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The Emergence and Persistence of Entrepreneurship Policy—  
A Policy Process Perspective

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Policy—A Policy Process Perspective**

Doctoral dissertation

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

This dissertation seeks to explain key factors behind the emergence and persistence of entrepreneurship policy across OECD countries in the developed world. The term entrepreneurship policy refers to a set of public policy instruments aimed at promoting entrepreneurship in specific socioeconomic contexts. These instruments include support services, educational activities, and subsidized financial support for current and prospective entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship policy became widespread in the 1990s and has since remained a stable feature of government programs. Its persistence is geographically widespread, with measures implemented across most countries and by multiple levels of government. However, this enduring presence across time and jurisdictions stands in contrast to the ongoing ambiguity surrounding the objectives and the results of these measures. This dynamic of emergence and persistence despite the policy's ambiguities is the focus of the dissertation.

A recent OECD (2023) report noted that many entrepreneurship policy programs lacked clearly specified objectives, citing this as the number one concern to be addressed (p. 36). Moreover, it identified the “absence of reflection on potential alternative policy approaches to achieving SME and entrepreneurship objectives” as the second most important problem regarding the evaluations of such programs (pp. 36–37). These concerns indicate that the lack of clearly defined objectives makes it difficult to evaluate the programs and to compare them against alternative approaches. Scholarly publications have also raised concerns about entrepreneurship policy. Researchers have noted that these policies often have unclear rationales (e.g., Acs et al., 2016; Arshed et al., 2014); have too many, confused, or overly distant objectives (Irwin and Scott, 2021; McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2016); or are difficult to evaluate because of the lack of essential information (Lundström et al., 2014).

While there are explicit concerns about this ambiguity, the sustained intensity of specialized expert activity is also a notable trait of entrepreneurship policy. Specialized initiatives and institutions such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Bosma, 2013) or the Global Entrepreneurship Network (2022b) show that the application of these policy instruments is widely and consistently discussed in an active community of

experts who specialized in the topic. At the same time, entrepreneurship policy generates almost no political conflict and is widely considered to be a form of government action that enjoys cross-party support. Entrepreneurship policy is not only persistent in formal-institutional terms, but also actively sustained as the object of specialized professional attention. To explain these characteristics of entrepreneurship policy, this research relies on theoretical work that can explain its emergence and persistence, its ambiguities, and the motivations and effects of the specialized expert activities.

To achieve these aims, the dissertation relies on the theories of policy process, a field of study that seeks to understand the interactions between public policies and actors, events, contexts, and outcomes (Weible, 2018b, p. 2). Entrepreneurship policy has been studied extensively in the economics literature, but it has not been researched from the perspective of the policy process theories. The existing economics literature has identified the ambiguities discussed above, but policy process theories can help explain the underlying factors that have contributed to the persistence of entrepreneurship policy and its related characteristics. Studying entrepreneurship policy from a policy process perspective also advances the general understanding of the interactions that surround public policies.

The analysis is based on the empirical expectations that can be derived from a recent theoretical innovation, the concept of instrument constituencies. The concept was introduced by Voß and Simons (2014) to describe the social life that can emerge around policy instruments, creating a community of specialists who then work toward the expansion of the policy instrument. An instrument constituency consists of actors in various roles in public governance, international organizations, NGOs, consultancy, and academia. Their cohesion as a group comes from their interest in the policy instrument rather than from other shared characteristics. Instrument constituencies are distinct from other conceptualized collective entities such as advocacy coalitions or epistemic communities, which differ in both their composition and key characteristics.

The concept of instrument constituencies is connected to different broader theoretical frameworks in the scholarly field of policy process theories. Most importantly, it is related to the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), originating from the work of John Kingdon (2014). Other frameworks can also be connected to the concept, such as

Policy Feedback Theory (PFT), Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET), and theories of Policy Diffusion and Innovation (PDI), because policy process approaches are not theoretically mutually exclusive. Connecting the analysis of entrepreneurship policy with this line of theoretical work can offer insights into how this empirical puzzle relates to broad and general patterns in public policy.

To address these aims, the empirical research is structured around the following questions:

1. What factors have contributed to the enduring and widespread persistence of entrepreneurship policy measures?
2. Did the implementation of entrepreneurship policies lead to the emergence of a transnationally influential instrument constituency, that is, a community of specialists whose work revolves around this set of policy measures?
3. Have the activities of this instrument constituency contributed to the spread and persistence of entrepreneurship policy measures?
4. Does an explanation based on the concept of instrument constituencies have stronger explanatory power than rival explanations?

To answer these questions, the empirical expectations based on the instrument constituencies literature were formulated in detail, relying primarily on the propositions developed by Simons and Voß (2018). The analysis explores the historical evolution of entrepreneurship policy using the available written sources and examines entrepreneurship policy based on 20 expert interviews conducted with experts from different OECD countries.

## **1.2 Findings and Structure of the Dissertation**

First, the analysis shows that there is a transnationally active instrument constituency around entrepreneurship policy, and that its activities contribute to the persistence of entrepreneurship policy. This instrument constituency consists of specialists and experts who are engaged with entrepreneurship policy in a transnational dimension. They form an active community with specialized events, forums, projects, and initiatives centered around entrepreneurship policy, demonstrating a shared interest in entrepreneurship policy measures. They are otherwise a diverse group, assuming different functions related to public policy. Their motivations for engaging with the

policy also vary, and there is no identifiable, clear pattern of shared political beliefs or other convictions among them.

Second, the findings of the analysis show that the presence and activities of a transnationally active instrument constituency constitute a key factor behind the spread and persistence of entrepreneurship policy, and that the empirical patterns match the expectations derived from the propositions. Within a constellation of factors, instrument constituencies play an important role in explaining how a collective entity of experts and practitioners contributes to this persistence. This instrument constituency dynamic does not operate in isolation, and there are other factors that also contribute to the stability of entrepreneurship policy over time. Nonetheless, the concept of instrument constituencies provides a useful lens for understanding how these different elements interact to produce the observed persistence of entrepreneurship policy over time.

Third, linking the propositions about instrument constituencies with other concepts from policy process theories helped to identify some of the key factors that have contributed to the persistence of entrepreneurship policy. These include, importantly, (i) a favorable policy image for the broader public, (ii) broad cross-party political support with limited political conflict, (iii) the disconnectedness between policy solutions and socioeconomic problems, (iv) the mechanisms of transnational policy diffusion, and (v) feedback effects caused by established ways of modeling the policy, which can generate path dependence. These elements and the activities of the instrument constituency can mutually reinforce one another, supporting the continued prominence of entrepreneurship policy. Some of the connections between instrument constituencies and these other concepts have already been established in the literature, such as their potential role in transnational policy diffusion. In other cases, these links have not been made explicit before, such as the connection between policy images and instrument constituency activities.

Fourth, the instrument constituency perspective also allows for a clearer differentiation from alternative explanations that rely on other collective entity concepts, such as advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities. The expert activities do not exhibit a strongly problem-centered dynamic; rather, entrepreneurship policy appears closely tied to the continued implementation and adaptation of specific policy instruments.

Nor is the policy topic characterized by intense conflict between competing groups. Instead, it is marked by relatively low levels of political contestation and a broad base of public support, and thus the instrument constituency perspective offers a stronger explanation than potential rival collective-entity-based explanations.

The dissertation starts in Chapter 2 with a detailed background on entrepreneurship policy and its notable characteristics. This is followed by a discussion of the relevant policy process theories in Chapter 3, including a detailed introduction to the concept of instrument constituencies and the relevant broader theoretical frameworks of the policy process. Chapter 4 explains the methodology of the analysis and sets out the empirical expectations for the analysis. The empirical analysis starts in Chapter 5 with a detailed history of entrepreneurship policy based on the available written sources. The second part of the analysis, in Chapter 6, details the results of the expert interviews, following the structure of the empirical expectations. In Chapter 7, the discussion details the findings of the analysis, their relevance for the theory, and the practical implications of the results. Chapter 8 closes the dissertation with the conclusion and summary remarks.

## **2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP POLICY: SCOPE AND CHARACTERISTICS**

### **2.1 Definition and Scope of Entrepreneurship Policy**

The concept of entrepreneurship policy is used to denote a set of public policy instruments that are labeled, modeled, and implemented together as a set of policy instruments. While there is no single clear definition, in practice, different sources label the same few policy instruments as “entrepreneurship policy.” These include subsidized or publicly provided services and financial support targeted toward entrepreneurs or individuals who would consider becoming entrepreneurs in the future (“nascent entrepreneurs”). These services include, among others, consultancy and other support, promotion or awareness-raising about entrepreneurship itself, and access to finance, usually in the form of subsidized loans or smaller grants. Additionally, the introduction of new or changed regulations that are believed to ease constraints on individuals becoming entrepreneurs or continuing their endeavors is also included in entrepreneurship policy. Detailed summaries of the types of entrepreneurship policy measures can be found in the literature (Bennett, 2014, Chapter 1; Lundström and Stevenson, 2005, p. 60; McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2016, p. 540; OECD, 2020, pp. 25–35), and further details about how the concept is connected to theories of policy process can be found at the beginning of Chapter 4.

Entrepreneurship policy has a strong international and transnational dimension. International organizations are strongly involved in the modeling and evaluation of these policies, and there are specialized non-governmental initiatives that are concerned with the subject. Entrepreneurship policy is also implemented across different geographies and jurisdictions. In this analysis, I delineate the subject by focusing only on entrepreneurship policy in developed countries. This distinction is warranted by three factors: (i) differences in the organizations involved in entrepreneurship policy in developed versus the developing nations, (ii) the distinct socioeconomic traits of these countries, and (iii) the divergent bodies of literature addressing them. Some prominent international and supranational actors, notably the OECD and the EU, are only active in the developed world, while others, like UNCTAD, focus on developing countries.

The OECD regularly lists entrepreneurship policy measures in its member states, and they are clearly widely prevalent across those countries (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2023). There are also relevant differences for entrepreneurship policy that are caused by the level of development of the countries. The relative lack of infrastructure and public services in developing countries creates a situation in which entrepreneurship policy can have a different weight than in developed countries. The availability of policy alternatives can also be different, because the marginal gains from, for example, spending on education or basic infrastructure can be seen as considerably greater in developing countries. Finally, much of the existing literature also makes this distinction either implicitly or explicitly (see for example the use of the concept of the “Western world” in Acs et al., 2016). In this dissertation, I thus limit the focus to entrepreneurship policy across the developed world, which is represented by the OECD member states as a set of countries. The OECD currently has 38 member states, which include most of the EU member states, the US, Canada, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, and some other European and South American countries (OECD, n.d.).

Further clarification is also needed to distinguish entrepreneurship policy from the related concept of small business policy. Entrepreneurship policy grew out of the already-existing “small business policies.” Some sources understand small business policy as a broader category of policy measures, while others differentiate between small business policy and entrepreneurship policy. The delineation can be unclear, and according to some scholars, the distinction between small business policies and entrepreneurship policies is not even meaningful (Arshed et al., 2014, pp. 639–640; Irwin and Scott, 2021, Introduction). However, when the distinction is made, small business policy is usually understood as referring to policy measures where already existing small businesses<sup>1</sup> are the target group (Lundström and Stevenson, 2005, p. 53), while entrepreneurship policy focuses more on individuals as subjects of the policy. Entrepreneurship policies are also understood as placing more emphasis on the early and even “nascent” phase of entrepreneurship. The definition provided by McCann and Ortega-Argilés (2016, p. 539) is similar: “SME policy applies to existing

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<sup>1</sup> They are also often referred to as small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

enterprises, whereas entrepreneurship policy relates to policies seeking to enhance the creation of new enterprises.”

There is a related but differently formulated distinction by Bennett (2014, Chapter 2) who argues that the object of entrepreneurship policy is individuals as opposed to firms. I will follow this definition and understand entrepreneurship policy as a label that denotes a set of policy measures *targeted toward individuals* to make them more likely to become successful entrepreneurs. Since, in some of the literature, entrepreneurship policy is handled together with small business policy, I use some studies that include programs labeled as small business policy, focusing on their observations that apply to entrepreneurship measures.

It is also important to highlight that the research is not about the role of entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship support in general in the economy or in society. Anything outside the realm of public policy falls outside the scope of entrepreneurship policy. The role of entrepreneurship in the economy or the labor market, or private initiatives for entrepreneurship promotion that are not publicly subsidized, for example, are not within the scope in any way. Non-governmental efforts without public funding are only the subject of this analysis if they influence or attempt to influence public policy in some way.

## **2.2 Key Characteristics of Entrepreneurship Policy**

The emergence and prevalence of entrepreneurship policy are curious phenomena, characterized by notable and seemingly contradictory features. The existing literature on entrepreneurship policy has uncovered these key characteristics and served as guidance during the initial phase of the research. These also signify the practical and scholarly relevance of the topic. In the following subchapters, I list the most important of those traits that I identified during the initial inquiry.

### **2.2.1 Rapid Emergence Followed by Stasis**

First of all, there was a *rapid emergence* of the concept of entrepreneurship policy. While small business policies have been applied since the 1950s (Bennett, 2014, Chapter 5), the idea of dedicated public policy programs for entrepreneurship only started to emerge in the 1990s (see details later in subchapter 5.1). The idea and its application, however, grew rapidly, and entrepreneurship policy became

commonplace within a few years. Moreover, it did not just become commonplace in the sense that it was applied in almost all geographical contexts across the developed world, but it also became common for nearly all levels of government to launch entrepreneurship policy programs (McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2016, p. 539). Not only national and federal governments have entrepreneurship policy programs, but also regions and municipalities at lower levels and international or supranational entities at higher levels. The activities of these different levels and departments might overlap; and while sometimes these are joint efforts, at other times different levels just seem to act on their own to launch programs.

The pattern of emergence and diffusion was also noted by the OECD (2020): “Entrepreneurship policy is a relatively recent but important policy area [...] The policy focus on entrepreneurship has been emerging since the 1990s” (p. 3). It also noted its widespread application “Most OECD countries have multiple policies and programs in place to promote productive entrepreneurship” (p. 26). It was also found in the literature that entrepreneurship policy has not changed much since, as Brown and Mason (2017) noted: “A final feature that is evident in many of the ‘new’ policy frameworks is their reliance on traditional narrowly-based policy interventions.” (p. 25).

The spread of entrepreneurship policy programs is further complicated by the fact that private entities are also often involved in the provision of publicly funded services through different arrangements. Apart from public-private partnerships, entirely private alternatives continue to coexist with publicly backed services as well. Private supply is also typically ample, with non-profits, consultants, venture capital funds, and academic institutions engaging in similar or identical services of entrepreneurship support and promotion. This broader landscape of entrepreneurship policy raises questions about why so many actors are involved in it.

### **2.2.2 Ambiguity Around Objectives and Expectations**

One possible explanation for this persistence is that it is merely based on the clear benefits that entrepreneurship policy brings to society. However, this is in contrast with the findings of the review of evaluations by the OECD (2023, p. 36), which found that policy objectives were often unclear, and in several cases, even absent in entrepreneurship policy programs. Bennett (2014, Chapter 3) pointed out how policies

can lag behind changing circumstances and that their aims may also be “deliberately obfuscated”. Arshed et al. (2014) found, in their overview, that policy rationales were often unclear during policy formulation and that “considerable time and effort was attributed in legitimizing the policy interest” (p. 654). Irwin and Scott (2021, Introduction) noted how small business and entrepreneurship policy in England has “confused policy goals.”

McCann and Ortega-Argilés (2016) emphasized that too many or too distant objectives can be another problem: “Many policies appear to have multiple—and often too many—goals, while others have stated objectives—such as raising GDP—which are realistically too far away from the individual policy actions or interventions to be meaningful.” (p. 543). Acs et al. (2016) note that “public policies to encourage individuals to become entrepreneurs generally lack a demonstrable economic rationale” (p. 36). Román et al. (2013) stressed the importance of clarifying whether start-up incentives are counted as active labor market policy or entrepreneurship policy, arguing that, according to their findings, these incentives only work as labor market programs: “prior to evaluating the effectiveness of policy intervention in this area, a much deeper reflection about policy objectives and target groups is required” (p. 171). Another concern in the literature is that unlike many other policies, even basic information about the costs is often unavailable for the evaluation of entrepreneurship policy (Lundström et al., 2014, p. 942).

Some researchers went even further and questioned the effectiveness of entrepreneurship policy programs in delivering the desired public benefits. Notably, Shane (2009) started the abstract of his journal article, titled “Why encouraging more people to become entrepreneurs is bad public policy”, with the following words: “Policy makers often think that creating more start-up companies will transform depressed economic regions, generate innovation, and create jobs. This belief is flawed because the typical start-up is not innovative, creates few jobs, and generates little wealth.”. Fotopoulos and Storey (2019) in their analysis of entrepreneurship policy in Wales, found that it was ineffective, and that increases in entrepreneurial activity in some parts of the UK can be better explained by prior economic growth rather than public programs targeting entrepreneurship: “in a low-enterprise country such as Wales, the use of considerable public funding to directly raise enterprise rates has not been effective in the medium term” (p. 205).

Cunha and Arvate (2021, p. 548) expressed how their findings show that entrepreneurship policy can often fail completely without strong monitoring: “we also question the suitability of unrestricted government-led programs for promoting entrepreneurship. In fact, these types of less rigid program may actually lower the incidence of individuals engaged in entrepreneurship”. Lucas et al., (2018) also expressed strong concerns about the effectiveness of the programs:

“our evaluation of the Standard view of entrepreneurship policy suggests an inconsistency among means and ends that is deeper than is regularly acknowledged. While we agree with entrepreneurship policy interventionists that an ‘entrepreneurial society’ is conducive to economic development, our framework suggests that targeted efforts to promote entrepreneurship may be inconsistent with that goal” (p. 351)

Unclear objectives make it challenging to judge how much benefit these programs can achieve. They also make it difficult to pin down the expectations for entrepreneurship policy. This can result in different actors having different expectations, and while this is not necessarily a problem in itself, expectations can be conflicting at times. Following the same logic, it is important to know in what cases we would deem a program unsuccessful. Public policy always has costs, resources spent on something could have been spent elsewhere or could have been “left with taxpayers”. From a public-benefit perspective, some information about effectiveness is necessary to make choices between alternative courses of public policy. While public policy tends to be ambiguous and complex in most cases, entrepreneurship policy seems to be associated with a particular complexity of benefits.

### **2.2.3 Concentrated Technical Discussion, Lack of Political Conflict**

The ambiguities recognized around the objectives of entrepreneurship policy are even more interesting when we consider the extent of specialized expert activity around it. The topic is characterized by a concentration of technical discussion within expert circles and at the same time, it does not generate intense political debate; political conflict is almost absent around it. There are different initiatives that indicate the intensity and scale of expert activity. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) is an influential initiative that monitors entrepreneurial framework conditions across countries, with the participation of national expert teams from more than 60 countries,

including most OECD members (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, n.d.-c). The Global Entrepreneurship Network, a separate initiative, has a platform called “GEN Policy”, which also has members from the public administration of 60 different countries (Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2022b). Their extensive activities are also reflected in their large-scale international events, such as the Global Entrepreneurship Congress and the Global Entrepreneurship Summit (Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2022b, pp. 25–29). Another private organization, the specialized consultancy Startup Genome, states that they have “worked with more than 180 economic and innovation ministries and public/private agencies in over 65 countries” (Startup Genome, n.d.). International organizations also have specialized committees and departments, such as the “Committee on SMEs and Entrepreneurship” and the “Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities” (CFE) of the OECD (see OECD/European Commission, 2021, p. 6). The expert discussion is intense, and at the same time quite technical and rather narrowly specialized in entrepreneurship policy.

Entrepreneurship policy is also often described as an area that generates consensus across political party lines (Irwin and Scott, 2021). Bipartisan support was also observed in the case of small business policies before the emergence of entrepreneurship policy (Anglund, 1998). While it is widely applied, the question arises as to whether there is any criticism or opposition in some circles, which might not be obvious without a more detailed exploration of the topic. There are other public policies that have a lot of conflict around them, such as building nuclear power plants or replacing car lanes with bicycle lanes. Compared to these, conflict seems largely absent around entrepreneurship policy.

