

# 51. Discursive analysis, framing, and the narrative policy framework

## Introduction

European Studies took a discursive turn in the late 1990s as scholars became increasingly interested in the role played by discourse in European politics and the making of European Union (EU) policies. To a large extent, this has been a continuation of the ideational turn in political science more broadly, and especially in international relations (Checkel, 1998) and international political economy (Blyth, 1997). While also interested in the nature of ideas, discursive analysis serves to investigate the fundamental triangular relationship between ideas, agents, and institutions, as ideas are constructed in and uttered through discourse. Depending on the type of relationship investigated and theorised, discourse can therefore be conceived in three ways: first, as the very substance of politics and the inescapable means to solve collective problems; second, as a process whereby the actors of political life interact with each other and raise and solve conflicts; third, as a meaning structure shaping behaviours and actions, institutions, and policies. In the discursive analysis of EU public policy, European integration therefore constitutes a highly heterogeneous research field with ramifications across disciplines, theories (from constructivism to institutionalism), and ontological stances (from positivism to post-positivism), yet with a common emphasis on conflict and legitimacy.

Our ambition here is not to cover the whole field of discursive analysis. Rather, this contribution focusses on two very widespread meso approaches that are particularly relevant for the study of EU policy making, namely, frames and narratives. We address in particular how they connect to process-based approaches with a focus on the narrative policy framework (NPF). We start by looking at how frames and narratives have grown as major conceptual tools for the discursive analysis of EU integration; we highlight differences and complementarities between the two, and how they can be employed

in processual analytical frameworks (policy process and NPF). In the second section, we focus on the NPF and explain why it has been at the centre of theoretical debates. In the final section, we suggest how the identified tensions can be overcome by relying on two examples of specific research on EU public policy.

## Frames and narratives: from pervasiveness to process theories

### *Research questions*

A wide range of conceptual tools are useful for the discursive analysis of EU policy making, including paradigms (Béland, 2007), *référentiel* (Muller, 1994), myths and visual communication (Lynggaard, 2019), or various linguistic tools such as metaphors (Borriello, 2017). Arguably, though, narratives and frames have been the most widely used concepts for scholars studying the European polity, politics, and policies (Crespy, 2015). A first set of research questions relates to the very existence of the EU as a political system. Frames and narratives constitute a fundamental mechanism to develop a common European identity (Bouza Garcia, 2017; Trenz, 2016) and generate legitimacy through competing (Chenal & Snelders, 2012; Gilbert, 2008) and conflicting (Kaiser, 2015; Nicolaidis, 2014) explanations of the EU and its role on the global stage (Della Sala, 2018; Manners, 2013). Turning to politics, scholars ask how discursive practices within civil society contribute to the building of a European public sphere. A common transversal question is to what extent conflicting discourses about the EU and its policies – taking the form of politicisation or Euroscepticism – contribute to forge a common political space or rather to delegitimise the EU (Crespy & Verschuere, 2009; De Wilde et al., 2013; Galpin & Trenz, 2017; Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

Following a discursive turn in public policy – ranging from rationalist (Schön & Rein, 1994) to constructivist perspectives (Fischer, 2003) – a third (heterogeneous) group of scholars have studied the role of narratives and frames in EU public policy. They have tackled mainly three sets of research

