



Understanding the emergence of new science and technology policies: Policy entrepreneurship, agenda setting and the development of the European Framework Programme



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ABSTRACT

We utilise conceptual frameworks from political science on agenda setting, policy entrepreneurship and the role of the European Commission to understand the emergence of a new research theme (security) under the Seventh Framework Programme. We open-up the “black box” of the European Commission and in so doing examine the controversies that emerged within the Commission as well as the critical role of mid-ranking officials in identifying and utilising a political window of opportunity provided by the 9/11 attacks on the United States. We emphasise ambiguity as a key feature in the complex process of framing and mobilisation and develop the idea of ambiguity as a multi-dimensional and dynamic phenomenon that changes its nature and function over the different stages of the agenda setting process. We argue that the understanding of science and technology policy making can benefit by applying this agenda setting approach and its emphasis on the origins of policy, the agenda setting process and the role of policy entrepreneurship.

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1. Introduction

If we do not know where policy comes from, we cannot understand its shape, scope and intentions. The academic science and technology policy community has had an enduring interest in the content and effect of policy and the emergence of new institutions to govern science and innovation. In contrast, we have paid arguably less attention to the *origins* of those science, technology and innovation (STI) policies. Indeed, public policy analysis writ large too often ignores questions such as why particular issues emerge as policy “problems”, the timing of their emergence, the representation of the “problem” and finally the acceptance of a policy solution space (Bacchi, 1999).

The emergence and development of the European Union's Framework Programme is a case in point. Established in 1984, the supranational Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development has become the European Union's (EU) main instrument for supporting and encouraging collaborative and transnational research, development and innovation in science, engineering and technology. Nonetheless, we do not have

a broad academic literature on its emergence and development. The origins and growth of the European Framework Programme has mainly been the subject of historical accounts (Guzzetti, 1995; Krige and Guzzetti, 1997). More theoretically grounded analysis has mentioned the role of—amongst others actors—the European Commission (the organisation that is responsible for preparing legislation, implementing decisions, implementing the EU's Treaties and the administration of the EU). Peterson (1991, 1995) explains the emergence of the Framework Programme as the result of the interplay between stakeholder networks and the Commission at the most senior level. He shows how different stakeholder networks developed and expressed their interests and how the role of those networks and the role of the Commission differed according to the nature of the corresponding industrial sector. Other authors have stressed the role of the Commission in developing “research policy” at EU level as a mediator and mobiliser of strong economic interests (Grande, 1994a,b; Grande and Peschke, 1999). In his seminal work on the emergence of the IT programme ESPRIT, the single biggest thematic programme of the early years of the Framework Programme, Sandholtz (1992) shows how in the early 1980s Commissioner Davignon mobilised the leaders of the twelve most important IT companies in Europe (dubbed the “Round Table”), convinced them to embrace the rationale of co-operative pre-competitive research and, together with those firms, lobbied national policy makers to adopt ESPRIT. Sandholtz argues

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that the emergence of ESPRIT: “is explicable only by the actions of an entrepreneurial IO [International Organization] allied with a potent industrial coalition” (Sandholtz, 1992: 173).¹ Analysis of the genesis of the industrial research Programme BRIT (Edler, 2000, 2003) demonstrates how the Commission took advantage of an emerging academic consensus as regards pre-competitive research, co-shaped the discourse arena and created discursive linkages between academia, the OECD and the EU. It then managed to link the idea of cooperation across the whole manufacturing sector to the normative idea of a “technology community” against the backdrop of the “Eurosclerosis” of the mid 1980s. In an analysis of the emergence of the security theme under the 7th Framework Programme, Citi (2014) offers a schematic, linear multi-step model of the emergence of a transnational problem and its framing as an EU level problem which notes the role of the Commission as policy entrepreneur.

What most of these accounts of the development of the Framework Programme have in common is some discussion of the role of the EU Commission. However, none of the accounts of the Framework Programme analyse the properties and strategies of the Commission and the nature of its role in detail, despite the considerable body of political science literature on policy entrepreneurship and the role of the European Commission in the European integration process. Equally, despite the body of political science research on agenda setting, most of the authors underplay the changing role and strategies of the Commission in the agenda process over time.² Finally, although it is a common place in the European integration literature that the European Commission is not a corporate unitary actor, most of the analyses of the Framework Programme do not differentiate the “actorness” of the Commission but treat the European Commission and the process of agenda setting as a “black box”. For instance, in Citi (2014) this role is under-determined, the author sees the emergence of policy ideas as the realm of high politics and treats “the Commission” as a reactive policy entrepreneur not seriously involved in the initiation and specification of the issue in its early phases.

