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Studying the Political through Frame Analysis

Co-directors:

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'Frame analysis' has a long history in the political sciences. Originally coined in other fields (Bateson 1972, Goffman 1974), the term had, by the latter part of the 1970s, been taken up in public policy analysis by Donald Schön and Martin Rein (Rein and Schön 1977, 1993; Schön 1979, 1983; Rein 1983a, 1983b) in groundbreaking research that led to their *Frame Reflection* (1994; see also Rein and Schön 1996), an ambitious effort to work towards what they called the 'resolution of intractable policy controversies'. During the 1980s another line of research developed, largely in political sociology and social psychology, that focused attention on framing conducted by and within social movements (e.g., Snow et al. 1986, Snow and Benford 1988, Gamson 1992, essays in Morris and Mueller 1992, Klandermans 1997; for an overview, see Benford and Snow 2000). Cognitive linguistics has also turned to studies of language and politics from a frames and framing perspective (Fillmore 1982; Cienki 2007).

These lines of investigation emphasize the ways in which political actors make sense of social and political realities. Framing processes enable such meaning-making by highlighting particular views of political and other social realities, while simultaneously occluding or downplaying other views. Frame analysis involves looking for patterns in the way political actors collectively put forward particular views of the specific issues they are engaging and for way(s) in which contending frames might be impeding communication between or among policy-relevant groups. In the latter instance, frame analysts oriented toward a more interventionist stance (such as in action research) might work toward mediating frame conflicts, including through changing frames or "re-framing", a central but under-theorized part of Schön and Rein's work that advocates bridging contending frames through a new, overarching one. (A more restricted version of a change in frames – without integrating more

than one frame – has been researched empirically more often; see Schön and Rein on frame shifts and Snow et al. 1986 on frame transformation. This is similar to individual frame changes as understood within psychotherapy, but this individual focus is not our concern here.)

For the Workshop we seek papers that theorize a range of topics, from understanding frames and framing processes themselves; to “re-framing”; to the similarities and differences among frames, stories, narratives, metaphors, models, theories, ‘maps,’ and the like. (The intersections of different tropes is well illustrated by the statement, ‘Policy frames can be seen as a type of story that is told by various political actors, and these narrative policy stories, including the use of symbols and synecdoches to tell them, help explain why some controversies are more wicked than others’; Nie 2003: 321.) The intention of this Workshop is to bring together scholars working on framing from various perspectives in order to elucidate the entailments of these ideas from a theoretical perspective grounded in empirical research.

Historical background and conceptual definitions

Whether conceptualized as story-lines that underlie a particular problem-setting narrative (Rein and Schön 1996; see also Stone 1988/2001) or as schemata for interpretation (Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986) more generally, policy and other political frames are seen as ways in which experience is organized. Frames accomplish this implicitly, by directing attention toward particular features of the political landscape and away from other features, thereby shaping the possibilities for taking action, including with respect to mediating intractable policy controversies.

Importantly, frame analysis does not have to be, and often is not, limited to the study of the *content* of frames regarding a particular issue, since framing itself takes place in socio-political processes. Seen as a broad, overarching interpretive approach, frame analysis joins a large, and still growing, group of methods exploring sense-making in empirical studies of public policies and other aspects of political life. In this view, ‘interpretive politics is a contest over the framing of ideas’ that shifts attention ‘from the contest over individual preferences to the contest over shared meaning’ (Abolafia 2004: 349; see also Stone 1988/2001, on politics as the struggle over ideas).

