

Building consensus and establishing compacts in social policy

Notes for an analytical framework

Carlos F. Maldonado Valera
Andrea F. Palma Roco



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Summary

Although democracy is no longer the exception in Latin America, in many cases the political feasibility of major social and fiscal covenants remains a standing challenge, which explains the interest that the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has in covering this issue, with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), in the framework of the project “Social covenant for more inclusive social protection”. This paper opens a line of inquiry into analysis of the emergence of compacts and consensuses in the social policy sector, presenting a methodological proposal to conduct ex post case studies of compacts and consensuses that have emerged in this sector in democratic contexts, as well as ex ante assessments of the possibilities for a broad social accord or consensus in specific contexts. This methodological proposal is built on three case studies on major consensus-based social policy reforms in Chile, Mexico and Uruguay, which will be published in the Social Policies series.

The introduction discusses the interest in and relevance of consensuses and compacts, both generally and in the scope of social policy specifically, and presents two theoretical approaches for addressing the emergence of compacts and consensuses in this sector of public policy.

The first part of the paper reviews several **explanatory paradigms on public policies in democracies** that political science has developed in recent years, highlighting some frameworks and concepts that are particularly useful for analysing the emergence of compacts and consensuses. The second part presents a model consisting of four elements that are relevant to the analysis. The first element is related to the individual and collective **actors** that ratify and influence the decision-making process for a public policy.

The second element consists in the identification and analysis of those actors’ **strategies and practices**, with the understanding that these unfold in specific contexts where repeated interaction generates recurring patterns and forms of negotiation, confrontation and deliberation that tend to play a central role in the feasibility and final scope of a public policy or reform.

The third element considers a set of **inertial factors** (both circumstantial and institutional) that contribute to, condition or even determine a final outcome, regardless of the intention or initial objectives of the actors in a reform process. The fourth element refers to the **ideas or conceptual frameworks** specific to social policy as a sector of public policy in a given moment and context.

These conceptual elements range from general ideas and values about the role of the State, social protection and the understanding of citizenship and democracy to very concrete technical instruments and management models for implementing the specific actions and interventions of social policy. These ideas and frameworks shape the way that reality is moulded by the actors, influence the preparation of strategies and discourse with reference to certain public policy models and help explain dissemination and imitation phenomena between and within countries. Lastly, the third part concludes with some questions to guide the analysis and presents some preliminary findings on the emergence of consensus and compacts in social policy.

I. Introduction: Why are compacts important?

In a number of papers addressing the challenges associated with Latin America's social and economic development, ECLAC has underscored the need for countries to establish social and fiscal compacts that will allow them to take on and finance, over the medium and long term, policies and programmes to fight poverty, reduce inequality and give full effect, once and for all, to the cultural, social and economic rights that the vast majority of the region's States have promised to guarantee through the ratification of various conventions and instruments of international law. In *Time for Equality: Closing Gaps, Opening Trails*, ECLAC made the point that without the legitimacy and political solidity of agreements between the various social and political actors, the proposed reforms for creating societies with less inequality run the risk of remaining in the realm of wishful thinking and good intentions. That document defined social covenants as explicit agreements between social and political actors on a certain general or specific social order. They are not merely a vehicle for incorporating certain desirable characteristics into a country's policy agenda, nor for promoting unanimity or consensus as an end in itself. That report puts forth a covenant for equality: a broad and lasting agreement designed to redistribute income and other assets, as well as to correct tremendous structural heterogeneity, in which the State has a key role to play, not only because it must equalize opportunities but also because it must reduce inequality of outcomes over the life cycle of individual people, within and across generations.¹

But the consensus required for a covenant or compact of this kind is not easy to achieve. Numerous studies have pointed up the political and institutional weaknesses that prevent Latin American democracies from translating electoral mandates into representative, stable and coherent public policies. For example, studies by Stein and others (2006, 2008) and Scartascini and others (2011), focusing on institutional determinants and incentives related to the emergence of public policies associated with better social and economic performance, have identified some desirable characteristics. These include credibility in the eyes of social and economic actors, stability and predictability (especially when they are effective), adaptability to changing environments and new social demands, coherence (between policies implemented in the different sectors), effective implementation such that proposed goals are pursued and achieved, and orientation toward the public interest, not toward the benefit of specific interests.

¹ See ECLAC 2010, pp. 255-257.

Such characteristics would be associated with the capacity of political actors to cooperate in a context of political competition. There are a number of factors that influence the willingness of the actors to cooperate. For example, there is more willingness to cooperate if there are greater benefits to be obtained from remaining on a path of cooperation; if the number of relevant actors is small; if these actors interact repeatedly and are operating on a long time horizon; if the interaction occurs in institutional settings that facilitate inter-temporal cooperation; and if there are suitable verification mechanisms in place for implementing the agreements, such as an independent judiciary or professional bureaucracy (Scartascini and others, 2011).

These analyses look at public policies broadly, focusing on their characteristics and formation process, regardless of content or the specific policy sector. Accordingly, the idea of a compact or consensus on equality entails, in addition to the focus on the origin and development of a policy and its political and institutional environment, an emphasis on processes that (i) were or could be subject to broad consensus and (ii) involve the adoption of initiatives, reforms or programmes that seek to improve conditions among the poorest sectors and/or close social and economic gaps.

Thus, achieving a feasible consensus on equality that produces a lasting compact may be a more elusive feat than establishing a simple specific cooperative agreement. This is because the former requires improbable agreements between political actors with diverging views on the best type of social policy and fiscal effort for financing programmes, and the ensuing debate often pits various organized social and economic actors with the ability to influence decision-making against each other. Moreover, as with other collaborative processes between political actors, fiscal and social compacts are, by definition, arrangements built on long-term positions of consensus that transcend electoral-political cycles. In democratic settings, those cycles and the tensions associated with them tend to lock social and political actors into short-term, confrontational patterns.

At the same time, the content of a compact, who develops it and the road taken to achieve it can only be determined by analysing specific situations, because in each case, “a society’s history and political culture are decisive, since their spaces, stakeholders and legitimacies are different from those of other societies” (ECLAC, 2010, pp. 255-257). This raises questions about the real possibilities for proposing and sustaining initiatives promoting change that are more ambitious from the viewpoint of the region’s medium- and long-term social challenges. In particular, the question should be asked whether, in the social policy debates and discussions of recent years, there is any room for the emergence of consensus around strategies to overcome poverty, combat inequality or achieve more inclusive social protection. This requires reflection on how to analyse, *ex post*, specific cases of reforms but also how to evaluate, *ex ante*, opportunities for a compact on social protection in a given context.

This paper first presents a critical appraisal of a toolkit consisting of several explanatory paradigms from political science on public policies in democratic settings. The second part of the paper introduces a proposal to outline the main characteristics of social policy as a sector of public policy based on a review of the prevailing debates, characteristics and challenges associated with social welfare and protection in the region. The third part concludes with some questions to guide the analysis and presents some preliminary findings. In the framework of the project “Social covenant for more inclusive social protection”, ECLAC, with support from GIZ, will address these issues and support social and political dialogue processes in Latin America. The proposal set out in this paper is expected to serve as an initial guide for analysing specific cases of reforms resulting from a compact, as well as to analyse processes that are under way for forging compacts, alliances and consensus for more inclusive social protection.

II. A toolkit for analysing the emergence of social compacts and devising roadmaps to establish them

As a topic of study, public policy can be explored using two very different strategies that encompass complementary areas and lines of inquiry. The first strategy is concerned with origin and nature: What is a public policy and how can its emergence, permanence, reform or termination be explained? The second strategy is an inquiry into the value of a public policy as an instrument, that is, as a programme of government action in a sector of society or geographical space (Müller, 2008, p. 21) with specific objectives and various options for achieving them based on the assessment, type of intervention, available financial and human resources and the technical capacity for implementation.

The first strategy focuses on analysing how, in a given economic, political-institutional or historical context, multiple actors conceive, invent, occasionally imitate or implement a programme of public action, all while the interests and ideals of various social and political actors —as the case may be— are served or threatened. Whereas the first strategy is concerned with how policy generally works and its limitations, particularly in democracies, the second strategy is a technical inquiry into how to best tailor certain means to meet certain ends based on a specific assessment of actual conditions. Such is the case with public management studies from which lessons are drawn to improve implementation or replication of policies in accordance with efficiency principles through public and market mechanisms (new public management), or with compendiums of good or best practices, where the objective is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public action tools in various contexts.

The two strategies are complementary because they both make it possible to look at the point at which administration (or management) of the public sector converges with politics understood in brief as the legitimate and authoritative allocation of scarce goods and services, the definition and imposition of rules of behaviour and coexistence and the identification of collective priorities, obligations and goals in a given society (Easton, 1981). In the present case, given the interest in the emergence of compacts and consensuses on social policy, the emphasis will be on the first strategy and on several approaches or paradigms for analysing them.

In recent years, the second strategy has been more widely used to study social policy in Latin America, i.e. to analyse and evaluate the relative efficiency, targeting or suitability of policy instruments, given certain phenomena regarded as being the responsibility or in the domain of the public sector, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment or health. This is understandable inasmuch as the scarcity of fiscal resources, the magnitude of social gaps and the volatility of growth have made it a matter of urgency to develop fiscally sustainable policy instruments capable of producing, to the extent possible, effects that are quantifiable, or at least distinguishable, on poverty and inequality. Thus, in recent years, most studies have focused on the design of social programmes or interventions per se—regardless of context or country—and on the measurement and evaluation of social policy impacts on specific poverty and inequality indicators. Others have directly addressed institutional structures of the social sector in order to identify more or less desirable configurations for effective social policy (Franco and Székely, 2010; Acuña and Repetto, 2007).

Significant advances have been made in programme design and evaluation, which is most evident in the level of theoretical, technical, operational and statistical sophistication that has been achieved in certain conditional cash transfer programmes, and specifically, in the corresponding management and impact evaluation mechanisms. In that context, social policy is seen more as an option or recommendation for fighting poverty and inequality, and less as a prescription for implementing universal democratic ideals in terms of effective enjoyment of social and economic rights.

A very different exercise is to attempt to open the “black box” that is the State to understand the origin, conception and effective implementation of a policy, in order to learn which actors in and outside the State are playing a role and identify the interests at stake; who is developing, promoting or blocking an initiative or reform of the status quo; what negotiation processes or institutional inertia are affecting the development and implementation of the initiative; and ultimately, whose interests are served or harmed. In the social sciences, this endeavor is being looked at from a multitude of theoretical traditions and approaches. This paper considers each one of these approaches as a “tool” for ex ante and/or ex post analysis of specific cases.

TABLE 1
SOME EXPLANATORY PARADIGMS ON INSTITUTIONS:
PUBLIC POLICIES IN DEMOCRACIES

| Approach | Variant | Time horizon | Theoretical scope | Descriptive scope of cases | References |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Classic pluralism | Interest group theory | Immediate / Medium term | General | Limited | (González-Rossetti, 2005) (March and Olsen, 2006a) (Dahl, 1975) (Held, 1997) |
| Neo-institutionalism | Rational choice theory | Immediate / Medium term | General | Limited | (Shepsle, 2006) (Hall and Taylor, 1996) (Tsebelis, 2000) |
| | Historical | Medium / Long term | Case specific | Broad | (Sanders, 2006) (Peters, Pierre and King, 2005) (Thelen, 1999) |
| | Sociological | Organizational | Immediate / Medium term | Case specific | (Hall and Taylor, 1996) (Boussaguet, Jacquot and Ravinet, 2004) (March and Olsen, 2006b) (Greenwood, Oliver and Suddaby, 2008) |
| | Cognitive | Medium / Long term | General | Broad | (Müller, 2008) (Hay, 2006) (Surel, 1998) (Schmidt, 2008 and 2010) |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of cited references.

Categorically classifying the diverse array of studies on this topic is not an easy task. Table 1 gives an overview, setting out some hallmark features and characteristics of each tradition.² The following analytical theories are presented: traditional pluralism and several variations of neo-institutionalism, which have differences, similarities and interconnections, and have been the subject of mutually enriching critical dialogue over the years. Each approach emphasizes some elements or variables of reality over others, e.g. ideas and paradigms of public action, historical and institutional inertias and interests and instrumental rationality of actors.

A. Classic pluralism and interest group theory

Interest group theory focuses on the motivations of various organized political and social actors to explain the advent of a public policy, inasmuch as certain actors (e.g. voters, unions, business groups and professional associations) advance their interests on the political stage or through the government apparatus, which translates into the adoption of policies that favour them. This approach is rooted in the pluralist models of how modern democracies work, with an emphasis on the way in which, in practice, certain organized groups strongly shape decision-making, by forming stable majority coalitions that lead the government to adopt certain policies, as well as directly (and sometimes in opposition) through pressure (mobilization or lobbying) by interest groups. This approach, first developed in the mid-twentieth century, has recently gained new currency as a result of studies analysing policies and decisions through the lens of the interests (preferences) and strategies of stakeholders, the equilibriums that are achieved and the aggregate results in terms of utility and the common good.

A hallmark characteristic of this approach is that the State or government is seen as a passive actor, even a “black box”, that processes demands and pressures and responds by producing policies, programmes or laws. It is merely an instrument of social actors with conflicting interests, and inasmuch as its actions are taken in response to demands successfully channeled by groups with sufficient influence to impose their interests, it is seen as having little or no autonomy with respect to these in causal terms. Organized interest groups (unions, businesses, professional associations, social organizations and others) and the electorate are seen as self-interested, calculating actors who seek to meet their needs through lobbying and social and electoral mobilization.

Decision makers (e.g. government, lawmakers and elected and appointed officials) serve the interests of one or another group based on the political benefits (basically, electoral, social or organizational support) that they expect to receive in exchange (González-Rossetti, 2005). The public policy or decision is the product of the requirements or demands of more or less organized interests that succeed in gaining access to some critical point within the decision-making structure of the political system, i.e. through the formally constituted branches of government (various decision-making bodies in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches), but also through political parties with representation, or in any number of forums or mechanisms for consultation between authorities and organized groups (Truman, 1995, pp. 70-71). Institutions are nothing more than a backdrop, or rather, a set of rules and procedures put in place by the stakeholders so interest groups can position one segment of the government structure against another as a result of competing interests. Thus, the government process is a versatile set of crosscutting relationships that change with the intensity and the shifts in power and hierarchy of interests (Truman, 1964, cited by Held, 1997b).

A controversial and relatively explicit hypothesis in the initial formulation of pluralism is that electoral competition between political parties and the negotiations between these parties, the government and interest groups tend to balance each other out and produce socially optimal results in which the preferences of the majority of the citizens are reflected more or less faithfully in the public policies that are implemented. These policies would be the result not of autonomous and coherent action by the State but rather of relatively uncoordinated pressures exerted on the government from all sides by

² This is not an arbitrary classification. As shown in the Annex, each tradition has been characterized according to the interests and motivations of the social actors, the view of the State and institutions, the drivers of change and continuity of public policies and the main underlying hypotheses.

competing forces without any one force exercising overwhelming influence (Held, 1997, p. 204). Given that electoral competition and the organized confrontation of interests force public decisions and policies to incorporate the interests of diverse minority groups, the pluralist model assumes as efficient the transmission of interest group preferences to the government and sees political decisions and outcomes as the byproduct of a certain competitive balance between the preferences of citizens and organized groups (Immergut, 2006). This relative efficiency is rooted in the assumption that citizens have clear interests, enjoy the right and actual ability to organize as a way of advancing their interests and have the right to vote. Indeed, the presence of organized interest groups is seen as a complement to electoral democracy (Dahl, 1975).

To a certain point, classic pluralism tends to construct a correlation between public policies and the set of organized interests that these policies favour through public action. Accordingly, public policies do not change very often and when they do, it can be due to shifts in the correlation of forces between organized social and economic actors, or to changes in the dominant electoral coalitions that give rise to mandates and governments that are more favourable to one or another coalition of interests. Usually, change occurs incrementally in response to negotiations and arbitration by the State/government with coalitions of mobilized social groups or actors. A key criticism of this approach is the low importance placed on the disparities and power asymmetries in access to decision-making; the scant attention given to “non-decisions” (i.e. the reasons why some issues but not others get on the public agenda); the difficulty of pushing through reforms that alter the influence of dominant groups, as well as the tendency to regard the interests or preferences of organized groups and other political actors as givens, which lends a short-term and ahistorical bias to this approach (Boussaguet, Jacquot and Ravinet, 2004; Dahl, 2000; González-Rossetti, 2007; Immergut, 2006; Schmitter, 1974).

The pluralist approach and its theoretical offshoots continue to be an important point of reference. The mass media, numerous political leaders, multiple descriptive studies and a segment of public opinion continue to portray public action as a product of the pressures exerted by competing organized interest groups. Moreover, a critique of the pluralist model offers a starting point—and a point of reference—for alternative explanations of public policies in democratic contexts that tend to be grouped under the heading of neo-institutionalism(s). In any case, although other models do not attribute the same degree of importance to interest groups, they do at least tend to regard interest groups as a variable to take into account.

From the perspective of the emergence of compacts and consensuses, pluralism instructs the analyst to consider how the presence of certain majority electoral coalitions and/or certain dominant interest groups translates into lasting equilibriums in favour of certain policies or programmes, a majority consensus that is imposed on the rest for a given period. With respect to social policy as a sector of public policy, this approach would identify which interest groups and/or social categories would benefit or not benefit from the policies adopted and which would assume the burden of financing or associated costs. In a context in which one coalition endures over time, the approach addresses the challenge of explaining how, given such dominant coalitions, a compact or consensus emerges in which minority stakeholders participate, despite everything. Explaining that participation and the eventual introduction of changes at the edges by said actors seems to be the main challenge. In addition, in the presence of repeated alternations between different competing coalitions, the emergence of a compact or consensus would point the analysis to the question of how its content better reflects the preferences and interests of one or another coalition, and to what extent such commitments, by occurring repeatedly over time, create a relatively favourable environment for achieving successive agreements.

B. The various neo-institutional approaches

More than a unified body of theory, neo-institutionalism is an assemblage of approaches that coincide on the importance of the institutional framework as an explanatory factor of public policies but diverge considerably in terms of key variables, methodologies and hypotheses. Neo-institutional approaches are based on the autonomous role of the institutional context in the behaviour, strategies and perceived interests of political actors to explain the introduction and implementation of a policy, but the

mechanisms in play and the ultimate causality of the process vary considerably. Based on the limitations of the pluralist approach and the finding that policies cannot be explained solely by citizen preferences or by the balance struck between the interests of organized groups or between structural forces or broader social actors (such as classes), these theories focus more on how the organization of the political community affects the gestation and implementation of policies (Immergut, 2006).

Neo-institutional theories attempt to explain the nexuses between political actors, their interests and motivations and their specific immediate context. By definition, they are rooted in the conviction that political institutions shape the action of governments and that the way in which political power is organized and structured is central to understanding why, in the same sector or in response to the same social problem, different countries adopt different policies (Boussaguet, Jacquot and Ravinet, 2004). The approaches that fall under the neo-institutional umbrella differ in the preference they give to the various explanatory factors for that phenomenon, such as track record, organizational practices and standards, ideologies and explanatory paradigms that influence thinking on public policy and incentives derived from the legal and institutional framework. At the same time, they are aligned in the belief that the institutional and historical framework determines which actors (government agencies and bodies, political parties, interest groups, policy communities or networks of experts, national and international organizations, nongovernment organizations and others) succeed in shaping the decision-making process, via which resources, procedures and means (formal or informal) and in which forums or mechanisms for engagement and conflict. The actors to take into account are diverse (individuals and groups, governmental and nongovernmental, permanent and sporadic) and vary depending on the policy sector and period of study. Their specific motivations are also a function of context and timing. This does not mean that there is no continuity but rather that analysing the institutional and historical context is a necessary step for understanding the emergence and content of a public policy (see table 3 in the annex).

Neo-institutionalism provides at least four different ways to assign explanatory value to institutions within the political process and in the development and implementation of public policies (see tables 2 to 6 in the annex). The strain of institutionalism associated with rational choice theory focuses on the type and design of institutions due to their role in prescribing rules of behaviour and incentives for actors. These incentives structures determine the strategies chosen by the actors to achieve their objectives. Meanwhile, historical institutionalism aspires to explain how and why different societies develop different institutions, analysing individual cases to determine how, in a given context characterized by a certain institutional framework, moment in time, and actors, one policy comes to be chosen over the other options. Sociological-organizational institutionalism focuses on the creation and development of models of action and thought among the members of a given organization or group. Lastly, sociological-cognitive institutionalism emphasizes the ways of conceptualizing and defining what constitutes a ‘social’, ‘public’ or ‘political’ problem (i.e. the social construction of public problems), the criteria for determining that it warrants public action and the paradigms that are mobilized to design State ‘responses’ to a given problem.

1. Neo-institutionalism associated with rational choice theory

Largely drawing on the methodological prescriptions of neoclassical economics on the motivations of human behaviour, rational choice theory constitutes an important strain of neo-institutionalism and contemporary political science. Its explanatory power (and also its main limitation) lies in its capacity to generate universal explanatory models based on clear causal links between individual preferences and incentives and group phenomena and outcomes, while its emphasis on strategic interactions between self-interested actors illuminates a non-negligible part of the conflict-intensive interaction that characterizes political life (Shepsle, 2006).

This theory is based on a set of assumptions about the motivations of political actors as self-interested, selfish and capable of interacting strategically and rationally to serve their interests defined in terms of preferences. The nature of the interests of these actors is ‘given’ by the context, and the guiding logic is always one of strategic calculation intended to maximize benefits and minimize costs. These actors possess a fixed, intelligible set of preferences (they know what they want), they behave in specific ways to maximize them (they know how to get what they want) and they do so strategically by

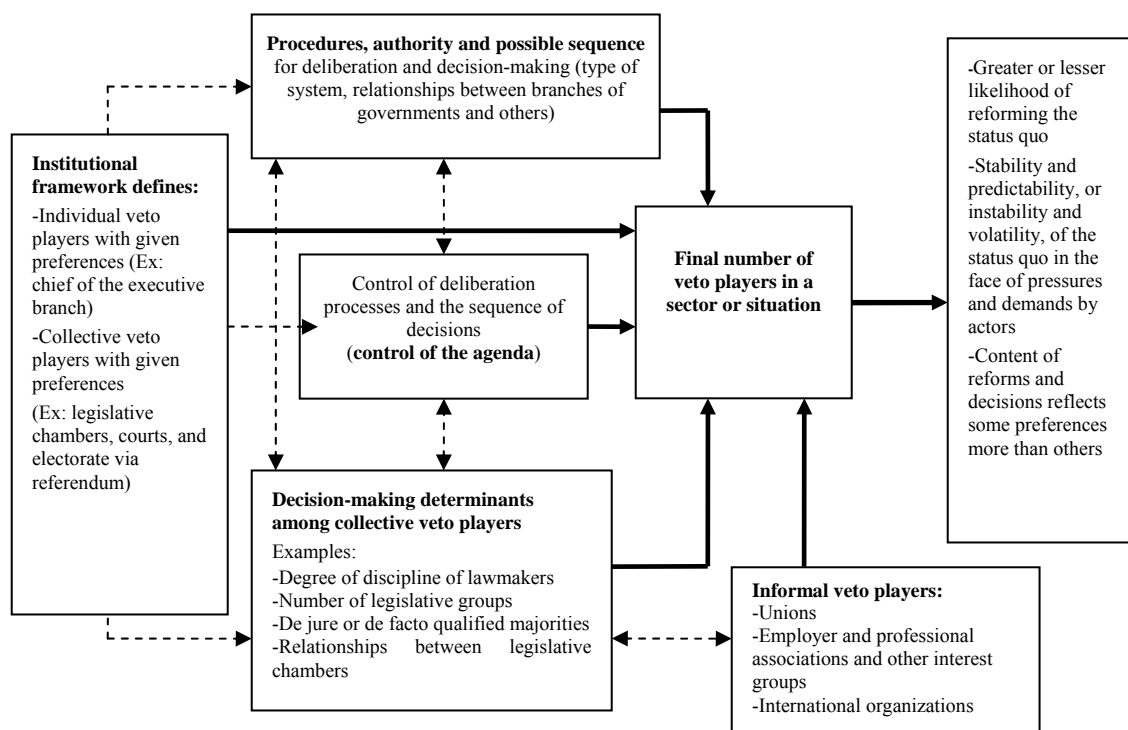
anticipating the behaviour of others. Thus, they are able to identify the best possible strategy based on the information they possess, the frequency with which the interaction —or game— recurs and the resources and means at their disposal. Lastly, they always act according to instrumental rationality —as opposed to ideology or values. In other words, the behaviour of an actor is determined not by impersonal, ideological, historical or macrosocial forces but rather by the strategic and individual agency of real actors, whose interactions are shaped, in turn, by expectations about how others will behave (see table 3 in the annex).

