
Introduction

Hubert Heinelt and Sybille Münch

THE AIM OF THIS HANDBOOK

In spite of a plethora of handbooks addressing the European Union and European integration in general (like the recent one edited by Jones et al. 2012) and a number of publications focusing on European policies (see, for instance, Wallace et al. 2005; George and Bache 2001; Nugent 2001; Cini 2003; Richardson 2005; Heinelt and Knodt 2010), the field has so far fallen short of an interpretive perspective on European policymaking and the development of EU policies. As opposed to policy analysis more generally where interpretive, sometimes also referred to as argumentative or post-positivist, approaches have gained ground over the past 20 years (cf. for instance, Fischer and Forester 1993; Fischer and Gottweis 2012; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2013; Münch 2016a), far fewer studies on policymaking in the EU apply an interpretive perspective. Or as Diez (2016, p. 268) maintains: ‘The study of European integration and the European Union (EU) is a relative latecomer as the subject of interpretivist studies.’ This handbook sets out to fill this lacuna by asking a set of questions mainstream approaches tend to neglect, the most basic being: how do ideas, arguments or discourses shape policies in the specific institutional context of the European Union as a multi-level polity? It is the handbook’s objective to offer theoretically grounded answers to this question and thereby open a conversation between critical policy studies and European integration theory (for a similar endeavour, see Münch 2016b).

As an interpretive understanding of public policy(-making) is quite broad, theoretically guided answers and research questions differ in detail. Since the early 1990s, the growing literature associated with the ‘argumentative turn’ (Fischer and Forester 1993; Fischer and Gottweis 2012) or ‘interpretive turn’ (Healy 1986; Yanow 1995 and 2000) in policy studies has suggested portraying policymaking as an ‘ongoing discursive struggle over the definition and conceptual framing of problems, the public understanding of the issues, the shared meanings that motivate policy responses, and criteria for evaluation’ (Fischer and Gottweis 2012, p. 7). These approaches share a concern for the way in which language, discourse and rhetoric construct our knowledge of society and its problems and, therefore, question the basic assumption that problems are part of a pre-given ‘neutral’ reality to which policymaking simply responds (Barbehön et al. 2015, p. 246). Moreover, with the shift away from hierarchical steering towards horizontal and communication-based modes of governance, often taking place outside formal legislative processes and institutions, it has become increasingly important for policy analysis to focus on ‘the struggle over ideas’ (Stone 2002, p. 11), interpretations or ‘meaning in action’ (Wagenaar 2011) as the essence of policymaking (see also Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). The occurrence of this interpretive turn is embedded in a complex intellectual environment, which is characterised, among other things, by the emergence of constructivism (Berger and Luckmann 1966), structuralism and post-structuralism (cf. Gottweis 2006, p. 462). The heterogeneous currents

dismiss positivism and share a certain scepticism about three alternative, pre-existing approaches to the explanation of political reality, namely institutionalist, behaviouralist and rational-choice approaches that are concerned with uncovering ‘the laws and regularities that governed social life irrespective of the beliefs of individuals and meanings found in a society’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2016, pp. 6–8). These approaches are criticised for failing to explain political change in situations which are not clearly determined by institutions and for overlooking the contingency and inner conflicts of institutions (as is the case with institutionalism) or neglecting the role of ideas in processes of preference formation and transformation and privileging self-interest as a motive (as is the case with the rational-choice approach). Whereas ‘the ghost of positivism’ (Dryzek 1993, p. 217) had long been discarded in philosophy, it remains powerful in the analysis of public policy, where institutionalism, rational choice and behaviouralism ‘cling tenaciously to the positivist belief that we can understand or explain human behaviour in terms of allegedly objective social facts about people’ (Bevir 2009, p. 63).

The success of the annual International Conference in Interpretive Policy Analysis, the prolific theoretical and methodological discussions in the *Critical Policy Studies Journal* and the recent publication of the *Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science* (Bevir and Rhodes 2016) and the *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies* (Fischer et al. 2015) demonstrate the ongoing advancement and multifacetedness of the field. On the downside, the wide variation of concepts, methods and theoretical roots ranging from authors as different as Habermas,¹ Foucault or Laclau, and the propensity of interpretive policy analysis to be inspired by debates in neighbouring disciplines, what is labelled as ‘interpretive policy analysis’ may seem ‘vast, varied, and often confusing’ to outsiders (Wagenaar 2011, book cover).²

IS THERE AN INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE – OR ARE THERE SEVERAL?

