A narrative-interactionist approach to policy change analysis. Lessons from cultural policy domain

Nicolás Barbieri Muttis
Public Policies and Government Institute
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
nicolas.barbieri@uab.cat
IPSA World Congress, Madrid, 8-12 July, 2012

Abstract

The eminently political nature of culture has been identified as a problem to be solved by means of public policies rather than as an opportunity. Cultural policy domain illustrates a tendency to create an apparently depoliticized vision of the policy process and, particularly, the policy change process. However, there are still few politological studies which analyse cultural policy domain and policy change. This paper therefore develops a narrative approach for analysing policy change based on evidence from this domain, and, particularly, from a case study of the development of cultural policy in Catalonia. I have termed this approach as narrative-interactionist because policy change is taken to mean the result of the symbolic interaction between political actors, within a relatively restricted institutional framework. Thus, this article deals with the role of policy discourse and political actors’ ideational margin of agency (through policy frames) in policy change processes. Policy change is conditioned by the variations in the process of symbolic legitimation of government intervention, in this case in the cultural arena. By adapting and applying the concept of frame alignment to policy change analysis, this article shows that the alignment between policy frames and a master frame underpins this symbolic legitimation and so helps in understanding policy change. The process of alignment is dynamic and leads to a modification of the actor's policy frame. Thus, collective action is not based on a type of instrumental rationality and ideas and values are not mere addenda to institutional rules or interests.

Keywords: policy change; cultural policy; policy discourse; policy frame; Catalonia.

Word count: 7266

To govern is, to a great extent, to define situations in a context of ambivalence (Bauman, 1991). Formulating and implementing public policies implies managing this ambiguity (Hajer and Laws, 2006). As Aaron Wildavsky wrote some time ago (1978), managing the irreconcilable is the standard fate of
government. This can be seen in the cultural policy domain, a good example of how policies have come up against problems that are ever more complex, unclear, and risk-filled: problems in the context of the information society (Castells, 2000), marked by global economic development under a dominant financial sector, in which symbols and signs have a central place (Rifkin, 2000), and by the consolidation of heterogeneous and individualized societies (Bauman, 2003).

How have cultural policies generally responded? The eminently political nature of culture has been identified as a problem to be solved by means of public policies rather than as an opportunity. For instance, justifications of public subsidy for the arts and culture becomes a technical rather than a political issue (Belfiore, 2010). This artificially depoliticized view of how policies come to be was developed in tandem with a conception of policy analysis as a tool to translate political and social issues into technically defined ends (Fischer 2003).

In order to appreciate the consequences of this process, understanding why does policy change becomes analytical and scientifically relevant. This paper understands the direction of policy change as being a primary element for analysing of its consequences. Thus, this article’s object of study suggests going beyond a conception of reality (and actors' preferences) as something stable and clearly defined.

Methodologically, the study of policy change has become split between those who emphasise changes in individual interests and preferences, in institutional rules, or most recently, changes in ideational frameworks and in institutionalised discursive practices (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004: 185). This article subscribes to the latter tradition, trying to make a contribution to the development of concepts that let us overcome the individuals-versus- institutions dichotomy and thus forge links between actors and structures. One of these concepts is the frame (Goffman, 1974) and more specifically, the policy frame, an organizational principle that transforms fragmented information into a structured and meaningful policy problem (Fletcher, 2009; Bustelo and Lombardo, 2007). Making a decision is equivalent, in the end, to adopting a specific policy frame (Regonini 2001). But frames are not only present in individual actors, but also in collective organizations, whose actions are influenced by their interpretative work (Snow et al, 1986).

Despite the growing importance of policy frame analysis in the study of the policy process (Baumgartner et al., 2008), less attention has been given to this approach in studies of policy change. Thus, this article deals with the role of policy discourse and political actors’ margin of agency (through policy frames) in policy change processes. Policy change is taken to mean the result of the symbolic interaction between political actors, within a relatively restricted institutional framework.

