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The Tactical Displacement of Ideas, or why I am Becoming Lakatos Intolerant

Die ideenorientierten (bzw. politikinhaltorientierten) Ansätze in der Politikfeldanalyse bauen auf den aus der Wissenschaftstheorie abgeleiteten Modellen auf, wie etwa auf dem Paradigma-Modell von Kuhn oder dem Konzept des Forschungsprogramms von Lakatos. Ein zentrales Beispiel dafür ist das Konzept der „Advocacy-Coalition“ von Paul Sabatier, denn dieses stellt eine Analogie zu Lakatos' Modell der „grundlegenden“ Postulate und „negativen Heuristik“ („protective Layers“) dar. Der Artikel strebt eine Kritik dieser Analogie an und weitet diese auch auf andere ideenorientierten Ansätze aus. Ein solchermaßen konzipiertes Theoretisieren der Ideen bringt nämlich Probleme mit sich, die sich in der Praxis der Politikfeldanalyse niederschlagen, insbesondere auf deren Anspruch einer dynamischen Analyse der Politik und ihrer Veränderung(en).

Obwohl die ursprüngliche Motivation der ideenorientierten Ansätze in der Politikfeldanalyse eine Kritik des sogenannten „black-boxing“ war, das an den institutionalistischen und interessenorientierten Ansätzen geübt worden ist, ist diese Kritik nun durch die Analogie mit Lakatos auf der Seite der ideenorientierten Ansätze selbst. Das Konzipieren der Idee der Politik („policy idea“) als „grundlegende Überzeugung“ verwischt ihren dynamischen Charakter; ihre angenommene Ambivalenz, die letztendlich laut den ideenorientierten Ansätzen das „Politische“ einer Idee ausmachen soll. Nach einer kritischen Diskussion dieser problematischen Analogie mündet die Reflexion in das Foucault'sche Konzept von „tactical displacement“, das einen analytischen Schlüssel für das Aufbrechen des Paradoxons der Ideen in der Politikfeldanalyse darstellen kann.

*Keywords: Lakatos, Sabatier, Foucault, Ideen
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Introduction

Ideational approaches have made significant contributions to the fields of policy studies and political science over the past two decades or so. Seeking to overcome the inherent staleness of the traditional juxtaposition between structure and agency, several new approaches have employed ideational categories to mediate between institutional structures and the reasoning of political actors within them. Opening up policy studies to political ideas has not increased its level of rationality or idealism, however. Just as often, changing ideas have been shown to be the locus of conflict and ambiguity, but this only underlines their inherent political importance. It is perhaps no longer even the question whether ideas matter, but instead how they do so and through what conceptual lenses we should study them.

To the group of ideational approaches we should not only count scholars using an emphatic concept of “ideas” (Blyth 2002; Campbell 2002; Goldstein/Keohane 1993; Walsh 2000),

but also similar approaches focusing on the policy impact of ideational phenomena such as discourses, arguments, interpretation, frames, policy paradigms, epistemic communities, policy communities or advocacy coalitions. They conceptualize ideas in many different ways and attach them to vastly different methodologies, of course, but still under the basic premise that political analysis is impoverished without at least some view to ideas.

Since political science has no generic tradition for making sophisticated descriptive analyses of ideas or arguments, most ideational approaches borrow concepts from other disciplines. Many scholars have imported concepts from philosophy and linguistics in order to perform discourse analysis in a policy or institutional setting. For example, Schmidt (2008) draws on both Foucault's theory of power and knowledge as well as Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in her formulation of a generic "discursive institutionalism". Others have drawn from normative political philosophy, for example as we see in Hajer and Wagenaar's (2003) work on "deliberative policy analysis" that draws on Habermas and similar theories of deliberative democracy (cf. also Fischer/Forester 1993; Fischer 2003). Similarly, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) draw their key concept of "isomorphism" from the less known discipline of human ecology, while Baumgartner and Jones (1993) have imported the concept "punctuated equilibrium" from Gould's evolutionary biology. Finally, a number of ideational policy approaches such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier/Jenkins-Smith 1993) as well as Peter Hall's work on policy paradigms (1993) draw on science studies and the philosophy of science, in particular on the work of Thomas Kuhn and Imre Lakatos.