In the policy sciences, frame analysis as sketched out by Schön, Rein, and others has been applied to several empirical settings. Linder (1995), for example, used the concept of frames to analyze the contestations of five different discourse

communities struggling over the meaning of EMF (electro-magnetic frequency) emissions policies and their implementation. Swaffield (1998) drew on policy frames to analyze the meaning of 'landscape' in debates over New Zealand natural resource policies. Dudley (1999) studied the way frames and reframing played a role in the relationships between the British Steel Corporation and the British government. Drawing on 'value-critical analysis' (Rein's other term for frame analysis), Schmidt's (2000) prize-winning book explored the meaning of language in the 'English-only' political movement in the US. Investigating policy meetings at the US Federal Reserve Bank, Abolafia (2004) showed how 'frame moves' are used in bureaucratic politics in the midst of a major policy change. Other recent examples of the use of frame analysis include Nie's (2003) analysis of natural resource policy, Scholten's work (2008) on immigrant integration policies in the Netherlands, and Daviter's (2007) exploration, using the more mainstream agenda-setting literature together with Schön and Rein's ideas, of how a 'procedural, policy-centred approach of policy framing' could be used in studying EU politics.

The promise offered by frame analysis to mediate policy controversies, a possibility suggested by interpretive policy analysis (e.g., Fischer 2003, Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, Yanow 2000, 2007), has recently been picked up by those working in the fields of dispute resolution and negotiation, in particular within the area of environmental policy. A stream of theoretical and empirical research has emerged from this scholarly community (see, e.g., Gray and Putnam 2003, Kaufman and Smith 1999, Putnam and Holmer 1992). In addition, International Relations scholars are increasingly turning to theories of frames and framing in their research (e.g., Payne 2001, Fumagalli 2007). Moreover, 'frame analysis' intertwines an analytic approach with a research method; and as such, it has been elaborated upon as a particular form of interpretive research method (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). Schmidt (2006), for example, drawing on his empirical research on the 'English-only' movement in the United States, details the steps involved in conducting such an analysis in a public policy context.

Frame analysis of the political, in policy and other studies, is now more relevant than ever before, in a world that is represented through various media as much as it is experienced in everyday life. With television and the internet, present-day political subjects are drawn into "political spectacles" (Edelman 1988) through a variety of media types and their distinctive framing devices (Gamson and Lasch 1983) that both compete with and replace direct political experience. Although

Bateson (1972) pointed our attention toward the way in which even animals are able to know with great accuracy when 'play' is different from 'fight', the variety and complexity of frames available to (post)modern political participants may not only puzzle them (Is this 'spectacle' real or not?) but may also force them to engage in explicit frame construction themselves. This makes framing relevant also for those who study governmental communication and deliberative policy making (Laws and Rein 2003).

This body of work suggests the potential power of framing as an analytic concept and approach and illustrates the breadth of scholarship that this Workshop potentially draws together.

Workshop Aims and Types of Papers Sought

Given our view of frame analysis as a broad theoretical-methodological approach, we are looking for papers that join theorizing and empirical research, grounding the former in the latter. For example, frame analysis often involves a study of the uses of political language, specifically, and political symbolism, more broadly (Edelman 1964/1985, 1971, 1977, 1988; see also Elder and Cobb 1983). Moreover, it overlaps in important ways with work on metaphor analysis (Carver and Pikalo 2008, Yanow 1992, 2000), narrative research (Ospina and Dodge 2005, Patterson and Monroe 1998), and discourse analysis (Hajer 1995, Howarth and Torfing 2005). Most of these language-based studies are not purely theoretical; they derive their theorizing inductively, from empirical case material.

We hope to attract papers that tease out various sorts of framing mechanisms in specific empirical cases as well as those that unite and/or compare different ways in which frame analysis has been done over the past 30 years. Additionally, although frame analyses of politics and policy have been developed and used in various forms, we note a lack of connection among the variety of interpretive approaches used across sub-disciplines like policy sciences and political sociology. Seen as a jointly theoretical and methodological approach, frame analysis has the potential to bring together a variety of social constructivist and other interpretivist researchers working in various substantive areas of policy and politics. A desire to bridge these several frame analytic communities forms a central motive for this Workshop.