Therefore, in the first place, this article builds a frame for analyzing policy change that I will call narrative-interactionist. Secondly, this approach is illustrated by means of an analysis of policy change in the cultural policy domain and, particularly, through a case study of the development of cultural policy in Catalonia. As I advanced, the particular characteristics of the cultural policy domain make it a scientifically relevant object of study for political science, especially as a way of illustrating processes of policy change in policy domains in which policy discourse and the ambiguity of language have a central role. Policy discourses on culture are the representations of those involved in
formulating policies in terms of what they understand, adopt and promote as ‘culture’. Cultural policy domain especially highlights that problem definition is fundamentally a political exercise, a worldshaping exercise which includes images and the assignment of values to objects, people and events, i.e. the elements that operationalise policy and politics (Stone 2002, Ingram et al. 2007). However, there are still few politological studies which analyse cultural policy domain and policy change. For this reason, this article aims to create knowledge about policy change that can be generalized in a historically limited way (Ragin, 1987) to other policy domains with similar characteristics.

THE NARRATIVE-INTERACTIONIST MODEL

My approach to the analysis of policy change starts out from a review of the bibliography in this area, but also from the need to construct generic narrations that account for causality processes that are not strictly positivist (Abbot, 1992). In such an approach, events are the largest unit of analysis, giving shape to the complete experience which is the object of study (Abbott 2001, Barzelay and Cortazar, 2004).

One of the most widely used analysis models for understanding policy change is that of punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; True, Jones and Baumgartner, 2007). Although the generic narrative that emerges from this model highlights the importance of ideational aspects (like policy images), the actors' agency can be explained by limited rationality. As for the ideas and values of the actors, these tend to be regarded as subsidiary to their interests. Thus, while recognizing the importance of the punctuated equilibrium model, this article seeks to gain a deeper understanding of political actors' ideational margin for agency. Its analytic approach therefore includes an explanation of the role of policy discourse in policy change developed by discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2001, 2002, 2008; Schmidt y Radaelli, 2004).

According to this model, policy discourses are used as guides to action by defining the concepts and norms to be applied, identifying the problems to be solved, developing the policy instruments to be used and framing the national policy discussion within a given policy arena. In turn, periods of policy stability can give way to ones of crisis, largely explained as a result of crisis in the policy discourse and/or programme. In this context, actors can modify policy discourse and generate an interactive consensus for change: they can alter perceptions regarding interests, showing the way to new institutional parameters and new cultural norms (Schmidt 2002, 2008).

However, the discursive institutionalism model pays less attention to the ambiguity present in policy discourses and also to the instability of actors' ideas and values. It is my view that frame analysis's theoretical and methodological approach sheds light on the importance of both aspects when explaining policy change. Each policy discourse can involve different policy frames, but all political actors operate in the public arena where the master frame (or common understanding of the principal patterns, relations and agents present in a society) (Goffman, 1974) is generated. The links that can be established between the respective actors' frames and the master frame explain (at least partly) actors'
agency and its effects on the policy change process. In order to account for this, in this article I recover the concept of frame alignment (Snow et al., 1986) and apply it in the policy change analysis. Alignment has an effect on policy change because it is about the way in which the frames of actors who play a role in the policy process (from governments to political parties, from interest groups to certain experts) align with the master frame and lead to mobilization.

Having, then, identified the theoretical and analytical stance of this article, figure 1 presents the narrative-interactionist model. This diagram places the various events on a single plane, shows the effects of the relationships between them, puts the stages of the narrative in order and offers (non-positivist) patterns of causality.