This article aims to address the latter group of ideational approaches where the structure of political ideas is conceptualized with a model lifted from Kuhn's and especially Lakatos' classic analyses of scientific development. The main focus is on the use of the Lakatos analogy in the ACF and to some extent also Hall's theory of policy paradigms, but mainly understood as examples of how ideas are conceptualized in policy studies. The aim is not to review the ACF as such or give an overview of its empirical achievements, far from it, but instead to use its Lakatos analogy as an opportunity to discuss some general problems related to the analytical function of ideas.

The criticism raised here is not against adaptations from other disciplines in itself. Recognizing the traditional weakness of political science in specifying the structure of ideas, it is legitimate and probably even necessary to draw on other disciplines. However, we should also examine the value of such analogies critically and consider their usefulness in the study of public policy. While drawing on other disciplines can be both inspiring and function as an eye opener to previously overlooked anomalies, analogies are by definition seductive. One can easily forget where the analogy ends and automatically assume that all characteristics of the original will also be present in the new case. Here, this problem would involve a process where one would ascribe every single aspect of a Lakatosian scientific research program to a set of policy ideas even if the analogy only had a limited validity at the outset.

Hence, the key question here is thus not if these approaches stay true to the original meaning of the adapted concepts, since the whole idea of an analogy is to stretch the original meaning. It is rather the objective to discuss the epistemological underpinning of the analogy between Lakatos' scientific research programs on the one hand and a set of policy-relevant ideas on the other. To what extent is the analogy well founded and if not, what implications may this have for the study of public policy?

There is of course more than one set of criteria for judging what a policy approach should be able to provide in terms of analytical opportunities. This raises the question of which standards the article uses to evaluate the usefulness of the Lakatos mimicking in approaches such as the

ACF. Sabatier's own compilation of policy approaches sets up its own standards for a theory of the policy process, and it is fair to say that the issues of causality, hypothesis testing and a cumulative research agenda play a large role there (Sabatier 2007, 8).

Without necessarily discarding the validity of such standards, the following discussion mainly applies two other, yet quite simple standards: First, is the ideational approach in question able to satisfy the analytical desires for which ideas were adapted into policy studies in the first place? The following sections specify this standard in more detail. And second, does this specific adaptation of ideas into policy studies leave us ready to understand and explain situations of change, be it subtle or dramatic?

In order to approach these questions, it is necessary to go back and consider not only what characterizes the use of Lakatos in the ACF, but furthermore to ask why these models seemed so appealing to ideational approaches in the first place. In the following sections, the article discusses the broader background for Lakatos' popularity in this area. It involves some critical remarks on the conception of ideas in the analogy, because they tend to be understood in a simplified manner as things in themselves. The Lakatos analogy involves a problematic essentialism, it is argued, which can only be addressed if we reconsider the underlying conception of "shared beliefs" in both the ACF and similar approaches. The middle part of the article discusses the substance of the Lakatos analogy in relation to the ACF and what it means to theorize the ideational aspect of public policy on that basis. In the latter part of the article, this leads to a broader discussion of the tactical function of ideas in public policy, which is in part inspired by the Foucauldian concept of "tactical polyvalence".

Black Boxes and Shared Beliefs

It is often noted in the ideas literature that one of the key advantages of introducing ideas, arguments or learning processes into policy studies is the ability to escape the tendency to treat politics as a black box. In some cases, the individual political actor, institutions or the state are also being unboxed instead of politics as a whole, but what remains is a general dissatisfaction with such traditional conceptions.

Thus, most attempts to open the black box of politics are motivated by a desire to unveil some internal or intrinsic form of reasoning in public policies, be it in the policy process itself or in related explanatory factors. This was the point of departure in Hecló's classical idea of policy-making as "puzzling on society's behalf" (Hecló 1974, 305). Instead of giving a purely mechanical explanation of various social policies, Hecló wanted to understand the process where bureaucrats reason and work to solve problems on behalf of society. A similar attempt at outing the hidden political reason is made in Peter Hall's renowned article on policy paradigms, where he targets the black-boxing of state theory and economic policy in previous studies (Hall 1993, 275).

