

Ideas, Globalization, and Policy Change: A Sociological and Political Perspective

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This paper offers a broad theoretical perspective on the role of ideas and frames in policy change. Drawing on the political science literature on ideas and the sociological scholarship on discourse and frames, this paper makes three contributions to the social science scholarship on public policy. First, the paper amends recent theories of policy change formulated by authors like Jacob Hacker, Paul Pierson, and Kathleen Thelen. From this perspective, the study of agendas, frames, and policy paradigms is necessary to a fuller understanding of policy change. Second, in relation to the existing literature on ideas and frames, the paper argues that a more systematic dialog between sociology and political science is necessary to capture the complex nature of ideational processes. Third, the paper explores the relationship between globalization and ideational processes. This discussion stresses the role of think tanks, international organizations, and transnational policy networks in the global propagation of policy ideas. More importantly, the discussion unveils the little studied tension between *transnational* policy ideas and the *national* cultural repertoires on which actors draw to legitimize the implementation of these ideas at the state and sub-state levels. The article concludes with a set of preliminary remarks about the North-South divide in the politics of ideas. Referring to the impact of neo-liberalism on social policy development, this discussion points to the structuring role of global inequalities in the social construction and political diffusion of policy ideas. All in all, this paper sketches a new framework for a global study of ideas and policy change that recognizes the enduring role of national cultures and institutions.