Interpretivism as a paradigm in the social sciences in general resists the positivist attempts at singling out causal explanations, the premise of cause–effect relationship between variables and their aim of discovering universal laws. Setting themselves apart from essentialism and positivist epistemology, authors in the interpretive tradition share the social-constructivist assertion ‘that there is nothing in the world whose meaning resides in the object itself’ (Loseke 2003, p. 18). To say that something is socially or discursively constructed, however, is not to imply that it does not ‘really’ exist:

An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whatever their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expression of the wrath of God’, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, p. 108)

Or in Bevir’s (2009, p. 70) words: ‘to conclude that our social concepts do not refer to essences is very different from adopting the anti-realist conclusion that our social concepts do not refer to anything at all.’

Consequently, interpretive research is ‘framed against the positivist presupposition that

straightforward, matter-of-fact observation would provide ready access to an objective world where meaning was not a problem' (Yanow 1995, p. 111). Meanings are not simply variables 'that are subject to experimental manipulation or that are "measurable through familiar survey methods" [. . .] nor can social construction be "eliminated" from policy processes' (Yanow 1995, p. 112).

Consequently, proponents of interpretive approaches share a particular approach of explanation (as Nullmeier highlights in his contribution to this volume):

This approach to explanation in the social sciences, in which we explain social phenomena through uncovering the intentions of the actors involved, is called *interpretivism*. Interpretivism 'may be defined as the view that comprehending human behavior, products and relationships consists solely in reconstructing the self-understandings of those engaged in creating or performing them' (Fay 1996, p. 113). This is a broad definition. It states that interpretive explanations must 'capture the conceptual distinctions and intentions of the agents involved' (Fay 1996, p. 114). (Wagenaar 2011, p. 16)

'Interpretive approaches to political studies focus on meanings that shape action and institutions, and the way in which they do so' (Bevir and Rhodes 2004, p. 130) – or how Wagenaar (2011, p. 4) puts it: 'Meaning influences people's behavior.' Therefore, proponents of interpretive approaches are not only focused on the explanation of social phenomena by the intentions of actors who are involved in the interactions from which the phenomena emerge. Going a step further, it is about the (social) meaning from which the intentions of the actors result in the first place and can be fathomed.³ 'This is what we mean when we speak of actions having meaning. This is also the bare-bones formulation of how we understand meaningful action; how we acquire valid knowledge of it through intentional explanation' (Wagenaar 2011, p. 16). This is also the reason why policy change is understood 'as an "action" that is defined and structured by intentions, rather than as an abstract behavioural phenomenon' (Serrano Velarde 2015, p. 52).

Because proponents of interpretivism do not just start their analysis from the (given) intentions of actors but try to explain the intentions by meaning, they solve problems proponents of rational choice approaches have or can be confronted with. Advocates of rational choice approaches may – like Dowding (1991, pp. 30ff.) – distinguish between 'needs', 'desires' and 'preferences'. However, they are not able to explain how general human needs (like sexuality or food intake/ingestion) are transformed into particular desires (for wine or beer, for instance, or – to mention the example Dowding [1991, pp. 148f.] referred to – for strawberries instead of raspberries), and how these are at the end condensed in a specific preference order and result in 'individual utility calculation' (Dowding 1991, p. 41) – or intentions.

Although *meaning* plays a crucial role in interpretive policy analysis, proponents differ particularly along diverging notions of this central concept. Wagenaar (2011) distinguishes three 'varieties of interpretation in policy analysis' (as expressed in the heading of the second part of his book *Meaning in Action*) – namely whether or not one starts from a 'hermeneutic meaning', a 'discursive meaning' or a 'dialogical meaning'. Instead, Münch (2016a, pp. 15–18) and Nullmeier (2012, p. 44) differentiate only between two basic understandings because, for them, 'hermeneutic' and 'dialogical meaning' merge. This is also confirmed by Wagenaar (2011, pp. 18f.) insofar as he sets apart 'subjective' and 'objective meaning' where 'subjective meaning' is related by him to 'what meaning an