### 3 THEORIES OF THE POLICY PROCESS

The analysis of entrepreneurship policies from the perspective of public policy scholarship has been limited so far. Arshed et al. (2014) identified that the ineffectiveness of these policies in delivering the promised socioeconomic results is related to the policy formulation and the institutional arrangements behind these policies. In their case study about the formulation of relevant policies in the UK, they highlighted how the related policy process diverges from the functionalist ideals of the policy cycle, and how “institutional entrepreneurs” within the public administration used the policy formulation process to advance their interests. While their findings can be in line with what different policy process theories posit, their observations were not connected to contemporary policy process literature because they came from a different scholarly tradition.

Irwin and Scott (2021) examined the politics around small business and entrepreneurship policy in England, but their work focused on the legislative processes, and they applied institutional theory, a different scholarly tradition. Anglund (1998, 1999) also analyzed, in detail, the role of problem definitions, problem perception, and popular ideas in the success of US small business policies, but her work preceded the emergence of entrepreneurship policy. Applying the insights of public policy scholarship can thus greatly contribute to a better understanding of entrepreneurship policy.

Entrepreneurship policy is, often studied by economists who are interested in the subject of entrepreneurship in general. Most of their work has been published in journals such as *Small Business Economics* or outlets of development economics. This disciplinary tradition looks at the subject from a different perspective, and while these studies are numerous, they have almost no connection to state-of-the-art theories in policy process research. Economic studies tend to focus on the effectiveness of particular policy programs, and they often do not reflect on the broader context of public policy. The available studies that try to understand entrepreneurship as a broader policy phenomenon either do not utilize insights from policy process research (Acs et al., 2016; Arshed et al., 2014) or only rely on the policy cycle model like Smallbone (2016), which is no longer considered an accurate model by policy process

scholars. These efforts thus remain disconnected from the insights that policy process research has accumulated over the last few decades by studying other public policy topics.

In my research, I rely on both policy process research and entrepreneurship scholarship. The former offers a solid foundation for theorizing the processes that shape public policy. The latter provides information about the characteristics and history of this policy area. Connecting the two and supplementing them with original empirical research has allowed me to understand the topic in more detail than previous research has and can contribute to both discussions.

### **3.1 Theory Selection**

I aim to understand what factors contribute to the persistence of entrepreneurship policy measures, despite the ambiguities associated with them. To achieve this, I ground the empirical work in a theoretical literature that can account for persistence, ambiguity, and the specialized, networked expert activities surrounding entrepreneurship policy. The existing scholarly literature and the body of policy documents presented in the previous chapter directed me toward the theories of the policy process, which constitute a major research strand within the scholarly literature on public policy (Weible, 2018b). Entrepreneurship policy has some key characteristics that emerged in the initial review and have clear implications for theory selection for its analysis. The key attributes of the case that guide the selection of the theories can be summarized as follows:

- *Divergence from a normative-functionalist ideal* of policymaking. The literature has noted certain concerns, such as confusion around policy objectives, a lack of adequate evaluations, and questions around effectiveness (see Section 2.2.2, above). These characteristics imply that functionalism cannot account well for its outcomes.
- *Temporal dynamics of policy evolution*. The history of the emergence of entrepreneurship policy shows that, after a more rapid phase of development, it entered a phase of stasis, as it remained persistently applied across diverse geographies and socioeconomic situations without much change (see Section

2.2.1). This suggests that theoretical propositions that deal with different periods of stasis and acceleration should be incorporated into the analysis.

- *Concentrated technical discussion and specialized expert community.* Entrepreneurship policy has its own largely specialized expert network, and the discussion around it is concentrated on specific interventions. There seems to be little political conflict around it, and the discussion is rather technical. (see Section 2.2.3). This implies that it can be fruitful to look at theoretical propositions that have meaningful implications about the role of a specialized expert community in the policy process.

These characteristics of the case narrow down the range of useful theoretical frameworks and concepts within policy process scholarship. In the coming sections, I elaborate in more detail on why a functionalist interpretation of the case is insufficient, then I identify which theoretical frameworks are most relevant for explaining the case. To arrive at useful, testable empirical predictions about the evolution and persistence of entrepreneurship policy, I review the existing theoretical literature on public policy processes. Since there is no single unified overarching theoretical framework in this scholarship, I review multiple theories and concepts to construct the empirical expectations for the analysis, with the goals of (i) adequately connecting the case with existing scholarship, (ii) operationalizing the analysis in a way that allows the results to be connected to the literature, and (iii) drawing appropriate inferences regarding the theory and the practical relevance of the findings.

### **3.1.1 Divergence from a Normative-Functionalist Ideal**

The first step in exploring the theories is to consider how the case can diverge from a functionalist understanding of the policy process. Possibly the most common depiction of the policy process is the *policy cycle*, and in non-academic discussions, the description of the policy process often stops with this model. The policy cycle is an early model of the policy process that can be traced back to Harold D. Lasswell's work in the 1950s (Weible, 2018b; Weible et al., 2022). This model describes the policy process as stages of decision-making, and it is also referred to as the "stages heuristic" (Nowlin, 2011, p. 41). These stages usually include "agenda setting, policy formulation and adoption, policy implementation, evaluation, and termination" (Weible, 2018b, p. 3). In both textbooks and policy documents, the policy process is

usually portrayed as this ordered sequence of steps in a calculated decision-making process. Behind the popularity of the policy cycle possibly lies the fact that a process like that would fulfill well the normative criteria of welfare maximization in public policy well.

The problem with this model, however, is that it is now generally rejected by scholars as an accurate depiction of how actual public policies are formulated (Weible et al., 2009). This simplistic portrayal is at best considered a useful heuristic, but not a proven theory. The more developed conceptual frameworks diverge from simple functionalist explanations and aim to provide a more complex and realistic portrayal of the policy processes we can observe in the real world. Nevertheless, functionalist models remain a normative reference point for how policy formulation, implementation, and reformulation are expected to work, and they are still widely referenced by governments, international organizations, and other actors to describe policy processes (see, for example, European Commission, 2025, pp. 4–5; López Acevedo and Krause, 2012, p. 23). Continuous improvement and a solid socioeconomic rationale are key normative requirements in this description of policymaking.

If this normative-functionalist understanding of the policy cycle were a universally true theory, it would be rather simple to explain the case of my research. It would mean that the emergence and persistence of entrepreneurship policy can be explained by the assumption that the policy measures simply serve their function well: they are effective means of reaching the desired ends through careful periodic evaluation, reformulation, and implementation. Yet moving beyond a functionalist model is relevant for analyzing entrepreneurship policy, because the observable outcome of the policy differs from what we would expect as the outcome of a functionalist explanation.

The confusion around the objectives goes against a functionalist policy cycle interpretation, as clarity about the goals of the policy is required for calculated decision-making and the periodic evaluation of policies. There is a wide variety of socioeconomic problems that these measures are supposed to mitigate. They are supposed to accelerate economic growth, foster innovation, advance the inclusion of disadvantaged minorities, and lower unemployment, among other objectives (see, for example, Bennett, 2014, Chapter 2; Lundström and Stevenson, 2005, pp. 122–124; see also the variety of rationales in European Commission, 2012). What we can see is that

problems vary greatly, yet instruments are largely the same across time and jurisdictions. Another sign that the outcome diverges from what would be expected from a functionalist explanation is the presence of critical voices regarding the effectiveness of these policies in the academic community. If these critical voices appear to remain unaccounted for during the reformulations of these policies, that also warrants closer examination.

The inadequacy of functionalist explanations is also suggested by the stability of entrepreneurship policy measures despite large-scale changes in economic and social conditions. It is enough to think about how much the economic and social conditions changed before, during, and after the Great Recession of 2008–2009, yet these policies remained essentially the same. This can be seen, for example, in the interim evaluation of the EU’s SME and entrepreneurship program, COSME. When comparing COSME with its predecessor, the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Program (EIP) the evaluation states: “The EIP and COSME look very much alike.... In most cases, the specific actions that were implemented or piloted in the EIP programme were continued also in COSME, with only minor changes, if any” (Technopolis and European Commission, 2017, p. 6). Substantially different unemployment and growth figures did not seem to bring about changes in these policies, even though these indicators are often referred to in the stated rationale for these measures. It is also important to note that these policies are largely similar across very different geographical areas and levels of governance, despite the fact that these jurisdictions have rather different socioeconomic conditions.

### **3.1.2 Temporal Dynamics in Policy Process Theories**

Acknowledgement of the limitations of functionalist interpretations directs the search toward theoretical explanations that can better account for the policy process dynamics of evolution and persistence. The relevant theories that aim to explain how public policies evolve and change, belong to the stream of research known as policy process theories. This field of study emerged in the 1950s, when some scholars started to focus on the formulation of public policies. (Weible, 2018b). Policy processes are understood as the “interactions that occur over time between public policies and surrounding actors, events, contexts, and outcomes.” (Weible and Carter, 2016, p. 27). A diverse set of theories and conceptual frameworks belongs to policy process

research. These were developed mostly independently of one another. They have different focal points and different vocabularies; they can both contradict and complement each other. (Heikkila and Cairney, 2018, pp. 301–302)

Theories of the policy process differ slightly in how they analyze public policy. Defining the dependent variable, which is also called the outcome variable, is a challenging task in policy research, as there are different levels and layers of public policy (Kay and Baker, 2015, p. 8). The definition of the dependent variable already directs me to theories that use a similar level of abstraction. As in this research, I attempt to understand the observed outcome of emergence and persistence that unfolded over multiple decades, the temporal scope of any applied theory cannot be too narrow. A relevant theory has to include propositions related to these temporal changes, which, in the case of public policies, span several years or even decades. Tosun and Workman (2023, pp. 325–326) note how time is prominent in the Multiple Streams Framework, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, Policy Diffusion and Innovation theories and the Advocacy Coalition Framework. Policy Feedback Theory also concentrates on the time dimension, as it compares public policies at different points in time (Mettler and SoRelle, 2018, p. 107).

Another consideration is that the testable theoretical element must also be appropriate for a single case study. Concrete causal propositions that can be tested in a case study must be formulated; therefore, the theorized causal mechanisms and the units of observation also need to be operationalizable. Van der Heijden et al. (2021) wrote in detail about the causal mechanisms in policy process theories. Their findings show that the existing theoretical frameworks do not elaborate the underlying causal mechanisms entirely clearly. Defining empirically testable causal propositions thus requires effort from the scholars who engage with a particular research project. It is recognized that the tools from these frameworks tend to be “more complementary than contending” (Petridou, 2014, p. S12). Van der Heijden et al. (2021, p. 180) also note that, as the policy process frameworks overlap considerably, specifying and testing concrete mechanisms can have meaningful implications for more than one framework. These considerations imply that beyond simply choosing a broad framework, further theorization of the causal mechanisms can be beneficial for the case. I continue the theoretical overview with those approaches that also focus on the actors in the policy

process (see Tosun and Workman, 2023, p. 335), and, at the same time, can account for the temporal dimension of the policy process.

### **3.1.3 Collective Entities in the Policy Process**

Within the scholarship, there are different concepts that describe the role of groups of actors in the policy process (Cairney and Heikkila, 2023, p. 306). Policy measures are planned, promoted, implemented, and maintained not by isolated individuals but rather by complex institutional arrangements and networks of actors who rely on each other in their work. Actors can form groups or networks that can be described as collective entities that show the signs of collective action in the policy process. The literature recognizes a number of different concepts of collective entities in the policy process. The most notable of these are advocacy coalitions, policy communities, and epistemic communities, and there are also more recently introduced concepts such as instrument constituencies. Further advancing the typologies of policy actors, including collective entities, is a developing area in policy process research (Nohrstedt et al., 2023, pp. 144–145).

In the case of entrepreneurship policy, there are intense activities in the form of expert networks, events, specialized working groups and dense interdependencies. The basic characteristics of entrepreneurship policy point toward the concept of instrument constituencies as a theoretical construct that conceptualizes collective entities with characteristics that plausibly match these initial observations. An instrument constituency is a type of collective entity composed of professionals who have a common interest in the promotion of a particular policy instrument or set of instruments. As social entities, they can come into existence with the emergence of policy instruments, and their subsequent activities are directed toward sustaining and expanding the instrument, which as a result, can become “oversupplied”.

Some of the other commonly applied concepts describe collective entities that have different characteristics. They are centered around either a coherent belief system as in advocacy coalitions, or specific problems as in epistemic communities, and are therefore more distant from the specificities of policy implementation. The confusion and ambiguity around the objectives of entrepreneurship policy, as well as the technical, instrument-centered nature of the expert discussion, suggest the lack of shared beliefs or a shared commitment to specific problems. The closeness of the

expert discussion to the instruments and implementation points toward an instrument-constituency explanation for the collective entity activities.

The concept of instrument constituencies serves as the focal point for the empirical analysis, as it is not only able to account for the collective entity dynamics of the case, but also helps to situate the case in the broader context of policy process dynamics. In the next section I present a detailed description of the concept and the empirical expectations attached to it. I then compare and distinguish the concept of ICs from other collective entity concepts in the policy process, most notably the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)<sup>2</sup> and the theory of epistemic communities (EC). The final part of Subchapter 3.3 situates the concept of instrument constituencies in the broader theoretical context. I describe the above-mentioned broader frameworks later in the chapter, with the aim of situating the concept of instrument constituencies in the broader theoretical context (the MSF, the PFT, the PET, and the PDI). I then show how the propositions associated with the concept of instrument constituencies can be interpreted in relation to these broad theoretical frameworks.

### **3.2 The Concept of Instrument Constituencies**

Recent work on policy processes has introduced the concept of instrument constituencies. The goal is to provide a theorized explanation of how policy instruments develop over time by introducing a new concept that describes a group of actors active in the policy process (Béland et al., 2018b). Instrument constituencies are composed of actors dedicated to the promotion of a particular policy instrument across different issue areas and jurisdictions (Voß and Simons, 2014). Actors are amalgamated by their commitment to a particular policy instrument or a particular way of implementing certain policies.

Their presence was most notably demonstrated in relation to emissions trading systems and other environmental policy instruments (Fitch-Roy et al., 2019; Grashof, 2021; Mann and Simons, 2015; Pischke and Wellstead, 2020; Voß and Simons, 2014; Zito,

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<sup>2</sup> Advocacy Coalition Framework is also considered a broader framework within policy process scholarship (Cairney and Heikkila, 2023). However, since this research focuses on the collective entity within the framework, I treat it separately from the other broad frameworks.

2018), as well as social policy instruments, such as pension privatization and cash transfers (Béland and Howlett, 2016; Béland et al. 2018a; Foli et al. 2018; Saguin and Howlett, 2019). There is also a line of literature that has covered processual policy instruments in public administration, such as “evidence-based policy” (Falkenström and Svallfors, 2022; Simons and Schniedermann, 2021) and behavioral policy (Strassheim, 2021). Case studies have covered other diverse instruments as well, such as fuel taxation (Perl and Burke, 2018), cluster policies (Blümel, 2021), social investments policy for regional development (Nicholls and Teasdale, 2021), and the third-country resettlement system in immigration policy (Ekstedt and Lundstedt, 2024).

ICs’ activities are centered around the promotion and implementation of a particular policy instrument. This differs from other theorized reasons why stakeholders may organize themselves to promote a policy solution, such as a common interest in addressing a particular socioeconomic *problem* or a dedication to certain (political) *beliefs*. (Béland and Howlett, 2016, p. 397). They are composed of diverse experts who are involved in the planning, implementation, and analysis of particular policy measures, whether they are within the bureaucracy or external suppliers of services, like consultants. Also central to the concept of ICs is the disconnectedness of problems and solutions. According to the associated propositions, the instruments can be detached from the problems because they are promoted by a particular group, largely regardless of whether the instrument helps to alleviate a problem. This “solutions chase problems” phenomenon has already been described by Kingdon (Béland and Howlett, 2016), and was further discussed by others (see, for example, Boscarino, 2009).

The concept of ICs also stands in stark contrast to functionalist depictions of public policy. The disconnectedness between solutions and problems, and the promotion of instruments for the sake of those who have an interest in their implementation, go against the purely functionalist rationales presented behind a policymaking (Voß and Simons, 2014). This is central to the concept of instrument constituencies, as the differentiation between the “functional and structural promises” of policy instruments aims to explain how structural interests can derail policies from fulfilling their promised functions. In a more detailed introduction to the concept of instrument constituencies, I review the most important propositions, as they are central to evaluating the empirical observations of my research. This is followed by reflections

on how the concept of ICs differs from the other two most important collective entity concepts in the policy process, the advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities.

### **3.2.1 Main Propositions**

#### *3.2.1.1 Instruments Develop a Life of Their Own*

The first proposition of Simons and Voß (2018, pp. 15–16) is that in an early phase of the introduction of new policies, policy instruments can develop “a life of their own”, with a social life and agency emerging around them. Specific instruments of governance are developed by specific actors. The interactions of these actors are not merely functional or instrumental, rather, a “social life” can arise among them. Through interactions between the different functions related to the planning and implementation of the policy, as well as interactions across different jurisdictions, the actors involved can develop various interdependencies in their work.

#### *3.2.1.2 Shared Interests Align Agency*

The second proposition describes how the expected prospective structures lead to shared interests among the heterogenous actors, which results in aligned agency (Simons and Voß, 2018, pp. 17–19). They come to rely on each other in their activities related to the policy instrument, and as their interactions become more intense and their activities more interconnected, they can develop cohesion among themselves. This cohesion creates agency, which can later lead to the active promotion of their favored instrument. The promotion of an instrument can result in the phenomenon that the discussion around the policy instruments becomes detached from the socioeconomic problems public policy supposed to mitigate. This is the central point of the concept of instrument constituencies, that they can shift the focus of policymaking from problems or broad goals to the details of how, when and where a particular configuration of governing instruments should be applied.

#### *3.2.1.3 Modeling and Implementation Become Interdependent*

This brings us to another important aspect, namely that the modelling and the implementation of the policy instrument go hand-in-hand in instrument constituencies (Simons and Voß, 2018, pp. 19–20). There are various interdependencies between the actors engaged in these two types of activities, and the modeling and implementation activities mutually reinforce each other in a direction that is favorable for the

constituency (Voß and Simons, 2014). While not necessarily all the actors involved in these activities are part of the instrument constituency, it is likely that the constituency at least mediates the connection between modeling and implementation. Evaluations, implementation guidelines, and consultancy activities are examples of what such mediation can look like in practice. The role of the different levels of governance is also interesting, as modeling and implementation are often far from each other in the hierarchy of public governance. This can provide opportunities for such mediation activities to bridge the gap between these functions.

#### 3.2.1.4 “Structural Promises” Are Sources of Stability

Important propositions are related to the differentiation between *functional and structural promises* of a policy instrument and the role of these two kinds of promises in the formation and cohesion of instrument constituencies (Simons and Voß, 2018, pp. 20–22). While functional promises are related to how the policy can change the state of society for the better, structural promises are related to how the planning and implementation of the policy can create favorable positions for the actors involved. (Voß and Simons, 2014, p. 739). These structural promises can include the establishment of new institutions, an increased demand for the services of certain experts, the expansion of a particular field of research, or new opportunities to manage the implementation of specific policy programs. More simply put, structural promises can mean jobs, budget lines, opportunities to demonstrate success, and other incentives for the professionals involved.

Structural promises are typically not made explicit when a policy instrument is presented to a broader audience. Yet they are important in motivating the experts to promote a specific policy instrument. Thus, the prospective structures that are needed for the enactment of the instrument, foster the formation of instrument constituencies. They create aligned interests among the different actors, which can generate coordination and agency to promote the instrument.

Structural promises are important beyond the formation phase, as they also have a crucial role in keeping the cohesion of an instrument constituency over the long term. Once implementation is underway and the necessary structures are established for implementation, different roles become necessary to maintain the operation of these instruments. The structural configurations can keep the interests of different types of

actors aligned, which brings stability (or even a stalemate like *lock-in*) into an instrument constituency. While the concrete benefits vary for the different actors, they remain incentivized to maintain and promote the favored instrument.

