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The Fields of Policy-Making

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1 Introduction

Policy-making and public policy in general are at the core of the major issues that political economy addresses. Market regulation, balance between private interests and common good, resource allocation, provision of goods and services by non-market and state-funded public bodies are indeed inseparable from the policy process and shaped through it. In addition to accounting for their outputs, political economy “opens the black box” of these processes by analysing the role of institutions, of interest groups and of ideologies, by identifying the factors that influence decision-making, and by accounting for the technical aspects of implementation through policy instruments. There is, therefore, a political economy approach to public policy. This approach is largely focused on economic policy in the broad sense of the term (Rausser et al. 2011). It is, however, not limited to it and is also used to analyse specific policy sectors (on agriculture and wine, see Anderson et al. 2013; Itçaina et al. 2016), especially since these sectors are increasingly impacted by economic policy rationales in the economicisation process observed in various domains (e.g. environment, urban planning, welfare, education or scientific research), and in various national contexts.

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The aim of this chapter is to contribute to these analyses by posing the question of the social organisation of the policy process. By this, I mean the internal structures of the social milieus involved in this process (e.g. the balance of power and modes of cooperation within bureaucracies, professional organisations or among experts, to name only but a few), and the relationships between these specific milieus (e.g. negotiations between a bureaucratic and a professional organisation, and their respective uses of expertise in these negotiations). It is no coincidence that I have chosen this angle of approach. By focusing on what I propose to call the social structures of policy-making, I follow the theoretical postulate according to which any given policy (its very existence, its contents, its style, its instruments and its legitimacy) stems from the system of relationships between individual and collective actors involved in its definition. This postulate is more original than it may seem, since it contrasts with usual ways of considering public policy (as a series of stages, from agenda to evaluation, in the sequential approach; as the result of an institutional trajectory, in historical neo-institutionalism, as a decision made after a calculation, in rational choice theory, etc.). It serves as the basis for a sociological redefinition of public policy as the product of social relationships. This chapter argues that Bourdieu's field theory is the most powerful analytical tool to unveil the structures of these social relationships, and, therefore, a key concept for critical policy sociology.¹

In the first section, I present this sociological approach to public policy and discuss the available tools to analyse systems of relationships in policy-making. This will bring us to Bourdieu's concept of field, which I present in Sect. 2. In the third section, I examine the various possible uses of this concept to analyse a public policy and briefly present six of them. In the fourth and last section, I show in greater detail how a policy and its orientation result from the relationships between various fields. In the concluding section, I open the discussion with the question of autonomy, which is central to field theory.

¹The critical orientation contrasts with what Burawoy has coined as "policy sociology", namely professional sociological knowledge in the service of policy-making (Burawoy 2005). For further explanation on what being "critical" means when it comes to public policy, see Dubois (2015).

2 A Relational Approach to Public Policy

2.1 A Sociological Redefinition

There are uncountable definitions of a public policy. It is not in the scope of this chapter to review them, nor is it even possible to discuss in detail the most influential ones. I will only mention that most definitions share at least one of the two following flaws. The first one has to do with an intentionalist if not rationalistic view, be it implicit, considering a policy as a means to a predefined end. This is the case of classic problem-solving approaches, for instance, and of all approaches referring to notions of intentionality, goals, plans or programmes as substantial elements for the definition of public policy. Such elements may matter, but not always. This is a research question and not a defining feature. We should not define public policy on the basis of pre-existing intentions or goals, or for that matter any phenomenon considered from a sociological point of view. A second flaw is that most definitions share, if not a state-centred point of view, at least that policy is mostly defined by the public status of its supposedly main actors. This is the case for instance of Thomas Dye's interesting classic definition of public policy as "what government chooses to do or not to do" (Dye 1987, p. 3). Not to mention the debatable concept of choice (does the things a government or an individual accomplishes really or mainly result from actual "choices?"), such a definition identifies public policy with the government (others refer to the state, or to public authorities), while these public bodies may not be the most important actors in the definition of a course of action (or inaction). Private companies, interest groups, experts or the media can be more influential in this regard than those officially vested with government or state power. We also know that private organisations play an increasing role in the implementation of public policies, by now even in traditional government/state functions such as policing (on this question, see for instance White 2012). Not overestimating the role public actors play in public policies should bring us to be cautious about conflating public policy and public actors.