The key challenge is of course how to replace the previous conceptions and introduce a reasoning aspect to the policy process without either adding infinite complexity or just substitute one simplified category for another. The question is what constitutes the real problem in black-boxed understanding of public policy. It is often reasonable to leave something in the dark in order to achieve a distinctive focus; and typically, cutting an object or idea in the shape of a box is also motivated on methodological grounds. It is very important how this demarcation is established, however, because any theoretical model comes with a limited focus and a limited room

of possible variations. The following discussion goes further into this problem in the context of policy ideas where we should pay attention to the way in which ideational approaches sometimes create new black boxes out of political ideas and thus end up with problems similar to those addressed by Hecló.

Before turning specifically to the use of Lakatos, another common feature of ideational approaches should be discussed besides the black box. When introduced into policy models, ideas are often conceptualized as some form of “shared beliefs”. Some of the inspiration for early contributions in the ideas literature came from studies on the structure of belief systems in both political elites and mass publics (e.g. Converse 1964). There is a big leap, however, between having belief systems as the study object in itself on the one hand and portraying these beliefs as the decisive dynamic in policy processes on the other hand.

If we accept for a moment that beliefs can in fact be used to characterize the ideational aspect of the policy process, the question is what structure and function these beliefs have. According to several writers in this tradition, beliefs can have impact on the policy process, because they are shared by actors in a given policy subsystem, and because their particular function is to glue the policy community or advocacy coalition together.

For example, Peter Haas defines his key concept of “epistemic community” as a network of policy professionals with shared normative and causal beliefs, and shared notions of validity in addition to a common policy enterprise (Haas 1992, 3, 6). Even though the concept of the epistemic stems indirectly from Foucault’s notion of the episteme, Peter Haas transforms the episteme into a set of shared beliefs located in the minds of individuals (Haas 1992, 26; cf. also Haas 1990, 221). If we look to other popular approaches in the field, they tend to build on similar assumptions of shared beliefs, for example in Rhodes and Marsh who define policy communities as a network in which, “[...] [a]ll participants share basic values” (Rhodes/Marsh 1992, 187). Likewise, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith conceptualize advocacy coalitions as a group of people, “[...] who share a set of basic beliefs (policy goals plus causal and other perceptions)” (Jenkins-Smith/Sabatier 1993, 5; cf. also Sabatier/Weible 2007).

Despite this widespread focus on shared basic beliefs, it is sometimes not perfectly clear why beliefs or ideas must necessarily be shared and agreed upon for them to become politically relevant. Even a very simple concept of politics would be able to argue on the contrary that ideas become politically potent precisely to the extent that they are the object of disagreement, ambiguity, conflict and compromise. The emphasis on shared basic beliefs must stem from a different place and we should consider why so many policy scholars take consensus for granted in this way. What makes writers such as Sabatier rely so heavily on a concept of positively articulated shared beliefs? Before turning to the implicit analogy with Lakatos’ research programs, we should first recall the theory of belief systems in Sabatier’s advocacy coalition framework plus to some extent the similar structure of ideas in Hall’s theory of policy paradigms.

The Lakatos Analogy in Policy Models

The main issue is whether conceiving ideas as shared basic beliefs will really overcome the black-boxing of previous institutionalist theories or rather create a new black box in its place. What we would like to know more explicitly is the exact content of these shared beliefs and what analytical consequences follow from positioning them as an ontological basis. Maarten Hajer has criticized Sabatier on this point for black-boxing the “why” and the “how” of policy change

in order to remain within a neopositivist methodological doctrine (Hajer quoted in Fischer 2003, 101). Hajer's criticism is right on this point and in line with the general argument here, but there may be other reasons involved in Sabatier's particular take on ideas in the policy process than simply methodology.

At the outset, the advocacy coalition framework includes a large number of claims that are relatively uncontroversial in political science, because the framework attempts to incorporate the findings of all major approaches into one large cumulative body of knowledge (see for instance Sabatier/Weible 2007, 202). The problem with the previous approaches, Sabatier says, is that they tend to ignore the role of ideas (Sabatier 1993, 15). The new claim in Sabatier's framework is that the outcome of a given policy subsystem is determined to a large extent by the belief systems that glue actors within the subsystem together.