#### 3.2.1.5 “Functional Promises” Support Public Acceptance

While structural promises have a crucial role, functional promises are also important. They create an acceptance in the eyes of the public, or even among experts in other areas and among politicians and decision-makers who are further away from the details (Simons and Voß, 2018, p. 24). Functional promises bring the outside support that is necessary for the initial establishment of the structures, and then also deliver the results that are needed for the continuation or expansion of the applications. What is important to note is that the interpretation of functional expectations and results often remains in the hands of those actors who are part of the instrument constituency. Those experts who are concerned with the planning, modeling, and evaluation of the instruments are just as much part of the constituency as those who are involved in the implementation. They define what can be expected from an instrument, and later they also interpret the results, and formulate recommendations, and make or future promises.

#### 3.2.1.6 Reflexive Coordination

“Self-organization” and “reflexive coordination” are additional characteristics of instrument constituencies proposed by Simon and Voß (2018, pp. 24–25). After an initial formation stage, the actors forming the constituency stick together, amalgamated by the structural benefits the instrument offers. The instrument constituencies then can become *reflexive* and can start to display collective actor qualities. The constituent actors can benefit from further expansion of the instrument, which can induce them to coordinate for collective action. They might organize platforms, conferences, or even associations, which help them to act jointly toward the promotion of the instrument. While these collective actor qualities are not necessarily displayed by every instrument constituency, we can expect that the constituencies will develop in this direction if the available structural promises provide them with sufficient incentives to invest in self-coordination.

### *3.2.1.7 Socio-Material Infrastructure*

Simons and Voß (2018, pp. 25–26) also identify the development of instrument-specific socio-material infrastructure as an important part of the activities of ICs. These elements of the infrastructure can include databases or datasets, documents (like practice standards and guidelines), metrics, specific credentials or permits, or even software. These can include “non-argumentative elements” (Voß and Simons, 2014), and indeed many infrastructure elements lack overt argumentation, such as, data or software. Even written documents can be largely devoid of explanations about why the policy measure is necessary and how it can reach the intended socioeconomic goals, instead focusing on the details of implementation. This infrastructure of technical elements can reinforce the position of the instrument constituency in promoting the instrument. These elements can increase path-dependency through the framing of the problem, by increasing the barriers to entry into implementation or modelling, including even entering the discussion about the issue. Designing this infrastructure in line with the mindset of the constituency thus further improves its position. Professional organizations, NGOs, and supranational entities indeed often create a variety of these technical elements. Entrepreneurship policy is not an exception, widely used databases and practice standards are maintained by the for example the OECD (see for example OECD, 2020). These certainly warrant a closer look from this perspective.

### *3.2.1.8 Solutions Are Detached from Problems*

A key proposition of the authors is that instrument constituencies can promote their preferred policy solution independently of specific problem definitions or policy rationales (Simons and Voß, 2018, pp. 26–27). An instrument constituency seeks to sustain or expand the use of a given policy instrument by linking it to different policy problems as the context changes. Active attempts to connect a particular policy solution to different socioeconomic problems are a distinctive empirical expectation attached to the concept. Empirically, we can expect that an established instrument constituency will, over time, adjust how the rationale for its favored instrument is framed to attach it to problems that became more salient over time. The instrument-centered interest of the actors enables a flexibility in this regard, and while their preference for the instrument remains, they can adjust the narrative around its effects. The above-described connectedness of modelling and implementation also makes the

instrument constituency more capable of actively attaching the instrument as a solution to different problems.

#### 3.2.1.9 “Supply Push” Across Different Stages and Jurisdictions

Instrument constituencies create increased availability of their favored instrument by actively promoting it, this is often labelled as a “supply push” of the policy instrument. (Voß and Simons, 2014). Instrument constituencies have an interest in the diffusion of the instrument, therefore, as a result of their active promotion, the specific instrument becomes applied in a variety of jurisdictions, levels of governance, and possibly even across different policy domains (Simons and Voß, 2018, pp. 27–29). In the case of the presence of an instrument constituency, we can expect that the application of the instrument will be visible across different territories and units of governance. Moreover, as instrument constituencies tend to be involved also in the different stages of implementation and evaluation, their activities are also present at different temporal points in the policy process. Through exerting influence and control, they actively create linkages in time and across jurisdictions, which can be described as “trans-local and trans-temporal linkages” (Simons and Voß, 2018, p. 29).

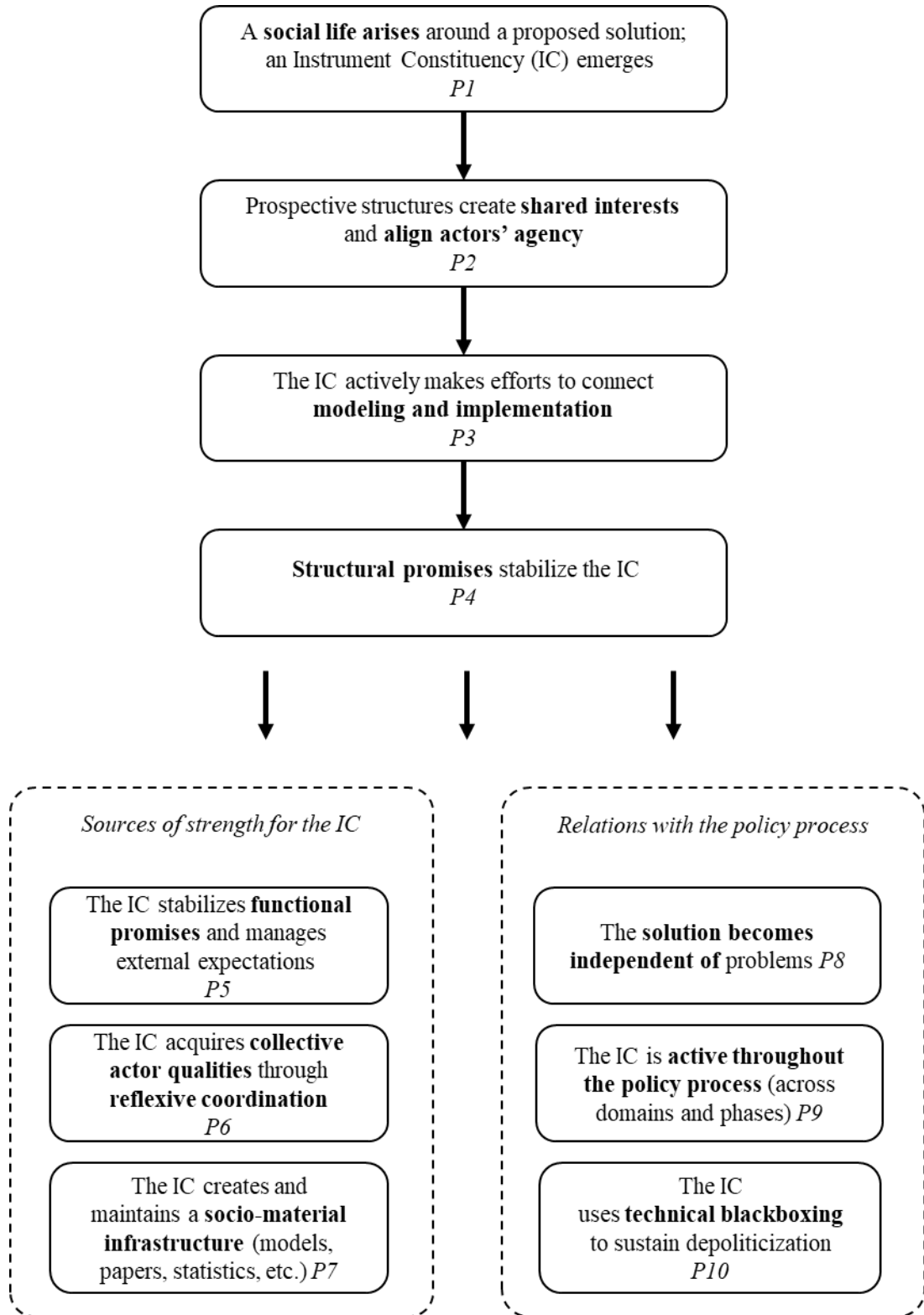
#### 3.2.1.10 Depoliticization and Technical Black-Boxing

The activities of ICs can depoliticize, or at least *seemingly* depoliticize, the issue of the application of their instrument. As they exert control over aspects of modeling, implementation, and even technical infrastructure, they are “blackboxing” many aspects of the policy (Simons and Voß, 2018, pp. 29–31). They tend to make the issue much more technical than political. While this aspect seems intuitive it is among the less clearly developed propositions around ICs. This depoliticization is even debated by Weible (2018a) for example. Even if we accept depoliticization, it is not clear what the cause of this observed phenomenon is. There are different possible reasons behind the absence of political debate around the issue. It is possible that ICs only form around instruments that did not have political debates around them in the first place. Alternatively, it is possible that they tend to actively depoliticize issues through their control of framing, because that would support the spread of the instrument in line with their goals. Or it is also imaginable that their activities lack political goals because they are themselves have very different political beliefs. While it is reasonable to expect that instrument constituencies are active in cases where there is a low level of

political conflict in relation to the instrument, this aspect has so far failed to produce useful causal propositions.

To provide an overview of all the above propositions, Figure 1 shows the propositions related to the concept of instrument constituencies as described by the original authors, Simons and Voß, (2018)

Figure 1. Propositions related to the concept of instrument constituencies (ICs), based on Simons and Voß, (2018), own edit. P + number indicates the numbered propositions in Simons and Voß, (2018).



### 3.2.2 Instrument Constituencies and Other Collective Entities

Since the concept of instrument constituencies theorizes a collective entity in the policy process, it needs to be distinguished from other collective entity concepts in the scholarship. Instrument constituencies must be distinguished negatively, from other collective entity concepts. This negative identification lies on a level of abstraction where empirical cases must exclusively belong to one conceptual category, excluding the possibility of classifying them into other categories. While broader theoretical frameworks can overlap, a single collective entity must be classified exclusively as either an instrument constituency or another kind of collective entity.

It must be clarified which other collective entities an observed instrument constituency cannot belong to, if the propositions associated with the concept hold true. The most notable of these are advocacy coalitions (ACs) and the epistemic communities (ECs). Since empirical observations related to instrument constituencies can be similar in many respects to observations of other collective entities, this distinction is also important for the design of case studies. The analysis must include empirical observations that can distinguish an instrument constituency from other collective entities.

Mukherjee and Howlett (2015) as well as Béland and Howlett (2016) went even further and theorized a threefold classification of collective actors in the policy process, claiming that ACs, ECs, and ICs are the collective actors of the different streams of the policy process recognized by Kingdon. In their classification, the collective actors of the different streams are advocacy coalitions, which operate within the political stream; epistemic communities, which are within the problem stream, and instrument constituencies which represent the policy stream. Weible (2018a), on the other hand, disputed that this classification is correct, as he claims that it stems from a misunderstanding of some aspects of the advocacy coalition framework.

Weible (2018a), however, still acknowledges that these different theories are not mutually exclusive. He even advocates for a *toolbox interpretation* of different policy theories. In this interpretation the different theorized patterns are observable in different real-life policy process scenarios, and researchers can apply the different theories and concepts as a toolbox to interpret empirical cases. If we accept this proposal, the direction of research can be to identify the conditions that are likely to

contribute to the predicted outcome of the emergence of a certain theorized type of community. This understanding is also in line with causal case study methodology. In causal case studies, it can be important to establish how much the empirical evidence rules out other theories, not just how strongly it supports the theory that is hypothesized to have the strongest explanatory value (Beach and Pedersen, 2016, pp. 171–176).

Besides the key difference of where the shared interest of the group lies, there are other specific differences between the three theorized entities (Béland and Howlett, 2016, pp. 398–399). The most important difference, as already stated, is that instrument constituencies are concerned with policy instruments, and their cohesion comes from the attachment of their actors to a particular policy solution, rather than anything else. This distinguishes them from both advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities. The constituent actors can have very different political beliefs and can also see the functional importance of public policy entirely differently. If they are aligned with each other in the promotion of an instrument, they can differ in other characteristics, and that would not affect the cohesion of the constituency. For other types of groups, the theorized cause of cohesion comes from somewhere else. In the case of advocacy coalitions, that is the shared belief system of actors, and in case of epistemic communities, it is their shared view and framing of societal problems.

### *3.2.2.1 Epistemic Communities and Instrument Constituencies*

The concept of Epistemic Communities (ECs) came from the international relations literature and was developed by Haas (1992). Epistemic communities consist of internationally recognized experts and scientists, and they form around an observed problem, which is often global in scale, to produce knowledge about the problem based on a shared understanding of causal and normative beliefs. The most important difference between ECs and ICs is that while ICs are brought together by their actors' interest in the instrument, ECs are centered around a problem that they analyze in detail. ICs are also much more concerned with implementation and action, as opposed to knowledge production about specific problems. Based on these differences, Zito (2018) also claims that the number of ICs is greater than the number ECs, as the latter are concerned with broader problems.

Another key difference is that, in an EC, the network of professionals shares normative and principled beliefs, as well as beliefs about causation. These characteristics do not

apply to ICs, whose individual members might think differently about these aspects, but share an interest in structural promises attached to the instruments. There is a higher degree of “intellectual coherence” required for epistemic communities, which are centered around knowledge production (Zito, 2018, p. 44). There are also aspects where it is more difficult to differentiate between the characteristics of instrument constituencies and epistemic communities. The relationship to politics is described similarly for both kinds of collective entities. Zito (2001, p. 467) notes how epistemic communities are related to politics, that “Political discussions will continue to dominate in difficult political areas while, in less politically divisive issue areas, bureaucratic policymakers are likely to rely on status quo solutions.” This is similar to the relationship to politics described in the case of instrument constituencies, where the less politicized environment around the policy is also noted.

### *3.2.2.2 Advocacy Coalitions and Instrument Constituencies*

The Advocacy Coalition Framework differs in both the unit of analysis, the policy subsystem, and the theorized causal mechanisms that provide cohesion for the coalition, namely the core and policy values. One observed community with collective actor qualities cannot be simultaneously an advocacy coalition and an instrument constituency. They are not, however, mutually exclusive in the sense that they can coexist and even interact with each other, as different authors have theorized scenarios where both kinds of communities coexist and possibly even interact with each other (Béland and Howlett, 2016; Weible, 2018a).

The ACF was first developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith in 1988 (Weible et al., 2009). The most important assumption of the ACF is that different types of actors form coalitions that share their beliefs about public policy (Petridou, 2014). This means that different policy experts, academics, interest groups, and bureaucrats together form coalitions advocating for certain public policies because they share certain *beliefs*, and they promote the policy alternative that is in line with those beliefs. They share their beliefs about public policies within the coalition, and they compete against other advocacy coalitions to influence the policy agenda. The ACF assumes active cooperation between the actors of different spheres as long as they share their core beliefs about policy. The ACF differentiates between policy core beliefs, which are very stable over time, and secondary aspects, which are much more prone to change (Sabatier, 1998). This means that small changes in secondary aspects do not mean that

there was a substantial change in the dominant coalition or the coalition dynamics. These coalitions and their core beliefs are also relatively stable over time, often over decades. The shared core beliefs are the main point of difference between advocacy coalitions and instrument constituencies. In the case of instrument constituencies, the actors within the constituency do not necessarily share any beliefs, apart from their interest in the instrument.

The power dynamics between the coalitions are also important, following this logic. The ACF talks about dominant and minority coalitions based on their positions in relation to the policy agenda. There can be other patterns as well, where relatively equal coalitions reach an agreement or find themselves in a *hurting stalemate* situation. Based on these propositions, a policy change indicates a shift between coalitions, that is, a change in which one of the competing coalitions can more successfully influence the agenda. Advocacy coalitions also coordinate their efforts with their political allies, who share their policy core beliefs. They do this either “formally” and actively, when it is explicitly acknowledged, or tacitly, when they exploit a “particular political niche” (Weible et al., 2020, p. 12)

Weible (2018a) presented the most detailed comparison between the ACF and the concept of instrument constituencies. In his interpretation, one of the main differences between the two, apart from belief centeredness, is their unit of analysis. In the case of ICs, the unit of analysis is the instrument, and in the case of the ACF, it is the policy subsystem. While ACs and ICs can both advocate for a policy instrument, in the case of an AC this can be temporary and last only until the application of an instrument is in line with their belief system. In contrast, ICs would span multiple policy subsystems, unlike ACs, which are composed of actors with different roles within a single subsystem. This distinction is key to understanding the “sphere of activity” of these different collective entities. This “translocality” is one of the key differences between instrument constituencies and advocacy coalitions. Advocacy coalitions are heterogeneous and can include diverse actors, from government officials to private sector representatives, consultants, academics, and others (Nohrstedt et al., 2023, p. 132), and this trait is shared with instrument constituencies. On the other hand, advocacy coalitions are understood as collective entities in a given policy subsystem, without the translocal activities that are theorized in the case of instrument

constituencies. Table 1 presents a summary of the key differences between instrument constituencies, advocacy coalitions, and epistemic communities.

Table 1. Key differences between instrument constituencies, advocacy coalitions, and epistemic communities

Dimensions	Instrument constituencies (IC)	Advocacy coalitions (AC)	Epistemic communities (EC)
<b>Composition of the group</b>	<b>Heterogeneous mix of professionals</b> – experts, consultants, academics, implementers, practitioners	<b>Heterogeneous mix of actors</b> – can include government official, experts, academics, representatives of the media and private sector	Network of recognized <b>experts and scientists</b>
<b>Source of cohesion</b>	<b>Solution-centered:</b> ICs form around policy instruments and actors share an interest in the structures through which they are implemented	<b>Belief-centered:</b> ACs form around beliefs and convictions	<b>Problem centered:</b> ECs form around problems, with shared beliefs about causation as well as shared normative beliefs
<b>Sphere of activity</b>	<b>Translocality:</b> ICs are active across different policy domains and jurisdictions, as well as across different levels of governance, including the transnational sphere	Coalitions are active within <b>specific policy subsystems</b>	Mainly <b>transnational orientation</b> , with weaker connections to implementation in particular jurisdictions
<b>Political acceptance and conflict</b>	Most often found in <b>depoliticized, technically framed</b> , broadly accepted policies	ACs <b>coordinate their activities with political allies</b> who share their core beliefs	Influence and connections to politics <b>depend on the relations of knowledge creation and policymaking</b>

### **3.3 Theoretical Frameworks of the Policy Process**

The concept of instrument constituencies provides the focal point for my empirical analysis. However, to interpret the activities of collective entities in a broader context, it is helpful to situate the concept in relation to the overarching theoretical frameworks of the policy process. These broader frameworks describe the general dynamics through which public policies emerge, persist, change, and spread over time (Cairney and Heikkila, 2023). The persistence of entrepreneurship policy needs to be interpreted in relation to the wider temporal and institutional patterns of the policy process in which it is embedded. Therefore, reviewing these frameworks therefore helps to connect the more concrete propositions associated with instrument constituencies to broader explanations of policy stability, change, and diffusion.

Among the broader frameworks, the Multiple Streams Framework is relevant because it describes how despite the independence of the problem, policy, and political streams of policymaking, windows of opportunity occasionally make policy change possible. The concept of instrument constituencies was also connected to the MSF from the time of its initial conceptualization. Policy Feedback Theory adds further important insights by explaining the importance of feedback effects, path dependence, and locked-in arrangements, clarifying how institutional arrangements can contribute to policy persistence over time. Punctuated Equilibrium Theory gives a refined account of the temporal dimension by describing the coexistence of long periods of stasis and more sudden episodes of change, emphasizing the role of limitations in attention, information processing, and vested interests. Finally, Policy Diffusion and Innovation is relevant because it explains how policies spread across jurisdictions, and from this perspective, instrument constituencies can also be interpreted as potential agents behind policy transfer and diffusion.