Figure 1. Generic narrative of the development of periods of policy continuity and policy change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbolic</th>
<th>+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Ideational crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C&amp;F</td>
<td>Continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Institutional crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional legitimacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PD: development of the policy discourse  
C&F: contents and forms of public policies  
PS: development of the policy subsystem

I have analyzed in previous works (Barbieri, 2012) the usefulness of the punctuated equilibrium model in the analysis of cultural policy change, looking especially at how the development of policy subsystems conditions the process of institutional legitimation of cultural policies, and accordingly, the policy change process (shown in the lower section of figure 1). Therefore, this article focuses on explaining the effects of policy discourse and policy frames on the symbolic legitimation of cultural policies or, in other words, on recognizing government's competence to intervene in the cultural arena, or the degree to which cultural
policies are accepted as a legitimate space for public policies. As figure 1 makes apparent, this article makes the claim that the policy change process is conditioned by the variations in the process of symbolic legitimation of government intervention. The development of a policy discourse and the effective alignment between a policy frame and the master frame are key factors in explaining this process of symbolic legitimation. We thus seek to answer the questions of when and how do policy discourse and policy frames matter when explaining policy change.

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY AND SELECTION OF THE CASE STUDY

This paper is based on a case study of the evolution of the cultural policies of the autonomous government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya) (1980–2008). On the one hand, in 1980, with the definitive reinstatement of the Generalitat de Catalunya after the Franco dictatorship, the Ministry of Culture (Departament de Cultura) was created. On the other hand, in 2008 the Parliament of Catalonia passed a law setting up the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONCA), and created the first mixed cultural policy system in southern Europe, bringing together both a department of culture and an arm’s length administrative body2. The National Council Law (CONCA) brought an end to almost a decade of changes in the Generalitat’s cultural policy.

In terms of specifying the object of study, I have decided to focus on the Generalitat’s Department of Culture, since in Spain it is the Autonomous Communities which have, a priori, the majority of formal powers in the field of culture. It is about a relevant case for understanding and illustrating the analytical perspective. In an accelerated way over a period of less than 30 years, both the cultural policies of Catalonia and those of Spain have attempted to achieve a similar level of institutionalisation as that achieved by many European countries after Second World War in under 60 years (Bonet 2001, Rius 2005, Rodriguez Morató 2005). Thus, even if the case of Catalonia may echo similar tendencies in cultural policy in Europe since the middle of the twentieth century, it would be difficult to identify a clear path between identified paradigms in cultural policy3 (Barbieri, 2012). This is why the case of Catalonia allows me to go beyond the historical-institutionalist approach (in the cultural policy domain see, for example, Gattinger and Saint-Pierre 2008) and analyze not only what cultural policy change process is implemented, but also how and why this is done.

Methodologically, the convergence between the case study method and the narrative approach allows us, on the one hand, to focus on the actors (their capacity for agency), without overlooking their structural restrictions, and on the other, to include certain concepts used in policy analysis (in this case, policy discourse and policy frame) that describe factors linked to the actions of those actors. The research (developed during 2010 and 2011) therefore combined frame analysis with content analysis of historical documents and semi-structured interview. The texts analyzed were, in the first place, debates in the Parliament of Catalonia: those of the president’s investiture and those of the commission on cultural policy. Their contentious nature lent itself to an analysis of the interaction

---

2 This system was to last for only three years, since in 2011 the government revoked CONCA’s competences in the management of support for cultural promotion. See Barbieri (2012).

3 A passage from a model of democratisation to another of cultural democracy in cultural policies (see, for example, Urfalino 1996).
between different political actors, while their regularity allowed a systematic study of how policy discourse on culture evolved over a period of almost 30 years. The analysis focused on identifying the different policy frames, codifying three aspects of policy discourse: the diagnosis of the cultural situation in Catalonia, the problem-solving measures to be taken and the interaction patterns between the different agents. In order to structure the narrative stages and propose (non-positivist) causality patterns, the results of the policy frame analysis were compared to the analysis of government budgets, laws and plans, publications of the political parties and their leading elite. Finally, the semi-structured interviews (from high officials to private sector agents) gave insights into the roles of the actors in the narrated events and into their institutional restrictions.