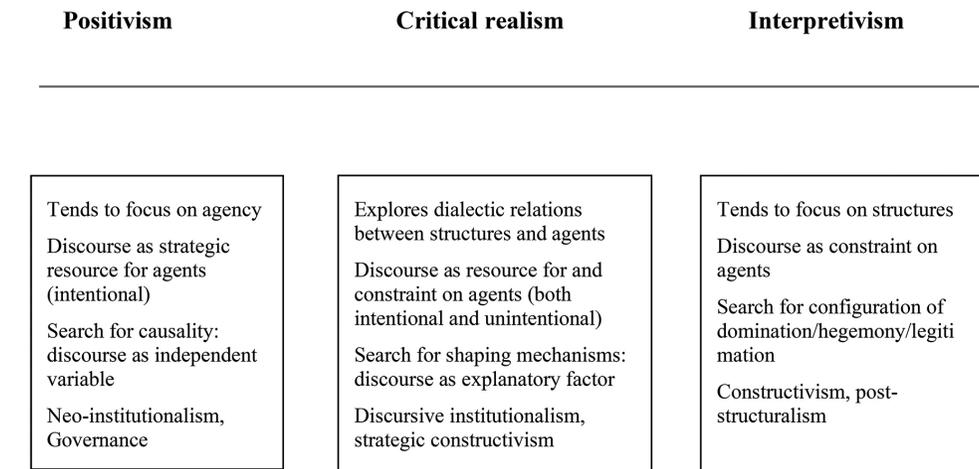
questions: a) how do ideas (ideologies, paradigms, expertise, etc.) contribute to shape policies compared to other factors?; b) how does policy change occur (through politicisation, paradigm shifts, punctuation, etc.)?; and c) how are policies (de)legitimised (through appeal to cognitive ideas, norms, or constructive ambiguities)? This approach has generated a broad range of empirical studies about the role of discourse in facilitating reform (Fouilleux, 2004; Howorth, 2004; Schmidt, 2002) or allowing major policy projects such as the building of the common market (Jabko, 2006). Narratives – for instance, the idea that tax competition among member states is harmful – can be used by advocacy coalitions and policy entrepreneurs to advance their preferred recipes (Radaelli, 1999). Resonating frames, such as calls for a ‘social Europe’, can create polarisation with counter-frames (e.g. a neoliberal Europe), and resonate within public opinion to shape policy debates and resulting policies (Crespy, 2010).

As pointed out by Lynggaard (2019), discursive analysis has been combined with a variety of theories rooted in different epistemologies and ontologies, including constructivism, critical discourse analysis, governance, and discursive institutionalism. As suggested in Figure 51.1, these should be conceived as a continuum, rather than separate approaches. In this regard, discursive

institutionalism was theorised as an encompassing and open approach to bridge the gap between positivist and interpretivist approaches.

### Frames and narratives as key conceptual approaches to discourse

Discourses can be understood as ‘an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities’ (Hajer, as cited in Lynggaard, 2019, p. 2). Frames and narratives are specific types of discourse, which allow agents to guide their actions, their belief systems, and their urge for meaning-making. Frame analysis aspires to comprehend what frames exist in the field of public policy, on the one hand, and how problems are constructed via frames, on the other. In its most typical form, frame analysis ‘illuminates the concrete ways from which information migrates from one place to another’ (Entman, 1993, p. 52), for instance, in the context of social movements and media. In social movement research, the question has been how framing and mobilisation relate to each other through threefold decomposition of frames into its diagnos-



Note: Partly based on Lynggaard (2019, Chapter 2).

Figure 51.1 The theoretical continuum of discursive approaches to EU policy making

Table 51.1 *Convergence and differences between frames and narratives*

Frames	Narratives
Frames and narratives both serve to construct and communicate:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cognitive beliefs through specific ideas and expertise</li> <li>– Normative beliefs through an appeal to values</li> <li>– Collective identities: protagonists, antagonists, publics</li> </ul>	
Frames and narratives both serve to:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establish diagnoses: what is the problem?</li> <li>– Establish prognoses: what should be done?</li> <li>– Mobilise support: resonate among the public, find potential allies</li> </ul>	
Frames are structuring angles: like a picture frame, they take in certain aspects of reality and leave others out	Narratives are stories or plots that are causal connections of events
Framing is the act in which reality is shaped	Narrating is the act in which connections are made
Researchers study: a) angles through a 'what' question, and b) the argumentative interaction processes through a 'how' question	Researchers study views on sequences of events through a 'how' question

Note: Partly based on Aukes et al. (2020).