#### **3.3.1 The Multiple Streams Framework**

The Multiple Streams Framework is one of the most widely used theories of the policy process. It was originally developed by John Kingdon in 1984 (Kingdon, 2014) and has been further developed and tested since then (Jones et al., 2015). It has also been applied to policy cases that are relatively close to entrepreneurship policy, like innovation policy (Huisman and de Jong, 2014), regional development policy

(Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, 2013), and economic governance (Saurugger and Terpan, 2015).

Recently there have also been efforts to better integrate the political and policy institutions into the MSF and to take account of the feedback effects of long-standing institutional status quo arrangements, which can play a role in policy stasis. Good examples of these efforts are the works of Zohlnhöfer and his colleagues (2015a) and Spohr (2016). Spohr (2016) even created a synthesis of MSF and the policy feedback models of historical institutionalism to better explain policy stasis, path dependence, and path deviation better.

MSF started with the work of John Kingdon, who described it in his extensive work “Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy,” which was first published in 1984 (Kingdon, 2014). In this book, Kingdon describes the common patterns of policy processes that he derived from the empirical case studies he conducted. The aim of the model is to reflect on why some policy topics become prominent on political agendas rather than others and how different policy alternatives are considered. Kingdon relied on the “garbage can model” of organizational decision-making, which he developed further to apply to a public policy context. (Kingdon, 2014, p. 84)

Structural elements of MSF are also referred to in the literature about instrument constituencies. In particular, the different streams of the policy process and their disconnectedness provide a background for the concept of instrument constituencies, therefore it is worthwhile to briefly review the framework and its key elements. This model relies on a few basic assumptions about decision-making and the actors who take part in the processes. The most relevant of these here are the notions of ambiguity, unclear technology, fluid participation, and stream independence (Herweg et al., 2018, p. 18). Stream independence is of particular importance in the framework. It refers to the observation that activities related to political agenda setting, problem framing, and the working out of policy alternatives are largely disconnected and, most of the time, independent of each other. These different streams are key elements in Kingdon’s explanations, and this is what this theoretical framework is most identified with.

The three streams that the MSF recognizes as disconnected are the (i) problem stream, the (ii) policy stream, and the (iii) political stream. The problem stream consists of the “real-world” problems; the policy stream is where the policy solutions are formulated;

and the political stream enables the enactment of these policies. These streams are all important in policy formulation, but actual change only happens during a window of opportunity referred to as the “policy window” or “agenda window”. This is an event that enables the conjunction of the streams at a specific time. Kingdon calls this the “coupling” of the streams. This temporal conjunction of different processes that happen in the streams is, in fact, the key explanatory factor of the MSF (Barzelay and Gallego, 2006).

### 3.3.1.1 *Problem Stream*

Public policies are considered to be *solutions* to socioeconomic problems, and the processes related to problem perception are one of the key elements of the MSF, with the problem stream being one of the three streams in the framework. The main argument of Kingdon (Kingdon, 2014, p. 90) is that problem perception is a key element in the processes that lead to policy change, and changes in problem perception can be key to inducing policy change. What is seen as a problem always depends on the perception and interpretation of the people. Problems are conditions that are not necessarily seen as problems by everyone, and the judgment of the conditions can also change over time. Collectively, the processes that affect the perception of problems related to public policies make up the problem stream of the policy process. There are some components that typically have a large influence on problem perception and, consequently, are important elements of the problem stream.

First, *indicators* are widely used to frame conditions through the use of a metric and to attach desirable and undesirable levels or tendencies to that metric (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 90–94). Changes related to indicators (changes in the values or the measurement) can then impact problem perception and alter expectations related to public policy as well. The ways and extent to which the public becomes aware of changes in conditions are often determined by the use of indicators. This also means that the lack of metrics or the difficulty of measurement can make certain problems less noticeable or less urgent than others. Another important element that influences problem perception is *feedback* related to governmental actions (Kingdon, 2014, p. 100). Typically, there is regular structured feedback attached to policies, such as monitoring, evaluations, surveys, and more informal feedback from beneficiaries or other stakeholders. These, similarly to the indicators, can largely influence problem perception in governments and bureaucracies.

Both indicators and feedback can be largely institutionalized; therefore, they represent elements through which existing institutions can affect future policies. On the other hand, problem streams also have unpredictable elements. *Focusing events* are typically recognized as unexpected negative events that suddenly bring attention to a condition that was previously less noticeable (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 94–100). Disasters, accidents, or high-profile crimes are the usual examples. These can suddenly bring very intense demands to change policies (like more funding for certain activities or stricter regulations) into policy systems that were previously stable.

Some of the most important insights from the MSF are related to the disconnectedness of the problem stream from the other streams. Kingdon, for example, elaborates on the observation that problems often fade over time, and after some attention, they tend to be forgotten or perceived as less urgent and consequently dropped from the agenda (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 103–105). It is observed that after a policy is enacted to alleviate a problem, the problem is often forgotten, regardless of the actual effect of the policy on the problem. A key message of MSF is that the conjunction of the streams only happens intermittently, which means that problems and policy alternatives change independently.

### 3.3.1.2 *Policy Stream*

The policy stream is the venue where different alternatives for public policies are generated (Herweg et al., 2018, pp. 22–24). These alternatives are worked out by specialists in a policy domain who make up the policy community of a policy system. There are experts inside the public administration, governmental agencies, or the offices attached to the legislature (committee staff, for example), but also outside the administration in academia, consultancy, or NGOs. These communities are characterized by different levels of fragmentation. Kingdon, for example, observed that the expert community in health policy was more integrated; people knew each other to a greater extent than in the transportation community.

Ideas related to new policy alternatives “flow freely” within policy communities; they are modified and recombined and are difficult to trace back to individuals (Kingdon, 2014, p. 73, called it practically impossible, an “infinite regress”). This is also called the “policy primeval soup,” where ideas can come from anywhere and their “fate” is uncertain (Herweg et al., 2018, p. 23). It is observable, though, that certain specialists

become active advocates for their preferred policy alternative. They are called policy entrepreneurs in the MSF, and their role is recognized as important in convincing others of a policy alternative's merit.

Nevertheless, not everything is dependent on the work of these advocates. Policy alternatives also have intrinsic qualities that, together with external constraints, can largely determine their success; these are called "criteria for survival" (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 131–137). It is important to note that success and survival here are understood as survival within the policy stream, not as the alternative gets enacted. Generally, two main criteria are recognized as key to an alternative's survival: *technical feasibility* and *value acceptability*. Technical feasibility refers to the implementation of the policy; the mechanisms of a policy proposal must work well in the real world and not just in theory.

It should be noted that there can be some uncertainty and disagreement among experts about the feasibility of a novel policy proposal. Thus, more accurately, it is the perception of feasibility that affects the survival of a proposal in the policy stream, and this perception can be dependent on previous experiences or other external factors. The second criterion, value acceptability, is even more subjective. It is recognized that the values of the experts are important in policy communities, and the acceptance of policy alternatives is not merely "technical," even among specialists, but dependent on cultural and ideological views to some extent. Deeper beliefs about more general ideas, such as, the desirable size of the government, the need for efficiency or fairness, or other considerations, can determine whether a policy proposal gains acceptance in the policy community or not.

### 3.3.1.3 *Political Stream*

The third stream of the MSF is the political stream. The main processes Kingdon accounted for here are the activities related to governments and legislatures, interest groups, and the national (political) mood (Herweg et al., 2018, pp. 24–25). Changes in governance and in the legislature can obviously change the chances of an issue gaining prominence on the agenda. These changes usually take one of the two forms: a change in personnel or a change in jurisdiction. If there are changes in the persons who are in positions of authority, that can affect the support for or opposition to proposals. Elections can bring large changes, but there are many other ways in which personnel

can change. Similarly, jurisdiction can also change, topics can be handed over to other parts of the government, or it can also be a question of which committee in a legislature handles the issue. Different agencies or offices can be attached to certain topics, so they might fight over jurisdiction.

Existing institutions have a large effect on governance. There are existing structures in the legislature and in government that define who handles a policy domain and, in some sense, how they approach the issue. There are existing committee and department structures that can be resistant to change. Some interest group activities are also part of the political stream. Interest group campaigns can prevent alternatives from making it to the agenda or gaining support in decision-making, but they can also promote favored alternatives. Kingdon also recognizes that changes in the national mood are part of the political stream, as politicians are keen observers of these changes and try to act accordingly to any change in public opinion (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 146–149).

While, structurally, the political stream is not difficult to understand, it is less straightforward how it influences the chances of coupling. Issues require some political attention, but they do not need all the activities within the political stream to support the prominence of a topic. The absence of political interest, however, can prevent change entirely, as legislatures and governments have a monopoly on enacting policies in their jurisdiction. Considering that streams are disconnected in the MSF, this means political inattention can render issues forgotten. It is therefore recognized that there needs to be a minimum of political support for any proposal to succeed (Herweg et al., 2018). Another important question regarding the political stream relates to the differentiation between agenda setting and decision-making. This differentiation was not marked in the original work of Kingdon but has been clarified since then (Zohlnhöfer et al., 2015a; Zohlnhöfer et al., 2015b). Alternatives need to gain a different level of political support to reach agenda status than to be actually enacted in the decision-making process.

#### *3.3.1.4 Agenda Windows and Policy Entrepreneurs*

The *temporal conjunction* in which the different streams connect and can produce a policy change is referred to as coupling in the terminology of the MSF (Herweg et al., 2018, pp. 26–28). Coupling does not happen automatically when the streams are ready but likely happens at certain points in time, which are referred to as policy windows

or agenda windows. These are opportunities for the proponents of issues to come forward with their proposals and push them onto the agenda. These windows are considered relatively rare and brief. It is considered that agenda windows can be generated by events in the problem stream or the political stream. In the former case, sudden disasters or extreme events can dramatically change problem perception, which opens the possibility or even necessity of immediate action to enact changes in policy.

If the agenda window opens in the political stream, it means that larger changes in the political stream open up the possibility of coupling the streams. These can be elections that bring about larger changes in the government or legislature, but they can also be changes in the political mood, changes in the interests of the constituency, and other developments. It is important that agenda windows open in either the problem stream or the political stream because it means that changes in the policy stream alone cannot result in the adoption of new policies. That needs to be supplemented with at least one other significantly intense change in one of the other streams. This was elaborated in detail by Spohr (2016) when he described the connection of MSF with path dependence.

The last key concept of the MSF is the role of *policy entrepreneurs*. Policy entrepreneurs are advocates, (individuals or organizations, who are willing to invest their resources, such as time, money, and other efforts, into the promotion of a particular public policy solution. (Herweg et al., 2018, p. 28). They advocate for their favored measures because they anticipate some sort of future gain, which can be a pecuniary benefit, but can also be motivated by more “altruistic” motives. They can come from any of the groups of policy-related actors. They can be bureaucrats, academics, politicians, interest-group leaders, journalists, etc. According to the MSF, they first seek to gain support within the policy community for their proposal and then work to couple that proposal with the other two streams. They need to have an open policy window to do so, and because of this, it can be expected that they will also try to manipulate the agenda-setting and decision-making processes, and they are not merely advocates for a particular solution.

### **3.3.2 Policy Feedback and Path Dependence**

The MSF can be considered “institutional processualism” because it seeks a causal understanding of processes and, at the same time, is also concerned with historically

grounded institutions. (Barzelay and Gallego, 2006). However, the original MSF of Kingdon was also criticized because the institutional elements of the framework were not elaborated well enough. Different authors have tried to develop models to better account for institutions in the MSF (see Zohlnhöfer et al., 2015a). From the perspective of my research, an institutionalist line of the literature that describes *Policy Feedback Theory* can provide important additional insights into the temporal stability and long-term dynamics of public policies. They describe policy feedback effects that can provide insights into how once established policies and institutions can affect subsequent policy decisions, often through what is known as *path dependence*. Spohr (2016) recently included the concept of path dependence from historical institutionalism to enrich the MSF model for his case studies. This is a helpful addition because institutionalist descriptions of path dependence are useful for describing policy stability and can address some of the weaknesses of the original MSF.

#### 3.3.2.1 *Path Dependence*

Within policy process research, there is a set of related theories labeled Policy Feedback Theory. Theories of policy feedback revolve around the question of how the introduction of certain policy measures influences or even determines which policy actions will be chosen in the future (Mettler and SoRelle, 2018). They recognize the importance of the fact that public policies are usually formulated in situations where previous policies have already altered the institutions, the distribution of resources, or the political processes.

Feedback effects can be positive or negative, depending on how previous policies make the continuation or expansion of the measures more or less likely. Positive feedback effects are much more studied than negative ones and are also more relevant for my research as it is about the expansion and persistence of certain policy instruments. Positive feedback means that previous actions create path dependence, where each step taken toward the strengthening of a certain policy makes it more difficult to reverse the process. Pierson (2004) studied the subject extensively and defined how self-reinforcing processes can manifest in politics. What he describes as inertia applies to the policy stasis situations with which I am concerned in my research. Inertia caused by path dependence means that once a process has been established, the feedback effects create an equilibrium that will be resistant to change (p. 45)

Policy Feedback Theory is based on historical institutionalism and other institutionalist approaches. Even though there are different identified “institutionalisms” in political science (see Hall and Taylor, 1996), historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism are both concerned with the feedback effects that previous policies and actions can create. The fact that policy feedback and institutionalist approaches are connected is also important because, in a policy stasis situation, this is how the role of institutions can be incorporated into the analysis. If certain institutions keep choosing the same policy measure despite there being alternatives, it is reasonable to assume that there is a positive feedback effect produced by some elements of the policy. Those institutional factors are also relevant in my study, and in the case of the analysis of policy process dynamics, they can be accurately captured by PFT.

There are different ways in which these existing structures can create path-dependent effects. Béland (2010) identified the most important streams of the policy feedback literature, which can also be used as a useful classification of these theorized feedback mechanisms. The central proposition of the *state-building* theory is that as states expand their capacities to administer and implement policies, this can create a substantial positive feedback effect. This means that public administration can actively promote the preservation and expansion of a policy program it implements. The concept comes from Theda Skocpol (Béland, 2010, pp. 570–572), but it was also described by others in similar ways. Bennett (2014), for example, uses the term “bureaucratic creep” to describe this phenomenon in the case of entrepreneurship policies. Scholars of the public choice tradition have also extensively studied bureaucracy and the incentives of government officials in relation to the implementation of policy programs (see Mueller, 2003, pp. 359–398).

Another relevant stream in the literature on positive feedback is about the *feedback effect of interest group formation and mobilization*. Public policies can provide benefits to groups, which then later have stronger incentives to lobby for the continuation or expansion of the policy. Besides stronger incentives, policy measures can also provide them with better access to decision-makers, which puts them in a better position compared to other groups to influence policies. They can also foster group formation itself, for example, by bringing together the individual actors who previously had not been able to meet (Pierson, 1993).

The central idea behind the third variant, the *political lock-in* effects of public policy, is that previous policies create commitments made by the members of the society, and these then *lock in* these policies for the future. The additional commitments increase the *disruption* that a change in the public policies can cause (Pierson, 1993). Commitments in society then also influence political decisions by altering the expectations of the political constituencies. This means that even in the absence of lobbying efforts, elected politicians face increased “transition costs” (Béland, 2010) to change the existing policies, and this creates a political lock-in effect. An interesting aspect of this political lock-in effect is that it might seemingly depoliticize an issue because it can make previously viable options implausible and thus create a situation where the political conflict around the issue is absent (Pierson, 1993). This absence of conflict can create a policy stasis situation like the one I would like to analyze in my research.

The above-described theorized path-dependence mechanisms in public policies have important implications for policy research. Most of the time, those who benefit from a previously established program, or would face losses from its discontinuation, can have clear incentives for the continuation or even expansion of the policy program. This can be the case for more direct beneficiaries but also for those who indirectly gain advantages, such as politicians and bureaucrats. These efforts, however, can divert resources and attention from other programs, which, in a new situation, could be more useful for the overall benefit of society.

Reflecting on the concept of path dependence has two main benefits for my research: it helps with both the interpretation of the results and the operationalization of the expectations. Spohr (2016) included the most important notions of historical institutionalism concerning path dependence in the Multiple Streams Framework. He describes what can be necessary for “path deviation” or, in other words, “*path-departing change*” in the MSF. Coupling of the streams is less likely if path-departing change is required, compared to a case where previous policies did not produce path dependence. Spohr (2016) describes three conditions for path-departing change in the MSF. First, change in the policy stream is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for a path-departing change. Two other conditions are, however, also necessary: the opening of a window of opportunity and the possibility of interpreting the changes in

a way that allows the issue to move forward in the political stream. Here, the central proposition is that path-dependence affects more than one stream.

### 3.3.3 Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory is one of the overarching frameworks of the policy process, based on the work of Baumgartner and Jones (Nowlin, 2011, pp. 49–51). PET is a system-level analysis, and it is concerned with the punctuation in policy change. (Cairney and Heikkila, 2023, pp. 295–299). As Jones and Baumgartner (2012, p. 4) themselves phrase it, „Punctuated equilibrium is explicitly a theory of policy dynamics”. The main premise is that policymaking is characterized by larger changes that happen more rarely, and otherwise policies experience near stasis, during which the status quo is maintained. It is most often applied in analyses that study budgetary changes, and media and political attention to policy topics over longer periods of time (Workman et al., 2022, pp. 72–74). The analysis of these quantifiable changes enables the study of the intensity of their distribution over time. As large-scale change is recognized as possible, but rare, the distribution of the intensity of change over time is characterized by a leptokurtic distribution. Within PET, important concepts have been developed that can relate to the kind of policy acceleration-stasis dynamics I am also concerned with in the case of entrepreneurship policy.

PET recognizes that the foundations of these punctuations are connected to the inherent limitations of the people and institutions that are involved in the policy process. It relies on the theory of bounded rationality as its microfoundation (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012, p. 3), and it emphasizes inherent limitations in information processing and attention among those who are involved in the policy process. This *selective attention* also applies to policymakers, who are “bombarded with diverse information from many different sources” (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012, p. 7) but only focus on some of it.

One of the main sources of policy stability is related to uneven attention from the different groups in society toward specific policy themes. Those who do not have any vested interest in a particular policy are largely indifferent, while other groups can have intense preferences that create strong incentives to exert efforts to influence policymaking. Among them, we can also find those experts who are specialized in a particular topic: “Specialists, experts, and others with an economic interest in the

nature of public policy in a particular area are the dominant makers of public policy in that area” (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p. 19). The importance of this notion is that stability is not necessarily the result of a compromise that balances out policy positions, but rather is created by the differences in attention that come from differences in the intensity of preferences, and the inherent limitations of information processing.

The existence of *policy monopolies* is also recognized in PET. A policy monopoly describes how those who have a vested interest in a policy can work toward establishing and maintaining a policy monopoly: a situation where a particular “understanding” of public policy becomes uncontested (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, pp. 6–9). Both institutional structures that limit access to the policy process and a strong supporting idea can contribute to sustaining a policy monopoly. This is closely connected to another important concept, *policy images* (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, pp. 25–27). Policy images consist of both empirical information and “emotive appeals”, and they can set the tone for policy discussions. A positive policy image is necessary for the development of a public policy, and policy monopolies can actively try to create and maintain a supporting image for their favored policy understanding.

PET also contains assumptions about the role of institutions in the policy process. *Policy venues* define where decisions are made about policies (e.g., different committees), and which venues have the authority can have a large effect on the policy outcomes. A policy image can be perceived positively in certain venues while it can be inappropriate in others. Institutional arrangements thus have a great importance in PET, and the establishment of new, sometimes specialized venues can affect the fate of policy issues. *Institutional “friction”* is also recognized as an important characteristic of the policy process, and it is also influenced by institutional arrangements (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012, p. 8). High friction can prevent changes from breaking through, until the forces for change grow strong enough to break barriers and create a change that will finally have a larger magnitude.

### **3.3.4 Policy Diffusion and Innovation**

Policy Diffusion and Innovation is the line of research that focuses on the general patterns of how public policies travel across countries or other jurisdictions (Cairney and Heikkila, 2023, p. 310). The core idea in this line of research is that countries do

not make decisions in isolation, but policies spread across jurisdictions. In the scholarship, diffusion models are contrasted with internal determinants models, where the factors that lead to the adoption of a policy are internal to the state. (Berry and Berry, 2018, pp. 254–256) In contrast, diffusion models are intergovernmental, and the adoption of policies by a state or jurisdiction are determined by previous adoptions by other entities.