Given these assumptions, even with shared interests, the cooperation that would enable the actors in a group to negotiate an arrangement that was more beneficial for all is unlikely because there are costs involved in terms of time, organization, effort and collective resources (Olson, 1971). In order for that cooperation to occur, there must be selective incentives for the actors to cooperate, as well as actors who voluntarily (i.e. with an interest in doing so) assume the costs of coordinating the collaborative action. In short, individuals will only collaborate if they are obliged to do so, or if they obtain some type of selective compensation in exchange, a position of advantage over those who have not mobilized or even a position of influence over other actors. By dedicating time, effort and diverse resources for the immediate goal of extracting benefits that will accrue exclusively to them (earnings, influence, prestige or power, among others), political leaders organize the collective mobilization with more or less efficiency for the group, putting certain groups ahead of others. The approach, therefore, assumes that the relevant actors are determined by the institutional context, that they possess unequal resources and that they find themselves in an ongoing situation of strategic negotiation and confrontation.

By definition, the design of selective incentives to encourage or obligate actors to cooperate includes rules and procedures that govern their interaction. Repeated interactions generate regularities in behaviours and procedures. These regularities are distilled into specific, stable institutional arrangements. Thus, institutions are the ‘rules of the game’, i.e. an exogenous restriction on the possible strategies of the actors, but that ultimately come from repeated interaction between the actors and how they ‘prefer’ to interact. As rules of the game, they include incentives to achieve more or less advantageous collective outcomes. As coordination mechanisms, they lower transaction and information-sharing costs, generating lasting equilibriums in the dynamic of political interactions. As mechanisms for verifying compliance with agreements between actors, they reduce uncertainty and increase the possibility of better collective outcomes. Institutions structure strategic interaction by determining the range and sequence of alternatives to set the policy agenda, as well as the options available to the actors. They help define the strategies used by the actors to achieve their goals. In this framework, the State is reduced to a set number of individual or collective actors with preferences that they seek to maximize by exercising instrumental and strategic rationality. The menu of possible actions and strategies available to State actors depends on the options offered to them by the existing institutional framework and the position and availability of resources that gives them their position in the State or social hierarchy. The State —or better said, State actors— may or may not serve the interests of powerful groups, or may in fact have their own reform agenda.

An especially relevant theory for analysing the emergence of compacts and consensuses is veto player theory. This theory can be used to summarize the implications of various debates on institutional characteristics and problems for decision-making and adoption of public policies based on the type of political system (presidential, parliamentary or semi-parliamentary); electoral system (majority or proportional representation, with or without re-election); party system (number and structure of parties and degree of partisan discipline); constitutional and legal rules and procedures as determinants of the interaction between branches of government; the presence of parallel interest representation and consultation systems (corporatism) and others (Tsebelis, 2000). Chart 1 summarizes the main considerations of the model.

DIAGRAM 1
INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, VETO PLAYERS AND DETERMINANTS OF DECISION-MAKING IN A PUBLIC POLICY SECTOR



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Michael Becher, "Constraining ministerial power: the impact of veto players on labor market reforms in industrial democracies, 1973-2000", *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 43, No. 1, January 2010 and G. Tsebelis, "Veto players and institutional analysis", *Governance*, vol. 13, October, 2000.

Based on the type of procedures, especially formal procedures but also informal ones, and the number of relevant competing actors, every institutional arrangement is characterized by prescribing, in a given policy sector, a certain number of players with veto power on the adoption of decisions that alter the status quo. These are players whose consent is needed to make a change to the prevailing state of things, be this a law or a public action programme. In a given sector, the institutional framework establishes the authority of the executive and legislative branches to amend or propose legislation, as well as to adopt public action programmes, setting up players with veto power on the adoption of public policies. This framework also dictates to what extent the courts and other judicial bodies, as well as other entities, are liable to block or reverse initiatives and decisions, such as constitutional courts and other collegial bodies. Lastly, other veto players may emerge, de facto, from parallel (informal or institutional) systems for consultation of powerful organized groups (unions, businesses or social organizations) such as occurs in corporatist systems, and there is also the matter of the autonomous power that bureaucracies may wield to block or decline to implement a formally approved initiative.

An individual actor, such as the head of the executive branch, is, by definition, a single veto player, while a collective actor (such as a legislative assembly or collegial body) has an internal dynamic that, in fact, may translate into the emergence of multiple individual veto players by virtue of deliberative and decision-making procedures and the preferences of those who comprise the group. In the case of legislatures, for example, the number of individual veto players depends on the determinants that would produce a majority favourable to a change or reform in a given sector and moment in time. Therein lies the importance, in the case of a unicameral or bicameral system (and the balance of power with other branches of government or entities), of the number of relevant actors needed for a potential majority to form given the characteristics of the electoral and party systems. At one extreme, this may be the number of individual, autonomous legislators capable of sabotaging the formation of a majority, and

at the other extreme, it may simply be the leaders of very disciplined legislative groups. In the case of a unicameral legislative system in which the executive has a disciplined legislative majority, the executive may, *de facto*, constitute the sole veto player. In a bicameral presidential system with multiple parties and the absence of majorities loyal to the executive (or divided chambers), there may be a large number of veto players.

Qualified majorities —*de jure* or *de facto*— also have the potential to influence the final number of veto players. Certain procedures that change the status quo (e.g. a constitutional reform) require a qualified majority, which makes the relative minority that is opposed to the change into a new collective player with the power to veto an initiative. Occasionally, the political game translates into the need for qualified majorities, such as when an absolute majority of the total number of seats is required (as opposed to an absolute majority of representatives in attendance) to approve a change but in practice a qualified majority of representatives in attendance is needed due to the abstention of absenteeism of legislators.

Another important factor is control over setting the agenda, as prescribed by the institutional framework, that is, which entities have the power or prerogative to determine the order in which the various actors look at the policy or reform options, because in the case of more than two options accompanied by competing preferences, the final decision may depend on the sequence and the forums in which the alternatives are evaluated. The preferences of the actors with agenda-setting authority (legislative committees or executive branches with right of initiative, to give two examples) are especially important, as they have key influence over the content of proposals and thus final outcomes. For example, in a presidential system, for the executive branch —especially when it does not have a favourable, disciplined majority— the final content of reform legislation approved by the legislature is always a *fait accompli* that it can only respect or reject by presidential veto, with the additional option, in certain cases, of issuing observations. In turn, any vetoes or observations that it issues may only be rejected by the legislature —in accordance with laws in force— through a qualified majority (Tsebelis and Alemán, 2005a). The legislature can, however, amend part or all of the content of any reform proposal, so in a presidential system, its preferences —and its sensitivity to the interests of certain social actors— have a considerable bearing on the final outcome of any legislative proposal.³

Most veto players are associated with formal entities with prescribed prerogatives, although this is not necessarily always the case. The consultation and consensus-building mechanisms in corporatist systems, for example, actually turn some employer or labour groups into permanent veto players in certain sectors, in parallel to the government's formal decision-making procedures.

The final number of veto players and their preferences in a policy sector determines the scope and frequency with which the status quo can be modified. This, in turn, affects the delicate balance between accountability and stability, i.e. how responsive a political system is to the social demands and shocks it faces and to what extent it produces consistent, predictable and stable policies despite the pressures exerted by specific interests. These characteristics in a given sector depend on the (known) preferences of the veto players with respect to the status quo (to what extent they are adverse or favourable), as this determines whether change is possible and whether it will be moderate and gradual, or rather, radical. When there are major ideological differences between veto players, change is likely impossible, as neither alternative to the status quo will be acceptable to them.⁴ In any case, the model has an expectation of policy stability due to the presence of multiple veto players, wide gaps in their respective

³ Even if the executive branch can propose legislation, the final content of its proposal is not always guaranteed, especially when it lacks a majority or when party discipline in the legislature is weak. One exception is when, at the end of the process, the executive branch has the prerogative to issue observations on an initiative that the legislature can only reject by an absolute or qualified majority, which gives the executive branch more power to set the agenda and shape the final content of a legislative change (Tsebelis and Alemán, 2005b). The option of calling a referendum is a way of imposing an agenda on the legislature—specifically defining the content of a reform knowing that it does not have sufficient support and submitting it to the electorate—that the executive branch does not see as otherwise having good prospects in the legislature. In contrast, by definition in parliamentary systems, the government is formed from a majority coalition and tends to have greater ability to weigh in on the content of a legislative reform proposal by negotiating with the majority that supports it, and in the case of ample, disciplined majorities, it can impose legislative content with relative ease.

⁴ A key problem is that it is not always possible to know in advance what the status quo is, because its shape only comes into high relief when a specific reform proposal or alternative is tabled and the preferences around it become explicit and known.

preferences, whether in one sector or across many, or the presence of qualified majorities (de facto or de jure) among group veto players. At a given moment in time, these factors, separately or simultaneously, will determine whether the status quo will prevail, or whether a moderate or deep change is instead likely (Tsebelis, 2000).

The appearance of an alternative proposal or arrangement, changes in the correlation of forces or in the preferences of the actors can generate equilibrium shifts: change, in this approach, tends to be seen as the result of an external shock that alters the preferences and/or resources of the actors. Such exogenous alterations generate changes of varying intensity, and when they are deep enough to change the rules of the game (i.e. the actual institutional framework), they change the structure of incentives for the actors. Thus, change is a transition between two stable equilibriums.

In summary, the variant of neo-institutionalism associated with rational choice theory draws on the instrumental and strategic component of politics, as well as the self-interested intentionality of social actors as determinant factors of public action. With this approach, unlike others that require a large volume of empirical information, the explanatory hypotheses can be corroborated based on a simplified model of the behaviour of political actors, which is intended to be universally valid regardless of context or timing. The approach is clearly useful for explaining short-term dynamics in stable contexts with strongly rooted institutions, that is, in situations where the actors have well-defined and well-known preferences and are accustomed to interacting strategically in a predefined framework. However, it is less useful for understanding medium- and long-term change processes, or ‘fluid’ situations in which the actors lack essential information on the identification of the other actors, their own and others’ preferences and the possible repertoires of action and outcomes.

From the perspective of compacts and consensus agreements, this approach steers the analysis towards the identification, in a given case, of the actors whose consent is indispensable for establishing a compact or consensus that changes the status quo (i.e. the actors with veto power), as well as the type of interaction and transactions (immediate and/or intertemporal) they conduct. Recently, studies by Stein and others (2006, 2008) and Scartascini and others (2011) have placed particular emphasis on the time horizon of the actors and the determinants of repeated interactions that contribute to a certain degree of stability and cooperation between them. An analysis of these patterns and the incentives of the actors given the rules of the institutional framework for decision-making would help determine how probable and exceptional the compact or consensus in question was (or could be). Furthermore, by looking at the emergence of compacts and consensus in the social policy arena, this approach invites the question as to whether a given agreement is situated more in a context that, of its own, encourages the actors to make commitments and cooperate, or whether it represents an exceptional moment in which the actors have converged against the odds. In the latter case, the challenge consists in explaining what the exceptional elements were that drove the actors to cooperate.

2. Historical neo-institutionalism

In response to analytical models with universal pretensions and explanations that are overly mechanistic or lacking in descriptive capacity, historical neo-institutionalism takes a neo-Weberian, inductive approach, with an emphasis on the uniqueness and historicity of the political and institutional processes that explain the emergence of public policies (see table 4 of the annex).

This approach places a great deal of importance on the inertias that bog down decision-making and public action. Rooted in the historical context, it focuses on the meanings that actors ascribe to their own actions in a given moment, integrating the contingent dimension of politics and considering that given a configuration of actors with certain interests, several different equilibriums are possible and only a meticulous case-study analysis can explain the final outcome. Thus, defining the interests, objectives and strategies of the actors occurs in a specific socio-historical context that explains them: these interests are not ‘given’ or dictated by a universal or ahistorical model of human motivation. In fact, the actors behave according to a combination of instrumental logic and logics derived from historically determined cultural and ideological values. This combination reflects how the actors, at a given juncture and in a given institutional context, perceive their interests and identify strategies to satisfy them, taking into account the opportunities provided by the institutional context and the ‘accepted’ means of action in that

context. Institutions shape and constrain the actors' strategies to a large extent but are also themselves the result (conscious or unforeseen) of deliberate political strategies and past political conflicts (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992).

The implication for the analysis of public action is that the State, depending on the case (the scale, period, or policy sector), is understood to be a multiple-actor constellation, rather than a single actor, and immersed in a context with strong inertias. These inertias are procedures, practices, political decisions, conflicts and preexisting agreements that tightly constrain public action. That understanding results in a specific view of change and continuity in policy as a dynamic in which there are critical or formative junctures in institutional development and policy adoption that put countries on different development paths. The institutions then continue to evolve in response to changing environmental conditions and ongoing political manoeuvring by the actors but in a way that is constrained by past trajectories. These historical experiences not only limit the strategies available to the actors, but also dictate which objectives are adopted at a given time (Thelen, 1999, p. 387). This path dependency is related, ultimately, to the 'increasing returns' that accrue over time from adopting a given institutional model or a specific public policy from among alternative arrangements (Pierson, 2000). Any model or policy entails coordinating and organizing actors in a certain way, making it more costly to adopt other arrangements and reinvent new ways of collectively interacting. Moreover, they generate cognitive processes for the interpretation and legitimation of public and political problems that tend to be self-reinforcing since changing them involves extremely costly collective learning and redefinition processes. Lastly, institutional development processes are necessarily shaped by the rules, procedures and mechanisms for resource distribution established by previous policy decisions, so much so that failing to observe them or creating new arrangements becomes increasingly expensive. Before new institutions or policies are created, the preferred and less costly option is usually gradual adaptation.

As a result, sudden or radical change processes are much less frequent than gradual, structured and incremental processes. The drivers of change are many and varied. Interactions between the various institutional structures in a society generate contradictions and reconfigurations to resolve inconsistencies, for example, between economic, political and social systems. Public policies and political change are discrete processes characterized by long periods of stability punctuated by formative, often turbulent, moments, in which an exogenous shock (an economic crisis, an unforeseen event or another situation) fundamentally calls into question the existing order, sometimes as new social groups are emerging (Peters, Pierre and King, 2005). Without generalizing or theorizing on the ultimate causes of change, this approach focuses on describing institutional emergence, change and erosion processes, as well as on social forces exogenous to the State and the internal dynamics at play.

Historical neo-institutionalism sheds interesting light on institutional development, maintenance and adaptation processes, as well as the public policies associated with them. Its main advantage—its capacity to describe and explain individual cases over time—is also its main limitation, inasmuch as the inductive, case-based methodology that characterizes it makes it hard to generalize about the effect of specific institutional models on public policies or on the determinants of change and continuity. Furthermore, although the approach simultaneously integrates instrumental calculation and historically determined cultural and ideological factors as part of the motivations of the actors, it lacks precision in explaining the causal link between institutions and the individual behaviour of the actors.

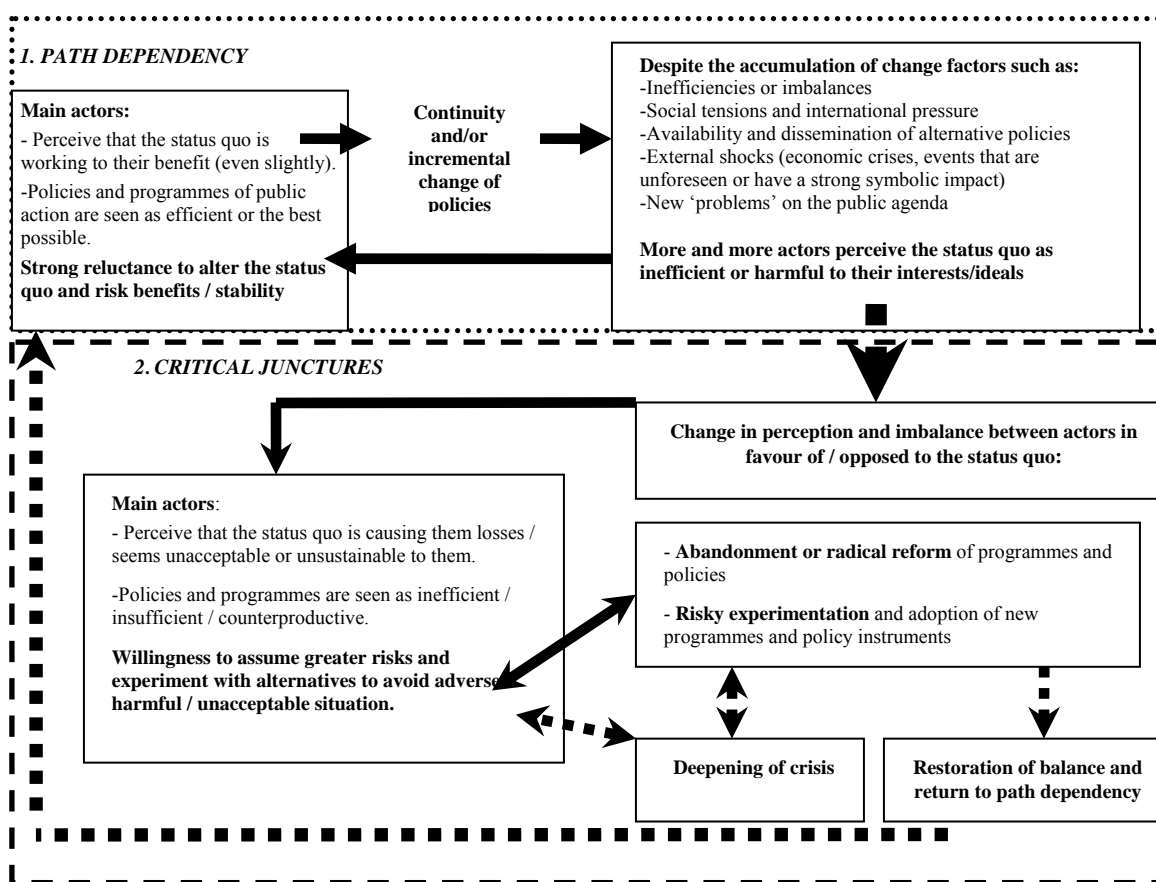
A recent contribution of major importance for analysing the emergence of compacts and consensus agreements has been provided by Weyland (2008) based on empirical observations drawn from experimental cognitive psychology on the limited rationality of actors in situations of uncertainty about the possibility of realizing gains or losses.⁵ The work suggests that social actors tend to be very averse to incurring losses, which leads them to make risky and drastic decisions to avoid losses. Conversely, they tend to be extremely cautious when it comes to changing situations in which they

⁵ This contribution is said to constitute a separate approach from historical neo-institutionalist approaches and rational choice theory. Although it is clearly different from the latter, based, as it is, on the limited and erratic rationality of actors, it would seem to be complementary to the former inasmuch as it draws on the empirical observation on the political change dynamic understood as long periods of path dependency punctuated by critical junctures that is specific to historical neo-institutionalism.

believe they are realizing gains, even when there are reasonable opportunities to considerably increase these gains through alternative strategies.

Decision-makers in the real world possess incomplete information and lack the ability to construct a perfect and unerring calculation for identifying the options that are available, the options that will be most beneficial and the strategies of other actors. Accordingly, they assess losses asymmetrically with respect to gains. Not only is aversion to losses so deep that when actors are confronted with them (or perceive them to be highly probable), they prefer to explore uncertain, risky alternatives as a way to avoid them, even at the risk of worsening their losses if they fail in the attempt. Conversely, they are very wary of making ambitious bets that endanger the gains that they are already realizing in a given situation. Due to this reluctance to incur losses, they instead prefer to maintain a status quo that ensures modest gains rather than assume risks by choosing an alternative that has the potential for greater earnings but also more risk (see chart 2).

DIAGRAM 2
DEVELOPMENT PATH DEPENDENCY AND CONTINUITY AND CHANGE PROCESSES IN PUBLIC POLICY: A LOSS AVERSION EXPLANATION



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of K. Weyland, "Toward a new theory of institutional change", *World Politics*, Vol. 60, No. 2, January 2008.

The aforementioned model explains why decision-makers tend not to take drastic action initially when confronted with certain policy imbalances, problems, demands or inefficiencies that would change an equilibrium that they perceive to be acceptable, for as long as they continue seeing it as beneficial or effective, despite the potential for tensions or problems to mount and create a real time bomb. This tendency is all the more pronounced if there is also no plausible reform alternative, a factor that is

contingent on the technical skills of the various social and political actors. This situation of immobilism or incremental adjustments can persist for some time until actors with decision-making capability finally decide to tackle challenges by taking drastic—even risky— action to rectify at any cost a deteriorated situation in which they perceive the benefits or effectiveness of the instruments used in that situation to have been exhausted. As conditions worsen, the actors are increasingly open to suggestions or alternative action plans from academia, international organizations or other national experiences. As a result, the availability of ‘recipes’ or reform alternatives for addressing a given public problem can unleash change processes in a country and even ‘waves’ of imitation or innovation in various countries. The rationality of the decision-makers is geographically, culturally and temporally limited. Because they cannot systematically integrate complex and disperse information in a context of urgency, they tend to make selective use of superficial or partial evidence that is already available. Thus, the supply of ‘promising’ reform proposals often comes more from emulation than innovation (Weyland, 2008).

Indeed, once a public action or reform model gains a reputation as being effective, it sparks optimistic emulation processes. During that moment of ‘euphoria’, the ‘informed’ actors who support such initiatives win influence and prestige, while those who question the initiatives may lose their credibility and prestige as repositories of expertise and influence. In Latin America’s social policy arena, the proliferation of conditional cash transfer programmes follows this pattern to a certain extent. The spread of public action programmes is obviously subject to hasty judgments that create serious distortions in terms of the actual success of an experience or ‘good practice’, the possibilities for replication in various different contexts and the suitability of the underlying diagnostic assessment. Over time, as more accurate and thorough assessments of the impact of such initiatives become available, this initial enthusiasm tends to level off and replication slows. In addition, the dissemination of public action reforms or programmes can modify the government agenda and public debate: the problems and issues that can be addressed by public action are many and compete for the attention of decision-makers, and the appearance of a model of action to contend with a problem can alter the government’s priorities or the national debate. Also, supply and demand for public action are not independent, but rather are each influenced by the other. A deep crisis can spur the discovery of or experimentation with new solutions, while the sudden availability of an action model can move a new issue onto the public agenda. Lastly, the inertia characterizing a public action sector can be broken by the mere availability or dissemination of a ‘solution’ adopted in another country.

This model also explains why redistributive inertias in an institutional order reinforce continuity more than change: the actors already benefiting from the status quo are averse to any change that would threaten their standing, so they cling to overly rigid strategies to stave off change, while the sectors that could benefit from a change push for it with comparatively less resources and (sometimes) determination. This unequal balance can only be inverted by social problems or challenges to the status quo that end up limiting or reducing the circle of actors who are benefiting from the existing order while increasing the range of actors who are incurring losses, until the original balance is inverted. In other words, it takes a looming crisis for aggregate benefits to acquire more weight than outsized concern over the losses incurred by the defenders of the existing system. Given the limited rationality of actors and the fact that they are incapable of controlling events and anticipating outcomes, it may be that a drastic attempt at reform would unleash an even less favourable situation and perpetuate a dynamic of disintegration and questioning of the previous equilibrium.

In short, historical institutionalism underscores the importance of analysing politics as a dynamic and uncertain process that often produces unforeseen consequences due to the interaction of various processes and conflicts whose outcome is hard for the actors involved to predict. Unlike approaches such as the one derived from rational choice theory, this approach does not view change as a transition between two stable equilibriums of the preferences and strategies of self-interested actors, but rather as a constant process of gradual adjustments, with the exception of certain critical junctures or formative moments that radically reconfigure a public policy sector (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). Historical neo-institutionalism argues that institutions emerge from and are sustained by features and inertias specific to *unique* social and political contexts. Thus, path dependency involves elements of both continuity and structured change, and institutional arrangements cannot be understood in isolation from

the political and social setting in which they are embedded (Thelen, 1999). Although criticized for a certain degree of ambiguity in addressing the drivers or determinants of change and continuity, and its relative weakness in generalizing the findings inferred from specific studies, this approach has considerable descriptive and analytical power that, on balance, can be supplemented with the findings from other approaches.