tic (problem identification and attributions), prognostic (solution to the problem), and motivational (call to arms) elements (Benford & Snow, 2000). Primary frameworks allow us to build 'sustained connections among activists' (Parks, 2008, p.60) without the need to negotiate a collective identity beforehand. Instead, it allows us to build this collective identity through a diffusion of frames, leading scholars to ask what frames were used by organisers and how the frames operate and 'restructure the political playing fields' (Riker, 1986, as cited in Daviter, 2011, p. 27). While frames can be understood as principles that structure reality and guide actions (Goffman, 1974, pp.10–11), narratives are products of these principles and allow us to make sense of actions (Aukes et al., 2020). In other words, several narratives can be consistent or embedded within the same frame, but several frames are not very likely to match the same narrative. Table 51.1 identifies how frames and narratives constitute overlapping yet distinct and complementary conceptual tools.

Narratives are causal connections of events transformed to a story with a beginning, middle, and end (Haste et al., 2015). They assist in organising mostly one's own experiences. Narrating is the act through which connections are made. The researcher studies these views on sequences of events through a 'how' question to assess how people in the public realm experience it (Mishler, 1995).

Following Patterson and Monroe (1998), narratives provide information on how humans behave to achieve their goals. They suggest a canonical view of the speaker, which is their understanding of what is 'ordinary' and 'right'. Thus, narratives do not only serve to organise the speaker's experiences, but they also provide a cognitive map of their thinking. From an operational point of view, narratives are sequentially ordered, implying sequencing of sentences to organise events and ascribe meaning to those events.

## Narratives, frames, and process-based approaches to public policy

Because they serve to construct meaning, frames and narratives have become key explanatory tools in combination with process-based theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, frames and narratives are arguably relevant at key stages of the policy cycle (Jones, 1970), namely, agenda setting, policy shaping, decision-making, and evaluation. The key aspect is perhaps most crucial with regard to agenda setting. At this stage, the way in which a specific policy issue is framed is key not only to attract a decision-maker's attention, but also to determine which venue (or institutional setting) will be selected to solve the problem at hand. For example, energy policy can be alternatively framed as

a market issue, as a security issue, or as an environmental issue. These different frames involve different settings – the Single Market regulation, foreign and security policy, environmental policy – involving different actors (Commission Directorate-Generals (DGs), member states, non-EU partners, international organisations, etc.; Jegen & Mérand, 2014). Furthermore, Princen (2009, p.42) argues that in the EU, ‘the framing effort involved both a substantive element (explaining why something should be done about the issue) and a scale element (explaining why the EU should be doing something)’.

At the stage of decision-making, too, framing and narratives can be decisive. Through grassroots mobilisation and lobbying campaigns, insider nongovernmental organisations put forward alternative expertise and normative arguments to counter the established frames, which can have a decisive impact on the formation of political majorities. This was, for instance, the case in 2011–12 when contestation arose against the Anti-Counterfeiting Agreement (ACTA) signed by 11 countries and 22 member states of the EU. While the stated objectives of the treaty were to tackle the cross-border counterfeiting of goods and protect intellectual property rights, digital rights groups and citizens’ demonstrations reframed it as a threat to democracy and civil liberties as it would criminalise file sharing on the internet and hamper the circulation of common goods, such as generic medicines. The campaign was able to powerfully shape an anti-ACTA majority in the European Parliament with members of Parliament eventually turning down the ratification of the treaty (Crespy & Parks, 2017). Because frames and narratives serve to construct problems and solutions, they are key at the stage of policy shaping. This can be captured through the ‘problem stream’ and the ‘solution stream’ when applying the Multiple Streams Framework (Princen, 2011, p.115–21; see also Chapter 50, this volume).

Alongside the policy cycle and the Multiple Streams Framework, the NPF emerged as one of the most salient process-based approaches to the study of EU policy making. The NPF is particularly useful to scrutinise so-called ‘wicked problems’ ‘characterized by an intense value-based conflict between policy coalitions and that resist resolution by appealing to facts’ (Schön & Rein, 1994,

p.4 as cited in Veselková, 2017, p.178). Moreover, policy makers have a tendency to be more open to narratives as a mode of meaning-making than expert-based information (Crow & Jones, 2018); this makes the study of narratives mandatory in the policy process and in shifting opinions or mobilising coalition members (Crow & Berggren, 2014; Jones, 2014). The following sections shed light on the advantages of the NPF and the scholarly debates surrounding it.

