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Theoretical foundations of the Programmatic Action Framework (PAF)

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Abstract

This article introduces the Programmatic Action Framework (PAF) as a supplementary perspective in policy process research. It focuses on professional biographies of programmatic actors, policy programs, and programmatic identities as driving factors for policies. Programmatic actors are individuals in direct interaction with the state apparatus. Civil servants, politicians, and similar individuals under certain predictable circumstances form stable alliances called programmatic groups. These programmatic groups are bound by commitment to the creation and promotion of a specific policy program, a definable set of instruments intended to attain an explicit policy objective. This policy program, rather than more diffuse beliefs or preferences, provides the defining element of the social group and corresponding social identity for such programmatic groups. Programmatic groups compete with each other for legitimate authority within and across policy sectors by seeking to impose their preferred instruments. Homogenous career trajectories, continuous linkages, and a coherent and strong joint program are essential determinants for the formation and success of programmatic groups.

KEYWORDS

policy change, policy stability, Programmatic Action Framework (PAF), social groups

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Theories of the policy process refer to manifold factors to explain policy change and stability (Weible & Sabatier, 2017). Recent decades have seen the development of competing frameworks that originated from the focus on one or a few specific explanations and integrated ever more different factors to be able to explain as many policies worldwide as possible. Most established frameworks originated from the peculiar circumstances of U.S. politics with little understanding of European political systems (Dudley, Parsons, Radaelli, & Sabatier, 2000). However, the last years have witnessed the emergence and distribution of frameworks originating from Europe and applicable to both sides of the Atlantic (Bandelow & Hornung, 2017). As a part of this development, the Programmatic Action Framework (PAF), originating from the programmatic approach in French political science and subsequently applied to other European cases, presents a new perspective on the policy process. As opposed to established frameworks, PAF accounts for the relevance of shared biographies and sector-specific careers in building up programmatic groups within the state apparatus that struggle over state authority and try to achieve this by means of a policy program (Hassenteufel, Smyrl, Genieys, & Moreno-Fuentes, 2010). Thereby, its research interest is strongly oriented toward explaining long-term policy change and periods of programmatic stability over at least 10 years. In doing so, the PAF's novelty particularly lies in the combination of an elitist perspective and social psychology to explain policy change and stability.

Previous empirical studies have generated initial empirical evidence on the existence of programmatic groups, on the role that shared biographies play for mutual trust and collaboration, as well as on the long-term success factors of policy programs (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008; Hornung & Bandelow, 2018). This contribution systematically presents the theoretical foundations of the PAF, elucidates a set of PAF-specific concepts and terms, and derives the central hypotheses that lie the foundation for future PAF applications and further development of the framework, eventually resulting in a research agenda. At the same time, it serves as one of two general foundations to the PAF and to this special issue of *European Policy Analysis*, which contains articles empirically testing and enriching the perspective. The second foundation presents—analogue to this theoretical contribution—a practical methodological guide on how to conduct PAF studies (Hassenteufel & Genieys, 2020).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. It begins by briefly demonstrating the premises of PAF, with a special focus on the past elitist literature and the research results on programmatic action in the last 20 years. Section 2 proceeds to build the theoretical foundations of the PAF with a view to the conceptualization of terms and the definition of programmatic actors and programmatic groups. Based on the theoretical groundwork laid here, the subsequent section centers on policy change (and stability) as the dependent variable of the PAF. Section 4 presents the independent variables and the mechanisms linking programmatic groups and policy programs to policy change and stability. The article concludes by proposing a research agenda that builds on existing research but also opens avenues for future studies.

2 | PREMISES AND LIMITS OF THE PAF

Policy process research is largely inspired by theoretical perspectives that originated from the study of American policymaking (Weible & Sabatier, 2017). Although there have been successful attempts to adapt the frameworks to European contexts (Dudley et al., 2000; Sabatier, 1998; Zohlnhöfer, Herweg, & Huß, 2016), the core assumptions and foci of the frameworks are still visibly connected to their ancestry. There are a limited number of known European frameworks that either build on the relevance of institutions (Scharpf, 1997) or constructivism (Saurugger, 2013), whereby the institutionalization of