Accordingly, we apply established conceptual frameworks from political science on agenda setting, policy entrepreneurship and the role of the European Commission to understand the emergence of a new research theme under the Seventh Framework Programme. We use a process-tracing methodology focusing on the emergence of the European Security Research Programme (ESRP) as part of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). Our case study shows that the emergence of the ESRP can only be understood if we systematically take into account the policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission. We show that it was individual mid-ranking Commission officials who identified a window of opportunity to put the theme on the agenda and mobilised the political and financial resources of selected Directorate Generals of the European Commission. We show how the policy entrepreneurs orchestrated the framing of this policy through managing ideational discourse and mobilising existing and novel actor networks. In doing so the Commission gained the credibility to be the venue for science and technology policy in the area of security research. We also show how the policy entrepreneurs used ambiguity in the definition of the meaning, scope and rationale for “security research” as a means of assembling a transnational coalition of interests and masking the initial cognitive and normative differences that

existed between the various interest actors. We show how a tension played out between this need for ambiguity to generate a transnational interest coalition and the need for sufficient clarity to allow implementation through legislative action. Throughout we emphasise the interplay between interest actors: the European Commission; industry; Member States and the European Parliament, while focusing on the entrepreneurial role of the Commission.

Our paper makes three contributions. First, in contrast to most of the literature on the emergence and development of the Framework Programme, we open-up the “black box” of the European Commission and by so doing we are able to examine the controversies that emerged within the Commission as well as the critical role of mid-ranking officials in identifying and utilising a political window of opportunity provided by the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Second, we mobilise the political science literature as a conceptual lens that enables us to understand in detail the emergence of a new theme in the Framework Programme and the role of policy entrepreneurship. We argue that the understanding of science and technology policy making can benefit by applying this agenda setting approach and its emphasis on the origins of policy, the agenda setting process and the role of policy entrepreneurship. Third, by highlighting ambiguity as a key feature in the complex process of framing and mobilisation we develop the idea of ambiguity as a multi-dimensional and dynamic phenomenon that changes its nature and function over the different stages of the agenda setting process.

The structure of this paper is as follows. We start by developing our conceptual framework, building on the literature on policy entrepreneurship, on agenda setting at the EU level, and on the EU Commission as a strategic actor. After explaining our methodological approach in Section 3, we then turn to our case study of the emergence of the European Security Research Programme. In Section 5, we conclude with an analysis and a discussion of the main general lessons.

2. Understanding the role of the EU Commission in agenda setting. A policy entrepreneurship perspective

In order to analyse and understand the specific role of the Commission in shaping a new policy at EU level, we now mobilise established concepts in the political science literature. This starts by introducing the concept and characteristics of the policy entrepreneur more generally, then looks at the characteristics and stages of the agenda setting process at EU level before discussing the extant literature on the role of and capabilities of the Commission in the agenda setting process.

2.1. The concept of policy entrepreneur

Policy entrepreneurs influence political processes in a way that alters policies or institutions. We follow a very general definition whereby policy entrepreneurs are organisations (Perkmann, 2003), individuals or teams (Mintrom and Norman, 2009) “who seek to initiate dynamic policy change” (Mintrom, 1997: 739) and are “willing to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money—in the hope of a future return” (Kingdon, 1984, p. 122). The literature on policy entrepreneurship is diverse and growing.³ The various approaches stress the *personal or organisational characteristics* and the institutional context conditions of the entrepreneur shaping the capabilities to influence policy change (Mintrom and

¹ Shearman (1986) and Peterson (1991) make similar observations about the mobilising role of the European Commission.

² An exception to that is the analyses of the role of the Commission in the emergence and revision of the Lisbon agenda, for which Borrás and Radaelli (2011) have persuasively shown how the role of the Commission has changed, not only in terms of the shaping of the policy, but in implementing it.

³ For a concise overview of different approaches to the study of policy entrepreneurship see van der Steen and Groenewegen (2008) and Cohen (2012).

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