In terms of analysing the emergence of compacts and consensus agreements, this approach considers the historical context as a determinant. In particular, it asks whether the moment in time that is being studied corresponds to a period of crisis, questioning and instability in which the actors can reach agreements that represent an important change with respect to the previous status quo, or, conversely, to a period in which inertias are so entrenched that any compact or consensus agreement can only make slight modifications to aspects in line with the status quo. In the case of social policy as a public policy sector, an agreement that emerges in a context of crisis and change (a critical juncture) could lead in the short term to structural changes from the viewpoint of objectives, coverage, financing or social groups or categories benefited by the social policies. In contrast, against a backdrop of stability and path dependency, any agreement or consensus would likely have a less ambitious scope in the immediate term, although it could represent a modest step in a series of ‘small’ adjustments with implications visible in the medium or long term. In short, this approach suggests two very different pictures of a compact: one is of a series of specific agreements or reforms that incrementally come to constitute a broad covenant on certain models of social welfare, and the other is of a general compact (explicit or implicit) that results from an exceptional critical juncture (a formative choice, a constitutional or regime change, a serious economic crisis) that subsequently guides specific agreements on or reforms to the social welfare systems in a similar direction.

3. Organizational neo-institutionalism

Sociological neo-institutionalism represents a critical alternative to models based on rational choice theory and emphasizes the ideas and meanings that actors ascribe to public action and their role in it. In this variant, preferences or interests are not seen as ‘givens’ but rather as social constructions, so their formation is addressed explicitly as an explanatory factor of public action. While not denying that social actors attempt to act rationally and in their own interests, the approach is based on the cognitive and cultural limitations inherent to each context that lead the actors to employ established behavioural routines or familiar patterns of public action to achieve their objectives, rather than an exhaustive process of reasoning. More than seeking to maximize utility, actors attempt to act ‘appropriately’ to satisfy their preferences by choosing lines of action based on their interpretation of a situation rather than on any purely instrumental calculation (Hall and Taylor, 1996). In its various expressions, this approach focuses considerable attention on the networks of actors in and between State and non-State organizations, in order to understand specifically how the government works by looking at the interactions and exchanges between actors, as well as the dissemination of ideas, paradigms or models of public action.

The various expressions of the sociological approach can be categorized into two groups according to the explanatory factors they emphasize, as follows: the processes tied to the logic of social appropriateness as the dynamic of organizations (*organizational*), and the exchanges and cognitive processes around which public action is conceived and constructed (*cognitive*).

Organizational studies are rooted in the concrete and erratic functioning of modern bureaucracies and invoke the notion of the ‘garbage can’ as a metaphor for the decision-making process. Cohen, March and Olsen observed that decision-making does not function according to a rational and well-ordered process consisting of clear and chronologically identifiable phases,⁶ but rather according to downright ambiguous, erratic, disorderly and contingent dynamics. These authors developed a model to describe decision-making processes as a garbage can in which there are decision opportunities, formal and

⁶ Among the models that attempt to describe the sequences of decision-making systems is the celebrated model by Jones (1984), who divides the process into clearly defined and sequential phases: identification of a problem by the government; design and approval of a public action programme; budgeting and implementation of the programme; and evaluation and termination of the intervention.

informal rules and procedures, actors with strategies, problems and solutions. Out of that jumble, as priorities and pressures emerge in the public arena, decision-makers attempt to establish a minimum degree of order and coherence in a limited period of time. They gradually define their preferences on a case by case basis and adopt existing ‘solutions’ (i.e. measures, models or programmes of public action) whose creators or promoters (e.g. politicians, experts and social and international organizations) are in turn seeking an opportunity to disseminate their proposed solution (Olsen, 2001) (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). Thus, the actors do not choose the option that maximizes utility but rather adopt the first option that seems appropriate to them.

The value of organizational studies lies in their attempt to understand how different actors, in a given configuration, will strive to draw together diagnostic elements and ‘pieces’ of solutions without anybody really controlling the process that leads to the final decision (Müller, 2008, p. 38). In that context, organizational inertias, which is to say the previous procedures and models of action, constitute the initial menu that will be considered by the decision-makers. The restrictions they face are twofold. One is cognitive: the impossibility of knowing all possible options and the respective consequences in a limited period of time. The second is practical: ‘inventing’ a model of action for organizations as complex as modern bureaucracies requires a major investment of time, coordination, resources and political capital, so exhausting all standing options is always the simplest option, regardless of how effective in addressing a ‘new’ problem. In short, the policy selection process is characterized by the confluence of three streams: “problems looking for solutions; solutions looking for problems; and people looking for things to do” (Moran, Rein and Goodin, 2006, p. 22).

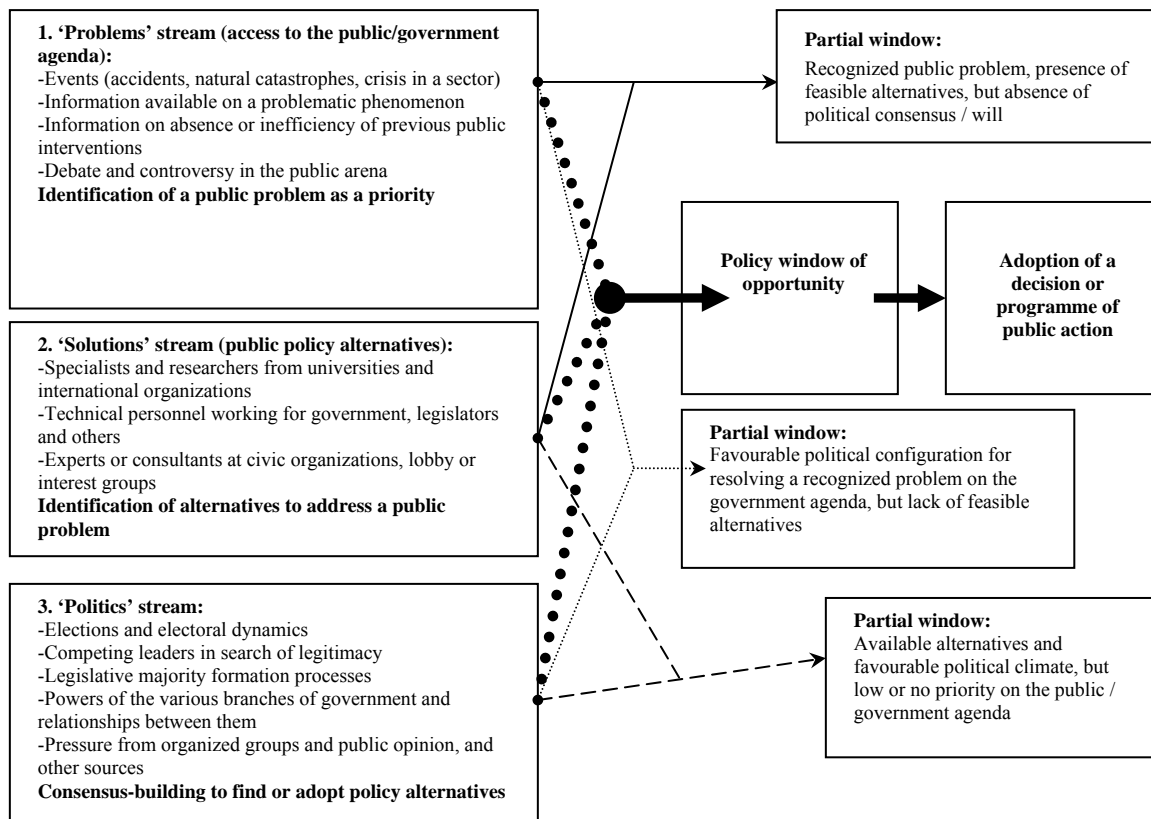
Particularly important in analysing the emergence of compacts and consensus agreements is the model developed by J. Kingdon on *policy windows of opportunity*, which emphasizes processes of access to the government agenda and its relationship with policy formulation in democratic contexts. According to Kingdon’s model, the adoption of public policies can be seen as a fluid, occasionally erratic interaction between three streams, each with its own dynamic (see chart 3).

First, the ‘problems’ stream refers to how actors with decision-making power and the general public obtain information on social conditions and go about identifying elements of reality as problems deserving of public intervention. This process is attuned to not only the available factual information (for example, variation of indicators defined as relevant in a sector) but also to the task of social construction that in the framework of public and academic debate, results in the definition of a phenomenon as a public problem. There are phenomena that have not always been interpreted as social problems that would warrant public intervention, such as natural disaster risk management, labour conditions or even poverty and inequality. In addition to requiring causal and discursive information to transform phenomena previously regarded as ordinary or inevitable into problems subject to public action, sometimes a sudden or fortuitous event (a crisis, an accident or event with a strong symbolic charge) pushes an issue onto the public agenda as a priority problem. Such problems can drop off the agenda as others that are considered more urgent or important emerge, either because attempts to resolve them fail or because they lose relevance after a certain period of time (Kingdon, 1995).

Second, the public policy (solutions) stream is peopled by scholars, specialists and technical personnel who analyse problems and devise alternatives, working in networks structured around the study of a phenomenon or area, sometimes constituting true ‘epistemic communities’ in a public policy sector. In this stream, various ‘solutions’ or alternatives are distilled, generating a small pool of action programmes that could be feasibly implemented. These alternatives tend to be taken up by other actors (e.g. interest groups, parties, politicians and media) that serve as ‘promoters’, advocating for their adoption. If no policy alternatives are available for addressing a priority problem on the public agenda, existing policies (ineffective or unadapted) may be invoked, or simple inaction may prevail.

Lastly, the ‘politics’ stream is a set of factors (such as elections, legislative dynamics, competition between leaders in search of legitimacy and influence, powers of and relationships between the branches of government and pressures from opposing interest groups or fluctuations in public opinion) that determine not only which issues or problems will tend to be priorities on the government agenda, but also the possibilities for reaching consensus through negotiation or persuasion to adopt a specific decision or programme of action.

DIAGRAM 3
DETERMINANTS OF ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC AGENDA AND POLICY WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Kingdon, J. W., "Agenda setting", *Public Policy. The Essential Readings*, Stella Z. Theodolou and Matthew Cahn (eds.), Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1995 and L., Boussaguet, S. Jacquot and P. Ravinet, *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques*, Les Presses de Sciences Po, December 2004.

In this model, a decision or programme of public action is very likely to be adopted when the three streams converge in a policy window of opportunity, that is, when in response to a problem recognized as a priority and subject to public/government intervention, a financially and technically feasible alternative is available and the political actors with decision-making power feel it is possible and either adopt it or agree to adopt it. The point at which the three streams converge is erratic and asynchronous, often with 'partially open windows', such as when 'solutions' for identified problems are available, but the political climate is not very receptive for getting the solution approved, or when there is clarity about the existence of a problem as well as the political will to resolve it, but no feasible alternatives are available, or even when there is potential consensus on an available alternative, but the problem is not recognized as urgent or sufficiently important on the government agenda, particularly due to the greater degree of urgency or attention paid to other problems. Most of the time, a policy window of opportunity opens in the 'politics' stream (e.g. with the arrival of a new administration) or in the 'problems' stream (e.g. when an event catapults a problem onto the government agenda). The key players in this model are elected politicians, public officials, scholars, journalists, specialists in the service of an interest group and other actors who are constantly alert to opportunities to use an event or favourable conditions to promote a (their) solution, or to broadcast the urgency of a problem and indicate the inefficacy or absence of policies to address it.

The strength of the policy window of opportunity model lies in its description of the set of factors that play a role in the volatile process of public policy creation in a democracy. In particular, it explains why widespread recognition of a social problem is not enough to induce a response by the government, suggesting that in the absence of available information, diagnostics and feasible action alternatives and without the support of actors with decision-making power, a public action programme is unlikely to be implemented.

However, the model has a descriptive bias and says little on the emergence of the windows. Furthermore, it tends to view the role of the academic community as apolitical or neutral when in fact it is more active and interested, both in the social construction of problems and in the promotion of policy alternatives (Sabatier, 1991). Lastly, the centrality of the policy windows of opportunity gives the model a short-term focus, leaving aside longer-term processes concerning the evolution of policies, ideas and institutions.

Decision-making as a ‘garbage can’ and the policy windows of opportunity model are important reference points for the organizational approaches, contributing to an understanding of the emergence, dissemination and standardization of policies in contexts involving the confluence of multiple authorities and legal systems, different levels and geographical spaces (local, national and transnational) and numerous social actors. Table 5 in the annex describes the general characteristics of the organizational approach. They emphasize that organizations (including the government) function according to action models that prescribe behaviours and instruments regarded as adequate, appearing to act rationally in order to avoid social censure, minimize demands for external accountability, improve their chances of securing necessary resources and raise their probability of survival (Greenwood, Oliver and Suddaby, 2008). As a result, actors with decision-making power tend to use existing public action models. At the individual level, actors that have been socialized into particular institutional roles internalize the norms associated with those roles (Hall and Taylor, 1996).

In general, the ‘organizational’ approach does a good job of elucidating the structural dimensions underlying the short-term behaviour of actors. Specifically, it addresses the process of the formation of preferences: it neither views them as ‘givens’, nor does it assume that they are rational in terms of utility maximization, but rather sees them as culturally and contextually defined. Thus, even if the government is a vertical, relatively centralized organization and substantive law prescribes bureaucratic hierarchies and a specific division of labour, in reality for each decision or policy that is analysed, there is a specific constellation of actors with preferences defined according to the organization that each actor represents and with a limited number of available alternatives.

One limitation is the difficulty of empirically verifying the processes that are the focus of this approach. Doing so requires a considerable volume of information that is hard to collect without undertaking a meticulous review of the documentary information, observing the actual functioning of the organizations studied and conducting interviews with the full contingent of potential actors. Moreover, it requires a careful process of interpretation to attribute causes. Even when the mutual influence between individuals/actors and their organizational context is recognized, the emphasis on structural dynamics threatens to obscure the role of individual actors.

In terms of the analysis of compacts and consensus agreements, this approach zeroes in on the formative process and content. Its consideration of the regulatory frameworks of the participating organizations or actors and the policies in effect is an important element and suggests that a consensus agreement or compact should be viewed as the product of organizational inertias that the actors go about adapting in a given context. Especially suggestive is the possibility of looking at a compact or consensus agreement as the result of a window of policy opportunity where three factors converge: recognition of a problem as a priority item on the public and/or government agenda, the availability of public policy alternatives presented as a solution to that problem and the willingness of political actors to adopt a public policy decision. In particular, in order for a broad collective agreement to exist, this approach places the greatest emphasis on the construction of the problems and alternatives that are the focus of the agreement or compact, especially on the way in which different actors or networks of actors participate in that process.

4. Cognitive/constructivist neo-institutionalism

This approach, like the organizational approach, ascribes importance to the social construction of actors’ preferences and other issues, areas or modalities that are subject to public intervention at a given moment in time. What distinguishes this approach is the centrality it places on ‘ideas’ in the public policy formation process, or more specifically, to the ways in which State action and public problems are conceptualized,

programmes and models of public action are disseminated and various alternatives are justified or strategically promoted.⁷

The cognitive (or constructivist) approach is based on the view that although the social actors that participate in the development and implementation of public policies act strategically, they do so not from a single type of rationality but rather from a variety of possible motivations and values. Their interests are not ‘givens’ but rather have a strong ideological and emotional component that reflects the normative orientation of the actor (moral, ethical and political) towards the context at a given moment in time. Unlike the approaches more closely aligned with rational choice theory, the behaviour of actors is a reflection of how they perceive their material interests in accordance with the cognitive framework they mobilize to understand their situation in a specific context and moment in time. Actors reformulate and translate social conditions and observed events based on the analytical frameworks that are available to identify public problems and public policy models and instruments, but these can be called into question by events or the emergence of new ideas or alternative models of interpretation and action. Thus, perceptions about what is possible, legitimate or desirable are moulded both by the institutional environment in which the actors find themselves—the prevailing paradigms and worldviews—and by the conflicts that arise among these actors around their redefinition.

As noted by Surel (1998), cognitive matrixes (or reference paradigms) of public action have a dual function. First, they give meaning to social dynamics and logics and determine possible areas of action, ‘making sense’ for the actors that adopt them and allowing them to interpret social reality in a coherent way. By providing a causal explanation for events, social conditions and processes under way, and by defining principles and practices of action, cognitive matrixes contribute to the management of social ‘problems’ and their consequences and effects. In each policy sector, the cognitive and normative framework that characterizes it helps the actors to ‘decode’ and understand the events and social conditions that they observe and then to identify actions to contend with current conflicts and tensions. This does not mean the absence of conflicts, as there are often multiple competing paradigms being promoted by various actors. However, in each sector, there tends to be a dominant paradigm that defines a circumscribed space for resolving conflicts between that policy sector and society. In short, a cognitive matrix redirects social exchanges and disagreements between policy sectors and between social and governmental actors.

The institutionalist character of the ‘cognitive’ approach stems from its view that institutions are shared ways of thinking and acting based on public policy: institutions establish rules, routines and operating modes for political activity and public administration, constituting a factor of order. As codified systems of ideas and practices (based on those ideas), they set parameters around the strategies and objectives of the actors. Institutions embody culturally shared understandings, knowledge and interpretations, but they are also subject to struggles and conflicts between actors wishing to redefine them, they can be seen as ‘inefficient’ and contradictory by some or many actors, and conflicts around their redefinition are contingent.

As with other variants of institutionalism, in the cognitive approach, the dialectic between change and continuity in public policy is characterized by periods of ‘normalcy’ in which inertias and incremental adjustments predominate and periods of more radical change when the frames of reference are questioned and changed. Change is gradual and limited as long as the same cognitive frames prevail. However, at certain moments, radical changes occur in the wake of (sometimes sudden) periods of crisis in the prevailing paradigms, in the framework of power struggles between different groups to impose other norms, interpretations and meanings and the legitimacy or the loss of prestige of a cognitive paradigm or matrix (Hay, 2006). The most distinctive feature of this approach is the role assigned to ideas as an autonomous explanatory factor. An underlying hypothesis is that change in ideas precedes change in policies and institutions: as new policy paradigms are internalized by politicians, officials, experts and other actors, an array of ‘legitimate’ public policy techniques, mechanisms and instruments takes shape and the goals and objectives of the policy itself become more defined. In each national

⁷ The emphasis on the role of ideas, public action models and interactive processes of persuasion and generation of narratives about the social reality aligns the cognitive (or constructivist) approach closely with the “discursive neo-institutionalism” recently introduced by Schmidt (2008, 2010). However, not all of the authors cited for this approach agree with the emphasis placed by V. Schmidt on discursive interaction as a constant dynamic driving policy change and realignment.

context or sector, the actors go about redefining the paradigms that underpin public policy through processes of discussion, dissemination and imitation.

The processes described are embedded in global, national and sector dynamics. Although analysis of a specific case begins, by definition, in a relatively well-defined sector (e.g. social policy), public policies address broader processes that are increasingly global. There are dynamics that are national in scope, that is, relationships between the various public policy sectors, where there tend to be clear hierarchies in terms of the relative importance and weight of each sector on the government agenda, the resources it controls, its public profile, and lastly, the cognitive matrix that characterizes it. The sectors can further be characterized by various paradigms, and the relationships between these can be contradictory and even controversial. In addition, it is possible to think in time periods in which one way of conceptualizing and implementing public action has hegemony over all public policy sectors. There are also transnational and global dynamics that play an important role, whether through global networks in which actors discuss, redefine or disseminate public action models in a sector, or through the circulation of cognitive matrixes that are capable of modifying the arrangement or hierarchy of public policy sectors in a national context.

Table 2 presents three versions that illustrate this approach. The first comes from the work of Peter A. Hall on the post-war history of economic policy, which resulted in an approach centred on public policy paradigms (Hall, 1993). The second is the model of public policy reference systems, in which the main emphasis is on the cognitive matrixes that predominate in each policy sector, intersectoral dynamics and conflicts and the relationships between sector, national and global contexts that spark change in public policies. Last is the public policy advocacy coalition framework, which integrates actors' beliefs as determinants of their strategies in institutional contexts, in policy sectors and at specific moments in time. Each one establishes a hierarchy of the cognitive components of the ideas and concepts underpinning public policies, so that general principles, specific principles, action modalities and very specific policy instruments can be identified.

In general, the variants of the cognitive approach have considerable descriptive power and capacity to make sense of medium- and long-term changes in public action, as well as of the dissemination, imitation or abandonment of public policy models at the national and transnational level. In particular, these variants look at the formation of the 'preferences' or interests of public policy actors that rational choice theory views as givens, as well as introduce the role that globalized communications and ideas are increasingly playing in the evolution of public policy.

Nevertheless, a limitation of these approaches is that they require a considerable volume of documentary and especially testimonial information that is not easy to collect. Even with such information, bringing to bear cognitive matrixes, paradigms, or belief systems concerning policy and changes thereto —by definition, intangible elements— is a tricky exercise in interpretation. One danger is to exaggerate or oversimplify the importance of cognitive frameworks or ideas, viewing them as the sole determinants of public policy to the detriment of the lengthy, complex, conflict-driven and deliberative processes that give rise to policies, and the way in which actors use those frameworks strategically, adapting and eventually transforming them. In addition, the relative weight of the material and ideological factors in the formation of the actors' interests is a grey area: To what extent are material interests exclusively a function of ideological or cognitive factors? Are the latter a product of the former, or does the behavioural logic of the actors vary according to whether material interests or ideological or cognitive factors predominate?

These approaches point out that in a time of crisis, actors question their interpretation of reality and even their capacity to clearly identify their interests and strategies. There is an area of implicit ambiguity that derives from the fact that all the approaches assume that actors with more resources (financial, organizational, informational or heuristic and others) will also be more likely to produce, seek out or imitate new ideas to reorient their actions. If this is so, then actors with more resources will tend to construct favourable narratives to strengthen their position to more easily weather crises, such that the autonomous role of ideas is extenuated by a type of 'residual materialism' not very different from that seen in other approaches that predict —more parsimoniously— greater capacity for adaptation and dominance by the groups that start out as dominant (Hay, 2006).

TABLE 2
THREE VERSIONS OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL-COGNITIVE APPROACH: PARADIGMS, PUBLIC POLICY REFERENCE SYSTEMS
AND ADVOCACY COALITIONS

| Components | Public policy paradigms (P. Hall) | Public policy reference systems (P. Muller/B. Jobert) | Advocacy coalition framework (P. Sabatier) |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>1. Metaphysical principles: Abstract precepts that define the realm of what is possible in a given society, shaping and justifying differences, identities and relationships between individuals and establishing a hierarchy of diverse social problems. (E.g. Valuing social equality above individual freedom; seeking social consensus before pursuing radical or controversial reforms)</p> | <p><i>Policy paradigm:</i> General principles and norms hierarchically ordered (from the general to specific and from abstract to concrete) that set out what is politically desirable, feasible and practical</p> | <p><i>Values</i> around which a system of representation of social reality and/or a sector of society defines what is good or desirable</p> | <p><i>Deep core:</i> Key general normative beliefs about society as a whole that are very hard to change</p> |
| <p>2. Specific principles: Hypothetical-deductive statements that give expression to the values in a specific sector, policy or political subsystem, with implications for the actors and organizations involved in a public policy dilemma or problem. These define 'legitimate strategies' given the objectives derived from the general precepts. (E.g. Unemployment or inflation as priority objectives of economic policy)</p> | | <p><i>Norms:</i> Principles of action related to the distance between perceived reality and desired reality that lead to the definition of general objectives</p> | <p><i>Policy core:</i> Statements derived from deep core beliefs but explicitly concerning the public policy subsystem, also hard to change</p> |
| <p>3. Modalities of action: Methods, means, instruments mobilized to accomplish the proposed values and objectives and satisfy the proposed normative and practical imperatives</p> | <p><i>Instruments:</i> Specification of sectoral instruments to achieve general objectives</p> | <p><i>Algorithms and images:</i> Causal statements and symbolic images that summarize relationships between the sectoral or global reference system and its connection with a more concrete situation</p> | |
| <p>4. Instruments: Key specifications for guiding public action precisely and in accordance with general objectives (E.g. budgetary allocations, administrative decisions, definition of tax rates by income level, specific programmes for a sector of the population to cope with a specific problem and others)</p> | <p><i>Levels of instruments</i> (E.g.: Set a minimum rate of inflation.)</p> | | <p><i>Secondary beliefs:</i> Associated with specific aspects of a subsystem, easier to modify via negotiation and commitment, such as the budgetary allocation for a programme, specific administrative rules or regulations, and others</p> |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Y. Surel, "Idées, intérêts, institutions dans l'analyse des politiques publiques", *Pouvoirs*, No. 87, November, 1998; P.A. Hall, "Policy paradigms, social learning, and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 25, No. 3, April, 1993; B. Palier and Y. Surel, "Les 'trois I' et l'analyse de l'État en action", *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 55, No. 1, 2005; P. Müller "L'analyse cognitive des politiques publiques: vers une sociologie politique de l'action publique", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. 50, No. 2, 2000 and C. Hay, "Constructivist institutionalism", *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, R.A.W. Rhodes, S.A. Binder and B.A. Rockman (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2006.