In PDI, the adoption is a result of both diffusion mechanisms and internal determinants. Methodologically, this is often studied in PDI using event history analysis (Karch, 2022, p. 181). The PDI literature does not just study whether diffusion occurred, but they also focus on diffusion mechanisms that can be informative about why the diffusion happened (Karch, 2022, p. 182). Policy diffusion recognizes different diffusion mechanisms that can explain policy adoption, and the main mechanisms recognized are learning, competition, coercion, and socialization (Oliveira et al., 2023, pp. 248-249)

*Learning* describes when governments use the experiences of other “early adopter” governments and base their decisions on them. This learning can be based on the political success created by the adoption of policies and not necessarily on the effectiveness of the policy. *Competition* recognizes that governments are also rivals of each other and can compete for investments, businesses, or to avoid unpleasant problems. This competition can influence their decisions on policy adoption, for example to offer attractive services but also potentially to cut taxation or social services. *Coercion* is connected to powerful actors, like central governments or supranational organizations that have the legal authority or the bargaining power to demand the adoption or abolition of certain policies. Socialization occurs when policies are spread because of shared norms and ideas that describe what governments ought to do or not do. Thus, commonly accepted views can also influence policy diffusion.

PDI is also concerned with the actors who are behind policy transfer, the *transfer agents*. It is recognized that both key individuals and organizations or communities can be important forces behind policy transfer. The latter can be interest groups, international organizations, multinational firms, media outlets, and professional networks. Among the collective agents that can foster policy transfer, instrument

constituencies, epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions are also recognized (Oliveira et al., 2023, pp. 246–247)

### 3.3.5 Instrument Constituencies and Broader Theoretical Frameworks

There are two main ways the concept instrument constituency positively relates to broader theoretical frameworks and concepts.

1. Instrument constituencies can be interpreted as the *agency* behind proposed cause-effect relationships in broader theoretical frameworks, or in other words they can be drivers of policy stability or change (Capano and Galanti, 2018, p. 25). In this case, instrument constituency activities can be understood as intermediate variables in a causal chain, and the propositions connected to instrument constituencies can add more detail to the propositions of broader frameworks. A good example of this is that policy diffusion models recognize that there can be “agents of transfer” behind policy diffusion. It is noted in the policy diffusion literature that these can be instrument constituencies, or other “collective agents” such as epistemic communities or advocacy coalitions. (Oliveira et al., 2023, p. 247)
2. Propositions of broader theoretical frameworks can also relate to *conditions that are supportive* of the formation and activities of instrument constituencies. In this case, some factors that are theorized in another, broader framework can be interpreted as causal conditions in relation to instrument constituencies’ formation or activities. An example is the inherent limitations of attention in the decision processes that are well theorized and studied in Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012, p. 4). Limited political attention is a condition that can support the formation of an instrument constituency, but this does not mean that instrument constituency activities are necessary for the political attention to be limited.

These connections can help with the interpretation of the findings of instrument constituency studies in a broader context. There are several different examples of how the concept of instrument constituencies can connect to the broader frameworks, can be compatible with them, and can even be used as a useful addition to the existing propositions. Table 2 provides an overview of these main points, looking at how the

concept can connect to the four main frameworks described above: MSF, PET, PFT, and PDI.

Table 2. Links between propositions about instrument constituencies and broader theoretical frameworks of the policy process

<b>Propositions – Concept of Instrument Constituencies (IC)</b>	<b>Multiple Streams Framework (MSF)</b>	<b>Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET)</b>	<b>Policy Feedback Theories (PFT)</b>	<b>Policy Diffusion and Innovation (PDI)</b>
<b>Social life and collective actor qualities</b> (P1&P6)	Stream independence: ICs are a form of agency in the policy stream enabled by stream independence		Positive policy feedback: an IC can form around proposed or new policies, and its' members' vested interests can make policy expansion more likely	
<b>Prospective structures create shared interests and structural promises provide stability</b> (P2&P4)		The intensity of the vested interests matters, and experts can sustain “policy monopolies”: an IC can be understood as a form of agency behind a policy monopoly		
<b>Interconnected modelling and implementation, socio- material infrastructure</b> (P3&P7)	Feedback can affect problem perception, ICs' activities can affect the problem stream	Information processing: IC activities can affect the flow of information, and the structure of information- processing	Path dependence: IC activities can increase path dependence as they have an interest in sustaining the status quo	Learning mechanisms of policy diffusion: IC activities can structure and affect policy learning

<b>Propositions – Concept of Instrument Constituencies (IC)</b>	<b>Multiple Streams Framework (MSF)</b>	<b>Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET)</b>	<b>Policy Feedback Theories (PFT)</b>	<b>Policy Diffusion and Innovation (PDI)</b>
<b>Functional promises</b> (P5)		Policy images: ICs can strategically use and influence supportive policy images		
<b>Translocality</b> , activities throughout the policy process and across different jurisdictions (P9)				Agents of transfer: ICs can be understood as “transfer agents” or “innovation vectors”
<b>Solutions independent of problems</b> (P8)	Solutions surfing for problems: an IC can be an agency that increases the disconnectedness between solutions and problems			
<b>Technical blackboxing / depoliticization</b> (P10)		Limited political attention: ICs are enabled by it and can strategically use the limitations of political attention	Lock-in: a politically locked-in situation can create a depoliticized environment in which ICs can operate	

In the case of the Multiple Streams Framework, instrument constituencies are connected mainly to stream independence and the “solutions surfing for problems phenomenon”. Instrument constituencies can be understood as the agency behind the policy stream following this logic, while, respectively, advocacy coalitions represent the political stream and epistemic communities the problem stream (Béland and Howlett, 2016). While it can be debated how well these different theorized groups are connected to Kingdon’s different streams, in the case of instrument constituencies the connection with the policy stream is convincing. Instrument constituencies are not preoccupied with beliefs or knowledge about problems, but with specific configurations of governing instruments. The other highlighted connection, the fact that policy solutions often become detached from problems or politics, was already well studied by scholars using the Multiple Streams Framework, before the recent invention of the concept of instrument constituencies (Boscarino, 2009)

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory uses different concepts and elements that can be connected to instrument constituencies. It emphasizes limitations in information processing and capacities for attention. On the one hand, limitations in political attention, the intensity of institutional friction, and even positive policy images are supportive conditions for the formation and the activities of instrument constituencies. On the other hand, instrument constituencies can also act strategically to exacerbate the situation through their activities that structure the flow of information, and they can also further contribute to a favorable policy image. Because they have vested interests in specific solutions, they can be understood as agents that are motivated to build or support a policy monopoly. The importance of vested interests in the form of structural promises have been described well by some of the case studies that utilize the concept of instrument constituencies. Blümel (2021, pp. 547–548) for example describes how new roles and tasks were created around cluster policies in Germany, and Simons and Schniedermann (2021) detail how the evidence-based policy created various opportunities for experts promoting evidence-based approaches in policymaking.

The concept of ICs connects to the Policy Feedback Theories, in three main ways. First, the emergence of an instrument constituency can be understood as a positive policy feedback mechanism. New policy instruments that are introduced can become more widely applied over time because an instrument constituency will promote it.

Secondly, instrument constituency activities can create path dependence through their engagement in connecting modelling and implementation, or through the socio-material infrastructure. The establishment of these linkages, models, and infrastructure can constrain future policy choices. Finally, PFT scholarship recognizes the lock-in phenomenon in public policies, where once a policy is introduced, its discontinuation can become politically unfavorable, and hence politics will avoid engaging with the topic further. A situation like this can be considered a condition that is strongly supportive of the activities of an instrument constituency, as it creates a depoliticized situation that gives a lot of room for experts.

Instrument constituencies also relate to Policy Diffusion and Innovation models in two main ways. As described in Section 3.3.4, it is recognized that instrument constituencies can be agents behind policy transfer. In this way they can add mechanistic explanations to policy diffusion models. Moreover, instrument constituency activities can also structure the learning mechanisms that influence policy diffusion. The activities related to connecting modelling and implementation can structure how results are measured and interpreted, and at the same time can limit the availability of other interpretations.

This chapter has established the theoretical basis for the empirical analysis and has identified the concept of instrument constituencies as the central perspective for explaining the emergence and persistence of entrepreneurship policy. The broader policy process frameworks reviewed here help situate the concept within the wider scholarship and connect instrument constituency propositions to other theorized concepts. This also enables further inferences about the empirical findings, providing a basis for Chapter 7, where the broader implications of the findings are discussed.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Case Study Design

The case analyzed is the entrepreneurship policy of the OECD countries. To define its boundaries clearly, I clarify the key terms used in the analysis and specify the empirical scope of the analysis. The concept of entrepreneurship policy denotes a set of public policy instruments that are typically discussed and implemented together. These measures include subsidized or publicly provisioned services, such as consultancy, training, awareness-raising, and other forms of entrepreneurial support, as well as financial instruments such as subsidized loans and small grants. The case also includes regulatory changes that are intended to reduce barriers to starting, maintaining, or expanding entrepreneurial activity. This understanding follows existing classifications of entrepreneurship policy measures in the literature (Bennett, 2014, Chapter 1; Lundström and Stevenson, 2005, p. 60; McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2016, p. 540; OECD, 2020, pp. 25–35).

The case is delineated by focusing on entrepreneurship policy in developed countries, which are understood here, for practical reasons, as those countries that are part of the OECD<sup>3</sup>. This is also an adequate choice because the OECD itself is active in the promotion of these policies, and OECD countries constitute a widely understood country grouping. Temporally, I include the entire history of entrepreneurship policy, which started in the 1990s and has been continuously implemented since then.

I restate the questions from Chapter 1, that my empirical case study seeks to answer:

1. What factors have contributed to the enduring and widespread persistence of entrepreneurship policy measures?

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<sup>3</sup> The 38 OECD member countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United States (OECD, n.d.).

2. Did the implementation of entrepreneurship policies lead to the emergence of a transnationally influential instrument constituency, that is, a community of specialists whose work revolves around this set of policy measures?
3. Have the activities of this instrument constituency contributed to the spread and persistence of entrepreneurship policy measures?
4. Does an explanation based on the concept of instrument constituencies have stronger explanatory power than rival explanations?

To find answers to these questions, I formulate detailed empirical expectations. The empirical expectations are based on the propositions related to the concept of instrument constituencies, with reflections on the broader theoretical frameworks of the policy process, as detailed in Chapter 3.

#### **4.1.1 Connecting the Case with the Theory**

I consider the application of the concept of instrument constituencies to entrepreneurship policy justified, because while it is not a single instrument but a set of instruments, it still meets the criteria formulated by the original authors. Delineating public policy instruments for empirical analysis can be challenging in general, as Howlett (2005) noted: “While students of instrument choices have focused on decisions to adopt individual instruments, administrative practice usually involves the use of multiple tools or ‘policy-instrument mixes.’” (p. 33). Despite naming the concept instrument constituencies, Simons and Voß (2018) apply a rather broad definition that can be understood for multiple instruments that are “packaged” and “condensed” together:

“So-called ‘instruments’, ‘tools’ or ‘technologies’ of governance – broadly defined here as condensed and packaged knowledge about how to govern<sup>1</sup> – can thus be studied regarding their social life and the dynamics...

... The concept of instrument constituencies captures this ‘social life of instrumental knowledges of governing’.” (p. 14).

Following this definition, entrepreneurship policy meets this description as “condensed and packed knowledge about how to govern” or “instrumental knowledges of governing”. Moreover, there are also previous examples of applying the concept of instrument constituencies in case studies to sets of policies similar in this regard to

entrepreneurship policy. Blümel (2021) analyzed “cluster policies” in Germany, a type of innovation policy that includes regional collaborative funding schemes aimed at fostering networked innovation efforts among companies and institutions. While the term cluster policies is plural and the policies in question include different forms of subsidies, he justifies the treatment of cluster policies as a policy instrument: “I argue that the success and expansion of cluster policies as a widely established policy instrument can be linked to specific narratives of innovation as a solution to an increasingly broad list of societal challenges” (p. 534). Simons and Schniedermann (2021) and Falkenström and Svallfors (2022) perhaps went even further and applied the concept to the social life of the “meta-instrument” evidence-based policy.

Beyond the existing examples, the question might still be raised whether this adjustment in the denotation of a concept can be justified for the analysis of the social life of entrepreneurship policy. If we apply the concept of instrument constituencies to a set of instruments we still need to make sure that we do not fall into “conceptual stretching”, in the sense used by Sartori (1970). As a concept moves higher up on “the ladder of abstraction” and the denotation changes, its connotation must be reduced accordingly. By reducing the defining properties and attributes, conceptual stretching can be avoided. In “medium level categories” of abstraction (Sartori, 1970, p. 1044), balancing denotation and connotation is important.

While the original concept included the possibility of applying it to sets of instruments, I see it as warranted that both the denotation and the connotation of the concept should be clarified. The analytically useful level of abstraction for the concept of instrument constituencies is where it is distinguished by its attributes from other collective entities in the policy process, such as advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities. The key element of this negative identification here lies in the property that instrument constituencies are *solution-centered* collective entities, as opposed to the problem-centeredness of epistemic communities and the belief-centeredness of advocacy coalitions.

This negative identification is also in line with the logic of Béland and Howlett (2016), who compared instrument constituencies with these other collective entities. They state that “it is important to establish that as an actor, the instrument constituency is solely oriented toward defining and promoting particular solutions while remaining

conceptually and empirically separate and distinct from those other sets of actors dealing with defining policy problems and broad political goals” (p. 399). Their choice of wording is helpful, as they talk about “particular solutions”, which might be a better description than “instrument”. Possibly, even a different name, such as “solution constituency” could have been a better choice for the concept than instrument constituency, because it could have made clearer that the social life around sets of instruments and meta-instruments are also covered by the concept. Following this logic, according to which the focus is on solutions, I propose that entrepreneurship policy is a suitable subject of analysis through the concept of instrument constituencies, because it is a *particular solution* that also meets the criteria of “condensed and packaged knowledge about how to govern” (Simons and Voß , 2018, p. 14).

## 4.2 Empirical Expectations

Above, I have identified the core of the empirical expectations, and in this subchapter, I operationalize the more concrete, observable predictions for the case study. These expectations guided me during the data collection, oriented the document-based historical analysis, and served as the basis for the expert interviews. During the formulation, following Beach and Pedersen (2016, pp. 171–176), I pay attention to the fact that the analysis should consider not only whether evidence is present, but also how strongly it supports or challenges the theoretical explanation being tested<sup>4</sup>. The evidence is assessed, on the one hand, by its strength in terms of how much it supports or challenges an expectation, and on the other, by its uniqueness to the theory. In the table below, I provide an overview of the empirical expectations I derived from the propositions connected to the concept of instrument constituencies.

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<sup>4</sup> This theoretical uniqueness of the empirical expectations and evidence related to the concept of instrument constituencies was also explored in more detail in my forthcoming work, which also includes more details on the differences between instrument constituencies, advocacy coalitions, and epistemic communities (Piross, in press).

*Table 3, Overview of Empirical Expectations*

Empirical Expectations	Summary of observable details
<b>E1 Background conditions and policy outcome consistent with the presence of an instrument constituency in entrepreneurship policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historically rapid evolution, followed by stagnant popularity, with no signs of decline.</li> <li>Implementation provides a supply of structural promises in the form of specialized jobs and engagements.</li> <li>Widespread application across different jurisdictions, governance levels, and policy domains. Measures are implemented in several countries and across different levels of governance and policy domains.</li> </ul>
<b>E2 There is an active and influential transnational community of entrepreneurship policy experts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active transnational community of entrepreneurship policy specialists. Signs of active coordination in the form of specialized forums, events, shared initiatives, and projects.</li> <li>Transnational instrument constituency actively managing structural promises, creating a “supply push” of entrepreneurship policy</li> <li>The transnational instrument constituency increased the implementation of policy measures at lower levels</li> </ul>
<b>E3 Policy objectives and socioeconomic problems are detached from the instrument</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large variety of associated problems and policy objectives that can be in conflict with each other.</li> <li>Activities of the experts to attach entrepreneurship policy measures to problems.</li> </ul>
<b>E4 Evaluation and modelling are closely connected to implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No accounts suggest that the evaluations have largely changed the course of entrepreneurship policy.</li> <li>Interdependence of modeling and implementation: participating actors in these different functions are close to each other.</li> </ul>
<b>E5 Broad political and public support for entrepreneurship policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universal political support, lack of political opposition, and a low level of political interest.</li> <li>Positive public perception of entrepreneurship policy based on "functional promises."</li> </ul>

Following the above table, I further detail the listed empirical expectations derived from the theory.

#### **4.2.1 E1 Background Conditions and Policy Outcome**

*Following a period of rapid evolution, the entrepreneurship policy is characterized by stagnation.* This expectation is included because the empirical findings should also support that the overall policy outcome is consistent with the theoretical expectations. The pattern of a relatively sudden and rapid growth in the prevalence of the policy instrument followed by a largely static persistence (maintenance of the status quo) is the temporal pattern that the theory attempts to explain.

*The implementation of entrepreneurship policy provides a "supply of structural promises" to the policy community.* Material and non-material benefits that motivate the development, retention, and expansion of entrepreneurship policy must be present, in line with the predictions associated with the concept of ICs. The implementation of entrepreneurship policy is expected to provide job positions, consulting and advisory opportunities, and research opportunities that are beneficial for the instrument constituency.

*There is a widespread persistence of entrepreneurship policies across different jurisdictions, levels, and domains.* It is an integral idea in the concept of ICs that the activities of the instrument constituency result in an "oversupply" of the instrument. That is expected to cause a situation where it is applied across many jurisdictions, governance levels, and policy domains. More precisely, it should be applied in significantly more of those contexts than we would expect without the activities of the constituency. While the ubiquity of entrepreneurship policy measures was already established during the exploratory phases of the research, detailed empirical explorations must further support this expectation. The ubiquity of the policy instrument can also point to the disconnectedness between policy problems and solutions, because if it is applied similarly in different contexts, that undermines the credibility of the intervention logic narratives. Strong evidence for this expectation is also in contrast with functionalist "policy cycle" predictions. This is because, in a functionalist explanation, policies should be evaluated in each different context, which makes a uniform outcome less likely.

#### **4.2.2 E2 Active and Influential Transnational Community of Experts**

*There is an active transnational community of experts, with some degree of active coordination.* This prediction can be observed through the existence of events, forums, networks, the traces of their activities, and their communication. It is important to note that there need to be traces of a non-trivial degree of coordination and joint efforts to promote entrepreneurship policy, and the degree of activity is something that can be difficult to judge. It can again be observed through the fact that these community or network activities depend on the existence of certain policy instruments or whether their focus lies elsewhere. If the network activities are defined by a broader or different topical interest, that would weaken the strength of the propositions of the concept of ICs in explaining the case. The activities and their “centeredness” on the policy instrument should be observed at the same time to support this expectation.

*The transnational instrument constituency actively manages the structural promises.* This is an expectation related to the mechanism by which the instrument constituency actively tries to manage structural promises provided by entrepreneurship policy. This means that entrepreneurship policy not only provides structural promises, but the instrument constituency actively works toward the expansion or at least retention of these opportunities. This expectation demands further observations compared to the related E1 expectation that focuses on the activities connected to structural promises. This requires stronger, possibly “confessionals” type of evidence (Beach and Pedersen, 2016, pp. 165–166) about the supply of structural promises, which would also further strengthen the explanatory power of the concept of ICs compared to functionalist/policy cycle explanations. In cases where personal motivations distort the policy outcome, this strongly goes against functionalist predictions.

*The influence of the transnational instrument constituency across different levels of governance and jurisdictions results in the increased application of entrepreneurship policy measures.* It is assumed that the instrument constituency actively tries to create linkages between different levels of government, vertically, and between different jurisdictions and policy domains, horizontally. To prove this, either extensive social connections need to exist between the experts who work in different jurisdictions or at different levels, or they must exert some control in other forms, e.g., through the establishment of binding legal or financial arrangements.