## The Narrative Policy Framework in flux

### *A newcomer combining discourse and process theory*

The NPF was originally formulated as ‘a quantitative, structuralist, and positivist approach to the study of policy narratives’ (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p.330). It provides a toolbox that allows to ‘systematically measure beliefs, strategies, and policy outcomes’ (Crow & Berggren, 2014) and to satisfy the criteria emphasised by Paul Sabatier (2000, p.137) of being ‘clear enough to be wrong’ (Jones & McBeth, 2010). Likewise, the NPF has become a particularly attractive method to study heuristics in policy processes, starting from the assumption that ‘people prefer to speak and think in story form, making social problems amenable to human action using policy stories’ (Jones & Radaelli, 2015, p.342). These stories have identifiable structures, including settings, characters, plots, and morals. The advantage of the NPF seemed twofold: on the one hand, it allowed actors to illuminate ‘component pieces of policy narratives – narrative elements and strategies’ (Shanahan et al., 2011). On the other hand, it could be rather easily incorporated into existing dominant theories in the field of political science (Veselková, 2017), namely, the Advocacy Coalition Framework initially set forth by Sabatier (1988) and the Multiple Streams Approach by Kingdon (1984). The NPF was conceived to enlighten questions of ‘how policy-relevant information is transmitted and interpreted by both policy elites and the mass public’ (Veselková, 2017, p.182).

Generally, public policies answer a specific problem. The NPF allows us to read

public policy as narratives with four essential components:

1. a setting (context in which policy problem is situated),
2. characters (heroes, villains, and victims),
3. a plot (causal linkage between a) a setting and b) characters), and
4. the moral of the story (policy solution).

The setting portrays the environment in which the policy problem is situated, contextualising the problem (Jones et al., 2014). One can view the setting as a stage in a theatre play where the most important information is laid out, including evidence, legal parameters, and geography, all of which have meaning to the audience. Characters are central to the NPF, as they have a strong effect on the credibility and persuasive power of a narrative (Shanahan et al., 2011). Through their heroic actions, heroes will help achieve the solution to the problem (Shanahan et al., 2011). Villains are associated with the cause(s) of said problem and need to be fought against, while victims are harmed by the problem and are in need of protection. The plot serves to link the setting with the characters. Combined, these elements make up the plot of the story through a causal narrative (Shanahan et al., 2011). Narratives usually have a beginning, middle, and end and create a causal storyline, which prepares the path for the possible (policy) solution(s). The plot often follows a specific type of story (e.g. stories of decline, stymied progress, helplessness, and control; Jones et al., 2014). Eventually, the moral of the story will ensue, serving to justify the desirability of the selected policy solution (Jones et al., 2014).

Two other crucial elements appear in NPF research: beliefs and strategies. First, narratives are embedded in belief systems, defined as a 'set of values or beliefs that orients individuals, groups, coalitions, and societies' (Shanahan et al., 2018, p. 5). Second, the NPF suggests that narrative strategies are a way that the narrator may shape the storyline. This idea is based on the assumption that narratives are purposeful and that the narrator manipulates narrative elements to achieve their goal through 'scope of conflict, causal mechanisms and the devil-shift' (Shanahan et al., 2018, p. 6).

From these theoretical reflections on narratives, which largely overlap with

post-positivist theorisations of narrativity, the NPF moves to a more concrete operationalisation, using mostly positivist methods, which Sabatier (2000) commended. Notably, theorists of the NPF (Jones & McBeth, 2010) have put forward a set of seven hypotheses to be tested as they distinguish between the micro level and the meso level of analysis. At the micro level, concerning public opinion and the persuasion of individuals, they posit that narratives departing from establish views, thus operating a 'breach' with the common understanding of normalcy, are more likely to be persuasive.