actor ascribes to a particular situation' (Wagenaar 2011, p. 19) and 'objective meaning' to 'some of the "reasons" for an action [which] are not necessarily available to the actors although they, undeniably, shape their actions' (Wagenaar 2011, p. 18). Starting from this distinction, 'objective meaning' can be related to 'discursive meaning', particularly to a Foucauldian post-structuralist understanding of meaning-making discourse which is not deliberately shapeable by actors but shape their understanding of the world, their action and even their subjectification. Instead, 'subjective meaning' refers to individually as well as collectively created meaning that can be unlocked hermeneutically. This is demonstrated by the role of language and with it of communicative interactions in collective sense-making processes: 'in the hermeneutic policy interpretation the world is mediated by language, while in discursive approaches it is produced by it' (Wagenaar 2011, p. 107). As Bacchi (2015, p. 3) posits, this distinction reveals a fundamental disagreement about the nature of political subjectivity. Whereas interpretivists in the hermeneutical tradition regard political subjects as agentic, 'that is, as sovereign or foundational subjects, who stand outside of and shape "reality"', authors in the tradition of "discursive meaning" see subjects themselves as constituted in discourses and therefore as 'precarious, contradictory and in process' (ibid.). To conclude, 'interpretivism' in interpretive policy analysis has a much wider notion. It has become an umbrella term that embraces both hermeneutical as well as post-structuralist approaches.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES IN EUROPEAN INTEGRATION STUDIES

Meanwhile, European Integration Studies since the late 1990s have also seen the rise of constructivist accounts of European integration, which is how interpretivist approaches have been labelled in this field.

These approaches are linked by a shared understanding that European integration cannot be explained or understood by reference to the interests of member states; that identities of member states and other actors are changing as a consequence of being part of the integration process; and that the meaning of integration and its associated norms and institutions is contested and politically significant. (Diez 2016, p. 268)

In this volume, the contribution by Sabine Saurugger traces the heterogeneous developments that have shaped constructivism in research on EU policymaking.

Yet, many authors like Barbehön (2016), Diez (2016) or Paul and Straßheim (in Chapter 9 of this volume) wonder, how these accounts 'remain remarkably absent in the EU integration and Europeanization scholarship' (e.g. Wæver 2009; Walters and Haahr 2005). Moreover, research on Europeanisation is guided, Barbehön (2016, p. 161) underlines, 'by the ontological premise that the EU is an objective reality which constitutes either adaptational pressures or windows of opportunities for domestic politics'. Even those authors that operate with the concept of discourse (cf. Schmidt 2008; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004; Lynggaard 2012) and contend that language is constitutive for making sense of an ambiguous multi-level system, Barbehön (2016, p. 162) maintains, still 'build on realist premises'.

Barbehön (2015, pp. 132–134) traces the specific genesis of constructivism in EU studies

and its epistemological consequences. Thus, social-constructivist EU research has been, and still is, inspired by analogous developments in international relations theory, where an awareness of the limitations of rationalist approaches to the explanation of international cooperation had been raised earlier on. Against this backdrop, since the early 1990s, ideas and norms were integrated into interest-based and institutionalist explanations of supranational communalisation. Towards the end of the 1990s, Barbehön (2015) recalls, this orientation was developed further under the label of social constructivist research in EU studies (Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998; Checkel 1998, 1999; Christiansen et al. 1999). According to its advocates, the European integration process could not be explained solely by given interests of rational actors, but also by different ideas as to how a legitimate political order might look. Striving for ‘equal fighting chances between interests and ideas’ (Jachtenfuchs 2002, p. 25; translation by authors), it was treated as an empirical question regarding what kind of situations fostered the dominance of either interests or ideas (Risse 2009, pp. 147–149). Therefore, Barbehön (2015) criticizes from an interpretive point of view that ideas and norms usually only appear as causal factors. This leads some exponents of EU constructivism to the conclusion that ‘constructivism shares with rational choice an epistemological commitment to truth-seeking, and the belief that causal generalization in the form of middle range theories [. . .] is possible’ (Risse and Wiener 1999, p. 776) – a claim unheard of in interpretive and therefore explicitly post-positivist policy analysis. In the shadow of these more mainstream constructivists accounts of EU integration, Barbehön (2015, p. 134) identifies a couple of the more recent discourse analyses that bear a closer resemblance to post-positivist developments in policy analysis (e.g. Diez 1999, 2001; Wodak and Weiss 2005; Schünemann 2013).