In order to avoid these common flaws and to consider public policy from a sociological and critical point of view, I propose an alternative conception. Following this conception, I define public policy as *the set of relationships, practices and representations which contribute to the making of politically legitimised regulation modes of social relations*. These relationships can be formal and institutionalised, as the chain of command within bureaucracies, or in

official arenas of negotiations. They can be unofficial and informal, as discreet exchanges between officials and lobbyists or between colleagues from different departments can sometimes be. These relationships bring together actors with various statuses, which are not reducible to public authorities, and may include journalists, clients, academics and many others. Their practices also are diverse, from expertise to raising issues in the public debate, from making rules to giving speeches and providing public services. Representations, defined as categories of perception and judgment, ranging from official views on “public problems” to the criteria used in the daily enforcement of a policy (e.g. who is regarded as a “real” refugee and who is not), are strongly associated with practices and do matter both as a factor influencing them and as part of the discourses accounting for and legitimising policy practices. Forms of regulation of social relations include resource allocation systems, legal rules, service provision, processing of people, management of undesirable situations, which contribute to maintaining social order, that is, an organisation of society which can be regarded as “normal” or acceptable, and which, at least, is not questioned by large parts of the population. The specific feature of public policies as forms of regulation lies in the fact that they are politically legitimised (contrary to market regulation, which does not require such a legitimisation). Political officials endorse them and present them as the desirable or unavoidable result of collective choices, even if they have played only a minor role in the process. This political legitimisation of a policy is what sets public policy apart, more than the public status of the actors influential in its elaboration.

This definition therefore takes into account the political dimension of public policy, while many existing definitions focus on its functional nature (solving problems). It is rooted in directly empirically observable elements (relationships, positions, practices), which enables us to analytically reconstruct indirectly observable ones (representations), while competing definitions most often use abstract notions (such as intentions or goals). Lastly, while “substantial” definitions of a “real” policy are widespread, at the risk of an essentialist if not normative bias, my definition is fully relational. Adapting Hegel’s famous proposal (“the real is rational”) to the principles of sociological reasoning, Pierre Bourdieu used to say that “the real is relational” (Bourdieu 1998a, p. 3ff.). My definition of public policy fully is. Each of its components is relationally defined. Positions, practices and representations are referred to other positions, practices and representations, and there is a direct relationship between a given position and the practices and representations of individuals holding this position. Last, I consider public policy from the point of view of the system of relationships linking

actors involved in policy-making. I propose to consider public policy as the product of the practices and representations of the agents involved in it, these practices and representations being determined by the social characteristics, interests and objective positions of the agents, and therefore by the structure of the relationships among them. By making it possible to objectify the structure of the positions, of the corresponding position-takings and relationships, Bourdieu's analysis of field enables us to uncover the social foundations of a policy, and in doing so offers a critical policy sociology.

2.2 Analytical Tools for a Relational Approach

Numerous concepts are useful to account for systems of relationships between actors involved in policy-making. The most commonly used certainly is the concept of network. This concept appears in various versions, and its uses range from a metaphoric mention to the implementation of sophisticated quantitative methods. One of the best examples of network analysis in policy studies is illustrated by the research Edward Laumann and David Knoke have published on two policy domains (health and energy) in the USA (Laumann and Knoke 1987). They beautifully illustrate the postulate I have formulated, according to which a policy stems from the system of relationships between actors involved in its definition. Following this postulate, the empirical analysis of such a system of relationships grounds the sociological explanation of a policy in its various aspects. *The Organizational State* locates the most powerful actors in the network, sheds light on their constraints, and, by doing so, helps us gain a better understanding of the orientations of health and energy policies. Laumann and Knoke, as network analysts in general, focus on concrete interactions between individuals. Who gets in touch with whom, how often, in which circumstances, are both empirical questions and explanatory factors. While direct interactions matter, I posit that they must be set in a wider and structural perspective to understand how they really do. First, the characteristics of actors cannot be reduced to their position in a network during a specific period of time. They also include pre-existing features such as social background, training, position held in an organisation and the position of this organisation in relation to other organisations involved in the process.² In other words,

²In Bourdieu's framework, the notion of "agent" reflects this structural definition of social individuals, who "act" (as "actors" do), but also "are acted" by social structures determining their possible actions (Bourdieu 1977).

policy networks and interactions within them are rooted in pre-established structures. We need to pay attention to these stable (but not unchangeable) settings to understand how a network works, which network analysis does not. This is what the concept of field enables us to do.

Just as there are various ways to use the notion of network, there are different conceptions of the notion of field (Martin 2003). Here, I will only give two examples among those that most directly relate to the topic of this chapter. The famous paper by DiMaggio and Powell on institutional isomorphism proposes the notion of “organisational fields” to account for the relationships between various organisations and institutions in a specific domain, in order to understand why and how they become increasingly similar. The authors define an organisational field as “those organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p. 148). More recently, Fligstein and McAdam have formulated the concept of “strategic action fields”, located at the intersection of social movement studies and organisational theory, to propose a general theory rethinking the roles of structure and agency (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Despite their claim of a renewal and progress in social theory, their attempt remains, for reasons which would be too long to explain here, a much weaker contribution than the systematic field theory Pierre Bourdieu progressively structured throughout his career.