processes (elite building, negotiations, scientific advice) that eventually results in policy formulation and adoption can be crucial in explaining policy change and stability. Furthermore, collective action in these views is either traced back to the existence of belief systems or rationalist-strategic behavior without appropriately capturing the developments in cognitive sciences (Jones, 2017; Weible, Ingold, Nohrstedt, Henry, & Jenkins-Smith, 2019). Recent social psychology provides some additional theoretically elaborated and empirically tested theories to be used in policy process research. Among these important perspectives are the Social Identity Theory and the related Self-categorization Theory that recently have been translated into concrete categories for analyzing policy actors (Hornung, Bandelow, & Vogeler, 2018). The PAF ties in with these recent debates and presents a framework that explains policy change and stability from a social-psychological group-theoretical perspective on elites and their influence in the policymaking process. The following lines are devoted to this exact synthesis of disciplines that led to the evolution of the PAF.

Elite theory has long been limited to the discipline of sociology, and only entered the field of political science when research attention shifted to actors. Building on the widely recognized study of power elites by C. Wright Mills (2000) and on an empirical study of French policy processes in health and defense policy, William Genieys (2010) presented a first holistic account of programmatic elites and the programmatic approach. The original image of programmatic elites (which we now call programmatic groups) rested on a sectoral struggle between two groups: On the one side, the “austerians” fight for weakening state influence in policy sectors by cutting budgets and reducing regulatory power of the state. These austerians can be found in the finance ministry and other positions inside the state. On the other side, so-called “custodians of state” in sectors close to the state defend the sector's authority and financial resources (Genieys, 2010; Hornung & Bandelow, 2018). Building on recent research on policy elites we have identified some cases that look like what we call programmatic actors. Extrapolating from these cases we conjecture that this pattern may be more common than is usually thought. Here we lay out the key theoretical points that deserve to be more widely tested.

We begin from the proposition that the desire to exercise authority is a principal motivation of elite individuals and groups and, as such, is the central objective of their action within government. Such authority, moreover, is considered to be not only the means but, in many cases, the end of government; achieving it for its own sake may be the chief purpose of those who seek to govern. Authority for its own sake particularly means the desire to occupy key positions in the policy process that allow for the exercise of authority over every stage in the policy cycle, from agenda setting and problem definition through policy formulation and adoption, and ultimately to implementation and evaluation. The postulate that competition for authority is a key motivating factor of elite groups and individuals, including those inside the formal structure of the state, provides us with an endogenous explanation for initiatives of policy change.

Individuals who potentially seek programmatic change and therefore have the possibility of becoming programmatic actors are policy actors. Within the PAF, policy actors are much more narrowly defined than in the ACF, which sees them “as those individuals from inside or outside of government who directly or indirectly influence policy subsystem affairs” (Weible, 2018, 62). From the perspective of the PAF, policy actors are individuals with direct influence on the policymaking process and in positions with direct access to the state apparatus, whose institutional position provides the capacity to contribute to policy change. These are mostly bureaucrats and civil servants, but also figures of indirect state administration or designated policy advisors close to the state (Howlett, & Wellstead, 2011). Occupying these positions, they have the formal means and personal ability to actively intervene in the policy process, at least but not limited to the stage of policy formulation. They are potentially able to become programmatic actors, but certain predispositions increase the likelihood that they will do so at some point.

In empirical studies and interviews, we inductively have gathered evidence that personal characteristics make policy actors likely candidates for becoming programmatic actors. Among these are a certain degree of egotism, craving for recognition, intrinsic motivation for change, and probably personality traits as they are measured by the famous “Big Five” (e.g., high levels of openness; Weinschenk, 2017). In this way, programmatic actors resemble in their personality that of leaders, with a particular task-oriented and relations-oriented behavior (Kornør & Nordvik, 2004). While researchers will only seldom have the chance to measure these personality traits of actors directly, we propose some indicators that help to identify programmatic actors. Firstly, programmatic actors—as opposed to non-programmatic sectoral actors—frequently engage in publications to make their ideas visible. Secondly, programmatic actors change their professional position more often than other sectoral actors for the purpose of gaining more influence. Thirdly, programmatic actors appear more often in public by giving public statements than other actors in similar positions. Fourthly, programmatic actors are more likely to engage in intellectual exchange with outsiders than other actors, which makes them more prepared to respond to requests for interviews by policy process researchers. It is important to note that these factors increase the likelihood of becoming a programmatic actor, and particularly of taking a leadership role within a programmatic group.