Some, like Joerges and Neyer (1997) even claim that the debates behind closed-doors in many fields of EU policymaking, what is called ‘comitology’, could be a space where the logic of argumentation prevails, since member states in these fora do not compete with each other openly. Even though it is exactly this kind of technocratic governance that has been repeatedly challenged by authors in the tradition of argumentative (hence post-positivist) policy analysis it could be an interesting empirical question whether arguing in these EU institutions is actually more distinct than bargaining.⁴

This *Handbook on European Policies* reflects the very heterogeneous approaches with some authors writing in the tradition of interpretive policy analysis while others represent different shades of constructivist approaches, as they are more common in European Integration Studies.

KEY CONCEPTS, RELATED DEBATES AND ‘FALSE FRIENDS’

In addition to the heterogeneity of interpretive propositions regarding the relationship between discourse and actors, core concepts of post-positivist approaches often hold very varied notions differing between various authors. This applies, for instance, for the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘frames’ as well as for the terms ‘narratives’ and ‘story lines’. Moreover, some concepts like ‘beliefs’ or ‘ideas’ seem to resonate with interpretivism, but in many cases merely supplement rather than question basic assumptions of rational choice theory (Finlayson 2007, p. 547). Those who emphasise the relevance of ideas but consider them as an (additional) variable in ‘conventional’ research designs can count as ‘neo-positivists’

rather than interpretivists (see Münch 2016a, pp. 28–33). The same holds true for ‘beliefs’ in Sabatier’s (1988) ‘Advocacy Coalition Framework’, which has been criticised as a rigorous call to rejuvenate an empiricist research agenda by one of the key protagonists of the argumentative turn, Frank Fischer (2003, p. 94). On the other hand, there are interpretive authors like Bevir (1999) who do constitute

a specific object of study: the beliefs held by individuals and the situated reasoning they employ when changing those beliefs as the result of a dilemma. This is the object of study brought forward by Bevir and Rhodes’ interpretivism: the ideas of persons inhabiting reasonably determinate but not determining traditions on the basis of which they formulate defensible plans of action. (Finlayson 2007, p. 548)

But let us return to the more prominent concepts in interpretive policy analysis. According to Hajer (1995, p. 44) discourses can be understood as ‘an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices’. Gottweis (2006, p. 471) asserts that discourse does not simply refer to a ‘system of words’ but to an entity which exists in a social, economic and political context. And for Fischer (2003, p. 74) a ‘discourse [. . .] is not just any collection of words or sentences. Rather it is an integration of sentences – spoken or written – that produces a meaning larger than that contained in the sentences that compose according to distinct *patterns* of reasoning.’ Discourse is therefore often treated as the broadest term, encompassing different arguments or narratives, for instance (Fischer and Gottweis 2012, p. 10).

‘Discourses contain narratives, which are essentially stories, either in oral or written form’ (Fischer and Gottweis 2012, p. 12). In policy discourse, narratives often take the form of ‘causal stories’, through which different events or observations are put in relation to each other: ‘Fundamentally, narrative story-telling reveals or conveys an experience structured as a sequence of events or occurrences (e.g. a beginning, middle and ending) through which individuals relate their experiences to one another’ (ibid.). These causal stories are sometimes conceived of as conscious strategies. Deborah Stone (1989) in particular emphasises these strategic aspects. In this respect, Stone leaves the narrower confines of social constructivism with her focus on ‘crafted arguments’ (see also Fischer 2007, p. 225) and purposely developed inventions (Münch 2016a, p. 88).

Interpretive terminology becomes even more confusing, because the concept ‘frame’ is sometimes used synonymously with ‘narrative’, yet sometimes it operates more on a macro-level, like ‘discourse’. The concept of frames in policy analysis is often associated with Martin Rein (1983) and Donald Schön (1983). In their joint work, Rein and Schön (1993, p. 146) define a frame as a comprehensive structure that guides ways of ‘selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality’. Accordingly, as Barbehön et al. (2015, p. 248) assert, controversies that build on opposing frames are difficult to solve because they are based on fundamentally different constructions of ‘what the problem really is’ (cf. Healy 1986, pp. 383–384). Depending on their frame, participants in these controversies pay attention to certain aspects of reality while neglecting others. Frames, as Hubert Heinelt (2010, p. 26) points out, operate on a meta-level as they convey basic standards and assumptions about how the world functions and, on a micro-level, shape how ‘a certain linguistic coding of problem definitions and patterns of action becomes binding for interactions’.