The explanatory value of belief systems allegedly stems from their differentiated structure in which some elements are variable and respond to failure, while a well-protected core remains stable over at least a decade (Jenkins-Smith/Sabatier 1993, 5). This structure is very important to the theory, because "the basic strategy of the framework is to use the structure of belief systems to predict changes in beliefs and attempted changes in policies over time" (Sabatier 1993, 30), which is to be evaluated in a strict procedure of testing falsifiable hypotheses (Jenkins-Smith/Sabatier 1993, 3).

Although Sabatier quotes a number of classic sources to this model of belief systems such as Putnam, Axelrod, and Converse, it seems relatively clear that the essential source of inspiration for this model of ideas in the policy subsystem is Lakatos' description of scientific research programs (Sabatier 1993, 30; Lakatos 1970). Sabatier is not the first scholar in public policy literature to use this analogy, but it is probably the most well-known and systematic adaptation. In an earlier contribution, Majone made the proposition that policy development resembles the structure of scientific development as it is described in both Kuhn's and Lakatos' philosophy of science (Majone 1991). The thrust of Majone's argument is that the patterns seem to match between policy development and scientific development, but as another scholar writes in the same book, this analogy rests upon "far-reaching assumptions" (Wittrock 1991, 345).

Another relevant point of comparison here is Peter Hall's classic article mentioned before where he argues that the structure and pattern of change in a policy paradigm is similar to how Kuhn describes the development of a scientific paradigm (Hall 1993, 279). Despite the fact that Hall's main focus is on the state while Sabatier's theory has a priority on the policy subsystem, there is a striking resemblance between the three-fold structures of policy ideas in each theory. Hall separates three orders of policy change, where the core category of third order change is reserved to fundamental changes of basic policy goals such as the movement from Keynesianism to monetarism. These rare changes are, Hall claims without giving very precise arguments as to why, simply akin to the scientific revolutions described by Kuhn (Hall 1993, 284).

Two aspects of Hall's Kuhn adaptation are worth mentioning here. First, he does not clarify how far he is willing to take the analogy with Kuhn and whether policy paradigms are also incommensurable like their scientific counterparts. If this were the case, it would not exactly bode well for the theory's flexibility in terms of explaining change. Second, while Hall's three orders of policy change does not stem from Kuhn's vocabulary, they do seem to have a strong affinity with the Lakatos model.

In both Hall's and Sabatier's theories, policy ideas are claimed to have an extremely stable core that consists of the most fundamental values and worldviews, basically what we would normally call ontology. In Sabatier's version, the structure is divided not in three orders, but in

a deep core, a near core, and a surface of secondary aspects (Sabatier 1993, 31). The deep core is almost perfectly stable and contains the fundamental normative and ontological axioms such as good and evil, the nature of man and the concept of justice.

In contrast to Hall's policy paradigms, Sabatier's methodology commits him to ground the deep core of an advocacy coalition in the minds of individual actors, although it is not clear how the ontology of social values such as good and evil can really be built on individuals. The deep core applies to all policy areas, while the near core of basic policy strategies is both specific to the policy subsystem and subject to change in some situations. Finally, the surface mounts a protective belt of secondary beliefs that can easily change, both in order to implement and to protect the policy core (Sabatier 1993, 31).

Several aspects of the Lakatos analogy call for discussion. Before I turn to the main problems of this analogy, it is important to notice that Sabatier also changes the meaning of Lakatos' categories, but without clearly establishing why. In the same way as Hall establishes an ontological core at the centre of his theory on policy ideas, Sabatier descends very quickly into fundamental axioms so general that they are perhaps relatively unimportant in analyses of policy change.

The core of Lakatos' research program consists of two or maybe five scientific postulates at the maximum (Lakatos/Feyerabend 1999, 103). In addition to not being ontological axioms located in the minds of individuals, these postulates are both specific to the given research program and although it is a well-protected core, they are definitely less stable than say the nature of man. It is also safe to say that the core postulates of a research program are openly articulated, since they are typically put down in writing and even sometimes mathematical formulas. It is difficult to see, on the contrary, why we should expect the ontological value axioms of a group of individuals to be overtly recognized (Fischer 2003, 107). Is it not the starting point of studying policy ideas that some aspects or assumptions are hidden, exempt from overt contestation? At least, most ideational approaches do point out that some aspects are tacit, non-articulated, or in some fashion taken for granted within a given context in order for policies to function in their day-to-day practice.