In terms of analysing compacts and consensuses, the cognitive approaches emphasize the conceptual frameworks that are subject to controversy or consent in the various public policy sectors. More than other approaches, these variants focus on the need to describe what distinguishes them. Thus, in the case of social policy, it is important to look at which conceptual frameworks are mobilized at a given moment in time by the different actors or networks of actors, and eventually, which shared elements can lay a foundation for consensus. In that regard, analysing the content of the compact or consensus with regard to the frameworks mobilized by the various actors is critically important. Under this approach, the analysis consists in looking at the gradual and conflict-driven configuration of the central values of a society and how these are rendered into consensuses (explicit or not) around the construction of common goods or public values, in the realm of social policy.

C. Strengths and weaknesses of the various paradigms and questions on the emergence of compacts in the case of social policy

Much of the debate on the various approaches presented has focused on the motivations of the actors, the explanation of change and continuity and the capacity to conduct empirical comparisons of patterns between countries and historical moments. The literature on the theory of interest groups attempts to explain change by looking at the formation of coalitions with varying levels of support in which the correlation of forces ultimately determines who will be benefitted by public action. The basic observation is that all institutional arrangements (and by extension all previously adopted policies or programmes) serve the interests of certain groups that tend to resist change, while others attempt to shift the arrangements to gain access to the benefits provided by a policy. The challenge for this approach is to go beyond an analysis of the correlation of forces to explain the considerable continuity of public policies and to understand how and under what conditions certain actors define the content thereof, as well as the cases in which the State acts independently of the dominant interest groups: inasmuch as the State is, to a certain point, an instrument of interest groups, what explains the role of those who design a public intervention for purposes that go beyond the interests of certain specific groups? Clearly, public officials and other actors that design and implement policies are more than just passive players executing a government directive generated to satisfy the interests of this or that group or coalition of interests. Most of all, how to account for reform processes in which the government clearly manages to implement policies that in principle alter the status quo? The neo-institutionalist approaches go the farthest in trying to answer this question.

The neo-institutionalist approaches, in general, face the challenge of explaining change itself: given that institutions are, by definition, a set of formal and informal norms that define the rules of the game and place constraints on the actors, shaping their preferences and strategies and influencing the type of policies adopted, what, then, explains the fact that these change? Neo-institutionalism, in its various forms, has put forth several hypotheses. One —the hypothesis of the variants closest to rational choice theory and economics— is to look at institutions as an equilibrium that constitutes an ‘efficient’ solution to collective action problems, and at actors as ‘preferring’ not to fight the same battle over and over again. However, this vision, as powerful as it may be in generating theoretically universal explanatory models, tends to avoid the matter of the formation of the actors’ preferences: these are regarded as givens, when what the actors perceive as their interest is shaped by the context —ideas in vogue, which can change over time. The most common response is that changes occur as a result of ‘external shocks’ to an established order, leading in short order to the creation of a new equilibrium, such that public policy change is seen as a punctuated equilibrium process. Historical neo-institutionalism, meanwhile, has considerable power to describe past processes and inertias that weigh on the present, but it also has a hard time explaining which conditions or factors alter the equilibriums and inertias that dominate the public policy landscape most of the time (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). In terms of how change and continuity are perceived in organizational institutionalism, by stipulating and emphasizing organizational and structural mechanisms of reproduction, this approach runs the risk of completely overlooking the individual actor when it comes to addressing concrete processes. For their part, the cognitive approaches, although aware of the complexity of the deliberative processes that drive public policy change, are ambiguous when it comes to the play between material and cognitive factors that explain the behaviour of the

actors and the inertias of the institutional context. In the end, in neo-institutionalist models, dynamism has to come from some external shock, so these perspectives “imply that political change is not amenable to the same type of analysis we use to understand the operation of the institutions themselves” (Thelen, 1999, p. 387). Why, at a certain moment in time, does an institutional arrangement ‘crystallize’ and persist? Or why is it called into question and changed?

This section has presented an overview of the main analytical approaches for understanding public policy. The objective was to open a ‘toolkit’ to analyse the emergence of compacts and consensuses in the social policy arena. The proposal was not to compare the explanatory scope of each approach for a single case but rather to take advantage of those approaches that can account for the dynamics of each case studied. Indeed, given their virtues and limitations, as well as their various focal points and time horizons, to a certain extent they can be considered complementary. For example, a medium- or long-term process —the construction of a social protection system, for instance— may be in line with dynamics that are well illustrated by historical or cognitive neo-institutionalism, especially in terms of detecting the processes by which actors’ preferences or interests are formed, whereas specific moments or phases in that process —the approval of a specific law or reform, for example— may be explained by the institutional dynamics emphasized by the rational choice theory. In fact, interests, ideas and institutions are indispensable components of any explanation of a public policy process, and it matters how they are ranked and how they are understood to interact in a given situation (Palier and Surel, 2005)⁸. Table 3 summarizes the various ways in which public policies are understood.

TABLE 3
VARIOUS WAYS OF DEFINING A PUBLIC POLICY IN DIFFERENT PARADIGMS

| Approach | Variant | Public policy is seen as... |
|----------------------|------------------------|--|
| Classic pluralism | Interest group theory | A ‘response’ from the political system to: (i) demands successfully channelled by organized interest groups and/or (ii) the preferences of dominant electoral coalitions. |
| Neo-institutionalism | Rational choice theory | A solution to collective action problems of actors whose influence is derived from the position, resources and incentives they possess in the institutional structure. It reflects an equilibrium between their preferences and the incentives to cooperate in that framework. |
| | Historical | Decisions adopted gradually in which continuity and inertias predominate, with the exception of moments of crisis when the dominant actors, models of action and interests benefited / harmed by the status quo are redefined. |
| | Sociological | Organizational Cognitive |

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 4 tentatively presents the approaches with the best potential for addressing specific situations and processes, as well as the various ways in which they can be applied to interpret a compact between the main actors.

Given that the various approaches presented suggest explanations that cover public policy generally, for various reasons it is important to conduct a second analysis that focuses on the unique aspects of social policy as a sector of public policy. The first reason is to survey, from a pragmatic perspective, elements that help connect the approaches described above. These elements should help to “put all the pieces of the puzzle on the table” as an intermediate step in understanding the origin and evolution of a compact or consensus, and even to weigh several possible interpretations from the various approaches. The second reason is because social policy as a sector directly calls into question the way in

⁸ In that regard, this paper concurs with the argument put forth by Vivian Schmidt, which explains that change requires “taking ideas seriously”, that is, focusing on the formation and evolution of the preferences and motivations of actors, as well as the deliberative processes and narratives with respect to public action that they use. See Schmidt, 2010.

which a society views the role of the State and the market in generating well-being, as well as citizenship in a broad sense and, ultimately, discussions around the ‘public welfare’ as the ultimate goal of policy. The third reason is because discussion of any public action instrument in this sector has redistributive and fiscal implications for the material interests of numerous actors. The fourth reason is because in the Latin American context, where democracy and inequality coexist, social policy plays a central role in legitimizing regimes that in many cases are weak and have limited capacity for public action.

TABLE 4
A TOOLKIT FOR ANALYSING PUBLIC POLICIES: DIFFERENT PARADIGMS AND THEIR EXPLANATORY POTENTIAL

| Approach | Variant | Greater analytical potential for... | The compact as... |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Classic pluralism | Interest group theory | Conflict-driven situations involving a limited, stable number of actors with specific interests/motivations who are accustomed to interacting and negotiating in predefined forums and sectors, with similar influence or access to actors with decision-making authority. | -An agreement between the main organized groups around a reform or policy favourable to their interests. -A response by the political system to satisfy the preferences of a dominant and majoritarian political-electoral coalition. |
| Neo-institutionalism | Rational choice theory | Conflict-driven situations in which the “rules of the game” (cultural and institutional parameters for interaction) are explicit, shared and known by the competing actors, to such an extent that they do not question them (or act unconsciously of them), so that they interact strategically in accordance with these rules and alternatives that are known in advance (Koelble, 1995). | -A change in the status quo, based on the consent of formal and informal actors with veto power in the sector. The content of the compact balances the preferences of those veto players. |
| Neo-institutionalism | Historical | Medium- and long-term formative processes for institutions and public policies, under conditions of uncertainty for the actors, with strong inertias with respect to previous decisions and high costs of calling them into question. | -An incremental adjustment agreed upon by the main actors in the framework of strong inertias and continuities with respect to previous agreements. -A radical adjustment agreed upon by the main actors in the framework of a brief situation of crisis and uncertainty, with major consequences for the subsequent development of the sector. |
| | Sociological Organizational | Continuity and gradual adjustment processes involving strongly institutionalized social and governmental organizations acting in accordance with identifiable practices or action models. | -The adoption or consolidation of a public action model in a specific sector or context. -A window of policy opportunity in which political actors agree to change the status quo by adopting an initiative to address a public problem considered to be a priority. |
| | Cognitive | Policy and institutional change processes where the actors create, appropriate or confront each other strategically, appropriating and adjusting various paradigms, arguments or interpretations as to the orientation and most suitable instruments for public action in a sector. | -An agreement on public action models based on convictions, paradigms or approaches shared by the main actors. |

Source: Prepared by the authors.

III. Towards the identification of basic elements for analysing the emergence of compacts and consensuses in social policy

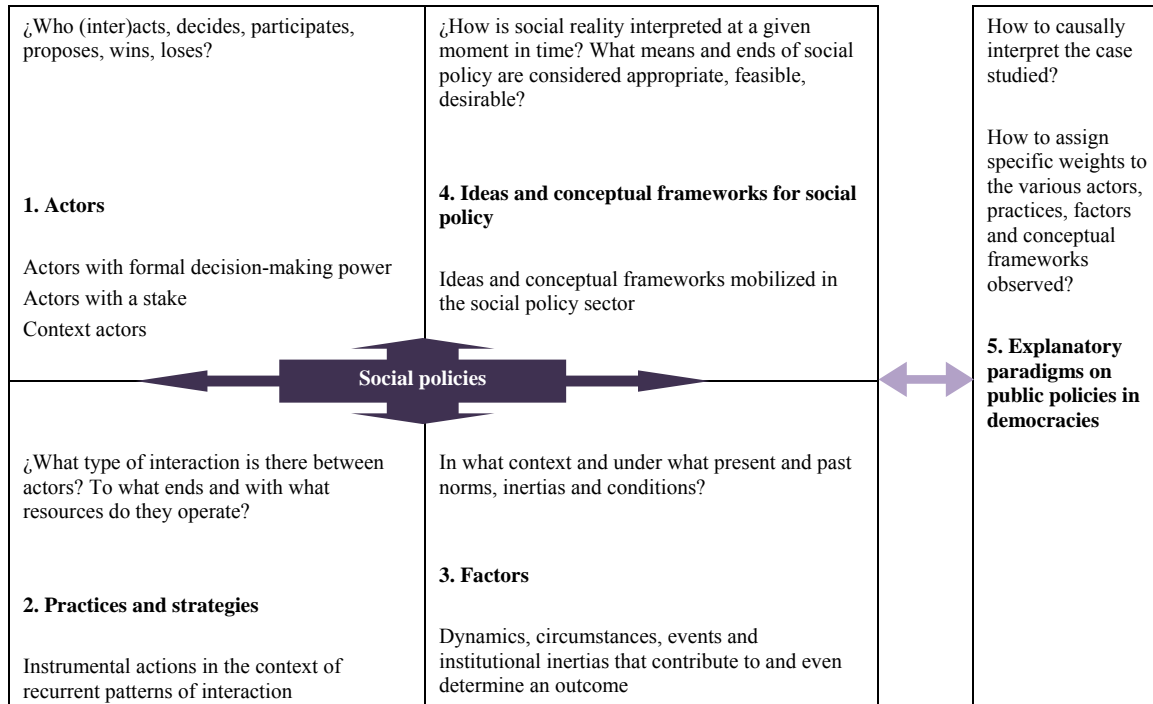
In order to gather the background information to be considered in generating long-term consensuses or agreements in the social policy sector, it is important to identify and incorporate into the analysis the full range of diverse elements present in this sector of public policy. It is only after looking at specific situations and identifying these elements that more decisive steps can be taken towards one of the approaches described in the first part of this paper, and towards the identification of common features, comparable trends or even replicable formulas.

To that end, a good starting point is a descriptive observation made under the same terms, i.e. by asking similar questions, so that a causal reading can then be pursued based on the interpretative approach that best accounts for each specific process. The central idea is that in defining social policies, there is always a convergence of actors, strategies and practices, factors and distinguishable conceptual frameworks, but (as is to be expected) the arrangement of, and interaction between, these elements, as well as their relative importance, vary greatly according to the context and moment in time being studied.

Each one of these focal points corresponds to basic questions about the emergence and characteristics of the social policies being studied: (i) who are the main players (which *actors*?); (ii) what resources, what type of interaction and what specific objectives are in play (which *practices* and which *strategies*?); (iii) in what institutional contexts and under what present and past conditions (what institutional and circumstantial *factors* in the context will condition the final outcome?); (iv) how is public action in the realm of social policy understood and redefined in that specific context and at that particular time (how is social reality interpreted and what *ideas and conceptual frameworks* guide and are mobilized by the actors?). For this final element, the characteristics of social policy must be viewed specifically through the lens of controversy and debate, inasmuch as social policymakers in the region are debating social policy models, typologies and parameters of well-being, social protection approaches and some key dialectics, such as the oppositional tension between targeting and universalization of social policy.

These ideas and conceptual frameworks contribute to and influence the moulding of reality, shape the strategies and discourse of the actors and indicate certain limits on what is “conceivable”, which orient public policies and/or favour specific interests.

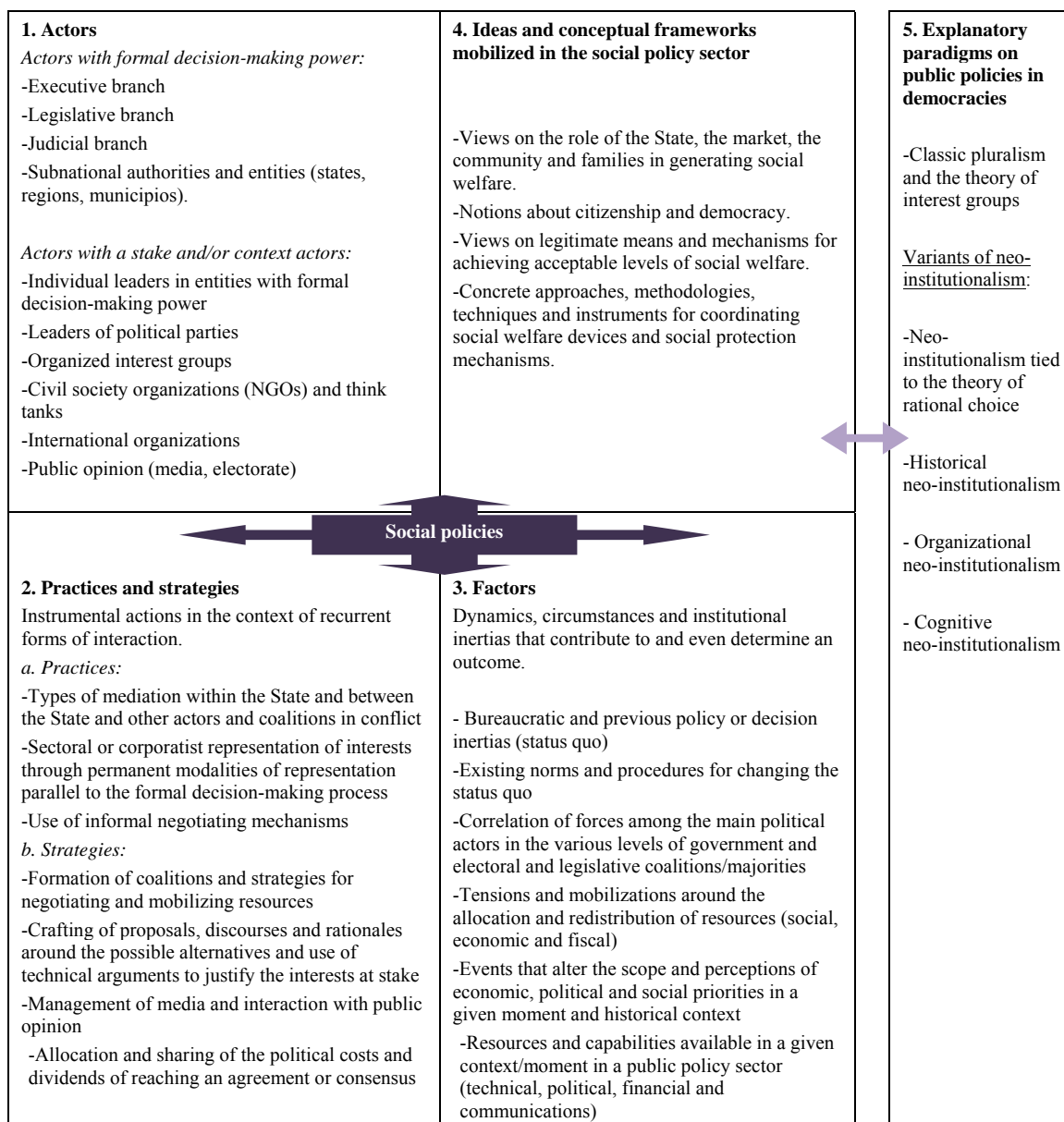
DIAGRAM 4
QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSING THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF A SOCIAL POLICY
AND THE EMERGENCE OF COMPACTS AND CONSENSUSES



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Lastly, once these four basic elements have been identified, the explanatory paradigms on public policy in democracies described in the first part of this paper offer different interpretations that give varying degrees of explanatory weight to the actors, factors, practices, strategies and ideas and conceptual frameworks identified (how to interpret the case studied?). Considering these diverse interpretations helps to identify which one best explains the case being studied. Chart 4 summarizes the questions addressed by each of the focal points that constitute the proposed model. Chart 5 lists the components of each one of these elements. Descriptions of the first four follow.

DIAGRAM 5
ACTORS, STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES, FACTORS, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND EXPLANATORY PARADIGMS FOR ANALYSING THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF A SOCIAL POLICY



Source: Prepared by the authors.

A. Actors

Who are the main players in a process and its outcome? In other words: who actively (inter)acts, participates, proposes, negotiates, wins or loses in the origin and evolution of a social policy reform? In broad terms, this question implies a definition that covers a great diversity of possible actors. Necessarily, it includes those who are formally authorized to propose, decide on and approve a policy, as well as those who promote and protect interests threatened or favoured by this process. However, it also includes actors whose values, views or technical knowledge on the reality considered are examined during the process, even when their more immediate interests and values are not being directly threatened or favoured.

There are many diverse individual actors and collective actors with intersecting paths in the area of public decisions. The first group consists of those who act as individuals—for example, the chief of the executive branch, a legislator or a union leader—while the second group consists of a variable and diverse number of individual actors, whose agreement and interaction determines the behaviour or final decision assumed by the collective actor in question. An obvious example are the legislative chambers composed in turn by individuals or legislative groups that together determine the direction that the collective actor takes in exercising the formal powers that it holds. These individual and collective actors include the branches of government endowed with formal decision-making capacity (executive, legislative or judicial, for example), political parties and intergovernmental, state and legislative leaders, pressure or corporate interest groups (e.g. private sector and unions and trade organizations), civil society organizations (NGOs), think tanks (networks of experts, research institutes, international organizations and others) and public opinion, understood broadly to cover the media and the electorate.

This group of individuals and institutions associated with the gestation process of a public policy performs functions and acts in various ways, guided by diverse motivations, areas of focus and interests. Three dimensions help to distinguish them more clearly: their position and powers within the formal decision-making structure in the case of actors with formal decision-making power, the significance of the process with respect to their interests and values and the resources they control and are able to mobilize throughout the process. Table 5 summarizes the characteristics of the various types of actors that should be pointed out.

TABLE 5
CLASSIFICATION AND EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT ACTORS IN THE ORIGIN
AND EVOLUTION OF A (PUBLIC) SOCIAL POLICY

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| I. Actors | Individual and collective actors that lead, approve and shape a process with various degrees of responsibility for the content and outcomes of the process, by virtue of: (i) their position and powers within the formal decision-making structure; (ii) the significance of the process in terms of their interests and values; and (iii) the resources that they control and mobilize. | |
| 1. Actors with formal decision-making power | <p>Definition</p> <p>Actors in positions with decision-making power based on the legal and institutional system and procedures established for decision-making</p> | <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chief of the executive branch -Legislative chambers -Courts in the judicial branch -Heads of ministries, vice ministries, bureaus, institutes and other public entities with various levels of decision-making power in the social policy sector |
| 2. Actors with immediate stake | Actors that believe their interests and/or values to be intensely harmed or benefitted by a decision-making process. These may be collective actors with decision-making power, or external to the formal decision-making structure | <p>Fluidity according to the sector, programme and/or moment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Individual leadership within collective actors with decision-making power -Political parties -Public and private interest groups -Civil society organizations -International organizations -Media |
| 3. Context actors | Actors whose experience, knowledge, resources, interests and values are called upon during a decision-making process. They provide reference information or support for the actors with decision-making power and/or an immediate stake. | |

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Actors with formal decision-making power are those who hold positions with decision-making authority in accordance with the legal and institutional system and procedures formally established for decision-making. This is a special category inasmuch as these actors, regardless of whether they serve the interests or motivations of other actors (e.g. a pressure group or political party) or the intensity with which their interests or values are affected by the process, are players by definition, due to the powers vested in them by their position in the decision-making process. From the positions they hold in the

formal decision-making structures and through their deliberate actions in the various phases or stages of development of a public policy, they steer the process of consultation, deliberation, negotiation and decision-making and ultimately authorize the various aspects that the initiative assumes as it takes shape.

The positions they give them exclusive resources and powers, so it is important to know the degree of autonomy with which they exercise them, the intensity with which the process affects their own interests and values, as well as their degree of sensitivity to the preferences of other actors in and outside the formal decision-making structure. For example, it would be important to know not only the powers and resources controlled by a government minister but also the degree of autonomy with which he or she can act (e.g. with respect to the instructions or preferences of other ministers, of the chief of the executive branch, of the political party to which he or she belongs or of various interest or pressure groups). In short, actors with formal decision-making power are the set of individual and collective actors in positions with decision-making capacity.

The second relevant dimension has to do with the degree to which a specific process accords with the interests and values of the actors, in and outside the formal decision-making structure. Based on that intensity, a diverse set of actors can be identified who participate—and mobilize their resources and powers—because their interests and values are directly or immediately affected by the maintenance or eventual modification of the status quo, and they act through formal and information channels alike. These are known as actors with an immediate stake. However, interests and values are differentiated in order to distinguish between instrumental motivations and normative, ideological or value-driven motivations. In the first case, material or power interests predominate, which motivate the various actors to attempt to influence the process in opposition to other actors, following a rationale of obtaining or maximizing resources and/or influence.

This category would include, for example, a trade organization that seeks to maintain or increase the benefits that its members obtain by maintaining (or changing) a public policy, or a political party that seeks to maintain its electoral share by supporting a specific policy or programme. Among actors with a stake are actors motivated above all by value-driven or ideological considerations, as in the case of civil society organizations mobilized around a specific cause, religious groups or technical associations that promote or protect some model or instrument of public policy based on a given diagnostic assessment (a think tank, for example, whose academic prestige is at stake in a reform process). Although in practice, actors' motivations tend to reflect a subtle blend of interests and values, drawing an analytical distinction between the two categories makes it easier to understand their rationales and strategies. In short, actors with an immediate stake are those individual and collective actors that believe their interests and/or values to be intensely affected by a decision-making process. This type of actor may be a collective actor with decision-making authority or may be external to the formal decision-making structure in question.