#### **4.2.3 E3 Policy Objectives and Problems Are Detached from the Solution**

*A large variety of socioeconomic problems and rationales are associated with entrepreneurship policy, which can be in conflict with each other.* According to the propositions related to ICs, the policy instrument is not, or is only loosely connected to, specific socioeconomic problems. It has been observed that a large variety of policy objectives and problems can point toward the phenomenon known as “surfing for problems” (Boscarino, 2009) when a certain solution gets attached to various problems. A challenge related to the assessment of this expectation is that there is no accepted scale on which to measure what counts as a large variety. To mitigate this, it is also important to establish from the accounts that the variety of problems causes issues for the planning and implementation of the policy because they cannot be fulfilled simultaneously.

*Members of the policy community actively try to attach entrepreneurship policy to problems in order to make it implemented.* In this case, empirical evidence could directly point to the fact that actors in the policy community actively sought to attach entrepreneurship policy instruments to problems to increase the likelihood of future implementation. This can be strong proof that the transnational instrument constituency actively tries to attach problems to solutions. This is in line with the expectations related to the concept of ICs (as well as an often-cited proposition in the MSF). If this expectation is supported, that would indicate that an IC explanation is more likely to be appropriate than functionalist, advocacy coalition, and epistemic community explanations.

#### **4.2.4 E4 Evaluation and Modeling Are Closely Connected to Implementation**

*It is expected that there are no accounts suggesting that evaluations changed the course of entrepreneurship policy.* According to functionalist explanations, public policies are supposed to resolve problems. This also means that if evaluations indicate that a policy intervention does not work, it should be changed, or another alternative policy should replace it to attempt to resolve the problem. The propositions related to the concept of ICs do not predict this, but rather that an instrument constituency tries to frame the results and evaluations so that the policy instrument remains applied or even extended.

Thus, in cases where, across different contexts, there are accounts showing that evaluations and monitoring do not change the trajectories of the policies, that can be a strong proof that the presence of an instrument constituency is a better explanation than functionalist policy cycle explanations. In contrast to that, if there were signs that the policy community seriously considers the application of other alternatives, that would be strong evidence against the explanatory power of the concept of ICs. A policy alternative in this case is sufficiently different to prove the expectation if it would change the "structural promises" of the instrument constituency. This means that the benefits from the application of the policy instrument would considerably diminish in the case of the implementation of the alternative policy (its implementation would divert resources to other actors instead of the current ones). An example would be the consideration of reallocating the resources spent on entrepreneurship policy to other policies, such as investments in large existing companies (if the problem is employment or economic growth), or to spending on general education or infrastructure development (in the case of social inclusion or regional development).

*Interdependence of modeling and implementation through social connections.* Interdependence means that those actors who are involved in the modeling of the problem and the intervention logic belong to the same professional community as those who have incentives for the implementation of entrepreneurship policy. This closeness of modeling and implementation is an important proposition and necessary condition for the concept of ICs. There should be "closeness": modeling is done by actors (individuals or organizations) with close links to and influence over the implementation.

An alternative disconfirming observation could be that the modeling community, such as academics, think tanks, statisticians, research groups, and others, has no social connections to the rest of the policy community or that their interests are only aligned to a limited extent. This expectation can be either judged by the "confessions" of the policy community or observed through other signs. If the forums and career trajectories of those involved in modeling are shared, that would point to connections between these policy actors. Also, if the interest focus of those who do the modeling is not the same because it is broader (like modeling industrial policy, economic policy, regional development, and other areas), that would also mean that they are less likely to be closely connected to other actors in forming an instrument constituency together

because their “structural promises” are different. In other words, this point can be supported if those who plan the interventions consistently use models produced by actors who are part of the constituency, and their work is centered around entrepreneurship policy.

#### **4.2.5 E5 Broad Political and Public Support for Entrepreneurship Policy**

*It is expected that there is broad political support for entrepreneurship policy, with a lack of significant political opposition, and politics also show a low level of interest in the issue.* According to the concept of ICs, instrument constituencies are expected to “depoliticize” topics, making issues more technical than political. They are also expected to frame the “functional promises” in a way that creates widespread acceptance. We can expect to see a situation where politics is modestly supportive of the issue but keeps a distance from the policy. On the other hand, an advocacy coalitions-based explanation predicts political conflicts, or at least that some politicians maintain interest in the policy by being part of the advocacy coalition. A low level of political conflict and political interest around entrepreneurship policy can thus strengthen the IC explanation, particularly against an explanation that relies on ACs.

*Finally, it is predicted that there is a prevailing positive public perception of entrepreneurship policy, based on the beliefs about the “functional promises” it can deliver.* Framing the functional promises in ways that provide broad acceptance for the implementation of the policy instrument is an integral proposition of the concept of ICs. It enables the instrument constituency to sustain the situation that is beneficial for it. Broad public acceptance and a positive policy image is a strong empirical expectation.

### **4.3 Empirical Methods**

Two methods were used in the empirical analysis to test the empirical expectations detailed above. First, a historical analysis (SoRelle and Michener, 2022, pp. 90–91) was conducted using the available policy documents, policy evaluations, scholarly sources, and publicly available information. The aim of this historical analysis is to uncover the temporal patterns of the emergence and persistence of entrepreneurship policy. A limitation of this research is that the feasibility considerations allowed only

a modest depth for the historical analysis, nonetheless, it provides an indispensable background for the interpretation of other observations. The structure of the analysis follows the empirical expectations to provide evidence about the timing of observations related to specific propositions. This structured manner of analysis differentiates it from the description of the key characteristics of entrepreneurship policy that can be found above in Subchapter 2.2

Second, the results of 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with entrepreneurship policy experts between October 2022 and September 2023 are analyzed in detail. The interviews were conducted with experts with different profiles and different nationalities, and they also varied in seniority. Based on their profiles, they were classified into four main groups: (i) experts with extensive international experience, (ii) experts involved in local implementation, (iii) experts with extensive civil service experience, (iv) and experts who are primarily academics. The list of the interviewees and more information about their details can be found in Subchapter 6.1. The interview transcripts were coded with NVivo software designed for qualitative analysis. The coding was based on the structure of the empirical expectations. The results are presented first through an analysis of the general patterns of information found across the interviews. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the results from the interviews, following the structure of the empirical expectations. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the results from both the historical analysis and the expert interviews, and presents reflections on the empirical expectations and the findings of the analysis.

## **5 HISTORY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP POLICY**

I conducted a historical analysis of the case with the help of relevant scholarly literature and policy documents. Historical analysis is an important method in policy process studies, particularly for understanding path-dependent processes in public policy. (SoRelle and Michener, 2022). The primary strength of historical analysis is that it helps to understand the trajectory of entrepreneurship policy. The beginnings of the policy paradigm go back decades, which makes it difficult to collect firsthand accounts of the beginnings of policy programs. The changes the policy went through over time, however, contain important information that is central to testing the assumptions of the theories.

It is relevant to understand whether we can talk about policy dynamics that are in line with the expectations associated with the concept of instrument constituencies. It can also shed light on the persistence of entrepreneurship policies and the social dynamics of the instrument constituency, and whether these have changed considerably over time or to a lesser extent. It is also important to understand how public and political perceptions may have changed since the emergence of the policy. It is also important to establish whether the intervention logic of the policy has changed over time following the changes in socio-economic contexts, as modeling and problem-solution relations are integral parts of the propositions related to the concept of ICs.

Scholarly literature on entrepreneurship already contains substantial information about the history of entrepreneurship as a research subject, as well as the history of entrepreneurship policy. A review of scholarly sources has been supplemented by an analysis of policy documents from the past (particularly from the OECD, the EU, and the US federal administration), newspaper articles (like the New York Times), and accounts of some relevant organizations themselves. In the following pages, I provide a summary of the evolution of entrepreneurship policy from the literature.

### **5.1 The Emergence of Entrepreneurship Policy**

Entrepreneurship policy has a historic innovation story that is rooted in previously established small business policies. Entrepreneurship gradually gained more attention, both in popular discourse and in academia in the 1980s and subsequently became a

widespread approach in public policy in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since then, as a policy theme, it has enjoyed stagnant, but continuous popularity, and its applications are extensive (Lundström et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship policy grew out of small business policies, and in many cases, the same institutions govern both policies. Small business policy in its current form originates from the United States; its formal beginning was marked by the establishment of the Small Business Administration in 1953 (Bennett, 2014). Ever since then, small business policies have enjoyed relatively uninterrupted popularity in the United States. While the problems they were supposed to mitigate changed from time to time, their history was characterized by bipartisan support and a popular image, as the idea of small businesses resonated well with the American public (see Anglund, 1998; Anglund, 1999). While small business policy programs in the US served as inspiration for other countries, they did not spread quickly, and similar programs only started later in other countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, they only commenced in the 1970s, following the “Bolton Report” in 1971. (Irwin and Scott, 2021)

Things changed when public attention started to turn towards entrepreneurship in the 1980s. This newfound popularity of the concept was likely due to the popular success of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, who in many ways rejuvenated the economy of the United States and left a lasting impact on western culture as well (Audretsch, 2021). Public attention was followed by increased interest in academia and, later, in policymaking. There was a rapid increase in academic interest in entrepreneurship between the 1980s and the 2000s (Lundström and Stevenson, 2005). During the 1990s, small business policy turned more towards entrepreneurship in some countries, and during the second half of the decade, entrepreneurship policy programs relying on the already-mentioned set of policy instruments started. Some earlier examples are the “Jobs through Enterprise” program in the Netherlands in 1997 and the “Entrepreneurial Development” program from 1997 in Spain. (OECD, 1998).

The next milestone was the beginning of the promotion of the policy by international organizations at the end of the 1990s. Most notably, the “Fostering Entrepreneurship” publication of the OECD (1998) and the “Action Plan to Promote Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness” of the European Commission (1999) raised the promotion of entrepreneurship high on the international agenda. Since then, both the European Union and the OECD have continuously promoted entrepreneurship policies. Other

international organizations also became advocates for this set of policy instruments. The World Bank, the ILO, the UNCTAD, and other regional institutions have all started to issue recommendations or “toolboxes” for states, advising them on implementing entrepreneurship policies (see Bennett, 2014, Chapter 4).

Some prominent non-profit institutions that actively engaged in the promotion of entrepreneurship policy also turned increasingly towards entrepreneurship around this time. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, which is among the wealthiest foundations of the world<sup>5</sup>, uses most of its revenue to promote entrepreneurship. Its focus gradually shifted more and more from local activities towards the global promotion of entrepreneurship.<sup>6</sup> The Kauffman Foundation became very active in sponsoring activities and has worked diligently towards promoting entrepreneurship policy (Dennis, 2016, p. 299). The promotion of the instrument to policymakers was already documented in the early 2000s, as Lundström and Stevenson (2005, p. 68) noted: “type of entrepreneurship promotion activity is emerging in the US - the concept of promoting entrepreneurship among federal and state politicians and government officials...”. They also describe how this effort was started in 2000 the establishment of the National Commission on Entrepreneurship (NCOE) an initiative that was funded by the Kauffman Foundation.

Other organizations also turned towards the promotion of entrepreneurship, and the related public policies. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, an influential research and modeling endeavor, which monitors "entrepreneurial framework conditions" in different countries was also created in 1997, and experienced rapid growth in the next few years (Bosma, 2013). Another organization, the ICSB (International Council for Small Business) for example over time rebranded itself as the organization that “Advances Entrepreneurship Worldwide” to emphasize both entrepreneurship and the global focus of its activities. It originally started alongside US small business policy in the 1950s, but their activities later became international, and it also became more

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<sup>5</sup> With an endowment value well over USD 2 billion, the Kauffman Foundation is listed among the 50 wealthiest foundations in the world (ARCO LAB, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> This was accelerated under the management of Carl J. Schramm even though his appointment and the changes in the activities of the foundation caused some controversy (Strom, 2003).

concerned with entrepreneurship policy. (Lundström and Stevenson, 2005; International Council for Small Business, n.d.) Activities that support the networking of those who engage with entrepreneurship policy continued to develop further. The GEN Global Entrepreneurship Week, possibly the largest forum of this kind, started in 2008, is a popular platform that proudly involves experts and representatives of governments from across the globe (Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2022b, pp.19–20.) These organizations remain active, and entrepreneurship policy is persistent up to this day. This is also well reflected in the numbers of the countries that are connected to the above-mentioned international platforms.<sup>7</sup>

## **5.2 Expert Community and Influence**

Looking at the social life around the policy instruments the propositions of Simons and Voß (2018) on the attributes of a developed instrument constituency are clearly observable. This set of instruments is actively promoted by the constituency, and the interconnectedness of modeling, implementation, and evaluation of the policy instrument is present in entrepreneurship policies. The international organizations and non-profits regularly issue recommendations on how, and what to implement, including different policy papers, “toolkits” and recommendations. Private organizations also cooperate extensively with the public sector. The OECD, the European Union, and GEN for example regularly work together on joint projects.<sup>8</sup> There are also “expert networks”, and directories for networking, which actively foster the development of connections between the experts of entrepreneurship policy.<sup>9</sup> There are large-scale global events that foster the activities, such as the Global

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<sup>7</sup> GEN’s website “GEN Atlas” for example, the “compendium of public sector policies and programs” lists hundreds of government initiatives (Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2022a) and “GEN Policy” has members from the public administration of 60 different countries (Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2022b). In its publication “The Influence of GEM on Policy 2017/18” publication the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (n.d.-a) details 21 countries where they successfully contributed to entrepreneurship policy programs. and the latest “International Compendium of Entrepreneurship Policies” by the OECD (2020) contained a detailed review of 16 different programs from OECD countries.

<sup>8</sup> GEN Global’s “GEN Policy” division for example organizes “policy dialogues” jointly with the OECD, and it also cooperates extensively with the World Bank or the UNCTAD. (Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2022b, pp. 53–56).

Entrepreneurship Congress (see Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2022b, pp. 25–27). The opportunities for the various actors to connect and discuss the policy instrument are abundant.

Modeling and implementation show the interdependency that has been observed in cases of other policy instruments. There are technical models created and promoted by these actors to describe the logic of the interventions to guide implementation and evaluation. Different indices were also created to measure “entrepreneurial activity” in different countries or territories or even the “entrepreneurial ecosystem” (see Bennett, 2014, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, n.d.-b). The presence of non-argumentative elements is also clearly observable. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor provides datasets for country comparisons, and their national teams are sponsored by the governments of several different countries (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, n.d.-d)

This implementation of the instruments can be seen not only across different jurisdictions, but also at different levels of government. This was observed from relatively early stages, as Gilbert et al. (2004, p. 313) noted “Entrepreneurship policies are implemented at all levels of government.” These organized activities, and the requirements of the implementation created the kind of benefits for those who are part of the instrument constituency that are recognized as structural promises by Voß and Simons (2014). There are established departments within international organizations<sup>10</sup> as well as in the local agencies involved in implementing the policy measures. There are research grants available, opportunities to partake in the events and networks, and to publish. The planning and implementation of these policies are also supported by the expertise provided by external consultants.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> An example is the “Committee on SMEs and Entrepreneurship” and the “Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities” (CFE) of the OECD (see OECD/European Commission, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> One specialized firm, for example, Startup Genome, provides “evidence-based ecosystem research, advisory, and scaleup programs” (Startup Genome, n.d.). It has offices in San Francisco, London, Berlin, Delhi, Bengaluru, Abu Dhabi, Tokyo, Sao Paulo, and by its own account, it has “worked with more than 180 economic and innovation ministries and public/private agencies in over 65 countries” (Startup Genome, n.d.).

### 5.3 Policy Objectives, Problem Definitions, and Evaluation

Entrepreneurship policies are supposed to mitigate various problems for example: decreasing unemployment, improving the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, accelerating economic growth, fostering innovation, improving the competitiveness of geographical areas, and even supporting urban regeneration (OECD, 2004; Bennett, 2014). The implementation and planning of these policies can also cross different policy domains in accordance with this variety of problem definitions. While the rationale of the entrepreneurship policy programs varies considerably, these programs not necessarily reflect too much to the different socioeconomic contexts they are supposed to address. Bennett highlights (2014, Chapter 3) how policies can lag behind the circumstances and aims can also be “deliberately obfuscated”. Irwin and Scott (2021, Introduction section) also concluded that small business and entrepreneurship policy in England has “confused policy goals” (see also Section 2.2.2 about confusion around the objectives).

These socioeconomic rationales presented behind the programs often receive only limited attention. In this understanding the suboptimal number of entrepreneurs is considered the immediate problem,<sup>12</sup> and addressing it can have many broader societal benefits in the understanding of the constituency. The models depicting the effects of entrepreneurship policy often seem to focus on the theorized impediments to an increased entrepreneurial activity, and not on how the associated socioeconomic benefits could be maximized. Using these models, statistics, and databases which revolve around “entrepreneurial activity”, the focus is further shifted towards this intensity of entrepreneurial activity as the objective of the public policy.

This “duality” of problem definitions was already identified in the case of earlier small business policies by Anglund (1998, p. 31) who found that these policies used “compound problem definitions”. This means that programs typically contain one problem definition that cites an underlying socioeconomic problem, yet this is often

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<sup>12</sup> As Lundstrom and Stevenson (2005, p. 5) formulated, entrepreneurship policy “has the primary objective of encouraging more people in the population to consider entrepreneurship as an option”

vague, distant, and chosen in a seemingly ad hoc fashion. Arshed et al. (2014) also observed in their overview of small business and entrepreneurship policies that “considerable time and effort was attributed in legitimizing the policy interest” (2014, p.654). The “compound” nature of the problem definitions is not surprising, because unless entrepreneurship, or entrepreneurship policy itself, is considered a “merit good” (Musgrave, 2018), something that is desirable simply for its own sake, some socioeconomic benefits are expected from the implementation of these policies for them to fit the utilitarian functionalist principles of modern policymaking.

It is also established that entrepreneurship is a very popular ideational concept, particularly since the rise of notable entrepreneurs in the high-tech sector. As Audretsch (2021, p. 849) noted, “The Silicon Valley model of entrepreneurship ... has captured the imagination of the world. The public is mesmerized by it, the public policy community strives to emulate it”. Acs et al. (2016) also described how a disproportionately large part of the working-age population would like to become entrepreneurs, which is a good indicator how popular this idea is. Entrepreneurship is a popular concept in the eyes of the public, as is the promise of creating a society with more successful entrepreneurs. There seems to be a strong desire to believe in entrepreneurship and what it possibly embodies: equal opportunity, great individual success regardless of social background, meritocracy, and the possibility of continuous innovation. Similarly, Anglund (1999) already found that there was a strong ideational element to earlier small business policies. In her work, comparison effect — comparing small businesses to large enterprises — was cited as the key element of the problem perception.

As for the current state of entrepreneurship policy, a recent OECD (2023) publication has systematically reviewed the existing evaluations of entrepreneurship policy programs in OECD countries (the review also included small business programs). It lists as its number one recommendation that the governments should specify objectives and targets (OECD, 2023, p. 19) and also says that the lack of clear specification of policy objectives is a key issue. It also includes a reflection on Acs et al. (2016) and points out that the effects of alternative actions from other policy domains (“macro policies”) should also be compared to the effects of entrepreneurship policy and small business policy. It also highlights the difficulties in assessing the cost-effectiveness of policies, as there is often no available information on the expenses (OECD, 2023, p.

64). The authors have also followed up on what happened with the evaluations and note that some have never been presented to policymakers, which raises questions about to the extent to which evaluations can fulfill the role that is attributed to them in functionalist policy models.

## **5.4 Political and Public Support**

In the available literature, we can see that small business and entrepreneurship policy are often described as topics that enjoy bipartisan support (Irwin and Scott, 2021). The global ubiquity of entrepreneurship policy programs is also a good sign that they are popular with people with different political beliefs. It is possible that this bipartisanship and apparent “depoliticization” of the topic are exacerbated by the activities of the instrument constituency. It is possible that the instrument constituency actively tries to maintain this bipartisan status of entrepreneurship policies, and the extensive use of technical language and complex modeling can further contribute to this depoliticization. Bipartisan support was also a characteristic of small business policies before the emergence of the current instrument constituency (Anglund, 1998, p. 25). This can indicate that this bipartisan nature was an existing condition prior to the development of the instrument constituency, and the low-conflict nature of these policies can also serve the interests of politicians. Irwin and Scott (2021) also analyzed how these policies can benefit politicians by engaging with the issue temporarily.