3 A Bourdieu-Type Approach to Policy Fields

Bourdieu’s field theory is a comprehensive and complex ensemble of inter-related notions, difficult to sum up in a few sentences. Here, I will only outline its key elements for unfamiliar readers (for an introduction, see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 94–115; Bourdieu 1993). A field is a social microcosm, meaning a social space whose activities and purposes (e.g. the arts) differ from others (e.g. politics), located in other fields, and which has its own specific issues and rules. What is at stake in the arts field has little to do with the core issues in the political field. Individuals (agents) within a field do not run or compete for the same trophies, and they do not obey the same rules (in the sociological and not the legal sense of the term). An artist will look for recognition among his or her peers and by arts critics, and will therefore endeavour to fit the criteria defining what a good artist is, while a politician will look for power positions and will either play the democratic game, show faithfulness to the party and its leader, or demonstrate usefulness in government as a well-trained technocrat. This also means that part of the resources

used in a field are specific to it; this is what Bourdieu calls the “specific capital”. The technocratic capital of acknowledged skills in government affairs matters in the political and bureaucratic fields, but is of no value in the arts field. In addition, lifestyles, preferences and attitudes conceptualised by Bourdieu as *habitus* differ from one field to another. Artists do not think, speak, dress or behave like politicians usually do, and conversely.

These elements introduce two major points. First, these specificities have been progressively defined, in the historical process of differentiation that specifies modern societies. Religion, politics, arts and science have not always been regarded and organised as distinct spheres of activities. This historical evolution is an *autonomisation* process, meaning that fields have appeared together with the specific rules (*nomos*) they have established for themselves (*auto*). Second, a field is a structured space of positions and competition. Positions are defined by the level and structure of relevant capitals in the field, in relation to other positions—namely according to the distribution of capitals within the field. Agents compete with others in order to reinforce their position within the field.

All of this is of great help to understand the way a specific sphere of activities is organised. But there is more: Bourdieu posits a relation of homology between the location of an agent in a field and the position he or she takes (a political statement, a work of art). There is therefore a multiple level relationship, between positions (agent a, agent b, etc.), between positions and position-takings (agent a, position-taking a', etc.), and between position-takings themselves (a', b', etc.). Products (like a work of art or a political discourse) are understood relationally by referring them to the set of products in competition at a specific period of time (the space of position-takings), itself referred to the social structure of their production (the space of positions, e.g., the arts field or the political field).

In order to illustrate how this framework can be used to analyse public policies, I shall reformulate the main five classic questions in field sociology and apply them to the space of production of public policies.

1. As we have seen, a field constitutes itself by defining a stake that is specific to it, irreducible to those of other fields. A first question then consists in establishing what stake specifies the space of production of a policy. One can answer this by positing that it is the power to regulate a particular sphere of practices (immigration, housing, education, health, etc.) by mobilising resources (financial, legal, administrative, etc.) specific to a public institution (national government, local authority, European Union, etc.), or one linked to the public authorities (a joint public–private agency, a para-public body, an association financed with public funds, a social security body, etc.).

2. How does one define and delimit this space? As with any field, its periphery cannot be posited a priori, but results from the reconstruction performed in the course of the study. In his research on housing policy (Bourdieu 2005, pp. 89–147), Pierre Bourdieu starts by identifying those whom he calls “the efficient agents”, on the basis of institutional positions, a reputation analysis and a survey of position-takings; this then serves as a basis for a systematic reconstruction of the whole through successive cross-checks and additions. Here as elsewhere, and indeed to a greater extent, the definition of the limits of the field is a stake in struggles, because being “inside” or “outside” corresponds to securing, or being denied official recognition of the right to intervene in the regulation of a sphere of activity and the opportunity to contribute effectively to it.

3. The existence of a field presupposes a degree of autonomy, short of which a field ceases to function as such, because it is subject to external logics. Far removed from the theoretical debates of the Marxist tradition on the autonomy of the state relative to the dominant classes, field sociology calls for empirically reconstructing the historical configurations of the power relations internal to each field and the respective chances of different fractions of impacting policy orientations (this is extensively discussed in Bourdieu 2014). In complementary fashion, it invites us to establish the state of the political and bureaucratic fields that determines the possibilities of alliances and the types of exchange with these different fractions, the regulation of their differentiated access to the sites of power and public resources, the capacity or propensity to gain the upper hand over them or to convert their demands into official policy. In other words, it is necessary to establish systems of relations among different systems of relations (or fields), following the logic of a conception of the state as a meta-field, which clearly opens more on to empirical research than to general, abstract discussion of its autonomy.

4. Which principles of opposition structure a policy’s field of production? The answer must be established on a case-by-case basis, but some recurrent principles can nonetheless be identified. The pool of the agents who successfully claim to speak for the general interest (e.g. senior civil servants, “qualified persons”) is opposed to the pool made up by those relegated to the defence of particular interests (e.g. trade union representatives, locally elected politicians); this opposition may overlap with the one between generalist agents and sector specialists. The two competing principles of legitimacy—competence and political legitimacy—pit the experts against elected representatives, in a game of mutual delegitimation between “technocrats” who are seen as aspiring to take over power and “politicians” chiefly concerned to be re-elected.