Lastly, another group, consisting of context actors, can be identified. These actors represent a larger circle, even on the broad order of society, and correspond to the different groups that are observing the dynamics in play, weighing in or offering their expertise, becoming instruments and points of support for the actors with an immediate stake and with formal decision-making power. They are active observers who participate in deliberations without necessarily being motivated by interests or values directly implicated in the decision-making process. They are also points of reference, often exploited by the actors with formal decision-making power and with an immediate stake to express, justify and broadcast their positions. They also shape the way in which social reality and the strategies and statements of the actors are interpreted, inasmuch as context actors are a source of diagnostics, instruments and public policy proposals. Although actors with formal decision-making power are relatively easy to identify based on the existing legal and institutional system, there is considerable diversity and fluidity among those who, in a specific process, are positioned as actors with an immediate stake or as context actors.

This diverse array of potential actors also includes national and international actors. The number and type of actors in one category or another vary according to the function of the public policy sector and the moment in time and scope of the particular process. For example, in the case of social policy, international organizations often appear as context actors in national reform processes, but they can play

an even more important role when they have financial resources that can be used conditionally to promote certain government policies or programmes. Even without resources for exercising direct power, the production of analyses, statistics and proposals constitutes a source of influence that is far from insignificant, a type of “soft” power. Similar influence is wielded by universities and other knowledge hubs, such as think tanks, public and private alike. Even when these actors are directly responsible for generating public policy proposals and may come to function as actors with an immediate stake, the mere production of knowledge or their position as technically recognized and proven interlocutors positions them as context actors.

Another relevant actor is the media, which tends to appear as a context actor that is exploited by other actors directly involved in a process. However, occasionally, the media can function as a true actor with an immediate stake when a process directly calls into question its credibility, prestige or the source of its resources. Media preference for certain public policy models and the dissemination or critique of some more than others are also an important source of influence. In summary, context actors are individual and collective actors whose experience, knowledge, interests and values are called upon in the course of a decision-making process, even though their own interests and motivations may not be directly involved in the process in question. They act as points of reference or support or as instruments of the actors with decision-making power and/or with an immediate stake.

The third and final dimension to take into account are the resources available to the various actors and that they are able to mobilize throughout a process. Inasmuch as resources are distributed asymmetrically, some actors have greater potential influence than others. At the same time, that asymmetrical distribution can lead to the formation of diverse coalitions of actors that eventually shift the initial equilibriums, while institutional and circumstantial inertias throughout a process can also alter initial equilibriums, always bringing a considerable degree of uncertainty and fluidity to bear on any reform process.

Lastly, the resources available to certain actors (including the powers they have when they belong to the decision-making structure, as well as access to, and influence over, the actors that hold those powers) can confer on them a real ability to veto any change to the status quo, sometimes for long periods of time. It is important to note that veto players can include actors in the decision-making structure (e.g. a legislative majority in opposition to a government or a reform project that requires a legislative change) as well as actors external to that structure but able to wield veto power in a sector, such as unions or employers’ associations.

B. Practices and strategies

How do actors interact in a specific public policy reform process? What bearing does the usual way of interacting in a given political context have on the definition of the specific strategies of the identified actors? This second focal point incorporates both questions for the purpose of identifying not only the individual strategies of the actors considered in isolation but also their interrelationship with each national and historical context, which tend to have unique characteristics that influence those strategies. Practices and strategies are defined as the set of instrumental tactics and mechanisms (i.e. the means to achieving concrete ends) used by the actors, in specific contexts or arenas where repeated interaction generates patterns and recurring forms of negotiation, confrontation, consultation, communication and deliberation specific to each context. Table 6 summarizes the proposed classification, with the understanding that it is not an exhaustive list of all possible practices and strategies but it does cover aspects that are particularly important in the case of social policy as a sector of public policy.

TABLE 6
SOME PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT IN THE SOCIAL POLICY SECTOR

| Practices and strategies | Instrumental mechanisms used by the actors in specific contexts or arenas where repeated interaction generates patterns and recurring forms of interaction. |
|--------------------------|---|
| Practices | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Types of mediation within the State and between the State and actors and coalitions in conflict 2. Sectoral or corporatist representation of interests through permanent modalities of representation that are parallel to the formal decision-making process 3. Use of informal negotiation mechanisms |
| Strategies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Formation of coalitions and strategies for negotiation and mobilization of resources 5. Preparation of proposals, statements and rationales around the possible alternatives and use of technical arguments to justify the interests at stake 6. Management of media and interaction with public opinion 7. Allocation and sharing of political costs and dividends of reaching an agreement or consensus |

Source: Prepared by the author.

Practices and strategies occur in specific contexts or arenas where repeated interaction creates general patterns and recurring forms of interaction (negotiation, confrontation, consultation, communication and deliberation) specific to each context. Accordingly, practices go beyond formal and immediate instrumental logics (e.g. the minimization of costs or the maximization of benefits or influence) and are specific to the context and history.

Practices, understood thusly, get into the specific way in which a group goes about its political activity, that is, its real political procedures (Cortés Terzi, 2000), a departure from the idea that politics and decisions derive exclusively from random events or as a product of interrelationships between actors with an ahistorical and abstract rationale. Policy decisions and the mechanisms by which they are made are rife with this type of activity, fed by narratives and social representations. The common sense derived from these and their dynamic strongly influence the development of an informal space for interaction, a space that originates many actions, positions and decisions that subsequently play out in the formal spaces where the decision-making process unfolds.

Therefore, studying the origin and evolution of a social policy always deals with a specific moment in time in societies with different histories. Even when major historical parallels and similar forms of political organization are observed, especially presidential democracies, as in the case of Latin America, the existence of shared elements does not necessarily mean that the specific ways for contending with power struggles and socioeconomic tensions and eventually resolving the different challenges that the political organization of each society faces are the same. On the contrary, aside from sharing a democratic form of government, the repeated interactions and deliberation within representative institutions generate different styles and proposals when it comes to resolving tensions and constructing governance. These disparities are the result of the specific historical-cultural processes that characterize each society. Thus, the ways of responding to similar phenomena are diverse in terms of content, style and particularly in the actual practices that are deployed. Included at this level are democratic learning processes (i.e. the cumulative effects of repeated games in a democracy) among political actors, social actors and the electorate, in which patterns of interaction emerge over relatively long time horizons. In effect, even when the institutional framework is the same, the political actors go about learning to manage conflict and advance their interests and motivations within that framework, an

aspect of considerable importance in Latin America, where democracy is relatively new and the patterns of interaction are evolving.

In short, in each society, specific patterns of interaction for resolving conflicts and tensions in all areas of social life are forged gradually. There are three practices that stand out as being particularly important for the social policy sector, inasmuch as they deal with elements that should be taken into account owing to their strong influence on the individual strategy types that are eventually chosen by the actors. They are also important because those features have a real bearing on the political feasibility of achieving consensuses or agreements that transcend short-term political-electoral divisions and ultimately on the institutionalization of reasonably successful ways of processing social conflict in the public sphere in the framework of a democratic system. Following is a brief description of these practices, which are also explained in table 12.

1. Types of mediation within the State and between the State and actors and coalitions in conflict

An important starting point for this analysis are the characteristics of interactions between actors in positions with formal decision-making power, and between those actors and stakeholder or context actors, that lead to the origin and evolution of a social policy. The types of mediation that occur in and outside the State, that is, the most frequent forms of consultation, deliberation, confrontation or negotiation between those actors, influence consensus-building in the social policy arena. This is because they affect the presence of spaces of interaction in which the main players in a public policy process in and outside the State apparatus eventually make decisions that help to align competing coalitions and interests. It is in the framework of these formal mediation spaces that enabling conditions are created for progress with respect to critical points that polarize the various economic and/or political actors.

A first type of mediation is associated with the political-institutional system. In the area of political practices within the State, within the governmental structure, between the various branches and levels of government, repeated interactions in the framework of institutions and rules in effect tend to generate specific patterns in the various sectors of public policy. Not only do certain governmental entities become more or less important, but also decision-making tends to involve specific processes and sequences. For example, in the case of social policy, it is important to know which government entity tends to assume sector leadership (e.g. the ministry of social development, the president's office, the finance ministry or the social security institute) and how much autonomy it has with respect to other government entities, as well as the powers and resources available to it. The patterns of engagement with other branches and levels of government tend to be characteristic of the social policy sector. For example, the requirements for modifying the status quo, whether in terms of the social programmes in place, the use of public funds earmarked for social development or the identification of the groups or categories that benefit from those funds, may be more or less rigid to the extent that legislative or even constitutional changes are needed (or not), or it may be that only government decisions of an administrative nature are needed. Specifically, when social policies and funds are associated with laws or constitutional provisions, any change in the sector will necessarily involve the legislative branch and perhaps even the judicial branch. Thus, depending on the political-institutional system in question, the patterns of interaction that are generated within the State affect the number and characteristics of the government actors participating in the definition or redefinition of the prevailing social policies.

Regarding interaction between actors with formal decision-making power and the rest of the actors involved, the relative frequency with which, in a political system, negotiation, confrontation, consultation, communication and deliberation on public matters tend to bring together the key decision-making actors with context actors in various public forums is an element that affects that feasibility of meet-in-the-middle agreements or solutions that are likely to be accepted by a large number of actors. It is to be expected that the more frequent the participation of a large diversity of context actors inclined to submit proposals built on transparent and technically based criteria, the more feasible it will be to reach consensuses or agreements without causing a head-on clash of interests and values of the actors with an immediate stake or those in positions with formal decision-making power. This is not only because the open participation of those context actors throughout the process helps to generate

‘middle-way’ proposals or grounds for agreement against a backdrop of irreconcilable positions by stakeholder actors or actors with formal decision-making power, but also because their participation can shift initial perceptions and diagnostic assessments and in so doing change the original positions of the actors whose consent is needed to reach consensus. Lastly, when the participation of context actors has the effect of generating feasible reform or agreement proposals, it can exert additional pressures, when public opinion is politicized, on actors with formal decision-making power to reach a consensus or agreement. In the case of social policy, inasmuch as the field has become a topic of research by universities, experts, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations and public agencies themselves, the participation of context actors in discussions and debates has had real influence on reform processes in this sector, especially in the case of permanent and ad hoc public forums for engagement where representatives of the government and experts, private sector, civil society, international organizations and social movements are playing a key role in the feasibility of broad and lasting consensuses. The relative frequency with which these types of mechanisms are being used constitutes an important practice for consensus-building.

2. Representation of sectoral or corporatist interests outside formal decision-making structures and procedures

Latin America has a strong corporatist tradition. During the twentieth century, permanent systems for intermediation of sectoral interests were installed in several countries in the region, bringing together large labour, business and government organizations. Although this corporatism was often authoritarian in the sense that the organizations tended to be vertical, obligatory for members and/or captured by the State, the intermediation mechanisms constituted real institutionalized bargaining systems parallel to the formal representation and decision-making structures (Schmitter, 1974). This was particularly the case for several of the main components of the social policy sector. In effect, the demands and tensions associated with areas such as education, health, social security systems and wage and compensation regulation in the formal sector of the economy were long dominated by such structures for intermediation and negotiation of interests. Although their influence began to shrink in the 1980s, labour and business actors alike continue to play a non-negligible role in specific arenas, especially those linked to social policy such as education, health and social security systems. In some cases, these actors are true veto players for the reform of social policies and programmes.

However, in addition to permanent, formal and even institutionalized corporatist practices, the sustained presence of powerful, organized interest groups must be taken into account. These groups use pressure mechanisms that can be plainly seen (mobilizations) or discrete, through direct ties of reciprocity and complicity with actors that have formal decision-making powers operating at the margins of the law. For example, in the case of social policies and especially privately run social security systems with individual accounts, financial and banking consortiums in charge of administering large volumes of resources raise them up as powerful actors with interests and influence over any change to the policies and rules in effect. This type of actor is also important in the case of health systems where, regardless of the extent to which they are State-subsidized, services are provided by private entities, which, as a result, acquire considerable and sustained influence.

3. Use of informal negotiation mechanisms

Given that formal decision-making processes cannot record, regulate or anticipate the full set of interactions that take place in a public policy process, informal mechanisms for interaction between the different actors are, by necessity, always in use. These are relatively widespread political practices that give communication, consultation, deliberation, negotiation and confrontation processes a certain degree of “flexibility without obligation” compared with formal procedures and forums that are subject to the scrutiny of all actors involved and public opinion. These mechanisms are used within the public administration and between the different branches of government (especially between the legislative and executive branches to process legislative reforms or changes in presidential systems), between government and opposition actors and between actors in positions with formal decision-making power and stakeholder and context actors outside the State structure. Thus, the importance of this modality of interaction lies in its intensity and relative weight in each public policy sector or process. Informal mechanisms can be regarded

as a practice that makes the process for building consensus around a public policy more flexible by allowing for exchanges and negotiation without immediate commitments, where it is possible to discuss and say what otherwise cannot be said in public. Also, though, habitually resorting to these informal mechanisms can be an indicator of the direct and privileged access that certain groups or organizations have to actors with formal decision-making power and of their *informal* capacity to assert their preferences and motivations in a specific sector or case.⁹ In the case of social policy, given the redistributive, fiscal and budgetary implications of any change in the status quo, as well as the expansion or contraction in the coverage of social protection systems for vulnerable groups (and thus, the potential legitimacy of such adjustments), the use of informal negotiation mechanisms is a particularly attractive option for powerful groups or organizations interested in limiting or reducing the fiscal burden on economic activity to finance social policies in a relatively progressive and redistributive way.

With respect to the strategies of the actors, that is, the analysis of the individual behaviour of the actors in context in the specific case of a reform or decision-making process, there are several elements that stand out as deserving of special attention.

4. Configuration of actors, formation of coalitions and strategies for negotiation and mobilization of resources

Actors mobilize the resources at their disposal and form coalitions in the framework of specific situations, always with a variable degree of contingency. The composition of such coalitions is tied, first, to the number and characteristics of the actors whose interests and motivations are directly affected at a given moment in time and over the course of a specific public policy process. The resources available to these actors and the mobilization thereof also affect the composition of these coalitions and their ability to question, alter or defend the status quo of policies in effect. This is how the diverse set of actors, their interests and motivations and the resources at their disposal determine the type of coalitions that form, an element that is especially helpful in supporting the best use of various classifications and theoretical approaches, such as interest group theory in the pluralist understanding of the term, of notions such as the concept of authoritarian or democratic corporatism or the presence of advocacy coalition frameworks (Sabatier and Schlager, 2000).

It is important to view strategies as evolving and inter-subjective courses of action, which is to say that they evolve as the actors interact. Therein lies the importance of contrasting the strategies initially chosen by the actors and paying close attention to any vacillations, adaptation of the original strategies or, especially, any change in the actors' perceived interests and motivations or in the objectives and the specific means used to achieve them. Although analysing strategies is indispensable for understanding the final outcome of a specific process, both the likelihood of success and the lines of action available to the actors are contingent upon a number of "inertial factors", as described in the following section. In a specific case, different institutional and circumstantial inertias always limit the actors' room to manoeuvre, determining the effectiveness of their strategies. That said, the degree of uncertainty resulting from the interaction between individual strategies, the formation and confrontation of coalitions and said factors and inertias always gives the process a certain degree of contingency, and rarely do the actors feel that the outcome was already a foregone conclusion at the outset.

5. Crafting of proposals, discourses and rationales around the possible alternatives and use of technical arguments to justify interests at stake

An essential component of strategies, actors construct and draw on ideological and value-driven elements as well as technical arguments to defend and promote their interests and motivations. The crafting of proposals, narratives and rationales around possible alternatives and the use of technical

⁹ This element is also closely tied to the politicization of public opinion around a specific issue. To understand the relationship between the politicization ('political salience') of an issue and the relative capture of regulatory processes by interest groups, see Culpepper (2008 and 2010).

arguments to justify advancing their interests and values at stake is a gradual collective effort with participation not only by actors with formal decision-making power or with an immediate stake but also a multitude of context actors, including public administration officials, university and private sector think tanks, national and international experts and various international organizations, to name just a few. This element is inseparably tied to the production, dissemination and accumulation of information, statistical data and methodological instruments which, coupled with the ideas and cognitive frameworks that are widely shared in the social policy sector at a given moment in time, reveal the substance of the public debates and deliberations, as well as the content that is used by the actors to underpin, disseminate and justify their interests and values. Accordingly, the actors base their arguments on the stock of information and knowledge available and on the conceptual frameworks that inform their proposals and address their ideological, economic and instrumental interests.

6. Management of media and interaction with public opinion

The proposals, discourses and justifications with respect to policy rationales, alternatives and possible instruments are strategically communicated by the actors through the media to the general public. This is a key element of the strategies adopted by the actors. Media outlets, however, are not just neutral spaces that the actors attempt to use to shape public opinion and advance their strategies; rather, they can also be recruited as active interlocutors in the public debate as context actors or even as actual actors with an immediate stake in a decision-making process in the origin and evolution of a public policy. Therefore, for social policies, the available materials (public statements, press releases, calls for the opinions of think tanks or national and international experts, the publication and dissemination of studies, surveys and articles, as well as propaganda and even audiovisual material) disseminated through and by the media are an important source of information for understanding the actors' strategies, as well as the terms of the debate at a given moment in time.

7. Allocation and sharing of political costs and dividends of reaching an agreement or consensus

The allocation and sharing of political costs and benefits is a key area of analysis inasmuch as it is a central objective of processes of interaction. These elements are particularly important when a consensus or agreement between certain actors is indispensable for modifying the status quo of the social policies in effect. It includes the "final outcome" in the case of an initiative that is, in effect, the gateway to a consensus or agreement that alters the status quo of social policies in force. At the same time, though, the costs and benefits are partly subjective elements that reflect the changing perceptions of the actors and strongly guide their strategies throughout the process.

The foregoing alludes to costs and benefits with respect to the actors' initial interests and values and to their originally stated positions and resources. Obtaining or, otherwise, ceding aspects that are controversial or polarizing for the interests and values of the various actors entails negotiations and struggles over losses and gains, where the final balance can be seen by contrasting the content of the final outcome with the proposals and discussions put forth over the course of the decision-making process. Given that it is hard for the actors to control the course of all events and since they have access to just a portion of the available information, such costs and benefits tend to be asymmetrical and the final balance is only clearly known *a posteriori*. In addition, a "non-decision" or the continuation of the initial status quo despite an attempt at reform or inquiry can always be interpreted as an inability by the main actors to reach an agreement or consensus given their interests and motivations, resources and strategies at a given moment. However, even when the actors' manoeuvring room for achieving agreements seems at first to be very limited, the way in which they negotiate or attempt to allocate and share the costs and benefits of adopting a specific policy or decision is essential for determining the probability of overcoming initial patterns of mistrust, "zero sum games" or opposing ideological positions that appear unyielding.

Lastly, once the negotiation processes are under way on substantive topics, the participating actors also expressly or tacitly define ways of acting and publicly portraying the costs and dividends associated with the negotiated agreements. This management of "egos", both within the coalitions

themselves and between actors who hold opposing positions, deserves special mention as a political skill that makes a difference and contributes to the solidity of the agreements.

C. Factors

Factors are understood to be dynamics, circumstances, events and institutional inertias that condition or even determine an outcome, regardless of the will and objectives of the actors engaged in a process of negotiation, confrontation, deliberation, consultation or communication in a public policy sector. They have a considerable bearing on the array of options available to the various actors and, thus, are determinant in the identification of the strategies that they deploy. At the same time, these factors strongly condition the efficacy of the strategies chosen by the different actors, with a degree of contingency and unpredictability that is hard for them to control. Yet, the purpose here is not to affirm that each one of these factors always plays a similar role or has the same weight, but rather to insist that they should always be evaluated in the context of each specific case study. These elements or circumstances will not be listed exhaustively in an attempt to cover all possible factors, but rather presented selectively to highlight the ones that are especially important in the case of social policy as a sector of public policy. Table 7 presents six factors that are particularly important for this sector, with brief descriptions following.

TABLE 7
MAIN FACTORS THAT CONDITION OUTCOMES IN THE SOCIAL POLICY SECTOR

| Factors | Dynamics, circumstances and events, as well as institutional inertias that contribute to, condition or even determine an outcome |
|---|--|
| 1. Bureaucratic and previous policy or decision inertias (status quo) | |
| 2. Existing norms and procedures for changing the status quo | |
| 3. Correlation of forces among the main political actors in the various levels of government and electoral and legislative coalition/majorities | |
| 4. Tensions and mobilizations around the allocation and redistribution of resources (social, economic and fiscal) | |
| 5. Events that alter the scope and perceptions of economic, political and social priorities in a given moment and historical context | |
| 6. Resources and capacity available in a given context/moment in a public policy sector (technical, political, financial and communications) | |

Source: Prepared by the author.

1. Bureaucratic and previous policy or decision inertias (status quo)

These inertias place considerable limitations on the actors' margin of action. They include public action programmes under way that cannot be modified in the short or medium term, as well as past judicial and budgetary decisions that have present and future repercussions on fiscal programmes and resources. They create obligations and binding commitments in the immediate term that often cannot be retroactively changed. In the social policy arena, prominent examples are initiatives adopted previously to impose and redistribute resources, the characteristics of social protection systems and programmes targeting social groups or categories explicitly identified as priority, underprivileged or vulnerable sectors. These elements result in welfare systems that are rigidly structured for at least the short and medium term.

The weight of these inertias specific to the functioning of bureaucratic and institutional structures has various origins. First, they correspond in part to norms and procedures in effect for decision-making at all levels, an element that is further described in the next section. They are adopted in response to political and institutional situations that are hard to reproduce, which complicates any effort to amend established laws, policies or decisions. In addition, inasmuch as any policy or decision implemented in the past always has intended beneficiaries and objectives, any modification will affect the actors that

were benefiting from it, which points up the problem of redefining the initial objectives. Lastly, given that any prior policy or decision had been justified or argued to the public at some point and may even have gained legitimacy, any bid to adjust or retire it would first require persuading numerous political and social entities and actors.

2. Existing norms and procedures for changing the status quo

Inasmuch as the institutional framework confers exclusive powers on various individual and collective actors and requires that a host of procedures and guarantees be met according to a pre-established sequence and timeframe, formal norms and procedures for decision-making are an obligatory path for any attempt at changing the status quo in any sector of public policy.

Formal norms, procedures and regulations determine the levels, stages and requirements that must be fulfilled to adopt a new law, reform or any other governmental action. Since this involves multiple obligatory steps and procedures of both an administrative and legal nature, these norms and procedures determine, in each specific case, which actors with formal decision-making power participate, at which junctures and with what authority. Therefore, they play a central role in the array of options available to the participating actors and the strategies that they choose. The scope of the exclusive and obligatory powers vested in those holding positions in the political-administrative structure ensures that they become actors with varying degrees of power and influence over the decision-making process. This, in particular, is what determines the division of labour between the different branches of government and the set of public agencies in that process. At the same time, these exclusive prerogatives become an unequally distributed source of power and influence for attempting to mobilize actors situated outside the institutional structure.

Lastly, the legal and administrative system constitutes per se a normative and procedural framework with its own effects, which affects the complexity or likelihood of a change in status quo. In particular, the steps and majorities required to introduce constitutional, legal, regulatory or programmatic changes determine to a large extent how feasible such modifications are given the preferences of the actors that hold formal powers. Accordingly, this is a factor that always conditions the outcome of a decision-making or reform process, making each specific context and juncture a special, and sometimes unique, case study.

3. Correlation of forces among the main political actors in the various levels of government and electoral and legislative majorities

The correlation of political forces in the different phases and spaces for negotiation is another powerful factor that conditions the dynamics of the process and its outcome. This refers to the conflict-driven interactions between the various institutional actors, especially among and between actors with formal decision-making powers. The combination of formal norms and procedures for decision-making at all levels and the correlation of forces between the main political actors determines “games” at various levels whose outcome makes it possible to alter or maintain the status quo in a public policy sector.

Within the legislative branch, dominant coalitions may form as a result of the popular vote and the electoral system, as well as from the cyclical positioning of parties and individual leaders. In the case of presidential systems, the presence or absence of legislative majorities that are favourable to the executive branch are particularly important due to the strict division of powers between the two branches and the “double legitimacy” of the legislative and executive branches (both constituted by popular vote) that characterizes this type of system, with varying potential for paralysis, polarization or even constitutional crisis when the political orientation of the two branches does not align.¹⁰

¹⁰ Presidential systems as such do not have a higher risk of instability or paralysis than parliamentary or semi-presidential systems. The characteristics of the constitutional rules, electoral system and parties and their internal structure can largely mitigate the risk. However, the double legitimacy of the executive and legislative branches (or triple legitimacy, in the case of presidential systems with bicameral legislatures elected on different schedules with separate rules) is a distinctive feature of presidential systems. For further discussion on this matter, see Linz and Valenzuela (1994) and Mainwaring and Shugart (1997).