*Hypothesis 1: As a narrative's level of breach increases, the more likely an individual exposed to that narrative is to be persuaded.*

Persuasion is also expected to ensue from the reader's or audience's involvement and identification with the protagonists (transportation).

*Hypothesis 2: As narrative transportation increases, the more likely an individual exposed to that narrative is to be persuaded.*

Persuasion further unfolds from resonance between the narrative and one's experience and belief system (congruence)

*Hypothesis 3: As perception of congruence increases, the more likely an individual is to be persuaded by the narrative.*

Finally, persuasion is more likely to occur if the narrator is seen as trustworthy and credible.

*Hypothesis 4: As narrator trust increases, the more likely an individual is to be persuaded by the narrative.*

Turning to the meso level of analysis dealing with groups and collective action, Jones and McBeth (2010) claim that:

*Hypothesis 5: Groups or individuals who are portraying themselves as losing on a policy issue will use narrative elements to expand the policy issue to increase the size of their coalition.*

*Hypothesis 6: Groups or individuals who are portraying themselves as winning on a policy issue will use narrative elements to contain the policy issue to maintain the coalition status quo.*

*Hypothesis 7: Groups will employ heresthetic policy narratives/heresthetically employ policy narratives to manipulate the composition of political coalitions for their strategic benefit.*

The positivist approach of narratives through the NPF was criticised both by positivist and post-positivist scholars. In fact, much of the criticism engages with a meta-theoretical debate by rejecting the mix of the post-positivist premises of narratives as a concept and the positivist methods used to analyse them.

#### *Challenges and frictions pertaining to the NPF*

On the one hand, critiques have come from the positivist camp. While recognising that ‘a framework should be compatible with multiple theories’, Weible and Schlager (2014, p.243) nevertheless argue that the NPF is not ‘clear enough to be wrong’. What they mean is that the hypotheses put forward do not respond to the positivist criteria of falsifiability. They also point to the fact that some hypotheses – for instance, Hypothesis 1 about the importance of breach, and Hypothesis 3 about congruence – are contradictory.

Critiques from the (critical) post-positivist camp have argued that inconsistencies in the NPF’s metatheory remain problematic (see Dodge, 2015; Lejano, 2015; Miller, 2020; Pierce et al., 2014). Leitmotifs have circled around three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methods.

Regarding ontology and epistemology, positivist and post-positivist scholars are arguing about the status of ‘true’ narratives. The former understand narratives as a rhetorical device, a ‘well-constructed form of discourse’ with the aim of convincing an audience of a specific message and meaning, as a means to legitimise or motivate actions (Shenhav, 2005, p. 4). Thus, this implies that a distinct (objective) reality exists beyond the narrative. A distinction is made between the representation and what is represented. This is vital as narratives are ‘consciously or not’

(Robert & Shenhav, 2014, p.5) tailored and, more often than not, have an instrumental character in policy making. Two realities co-exist in this view. The main focus is set on assessing how narratives and reality correspond to each other and to distinguish true from false narratives.

In contrast, the latter see humans as ‘homo narrans’ (Fischer & Gottweis, 2012). This implies that narratives are part of an ontological and epistemological condition (Haste et al., 2015) through which ‘we constitute our social identities’ (Somers, 1994, p.616). This statement has far-reaching consequences, as it claims that narratives are a part of human existence and create the social world. It is assumed that narratives respond to the need of organising perceptions, allowing us to make sense of a complex, contradictory, fragmented, and partial reality (Mishler, 1995; Somers, 1994; White, 1980). This view suggests that life is inherently patterned in narratives (Somers, 1994), which has epistemological consequences. The aim of discursive analysis is therefore not to assess the fit between narratives and reality, but to engage with the narrative itself. Truth and objectivity only exist in the shape of intersubjective meaning, which ‘means that knowledge emerges from the interpretation of interactions between acting subjects, objects, or text’ (Durnová & Weible, 2020, p.578).