5. Final question: what are the products of these competitions? They are politically legitimated ways of seeing a “problem” or a sphere of activity (objectified, for example, in speeches and official reports) and handling it (materialised in projects and reforms). These products are formally legitimated by their endorsement by an agent endowed with political authority (a mayor, a minister, etc.) or sanctioned by a vote. They are also legitimated by the very logic of the functioning of the field, by observance of the procedures, by the claim to technical or scientific competence, by the accumulation of symbolic capital, by recourse to public opinion, by a more or less staged consultation or the regulated confrontation of rival points of view, aimed at producing a somewhat illusory consensus.

Following the hypothesis of a homology between the space of production and the products, it is possible to provide a sociological understanding of policy orientations (products) by referring them to the field of public policy (the space of production). As we have recalled, Bourdieu’s field theory posits a relation of homology between positions and position-takings. On this basis, we can relate the competing options and orientations in the definition of a policy (regulating the financial system or not) to the positions and interests of those who advocate them (activists and left-wing political leaders, bankers and orthodox economists). Having objectified this system of positions and position-takings, it is possible to propose a more innovative hypothesis, which consists in establishing a correspondence between the content of a policy (its orientation, its style), and the relational structure of the space of the agents involved in its production. I will expand on this hypothesis now, further specifying the sociological redefinition I have proposed in the first section of this chapter. Under this more detailed definition, a policy can be considered as the output of a provisional state of the power relations within the field of struggles over the definition of politically legitimated forms of regulation.

4 The Notion of Field: Six Possible Uses for Policy Analysis

Quite surprisingly given the international dissemination of Bourdieu’s theory and the multiform rise of policy studies over the last decades, this framework is rarely used to analyse public policies. Emirbayer and Johnson have elaborated on a similar underuse in the related research domain of organisational analysis (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). Apart from limited

references to the notion of field in general (see for instance Duffy et al. 2010), most—rare—mentions to Bourdieu's theory in research on public policies are found in literature in the field of education (Lingard and Rawolle 2004; Thomson 2005; Lingard et al. 2005; Rawolle and Lingard 2008). As Hilgers and Mangez write, many of these researches often refer to Bourdieu's theory of fields only partially and do not systematically follow up on its analytic and methodological implications (Mangez and Hilgers 2012). Rawolle and Lingard have recently proposed one of the most systematic and comprehensive applications of this theory, but without fully fulfilling its empirical (that is, quantitative) programme (Rawolle and Lingard 2015).

Yet, as we have already seen, this theory may be of great help to understand the origins and orientations of public policies. In this section, I will examine six different possible uses of Bourdieu's field theory in policy analysis.

1. The notion of bureaucratic field makes it possible to analyse the formation, structure and functioning of a space of positions specific to the state, which in turn specifies the state itself (Bourdieu 2014). This notion avoids the monolithic view of bureaucracy as a homogeneous whole oriented towards shared collective goals and sets specific bureaucratic organisations in the general landscape of inter-organisational competition, usefully complementing organisational analysis (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008, p. 20). Within the bureaucratic field, one generally observes a combination of hierarchical, vertical oppositions (central state vs. local authorities, senior vs. junior civil servants), functional oppositions (e.g. financial departments vs. spending departments) and institutional competitions between “bureaucratic fiefdoms” (Allison and Zelikow 1999) defending divergent interests and orientations. At the level of the individual agents, this corresponds to competitions between different kinds of bureaucratic capital, also linked to generational oppositions: experience vs. technical knowledge; internal competences and legal or practical mastery of the rules of the game vs. sectorial competences, transposable outside of the bureaucracy. These principles of opposition combine with principles of grouping and solidarity, such as the classic *esprit de corps* observed among senior members of the different branches of the French civil service. Systematically accounting for internal competition and contradictory views in a structural perspective enables us to understand how public choices reflect the internal balance of power within this specific space of relationships, for instance between budget departments and welfare departments.

2. The concept of field can be mobilised to analyse a space of specific positions and relationships which is closely related to the formulation of public policies. Thomas Medvetz gives a good example of this in his research on American think tanks (Medvetz 2014a, b). In this study, Medvetz shows how the formation of a distinct sub-space of intellectual production contributed to the structure of public debate in the USA, drawing the space of politically conceivable and possible options, and thus indirectly orienting government policies.