POLICY DISCOURSE AND SYMBOLIC LEGITIMACY: FROM CONTINUITY TO AN OPENNESS TO POLICY CHANGE

From 1980 onwards, for almost two decades, the cultural policies of the Generalitat remained largely unchanged. Continuity was manifested by the emphasis on institutionalisation of cultural policies and policies of direct intervention for promoting the production, rather than the distribution, access to or consumption of culture. Facilities were built or developed based on a double logic: infrastructure for production (over and above stimulation) and national infrastructures, for instance the National Theatre of Catalunya or The Auditori. Legislation on cultural matters focused on the Catalan language and on heritage. Furthermore, the principal institutional arrangements remained stable. 1985 saw the beginning of a brief period where the government of the Generalitat appeared to modify some of the basic policy contents. The Consell Assesor de Cultura de la Generalitat de Catalunya (an advisory council) was established (made up of cultural agents with a certain ideological plurality) and a national pact for culture was drawn up among the different public administrations. However, both measures failed: the national pact failed to win the support of all public institutions (among other reasons, because it was ultimately rejected by the then president of Catalonia), the advisory council was dissolved and the then Ministry of Culture (conseller) resigned (Barbieri, 2012).

This continuity corresponded to a process of significantly high symbolic legitimation of policies, at the same time that the policy discourse of “cultural standardization” (normalització) was being developed and was holding sway. The normalització was the cornerstone of the discourse of Catalan nationalism in matters of cultural policy. As the Catalan Minister for Culture Joan Guitart (1990) pointed out, to standardise Catalan culture was to define it as a market (where goods are produced) and at the same time as an expression of national identity. In line with the political transition after the dictatorship, this entailed the need to adopt pragmatic and politically “neutral” positions.

Standardization established itself as a master frame, but this did not imply a strict conditioning at the institutional level or of the discursive context (Schmidt, 2001). On the contrary, it was the Generalitat government officials who had a (relative) margin of agency to construct this principal and official focus of attention for actors in the policy process. Defending, rescuing and standardising culture (and the values associated with it) was considered to be a task of such an extent and importance that apparently only the Department of Culture had the capacity and
status to take this on. The policy problem was constructed in such a way that the preferred option was practically the only one possible. Actors who opposed the orientation of the Generalitat's cultural policies (especially those who were linked to the Socialist Party of Catalonia, the PSC) adopted their own policy frame, but found little echo in their audience, that is to say, in those who contributed directly to the formulation of Generalitat policy, and also those who could influence the policy-making process. Thus, continuity in public policies can be explained (in part) by the lack of alignment processes between the policy frames of those who were against official policies and the master frame.

However, maintaining the diagnosis and prognosis as well as the viability of the policy options associated with the same protagonists for almost two decades carries it the risk that the policy discourse will become out of touch. Thus, the degree of symbolic legitimacy of the Generalitat's cultural policies diminished considerably in the nineties to the point of bringing about an ideational crisis. This process can be explained in two ways.

Firstly, rather than on the effects of external factors (Schmidt, 2001), this paper sheds light on the importance of analyzing the incompatibility between policy discourses, policy contents, institutions and socio-demographic characteristics and cultural production dynamics. This mismatch is an indicator of actors' difficulties in managing old and emerging conflicts and inequalities. The ideas and values regarding culture that had been useful with the return of democracy were seen to be completely outdated at the end of the 1990s. An example of the above is the conditioned attitude to cultural diversity that the Ministry of Culture’s policy discourse presents. Culture was understood as that which, in spite of diversity (and not thanks to it), makes up the backbone of an integrated society. This idea of cultural diversity contrasted with the intensity and the origin of the immigration phenomenon that Catalonia was undergoing4.