The contestants in the race for legitimate authority, critically, do not compete on their own. A pattern evident in prior work on this topic is the formation of stable alliances of policy actors acting over the medium term. To these, we give the name “programmatic groups” (later Assumption I).¹ The policy actors who comprise them can be thought of as “programmatic actors.” By definition, programmatic actors are always part of a programmatic group; the PAF focusses on the collective dimension of their action. From an analytical standpoint, this is of the first importance. By treating programmatic groups as collective actors, we restore a usable base of micro-foundations to our model. Following (Scharpf, 1997, 58, 59), we can study directly both the “cognitive” and “evaluative” dimensions of programmatic groups, determining how the individuals who comprise them have constructed and communicated among themselves their particular understanding of relevant interests and relative gains. Central to these dimensions of a group is the social identification with this group (later Assumption II). We can determine through observation and analysis the program they seek to promote and the means available to them for doing so both in terms of their internal structure and of their external institutional environment (later Assumption III). Having done this, we can restore a limited but analytically useful measure of instrumental rationality to our analysis; rationality based not on abstract behavioral assumptions about individual but rather on observed cognitive and institutional features of collective actors and their environment (later Assumption IV).

Several necessary conditions define such a group; none by itself is sufficient. In the first place the potential programmatic group must be made up of policy actors, individuals who *already* hold or have ready access to the institutional levers of decision making in the policy area in question. The best ideas in the world—as academic researchers are only too well placed to know—will have little impact on policy if institutional power is not available to back them. A second condition is the emergence around the programmatic group of a distinct social identity. Originating from social psychology, the social identity approach takes a group-theoretical perspective on individual behavior according to which individual action is largely determined by the social context. Individuals then will always behave in a way that favors the in-group, if necessary, to the disadvantage of the out-group (Hornsey, 2008). Identification with a social group shapes a social identity that comprises the individual's feeling of belonging, positive evaluation, and emotional attachment toward the social group. Depending on the context, any one social identity can be salient and guide individual behavior—which one it will be is determined by accessibility and fit (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999). Accessibility is likely to be higher the stronger the social identity, whereby social identity strength results from frequent

interactions with other group members and a long group history; fit is largely dependent on the context at hand that can trigger a certain identity (Hornung et al., 2018).

While the defining features of programmatic group formation are the personal links based on shared or intersecting career paths (Genieys & Hassenteufel, 2015) and a likely feature of potential programmatic groups will be a previously strong sectoral identity, the resulting programmatic identity is likely to be readily accessible. The programmatic identity is irrevocably tied to the policy program and therefore the program is what binds the group over the long term. The elements of identity are complemented by the experience of programmatic action itself. Introducing a diachronic element to this analysis saves it from the problem of circular reasoning. The salience of the programmatic identity increases to the extent that “this social identity fits the policy issue at hand” as well as “with the extent to which the policy issue at hand activates a given social identity” (Hornung et al., 2018, 8). At the same time, past experience of collective action adds to the future salience of social identity. In this way, the PAF can remain agnostic as to which condition precedes the other; in any given case what we expect to see is that, regardless of order, the presence of both increases the overall salience of this identity as opposed to others for the programmatic actors of a programmatic group. For this process, physical proximity is not necessary but a regular contact and cohesiveness especially in the group's public communication appear as crucial (Bandelow & Hornung, 2019).

Taken together, these conditions distinguish the programmatic group from Sabatier's “advocacy coalition” (Sabatier, 1988, Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). As a necessary result of its definition, the programmatic group, is narrower and more closely integrated than would be the case of an advocacy coalition encompassing a complete policy subsystem. Actors such as organized interests and outside experts (except to the extent that these are brought directly into government), who are central to the advocacy coalition approach, have very little place here. What is more, the formation of programmatic groups rests on different premises than an advocacy coalition. While the latter is based on shared policy core beliefs as the binding element, a programmatic group consists of individuals who do not necessarily share policy core beliefs but have forged a collective social identity based on career trajectories and biographies that is stable for the policy-relevant medium term. Programmatic actors do have a personal interest whose enforcement requires collaboration with others based on mutual trust. This creates a very personal element that usually has an emotional component in social groups. Important binding elements of a programmatic group therefore are mutual trust and the shared social identification with the program, which is the programmatic identity.