3. In Bourdieu's theory, while fields usually organise a specific range of practices (such as arts, sports, medicine or science), the "field of power" has a more transversal dimension. The field of power is composed of the most dominant fractions of a series of specific fields (such as the field of economy, the media, the political and intellectual fields), whose power can be exerted on other fields in addition to their field of origin. For instance, CEOs of the largest companies may own press outlets and TV channels, then be powerful in the field of media and, thanks to this position, exert power in the various domains where the media play a direct role, such as politics or culture, these indirect influences reinforcing their initial dominant position in the field of economy. These CEOs are then part of "the field of power", together with politicians, influent journalists or intellectuals, with whom they share a high level of capital under its various forms (economic, social, symbolic), enabling them to intervene in a wide range of domains. In Bourdieu's words, the field of power is not only about enjoying a high level of capital. It is about enjoying power on capital itself. This is the case when bankers can influence political decisions on interest rates, or when media coverage impacts the internal balance of power of the political or cultural field. As any field, the field of power is defined by the structure of power relationships within it, namely, by the competition between its various fractions (economic, political, cultural, in some cases religious). What is at stake in this competition is power on various forms of capital and on the hierarchy between those forms (e.g. between economic and cultural capital)—namely the general economy of hierarchies between fields and within the social space as a whole (Bourdieu 1998b). The notion of field of power is therefore of great value to understand the elite both as a specific social milieu and as a collection of various specific milieus (fields), while literature on the elite usually opposes these two dimensions in the "monist" vs. "pluralist" debate. This has been illustrated by several national case studies, for instance on France (Denord et al. 2011) and on Norway (Hjellbrekke et al. 2007). This powerful relational morphology of the elite

could be directly useful in policy analysis. It can be argued that most policy decisions are made among this specific space of relationships. It can also be argued that what we have called “policy”, as politically legitimised modes of social regulation, is only a specific way of regulating the various forms of capital and their hierarchy, which Bourdieu defines as the function of the field of power.

4. A fourth way of mobilising the concept of a field to analyse the system of positions within which policies emerge consists in establishing the structure of an institutionalised space of political power relations. Didier Georgakakis and Jay Rowell propose such an analysis in the case of the European Union. While it is most often viewed from an institutional and legal perspective, they consider the European Union as a field, with its own (social) rules, forms of capital and stakes. Their study of “the field of Eurocracy” provides a comprehensive perspective on the various types of agents involved in this system, from national officials to journalists covering EU news, from high-ranking civil servants of the European Commission to lobbyists, and on their relatively stable relational structures. This is of great value to understand the style and contents of EU decisions and programmes.

5. This concept can serve to objectify the space of production of a specific policy, whose power is to regulate a particular sphere of practices (immigration, housing, education, health, etc.) by mobilising resources (financial, legal, administrative or symbolic) from a public institution or linked to public authorities. It is then necessary to consider a policy as the objectification of a provisional state of the internal balance of forces within the specific field of struggles for its legitimate definition. Pierre Bourdieu and Rosine Christin give an example of this in relation to housing policy, explaining the reform by referring it to the alliances between “modernist” fractions which lead to the relegation of formerly dominant agents in this sector, and, consequently, of the policy orientations they promoted (Bourdieu 2005). It is worth elaborating on this case study, since it is the one policy programme analysis in which Bourdieu’s field theory has been most comprehensively illustrated so far, including at the methodological level with a multi-correspondence analysis, a statistical method used to map systems of positions which can be regarded as the technical tool for a systematic empirical application of the notion of field (on MCA, see Le Roux and Rouanet 2004; on the affinity between this technique and the notion of field, see Lebaron and Le Roux 2013; Duval 2013). This research shows how changes in the relative values of forms of capital within the bureaucratic field (see above)

in the latter half of the 1970s, during the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, facilitated a short-term alliance between young technician graduates of the *École Polytechnique* (one of the most prestigious French *grandes écoles* training state engineers) and young financial administrators from the *École Nationale d'Administration* (another prestigious French *grande école* training higher civil servants) to gain the upper hand over the positions previously established in housing policy—civil servants in the *Ministère de l'Équipement* (at the time in charge of housing, in addition to environment and road infrastructure) local politicians and representatives of joint public–private undertakings. The former were thus able to impose the “modern” and “liberal” vision attached to their own position and interests, dismissing the latter’s ideas as “archaic”. One then understands the social and also ideological foundations of the decline of building subsidies (*aide à la pierre*) in favour of personal subsidies (*aide à la personne*), the technical translation of an individualisation of the housing question (financial support for households rather than building social housing units), signalling the start of the move to neoliberalism.

This example shows that the contribution of field sociology to policy analysis goes far beyond the social morphology of the elite “decision-makers”. On this basis, it demonstrates what the properties of the agents and the logic of their relationships induce in terms of position-takings, i.e. symbolic productions (expert opinions, ideological constructs, legitimate visions of the world) and, inseparably, practices of intervention (laws, regulations, budget decisions, reforms, institution building, resource allocation, policy instruments). This example also shows that the sociological objectification of the structure of a field does not prevent scholars from accounting for change. Giving an account of the successive states of this structure makes it possible, on the contrary, to better understand policy changes, which can no more be ascribed to the individual “wills” of the decision-makers or their replacement than to a simple “adaptation” of public choices to the objective development of the situations on which they have an impact, but which can be systematically referred to the shifts in the power relations within a specific policy field.