The notion of framing in social science in general (see Goffman 1974) and political science in particular (see e.g. Campbell 1998; Hay 2002, pp. 194–215) refers to a shared agreement about the relevance of a particular choice of action (see for an overview, Rein and Schön 1993, p. 146). This consensus points to a process of ‘interactive sense-making’ (Rein and Schön 1977, pp. 240ff.), an inter-subjective ‘sense-making’ (van Hulst and Yanow 2016) or an ‘interactional co-construction’ (Dewulf et al. 2009). This allows ‘to wed fact and value into belief about how to act’ (Laws and Rein 2003, p. 174). Or even more, asserts that ‘frames determine what counts as fact and how one makes the normative leap from facts to prescriptions for action’ (Schön and Rein 1994, p. XVIII). To put it another way, a frame gives actions a direction or a perspective. Therefore, a frame can be defined as ‘a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined, problematic situation can be made sense of and acted on’ (Rein and Schön 1993, p. 146). This implies that detailed reasons no longer have to be given why this and not that has to be done (with priority). Frames appear as ‘rationales’ in narratives and are reproduced through acts of narration (see Biegelbauer and Weber as well as Kurowska in this volume).

As mentioned above, frames and framing refer to processes ‘[that] determine what counts as fact and how one makes the normative leap from facts to prescriptions for action’ (Schön and Rein 1994, p. XVIII) as well as to processes, ‘[that] wed fact and value into belief about how to act’ (Laws and Rein 2003, p. 174). This notion very much resonates with what has been termed – particularly by German advocates of interpretive policy analysis⁵ – as ‘knowledge’ because processes leading to the creation of a frame can be related to what is called, from this perspective, ‘collective choice of interpretation’ (*Deutungswahl*) and ‘choice of knowledge’ (*Wissenswahl*; see Heinelt 2016, p. 33 with reference to Nullmeier 1993, pp. 186f.).

That there are conceptual overlaps between knowledge and frames (also outlined by Daviter, Chapter 5, this volume) is, for example, demonstrated by Radaelli who, in his frame analysis in early policy studies (1995a), posits the relevance of ‘epistemic communities’ in defining problems which have to be addressed by political interventions. Furthermore, Radaelli (1995b, p. 165) emphasised already that framing and knowledge not only constitute problem perceptions but also interests. In this respect, Radaelli shares a basic assumption of the German *Wissenpolitologie* – namely that categories like interest need ‘a translation [. . .] into the body of knowledge of the involved actors’ (Nullmeier 2013, p. 27; translated by the authors). In addition, conceptual overlaps between knowledge and frames become obvious when talking about ‘cognitive frames’ (like in the case of Saurugger in this volume).

Early proponents of interpretive policy analysis – such as Fischer (1990) – identified and problematized the importance of expert knowledge in technocratic debates over policymaking and implementation (see also Saretzki 2015 on Habermas’ influence on notions of policy advice). Yet, the role of knowledge in policymaking is not a recent topic, as Boswell (2016, p. 12), in her take on what she calls the ‘epistemic turn’, stresses:

The 1970s saw a wave of studies on the sociology of research utilization. Scholars sought to explain why research was not taken up more extensively in policy making, exploring the apparent gap between the types of knowledge valued by academics and policy makers.

Torgerson (1986) in his seminal work, differentiates

three distinct ‘faces’ distinguished with regard to differing relationships between knowledge and politics: one where knowledge purports to replace politics, one where politics masquerades as knowledge, and one where knowledge and politics attain a measure of reconciliation. Historically, these three faces may be viewed, to an extent, as periods in the development of policy analysis: from positivism, to its critique, to present post-positivist efforts.

Nevertheless, knowledge (‘Wissen’) as a concept in its own right seems to be a scholarly discourse that is particularly strong among German authors⁶ where the so-called *Wissenspolitologie* has gained ground in policy analysis. Being inspired by, but going beyond, central premises of sociology of knowledge, Nullmeier and Rüb (1993, p. 26), as proponents of *Wissenspolitologie*, stress the role of politics, as the following quote highlights: ‘It is neither possible to reduce politics to knowledge claims free of conflicts of interests and power nor to comprehend (scholarly) debates as an expression of a sphere free of interests and power orientated just on validity’ (translation by the authors).