In the executive branch, and more generally within the public sector, this factor refers to the relationships and differences among and between individual and collective public actors. In the first case, coalitions can form between the heads of the various portfolios or ministries. In the case of social policies, the competencies and relationships between social sector agencies (ministries of social development, education and health, social security institutes) and other agencies that control the collection and redistribution of fiscal resources, such as ministries of finance and planning, are dynamics to consider in analysing the origin and evolution of a social policy.

The correlation of forces among other collective actors with national decision-making powers such as supreme or constitutional courts, lower courts, municipal councils and other autonomous public agencies (e.g. social security institutes) can also acquire considerable importance when a specific stage of the decision-making process is in their domain.

Lastly, the correlation of forces between agencies at different levels of government (central or federal, state and municipal) is another important area, especially when the norms and procedures for decision-making call for complementary competencies in the case of a public policy sector. In the case of social policy, the entities responsible at each level of government for education, health and social protection generally establish relatively complementary relationships between the central government and the local governments, creating spaces for confrontation and negotiation.

4. Tensions and mobilizations around the allocation and redistribution of resources (social, economic and fiscal)

In each historical moment and context, political, economic and social tensions are always present, especially around the allocation and distribution of resources in a broad sense. Drawing on H. Lasswell's classic definition, these are latent tensions about "who gets what, when and how".¹¹ However, these tensions do not necessarily manifest explicitly at all times, such as in the form of public controversy and debates on these or eventual attempts to change the status quo taking place through open confrontation between different actors. However, such tensions arise from the unmet preferences of the different actors and their expectations about meeting them. In the particular case of social policies, social welfare systems establish an equilibrium and a division of labour between the public and private and the individual and collective spheres with respect to the mechanisms and resources for providing social protection to individuals. That equilibrium reproduces a more or less unequal social stratification that prolongs tensions over the way in which available fiscal, economic and social resources are allocated and redistributed among different social groups and categories.¹²

These tensions can be strong or weak depending on the specific economic and political conditions, making them subject to corresponding degrees of consensus and dissension. The intensity of these tensions can reach a point at which the specific actors become politicized and mobilize. Some ways of measuring these tensions and their potential to generate conflict are by looking at indicators such as poverty rates, various indicators of inequality, the degree of mobilization and organization among certain groups and social categories and their relative status in the social system, their characteristics and geographical location, among others. In effect, the allocation of resources to finance social policies is a function both of resource availability and apportionment and of ideological considerations. In each context, there is a more or less unequal distribution of resources that influence the feasibility of changing often powerful vested interests. For example, the degree to which powerful organized interests are affected by an initiative largely determines the level of conflict around and resistance to its approval and implementation. Moreover, social policy decisions tend to be analysed and justified in light of the fiscal policy and the economic model in place during a specific period of time in a country. For example, linking social policies (or even making them conditional on) economic and fiscal policies is a factor that is expressed from the outset in how a social policy is defined and how it is implemented.

¹¹ See Lasswell (1990).

¹² For more information, see Esping-Andersen (2007).

Thus, the cited tensions and their context play a role in the scope of eventual attempts to introduce more or less radical reform to the status quo, and on the resistance among and capacity of the various actors to change or maintain it. Above all, these tensions point up the major scissions on which social policy is inscribed, as well as the oppositional forces that serve to reproduce or temper it.

5. Events that alter the scope and perceptions of economic, political and social priorities in a given moment and historical context

All public policy sectors are exposed to political and economic interdependence phenomena with respect to decisions and tensions that come from other public policy sectors, as well as to national and international events that can exacerbate tensions and perceptions around economic, political and social challenges for which public action is invoked. This factor confers a degree of contingency and unpredictability that is particularly important in the social policy arena inasmuch as it has considerable bearing on mobilization and demand for new public policy interventions to offset or lighten the tax burden or the social welfare benefits of various social groups and categories. In addition to influencing the availability of fiscal resources to finance these interventions, these factors shift the public debate and the order of priorities on the government's agenda.

Topping the list of these events are economic crises or shocks of national, regional or global origin. Periods of recession, the cumulative effects of high or low growth phases and other phenomena linked to volatility in economic prices, flows and transactions are the most evident. In second place are political crises and events of national and international origin. The effects of contagion, irradiation or convergence at the regional or global level of these economic and political shocks can quickly change the reference models used to identify priorities, objectives or instruments of social policy.¹³ At the national level, there are a number of events that can alter the social policy sector and spark new change processes, including the arrival or fall of a government, changes in coalitions or legislative majorities or early elections. Other isolated events with a strong symbolic charge can also modify the initial context in ways that are hard to predict, such as the spreading mobilization of various actors in other public policy sectors (or even in other national contexts), the consequences of a natural disaster or a particular scandal publicized in the media, among many others.

These elements are particularly important in describing and interpreting the genesis and evolution of a policy or reform, whether this was as the result of an immediate situation that required urgent action to resolve or address an unexpected event (e.g. a global recession that spreads to a national context) or, otherwise, an incremental process in which the existing instruments, programmes or benefits were adapted gradually over time.

6. Resources and capabilities available in a given context/moment in a public policy sector (technical, political, financial and communications)

In each historical moment and context, the asymmetrical accumulation of individual and collective capabilities affects the manoeuvring room available to the various actors. Differentiated access to resources gives some actors greater margins for action and influence than others. These resources include financial resources and the availability of specialized technical information, as well as access to social and organizational networks (especially to actors with formal decision-making power). Therefore, this asymmetrical availability of resources is a factor that is determined by the historical context and moment in time (i.e. it is systemic), in the sense that it corresponds to mechanisms for reproducing the social and political order. However, the capacity to mobilize and use these resources is a function of the aforementioned practices and strategies and constitutes a point of contact between what is "given" by the context and what the actors are able to with it at a specific juncture.

¹³ For an analysis of the mechanisms of economic and political interdependence in Latin America and the transmission channels of national, regional and global shocks, see Dabène (1997).

The type of technical resources that are available at a given moment also confers a considerable degree of historicity to each case study. The development, availability and accumulation of statistical data, as well as of technical, methodological and information instruments, by the various actors influence the options available to them and also sometimes shape perceptions about what is possible or feasible to do in terms of public action. The existence of technical capabilities and resources within the State apparatus, as well as in the executive and legislative branches, and the collaboration of national and international academic and research institutes provide an increasingly important source of support for decision-making.

In the case of social policies in particular, increasingly sophisticated statistical devices and management and evaluation models and methodologies actually constitute the substance of the public policy “instruments” around which much of the discussion on policy alternatives and objectives revolves. As in other public policy sectors, growing technical specialization and sophistication explain the systematic call for the expertise of different actors (public and private research centres, universities, international organizations) that have become context actors with increasing influence over the genesis of social policies.

D. Conceptual frameworks in social policy

The diverse actors, factors, practices and strategies at play in the evolution of a social policy are associated with conceptual frameworks that distinguish it from other sectors of public policy.¹⁴ Unlike in other sectors, in the social policy sector, the identification of strategies, the reproduction of practices and the crafting of discourses and management and evaluation instruments are strongly tied to different views concerning the role of the State, market, community, families and individuals in generating and guaranteeing minimum levels of well-being at the individual and collective level.

These views also differ in terms of how extensive social protection mechanisms should be.¹⁵ This is closely tied to different ideas about citizenship and democracy, and especially ways of thinking about the intrinsic and universal rights of individuals in a participatory and representative system, as well as to what extent the State or individuals should or should not guarantee certain negative or positive liberties. That, in turn, determines the means that are considered more or less acceptable or legitimate for guaranteeing more or less universal levels of social welfare. In particular, it indicates up to what point it is legitimate to advance certain collective objectives and at the expense of which goods, resources or values.

Lastly, these views generate and justify specific approaches on the instruments and objectives of social welfare and protection policies, even giving shape to reference paradigms that the actors use to prepare their strategies, justify their positions to the general public and implement specific public policy instruments.

As such, these elements are not always explicit or visible, but it is possible to discern these conceptual frameworks through the discourse, controversies and public debates that occur between the identified sectors. The points of controversy that characterize a given context or moment in time (e.g. in terms of the criteria for targeting a policy intervention to certain groups, or the orientation and relative priority of social spending) make it possible to glimpse the various approaches to social protection and reference models of social welfare that are being debated. Table 8 presents the elements that comprise this fourth focal point to be considered in the analysis of specific cases in the social policy sector.

¹⁴ In other sectors of public policy, the conceptual frameworks mobilized by the actors are likely to be very different. For example, in the case of foreign policy, the conceptual frameworks at play will be related to ways of understanding sovereignty, notions about a country's role or place in the world, ways of addressing national or global challenges through strategies (regional or global integration, multilateral or bilateral action, primacy of national legislation or international law), as well as approaches to the most pressing threats for a country in the international environment and other considerations.

¹⁵ Clearly, these elements are not exclusive to the social policy sector: the relative degree of State responsibility is an element present in the conceptual frameworks of all public policy sectors. What distinguishes social policy as a sector is its relatively greater importance and direct relationship with notions of citizenship and democracy.

TABLE 8
IDEAS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS IN SOCIAL POLICIES

| Components | Examples |
|--|--|
| | Social welfare models and systems Social protection approaches Specific dialectics and controversies |
| 1. Views on the role of the State, the community, families and individuals in generating social welfare and on the guarantee of and access to social protection mechanisms | <p>Different levels of exclusive or complementary State responsibility for individual and collective welfare:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Specific role of the individual or family as agents of social welfare and provision of social protection -Levels of State intervention in regulation of the job market -Levels of State intervention in the economic activity of individuals (higher or lower tax burdens in general and for the various social groups and categories) -Greater or lesser centrality of social policies as a public policy sector |
| 2. Ideas about citizenship and democracy | <p>Rights and obligations constituting citizenship that should be guaranteed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Functions and purposes of democracy to guarantee rights and freedoms -Negative liberties versus positive liberties -Equality of opportunities versus equality of outcomes -Centrality of social and economic rights of individuals |
| 3. Views on legitimate means and mechanisms for achieving acceptable levels of social welfare | <p>More or less extensive social protection approaches with implications for the regulatory powers and fiscal capacity of the State</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More or less progressive or regressive tax rates -Approaches and mechanisms for guaranteeing access to more or less extensive and subsidized social protection mechanisms -Partial or total, targeted or universal guarantee of certain goods, resources or specific social services -Regulation of the labour market |
| 4. Concrete approaches, methodologies, techniques and instruments for coordinating strategies for social welfare with mechanisms for social protection | <p>Concrete modalities for the implementation of social policies and programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Methods for identifying the population, groups or individuals served by social policies (targeting, self-selection and others) -Conditional or non-conditional transfers of income or goods -Cash subsidies versus benefits or goods in kind -Public or private provision of social services and benefits |

Source: Prepared by the author.

Thus, within the social policy sector, these elements (views on the role of State and other agents in generating welfare; general ideas and values with respect to democracy and citizenship; social protection approaches; specific instruments and strategies of social policy) constitute what the actors regard as problematic, feasible and desirable at a given moment. They especially influence the way in which the actors think about social reality, craft strategies and discourses and implement actual social policy instruments, playing a central role in the orientation of public action in this sector and favouring the preferences and interests of certain actors over others. These elements are described briefly below.

1. Views on the role of the State, the community, families and individuals in generating social welfare

The general views described above give rise to different levels of responsibility assigned to the State with respect to individual and collective welfare, complementary to individual efforts and to the economic participation of individuals and their families. Also important are economic participation and employment status as means of gaining access to social welfare and protection in a more or less differentiated way for the different social categories, various levels of State intervention in regulation of the job market, (legitimate) taxation levels in general and on sectors of activity, social groups and professionals, and the relative centrality of social policies as a public policy sector vis-à-vis other sectors. These considerations, in turn, determine how ambitious social protection systems will be in terms of including individuals and various social categories, as well as in terms of the risks that should

be insured. Lastly, the role attributed to households (particularly the traditional patriarchal model of family) or to individuals as subjects and agents of welfare and access to protection mechanisms entails different ways of looking at social policy instruments, especially at the level of modalities of access to benefits, subsidies and compensation.

While it is true that from the viewpoint of comparative sociology, there are many different approaches for evaluating the institutional evolution of welfare states, one of the most influential is found in the works of Esping-Andersen (2000, 1996, 1993), who developed a triad of welfare systems in the industrialized world, each one of which fits within a specific political economic structure and a specific labour market. These are liberal systems, social democratic systems and conservative systems (see table 9).

TABLE 9
BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIFFERENT WELFARE STATE MODELS

| | Liberal system | Social democratic system | Conservative system |
|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--|
| Role of the family | Marginal | Marginal | Central |
| Role of the market | Central | Marginal | Marginal |
| Role of the State | Marginal | Central | Subsidiary |
| Type of solidarity | Individual | Universal | Family-based Corporatism Statism |
| Place of solidarity | Market | State | Family |
| Degree of decommodification | Minimum | Maximum | High (for the head of household) |
| Model examples | United States | Sweden | Germany and Italy |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Esping-Andersen cited in Martín Ramos, "Las diferentes políticas de estado de bienestar", *Políticas sociolaborales: un enfoque pluridisciplinar*, Barcelona, Editorial UOC, 2004.

This author uses the concept of welfare systems to categorize the way in which welfare is produced and distributed in the framework of the State-family-market triad, moving from one solidarity model to another, as a function of the responsibility assigned to each one of the components of the triad, and determining, on that basis, the way in which each model of welfare state organizes the management of risk (Vidal Fernández, 2006) (see table 10). This approach follows the analytical doctrinal logic proposed earlier by Alegre and others (2005) and helps situate the contemporary terms of the debate in this field.

TABLE 10
REGULATORY GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE DIFFERENT WELFARE STATE MODELS

| | Liberal system | Social democratic system | Conservative system |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Predominant normative reference | Assistance | Equality | Security |
| Level of social expenditure | Low | High | High |
| Rate of decommodification | Weak | Strong | Average |
| Financing structure | Taxes/fees | Taxes | Contributions |
| Type of population coverage | Selective | Universal | Selective |
| Criteria of access to benefits | Need | Right (citizenship) | Employment |
| Regulatory density of labour market | Low | Medium | High |
| Stratification principle | Dualization | Egalitarian | Reproduction |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of J. Adelantado, *Cambios en el estado del bienestar. Políticas sociales y desigualdades en España*, Barcelona, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 2000.

2. Notions about citizenship and democracy

Notions about principles and responsibilities with respect to social welfare, as well as about the means of access to social protection, are closely related to conceptions of citizenship, that is, the rights and obligations that are inherent to an individual's status as a citizen and his or her place in a democratic system. Specifically, effective enjoyment of social and economic rights as an integral part of citizenship makes guaranteeing those rights a condition and a mission of democracy as a representative and participatory system. Thus, the rights and obligations of citizenship, which must be guaranteed or protected, impose specific responsibilities on the State. The same occurs with respect to the place provided for the effective exercise of certain negative or positive liberties as the basis of the proper functioning of a democratic system. Also, the idea of civic obligations or responsibilities plays an important role in the sense that access to or enjoyment of rights can be understood as a contract under which the citizen must always make a corresponding effort or recompense in exchange for the rights and benefits that he or she enjoys.

This diversity of ideas about citizenship and democracy is particularly visible in the controversies and debates on the targeting or conditionality of social transfer programmes for the poorest sectors. The conditionality and limited duration of the supports or benefits can be justified based on the idea of autonomous and free citizens who are not dependent on the State, as opposed to the image of dependent individuals who can be manipulated and make easy prey for clientelistic arrangements that pervert voting and democracy. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the absence of minimum levels of universally guaranteed welfare can be denounced as a situation that distorts democracy through fictitious citizenship where equal rights and the effective exercise of freedoms are a legal illusion (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Boix and Stokes, 2009). If, instead, citizenship is understood as a status of those who belong to a political community, then all those who are members of the community have the same intrinsic rights and obligations, regardless of their specific situation or condition. The legal and constitutional recognition of social rights is “a new field of social power” (Cunill Grau, 2010) that extends to the entire population, although making it a reality is contingent upon the design of an institutional framework that enables policies to be implemented.

Another related aspect is the way of looking at individual liberty as the absence of coercive restrictions (negative liberty) or as enabling conditions for the effective exercise of a freedom (positive liberty). The first notion is strongly associated with minimal intervention by the State, so that individuals, viewed as the principal agents of their own welfare, can act without external interference or obligations to maximize their potential. The second notion, meanwhile, is associated with systematic public intervention as a necessary condition for the exercise of freedoms that would otherwise be merely formal and/or exercised unequally (Berlin, 1990).

Lastly, views on democracy and citizenship are intimately associated with notions of social justice, according to which certain rights and living conditions must be guaranteed for all. In the case of social policies, the disparity between equality of opportunities (equity) and equality of outcomes (equality) plays a crucial role by legitimizing various modalities and objectives of public interventions in different areas (e.g. education, health, employment, pensions).

3. Views on legitimate means and mechanisms for achieving acceptable levels of social welfare

These general notions on the creation and provision of social welfare, and the guarantee of rights and freedoms in a democratic system, are associated with different approaches to social protection with various implications for the regulatory and taxation capacities of the State. These are the means considered legitimate to achieve collective objectives and ideals related to social welfare.

Among the general means available are tax rates, which can be higher or lower, progressive or regressive with respect to the distribution of resources produced by the market, principally related to the financing of social protection mechanisms with, specifically, total or partial guarantees on a temporary or permanent basis that are targeted or universal for certain goods, income levels or specific social services.

Lastly, among the means considered legitimate (or feasible) is the regulation of the labour market, that is, stipulation of remuneration levels, working conditions, access to benefits (particularly health and pension benefits), terms of employment and dismissal and any unemployment insurance models. These principles provide direction, especially, for the frontier between formal and informal work and the potential duality of social protection systems.

Regarding access to social protection mechanisms, Marchesi (2004) describes two methods that can be applied to social protection systems, corresponding to universalism and selectivism (or targeting), together with an intermediate position that combines the two, which is in line with the proposed logic described in the type of demographic coverage for the various systems identified by Esping-Andersen (2000, 1996, 1993). This makes it possible to classify the different welfare state models by their coverage and implications in various dimensions of social life, as shown in table 11.

TABLE 11
FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS
IN THE VARIOUS WELFARE STATE MODELS

| | Residual model | Universal model | Traditional model | Corporatist model |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Labour dimension | Market-based deregulation model | Public model of flexible regulation | Market-based deregulation model | Public model of flexible regulation |
| Exclusion dimension | Residual, reactive and transfer-based policies | Intensive, anticipatory and service-based policies | Residual, reactive policies and mix of services/transfers | Moderate intensity reactive and transfer-based policies |
| Gender dimension | Labour equality without family standing Segregation | Labour equality with family standing Integration | Labour inequality without family standing Segregation | Maintenance of the logic of the patriarchal model |
| Intersectoral relationship | Dualization Residual selectivism geared toward employment | Integration Social citizenship geared toward employment | Dualization Residual selectivism unconnected with employment | Dualization Dualization via market |
| Society-State-market relationship | Private/pluralist model | Public/pluralist model | Private / moderate pluralist / pluralist model | Private/corporate model |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Gomá, 1996, cited in Martín Ramos, "Las diferentes políticas de estado de bienestar", *Políticas sociolaborales: un enfoque pluridisciplinar*, Barcelona, Editorial UOC, 2004.

4. Concrete approaches, methodologies, techniques and instruments for coordinating social welfare and social protection mechanisms

As stated, social welfare systems make reference to the division of labour between State, market and families for the generation of individual and collective welfare, as well as to the collection of institutions that structure that division of labour, whereas social policy refers to the array of public policy interventions that directly affect the welfare of the population. As noted by Cecchini and Martínez (2011), social policy is the design, financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies and activities aimed at improving the quality of life of the population. It has three components: sectoral policies such as education, health, and others that play a direct role in human capital formation; social promotion policies that are geared towards improving the development and use of capacities; and last, social protection systems that bring together both elements, managing risk by protecting and guaranteeing income, promoting decent work and ensuring access to social services for the entire population, particularly those who cannot do so without public intervention. From this perspective, social protection fulfills functions that centre on managing risk and guaranteeing various

levels of social welfare. There are several approaches in terms of how to view and coordinate those functions that can be identified.

Based on the principles and means that are regarded as legitimate, concrete public policy instruments and modalities are developed that give rise to the implementation of specific policies and programmes. These instruments and modalities form the core around which the call for expertise from various actors and the bulk of public controversies and debates on the different policy alternatives are organized. In effect, these instruments receive technical and ideological justifications anchored with varying degrees of clarity in the various more general elements that have already been described (social welfare, citizenship and others). In addition to legal instruments (laws, regulations and decrees) and the programmes and transfers that define rights and obligations and conditions of access to goods, services and insurance mechanisms, there are methods for identifying or selecting the population, the groups or individuals who should be given priority status for specific interventions and instruments. Examples are mechanisms for targeting or self-selection based on a number of criteria such as employment status, income level and personal or household socio-demographic characteristics. They can also include various methodologies for defining and measuring poverty or inequality that are clearly based on the establishment of minimum levels of welfare under which public policy should intervene to provide varying levels of support so beneficiaries can rise above the minimum levels.

In addition, a diverse array of very concrete types of public policy alternatives can be identified. In the Latin American context, the example that stands out are conditional transfers of income in exchange for certain requirements or co-responsibilities, as opposed to a universal guarantee of certain income or transfers. Another example is the provision of subsidies or cash transfers, as opposed to the direct distribution of basic consumer goods and services. There is another important discussion that revolves around the various modalities for financing social benefits (especially pensions) through combined contributions from the government, employees and employers. A final important example are the modalities for the provision (public or private) of goods, services and social benefits. The dialectic positions on these instruments will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Taking this into account shows how the scope, content and modalities of the prevailing social protection systems in each country in Latin America will largely depend on the approach that the winning socio-political coalitions adopt, which will be determined by the convergence of the political, fiscal, organizational and ideological restrictions in play, including those rooted in the history and the formal and informal institutional framework (Repetto, 2010, p. 2). In the case of Latin America, at least three areas of focus that inform different welfare policies can be identified (see table 12).

TABLE 12
FOCUS OF WELFARE AND SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICIES

| Focus | Content | Policy |
|------------|--|---|
| Needs | There is a problem of unmet basic needs. | Compensation of the deficit |
| Capacities | There is a problem of relative lack of opportunities and skills to enable individuals to freely choose between alternatives for their welfare. | Promotion and training, considering direct compensation in extreme situations |
| Rights | There is a problem of failure to observe rights that translates into an increase in vulnerability and inequality. | Guaranteed social minimums that represent a floor of social empowerment and integration |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of references cited in the document.

These focuses produce very different public policy interventions. A needs-focused approach will tend to steer public action towards discrete mechanisms to satisfy the unmet needs of specific people and groups. Meanwhile, a capacity-focused approach will also act on the social and economic conditions of disadvantaged groups and individuals, enabling them to achieve higher levels of welfare. A rights-based focus assumes the universalization and universal guarantee of minimum standards, on top of targeting, incorporating human rights principles and standards (guidelines) to analyse problems and the

formulation, execution, monitoring and evaluation of social policies and development strategies. As indicated by Cunill Grau (2010, p. 3), the principles underlying rights-based public policies include, in addition to universality, enforceability, social participation, integrity and progressiveness.

According to Pautassi, the rights-based approach translates into legal standards —such as the obligation to guarantee the minimum content of rights, the obligation of States to apply progressive, not regressive, policies and the obligation to guarantee citizen participation— and also principles —the principle of equality and nondiscrimination, universality, access to justice, access to public information— that are used to develop a matrix that is useful for defining intervention policies and strategies, both by States and by social actors and development cooperation agencies, as well as for designing actions for the monitoring and evaluation of public policies (Pautassi, 2010, p. 2).

It should be noted that recognizing rights without specifically guaranteeing them could simply be interpreted as a mere strategy to position the current administration favourably as a guarantor of social protection. The major challenge concerning the rights-based approach as the guiding force of public action in the social sector is moving beyond discussion and actually implementing it, i.e. developing sustainable concrete mechanisms that are necessarily incremental but go about defining and improving minimum floors of welfare (Cecchini and Martínez, 2011).

In summary, the elements contained in what is referred to here as the conceptual frameworks for social policy are a set of ideas, principles and instruments that progressively make up social welfare systems. These host more or less extensive social protection mechanisms, shaping “models” or “systems” of welfare with specific characteristics. From the viewpoint of the emergence of compacts and consensuses, reaching an agreement in this area is significant because its scope goes beyond the limits of the social policy sector to encompass relationships between the State and society, and between democracy and citizenship.