Policy programs are not limited to single policies. Therefore, they usually embrace different types of instruments, including regulative and redistributive policies, and can also combine other policies such as social regulatory and distributive ones. One of the central ideas of the notion of policy programs is it that policy programs can crack hardened fronts that are often inherent in single policies. For example, redistributive policies produce profiteers and payers of redistribution measures. The field of health policy serves as an illustration for this: In earlier times, health policy has been dominated by the questions of whether and to what extent co-payments should be allowed, and whether employers and employees should pay social contribution in parity. Policy programs can provide a source for overcoming such conflicts in that they provide a vision and an identification for sectoral actors that enables major reforms to gain the agreement of a large proportion of sectoral actors. The scope of these visions is, however, adaptable as long as it is designated by an identifiable name commonly shared by the programmatic group. Thereby, both the Affordable Care Act, which is the explicit name of a reform, and the vision of Competition in a Solidaristic Framework in German health policy can be considered as programs (Beaussier, 2012; Hornung & Bandelow, 2018).

Focusing on career trajectories and on the social identity forged by programmatic action itself marks a clear distinction between the PAF and various models of bureaucratic politics, whether in the

American context (Allison, 1971) or in the European traditions of bureaucratic elites as the British treasury or the French *Grand Corps* (Suleiman, 1978). This does not imply that programmatic actors cannot equally be found, in slightly varying forms, also in US-American contexts (Derthick, 1979). The social identity of programmatic groups, we suggest, is forged not by pre-existing institutional structures but through personal interaction, and most of all by programmatic action itself. Nevertheless, institutional structures foster repeated interactions and help to build a programmatic group before this develops a social identity based on the binding element, which is the policy program around which the programmatic group forms.

Key assumptions:

- I Programmatic groups consist of policy actors who are defined as being in direct contact with the state's policymaking apparatus.
- II Programmatic groups thus create a subjective social identity, in the sense that both participants and competitors share an understanding of who are the key participants in a given programmatic group.
- III For the programmatic actors who make up programmatic groups, policy programs are the means by which the end of increased authority is sought. Programmatic actors are accordingly identified with respect to the policy program around which they coalesce. A policy program takes its place in a broader programmatic vision for a sector that—once established—is a source of identity and a focus of loyalty for the programmatic actors who support it.
- IV Programmatic groups follow a duality of behavioral incentives, including both a strategic interest toward (financial and regulative) authority and support for a policy idea. Competition for authority (for its own sake) is seen as a key motivating force. Successful adoption and implementation of a policy program is both a means to that end and a product of the increasing authority. This may not be how actors view themselves but, as a heuristic tool, it explains their action.

The PAF differs from other perspectives on policy change in that it considers that an important and understudied cause of change is endogenous to the policy process, rather than the result of exogenous shocks (as in models of punctuated equilibria), of belief-centered external advocacy (as in the advocacy coalition framework) or of functionalist problem pressure (as in policy cycle or incrementalist models). It is endogenous because the initiative and desire for change is born within the daily structures of policymaking, although bringing change to successful fruition may still depend on external factors, as will be shown later on. At the core of our approach is the human and dynamic element provided by policy actors whose institutional position provides the capacity to contribute to policy change. It is worth pausing for a moment, however, to ask why anyone should ever do this. In a context defined by institutional stability, individuals and groups generally play by the rules. The rules, in turn, generally define and limit the strategies and resources available to a given actor (individual or collective). Capacity to bring about change requires significant resources and available strategies, but these, in turn, are generally the reward for past success. Why should actors seek to change the very conditions that have brought them that success?

The answer, we suggest, lies in the desire to engage in what King and Lieberman (2009, 299) describe as the “authoritative rule-maker.” “Authoritative,” in this context, means more than just mandatory or binding, but also legitimate in the sense that rules are accepted by those to whom they are applied as being both inevitable and necessary. As such, it is distinct from the Weberian notion of power, which rests ultimately on the use of force. While both power and authority remain useful concepts, we agree with Orren and Skowronek (2004, 125) that “If power is the means, authority is frequently the objective” of public action. Influence, in contrast, understood as getting A to change his/her behavior

in ways that B prefers (Banfield, 1961), is very specific and thought of as too short-term oriented and limited to be used by PAF. Instead, the PAF relies on the use of the term authority, as it holds that the actors' goal is not (only) to realize policies but also to gain positions and thereby authority. In a way, achieving this goal brings with it increased influence, but in a specific form that programmatic actors strive for, namely the authority over others.