The key issue here is to what extent a theory of policy ideas can base itself on pure methodological individualism and expect all relevant aspects of policy ideas and discourse to be positively articulated and recognized by individual actors. This type of critique has been essential in the establishment of the alternative variety of "interpretive frameworks" in policy research in which the actions of both policymakers and citizens are seen as being embedded in social and discursive contexts rather than accessible to the researcher in a raw and atomistic form (Fischer 2003; Yanow 1996; 1999). A similar critique of individualist ontology is found in Hajer's work on environmental discourse coalitions (1995, 69–70). The important aspect in this context is how Sabatier's theory seems to take the overt status of policy ideas for granted, since it is not really argued why this aspect of the analogy with scientific research programs is even applicable in the world of politics.

Quite the contrary, because while Sabatier's theory seems to imply that ideas and values are prone to have a larger policy impact the more clearly demarcated, and deep-rooted they are, this is in fact a highly problematic assumption. For example, Stone's (2002) seminal formulation stresses the generic ambivalence of ideas in the policy domain and demonstrates how the potential for conflict and change only becomes greater when the political meaning of a phenomenon is not simply given. Hajer comes to a similar conclusion in his analysis of pollution policy where the storylines are characterized as being even more effective the more "multi-interpretable" they are (quoted in Fischer 2003, 107). By opening the analysis of advocacy coalitions to different

discursive interpretations, Hajer is thus able to uncover more sophisticated layers of political conflict and contestation in the area of environmental policy. In general, there are obviously different ways to conceptualize the inherent ambivalence of political ideas and different ways to turn the conception of policy ideas into specific analyses, which we will return to briefly in the final section on tactical displacements. For now, it is essential to underline how the Lakatos analogy leads Sabatier's theory into an uneasy position where ideas are simply assumed to be as clear and unambiguous as a mathematical formula.

A similar discussion could be raised on the other steps in the analogy. For example, if public policies do actually have protective belts, they might differ quite substantially from their alleged counterparts in a scientific research program, i.e. the so-called negative and positive heuristics. The key purpose here is to question why Sabatier and others find the Lakatosian structure so appealing, when its content, function and boundaries have relatively little to do with the policy process. Other than the observation that there are both stable and changeable elements, is there any particularly obvious reason why the development of environmental policy, for example, should resemble the internal development of Newtonian physics?

Lakatos and Sabatier as Anarchists in Disguise?

There are at least three possible reasons why some mainstream scholars find it tempting to establish a fully-fledged analogy between belief systems in policy development on the one hand and the philosophy of science on the other.

First of all, there is some element of scientism in this attempt to incorporate the Lakatos model in political science. Demonstrating a fundamental theoretical affinity between public policy and scientific development enables us, it may seem, to fraternize with the major players of Western civilization. Newton, Copernicus and Einstein seem to be "more scientific" scholars to stand on the shoulders of than say Marx, Hegel, and Nietzsche, and the Lakatos analogy creates a basic association between politics and the former group while distancing itself from the latter. We should keep in mind that Lakatos himself considered the social sciences to be on roughly the same scientific level as astrology (Lakatos/Feyerabend 1999, 107), so the consideration of favourite playmates is not far off. Although policy scholars such as Sabatier may not agree with this evaluation, the ACF literature does pay considerable attention to how the policy sciences can become more scientific, understood here in a rather traditional sense of accumulating causal relationships through strict hypothesis testing (Jenkins-Smith/Sabatier 1993, 3).