It should be noted that these models are simultaneously concrete configurations of public policy (observable social protection and welfare systems) and reference models for the actors participating in the social policy sector. Owing to the importance of the foregoing and to the fact that conceptual frameworks for social policy confer much of its specificity as a sector of public policy, some of the dialectic arguments that are typical of recent public debate in the region are presented below.

E. Some dialectic issues typical of social welfare and protection policies in Latin America in recent years

Much of the controversy around which recent public debate in the social policy sector has revolved could be summarized in a few dialectic questions. The discourse and justification of instruments, techniques and programmes promoted by the various actors tend to be entrenched in one or another of these debates.

1. Guarantee social rights up to what point? A political and/or economic decision

As indicated by Montagut (2000, p. 21), there is a constant conflict between the perceptions and interests of the various social actors and over differing views on the role of the State in economic and social matters, so if social policy is the manifestation of the social rights¹⁶ of the citizens, determining their significance and the most suitable instruments for guaranteeing them is a highly complex technical undertaking. In addition to debates on financing and the impact it could have on economic development, social policy involves discussing the most efficient strategies to address old and new socioeconomic risks, with different levels of fiscal effort.

¹⁶ These rights express the values of equality, solidarity and non-discrimination and are considered to be an extension of the principle of liberty (Ocampo, 2008b). For T. H. Marshall, it refers “to universal access to a set threshold of benefits and income that ensures that basic needs are met” (cited by Hopenhayn, 2007, p. 18).

From an argumentative or rhetorical viewpoint, political actors position themselves in favour of universally guaranteed rights and liberties but differ on their content and how to achieve them, which values and resources they come at the expense of and what type of society should be achieved as a result. In order to summarize, three recurring lines of argument can be outlined.

A first argument centres on the preeminence of the market as a generator of wealth and individual and collective welfare through economic growth. The latter is an element that conditions the achievement of any other social objective, such that priority should be given to factors that drive growth (macroeconomic equilibrium, limited tax burden, low public deficit, incentives for private and foreign investment and others) as a precondition for achieving concrete social advances. This leads to guidelines and recommendations ranging from the need to deepen ‘incomplete’ or ‘truncated’ economic liberalization processes to conditioning the adoption of any fiscal reform or social policy on its non-interference with factors that promote growth driven by a dynamic market regulated only to avoid the worst failures. In this line of thinking, guaranteeing social rights is a collateral, incremental, long-term result that takes the form of access by individual people to opportunities by dint of their own efforts.

A second line of argument also stems from an understanding of growth as a structural factor that produces higher levels of individual and collective social welfare while recognizing the need for State regulation to ensure that the benefits of growth will be accessible to the majority and that minimum levels of welfare will be actively guaranteed through public action. This line of thinking argues that incentives should be actively created, certain resources should be redistributed and certain interests should be limited to ensure optimal levels of growth with equity. In this view, guaranteeing social rights is an incremental, collective effort that calls for a much more active role by the State within the limits of the need for vigorous growth.

Lastly, a third line of argument sees guaranteeing social rights as a primary obligation of the State, which is not to dismiss the role of economic growth on welfare but rather to acknowledge the imbalances, inequalities, vested interests and perennial delays that always come with market logic. According to this view, maintaining ‘favourable’ conditions for economic growth driven by a dynamic market is denounced as a false dilemma; instead, guaranteeing minimum universal standards for all individuals should be the starting point for regulating the different spheres of economic life and public policies. In other words, ‘market forces’ should be required to act within parameters that guarantee those standards.

2. Conditionality, redistribution of resources through (non)contributory systems and incentives or disincentives to work and individual effort

Social inclusion strategies attempt to identify the most vulnerable socioeconomic groups and implement programmes to help improve their situation. These range from job creation programmes and preferential access to credit or price subsidies for certain products to various fiscal exemptions, training programmes or distribution of basic needs items as well as conditional and non-conditional cash transfer programmes and others. Typically, conditionality in the delivery of benefits, as well as the redistribution of resources, attracts controversy. There are two important assumptions made with respect to conditionality in the delivery of benefits and access to services. The first is that free delivery of benefits creates perverse incentives with respect to willingness to accept employment and be self-reliant, with an adverse effect on the efficiency of interventions, the productivity of economies and the fiscal sustainability of social policies. The second assumption is that the non-conditional delivery of benefits or resources leads to dependency, which weakens individual liberty. There are several arguments that are made against conditionality. One is that conditions cannot be placed on resources or services that are basic or essential to an individual’s ability to exercise his or her rights. From that perspective, conditionality is seen as a coercive element. A related argument is that human motivations, especially a willingness to accept employment and be self-reliant, will not be affected by access to services or the delivery of resources.

This controversy is often accompanied by another argument. Conditionality is also associated with public interventions of limited duration and resources (even though the cost of verifying and monitoring compliance with benefits requirements may be high). At the same time, this is justified in

terms of the disincentives to work, self-reliance and creativity that are generated by the fiscal burden on the wealthiest sectors. From that vantage, a high tax burden and the redistribution of resources harm productivity and economic efficiency. Also, inequality, in and of itself, can generate positive incentives, especially when the basic needs of the least advantaged sectors have already been met. Meanwhile, the opposing view points up the disparities that persist and increase if not corrected, sapping the development potential of those who are in a disadvantaged situation. According to that view, ongoing redistribution of resources through public action is indispensable to balance conditions between different groups, generate social cohesion and ensure the effective enjoyment of rights.

These competing positions have been particularly significant in driving the evolution of pension systems, especially in the debates on privatization, individualization of contributions and benefits, as well as the introduction of non-contributory mechanisms to mitigate system inequality and guarantees of a minimum level of benefits for the least advantaged sectors.

3. Targeting as a means or an end?

As Hopenhayn proposed, the problem with how to execute social rights depends not only on the way in which they are distributed but also on their availability, inasmuch as they involve concrete benefits and resources (Hopenhayn, 2007), which raises the important question as to whether policies to implement these rights should be targeted or universal, either from the labour market or towards families and individuals.

For much of the twentieth century, in the framework of import substitution models, social policies were generally geared towards participants in the formal labour system, which in turn was seen as a corollary of industrialization and economic growth driven by public and private spending. According to that logic, more economic growth meant greater formal job creation and eventually larger drops in poverty levels. Of course, not only did the capacity for economic growth via that model turn out to be limited and unsustainable from a fiscal standpoint but also vast segments of the population remained on the outside of the formal labour system.

Beginning in the 1980s, in the framework of major structural adjustments and cuts in spending and public intervention, controlled inflation and stable and sustained economic growth again became the primary objective of economic policy. The thinking was that greater economic growth would drive wealth creation and in so doing reduce poverty levels.

Although economic growth has translated recently into lower levels of absolute poverty, in the 1990s and the early 2000s volatile growth left very little fiscal headroom for public spending, public health and social security systems in the region remained highly stratified, and formal employment rates fell short against growth in the informal sector and structural unemployment. The fiscal squeeze and inherent limitations of weak growth and formal job creation revived interest in the role that social policies can play in improving the welfare of excluded segments of the population in a sustainable way, targeting groups in need of immediate assistance through supports with real potential to raise these sectors out of poverty and create the right conditions for them to enter the labour market (Cordera and Cabrera Adame, 2005).

In that context, targeting, as an instrument for enhancing the progressive aspects of social spending by aiming public efforts at those most in need (Filgueira and others, 2007), achieved high levels of legitimacy for imposing greater efficiency on the use of public funds earmarked social spending and targeting actions to the neediest sectors, as well as becoming, in the short term, a tool for leveling the playing field with respect to risks and vulnerabilities (ECLAC, 2006). Thus, targeting became an instrument that promised to minimize leaks to those with fewer needs, implementing temporary and compensatory coverage with quality standards that were not always uniform.

In addition, from a technical viewpoint, Cornia and Stewart (2005) noted that this strategy could face at least two problems having to do with the criteria used to identify the target population, namely, errors of exclusion of the poor and errors of inclusion of the non-poor, both as a consequence of interventions targeted on the errors generated by excessive coverage. As a result, in many cases, strict and relatively inflexible criteria have been set, producing coverage deficits and driving up the failure

rates and costs of targeted policies. In addition, the sums delivered by these programmes are relatively modest, so their impact is limited (Ocampo, 2008).

It should be mentioned that for Filgueira and others (2007), the trend away from implementing universal public policies has also been spurred by the fact that previous policies were seen as having achieved little success and in practice excluded the least advantaged sectors. On this topic, some authors assert that it is not an efficient alternative owing not only to the sums involved but also because it translates into relatively unjust measures by treating people with different needs and resources the same way, such that the poor are subject to the same conditions as the rest of the population (Salama, 2005). The argument is that universal policies would also make inefficient use of scarce resources by distributing them to middle-income sectors that already have greater access to income and services and that historically tend to participate in pressure groups that preserve their favourable situation through influence on the bureaucratic apparatus, unlike the more vulnerable sectors, which remain socially, economically and politically excluded (Ocampo, 2008). This has led to a recent reinvention adapted to the Latin American style of universalization, or to use the term coined by Filgueira and others (2006), “basic universalism” supplemented with targeted programmes to address the specific problems of excluded groups. This new universalism should consider:

“(…) universal coverage of essential benefits and risks that guarantees access to transfers, services and products that meet uniform quality standards” established on the basis of the principles of citizenship, that is, coverage that represents a departure from the principle of selecting beneficiaries of services based on a demonstration of resources and need that prevails in the region, and that intends for these to be understood as rights, but also as generating duties and obligations (Filgueira and others, 2006, p. 21).

This discussion reveals a fundamental dichotomy that tends to be used technically and rhetorically by the various social policy actors. It has to do with seeing targeting exclusively as an instrument of a social policy that can have a wide range of general purposes (including the universalization of certain welfare and protection standards), as opposed to seeing it as a desirable and necessary modality of a subsidiary and compensatory social policy.

In the first case, targeting is a potentially efficient instrument for incorporating excluded segments with limited fiscal resources, or for addressing a localized social problem or a specific deficit. In this regard, targeting can be a key piece in the framework of a social protection system that is being expanded or universalized, that is, as a complement to that system. This has been demonstrated with conditional subsidy programmes that have had a greater impact precisely due to a broader level of coverage, such as, for example, the reform of the family allowances system in Uruguay, which sought to “universalize” this benefit to the entire vulnerable population in the country by transforming the criteria for admittance to the system and an increase in benefits, with the result that targeting (or selectivity as Ocampo calls it) has taken on a subsidiary role.

In the second case, the idea that social policy should focus solely on the poorest sectors or those who would otherwise be unable to meet their basic needs or achieve a minimum level of welfare corresponds to a residual, compensatory, and subsidiary welfare model that is removed from the concept of certain social rights being universally guaranteed as a defining aspect of citizenship. Underlying this view are beliefs concerning the dominant role of the market in creating wealth, free enterprise as the engine of growth and innovation, and in short, the idea that inequality of outcomes is tolerable provided it allows for higher levels of welfare across the board, especially for the poorest, even if proportionately less or more slowly than for segments with more resources. These tensions have been present throughout the recent history of social policy in the region.

However, the implementation of a more extensive social protection system means heavy demand for fiscal resources, on which Latin American countries are short. This is related to the low tax burden issue raised previously and requires urgent review by the different States. Moreover, as Ocampo states (2008b), excessive emphasis on targeting, public-private models and decentralization, instead of on the guiding principles, has undermined the strategic vision of social policy.

This is why the latest conditional transfer programmes fit within a new social protection system that takes a rights-based approach, which is to say a universalist logic in which the enforceability of rights for the most vulnerable citizens is front and centre —a universalization tailored to a specific audience (Cunill Grau, 2010).

4. Protect whom? The priority groups and objectives in recent social protection reforms

To a certain extent, consensus has built in recent years around the idea that distributive inequality undermines rights in more than one way (Hopenhayn, 2007, p. 25), inasmuch as failing to achieve a certain socioeconomic level precludes a standard of living that would make it possible to exercise rights in all realms, a situation that affects the most vulnerable demographic groups, that is, children, the elderly, women and the poor. Given the conditions of inequality and gaps in the social protection systems, there is debate about which groups should be given priority for public action. As a result, the various initiatives for social protection reform in Latin America put some groups or sectors ahead of others, such as children, the elderly, the poor or citizens in general, depending on the specific country and context.

Given the foregoing, a variety of different situations can result depending on the country. As shown in table 13, there were several different approaches to social protection in place in Latin America around 2009, each translating into very specific social policy instruments.

A general analysis of the social groups that are given priority in social protection reform processes points in each case to which approach is dominant at different junctures and in different contexts. By specifying which groups are vulnerable, poor or the beneficiaries of specific programmes, the target population and scope of intervention are inseparable from the general ambitions of the social policy and the implicit welfare model (Ananias, 2009).

TABLE 13
SOCIAL PROTECTION APPROACHES IN LATIN AMERICA, CIRCA 2009

| Main approaches | Characteristics | Countries |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Protection as assistance and access to social promotion | Non-contributory social protection targeting the poor (CCTs) | Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru Caribbean: Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago |
| 2. Intermediate position between assistance and access to social promotion and citizen guarantee | Non-contributory social protection targeting the poor (CCTs). In addition to the CCTs, other non-contributory social protection policies (targeted or universal, in pensions and health) are incorporated and progressively connect the different components. | Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico and Panama |
| 3. Social protection as citizen guarantee | Transfers and loans as part of non-contributory social protection Growing coordination between contributory and non-contributory social protection policies Intended to make integrated and coordinated systems of social protection | Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay |

Source: Simone Cecchini and Rodrigo Martínez, "Inclusive Social Protection in Latin America: A Comprehensive, Rights-based Approach", *Libros de la CEPAL*, No. 111 (LC/G.2488-P), Santiago, Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), 2011.

IV. Questions for analysis and preliminary findings

The impetus for this paper was a paradox and a practical concern. The paradox is that despite the importance of achieving medium- or long-term consensuses in social policy to address the most pressing poverty and inequality challenges in Latin America, in many countries in the region democracy has fallen short of producing such consensuses and implementing policies to close social and economic gaps. Thus, there is the practical concern of analysing specific cases in which consensus has formed around major initiatives, for the purpose of understanding in each context which elements made that outcome possible, as well as an interest in proposing ways to evaluate how feasible a compact is in a given context. To that end, the proposal presented in this paper around various focal elements (explanatory paradigms for public policies in democracy, practices and strategies, factors and conceptual frameworks for social policy) is an attempt to identify elements to consider in addressing specific situations. In short, what questions can guide the analysis? What do the findings say about the feasibility of compacts and consensuses in social policy?

A. Some questions for analysing the emergence of consensuses and compacts

1. What favourable elements signal open policy windows of opportunity for a consensus or compact?

As with any change in the prevailing status quo, a compact or consensus can be seen as a particularly complex policy window of opportunity in which the initial situation changes through the adoption of a new social policy or reform and where that change occurs with the support or consent of the main participating social and political actors, despite the differences that usually divide them. As the model described earlier points out, a policy window of opportunity is composed of three streams that converge at a given moment in time: access of a problem to the public and government agenda; availability of policy alternatives; and agreement and political will on the part of the actors with formal decision-making power. When looking ex post at cases in which consensus was possible, a relevant question is to look in each case at how one of these streams evolved to the point of convergence. Another area of consideration are the factors that previously impeded a consensus.

Meanwhile, a corollary is that when evaluating *ex ante* the feasibility of a consensus or compact in a given context, doing so from a perspective based on the notion of policy windows of opportunity also helps to identify the main obstacles, any partial windows of opportunity that are open (and should be used) and the strategies of persuasion and negotiation that can help overcome resistance. Basically, when some of the conditions are already present, an approach based on that perspective could help identify feasible courses of action. Examples of this could be the dissemination of specific policy alternatives, efforts to position the limitations or inadequacies of existing social policies as a priority item on the public and government agenda, or to identify and publicize the obstacles preventing the political actors from adopting a reform despite the existence of feasible alternatives and a willingness on the part of the government to address the issue.

Given the difficulty identified by ECLAC in generating compacts or consensuses to implement more inclusive social protection systems, an analysis of the obstacles preventing the appearance of favourable policy windows of opportunity should begin by looking at the availability of reform alternatives that tend towards more inclusive systems, and subsequently at whether information on such alternatives is sufficiently disseminated among the main social and political actors. Along these lines, one hypothesis is that a broad agreement or compact requires the dissemination of diagnostic assessments on the problems and policy alternatives by certain actors (or networks of actors) who are able to successfully bring them to the attention of those who possess decision-making power. This task of disseminating diagnostic assessments and policy alternatives and lobbying can work from the specific to the general, from highly targeted reform proposals such as the modification of a social programme to more ambitious proposals with implications for the entire social welfare system and even across economies. Clearly, the feasibility of influencing policy orientations to that degree is more likely in the case of specific reforms than on a larger scale, as discussed in the following points.

2. Who are the veto players whose consent is indispensable?

Another way of approaching *ex post* cases of consensuses or compacts is to look at those junctures as changes in the prior status quo in which support or consent was obtained from the main actors in and outside the institutional structure with veto power in the social policy sector. Due to the formal and informal powers and influence of those actors, the achievement of a compact or consensus is indicative of an extraordinary moment in which initial or prior resistance was overcome. It also points to the possibility that the policy reform or change at that juncture was perceived as favourable to the values and interests of those actors or, at least, that it was preferable to preserving things as they stood initially. Understanding the evolution of the positions, discourse and strategies of those actors is crucial. This means examining not only the powers and resources held by the identified veto players but also the evolution of their preferences, the content of which should not be seen as something given and immutable but rather as a set of evolutionary and changing inclinations throughout the process, particularly the dynamics of deliberation, negotiation and pressure.

Concomitantly, by exploring *ex ante* the feasibility of a consensus or compact in a situation in which one has not emerged, a key question consists in identifying the veto players who were maintaining the status quo up to that point and were resisting, explicitly or implicitly, a change in one sense or another. This line of inquiry makes it possible to conduct a better assessment of the feasibility of a consensus, but also to determine to what extent the dissemination of policy alternatives and analysis on the limitations of the social policies currently in place may influence the actors' positions and identify, on that basis, the realm of possibilities with respect to the introduction of changes in favour of more inclusive social protection systems.

Lastly, analysing these patterns and the incentives for the various actors given the rules of the institutional framework for decision-making would help determine just how likely and exceptional the compact or consensus studied *ex post* was. This begs the question about whether it was just "one more agreement" in a context that encourages the actors to compromise and cooperate or whether, instead, it was an exceptional moment in time when the actors were able to reach an agreement against the odds.

3. Is the social policy sector going through a phase of crisis and questioning, or is it showing signs of stability and strong continuity inertias?

The emergence of a compact or consensus can always be seen as either a moment of continuity with respect to established trends in the social policy sector or as a break with past and present inertias. Identifying the context in which a collective accord has emerged makes it easier to identify the elements that made it possible, as well as the manoeuvring room of the various actors that were involved.

In the case of continuity and incremental change processes (gradual and progressive), the consensus or compact comes about according to pre-established guidelines, that is, guidelines laid down during previous dynamics that shape the actors' preferences and values to such an extent that the agreement emerges within set parameters that do not threaten the array of social policies in place. In a sense, in these cases the compact emerges in a less divisive environment because the main actors are likely already in agreement about some of the fundamental aspects of the policies in effect. Nevertheless, even in these cases, the cumulative effect of successive incremental changes can be considerable, such that a collective accord, even on an issue that seems minor, can be part of a medium- or long-term transformation process. For example, incrementally defining and implementing minimum standards of well-being in various areas (e.g. education, health, nutrition and social security and insurance), social guarantees for different vulnerable groups or categories or commitments and limits on government responsibility with respect to social protection for individuals can gradually alter the nature of entire social welfare systems.

A compact or consensus can also emerge during a moment of crisis, uncertainty and questioning of existing social policies. In this case, the main actors accept and negotiate alternatives that were previously regarded as unacceptable or even unimaginable. The need to respond to a wave of new social demands, mitigate the social effects of an economic crisis or restore public finances and macroeconomic equilibriums can lead to major course changes in social welfare systems. When these changes occur in a context of crisis and urgency, agreements are reached that can be either exceptional or pedestrian but have real consequences in the medium and long term. In these situations, the manoeuvring room of the different actors changes with respect to the earlier situation and it becomes important to know not only their strategies, powers and influence but also the conceptual frameworks for the social policy that they mobilized. This is related to the two different pictures of compacts that were mentioned in the first part of the paper: first, the gradual constitution of a global compact in conjunction with successive incremental changes agreed upon by the main actors, and second, a global compact (explicit or otherwise) that emerges from an exceptional situation that subsequently guides successive adjustments in a similar direction.

One suggested hypothesis is that an agreement that has emerged from a context of crisis and change—a critical juncture—could lead to substantive changes in the short term in terms of objectives, coverage, financing or social groups or categories benefited by the social policies. Meanwhile, in a context of stability and path dependence on earlier decisions, any agreement or consensus would likely have a less ambitious scope in the near term, although it may be a modest step in a series of small adjustments with visible implications in the medium or long term.

4. In a given moment and context, what policy alternatives and what conceptual frameworks for social policy influence how social reality and public action are perceived?

The substantive matter of a consensus or compact on social policy, that is, its contents, can be viewed as a set of measures and prescriptions for public action that succeed in attracting the support of a large number of social and political actors with otherwise competing positions and interests. It depicts how, at a given moment, such measures and prescriptions, as well as their implications from the viewpoint of what is referred to in this paper as conceptual frameworks for social policy, converge in a shared space, even in the presence of different and opposing visions.

Viewed in this way, the content of the intermediate initiatives, debates and proposals that precede the final result reveal how that common space was constructed, capturing the concessions of the parties involved, as well as, eventually, the evolution of the preferences of the actors.

In other words, the way in which the conceptual frameworks for social policy configure in a specific case should always be a topic of analysis. Basically, examining those frameworks (from general ideas and views about the generation of well-being, provision of and access to social protection, and citizenship and democracy, to the specific corresponding social policy instruments) is an essential step in understanding the positions and strategies of the actors. This is especially so if, for example, the interests and justifications outlined by the veto players throughout the process are analysed. In general, mapping the various policy alternatives and instruments and the underlying justifications and arguments for them and identifying the actors and coalitions of actors that promote them elucidate the origin of the contents of the initiative that is ultimately adopted. As previously mentioned, the conceptual frameworks for social policy always have a double function: they are used by the actors to advance and defend their interests and values while simultaneously moulding the way in which social reality is understood and the direction of public action, thus partially shaping the preferences of the actors.

Similarly, these frameworks are a key reference for elucidating whether the consensus or compact in question is seen as a continuity processor, instead, as a break with existing social policies and in general with the social welfare model that characterizes the case in question. In fact, the only way of evaluating the extent to which a compact or consensus has changed the previous order is to look at the characteristics of the previous welfare system and at how the agreement has altered the functioning thereof.

Analysis of the conceptual frameworks that have been mobilized provides another key reference for understanding how a policy window of opportunity forms, inasmuch as a central part of this model consists in determining which social phenomena are considered problematic and subject to public intervention at a specific juncture, which policy alternatives are available or invoked, and how acceptable they are to the actors with decision-making power.

Lastly, as was emphasized, conceptual frameworks confer on social policy much of its specificity as a public policy sector (compared with, for example, foreign policy). Although certain institutional factors affect all public policy sectors (e.g. decision-making norms and prerogatives), analysing the content of policy discussions and alternatives in this particular sector always means going back to its conceptual frameworks. Indeed, the ideas, alternatives and instruments with respect to social policy that circulate and are discussed in a given moment and context, lend the case under study much of its specificity and historicity. For example, in the Latin American context, the political feasibility of one policy alternative in particular —State guarantee of a minimum universal pension for the entire senior adult population— has changed radically over time. While the public (and social) policy frameworks associated with the so-called Washington Consensus were at the fore, an alternative of this type was not very feasible and may even have been considered counterproductive given the prevailing way of thinking about social policy priorities. Now, following many technical and political analyses and inquiries into the validity of that vision, that public policy alternative has entered the public debate and/or government agenda in several countries, regardless of the orientation of the political-electoral coalitions that are in power. In other words, ex post analysis of the conceptual frameworks mobilized in the case of a compact helps to define its importance concerning the public values and goods that a society agrees upon with respect to the orientation of its social welfare system.

B. Some preliminary findings from reforms where a compact was possible¹⁷

A **first** consideration is that most of the time, inertias weigh heavily on and even dominate the landscape, such that actors, regardless of their aspirations and interests, must work with and adapt to them. Evidently, the action of interest groups and the economic and political institutional framework set the stage on which all actors must act in the framework of inertias that strongly influence the dynamic of public policies. In this regard, achieving consensus around social policy illustrates the complexity of public policy as the art of the ‘possible’. These inertias cannot be broken by decree or voluntary action based solely on the dissemination of desirable public policy alternatives, even though doing so is an essential factor of change. What is also required are extensive and lengthy processes of persuasion, dialogue, mobilization and pressure.