To conclude this brief overview, in interpretive policy analysis there is a plethora of different concepts and related methodologies aimed at capturing ‘meaning in action’ (Wagenaar 2011). To reflect this wide variation in approaches within this paradigm, the editors left it to the authors of the single chapters to clarify their own definitions of what kind of (interpretive) concepts are central to their respective contribution.

STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

The book consists – apart from this introduction – of a more general, conceptual part and a second part covering individual EU policies. The third part tackles, empirically, two topics cutting across different EU policy areas.

The first part of the handbook starts with a chapter by Sabine Saurugger on ‘The constructivist turn in EU public policy approaches’. The author asserts that the constructivist turn allowed for asking new questions such as how cognitive frames shape policies in the specific institutional context of the multi-level system of the EU or why actors act as they do, beyond purely cost–benefit-based analysis. Sabine Saurugger argues that answers to these questions help to understand EU policymaking, not just as functionalistic spillovers or intergovernmental processes whose progress is dependent on member state interests, but as complex communicative interactions embedded in cognitive frames. However, she concedes, constructivist approaches to the EU tended to slightly underestimate the ability of actors to pick and choose and even create framings appropriate to their (initial) worldviews. Yet, she reveals how the more recent actor-centred perspective of constructivism has made up for this.

This perspective is further elaborated in a particular way in the chapter on ‘The role of ideas and discourse in European integration’, contributed by Vivien A. Schmidt to this handbook. From the perspective of discursive institutionalism developed by her, the chapter begins with the ideas and discourse of analysts and actors about what the EU is and what it should become; follows with how drivers of European integration are conceptualized; and then how questions of legitimacy in the EU have been dealt with. The chapter ends with an exploration of ideas and discourse related to the Eurozone crisis and its impact on the member state policies and politics.

In his chapter on ‘EU policies and the Europeanization of domestic policymaking’

Claudio M. Radaelli critically appraises the related literature. He goes on to discuss concept formation, the role of EU pressure and the agency of actors in processes of Europeanisation, and the relationship between this field of research and interpretivism. Finally, the chapter looks at the future of Europeanisation research in a context characterised by multiple crises and what could become, in his words, ‘Europeanization in reverse gear’.

With their dismissal of causality and variable-based research, many interpretive authors shy away from explanation. Taking this lacuna as a starting point, Frank Nullmeier reveals ‘How to explain discursive change’ in a particular interpretive way. His six-stage model of interpretive explanation should be applicable for empirical studies on EU policies, as Nullmeier demonstrates in the second part of the chapter.

Falk Daviter discusses how frame analysis can contribute to studies of policymaking in the European Union. Particularly, studies that assume a longitudinal perspective on policy development show how ‘The framing of EU policies’ is constitutive of the way in which the jurisdictional boundaries and constitutional mandates of the EU evolve over time. Reviewing the growing body of empirical studies on EU policy framing, the author shows that frame analysis contributes a unique perspective on EU policymaking.

In order to systematically address the question of how ideas, arguments or discourses shape policies in the specific institutional context of the European Union as a multi-level polity, the chapters in the second part of the book address a number of topics for their respective policy areas:

- Every contribution is briefly setting out how its take on European policymaking is ‘interpretive’, what methodological implications this will have and how it therefore might differ from more mainstream approaches.
- Every chapter deals with the question of what the problem perceptions have been which have led to policy action – including altering perceptions/interpretations of a policy problem, which led to policy change over time.
- This includes – in one way or another – reflections on communicative interactions on which processes of agenda-setting and policy formulation are based, setting out the actors or discourse coalitions (Hajer 1993) that are involved with their possibly conflicting preferences, beliefs or ideas. Furthermore, it is considered how their discursive interaction is embedded in different institutional contexts under changing external conditions and how the formal policy outputs, that is, legislation, decrees etc., resonate with particular objectives and problem definitions, and how formally adopted policy measures are put into practice under the particular conditions of the member states or even their sub-national tiers of government.

Peter H. Feindt, in his chapter on ‘EU agricultural policy’, investigates how three layered discourses (labelled ‘productivism’, ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘multifunctionality’) exerted power in ideas and were institutionalised in such a way that it was possible to transfer an enormous budget into new programmes and instruments in this policy domain.