Secondly, the difficulty of a policy discourse in legitimizing government action on culture is conditioned by interaction (and conflict) with alternative discourses. This interaction has effects on the stability offered by the master frame. The construction of alternative policy frames can be interpreted as a call for policy change. This was the scenario faced by the cultural policies of the Generalitat (and the Ciu government, the nationalist conservative coalition party) at the end of the 1990s. The socialists' policy discourse on culture, voiced by many provincial and local governments ruled by PSC (mainly in Barcelona) implied a policy frame with an alternative diagnosis in tune with the times: cultural policies must meet the challenges posed by a city that functions as an international knowledge and services hub, a process that policy discourse presented as apparently irreversible. In this policy frame, culture was metropolitan culture: civic and material, the expression of a particular social class and an instrument of cities' economic growth. It presented Catalan culture as one more component of (metropolitan) culture, but not the central one. This reinforced the relationship between culture and city, transcending the national or state-wide dimension of culture. And a new, different, image of cultural policy was put forward.

---

4 Since the end of the 1990s, the "new" immigrant influxes (different from those experienced during the dictatorship) do not correspond to the territorial inequalities within Spain (Solé and Parella, 2008: 88), but in the words of Castles (2004), form part of globalisation and the worldwide inequalities deriving from it.
Ultimately, the symbolic legitimacy of cultural policies was not only eroded in the case of a particular government (in this case, the Generalitat), but rather, the ideational crisis affected the policy domain and policy image as a whole. As early as 1994, Ferran Mascarell, who would later become the head of cultural policy of the Barcelona City Council and subsequently of the Generalitat, wrote: ‘Public policies continue to act as if they have a monopoly of all things cultural. As this is not the case, they appear less and less incisive and necessary, and remote from the real ways of producing, distributing and consuming culture’ (2005: 177, author’s translation). At the end of the 1990s there was a perception that public institutions were often outdated when it came to providing responses to social conflict. Some professionals in the cultural sector demanded the creation of an arts council that would in practice replace the executive functions of the Generalitat’s Department of Culture. It was argued that administrative bodies were not a good instrument for cultural policies, and that public policy and administration were enemies of culture (Generalitat de Catalunya 2005). Such a scenario opened the way to alignment processes between different actors’ policy frames and the master frame, and thus to a period of significant changes in cultural policies.

POLICY FRAME ALIGNMENT, NEW LEGITIMACY AND POLICY CHANGE

From the end of the nineties, and at least up to the CONCA law (2008), it is possible to identify a period of significant changes in the cultural policies of the Generalitat. These changes can be seen as significant if the process under study is looked at as a whole. The policy change began before the change of the coalition government in the Generalitat de Catalunya in 2003, which meant the arrival of the socialist party in the Department of Culture. Even if this significant institutional perturbation from outside of the policy domain is a key factor, it does not explain the process of policy change. Thus, table number 1 compares the periods of policy continuity and policy change.

Table 1. Development of the Catalan Generalitat’s cultural policies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy period</th>
<th>Contents and forms</th>
<th>Continuity</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public problems of</td>
<td>-Identity and language under attack</td>
<td>-Globalization and reduced market vs. promotion of cultural diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>policies</td>
<td>-Institutionalization deficit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Lack of normality (emphasis on cultural production)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>-Stabilisation of the organisational chart and powers (cultural promotion, heritage, language)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Significant changes in the organisational chart: orientation by sectors and by type of cultural agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrangements</td>
<td>-Failure of the national pact and the advisory council</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Desetatization and proliferation of autonomous bodies: Catalan Institute of Cultural Industries (ICIC, in 2000), Ramon Llull Institute (IRL, in 2002), National Council for Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How can this process be better understood when examined from the angle of policy frames and actors' (relative) margin of agency? Ideational crises do not guarantee that policy contents will change, nor do they explain their orientation. These changes take place in parallel with a growth in the symbolic legitimation of government intervention in the cultural arena. Key to this development are the processes of effective alignment between the policy frames of the different actors (in this case, government ones) and the master frame. In these alignment processes, the actors reappraise their own views on culture and reconstruct diagnoses, prognoses and motivations to act in the cultural arena. Effective policy change shows itself in micro-mobilizations of this type: constituent and not exclusively instrumental, dynamic and not mere reflections of stable interests. This article recovers, therefore, two types of frame alignment: frame amplification and frame extension, described by Snow et al. (1986), adapts them, and applies them to the analysis of policy change.