Secondly, though, there are also defining moments associated with political change and economic shocks, sometimes even crises, where policy windows of opportunity open in which specific decisions have a strong impact on subsequent developments and where inertia-driven restrictions and resistance ease up or yield. Thus, times of crisis and/or political change often provide windows of opportunity for making deeper changes in the orientation of social policies. When these changes are agreed up by consensus, this larger shift in orientation can acquire continuity, legitimacy and staying power.

A **third** consideration is that pursuing consensus and compacts has a cost in terms of time, resources and prestige and always compromises the final scope of an ambitious initiative. By definition, a consensus or compact is the product of concessions by the main actors, though these may be asymmetrical. At the same time, however, these costs represent an investment that makes the final agreement stronger and more durable.

Meanwhile, a **fourth** consideration alludes to the importance of sharing dividends, at least in the short term, in the generation of consensus, as well as assuming some costs disproportionately, especially in the case of actors in relatively dominant positions. Sharing dividends, which is to say extending the prestige or legitimacy deriving from an initiative to all actors involved, is a factor that builds trust and reinforces positive, lasting dynamics.

A **fifth** important element, which makes for longer negotiations and a larger number of participating actors, is opportunity for engagement between political actors, technical experts and civil society. In fact, this is a basic prerequisite for building consensus that go beyond the strict confines of the political-electoral spectrum. Bringing together diverse positions and interests and incorporating the opinions and instruments of actors from informed or technically specialized backgrounds, thus transcending the immediate divisions resulting from the strict correlation of forces within formal decision-making forums, increases the possibilities of putting together an initiative that is acceptable for a large number of actors. This does not get around the strong vested interests of actors that are, informally, real veto players capable of blocking an initiative. The presence of ‘de facto powers’ is a constant, and the success of a consensus initiative often depends on making concessions to those interests or even opting not to challenge them.

It should also be noted that extensive consultation processes involving multiple political, technical and civil society actors help generate spaces for dialogue and initiatives that promote the formation of diverse coalitions that may be able to obtain concessions or even impose certain limits on powerful or strongly organized interests.

This last element is tied to a **sixth** observation. The ideas and conceptual frameworks invoked by the actors play a crucial role not only from an instrumental viewpoint. Actors use ideas and conceptual

¹⁷ These considerations are based on findings from three ex post analyses of specific experiences where consensus or covenants were generated in the social policy sector: the General Law on Social Development in Mexico (2000-2008) in Maldonado (2013); the New Law on Family Allowances in Uruguay (2003-2008) in Maldonado and Palma (2013a); and the Reform of the Pension System in Chile (2005-2009) in Maldonado and Palma (2013b).

frameworks to justify their interests but also to define them, so argumentation, deliberation and persuasion are important. They are, in fact, one of the vehicles available to actors who lack formal decision-making powers or de facto influence. The production of information, alternatives and diagnostic assessments, as well as the effective transmission thereof to actors with decision-making powers, is a course of action that can reorient the positions of actors and even shift the balance in favour of change.

All of these aspects point up the enormous importance of a **seventh** element that is hard to control, promote, replicate or measure: the forward-lookingness and capacity of the actors involved. Regardless of the presence or not of large corporate interests, the degree of pressure from political tensions or economic crises and the quantity of fiscal resources and technical and analytical information, the possibility of a consensus tends to challenge the actors to look beyond the present and set aside their understanding of their differences as ‘zero sum games’. This capacity to see beyond immediate strategic interests and institutional inertias suggests that in fact actors can always make a big difference and ultimately, the delicate balance between ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility that Max Weber called the great virtue of modern politics continues to be very applicable today.

As for the explanatory paradigms from political science for analysing public policies in democratic systems, it should be noted that the various approaches and variants are very useful provided they are used as instruments whose validity ultimately depends on their capacity to explain the case at hand. As argued previously, each approach makes important assumptions and is predisposed to give certain variables, processes and actors more weight than others. Therefore, relying on any one in particular can bias a case study from the outset, so it is always wise to maintain a broader, more pragmatic perspective. The strategy set out in this paper —no doubt far from perfect— proposes to examine the presence and weight of a set of actors, factors, practices and conceptual frameworks specific to the social policy sector in order to describe the individual characteristics of each case, as a prior step in determining which analytical approach(es) would go the distance. The goal of this proposal is none other than to make the best possible use of the diverse analytical tools that are available, while avoiding the risk of choosing a specific approach just to have the case in question corroborate it or demonstrate the superiority of one approach over another, a false debate very often seen in academic circles. Considering several different interpretations of the same case allows an informed choice to be made about the one that goes the furthest.

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Annex

Main features of explanatory paradigms for public policies in democracies

TABLE A.1
PLURALISM AND INTEREST GROUP THEORY AS AN EXPLANATORY PARADIGM FOR PUBLIC ACTION

| Approach / Variant | Main actors and their motivations | State – government | Institutions are defined as: | Origins of change and continuity | Public policy hypothesis |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| Classic pluralism – Theory of interest groups | <p>-Organized interest groups (unions, businesses, professional associations, officials and others) and the electorate.</p> <p>-These are self-interested, calculating actors who seek to fulfill their material interests through lobbying, social mobilization and voting.</p> <p>-Their interests are “given” through preferences revealed by their behaviour.</p> | <p>-A neutral actor, an arbitrator that mediates and meets the demands and interests of interest groups and/or dominant electoral coalitions.</p> <p>-Bureaucracy and organized public sector groups can be another interest group with discrete influence and veto power.</p> | <p>-A set of procedural rules and forums for decision-making used by the various social actors to try to influence government policy in their favour.</p> | <p>-Changes in the correlation of forces of organized social and economic actors.</p> <p>-Changes in electoral coalitions give rise to mandates / governments that are more favourable to one or another coalition of interests.</p> <p>-Change is incremental, in response to negotiations between the State / government and coalitions of social actors or groups with influence.</p> | <p>-Public policies are a response by the political system to demands channelled successfully by interest groups with sufficient influence.</p> <p>-Actors with decision-making power (government, legislators, elected officials and others) serve the interests of one or another groups based on the political support they hope to obtain in exchange.</p> <p>-Public policy is determined based on exchanges and negotiations between self interested, calculating actors.</p> <p>-Mandates derived from electoral competition and negotiations between the government and interest groups tend to balance out and produce socially optimal outcomes that reflect the majority preferences of a society.</p> |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of A. González-Rossetti, “La factibilidad política de las reformas del sector social en América Latina”, *Estudios y Perspectivas series*, No. 39 (LC/MEX/L.684), Santiago, Chile, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2005; J.G. March and J.P. Olsen, “Elaborating the ‘New Institutionalism’”, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, R.A.W. Rhodes, S.A. Binder and B.A. Rockman (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2006; D. Held, *Models of Democracy*, Stanford University Press, January 1997 and R.A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, Yale University Press, 1975.

TABLE A.2
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIFFERENT VARIANTS OF NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM

| Main actors and their motivations | State – government | Institutions are: | Origins of change and continuity | Public policy hypothesis |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <p>-Very diverse individual and collective actors.</p> <p>-The institutional framework defines which actors are able to influence the decision-making process, with what resources and by what means and in which forums or venues.</p> | <p>-Composed of multiple actors (individual and collective) whose interactions, strategies, interests and ideas guide the definition of specific policies in different sectors.</p> <p>-Autonomous capacity to transform social reality through public policies.</p> <p>-Capable of modifying the correlation of forces between various social actors and set a reform agenda that does not necessarily align with the interests of the dominant groups benefited by the status quo.</p> | <p>-A set of (formal and informal) procedures and rules of behaviour that prescribe the distribution of resources and guide the possible strategies of the actors.</p> <p>-They define the way in which the State and society interact.</p> <p>-By defining a logic of action considered ‘appropriate’ or ‘optimal’ for the actors, they create elements of order and predictability in the political system, as that logic drives, maintains and constrains the behaviour of the actors.</p> | <p>-Change comes from myriad causal processes, always mediated and redirected by rules, procedures, times and distribution of resources and opportunities generated by the existing institutional framework.</p> <p>-With the exception of foundational moments of crisis and shifts in equilibrium, changes are incremental and gradual, as past inertias (i.e. accepted rules of behaviour and patterns of interaction) condition the feasibility and scope of change.</p> <p>-The different variants differ when it comes to explaining the specific causes and modalities of change and continuity, how recurring patterns of action and organization stabilize and destabilize, and which factors sustain or interrupt these continuity processes.</p> | <p>-The institutional framework has a strong impact on the process and content of public policies. Multiple actors and procedures intervene in the final outcome.</p> <p>-Interest groups are yet another actor and the State has room to manoeuvre to change society through a reform agenda.</p> <p>-Actors choose their strategies based on the options offered to them by the institutional context.</p> <p>-That context also determines access to differentiated resources among the actors: the resolution of a conflict or the adoption of a policy is not necessarily optimal and has the potential to produce ‘historic inefficiencies’ that can persist over time.</p> <p>-Change tends to incremental, except at certain ‘foundational’ moments when the institutional framework and patterns of interaction between actors are established or redefined.</p> |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of J.P. Olsen, “Change and continuity: an institutional approach to institutions of democratic government”, *European Political Science Review*, vol. 1, No. 01, 2009; J.G. March and J.P. Olsen, “Elaborating the ‘New Institutionalism’”, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, R.A.W. Rhodes, S.A. Binder and B.A. Rockman (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2006 and P.A. Hall and R.C.R. Taylor, “Political science and the three new institutionalisms”, *Political Studies*, vol. 44, No. 5, December 1996.

TABLE A.3
RATIONAL ACTION THEORY OF NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM AS AN EXPLANATORY PARADIGM FOR PUBLIC ACTION

| Main actors and their motivations | State – government | Institutions are: | Origins of change and continuity | Public policy hypothesis |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>-The interests of the actors are ‘given’ by the context and the guiding logic is strategic calculation intended to maximize benefits and minimize costs.</p> <p>-They possess a fixed set of preferences, they behave instrumentally to maximize them and they do so strategically by anticipating the behaviour of others.</p> <p>- They always act according to instrumental rationality, as opposed to ideology or values.</p> | <p>-According to the case of the scale of the case study, the State is disaggregated into a certain number of relevant individual or collective actors with preferences that they seek to maximize by exercising instrumental and strategic rationality.</p> <p>-The menu of possible actions and strategies available to State actors depends on the options offered to them by the existing institutional framework and the position and availability of resources that gives them their position in the State or social hierarchy.</p> | <p>-The ‘game rules’ in a society, i.e. an exogenous restriction on the possible strategies available to the actors.</p> <p>-Coordination mechanisms that lower information sharing and transaction costs, generating lasting equilibriums between the actors.</p> <p>-They structure strategic interaction by determining the range and sequence of alternatives to set the agenda and determine the options available to the actors. They define the strategies used by the actors to meet their purposes.</p> <p>-The provide information and mechanisms for verifying fulfillment of agreements between the actors that lessen uncertainty and enhance the potential for better collective outcomes.</p> <p>-They process how the actors want or prefer to interact.</p> | <p>-Change is a transition between two equilibriums that underpin a system.</p> <p>-It comes from an external shock that alters the preferences and/or resources of the actors, or the rules of the game and thus the structure of incentives.</p> <p>-Institutions persist due to the functions and benefits that the actors extract from them.</p> <p>-It is an intentions-based approach that assumes that the creation of institutions is a voluntary process (quasi-contractual) between powerful actors that are relatively equal and independent.</p> | <p>-Policy is seen as a series of collective action problems (situations in which it is hard to get to collectively optimal outcomes because the actors are seeking to maximize their individual preferences). “What prevents the actors from taking a collectively-superior course of action is the absence of institutional arrangements that would guarantee complementary behavior by others” which leads to suboptimal equilibriums (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 945).</p> <p>-The origin and permanence of institutions and policies is explained by the value assigned to these by the actors based on the benefits they obtain from cooperating in that framework. Survival over time is an indication that the arrangement is the best possible one due to the superior benefits it provides, compared with other possible arrangements.</p> <p>-The likelihood of change in the status quo (policies, laws and others) decreases as the number of actors with the power to veto a change proposal increases.</p> |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of J.G. Shepsle, “Rational choice institutionalism”, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, R.A.W. Rhodes and others (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2006; P.A. Hall and R.C.R. Taylor, “Political science and the three new institutionalisms”, *Political Studies*, vol. 44, No. 5, December, 1996 and G. Tsebelis, “Veto players and institutional analysis”, *Governance*, vol. 13, October 2000.

**TABLE A.4
HISTORICAL NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM AS AN EXPLANATORY PARADIGM FOR PUBLIC ACTION**

| Main actors and their motivations | State – government | Institutions are: | Origins of change and continuity | Public policy hypothesis |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| <p>-The definition of the interests of the actors and their objectives and strategies occurs within a specific socio-historical context that explains them.</p> <p>-The actors act according to a logic of instrumental calculation combined with contextually determined ideas and cultural values.</p> <p>-Actors are viewed simultaneously as subjects of analysis and agents of historical process / change.</p> | <p>-Depending on the scale, period or policy sector in a specific case, the State is seen as a multiple actor (components of government, ministries, coalitions or networks of individuals in strategic positions and others) and immersed in a context of strong inertias, that is, existing procedures, practices, policies, conflicts and agreements.</p> <p>-These inertias not only limit the actors' possible strategies but also condition the objectives that are adopted at a given moment.</p> | <p>-Formal and informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions that tend to be enduring legacies of past political conflicts.</p> <p>-They emerge from and are inextricably tied to concrete historical processes. Although it is difficult to generalize the type of effect that 'the institutions' have on public policies, in each case / at each specific moment they always have a structuring role.</p> <p>-They have identities and roles that make the character, history and visions of a public policy sector unique in each national context.</p> <p>-The various institutional arrangements that comprise a political system emerge at different historical moments with different configurations of actors. As a result, the various 'pieces' of the political system do not necessarily fit together in a coherent, self-sustaining or functional way.</p> <p>-Interest in building, maintaining and adapting institutions is based more on the analysis of turbulent processes of collective action and outcomes and less on the individual preferences or strategies of the actors.</p> | <p>-The origins are multiple and complex: -Institutional orders and specific policy sectors in a society emerge from different historical moments, configurations of actors, and processes, so their interactions are contradictory and eventually generate transformations or reconfigurations.</p> <p>-Politics is a dynamic process that often produces unforeseen consequences due to interaction with various processes under way.</p> <p>-The evolution of policies occurs between critical junctures of change and long stretches of stable and reliable development (path dependency).</p> <p>-Most of the time, change is gradual because it occurs in the framework of the inertias of established institutions that give certain actors more or less power to influence the process. Dependency on the path taken happens because any attempt at a change or shift is influenced by, managed and tied up with the existing institutional matrix.</p> | <p>-The genesis, continuity and change of public policies correspond to dynamics that are unique to each historical context.</p> <p>- Institutional emergence, times of change and transformation, and exogenous social forces and the associated internal dynamics correspond to medium- and long-term processes.</p> <p>-Public policies and political change are discrete processes characterized by long periods of reliable stability and reproduction —known as periods of path dependency— punctuated by 'critical junctures' of radical change.</p> |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of E. Sanders, "Historical institutionalism", *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, R.A.W. Rhodes and others (eds.), Oxford University Press 2006; G.B. Peters, J. Pierre and D.S. King, "The politics of path dependency: political conflict in historical institutionalism", *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 67, No. 4, Southern Political Science Association, November 2005; G. Capoccia and R.D. Kelemen, "The study of critical junctures: theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism", *World Politics*, vol. 59, No. 3, April 2007; K. Thelen, "Historical institutionalism in comparative perspective", *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 2, No. 1, June, 1999.

TABLE A.5
SOCIOLOGICAL-ORGANIZATIONAL NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM AS AN EXPLANATORY PARADIGM FOR PUBLIC ACTION

| Main actors and their motivations | State – government | Institutions are: | Origins of change and continuity | Public policy hypothesis |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <p>-Actors interpret reality in line with their social and organizational context.</p> <p>-They define their preferences and strategies based on the cognitive frameworks and practices of the organization to which they belong: what an individual sees as 'rational action' is socially constructed.</p> <p>-Their objectives are not only to maximize utility but also seek to "define and express their identity in a socially appropriate way" (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 949).</p> <p>-Individuals do not ask how to maximize their interests but rather what would be the most appropriate response, given their position and responsibilities in an organization.</p> <p>-Networks of actors play an important role in collectively defining 'appropriate logics' of behaviour.</p> | <p>-An organization based on the cognitive frameworks and practices of the actors and the normative frameworks of the constituent organizations at a given moment in time.</p> <p>-Actors at all levels of government mobilize to address or resolve that which the normative frameworks regard as politically problematic and feasible.</p> <p>-State actors proceed according to a menu of actions and means regarded as valid (previously used administrative routines, policies and models of action).</p> | <p>-A formal and informal set of rules, procedures and norms but also complex symbolic systems, practices, cognitive scripts and moral frameworks that together provide universes of meaning that guide public action.</p> <p>-They shape individual behaviour by providing scripts, norms for behaviour and interaction, cognitive models and categories for action and interpretation of what others are doing. They also influence behaviour by specifying what should be done, as well as what one could imagine doing, in a given context.</p> <p>-They manufacture repeated social behaviours, which are taken as givens, and are supported by normative systems and cognitive interpretations that make sense of social interaction and reproduce the social order.</p> | <p>-Continuity predominates due to the inertia of reproducing the same ways of organizing collective action over long periods of time.</p> <p>-Organizations adopt new institutional practices not because they improve the efficiency of the organization but rather because they strengthen the social legitimacy of the organization and/or of its participants.</p> <p>-What is regarded as socially appropriate at a given moment comes from where the 'cultural' authority stands on an issue or sector, such as professional or academic groups or networks of actors with a certain way of looking at reality, which results in shared cognitive and normative maps.</p> <p>-Change is not random; rather, existing institutions establish the horizon of those who are considering changing or reforming the status quo.</p> <p>-The creation of institutions goes beyond their instrumental 'efficiency' and depends on collective processes of interpretation and concern about social legitimacy, which explains the prolonged presence of inconsistencies between instrumental and normative logics.</p> <p>-Change often consists in transferring normative frameworks and models of action from one organizational or national context to another ("isomorphism").</p> | <p>-Key processes for understanding the content of public action are the creation and development of models of thought and action among the members of different organizations.</p> <p>-The practices and procedures of the institutions are not explained by any type of superior efficiency associated with the preferences of the actors but rather follow specific cultural patterns and are explained in terms of rationalized myths, i.e. prescriptions regarding behaviour that is considered adequate.</p> <p>- Organizations (including the government) appear to act rationally in order to avoid social censure, minimize external accountability demands, improve their chances of securing necessary resources and raise their probability of survival.</p> <p>-Actors tend to use existing public action models and behave in line with a cultural logic (socially accepted norms and conventions): individuals that have been socialized within specific institutional roles internalize and reproduce these roles.</p> |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of P.A. Hall and R.C.R. Taylor, "Political science and the three new institutionalisms", *Political Studies*, vol. 44, No. 5, December 1996; L. Boussaguet, S. Jacquot and P. Ravinet, *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques*, Les Presses de Sciences Po, December 2004; J.G. March and J.P. Olsen, "The logic of appropriateness", *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, M. Rein, R.E. Goodin and M. Moran (eds.), Oxford University Press; B. Palier and Y. Surel, "Les 'trois I' et l'analyse de l'État en action", *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 55, No. 1, 2005 and R. Greenwood, C. Oliver and R. Suddaby, "Introduction", *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, Royston Greenwood and others (eds.), Sage Publications Ltd., 2008.

TABLE A.6
SOCIOLOGICAL-COGNITIVE NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM AS AN EXPLANATORY PARADIGM FOR PUBLIC ACTION

| Main actors and their motivations | State – government | Institutions are: | Origins of change and continuity | Public policy hypothesis |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| <p>-Actors act strategically but are socialized in specific contexts, such that their behaviour can vary depending on an array of motivations and values more complex than political or economic gain.</p> <p>-Their interests are not ‘givens’ but rather have a strong ideological and emotional component that reflects the normative orientation of the actor (moral, ethical and political) towards the context at a given moment in time.</p> <p>-They have differentiated access to strategic knowledge, resources and networks, so some have greater opportunities to influence the context.</p> <p>-They perceive their interests through the dominant cognitive frameworks and norms, although they have a margin of autonomy to define their own strategy within that framework and question it.</p> <p>-The behaviour of actors is not a direct reflection of their material interests but rather their perceptions of their material interests.</p> | <p>-The State is considered to be a set of networks of actors in various sectors of public policy.</p> <p>-The actors’ dominant cognitive frameworks give coherence to the policy sector.</p> <p>-The dominant cognitive frameworks can be questioned by other rival frameworks or frameworks from another policy sector.</p> <p>-State actors reformulate / translate events or social conditions as public problems in the framework of forums and networks in which they reinterpret and redefine public action.</p> <p>-They constantly interact with other networks (local, national and transnational).</p> | <p>-Shared ways of thinking and acting that represent a factor of order, inasmuch as they set rules, routines and operating modes for political activity and public administration.</p> <p>- Codified systems of ideas and practices (based on those ideas) that set parameters around the strategies and objectives of the actors.</p> <p>-Socially constructed: they embody culturally shared understandings, knowledge and interpretations but are also subject to struggles and conflicts between the actors.</p> <p>- They can be seen as inefficient and contradictory by the different actors, leading to conflicts around redefining them.</p> | <p>-Continuity predominates, as the cognitive frameworks of the institutions and the policies (the ideas on which they are based) shape subsequent processes.</p> <p>- Change is gradual and limited as long as the same cognitive frames prevail: the way in which public action is understood and utilized and social reality is interpreted (cause-effect relationships) is the basis for how to address new problems or act in different organizational contexts.</p> <p>- Radical changes occur in the wake of (sometimes sudden) crises in the prevailing cognitive paradigms or matrixes that modify perceptions about their legitimacy or usefulness.</p> <p>-Ideas are an autonomous factor that can spark change, since the codification (or questioning) of ideas and paradigms are contingent processes.</p> <p>-Through forums or networks, actors go about modifying and adapting sectoral, national and even global cognitive matrixes.</p> | <p>-Ideas play a central role in the invention, justification, dissemination, continuity and change of public action models.</p> <p>-Institutionalization is explained by the normalization of public policy paradigms.</p> <p>-Perceptions about what is possible, legitimate or desirable are moulded both by the institutional environment in which the actors find themselves and by the prevailing paradigms and worldviews.</p> <p>-Change in ideas precedes institutional change: policy paradigms are internalized by politicians, officials, experts and other actors, who develop an array of ‘legitimate’ techniques, mechanisms and instruments for public policy, defining its scope, goals and objectives.</p> <p>-Periods of normalcy in the policy process characterized by incremental change and extraordinary periods are associated with, respectively, the dominance of certain parameters and models of public action or paradigmatic crises in which these are questioned.</p> <p>-In times of crisis, actors search out new ideas and models of public action whose impact can modify their perceptions of their interests and their strategies.</p> <p>- In each national context or sector, the actors go about redefining the paradigms that underpin public policy through processes of discussion, dissemination and imitation of public policies.</p> |

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of P.A. Hall, “Policy paradigms, social learning, and the state: the case of economic policymaking in Britain”, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 25, No. 3, April 1993; C. Hay, “Constructivist institutionalism”, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, R.A.W. Rhodes, S.A. Binder and B.A. Rockman (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2006; P. Müller, “L’analyse cognitive des politiques publiques: vers une sociologie politique de l’action publique”, *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. 50, No. 2, 2000, P. Müller, *Les politiques publiques*, Presses Universitaires de France - PUF, February, 2008; Vivien A. Schmidt, “Taking ideas and discourse seriously: explaining change through discursive institutionalism as the fourth ‘new institutionalism’”, *European Political Science Review*, vol. 2, No. 01, 2010; Vivien A. Schmidt, “Discursive institutionalism: the explanatory power of ideas and discourse”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 11, No. 1, June 2008; Surel, Y. (1998), “Idées, intérêts, institutions dans l’analyse des politiques publiques”, *Pouvoirs*, No. 87, November and B. Palier and Y. Surel, “Les ‘trois I’ et l’analyse de l’État en action”, *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 55, No. 1, 2005.



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