In their chapter on ‘The structural funds and EU cohesion policy’, Hubert Heinelt and Wolfgang Petzold analyse the narrative of EU cohesion policy and the way it changed over time. Since the later 1980s, the ‘cohesion narrative’ framed an EU policy addressing regional economic and social disparities by the transfer of funds through a distinct delivery mechanism. Its ideas, concepts and categories dominated debates among actors

at the EU, national and regional level. However, the authors illustrate how the narrative has gradually changed since the beginning of the 2000s.

At the EU level, spatial planning is synonymous with the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), a non-binding intergovernmental document agreed between Member States in 1999. Although this non-binding document reflects the lack of any specific legal competence of Community actions in this sphere, Rob Atkinson and Karsten Zimmermann, in their chapter on 'European spatial planning policy' contend that one should not underestimate its impact at European and national levels through its influence – particularly on the EU structural funds.

Katharina T. Paul and Holger Straßheim observe that it was difficult for 'EU consumer policy' to emerge as a distinct policy area. Moving beyond institutionalist accounts, the authors offer a critical focus on continuities and changes in notions of 'being a European consumer' and how these are invoked in policy discourse. They propose that the quality of language and complex interaction in this multi-level setting, as well as the particular strategy of the European Commission to set aside consumer affairs – as a strategy of depoliticization – marked the gradual development of this policy area. Furthermore, they observe that these ambiguities – and the 'interpretive voids' they produce – form the very conditions for the rise of behavioural approaches as a relatively recent regulatory paradigm in European consumer policy.

In his contribution on 'EU trade policy', Yelter Bollen starts with a critical inventory of mainstream research in this area, which has its roots in rationalist-institutionalism. Based on this critique, he explores the language, the ways of thinking and the overall institutional and discursive context in which the European Commission's Directorate-General Trade, national trade administrations and 'the public' are embedded.

Miranda A. Schreurs, in 'EU environmental policy', shows how the European Union has become a leader in environmental policy by the ways environmental problems, as well as solutions, have been framed and presented to the public by different groups of actors. And she demonstrates that the growing acceptance by publics and policymakers of new ideas and concepts related to environmental protection is linked to changed narratives about the causes and consequences of environmental problems. However, she also emphasizes that one should not ignore the opposition to specific policies from some member states and industrial or other interest groups, and speculates that the elaborate body of EU environmental laws may have even played a role in the Brexit decision for some voters.

Michèle Knodt observes how the development of 'EU energy policy' was informed by different, sometimes competing, frames in different periods of the integration process – namely the frames of security, sustainability and competitiveness. And she posits that deadlock in the development of this policy could not be explained by rational choice approaches because these approaches cannot help in understanding what drives conflicts between the three mentioned frames.

Peter Biegelbauer and Matthias Weber argue in their chapter on 'EU research, technological development and innovation policy', that the creation of this policy area is a prime example of the important role of policy frames with the function to underpin policy initiatives such as the framework programmes. The authors analyse frames and narratives utilised by the European Commission to gain competences and show how the resulting discourse began to develop its own dynamic, which was difficult to change later on.

Dorota Dakowska and Kathia Serrano Velarde shed light on the construction of a ‘European higher education policy’. They take a closer look at the structural arrangements and actor-constellations that have developed over time and explain the political intricacies of European higher education policy. Thereby it is shown that an interpretive perspective on education policymaking provides an adequate tool for understanding how political practice undermines the formal division of competences between the Commission and the member states, to capture the emergence and transnational circulation of narratives concerning higher education reform and to understand why European governments feel increasingly bound by rules developed outside of the realm of domestic policy.

Xymena Kurowska reviews current trends in interpretivist scholarship on ‘EU foreign policy’. She emphasises that the (re-)turn to narrative has been at the core of the interpretivist research agenda in studies on EU foreign policy as both an analytical category and a means of interpretivist methodology. This, Xymena Kurowska observes, creates a growing sensibility about the inherently contextual and contentious character of knowledge production, which signals a major shift in studies on EU foreign policy.

Development policy within the discipline of EU studies is relatively under-researched. This applies even more so for studies carried out with an interpretive perspective. Sarah Delputte and Jan Orbie try to close this gap by their contribution to this handbook. Furthermore, they demonstrate how an abductive research strategy, involving a continuous interaction between theory and empirics, can be applied to the study of ‘EU development policy’. This is illustrated by their own research on four case studies.