The second reason why Lakatos is so popular in ideational approaches has more to do with methodology, a topic that was discussed earlier also. Many of the concepts that ideational approaches have adapted to theorize the role of ideas – such as discourses, the episteme, framing, and arguments – are all somewhat difficult to operationalize within the rather traditional political science methodology that they use. Neither discourses nor epistemes work particularly well as either the dependent or the independent variable in a causal relationship, because they are originally created in order to clarify that which defies such analytical separations. It was one of the reasons why such concepts became introduced to political science in the first place, but the lack of clearly demarcated entities clearly poses a problem for dedicated rationalist projects like Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework. This does not mean that any attempt to use ideas as variables will inevitably fail, only that there is an analytical reason behind what may look like a methodological deficit.

In other words, the claim here is that the ACF is built on the Lakatos analogy, because it allows – or, at least because it seems to allow – a black-boxing of ideas into a neat and perfectly demarcated deep core. It seems almost as if the vital function of the deep core in Sabatier’s theoretical architecture is not to explain anything. Being constant and limited to basic ontology, it is difficult to see the deep core playing a dynamic role in specific policy studies (see also Hajer 1995, 72). Its function, it seems, is to establish order and a solid foundation on which the three-fold model can be built.

Lakatos’ model of a core surrounded by concentric protective belts seems to offer this kind of a fixed base and a clear demarcation. This is no coincidence, since Lakatos was very conscious about demarcation in order to keep his model close to a Popperian rationalism while still resembling Kuhn’s more constructivist account of scientific development. The commitment to demarcation is the reason why Lakatos’ main critic, the self-proclaimed epistemological anarchist Paul Feyerabend, continuously referred to his model of a scientific core and protective belts as an “epistemology of law and order” (Feyerabend 1975, 181).

In a similar fashion, one could argue that the heavy reliance on the Lakatos analogy transforms the ACF into an ideational approach of law and order. It gives the impression that one can reap all the explorative benefits of policy ideas and discursive phenomena without compromising the strictly rationalist stands on methodology and epistemology one bit. Since we are never presented with a clear argument of why policy ideas should resemble the scientific postulates in Lakatos’ research programs, one could suspect that the demarcation itself is more important than what the substance of the ideational model really means.

The third reason for Lakatos’ popularity in policy theories follows from the same point, i.e. the aspiration to law and order in these theories. As Feyerabend correctly points out, the main purpose for Lakatos is not to be able to describe the structure of the scientific research program itself. What he wants to do is to show that the development of a scientific research program is essentially a rational process. Thereby, he hopes to save science from merely becoming a reflection of “mob psychology”, that is a situation where scientific claims are rejected not because they are false, but because enough people oppose them. Reducing science to mob psychology was the indirect outcome of Kuhn’s work on scientific revolutions, and again we find Lakatos wanting to take his model in a more rationalist direction. On the one hand, Lakatos’ description tells him that all research programs are struck by anomalies at some point, but still on the other hand he wishes to maintain the Popperian belief in a bulletproof method of eliminating anomalies and that the progress of a research program is essentially rationally guided.

In this delicate situation, Lakatos brings up a new and very inventive concept. The idea is to grant new theories and thus research programs a “breathing space” before considering them as being degenerate in the event of falsified hypotheses (Feyerabend 1975, 183). It means that you do not have to abandon a research program just because it fails. With the option of granting a breathing space, any proponent of a degenerative program can always claim to still be on a rational course and say that fewer anomalies will persist in the future development of the program. But if we follow this principle, how is it ever possible to rationally criticize a researcher who sticks to a degenerate research program?

Whether he sticks with the program and hopes for better results or whether he abandons it in favour of something else, both choices can be equally rational. Lakatos does have an auxiliary concept to judge on these matters, which is the question of whether a program continues to accumulate more facts and empirical content. But for a law and order rationality, this is not an easy criterion to administer, since it lacks a principle of demarcation. This situation is highly

problematic for Lakatos' rationalism, because the theory is no longer able to prescribe a situation where a theory must be abandoned without question. In Lakatos' theory, therefore, "'Reason' no longer influences the actions of the scientist (but [...] provides terminology for describing the results of these actions)" (Feyerabend 1975, 186). This is the reason why Feyerabend can bluntly state that "Lakatos' philosophy appears liberal only because it is an *anarchism in disguise*" (Feyerabend 1975, 181, emphasis in original).