The focus on moments of reform and the potential agents of change, of course, does not blind us to the fact that there will always be actors in any given policy setting who, for a variety of reasons, do not desire change at all but rather work actively to maintain a *status quo*. The PAF indeed, more or less guarantees their presence by presuming that any attempt at change will be resisted by those deriving legitimate authority (and not merely material benefits) from a given *status quo*. Consequently, those eventually achieving authority will later defend it against the great reformers. Similarly, struggles internal to programmatic groups over authority within the group may arise. In such cases, social psychological perspectives on group dynamics may shed light on how this influences group cohesiveness and coordination and how this translates into the alteration of programmatic groups' strategies.

The PAF does not assume that programmatic action is the only possible source of change or resistance, nor does it propose that it has definitively replaced all other policy logics. In this context, it competes most directly with Hecló's (1974) premise that disinterested "puzzling" on the part of individual civil servants explains policy change in such circumstances, as well as all explanations based primarily on the functional imperative of "problem pressure." In a similar way, the PAF addresses resistance to change that cannot be accounted for simply by inertia or path dependence.

Bringing these premises together does not generate a general theory, but rather results in a mid-range framework for the analysis of public action, because it accords a central role to the intermediating and structuring role played by institutions. It thereby provides a framework within which theories can be constructed in a given institutional context. The use of the term framework is not coincidental but follows the classification of Schlager (2007). Sticking to the label of framework, we intend to keep the PAF open to the integration of theoretical elements from other research disciplines (such as social psychology, institutional economics, comparative politics, public administration) and handle it as a dynamic approach. In its current form, the PAF is already a synthesis from research in several disciplines that does not contradict any of them. At the same time, we aim to present here a first definition of assumptions and concepts as well as the formulation of first hypotheses on how these concepts are linked to lay the basis of the framework that needs to exist to underline its added value compared to established approaches. Having elaborated on the definitions in this section, we will proceed with the links between the theoretical concepts in the following two.

3 | THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE OF PROGRAMMATIC CHANGE

Change (and resistance to change) of sectoral programs emerges as the principle dependent variable in theories compatible with the PAF, and the premises of the framework suggests that explanations for change will be found in the competition for authority. Thus, the PAF is above all a framework in which to understand policy change. But what is it exactly that changes? Our focus on "programs" represents an attempt to stake out a useful middle ground between individual instruments (Lascombes & Le Galès, 2005), and overarching public philosophies (Weir, 1992), or a global *référentiel* (Jobert & Muller, 1987). With respect to the former, we seek to provide additional context. As regards the latter,

we question the premise that such overarching cognitive and normative integration is the norm. Our starting point is that the world of policymaking is more likely to be made up of competing “frames” (Schön & Rein, 1994; Shanahan, Jones, & McBeth, 2011) among which differences in definitions and priorities will create conflict.

It is at the level of more specific sectors that we expect to find explicit policies for public action. In defining policy sectors, we borrow the words from Knoke (1994, 279) to designate them as all policies and actors “concerned with formulating, advocating, and selecting courses of action to solve that domain’s problem” (also found in Metz, Angst, & Fischer, 2020). It is at this level that we find the agencies and other mechanisms of the state, as well as the instruments of public policy. Indeed, the demarcation of policy sectors is questionable. Taking the example of health, this may as a subsector falling ambiguously in a variety of overarching policy sectors, for example environmental policy (dealing with the effects on public health) and technology policy (when it comes to technological answers to preventing, discovering, and curing diseases). In subsectors, programmatic actors are even more likely to achieve authority and implement their policy programs. In that, focusing only on a subsector can equally serve as a strategy of programmatic actors.

Following Lascoumes and Le Galès (2005, 13), we understand instruments to be measures “whose function is to organize a specific set of social relations between public authority and its intended public.” Instruments, in this sense, are the quanta of public action: a given tax, regulation, or distribution mechanism. A program, in our sense, can be thought of as a coherent set of instruments aimed at achieving a public purpose at the sectoral level. A policy program is thus defined both from above, by reference to the sector and subsector within which it is situated, and from below by reference to the explicit instruments that comprise it. By their nature, programs are algorithmic; they purport to produce desired outcomes through the application of appropriate instruments. In this way, programs are qualitatively different from the instruments that comprise them, which are characterized by Lascoumes and Le Galès (2005, 15) as “generic,” applicable to a variety of different policies. Programs apply the instruments that comprise them to a single policy and a given purpose. Their definition and the identity that being associated with them provides to their supporters is closely bound to the end they claim.