There was one study by Debus et al. (2017) on how the topic of entrepreneurship and self-employment has appeared on the agendas of German political parties. They used party manifestos, and through the analysis of the frequency of key terms, they measured the salience of entrepreneurship and self-employment. They found evidence that the issue is more salient in the communication of conservative and liberal parties than the left, although this was only true for some of the states in Germany. The increased salience does, however, follow the same pattern that others have also identified: that entrepreneurship surged in popularity during the 1990s. They highlight that Germany experienced increasing unemployment during the 1990s, and during that time, the issue of entrepreneurship and self-employment became more salient in the communications of political parties. While this analysis of the prominence of entrepreneurship on political agendas was limited, it can indicate that for the political left, the topic of entrepreneurship is less important or was less important in the past.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that they also actively oppose entrepreneurship policy measures.

## **6 EXPERT INTERVIEWS**

### **6.1 Collection of Interview Data**

The key original empirical work in the research was conducting interviews with experts whose work is related to entrepreneurship policy. 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 2022 and September 2023. Prospective interviewees were identified based on their experience and expected insights into the topics. The selection of interviewees was done through purposive sampling in order to find interviewees who could provide informative insight into the case. Potential interviewees were identified by studying available documents and online resources. Interviewees themselves were also asked whether they could recommend other interviewees, which in a number of cases helped me reach more experts.

More than a hundred potential interviewees were contacted directly via email. The positive response rate varied among groups and was significantly higher among those who were referred by another interviewee. The overall experience with the organizations was that it was challenging to find direct contact details for experts in certain kinds of organizations, and in many cases, email addresses could not be found. In these cases, I tried to contact the organizations online via contact forms on their websites; this method was only successful in one case. Even when it was possible to obtain email addresses, I failed to get experts from some organizations. Notably, I was not successful in approaching any current employee of the OECD, even despite multiple attempts. The difficulty of reaching interviewees is itself a limitation of this empirical method. In spite of the challenges, the interviews conducted were successful and provided a rich source of information.

I was able to successfully interview a good mix of academics, employees of public administration, and specialists who work in private firms or NGOs practitioners. Potential interviewees were identified through different resources:

1. Scholarly publications on entrepreneurship policy to find authors who have relevant insights

2. Policy documents, reports, websites of international organizations and NGOs to find experts and practitioners (OECD, European Commission, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Global Entrepreneurship Network, etc.)
3. Websites of national/local organizations, agencies, universities, etc.

The experts approached were from different countries of the developed world (OECD countries), allowing me to collect insights from various contexts. A significant proportion of the interviewees had international experience and thus were able to provide direct accounts of the transnational dimension of entrepreneurship policy. Those interviewees who had experience in domestic policy settings nonetheless also provided insight into how the transnational sphere have influenced public policy in their country. The interviews were semi-structured. A topic guide was created with questions, based on the expectations derived from theory, but the interviewees were able to answer freely, and additional questions were added when it was necessary.

Interviewees also varied in seniority: some had started to work on the topic decades ago, and were able to provide information about the evolution of the policy, while others were younger, with a different perspective. It is important to note that most of the interviewees had fulfilled different roles related to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship policy during their careers. This made it difficult to categorize the interviewees by role, on the other hand, it helped me gain insights from a variety of different experiences.

It seems usual that during a career, someone starts as a researcher of entrepreneurship, then gets involved in policy analysis or even implementation, or later continues work at an NGO. These activities can also be simultaneous, and there was no apparent clear temporal pattern of how the individuals went through these different career steps. Experts also tend to be involved with different jurisdictions during their careers. Those who are engaged at the international level might also have worked with policy at the national/state/local level, and there are also examples of experts who have engaged with different national administrations as consultants. It was only some local implementers whose engagement was limited to one type of role related to entrepreneurship policy. Nevertheless, even among many local implementers, it was apparent that during their careers they were engaged with the topic in different roles

in academia, public service, and other types of organizations. The list of the interviewees was the following:

*Table 4. List of interviewees*

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Brief description of the experience</b>
Experts with extensive international experience	INT01	Academic with a long experience in researching entrepreneurship, experience at a US federal agency, international advisory experience
	INT02	Former entrepreneur, lecturer at a US University, internationally active consultant, former advisor to the US federal administration
	INT03	Internationally active advisor (UN, OECD, etc.) former academic, previous experience working in the public administration in Canada
	INT04	Internationally active advisor (to the World Bank, etc.), prior experience in advisory positions in the UK
	INT05	EU-level representative of an advocacy association, prior experience in an EU member state
	INT06	Internationally active expert at an NGO, with advisory experience working with the UN, OECD, EU bodies, etc; former civil servant at the European Commission and in the UK
Local implementers	INT07	Expert at an NGO in Poland, involved in the implementation of publicly funded entrepreneurship support
	INT08	Expert at an NGO in Austria, involved in the implementation of publicly funded entrepreneurship support
	INT09	Expert at a private cooperative in Italy, involved in the implementation of publicly funded entrepreneurship support
	INT10	Expert at a university-organized support office in Denmark, involved in the implementation of publicly funded entrepreneurship support
	INT11	Expert at a university organized support office in the United States, involved in implementation of publicly funded entrepreneurship support
Extensive civil service experience	INT12	Civil servant, European Commission DG GROW, involved in entrepreneurship education
	INT13	Civil servant, European Commission DG GROW, previously other DGs, with experience working in other international organizations
	INT14	Civil servant, European Commission DG EMPL
	INT15	Civil Servant, Regional development agency in Poland

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Brief description of the experience</b>
	INT16	Academic, former civil servant in Scotland, UK
Experts who are primarily academics	INT17	Academic also involved in implementation, working at a university in Italy, involved in the implementation of publicly funded entrepreneurship support
	INT18	Academic at a Canadian university, formerly involved in the implementation of entrepreneurship support at a publicly funded NGO in Canada
	INT19	Academic at a university in Scotland, UK, with advisory experience in the UK
	INT20	Academic from Austria

All except for one of the interviews were conducted online, with the help of video-calling software (Zoom or MS Teams). This enabled me to conduct interviews with people from diverse geographical locations, such as the US, Canada, the UK, and the different countries of continental Europe. Due to the recent surge in the use of online videoconferencing services, all of the interviewees were able to use this opportunity without any difficulty.

I fully utilized this recent proliferation of technology, this development opened up possibilities that previously had only been available for larger research groups and would have been rather resource-intensive. Although the possibility of conducting interviews over the phone or the Internet is not new, I believe that the fact that videoconferencing became an everyday experience for professionals really contributed to the willingness of interviewees to use this mode of communication. One interview was conducted face-to-face because the interviewee was available in person at the same location where I reside. The duration of the interviews varied between 40 and 90 minutes, with 60 minutes as the typical length.

### **6.1.1 Patterns Across the Interviews**

The interviews were all recorded after the interviewees provided their explicit consent. Audio transcripts of the interviews were coded and analyzed with the help of NVivo software, which is specifically designed to support qualitative analysis. Important information was coded in the interview transcripts, with different codes representing

the different categories of empirical information that is relevant for the expectations derived from the theoretical sources. An initial set of codes was defined in the software to label the relevant parts of the interview transcripts. This coding was revised to an extent to help code those statements where a more differentiated classification seemed necessary. Not all of the interviewees shared information on all aspects of entrepreneurship policy, so different interviews contained different numbers of coded themes as well.

To explore general patterns across the interviews and the interviewee profiles, a crosstabs analysis was conducted with NVivo software. The software allows users to compare the mentions of codes in the transcripts across defined categories of the interviewees. While the limited number of interviewees does not allow for robust generalizations, the comparisons showed some patterns that allow for useful inferences. Importantly, all interviews contained relevant information. As the information was dispersed across the different interviewee profiles, the selection of diverse profiles was justified.

There was no statistically significant pattern in the distribution of any of the codes, and this result alone allows for some important inferences. While some patterns might exist in the broader population of potential interviewees, this was not clear from the results of this selection. The dispersion of information about the different topics indicates that most observations are shared across the experts with different profiles. This can indicate a degree of universality in the observations.

### **6.1.2 Rationales for Entrepreneurship Policy in the Interviews**

A dedicated crosstabs analysis was conducted to analyze the different policy rationales for entrepreneurship policy mentioned by the interviewees. The interviews revealed a wide array of policy rationales that are associated with entrepreneurship policy. All the main types of rationales were mentioned by at least one interviewee in each profile group. This shows that mentions of a certain rationale could not be directly identified with a certain interviewee profile. At the same time, no single rationale was mentioned by more than two-thirds of the interviewees in a single group. This internal variability also points toward a general dispersion of associated rationales, and a lack of clear agreement. The details can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Types of rationales for entrepreneurship policy mentioned by interviewee group

Most common rationales	Percentage of interviewees in each group who mentioned the rationale			
	International experts (n=6)	Local implementers (n=5)	Civil servants (n=5)	Academics (n=4)
Economic effects	50% (3)	20% (1)	40% (2)	50% (2)
<i>of which economic growth</i>	50% (3)	0% (0)	40% (2)	50% (2)
<i>of which economic resilience</i>	0% (0)	20% (1)	20% (1)	0% (0)
Job creation	100% (6)	60% (3)	60% (3)	25% (1)
Fostering innovation	67% (4)	60% (3)	20% (1)	50% (2)
Equal access to entrepreneurship or business creation	33% (2)	80% (4)	60% (3)	75% (3)
Social inclusion of disadvantaged groups	50% (3)	40% (2)	80% (4)	100% (4)
Promotion of desirable values in society	67% (4)	40% (2)	40% (2)	25% (1)
Green and digital transitions	50% (3)	40% (2)	40% (2)	50% (2)
Surfing for problems (accounts on attaching entrepreneurship policy to new rationales)	33% (2)	0% (0)	60% (3)	50% (2)

The variety of rationales and the lack of a clear "dominant" rationale are strongly in line with preliminary observations that there is ambiguity around the objectives of entrepreneurship policy, and that the solutions can be disconnected from the problems. While the frequency of the number of interviewees mentioning particular rationales did not show a significant pattern, some indicative patterns can be mentioned that could possibly be tested in further studies.

Job creation, inclusion of marginalized groups, and disadvantage alleviation for the policy target groups were the most frequently mentioned as key reasons for entrepreneurship policy. These were followed by the fostering of innovation, the advancement of green and digital transitions, the promotion of certain values in society and economic benefits (economic growth or increased resilience of the economy). About one-third of the interviews contained accounts that described a “surfing for problems” mechanism, which described attempts to connect the topic entrepreneurship policy to different problems that became more salient over time. These observations support some empirical expectations, and as this was mentioned by interviewees across different groups, it shows that the phenomenon can exist across different venues and governance levels involved in policymaking and implementation.

### **6.1.3 Other Topics in the Interviews**

While the small number of interviewees does not allow for robust generalizations, there were some other emerging patterns that could be the subject of further research. International experts and academics were more likely to be able to provide accounts of the historical evolution of entrepreneurship policy. These two groups were also more likely to reference international expert networks. Interviewees with a local implementer profile on the other hand were more likely to be able to share information about the local networks. Interestingly, the academics among the interviewees were the group that most often had information about both international and local expert networks, as they also had information about the local situation.

Interviewees with civil servant and local implementer profiles were more likely to be able to provide information on the top-down influence of the higher levels on local or regional policy implementation, including the influence of the EU on member states and lower levels in the case of European participants. In terms of the stakeholders mentioned in policy design and implementation, the interviewees with international

profiles were more likely to mention international NGOs and academia, but they rarely referred to some local stakeholders that the other groups were more likely to mention, such as chambers of commerce or local NGOs.

These differences can indicate that the transnational dimension of entrepreneurship policy and the local implementation do not connect through many linkages. The different levels only have limited connections with each other, with possibly some key actors being connected to different levels at the same time. The role of academics can be interesting for future research as there was an emerging pattern that they are connected to both the local networks and the international/transnational sphere. In the following subchapters, I continue the analysis of the interviews with concrete details relevant to the empirical expectations, supported by quotations from the interview transcripts.

## **6.2 Background Conditions and Policy Outcome**

### **6.2.1 Evolution and Persistence of Entrepreneurship Policy**

While it was not an integral part of the interview topic guide, some interviewees gave informative accounts of the evolution of entrepreneurship policy. Their accounts were in line with what was found in the literature. One interviewee (INT01) made mention of the "SBIR" program in the US in the 1980s, which can be considered, in their opinion, the first entrepreneurship policy initiative. The same interviewee made mentions of how the language related to the policies has evolved over time.

*And then access to the R&D infrastructure was a big issue. And so there was a law passed, I forget the exact year, sometime in the mid 80s called the SBIR program. Small Business Innovation Research program where the federal government funds a lot of R&D, and they passed a law that said 3% of all R&D had to be given to small firms. That's an entrepreneurship policy. (INT01)*

Interviewee INT03 who also had extensive experience, also described experiences from the "early days" of entrepreneurship policy. INT03 also made mention of how the terms changed, and how the concept of "entrepreneurship policy" was so novel at the time, yet it became popular. This included mention of how there was, as there still is, a debate around whether entrepreneurship policy should be separate from small business policies or not.

*“I was an academic, I was a professor for 10 years and started doing research in a business school, university in Canada and started doing research on women's entrepreneurship. Initially women business, we weren't even calling it entrepreneurship back then, we were calling it business ownership. So women and business ownership.” (INT03)*

*“So in that consultancy project I was still a professor, but I did interviews and so on and so forth and developed an entrepreneurship strategy for them. To increase the number of entrepreneurs and improve the promotion of entrepreneurship in the region...*

*...Nobody was doing this, governments and no country that I had looked at was doing the whole thing they were doing bits of it. Like maybe entrepreneurship education, or maybe, you know, micro loans for startups. But nobody had the... so I built the whole model for this regional development agency for entrepreneurship. And then they liked it, and they said, would you come in and implement it” (INT03)*

### **6.2.2 Widespread Implementation of Entrepreneurship Policy**

The descriptions of the interviewees about the policy settings they are familiar with revealed a remarkable variety of actors, organizations and governance levels involved in the planning and implementation of the policy. Typically, all levels of government are involved in it in some way, with a considerable number of private institutions as well. It is not just ubiquitous across different territories and jurisdictions, but in many cases, there are programs that run parallel to one another, targeting the same population of possible end beneficiaries. In Europe, the European Commission has initiatives managed centrally by the Commission itself, while EU member states also have their own programs, and regional governments and municipalities then also have programs of their own, financed by different sources. As the interviewees stated:

*“Obviously, within the EU you have these different levels of policymakers, so starting from, you know, the local mayor's office says once, who you know is active or not active in helping local entrepreneurs to the regional office, to the national government. And then finally you have EU level where you then also do something. So there's a, you know, so there's a whole sort of string and hierarchy of actors involved in this.” (INT13)*

*“Policies often devolved. It's not always at Member State level, and then you're going down another layer and then it's very hard and there is a lot of opportunities to learn and it's hard to take them and it's hard to facilitate them, but they should be there. Right. So it's policy at different levels of governance, as well as then like you know, an NGO implementing stuff with a particular region et cetera” (INT06)*

Not just in Europe but also in the United States and Canada, there is a similar situation where considerable federal programs are run, and the states, cities, and even counties can have their own programs as well. In both cases, the above are also supplemented by the activities provided by the private sector: venture capital funds, consultancies, and NGOs have many activities which are similar (if not identical) to the government-created programs.

Moreover, the line between public and private provision can be blurred. In simpler cases, governments involve private actors in the implementation of their programs, or simply provide some form of subsidy to the activities of private initiatives. There are also other cases where the law guarantees funding for some NGOs that are typically involved in entrepreneurship support. The best example of this is how, in many countries' chambers of commerce have guaranteed funding, either directly from the public budget or by giving them the right to apply mandatory membership fees to companies active in the area.

This complicated web of different kinds of actors, involved also to very different degrees, makes entrepreneurship support complex and challenging to follow. The interviewees unanimously described policy landscapes as ones in which a lot of different actors are involved simultaneously. They had different opinions, however, about whether this was a problem in their view, or not. Some interviewees thought that these situations led to the fragmentation of resources, which was seen as inefficient and unnecessary.

*“If I analyse policy, you know the Small Business Act or the SME strategy of a country will deal with some aspect, and the innovation strategy will deal with other aspects and the economic development strategy will deal with other aspects... and the higher education strategy will deal with other aspects*

*[laughs]. You know, and it's all very... you know, it's like there's no joined upness to this sometimes" (INT06)*

Another interviewee mentioned that while, in general, they think it is beneficial to have “a lot of players”, it can also be too much, and described how some services are oversupplied in Austria:

*“Sometimes... it's too much. Because it can of course be inefficient when the... our university funds a startup, which is also funded by the City of [city name redacted] which also gets support from some funding other funding body or an NGO... Because they are “over supervised” and we all are proud when this start-up is successful and we say it's our start-up... and the others say no... it's our start-up. You know, it can get inefficient to provide the same services from all the organizations, because basically, more or less, we do similar things. So we provide some space, we provide education, training. We do this pitching contests, sometimes there are too many. We try to get prizes, but then we have all these winners and it's not so valuable anymore because there are so many different contests...” (INT20)*

Others, however, were content with the situation in their country or territory, and described a case where different actors coordinated the efforts nicely, or at least where the parallels were not causing any problems.

*“it had that province wide mandate plus it also was funded by, you know, Federal Government. So the Canadian Federal government and the provincial government. So it really made for some interesting dynamics because you know, those two governments are often not cooperating. So it made for some interesting sort of every time the funding got renewed, it was, it was always interesting in double quote. And often we could almost sort of, you know, we could use the fact that, as soon as one government sort of agreed to fund this, then we could use that as leverage to sort of convince the other side to fund and honestly that in the history of that organization that's essentially how it's been done.” (INT18)*

Interviewees mentioned a number of reasons that can lead to the large number of actors involved. One recurring theme in the answers of the interviewees was that the separation of policy domains and governmental departments can cause difficulties.

Many interviewees recognized that entrepreneurship policy as a topic crosses policy domains or departments in the current status quo of public policy. This was mentioned frequently in relation to the European Commission, where this is very apparent. Yet there was no indication that the situation is different in the member states or elsewhere in other countries. Industry and trade policies, innovation and research policy, employment policy, territorial development, and education are the most "affected" policy domains, and the responsible governmental and executive agencies can have some role in the situation. The interviewees mentioned that the departments can be reluctant to cooperate to the extent that would be desirable, and also that the cross-cutting nature of entrepreneurship policy can create a challenging situation from a budgetary point of view as well.

In some cases, they mentioned the explicit opposition of the agents of some policy domains to engaging with entrepreneurship policy actions. This is remarkable, because this was the only systemic opposition to entrepreneurship policy the interviewees mentioned. It was claimed that, in particular, those who work in education policy often refuse the idea to include entrepreneurship promotion in the education policy agenda.

The cross-cutting nature of the policy is something that the expectations related to the concept of ICs would also predict, but whether it is a precondition for an instrument constituency to form, or the result of its activities is difficult to untangle. These two causal relations are not even necessarily exclusive. It is easily imaginable that an initial situation where some "nascent" policy instrument is not a good fit for the existing structure of public administration, and this situation provides good conditions for a constituency to form around the instrument. Then, the existence of the new community can exacerbate the cross-cutting nature of the policy instrument over time.