What does this mean for ideational approaches drawing on the Lakatos analogy? It is clear that problems such as those discussed here in relation to Lakatos' model of scientific development do not automatically have the same status in a policy context, because ideas and scientific postulates are not the same thing, which is a key point in itself. The question is not completely far-fetched, however, if not only Lakatos but also Sabatier is an anarchist in disguise. The reason for this is that they share a very similar aspiration to rationalize the structure of their basic object, policy-relevant ideas in Sabatier's case and scientific development in Lakatos'. But the question is whether any of these objects lend themselves to be treated as entirely linear and rational, at least not without sacrificing much of what made the politics of ideas interesting in the first place.

Sabatier generally views the structure of belief systems as the essential vehicle for policy development, and in this respect it matters greatly to what extent the structure will respond in a predictable and rational manner. Sabatier seems to be caught in a similar dilemma to that of Lakatos in that he wants to make ideas the decisive factor and yet he is not willing to accept the muck and complexity that they add to the study of public policy. It is difficult, in other words, to be both a full-blooded rationalist trying to use perfectly demarcated sets of beliefs to predict the outcome of the policy process and still be able to cash in on the explanatory power of ideas, which is much more muddy.

Even if Feyerabend's position is sometimes pretty far out, for instance in his general call for "anything goes", it is possible to extend parts of his criticism against Lakatos and say that the contention "ideas matter" will always involve a little bit of anarchism. As argued further in the final section, the analytical power of ideas lies also in their ability to be ambivalent and change meaning.

The Tactical Displacement of Ideas

Before the final conclusion, an additional aspect of ideas and policy change should be brought into the discussion. The previous section ended with the observation that the issue of demarcation is crucial in Lakatos' model and its strict separation between a completely stable scientific core and a number of less stable protective belts. This model and its adherence to strict demarcations is what enables policy theories which build on it to claim a similar stability in the structure of policy-relevant ideas. As the previous section also discussed, the desire to keep policy ideas as nicely demarcated and internally stable entities is not primarily analytical. It seems to stem more from an aspiration to keep the model on the safe side of a rationalist methodology rather than from a substantial theoretical argument saying why we should expect political ideas to work that way.

The purpose of this last section is to explore in a bit more detail how big a difference it makes for the analysis of ideas and public policy to reject the essentialist understanding of ideas and allow for them to undergo change. Ideas undergo tactical displacements in political proc-

esses and our models should thus be able to observe such changes even if it comes at the expense of increased complexity. First, this point is illustrated by drawing briefly on a Foucauldian concept of “tactical polyvalence”, which is then used to explain the general point about change.

In his 1976 *Volonté de savoir*, Foucault laid down a few rules of thumb for studying the relationship between power and discourse, or ideas if you will. One of them is the rule of the “tactical polyvalence of discourses”, a mechanism in which discursive elements can be regrouped or realigned with various tactical positions (Foucault 1976, 132–135). It means that in political analyses, one should not understand an idea ontologically, i.e. as a specific, fundamental position on good, evil or the nature of man. It is rather an epistemological tool that can play different tactical roles. What may be a progressive critique against the established hegemony at one point might become conservative in other settings, because its tactical function can be reversed. This is obviously contrary to Sabatier’s model, where deep core ideas are seen as ontological and essentially stable.

Foucault exemplified the tactical polyvalence of discourse by pointing to the historical struggles over homosexuality. He claims that both the ideas, knowledge forms and categories that were first invented to repress and contain homosexuality as a disease were later turned completely upside down when homosexuals began to refer to themselves in the exact same terms (Foucault 1976, 134–135). The main point is not that the ideas themselves are thus without importance, because they play a significant role in enabling these internal changes, sometimes subtle and sometimes dramatic. The concept of tactical displacements is only implicitly reflected in the broader literature on Foucault (e.g. Dean 1999; Rose 1999), but is nevertheless a key aspect of Foucault’s lectures on governmentality and the so-called “revolts of conduct” (Foucault 2004). The main point is to always focus on what political ideas formulate themselves in opposition to rather than keep power struggles and ideational shifts on two separate analytical levels.