4 | EXPLANATORY LINKS OF PROGRAMMATIC ACTION

A central contention of the PAF is that “politics” is not limited to electoral competition. Legitimate authority can be and frequently is sought through direct participation in shaping the content of authoritative rules. The participants in this game are typically grouped together under the label “bureaucrats,” but this is misleading in a number of ways. Most obviously, not all are career civil servants. In addition to the ubiquitous “high civil servants” central to the French policy process, programmatic actors may be found among short-serving “advisors,” territorial administrators, or even individuals and organizations whose place is outside the strictly defined boundaries of the public sector. What all of them have in common is that at the heart of their professional activity are institutional positions granting direct access to the ongoing process of policymaking, at least that of policy formulation but not necessarily limited to this stage of the policy cycle. The authority they strive for lies exactly in the desire to gain control over the evolution of policies and to help these to place them higher in their individual positions where this authority is again strengthened.

A second distinction, thus, is between programmatic actors and the strict Weberian notion of “bureaucracy” as a collectively rational instrument for executing political decisions. At the very core of the definition of programmatic action is definition of policy content, not merely the execution of content determined elsewhere. Policy “content,” in this context, can mean anything from the substantive

change that the policy is meant to bring about to the administrative or regulatory means marshalled to ensure this. It is not at all necessary to assert, moreover, that the programmatic actors involved are the sole intellectual authors of every scrap of content. John Kingdon's much quoted point that the ultimate source of any given policy idea may be impossible to pin down is well taken, and does not detract from the assertions made here. What we argue is that while programmatic actors may, at least in part, be shoppers in the "market for policy ideas" (Dudley & Richardson, 2002; Hecl, 1974, 309), they are not mere "brokers." Even if all of the individual elements of a given policy could be shown to originate from various issue advocates or interest representatives, the act of selection and combination, what John Campbell (2004, 69) labels "bricolage" (see also Deruelle, 2016), is nonetheless creative, and the result original in the sense that it could not be predicted simply from an inventory of its components, any more than a dinner menu can be perfectly predicted from a shopping list.

In order to operationalize these assumptions, an institutional context must be specified, which in turn will provide concrete definitions of key terms. The "state's policymaking apparatus," for health payment policy to take an obvious example from our first assumption, is different in Germany and the United States. In the first case but not the second, representatives of self-governing professions play a direct role. Specifying key definitions for a given institutional setting makes it possible to use the PAF to generate setting specific hypotheses and theories. Supplementing these, and making comparison possible, are more general hypotheses derived directly from the assumptions above.

The above considerations allow for formulating three key hypotheses on the likeliness of programmatic group formation. Group formation always follows the assumption that policy actors strive toward increased authority, which is the behavioral incentive that drives them to the formation of a group, while it is shared career trajectories like educational training and positions (Career Trajectories Hypothesis) and biographical linkages, such as repeated cooperation in an organization or similar (Shared Biography Hypothesis) as well as opportunities to form around a promotion of ideas (Program Arena Hypothesis) that decide on which policy actors form a programmatic group.

I. The formation of a programmatic group is—*ceteris paribus*—more likely if

- a. career trajectories of key policy actors are homogenous (Career Trajectories Hypothesis)
- b. key policy actors share biographical linkages in their history (Shared Biography Hypothesis)
- c. there are formal bodies or recurring informal occasions in which key policy actors belonging to different organizations or agencies can come together to develop solutions for current policy-oriented challenges (Program Arena Hypothesis)

When constituted along these lines, a programmatic group functions, for the span of its existence, as a genuine collective actor. In the typology of collective actors proposed by Fritz W. Scharpf (1997, 57) such an elite is a "movement," in which individual power resources are placed at the service of a common goal. With this in mind, the study of institutional structures takes on renewed interest. Along with the identification of veto points or elements of positive reinforcements in chains of path dependence, we should begin looking for features that encourage or inhibit the formation of programmatic groups. The salience of programmatic groups will be greatest, we suggest, when policymaking is relatively independent of electoral or interest group influence, but characterized nevertheless by competition among distinct policy actors for legitimate authority over the sector in question.