**Policy frame amplification**

A frame amplification process implies the clarification and reinforcement of a policy frame. It can occur through the amplification of values or that of beliefs. In the first case, there is a reconstruction and elevation of values linked to the policy problem or the policy image that have not inspired action in favor of policy change. In the cultural policies of the Generalitat, for example, culture (and cultural policies) had value (and function) as promoters of equality in terms of indivisible (socio-political) citizenship. Alignment was possible because culture was associated with an apparently unquestionable value, but also because it was achieved by reformulating (not rejecting) another value that is present (though partly in question) in the master frame: culture as an element of nation building, from then on in line with citizenship building. Thus, for the president of Catalonia José Montilla (2006) "Catalanism is based on a civil concept: the patriotism of citizens' rights and duties that defines our people's present and future". This policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Initiative types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| -Consolidation and stagnation  
-Emphasis on direct intervention and institutionalisation  
-Heritage policies and major facilities | -Expansion  
-Transfers to agencies, consortiums and public law bodies  
-Cultural promotion policies: music, performing arts, cinema |
| -Emphasis on generating cultural offers (Catalan language)  
-Limited decentralization, national symbolic cultural infrastructures (in Barcelona)  
-Legislation in language and heritage | -Diversification of intervention: industrial production and distribution (internationalization)  
-Attempt at strategic (economic) planning with cultural sectors  
-Legislation in cultural industries and creation |
discourse recognized cultural diversity unequivocally as a policy problem to be taken into account, but only under certain conditions. Cultural diversity has since been understood as that which allows the construction of a single people, the self-proclamation of a nation, though based on a less and less abstract idea of nationhood.

Hence, certain beliefs came to be amplified. There was an amplification of certain ideas present in the policy discourse on culture of the Generalitat government. On the one hand, evidence was gathered about phenomena regarded as obstacles to collective action: in our case study, the conservative attitudes of certain cultural actors in Catalonia. It was deemed necessary to take part in the building of the new world cultural order and the apparent lack of ambition of national cultures (expressed by the weakness of their international projection and cultural industry) was seen as one of the main policy problems. The change to a cultural policy that involved promoting the production and international distribution of cultural products was embedded in this process of policy frame alignment and re-legitimation of government intervention in cultural affairs.

This amplification of certain beliefs implies the gathering of evidence about the efficiency of collective action. A policy frame is reinforced by appealing for certain actors to participate. There is an amplification of the belief that only if certain actors participate can policy change come about. Who were the agents called on to solve Catalonia's policy problems? Policy discourse appealed to the industrial sector to act, through sectorial concentration and the search for new markets. The re-legitimation of government intervention meant redefining the role of the public authorities, a less centralized, more multi-level form of government. The policy image was re-created: from then on it was assumed that cultural policy was responsible for designing specific tools to promote agents of the so-called cultural system. In other words, the rationale behind cultural policy was the promotion of, basically, businesses and creators. This approach sidestepped the debate about the effects on the citizenry as a whole of public policies aimed at promoting certain organizations, or in other words, avoided the debate about the public value of cultural policies. Finally, this process included the significant changes in the organizational chart of the Culture Ministry, and also the tendency towards desetatization by means of creating autonomous bodies dedicated to the different cultural agents: the ICIC for the industrial sector and the CONCA for the creative arts sector.