The study of ‘EU migration and asylum policies’ is a latecomer to interpretive approaches. Sybille Münch conjectures that rationalist approaches could have dominated research on asylum and migration policies because these policies represent core areas where states exercise sovereignty and where policymaking was long characterized by inter-governmental procedures. This chapter starts by briefly introducing the status quo and the development of a European governance structure in the field, gives a short overview over how the mainstream has analysed EU migration policies, before presenting more recent research that employs a post-positivist research agenda. Drawing from this review, the main part discusses different narratives and frames that are central to an interpretive analysis of EU migration policymaking.

In ‘EU gender equality policies’, Johanna Kantola and Emanuela Lombardo show that gender equality is constructed and contested in the EU. Not only do the European Parliament, the Commission or other institutions involved in policymaking at the EU level put forward different framings of gender equality problems and solutions, but also within each institution different meanings are attributed to gender, equality, women and men. The authors demonstrate that shifts in framing over time have led to the expansion of gender equality policy strategies from equal treatment to positive actions, gender mainstreaming, and multiple inequalities as well as to moves from employment to human rights, and the predominance of neoliberal economic priorities over gender and social aims in times of economic crisis. Thereby, interpretive studies also infer that power relations mobilised in the construction of the EU have important gender and intersectional dimensions.

The third part of this handbook tackles empirically interpretive research questions that cut across different policy areas – namely the role of expertise and think tanks in EU

policymaking (by Jesper Dahl Kelstrup) and the discursive development of the doctrine of market competition in public procurement (by Detlef Sack and E. K. Sarter).

Kelstrup's chapter on 'Think tanks in EU public policies' reveals different understandings of the ways in which public knowledge should be legitimated in the EU. Most recently think tanks have contributed towards opening up the ways in which knowledge can be made authoritative in the EU, for example by interacting directly with citizens in the member states or by calling into question Brussels as the geo-political centre of the EU.

The issue of public procurement is one core element of general public sector politics. In the final chapter, 'Strategic use and social taming – opening up the doctrine of market competition in public procurement', Detlef Sack and E. K. Sarter demonstrate how discursive policy analysis can address the contested process of regulations related to this issue in order to identify the criteria indicating the normative idea of 'appropriate' public spending behaviour.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the numerous colleagues who agreed to act as reviewers for single chapters and who helped to sharpen all drafts. We would also like to thank Lucas Flath who invested a lot of time in painstakingly formatting this handbook. Moreover, we thank Emily Mew and the team at Edward Elgar Publishing for their pleasant and patient cooperation as well as Frank Fischer as the editor of *Handbooks of Research on Public Policy* series.

We dedicate this book to our colleague, the late Wolfram Lamping. We worked with him for many years and drew a lot of inspiration from the daily discussions with him, in and in-between our offices at the Institute of Political Science and at the Urban Research Centre of the Technische Universität in Darmstadt. Wolfram Lamping wanted to contribute a chapter on health policy but fell terminally ill before this handbook was finished.

NOTES

1. See for instance Saretzki (2015) on how Habermas' critique of positivistic science as well as his models of policy advice and deliberative democracy have become reference points for critical policy analysis. In EU studies in particular, Habermas's concept of the public sphere has inspired conceptual reflections (cf. for example, Heinelt 2002) as well as empirical research (cf. for instance Koopmans and Statham 2010).
2. To make the situation even more complex, there is now talk of a 'second wave' of interpretive approaches to policy analysis that are characterised by incorporating anti-dualist or relational elements, based on even more disparate philosophical foundations. This is reflected, for instance, by the ECPR Standing Group on Theoretical Perspectives in Policy Analysis during the General Conference in Oslo in 2017.
3. See on this topic already Max Weber (1988, pp. 70, 550ff.) who talks instead of intentions about motives.
4. For the difference between the concepts of communicative versus strategic action or arguing and bargaining see Saretzki (2009) and Heinelt (2010, pp. 19–20).
5. See Nullmeier (1993, 1997, 2013), Nullmeier and Rüb (1993), Rüb (2006), Edmondson and Nullmeier (1997), Münch (2016a, pp. 34ff.), Heinelt (2016, pp. 33ff.).
6. But see also Colebatch (2015) on 'Knowledge, Policy and the Work of Governing'.

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