We suggest that the success of programmatic groups is dependent on different types of resources. Successful programmatic groups benefit from their closeness to the decision making process (Direct Resources Hypothesis), the access to professional knowledge (Intellectual Resources Hypothesis), and the authority to create and occupy new positions (Institutional Resources Hypothesis). By studying the policy process the PAF also focuses on the power of opponents (Situational Power Hypothesis)

and potential allies of a programmatic group (Tactical Alliances Hypothesis). These resources become particularly important given that elected officials may fear the authority of programmatic actors over key processes in policymaking and aim at replacing these very key positions by actors of their own reach. An example has been the Blair era in Great Britain (Wilson & Barker, 2003). The five listed factors of success for programmatic action may not be exhaustive nor will any one of them be as relevant as the others in a given situation. It is a question of evidence under which conditions one of them, several in combination, or others not yet discovered enable programmatic groups to accomplish their goal of increased authority and to this end manage to adopt their policy program.

II. Programmatic groups are more likely to accomplish their goals if

- a. they have access to resources that enable their members to intervene in the collective construction of policies and decision making process (Direct Resources Hypothesis)
- b. they have access to resources that enable members of programmatic actor to access and influence the loci of intellectual reflection on policies and reforms (Intellectual Resources Hypothesis)
- c. members of programmatic groups institutionalize their authority by placing themselves in new power positions created by their policies (Institutional Resources Hypothesis)
- d. the dominant programmatic group is pressured by outside developments and supported by interest representatives and issue advocates or is able to take advantage of the demobilization of such advocates or representatives (Situational Power Hypothesis)
- e. programmatic groups are in a position to make tactical alliances with powerful partisan actors and interest groups (Tactical Alliances Hypothesis)

Comprised of an array of instruments, programs may ultimately involve an array of organizations, each of which both derives authority from its association with the program and wields a measure of authority over it. This multiplicity carries the risk of incoherence in implementation, but this does not diminish the need for a clear coherence in design, which constitutes an essential factor of success for policy programs (Program Coherence Hypothesis). Programs typically have generally accepted labels, known both to supporters and opponents. To those who conceive them, they are seen as greater than the sum of the instruments that comprise them. They present the key source of social identity for the programmatic group that conceives and promotes them.

Besides the necessity of coherence for a program to be successful, meaning that the instruments within the greater vision of the program should not contradict the overarching goal, we hypothesize (at least) two further characteristics that make an emerging program more likely to take over or a dominant program more likely to stay in place. Integrating an exogenous component and the frequent empirical observation that societal developments influence policymaking (Baumgartner, Jones, & Mortensen, 2017; Koski & Workman, 2018), a program is said to be more successful if it addresses emerging challenges (Program Responsiveness Hypothesis) and provides a narrative that fits the dominant national mood (Program Fit Hypothesis). Especially the latter hypothesis has been derived from a study on French and German labor market policy, in which the programmatic group successfully dominated the public discourse and was able to impose its reform narrative in a way that legitimized even strongly resisted policies (Bandelow & Hornung, 2019). The hypotheses on policy programs' success sum up as follows:

III. Policy programs once enacted are more successful if

- a. the program is coherent (Program Coherence Hypothesis)
- b. the program addresses emerging challenges (Program Responsiveness Hypothesis)

- c. it provides a narrative that fits into and is responsive to the dominant national mood (Program Fit Hypothesis)

Figure 1 presents the overall logic of the approach.

5 | CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH AGENDA

The PAF provides a new perspective on policy process research that highlights the importance of the struggle among actors within the state for positions and authority. To this end, it focuses on the formation of groups capable of collective action, as well as the role of biographies and specific policy programs in forming and strengthening these groups. By focusing on these factors, the framework provides a necessary complement to existing Anglo-American approaches to understanding policy-making. For example, case studies of French arms policy and German health policy underpin the argument presented in this contribution (Faure, 2020; Hornung & Bandelow, 2018). In all these examples, it was possible to identify programmatic actors from diverse ideological lines actively pushing for reforms in the direction of a greater vision of the policy sector, without an observable external event enabling them to do so, and benefited from this with career promotions. The PAF thereby explains the internal dynamics of policies in cases where external events did not induce policy change. Additionally, the framework provides an explanation for coalitions among actors that neither follow the bounded logic of public choice nor the outside orientation of shared policy core beliefs. Both the emergence and political relevance of programmatic groups as “movements” may be analyzed through the analytical vocabulary of the PAF. In this way, the PAF sheds light on the formation but also on the endurance and eventual decline of programmatic groups shaping policy change and policy content. The PAF is intended as a mid-range framework applicable to diverse policy sectors in fully