Policy frame extension

Extension of the boundaries of a policy frame also explains the process of alignment with the master frame. The actors (and the organizations they make up) reorganize their priorities for evaluating events. In our case study, the policy discourse of Generalitat officials took on values and interests of diverse groups (from political parties to representatives of professional bodies), which thus could possibly participate in the formulation and implementation of cultural policies. These were the same groups that were included as part of the policy problems, groups whose values and interests began to stand out in the master frame, especially after the crisis in symbolic legitimacy undergone by the cultural standardization program.
Thus, the Culture Ministry’s policy frame (built on the link between culture and national identity) expanded and took on notions like competitiveness. This process of alignment by extension of frames led to modifications in the idea of culture, in the idea of Catalan culture and in the notion of Catalonia that were present in the policy discourse of Generalitat officials. Culture continued to be one of the central elements of the idea of Catalonia, which meant no change with regard to the master frame of standardization. But this reference came with a notion of culture as a productive process of accumulation of goods, knowledge and values. The representation or concept of Catalonia that has ended up being consolidated in the policy discourse was that of an enterprising and innovative society devoted to excellence, and one that is able to compete in the world. Catalan identity was put at stake less in the political negotiations with the State than in the economic relations within and outside those limits. National identity was at once a condition of existence and a tool of competition. As in a good number of European cultural policies (from European Capitals of Culture to the European Year of Creativity and Innovation), culture was understood definitively as an element of competitiveness, with its condition being recognised as a stage, as an arena for performances, conscious choices and justifications that are explicit and no longer tacit. Culture was conceived as the material used to mold the economy in a post-industrial society, as a pre-condition for the economy to exist. Although there were differences between the policy discourses of the parties and ministers responsible for cultural policies (CiU, PSC and ERC, the left wing nationalist party), the alignment process turned out to be common to all of them. This process included the significant changes made in the direction of cultural policy, in particular the move towards internationalization and budget growth (especially in cultural promotion policies: cinema, music and performing arts), the attempt at strategic (economic) planning with this cultural sectors and the legislation in cultural industries and creation.

In this period, the policy discourse on culture was constructed based on permeability; appealing to the future and to policy change. What is lost in ideological coherence is gained in the flexibility arising from the use of a wide range of concepts and norms, including some of which are contradictory. This policy discourse on an extended concept of culture was a reflection and at the same time a condition of the lack of boundaries in the area of cultural policies, which in large measure have allowed significant change to take place. In reconstructing the image of cultural policies as social policies and at the same time as policies for economic development, the public authorities appealed to the notion of excellence. Excellence was presented as a criterion for evaluating the intervention of public policies in cultural affairs. If the persistence of this criterion reflected the will to separate public funding from the vagaries of the political system (of the party system, above all), it also meant a tendency to de-politicize cultural policies. Calls were made for an apparently rational, instrumental vision, applying non-prescriptive evaluation criteria. In this context, again there was a striking absence of public debate on the relationships between cultural-political issues (for example, power relations in the cultural sector) and the cultural excellence criteria.

There remains one last observation to be made before ending this section on the processes of policy frame alignment, symbolic re-legitimation of cultural policies and policy change. After a period of ideational crisis, the reconstruction of policy image (and its re-legitimation) takes place in the policy domain itself. And it can be
understood as the result of the frame alignment process. Apparent in this process is the margin of agency of those responsible for policy to resonate with their audience, to re-legitimize cultural policies and to bring about policy change.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a tradition in policy analysis that has long sought to develop concepts that can link the agency of actors to (institutional) structures (Hajer and Laws, 2006:254). Based on this tradition, this article proposes a model for analyzing policy change that I have termed narrative-interactionist. In particular, an analysis is made of the role played by policy discourse and policy frames in the (relative) margin of agency of actors.

Based on evidence from cultural policy domain, and, particularly, from a case study of the development of cultural policy in Catalonia, this paper presents several findings. Firstly, it is shown that continuity in cultural policies corresponds to a significant degree of symbolic legitimacy on the part of government intervention, a process in which the lack of alignment between the policy frames of the actors in opposition to the government and the master frame is obvious. Secondly, a period of continuity gives way to one of changes when policies go through an ideational crisis. In this sense, this article confirms (in a different context and policy domain) a central thesis of discursive institutionalism. But as well as making this confirmation, the article specifies the process of dislegitimation, identifying two significant phenomena. On the one hand, the incompatibility between policy discourses and socio-demographic characteristics and cultural production dynamics. And on the other hand, interaction (and conflict) with alternative discourses.