6. Finally, the sociology of fields invites us to account more broadly for the relations between distinct social spaces within which public policies are formed. In the process, it allows us to grasp the foundations and the scope of the relations of domination and legitimisation that define the intervention of the public authorities. This final level of analysis in terms of field is developed in the final section of this chapter.

5 Policy as the Product of Relationships Between Fields

As we have just seen, there are many possible ways to use Bourdieu's field theory to objectify the systems of relationships between agents involved in policy-making processes. The choice between one of these six ways depends on the research question, but also on the empirical case under scrutiny. In any case, the concept of field needs to be used for clearly stated reasons, documenting its relevance to the research design.

In this section, I have chosen to elaborate on the relations between the constitutive social spaces of public policy, as contemporary policy-making processes are increasingly complex, involving multiple relations and a wide variety of agents which cannot easily be circumscribed to a single field. Beyond a monographic use of the concept to account for a single system of relations within a field, I will here illustrate an analysis of the relations among the fields or fractions fields mobilised in the pursuit of a policy, establishing (systems of) relations among (systems of) relations in the process.

5.1 The Relations Between the Bureaucratic Field and the Other Fields

The first form that these relations among systems of relations can take consists in the exchanges, collaborations, confrontations, etc., that are established bilaterally between the fraction of the politico-bureaucratic space mobilised in the public handling of a particular domain (e.g. the civil servants and political agents at least temporarily in charge of a particular sector or dossier) and the corresponding field. This approach can be applied to any policy that touches on the functioning of a field constituted as such—culture, education, science or sport, for example—even when this field is itself constituted within public institutions, as in the case of the field of justice.

This can be useful to analyse the genesis of a policy, which then can be viewed as the result of the interaction, be it a collaboration or a confrontation, between the politico-bureaucratic field and the field in question. In my research, I analysed French cultural policy from this standpoint, as the product of the relations between the field of culture and the group of administrative and political agents who intervene on cultural questions within the governmental space (Dubois 2012). The history of cultural policy is then defined as the history of these relations. Reconstructing them makes it possible, in particular, to understand the formation of inter-field alliances which

could not have happened at other times, and in which one finds the principle of the major innovations or reorientations in this domain—even if credit for them may be claimed by or attributed to singular agents. The first political formalisation in France of a “Republican policy for the arts”, for example, sprang from the encounter, in the late nineteenth century, between reformist administrators, the composite milieu of the “industrial arts” and the avant-garde of the artistic field; it was facilitated by political agents who were both novices and multi-positioned and made possible by a political juncture that was conducive to innovation. The institutionalisation of policies for culture in the modern sense of the term corresponds to a moment when the field of culture was sufficiently established for the intervention of the state to be seen as a support rather than external interference, when, on the contrary, the market was seen as unable to fulfil necessary functions in artistic innovation, cultural dissemination and heritage preservation, if not a dangerous force liable to make financial logics prevail over “the rules of art” (Bourdieu 2006), and when the central administration was strengthening itself in a modernising direction that favoured the opening up of new areas of intervention.

In democratic regimes, policy orientations are rarely reducible to the coercive imposition of choices by public authorities, especially when these policies concern autonomous fields. This perspective is therefore also useful to show how relations between fields ground the compromises and shared beliefs influential in policy programmes and in their legitimisation. This is how we can interpret the principle of “cultural democratization” as a motto issued from the collaborations between the politico-bureaucratic and the cultural field in the 1960s France. The dual political and cultural connotation of the phrase clearly indicates its origin: a technocratic humanism taking up and neutralising the political strategies of the artists in a compromise between agents of the bureaucratic and cultural fields made possible because the notion of democratisation could echo principles rooted in the history of the cultural fields, such as the “popularisation” of the arts and the “social function” of the artists.

Here again we can notice that this relationship is not unilateral. Public policies illustrate how the politico-bureaucratic field intervenes and influences the other fields and their internal structures. Sectorial policies also reflect the state of a given field, i.e. its legitimate definition according to the balance of competition within it, which determines the options for public policies. In addition to that, the specific settings, principles and rules of a field are partly imported in the politico-bureaucratic field in the policy-making process. Departments and services in governmental bodies more or less follow the distinction between fields (e.g. separating culture and education

in France). They also partly comply with the rules of the field they regulate, as when state councils invite arts critics and artists to grant subsidies to other artists, following the principle according to which only members of the arts field are fully legitimate in making artistic choices. This could be viewed as a reversed form of the “institutional isomorphism” analysed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

5.2 Policy as the Output of the Relationships Between Multiple Fields

It would, however, be too simple to consider that a policy stems only from the binary confrontation between the political-bureaucratic space and the relevant field. That is a possible configuration, especially when the question is very specific and narrowly defined and/or the field is strongly self-enclosed and its functioning has little effect on the functioning of other fields. In most cases, the multiplicity of the spaces and sub-spaces involved in generating a policy actually entails a much more complex set of interrelations. Even a seemingly technical question, internal to the bureaucratic field, such as the reform of the State, originates and derives its logic from its handling in different spaces and through their interrelation: the airing of the administrative question in the press; its transformation into a stake in electoral competition; the intellectual and literary investments of senior civil servants in devising and diffusing reformist arguments (Baruch and Bezès 2006).