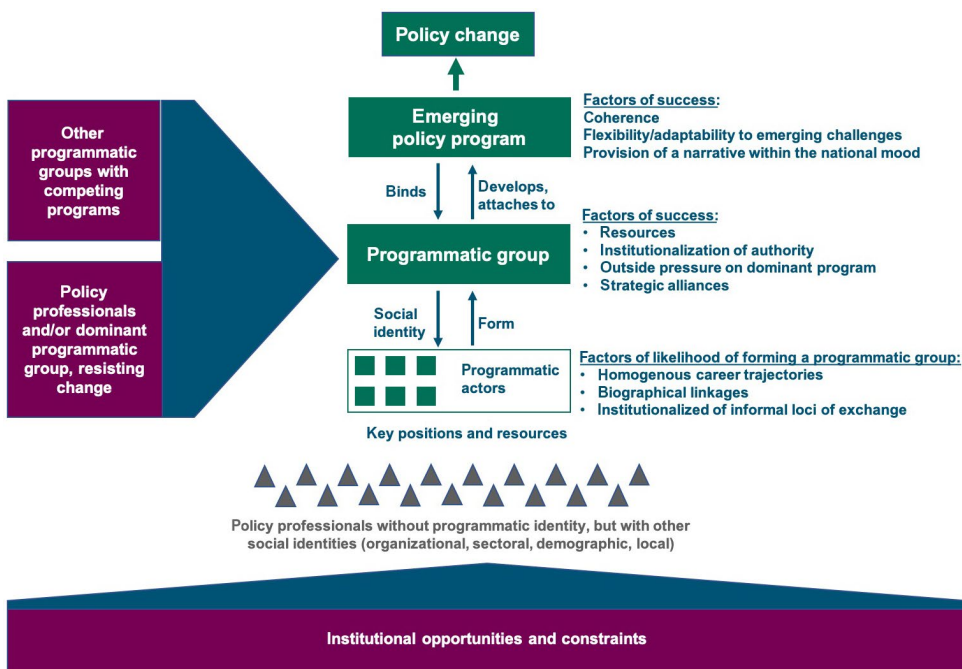


FIGURE 1 Programmatic Action Framework

Source: Own depiction.

institutionalized political systems and sectors close to the state, including transport policy (Bleiklie & Michelsen, 2019; Döhler, 2019). As with all frameworks, there are cases that promise to emphasize in a particular manner its added value. It is specifically valid for policy sectors in which the state influence is substantial and direct in the sense that the state does not only act as a regulator but is a supplier of services. In such cases, the leeway for regulation is wider. In most countries, this is true for health, education, defense, and research policies.

While the PAF is clearly distinguished from existing theories of the policy process, its assumptions and foundations do not necessarily contradict existing approaches. Under adequate consideration of PAF's scope, a cross-fertilization of theories or single elements is possible. Nevertheless, as a stand-alone framework, the PAF already presents an innovative and original lens on the policy process with the potential to inform the production of new knowledge on policymaking dynamics across the world. Beyond providing the conceptual foundation of the framework and suggesting an analytical vocabulary suitable to it, this article paves the way for future applications of the PAF by presenting testable hypotheses for empirical application. Such applications to concrete cases will serve to assess the value of these propositions in the context of the PAF, but will also contribute to defining more precisely the relevant range of the framework. We expect the boundary between programmatic and partisan logics of action, for example, to vary among institutional settings. Likewise, the effective—if not necessarily constitutional—boundaries of the state are likely to vary from one case to another. Far from invalidating the PAF as a generalizable approach, these variations as they are made concrete through empirical study should increase its comparative explanatory power by providing a structural foundation on which to construct stronger behavioral theories.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTE

- ¹ An earlier version of this argument in Genieys and Smyrl (2008), referred to collective actors of this kind as “programmatic elites.” Subsequent work, however, suggested that this label be reserved for a particular type of programmatic group (Hassenteufel et al. 2010). Accordingly, we use the more general term throughout the present work, preferring “group” to “actor” in order to stress that programmatic action is collective.

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