Contrary to the indications of the punctuated equilibrium model (True et al. 2007: 158), openness to policy change does not come with (or after) a change in the level of public attention to policy problems, nor with access to the macro-political agenda. Neither can the process of policy change be explained by stating that it is politically determined. A significant political perturbation (such as the change in the coalition of the government of Catalonia after 23 years) represented a considerable, though insufficient, cause for the openness to policy change.

When and how then do policy discourse and policy frames matter when explaining policy change? After a period of ideational crisis, the policy change process corresponds to the symbolic relegitimation of government intervention, in this case in cultural affairs. By adapting and applying the concept of frame alignment (Snow et al., 1986) to policy change analysis, this article shows that the alignment between policy frame and master frame underpins this symbolic relegitimation and so helps in understanding policy change.

Actors (individually and collectively) are potential agents for change through their frames. Aligning with the master frame means aligning with the context of shared meaning and therefore resonating with the audience, which in this case consists of those who participate directly in policy formulation, but also those who influence this process. That is, the efficiency of a frame will lie in its robustness, in its internal consistency but also in its capacity to account for the complex relations between the actors in the policy process and to resonate in a particular context of meaning. This process can happen in at least two ways. Policy frame amplification means
alignment with the master frame through the elevation of certain values or beliefs. Policy frame extension is achieved through a reorganization of values and the inclusion of values and interests of diverse groups in the policy frame.

The process of alignment is dynamic and leads to a modification of the actor's policy frame, the actor being in this case mainly those in charge of public policies. Thus, collective action is not based on a type of instrumental rationality or a behavior that simply reflects interests that are defined, apparently stable and with an accompanying objective reality. Ideas and values are not mere addenda to institutional rules or interests. In policy change, the acknowledgement of what is considered real is not a prior step to be taken before making decisions, nor is discourse only of an instrumental nature. Change is constituent to the development of public policies, though not only in an evolutionary-positivist sense but also, and mainly, in a historic and social sense.

Finally, this article shows the importance of analyzing the cultural policy domain for a narrative-interactionist approach to policy change analysis. This domain (and the case of Catalonia) illustrates the tendency (on the part of political actors, but also of analysts) to create an apparently depoliticized vision of the policy process. This tendency has been developed in three ways. Firstly, the dominant policy discourse seeks to present culture as something that is free, balanced and politically neutral, avoiding defining its boundaries and implications by appealing either to a tacit construction (culture as a given thing) or to complexity (culture as the sum of all things and belonging to everyone). Secondly, this policy discourse calls for an apparently rational, instrumental vision, applying non-prescriptive evaluation criteria of cultural policy, as in the case of the concept of excellence. And finally, cultural policies have experienced difficulties in establishing differences between interlocutors (the cultural sector) and recipients of their actions, so that their public value has been questioned. All this shows that a political-based approach to cultural policy process and cultural policy change is still analytically and empirically relevant, both for policy practitioners and analysts.

There are obvious limits to the extrapolation of this article's findings to other policy domains. However, it would be interesting to do a comparative narrative-interactionist analysis of cultural policy change and policy change in other (specific) policy domains. It would certainly be appropriate to make a comparison with ideational or institutionally hybrid domains, such as (for instance) policies for information and communication technologies or urban policies.

REFERENCES


Bauman, Z. 2003, Modernidad líquida, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México D.F.


Castles, S. 2004, "¿Por qué fracasan las políticas migratorias?", Migraciones, no. 15, pp. 147-184.


Fletcher, A. 2009, "Clearing the air: the contribution of frame analysis to understanding climate policy in the United States", Environmental Politics, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 800-816.


Rodríguez-Morató, A. 2005, "La reinvención de la política cultural a escala local: el caso de Barcelona", *Sociedade e estado*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 351-376.