A few examples from a policy context should illustrate the general applicability of tactical displacements. One area that has undergone tremendous change over the past few decades is tobacco control where the previous domination of industry interests has been replaced by a much more critical agenda in which health concerns are the top priority. Looking back on past developments, one could easily reduce the change to a shift in power positions between first an industry-dominated advocacy coalition with one set of beliefs and second a health-dominated coalition bearing other beliefs.

Explanations are only this simple in hindsight, however, because the process involved a series of tactical displacements within the ruling arguments around tobacco, a complete reframing if you will, in order to prepare the ground for a new representation of interests in policy formulation. To take just one example, strict regulation of passive smoking was previously scorned in several Western countries based on a liberal idea of individual freedom and autonomy. Anti-tobacco advocacy groups did not address and eventually defeat this argument by arguing for more health at the expense of a little less freedom, which would probably be the rational expectation based on the shared fundamental beliefs of such groups. On the contrary, they made a successful tactical displacement of the connection between smoking and freedom and argued instead that protecting innocent third parties from involuntary smoking is almost literally in accordance with liberal conceptions of freedom (Larsen 2008).

The area of tobacco control illustrates that despite clear scientific evidence and an obvious group of victims, political ideas retain an immense transformative power. Not just because politics can be influenced by different sets of ideas, but mainly because the content of the policy

ideas themselves can change. This aspect of tactical polyvalence makes it imperative to study ideational changes over time, since there is no longer an essential core to what for instance “health” means in and by itself. Ideas such as health and health promotion are tactical oppositions to what in a given context is seen as being detrimental to health, which a ideational policy analysis of the area should be able to decipher (see Larsen 2009).

To focus on tactical displacements does not mean that moral values are irrelevant to political analyses or that they change all the time, only that we should not underestimate the tremendous changes resulting from how they are actually framed. This is illustrated in a recent analysis of the new framing of the death penalty in the United States (Baumgartner et al. 2008). The authors claim that although the underlying moral value of “an eye for an eye” has sustained a stable and strong support in the American population, a new innocence frame has shifted the focus of the debate in order to make it about other aspects of the death penalty, such as the failures of the penal system and the possibility of executing an innocent.

Again, most of the anti-death penalty advocates probably do not even share the fundamental belief in “an eye for an eye” and thus we would not gain much knowledge about the policy dynamic by doing a survey of their shared core beliefs. Similar to the anti-tobacco advocates, they have successfully twisted the arguments of their opponents in order to make a completely different political argument out of the exact same moral values. This is a key example of tactical displacements and their role of the interaction between ideas and policy change.

Conclusion

The implication of the previous discussion is that political analyses of ideas must focus on what they attach themselves to rather than only seeing what values they hold in the absolute. Tactically polyvalent ideas simply do not fit into the core-surface models built on the Lakatos analogy, because they do not bear the characteristics of basic scientific postulates nor of fundamental shared beliefs in Sabatier’s version.

Political groups such as advocacy coalitions do not just try to advance their shared beliefs that can be neatly compartmentalized as a stable core. They do not simply enter the policy process with a list of their most fundamental values and wait for policies to change accordingly. Much more often, political battles over ideas are about the displacement of their meaning and how they attach themselves to other existing political arguments, which of course should be observable in theoretical models of the policy process. There are many ways to do this, which is also illustrated in the numerous ideational approaches included in this discussion.

The article has mainly focused on ideational approaches building on an analogy with Lakatos’ model of scientific research programs. Although most critical remarks have been directed against the use of this analogy, the main point is not that all problems will be solved if we declare ourselves Lakatos intolerant.

The essential point to consider is why the problematic analogy was in demand in the first place and why, in this author’s opinion, it is no use cutting ideas into neat variables if it comes at the expense of what ideational analyses of public policy have to offer. The analytical insights of political ideas cannot be fully developed if they are always conceptualized solely as an add-on to a prefixed model of actors and institutions (for a similar argument, see Blyth 1997). This does not mean, however, that ideas should be thought of as the deep ontology of policy problems. Such a proposition is similarly problematic as it makes a monolith of fundamental beliefs, which

is no better equipped to analyze processes of change, subtle as well as dramatic. Policy processes involve ideas because they help to explain what the policy is about, while they are also tools in the hand of actors whose conflicts might change in the process of using these ideas.

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