This is especially so when the reform or policy programme in question has more diverse roots and implications, which is most often the case. We can thus hypothesise that an option is most likely to be selected when the dominant poles of the different fields involved are, for reasons that may differ, favourable to it or have an interest in it. A policy and its orientation may be therefore regarded as the result of the convergence between logics and interests that are (partially) specific to distinct but interrelated spaces of interrelation. This is what I show in my ongoing research project on what I would call *the dark side of workfare*, meaning the reinforcement of surveillance and penalties for welfare recipients observed over the last two decades in most European countries. In the following, I focus on the four social fields most directly active in the success of this policy orientation in France.

First, the scientific field of economic expertise contributes to framing policies. It provides intellectual models which can play two roles: they sometimes strongly influence policy-making; they are referred to after the fact by policy-makers in order to confer so-called scientific legitimacy on political

orientations defined on different grounds. The field of economic expertise, now dominated by neoclassical orthodox approaches, paved the way for more control in welfare. The success of the concept of inactivity trap, or poverty trap, is a good example of this role. To put it simply: according to this model, individuals on welfare calculate their financial interest to decide whether they take a job or stay on welfare. When the level of welfare benefits is “too high”, they will prefer to stay on welfare. This debatable model has been widely used as a basis for welfare reform and its legitimisation, including the development of control and sanctions as incentives to work. This has been the case in France, as we can see in numerous policy recommendations by economists. To mention only one, Michel Camdessus, former director of the IMF in 2004, in a report on the general economic situation of the country entitled “The burst: towards a new growth for France”, surprisingly devoted numerous pages to urging the government to strengthen control over the unemployed and welfare recipients, directly in line with the inactivity trap model.

Second, in the bureaucratic field, the welfare elite took a decisive managerial turn, beginning in the early 1990s, whose impact has been increasingly visible during the past two decades. These economic models became all the more influential as a new generation of higher civil servants with a background in management and in economics replaced the previous one, trained in law and attached to the old welfare model. At this level, welfare control was defined as a good management technique. The new welfare officials laid emphasis on financial concerns and imposed neo-managerial references and practices on their organisations and their agents. Within the bureaucratic field, the ministry for finance and budget, the Court of Auditors (*Cour des Comptes*) and the accounting departments in welfare organisations came to play a decisive role in the management of welfare provision, including a new “risk management” strategy which in practice consists in new tools for monitoring and sanctioning welfare recipients.

These orientations were widely reported upon if not supported in the media field. In my research, I found hardly any evidence of papers on welfare fraud before the mid-1990s. By contrast, countless amounts were published after that date, especially after the most important reforms of the early 2000s. This chronology shows that the media have not fulfilled an agenda-setting function, urging the government to make reforms. On the contrary, they have generally followed the government on these issues, spurring public support for governmental reforms. While some left-wing papers were initially critical and used references to George Orwell to denounce a surveillance society, the vast majority of articles denounce welfare fraud as

a scourge requiring more control. Not all the press follows this orientation, but crucially, national TV channels and mainstream newspapers do.

Fourth and last, the internal dynamics of the political field appear to play a prominent role. The right has unsurprisingly promoted the theme of welfare fraud. In 1995, this was to retain the support of the privileged fractions of the conservative electorate and of independent workers. Later, it became an explicit means to gain support from the working classes, among which turnouts are very low. Criticising the “lazy entitled” became a very common way for right-wing politicians to present themselves as sharing the concerns of workers who can hardly make ends meet and are supposed and encouraged to be upset with “their neighbor who stays home and makes as much money on welfare”. This is in my view a good example of the circular effect of a political discourse, which by repeating the same arguments reinforces if not generates the concerns to which it supposedly responds. This is also an illustration of how right-wing themes spread across the political spectrum. Other issues, such as security and immigration, have become central in the political debate on welfare and beyond. The moderate left which alternates with the right in government could not avoid addressing them. Its leaders have had to do so in order to appear as credible government officials, tough on crime and fraud, far from the “over-leniency” denounced by their competitors. By doing so, they have progressively included some of their opponents’ arguments into their own discourse and unintentionally contributed to the political success of these themes.

