypothesis to explain an expected contrasting national reception to international mainstream policy frames and receipts from one country to the other, that the workshop discussion will confirm, amend or reject:

- First, the ability of a country to select among different patterns and policy receipts and to reinterpret them according to its national specificities might depend strongly on its political resources and bargaining position in the international political exchange. Countries depending highly on external donors or lending institutions as it is the case of a number of non-OECD countries –in particular the ‘least developed’ ones- may be more vulnerable to external pressures (through financial or political conditionality) on their
decision-making process and are thus provided a much reduced room for manoeuvre to selecting among various possible policy frames and models.

- Second, the reception to international standards may also considerably depend on the degree of previous interiorisation of mainstream norms and patterns, that may vary from country to country and result from various possible diffusion channels: education of the elite (with skills and diplomas obtained in developed countries for example), socialisation of the elite through working experience in international institutions (as consultants, staff, etc.), or the attendance to capacity building modules provided by development agencies directly in the countries.

- Third, the ability for a country to argue for different patterns than the mainstream ones may also depend on the existence, development, activeness, and degree of independence of an intellectual elite at the interface between the state, donors and the civil society (hardly missing in Africa for example, as underlined by Thandika Mkandawire, 2000). This dimension relates to the will and ability of the state and of the political elite itself to building and feeding a productive and organic relation to their intelligenstia.

- Fourth and finally, it may also depend on the vivacity of the national political and policy debate, which depends itself on the degree of democratisation or/and political mobilization at the national level.

This leads us to the third and concluding issue the workshop will try to address, which regards the paradox of the participation rhetoric in developing countries. Actually, as argued above, any country aiming at keeping some space of autonomy in the design of its policy frames and programmes is conducted to specialise and allocate a large part of its cognitive, intellectual, bargaining resources and capacities to address international oriented issues and be able to press international processes of policy receipt and norm production. As already mentioned, such a shift of the policy debates and processes towards the international level is rather costly and could end up with marginalizing countries with poor financial and administrative resources. But moreover, it results in an increasing disconnection with the public sphere, which remains mainly organised at the national level. And such an increasing isolation of the policy process from the broader public appears as strongly contrasting with the rhetoric of decentralisation, civil society’s participation, “empowerment”, and participative democracy, leitmotiv in the supportive narratives to these processes (as illustrated in the case of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers by Stewart and Wang, 2003 for example). Contribution putting into light the various dimensions of such a paradox in different countries would be very welcome. Such a potential contradiction might be particularly acute in least developed countries, in which for so many decades the most important State’s interlocutor in the field of policy-making very often is not the public, but a set of international donors and potential donors.

References


Type of papers and participants expected

We welcome all types of papers fitting within this general framework of issues, with a preference for empirical papers and comparative analysis; papers comparing different non-OECD countries cases would be very much welcome. We also welcome papers working on the theoretical and analytical dimension of the issue at stake, that is regarding the tools best suited to encompass the ideational dimension of policies in developing countries, be they derived or not from the “referential”, “paradigm”, “advocacy coalitions” schools, usually used to analysing developed countries policies.

Beyond the opposition “developed” versus “under-developed” or “developing” countries, empirical studies presented during the workshop will certainly work out important differences from countries to others, even within continental or regional groups of countries. As already mentioned one aim of the work would be to find out explaining variables to the contrasting ability of developing countries to participate to the international policy patterns and receipts productions and to the differentiated disconnection between public sphere and decision making processes from case to case.

Participants from all social science disciplines as political scientists, sociologists, political economists, anthropologists as well as practitioners in the field of development policies are very welcome to participate.

About the directors:

Eve FOUILLEUX is a research fellow in Political Science for the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research). Her main field of work regards the role of representations, ideas, discourses in public policy change in the context of complex political and multilevel governance systems, with a special attention to competing alternatives in policy debates and to the way actors select among them. She has been working on the European system of governance for many years, with a special focus on the EU Common Agricultural Policy and its reform process. Among her main and more recent publications:


In 2003 and 2004 she has been working at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization on agricultural policies for development, as a Visiting Scientist at the Policy Assistance Division (Policy Support Service). Her research is now increasingly focusing on development policies and politics.

Bruno JOBERT is a senior researcher in political science for the CNRS. He has written several books and articles on the role of social representation and ideas in policy making. His main field of investigation is Europe, but he has also been working several times on Indian policies. His main interest is the cognitive dimension of public policies, which he looks at both from a national and a comparative perspective. At the national level he has published a book dealing with the social dimension of economic planning (*Le social en Plan*, Paris, *Editions Ouvrières*, 1982) and has developed an original approach of the “State in Action” together with Pierre Muller (*l’État en action*, Paris, *PUF*, 1987). In the comparative field, he co-edited with Monica Steffen a book comparing health policies in France and in Germany (*Les politiques de santé en Allemagne et en France*, *OEPS*, 1993) and edited a book on the reception of neoliberal ideas in different European countries (*Le tournant néolibéral en Europe*, Paris, *L’Harmattan*, 1994). He also edited with Jacques Commaille a book on “the metamorphosis of political regulation" (*Les métamorphoses de la régulation politique*, Paris, 1999, *LGDJ*). He currently coordinates a programme on the contending policy frames regarding the involvement of civil society in policy making within the CONNEX European network of excellence.

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N.B. Our proposal of workshop is based on a codirection by two scholars sharing a common conceptual approach which they apply to distinct fields of investigation. However, we know that our belonging to the same country might be a problem for the ECPR, and we would like to underline that if necessary –and still possible!– we are open to adjust our proposal by including a director from another country (we already have some names of colleagues in mind!)…

**Funding:**
An application for funding the workshop as a whole will be sent to the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research), which both directors belong to, according to the specific existing procedure regarding these matters (applications must be sent by 15 June 2005).