The aim of the workshop is, then, threefold:

1. *to advance the theoretical and empirical work being done on frames and framing-in-action (so to speak) in public policy and other subfields of political science and political studies;*
2. *to join various approaches to frame analysis relevant to political and policy studies, facilitating an exchange of findings and ideas, on the one hand, and providing a platform for debate about the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, on the other;*
3. *to advance the methodological systematicity (a.k.a. 'rigor') of frame analysis.*

As we anticipate an interdisciplinary group of participants, all papers will be required to clarify the definitions and intellectual origins of their central concepts (like frame and framing) and the scope of frame analysis in use. We hope to avoid papers that treat the posited a priori existence of reified, universal frames and instead to attract papers that explore situated, context-specific analysis.

Possible research questions for papers are:

- How does the use of frames/framing help the analysis of specific policy/political issues?
- What are the differences and similarities between/among different theoretical approaches to (re)framing?
- How do political subjects look at issues through frames?
- How can frame analysis capture the dynamics of present-day politics?
- How is policy making grounded in the framing of political issues?
- What are the conditions for successful (re)framing of policy and political issues, and which conditions hamper (re)framing?
- How are such concepts as frames or framing, narrative, stories (or story-telling), metaphor, model, 'map,' theory, and discourse in studies of politics and policy similar and different?
- What is the relationship between policy metaphors and/or any of these other tropes and policy frames?
- What is the relationship between framing and 'naming'?
- How do the possibilities of the Internet and other new media alter or sustain particular ways of framing political issues?
- How might frame-reflective (or value-critical) analysis as a method be theorized?

As noted above, in any of these theoretically-oriented issues, we would expect Workshop participants to ground their theorizing in empirical case materials.

This Workshop builds on earlier Workshops conducted within the ECPR, notably the 1992 Limerick gathering on 'Applying New Interpretive Methodologies', papers from which were subsequently published as an edited book by Routledge (Carver and Hyvärinen 1997), the 2001 'Policy, Discourse and Institutional Reform' in Grenoble, and the 2005 'Metaphors in Political Science' in Granada, papers from which have recently appeared also as an edited Routledge volume (Carver and Pikalo 2008).

Paper proposals (400 - 600 words, 1.5 or double spaced, describing the proposed paper) should be sent by December 1, 2008 to Merlijn van Hulst <m.j.vanhulst@uvt.nl>. Please make sure to include your name, affiliation, and contact address at the beginning of the proposal; please label the file ECPR2009.Frames.YourName, and use that for the email subject line as well. Also, indicate clearly in your proposal which framing literature(s) you will draw on in your paper.

Co-Directors

The two co-directors have worked together in the past, having met as fellow participants in the 2005 Granada ECPR Workshop on Metaphors in Political Science. They joined forces to co-teach the course in interpretive methods at the first ECPR Summer School in Methods and Techniques (Ljubljana 2006) and have recently begun to collaborate on various research projects.

Dr. Merlijn J. van Hulst (m.j.vanhulst@uvt.nl) holds a Ph.D. in the Social Sciences (Public Administration) from Erasmus University, Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and works as an Assistant Professor at the Tilburg School of Politics and Public Administration. With a background in Cultural Anthropology, his research has focused on the culture of local government. In it he has used a narrative approach to studying sense-making processes in municipalities. His interest in frame analysis has grown over recent years and has already materialized in a book chapter engaging Donald Schön's work (van Hulst 2008; the book resulted from the 2005 Granada ECPR Workshop on 'Metaphors in Political Science') and in recent paper proposals for international conferences exploring the links between Schön's ideas on reframing and his notions of reflective practice.

Prof. dr. Dvora Yanow (d.yanow@fsw.vu.nl) holds the Strategic Chair in Meaning and Method at the Vrije Universiteit (Amsterdam), Faculty of Social Sciences, and is a Senior Scholar at the Amsterdam School of Social Research. Her most recent empirical research, *Constructing American "race" and "ethnicity": Category-making in public policy and administration* (M E Sharpe, 2003), won the 2007 Herbert Simon Book Award from the American Political Science Association, having earlier been awarded the American Society for Public Administration book prize. She has published widely on interpretive policy analysis and interpretive research methods. Her latest work on political metaphor appears in the Carver and Pikalo edited volume (2008) that emerged from the 2005 Granada ECPR Workshop.

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