Even though leaning towards a post-positivist epistemology, the NPF also allows for a positivist epistemology. The NPF is able to accommodate both traditions since it does not necessarily require us to discuss the status of an objective reality (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p.37). Instead, the authors refer to an ‘intersubjectively reliable reality rooted in scientific agreement’ (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p.37). Hence, in the NPF, it is possible to compare a subjective narrative to an intersubjective one. However, questions relating to the objectivity of reality emerge when coming to argumentation and interpretation of findings.

Turning to methods and the meaning of the findings, Jones and Radaelli (2015) argue that the NPF is compatible with qualitative and quantitative empirical methods. Researchers of both traditions will use interference to construct an argument and knowledge development. In post-positivist research, this will most commonly be based in a smaller-N format, where the aim will

be to understand in opposition to explain the narrative (Dodge, 2015). The positivist account will aim to explain and therefore need to produce a generalisable statement with external validity, based on the logic of hypothesis testing (Durnová & Weible, 2020). For this, a larger-N format is more suitable in order to identify causal mechanisms and to ‘separate the particularities that fit to a localized context versus those that generalize across contexts’ (Durnová & Weible, 2020, p.583). However, this is not the aim of a post-positivist discursive analysis. The relevance of a narrative analysis is in its ability to show how narratives ‘persuade’ or ‘instruct’ (Dodge, 2015, pp.364–5). There is no such a thing as one correct scientific method to explore post-positivist questions.

### An inflated conflict of research traditions?

Both positivist and post-positivist research traditions wish to deconstruct a narrative or a frame. The concrete conceptualisation of narratives and frames varies according to the previously discussed ontological and epistemological positions; this is reflected in the question that one might wish to answer, to what end, through what means. As Shenhav (2005, p.87) has pointed out, the decision on the definition of ‘narratives’ is crucial: ‘In many respects, when trying to define narratives we reach the point at which we must decide whether narratives are a well-constructed form of discourse, used only on specific occasions [positivist], or a common vehicle for human communication [post-positivist]’. This will briefly be discussed in this section through one example of positivist research and one example of post-positivist research on the EU policy process.

Radaelli et al. (2013), on the one hand, and Nessel and Verhaeghe (2022), on the other, have used the NPF method to analyse the discourse of the European Commission and European Parliament: the former with a positivist stance, the latter with a post-positivist stance. Both contributions have in common that they shift the focus from the efficiency of policy to its legitimacy in order to explain or understand wicked policy problems. In

this regard, policies are treated as argumentative tools for creating legitimacy of specific EU actions. However, different interests and a necessity for different methods become apparent when looking at their respective research questions.

In their positivist work, Radaelli et al. (2013) examine impact assessments in EU Commission discourse through two questions. The first asks whether the ‘Commission is a narrator when performing impact assessments (IA)’ (p.502). Raising a question in these terms implies that there are instances when the Commission is not a narrator. This question, even though theoretically also possible in post-positivist research, does not make much sense to pursue for post-positivist research. Seeing narratives as an ontological and epistemological condition implies that the Commission is always a narrator when formulating policy solutions – connecting a beginning, middle, and end through causal assumptions (informed by underlying belief systems). In post-positivist research, Radaelli et al.’s question would need to be reformulated to analyse to what extent the Commission’s narrative adheres to all the criteria suggested in the NPF. The added value of the NPF would then lie in seeing how the elements of the narrative, particularly the characters, are constructed and performed. The authors’ second question continues: ‘If so, what type of narrator is it? For example, do we find variability across the Commission or in relation to issue characteristics?’ (Radaelli et al., 2013). The purpose here is to explore differences of narrations in impact assessments. From a post-positivist perspective, this question can indeed be asked, as the existence of different narratives is a fundamental part of post-positivist thinking. However, the question would beg for a follow-up question exploring meanings attributed to a specific issue. So what actors see, feel, and understand stands at the centre of attention, as well as what the meaning or significance of an action is in a specific context.