The construction of welfare fraud as a public problem and the new relevant surveillance policies result from the interaction between these four fields. This interaction is also an explanation of the fact that welfare fraud as an object of public rhetoric combines a wide range of registers, from financial rigour to morals, from expertise to casual conversation and barroom politics. Its targets can vary from the bad mothers who “have children to live on welfare” to the bad immigrants who come to France to abuse the system; it is also part of the delegitimisation of welfare in general, even if it, somewhat ironically, the system is depicted as in need of saving because it is supposedly undermined by fraud. This rhetoric peaked under the Sarkozy regime, when welfare fraud and entitlement were contrasted with “the work value” (*la valeur travail*) promoted as the key element of the governmental programme to “redress” French society.

From a political economy perspective, we should not forget that such policy orientations may serve the private interests of employers, and that they may have been influenced by their unions and lobbying. Sanctions to welfare recipients are closely related to cuts in welfare benefits, themselves necessary to achieve the tax cuts routinely demanded by employers’ representatives.

Making welfare “less comfortable”, as reformers put it, can also be a means to make precarious work and underpaid jobs more easily acceptable. Field theory enables us to understand that these interests could not have been translated into policy programmes if they had not been instilled through a long and complex circuit of legitimisation, including various social spaces, that in the end makes these options appear as inevitable if not consensual. The social structures of policy-making are, in the meantime, the basis for policy legitimisation (I elaborate on this question in Dubois 2014, pp. 216–217).

6 Conclusion: Questions of Autonomy

To conclude this overview of the contribution of Bourdieu’s field theory to policy analysis, I will come back to the question of autonomy. This question is central to field theory and in turn raises other theoretical questions. I will address it in two main parts.

First, how can we rethink the question of the autonomy of policy apparatuses? This question is most often posed in the perspective of the Marxism vs. neo-institutionalism debate on the state. While Marxists authors, such as Nikos Poulantzas, mainly posit that the state and its policies reflect the interests of the dominant class, and enjoy no or at least only little autonomy, neo-institutionalists, on the contrary, posit that the state and its institutions are able to pursue their own goals and to conduct policies that cannot be reduced to the influence of external actors (Skocpol et al. 1985). The problem of this dichotomist opposition is that, whatever side we are on, it substantialises “the state” when we should view it as a complex web of relationships without unchanging established boundaries (Bourdieu 2014). Field theory invites us to examine this question in a different perspective. Looking at the objective system of positions involved in policy-making gives us a more concrete view of the relationships between agents (state agents and others) who effectively intervene in policy-making processes. This system of positions is an arena in which various views and interests compete, according to the spheres the agents belong to, from state organisations to interest groups and experts. It is not therefore independent from private interests, but cannot merely reflect these interests. It has to be organised following specific rules to translate interests and rationales into a policy that claims to serve the public interest. This translation is not only a discursive process; it consists in legitimisation procedures which rest on the social organisation of the policy field. We could therefore say that, paradoxically, a certain degree of autonomy is necessary for external powers to be efficiently exerted in policy-making processes.

A second way to address the question of autonomy is to reflect on what public policies do to the autonomy of social fields. Upon first glance, as external interventions on the internal functioning of fields, public policies may reduce their autonomy. This is obvious in authoritarian regimes, where all spheres of social activity are subject to the rules of the political-bureaucratic apparatus and are no longer (autonomous) fields in the strict sense of Bourdieu's concept. This also may be the case in other political contexts, as public policies import if not impose heteronomous logics (political and or bureaucratic) into fields ruled by other logics. However, we could say that a certain respect for the principle of self-organisation of the differentiated social spaces is an implicit rule of contemporary liberal democracies, where intrusive political interventions in the internal functioning of a social field (the arts, sports or science) may occur, but under particular conditions so as not to cause outrage. More generally, historical analysis shows that public intervention has contributed to the genesis and autonomisation of fields. Among others, Pierre Bourdieu has shown that the creation of an economic market required state intervention, through a minimal guarantee of security, transport infrastructure and monetary unification (Bourdieu 2005). Likewise, the formation of fields specific to the arts, sports or science partly results from political and state initiatives. From the post-war era to the neoliberal turn, we could generally say that the growth of public intervention went hand in hand with the autonomy of social fields, insofar as this intervention consisted in "correcting" the effects of the market and in preserving a wide range of social activities from an excessively straightforward implementation of its rules. In contrast to this paradoxical contribution to their autonomy, neoliberal policies consisting in imposing these rules as functioning principles of potentially all spheres of activities have contributed to reducing the autonomy of social fields. This is the case in health, higher education, sports, culture, welfare and many other fields. This time, the redefinition of public policies, sometimes nearly amounting to a retrenchment of public intervention, is leading to a growing heteronomisation of social fields. Pushing the paradox, we could say that, contrary to common conceptions, "interventionism" may, in certain conditions, favour the autonomy of fields while "liberalism" can work in the opposite direction.

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