In the interpretivist (post-positivist) work of Nessel and Verhaeghe (2022), ‘the narrative construction of the EU’s trade policy for the case of Vietnam’ is analysed as a ‘performative story’. In this work, an implicit difference is made between narratives and the NPF characterisation of narratives. An interpretivist premise is kept and the NPF

is primarily used to see how the characters are constructed, informed by underlying belief systems, emplotted in a story to answer a wicked policy problem. A positivist research project would reformulate the research and ask how the EU Commission was able to construct a performative narrative against the reality in Vietnam. This positivist question could, however, not be asked by post-positivist scholars as it would imply that there is an objective reality in Vietnam and that the narrative of the EU differs from it. In the post-positivist research paradigm, it is therefore not narratives (as a strategic type of discourse) that stand in the centre of attention, but elements of the narrative that construct and perform knowledge and legitimacy. It is the ‘power of the narrative’ that forms the policies, which academics want to understand, not whether the narrative is ‘true’ or not.

The NPF makes it possible to ask both kinds of questions if they are analysed with the suiting quantitative or qualitative method(s). In a way, by giving place to an ‘objective truth’ or ‘intersubjective truth’, this approach provides an interesting ground for discussions of possibly different research results. Dialogues and maybe even synergies may emerge from, for example, comparing the results of positivist and post-positivist research (Durnová & Weible, 2020). It is because a shared minimal goal of narrative research can be identified that one needs to see how the results of studying a similar issue diverge empirically and thereby move the discussion on the conflict between the two meta-theoretical positions to the empirical level.

## Conclusion

Originating in post-positivist research traditions and theories – in particular constructivism, post-structuralist, or critical discourse analysis – narratives and frames have also been used by scholars with a more positivist stance who attempted to assess the causal role of discourse in policy making alongside other explanatory factors, such as interests or institutions. Thus far, they have often been combined with process-based theories of approaches in public policy, especially the policy cycle (agenda setting in particular) and

the Multiple Streams Framework. The more recent elaboration of the NPF represents an attempt to formalise a process-based analytical framework relying on a sequencing through which the persuasiveness of a certain discourse unfolds through storytelling and its constitutive elements. Theoretical controversies surrounding the NPF are illustrative of the tensions at stake between contrasted epistemologies and ontologies underpinning discursive analysis more broadly, and in the study of EU public policy in particular.

The EU is facing important legitimacy issues perhaps more acutely than any other polity or organisation. Its competences to intervene in given policy areas are restricted by the provisions laid down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. But the boundaries of said competences are constantly in flux and often contested. Furthermore, in many policy areas, the EU action relies on soft law and can only act as a laboratory for benchmarking national policy making, forging consensus over policy recipes, and formulating recommendations.

Needs for European elites to forge convincing narratives and frame policy making in ways that resonate within the broader public have starkly increased over the past decade and will only continue to do so in the future. The relevance of studying EU policy making from a discursive point of view will be key in at least two main research agendas. First, the EU is now seen as a polity in perpetual ‘crisis’ as important policy challenges – ranging from international security to inequality and climate change – trigger existential turmoil and unprecedented policy responses. In this regard, scholars need to analyse how crises – their cause, their nature, their consequences – are constructed through narratives and counter-narratives to understand which policies are coming of age, and how. Normative themes, such as solidarity, and cognitive themes, such as learning, have emerged as important research avenues. A second agenda concerns the implementation of the national resilience and recovery plans funded by Next Generation EU (i.e. the EU budget). Over the next few years, these plans will be constructed as ‘successes’ or ‘failures’ in the struggle opposing the proponents and opponents of increased pooling and redistribution of fiscal resources across the EU. Prevailing frames will shape decisions pertaining to the foreseen discontinu-

ation of transfers and investments via Next Generation EU. Ultimately, there are also good reasons for scholars to use discursive analytical tools in a reflective manner in order to understand how scientific and academic narratives – such as the idea of an ever closer union, the union going forward through crises, or the democratisation of the EU's neighbourhood – contribute to shaping Europe's political fate.

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