*"I see it as both a fragmentation but also a homogenization. So let me try and sort of unpack this thought a bit more. There is a fragmentation in the sense that, [all of them ] kind of go off and do their own thing. They don't talk to each other as much as they should do. The homogenization I think comes from the overall policy agenda and the mechanisms in which it's funded. [I] mean that a lot of these organizations end up coalescing to do the same thing and we get a lot of duplication. So in that sense, everyone's doing the same thing. Or*

*adopting the same narratives and you know, as I said, the delivery of enterprise support hasn't really innovating much.” (INT16)*

## **6.3 Community and Influence of Experts**

### **6.3.1 Expert Communities and Networks**

A central proposition of the concept of ICs is about the existence of active communities of experts around the policy instrument and the activities they undertake towards the advancement of the instrument. According to the interviews, expert networks certainly exist, but their activities seem to be limited to certain levels of governance. I got the picture from the interviews that there is indeed a transnational community of experts of entrepreneurship policy, and there are many other networks at federal, state, or regional levels. While there are linkages between these communities, overall, the connection between them seems to be weak. In general, it seems that there are limited personal connections between these expert communities across different levels and geographies. The transnational level is connected to these more local levels mostly through official channels, and through a few people who are engaged at more than one level.

*“World Bank and OECD since these are non-legislative, like it's rather about recommendations and guidelines... exchange of best practices. There are, yeah, I think it's an important contribution to a discussion but it's not that has an enormous influence on policies, on the regional or national level.” (INT05)*

*“it's very difficult to change things even when we are able to demonstrate what the best practice is through research. and it's through these networks. And you know like I attend conferences, and sometimes you see policymakers from, you know, various policy bodies. I was at the Regional Studies Association conference the other week. And... you know, people from the European Commission and OECD and people like that, that do policy work. So they know what the best practice is. They know what research says, you know, should work. But it's a whole other thing to actually, you know, implement that. So I don't know, it's a bit frustrating.” (INT19)*

Those interviewees who are active mostly within one country had little awareness of the international level of entrepreneurship policy. They do not seem to follow or attend

international events, or read publications, except those that are organized as part of a policy program itself such as the annual meeting for the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs network.

It was also expressed by some of them that it is mostly the central (or federal) administration of their country that is connected to the international organizations, and international networks. In this sense the relations between the experts seem to be formal and hierarchical. On the other hand, they unanimously shared the experience that there are events, networking opportunities, and knowledge exchange within their own country or at lower levels in which they are active. This shows a picture where different networks coexist, each at their own level, and one or more transnational networks exist above these. Those interviewees who were active at the international level, in sharp contrast to the local experts, were very informed about the international landscape of the policy. They typically knew a lot about international organizations and seemed to have many connections to international organizations and projects.

*“Sometimes the OECD asks us: we have this and this event and we would need a member of you or two or three to speak to and to have all the presentation. Or even like to get an entrepreneur, like they ask them to ask a member to find one of their clients, a smaller company that would join the event. So, the same with the World Bank. Then it was like the most recent works on these guidelines was in a way that we could include those members that were most active in this area, so that they would directly join the meeting and participate. So yeah, active members perfectly know about it and are involved, and others will be informed by us but it might not be that they are really aware of it because of overload” (INT05)*

The career path of the experts could also create a lot of connections, as many have worked at more than one internationally active entity. The career paths also seem to be complex in other ways, as people sometimes moved between types of organizations during their careers or were engaged in more than one simultaneously: from an international organization to a consultancy or an NGO, or from academia to government consultancy, etc. Although the limited number of interviewees does not allow me to derive strong inferences, the career paths and past engagements of the experts seem to be an important factors in establishing linkages. It was typical for the

interviewed experts to describe several different past engagements with various organizations, as in this example:

*“I’ve worked with UN, OECD, European Commission, European Training Foundation, most organizations. From both the research perspective and also a practice, implementation perspective.” (INT06)*

There are organized, curated networking events and platforms at the international level, organized by one of the internationally active organizations. The perception of these networks and platforms was generally positive among the interviewees. One expert explained this in an illustrative way:

*“There’s loads of expert networks now, it depends how you look, what is an expert network. European Commission has expert networks. I’ve run them. And they are valuable for exchanging practice, exchanging ideas, you know, moving people forward towards a kind of, OK, this and exchanging evidence to show a common route to rationalize policy into a kind of acceptable context per country. I think that has a lot of value in terms of, say, the European Commission, working groups, expert networks, those are member states and experts. When I look at the OECD ones... ..There’s a lot of value in some of the work with OECD. They go into a country and they take experts and they analyze, you know and they really explore the context, the ecosystem. And I think that also, I mean all of this brings value” (INT06)*

Other interviewees shared similar positive sentiments:

*“GEN itself, I think it’s a very useful network that has lots of different functions. You’re probably aware of things like the GEC, the Global Entrepreneurship Congress, that will be in Melbourne later this year. Which is intended to be a sort of global get together of the sort of high-level policymakers and present to them some of what’s known in entrepreneurship policy. So I think that that’s quite interesting.” (INT04)*

*“[on how important networks are in driving policy] They affect policy because in some cases they’re a sounding board for policymakers. In some cases, they’re an active lobby group for policymakers. And another case, it’s sort of, it’s a bit*

*more subtle.... They sort of end up circulating ideas which maybe return to policymakers, you know, slightly different form, a little bit, a little bit later on. And you know, they are a way in which ideas get informally disseminated across other organizations” (INT04)*

*“We set up 10 years ago a network of what's called EU SME envoys. Those are in the in national administrations the people who are really in charge for SME policy. And... this is a, you know, very sort of very dynamic network, and where we... Part of the setting up of the network is that we do exactly that, that we try to share with them or enhance the sharing of good policy practices and experiences among them. So that's certainly a role that we can play” (INT13)*

One of the interviewees who had extensive experience with the Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN) also described how these networks can operate, which is interesting if we want to look at them from a collective action perspective:

*“My experience is networks always need curation. So even with the best will in the world, networks, club societies... I'm a member of a number of sporting associations and societies where we all do it... no one's paid to do this... They're just, you know, we get together because we want to help each other, and we see value in running a club or a society. But it takes time... and unless there is someone tasked with kind of curating that network and keeping it alive, the natural tendency is to fizzle out...*

*...How does that active curation happen? It happens either because you have an organization who's sort of in charge of it, and sees some benefit to them. Right....*

*...Or you have a bit of public money devoted to sort of a person to sort of keep it alive. Or you find someone who's just super, super, super committed, [laughs] right? You know, uh, you get some personal benefit for, you know, having this network at their disposal.” (INT04)*

Lobbying related to entrepreneurship policy does not seem to be a strong factor that would influence the adoption of the policies. There seems to be little lobbying, if any, in favor of the policies, but there also seem to be no groups that would lobby against them either. This policy area does not seem to be one where pressure groups or more covert but strong lobbying groups would exert efforts to change public policy. There

certainly are, however, advocacy groups that at least formulate, discuss, and present opinion related to public policy which aim to promote entrepreneurship, and also other policies that less directly affect entrepreneurs or the promotion actions themselves.

Also, while there is no outside lobby, those who are involved in the implementation can try to influence policymaking to have more of these policies, as also propositions about the concept of ICs posit. Their influence is difficult to assess, but what was apparent from the interviews was that those who are involved would like to have at least some more funding or other resources for these policies. While this still proves little about their efforts, it is at least a possibility.

Overall, it would be hard to imagine a situation where lobbying could be a strong influence on politicians in this case. The target group of new, or even "nascent" entrepreneurs is not organized, and lobbying would hardly be worth the effort for a smaller group of them. Those who are in the bureaucracy or who represent intermediate beneficiaries, could be more motivated to try to exert influence on politicians. While this is a possibility, comparatively, beneficiaries of other policy areas are probably much more likely to lobby for their favored legislation. Nevertheless, the activities of some advocacy organizations have been mentioned in connection with their influence at national levels:

*“it's the same with the Chamber of Commerce. Chambers of Commerce very, very strong seat around the table in policy conversations. Well, they represent a lot of the business, a lot of businesses, FSB, so the Federation for small business. Now they report they produce reports and things like that. They're so like a membership organization.” (INT16)*

*“Here you have the Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Workers get money directly from the government. They have a lot of money and basically everyone, you're employed, a part from your salary goes automatically to the Chamber of Commerce. Either you like it or not. That's it.” (INT08)*

### **6.3.2 Motivations of Entrepreneurship Policy Experts**

As detailed in the earlier chapters, the presence of “structural promises” is an integral part of the empirical expectations. Interviewees made some mentions regarding what kind of incentives or motivations play important roles for those whose work is related

to entrepreneurship policy programs. There was agreement, that getting involved in programs supporting entrepreneurship is popular in general. The popularity of participation can possibly also contribute to the prestige of these actions, making participation in these programs more "sought after". Prestige and self-esteem were mentioned by interviewees as important motivations:

*“So the motivation is we see wouldn't be what the traditionalists would call public service motivation. Although there is a lot of compassion, not saying there isn't. We also see there's a lot of esteem involved. In this sector there's an esteem motive, definitely. The people that are running these organizations like to be seen as. So it's a, you know, there's social status in being associated with a specific cause” (INT16)*

*“certainly that that reputation and the prestige is definitely there and especially for the senior, you know senior folks in these organizations, like that's, you know that's their sort of currency.” (INT18)*

Seeking these personal benefits, such as prestige, can be motivating. There is even the possibility that some actors merely want tasks that they like, and that the implementation of these programs is easier or more enjoyable than other alternatives. This was also connected by an interviewee also with the tendency for “bureaucratic creep”. They explained the phenomenon in detail as a reason for fragmentation, namely that a lot of different entities or stakeholders can be out there who would like to "have a piece" of entrepreneurship policy.

*“wherever you have public money in Italy. You have a lot [of] we say “people eating”. It's like a buffet. Then everybody comes and it becomes really... It's really not so transparent how public money is managed. And I don't think it's meritocratic or really based on strong evidence how the money are allocated and spent. I think it's very opaque, very, very gray. You can't really see through. And then you have the friends of the friends, the people connected to the local politician, and so on....*

*... It's because they want the funding they want, the power and the prestige.*

*OK, all of those things.*

*So whenever you... yes, maybe I am pessimistic today, but I don't know when once you have this new organization you will have the president. You will have the director. And you will have the possibility to hire four people, which is power. Because it's, uh, vacancies, and you will manage some funding and then you can participate to the Regional Roundtable on Innovation and you can become the chairman of the local association of the Innovation Bodies.”*  
(INT17)

The overall picture of how large a role the different incentives play in motivating those who are involved is unclear. Motivations related to pecuniary benefits have been mentioned by some interviewees, but only by a few. Other motivating factors can also play an important role, such as those mentioned above. It should also be noted that in a situation where the structures of policy have already been established, these motivations can be driven by the avoidance of losses, rather than the desire for more gains by expanding the instruments. Even if another policy alternative could, over time, deliver the same benefits, including non-material ones, such as prestige or career prospects, the transition from one solution to the other would certainly be "costly" for the those who are already part of the implementation. One of the interviewees from Canada seen that the incentives that the implementing organizations had to keep young companies in their services had a negative influence on the policy programs:

*“You know eventually need to let the company go, and sort of, you know, make it on their own. And I think that transition hasn't really been done that well. Yeah, because I don't, I'm not sure what your experience are with the support ecosystem, but like here, all the incentives are for a support provider to keep the company on their books. You know, as a client, as long as possible, because again their metrics are really based upon how many clients they're helping and those types of things. So the last thing they want to do is to have a client, you know, go.”*

*“So again, to me, I think in terms of the way to support ecosystem works like all the incentives are to hold on to the client, all the incentives are to keep adding you know support services, you know as the client who needs them but not in a way that sort of looks at the broader ecosystem and saying wait a second. There's already four or five other organizations doing that exact same*

*thing, and a lot better than we could ever do, so we really should be, you know, sort of redirecting this client, you know, this entrepreneur or this company, you know, over to this other sort of organization “ (INT18)*

In another example, a situation like this was mentioned by one of the interviewees in relation to an international project that was aimed at generating relevant statistics and models. The interviewee explained that in a previous role, they discovered over time, that the way they model entrepreneurship was not actually true according to some empirical findings. They proposed a way for colleagues to adjust the existing model, but they met with opposition, as other colleagues feared they would lose the project if they admitted the inadequacy, and that a new model would be less supported by stakeholders. This story was not published, although there was evidence of some disagreement between the parties, but the interviewee also highlighted that there were some high-profile scandals in which even corruption of some experts was exposed. Although only indirectly related to entrepreneurship policy, the recent scandal around the World Bank Doing Business project is probably the most notable case where dishonest practices were exposed in international projects related to policy modeling or policy advisory.

*“We presented this and the [Project name redacted] people were very mad because they said, you know we're trying to destroy the project. And we just wanted to save the project.” (INT01)*

*“You know the ease of doing business ended up in disgrace. Because they started cooking the books.” (INT01)*

These cases can show us that at least the possibility of dishonest practices is there, and these motives should also be considered alongside the more noble motivating factors. There were several other interviewees, on the other hand, who explained that the motivation to participate in many of the initiatives is not pecuniary and can certainly be shaped by personal conviction and compassion. As an expert described in relation to the Global Entrepreneurship Research Network:

*“The Global Entrepreneurship Research network. No one there, basically no one was remunerated by GEN, right? Everyone who was part of that network was working as an entrepreneurship policy in a university or a think tank or in some cases as sort of another innovation agency. So, we were giving up our*

*time to that network because we saw it of benefit of mutual benefit to share information” (INT04)*

In a somewhat similar way, an interviewee who works directly in implementation described that getting involved in a publicly funded EU project is only a supplementary activity for their organization:

*“We don't get help from the government directly, so we basically live on our projects that we have....*

*That's our core business, but parallel to that and due to that, basically because we cooperate with so many companies as well. We have all these other projects. I mean Erasmus for Entrepreneurs in a general sense as a project for us, it's not a project where you say we're going to live out of it, yeah, but it's a important project for us in terms of visibility and because of that we get a lot of partners or new partners for different types of projects.” (INT08)*

#### **6.4 Policy Objectives and Socioeconomic Problems**

There is a large variety of the socio-economic problems that the measures are supposed to address, and there also seems to be flexibility in attaching problems to the instrument creating a "surfing for problems" situation at least in some settings where the instrument is applied. Interestingly, the variety of problem definitions/policy objectives cited by the different interviewees as important showed an even larger variety than what was identified from the literature. This variety of associated problems inevitably also comes with a variety of claimed causal linkages about how the interventions are supposed to induce change in the world around them.

This diversity of the problems and intervention logics can raise several questions about the program design and evaluation. The simultaneous presence of these different policy objectives and causal models are directly conflicting in some cases, which can lead to confusion around the goals of public policy. It can be difficult to design programs that simultaneously foster self-employment among disadvantaged groups and at the same time advance high-tech innovation for a few select high-potential technology entrepreneurs. Moreover, assessing alternative policy actions to entrepreneurship policy also hinges on the intervention logic, and thus can differ depending on the objectives of the policy. In the same example, the inclusion of

disadvantaged groups has rather different alternative solutions than the fostering of high-tech innovation. In the following pages, I provide an overview of the main different problems and interventions the interviewees mentioned.

While a large variety of associated problems and rationales appear in the interviews, they can be grouped into six main categories:

1. Fostering overall economic growth and economic resilience
2. Job creation, increased employment
3. Fostering innovation
4. Entrepreneurship as a vehicle of social inclusion of marginalized groups
5. Creating equal opportunities to become an entrepreneur
6. Promotion of certain values or attitudes in society

#### **6.4.1 Economic Growth and Economic Resilience**

An often cited rationale for entrepreneurship policy is that, with the support provided, faster economic growth is attainable. In this logic, with the help of public policy, those who become entrepreneurs could generate more economic activity than without it, for example, if they were to remain employees otherwise, or if their endeavor were simply more successful than it would have been without the policy. Statements by interviewees have echoed this in a number of cases, as something that they think is an important role for entrepreneurship policy:

*“my personal point of view is that in Italy for example, we have a very stagnant and static market. We actually haven't been growing for more than 20 years economically and we have substantial... significant lower rates of entrepreneurs and startups in our ecosystem compared to the other EU countries.... it's like for me entrepreneurship, young entrepreneurship, new entrepreneurship is really a way. It's like a medicine to give to our sick economy, to make it recover and start moving again” (INT17)*

There was also an interviewee who highlighted that this rationale is considered important in the context he is familiar with, though they do not agree with it:

*“In Scotland, policymakers are obsessed with high growth companies. They're very much dominated by an economic logic which says that a high growth company punches above its weight. In terms of creating jobs, innovating,*

*exporting, which is absolutely true, they punch above their weight. So everything that the Scottish Government, and Scottish Government policies want to do is completely obsessed with this growth, this scale, and the pursuit of gazelles and unicorns or whatever you want to call them.” (INT16)*

Connecting this rationale with the instrument results in a simple causal logic where more entrepreneurship policy results in more economic activity from the beneficiaries. The challenge it poses than that economic activity can be well measured, however, alternative scenarios are rather difficult to model in impact assessment. This rationale is hardly exclusive to entrepreneurship policy, because a lot of different policies are thought to generate additional economic activity. Thus, in this case, it is obvious that in this logic these different alternatives need to be assessed against one another. One interviewee cited that, increasingly, the need for a resilient economy is the reason for entrepreneurship policy. A resilient economy is not necessarily fast growing, but rather one that can stay strong in cases of economic/financial/political turmoil. A resilient economy is thought to be diverse, as diversity can provide safeguards against shocks. In this view, an economy where a diverse range of economic actors are active, who are varied in industry, size, and modes of operation is desirable to an extent that would not occur without government intervention. Entrepreneurship then can be an important way to achieve this diversity and ultimately more resilience.

*“The overall political assessment was, OK, we have had our share here with these big firms, big banks and so on and didn't go there very well, and well we see that the backbone of the economy is really elsewhere. It's a smaller one, so let's see that we push them. And also in a way, uh, I guess implicitly assuming that those firms really are help more to create a stable economy where a given firm like certain individual firms go under, it doesn't really matter, because then basically the economy rests on so many kind of different pillars that overall it provides for a more stable overall economy” (INT13)*

This is a more complex reasoning, but it can be rather easy to defend, as it hinges on assumptions about risks that are rather difficult to assess, and there can be considerable disagreement around their valuation, even among experts. In the case that the policy indeed leads to more diversity in the economy, then the intervention is justified.

#### **6.4.2 Job Creation**

Job creation is another often cited problem that entrepreneurship policy can be prescribed to address. It should be considered different from economic growth because it targets a different economic metric, which also has strong social aspects. The relationship between job creation and entrepreneurship policy is possibly the most discussed and debated topic related to this line of public policy. The role of small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures in raising employment levels is often referred to as the key reason for governmental engagement. It is also, however, contested, the critics of this logic claim that those who become entrepreneurs often leave other jobs for their endeavors and at average entrepreneurship replaces other forms of employment rather than adding to overall employment levels (Acs et al., 2016; Shane, 2009). Moreover, since new enterprises often quickly fail due to their experimental nature, new jobs can be short-lived. It is important to assess their overall net contribution to employment levels rather than simply looking at the number of new jobs associated with novel entrepreneurial ventures.

Another critical way to look at this is through the large differences in the contribution of new enterprises to employment levels. Some experts like to highlight that only a few of the entrepreneurs start businesses which grow large and then add jobs in their area of operation, and thus a broad, non-targeted approach might not lead to better employment levels (Acs et al., 2016). In this understanding those endeavors that lead to self-employment only should be handled separately from those ventures that have high-growth potential. This is one of the reasons some prefer to make this differentiation or even would only like to target these high-potential firms with public policy.

Connecting employment and entrepreneurship policy also raises another important question. The extent to which unemployment is a problem is highly cyclical, employment levels were markedly different in the developed world, and also show a large geographical variation. In the case where the primary rationale for the support for entrepreneurship promotion is to foster employment, then it is interesting whether at least the intensity of the interventions follows these changing conditions. However, an interviewee also reflected on this cyclical nature of unemployment defending entrepreneurship policy, arguing that this would not be a reason to abandon the programs:

*“the only truism about economics is, it's cyclical right? Sometimes it's better, sometimes it's worse, it goes up and down. It's never the same, and so even places with low unemployment aren't probably going to have low unemployment all the time. Number one, and at a national level it's extremely unusual for there to be low unemployment in every corner of the country. Usually there are big differences regionally, so you know it's sort of like saying if we don't have an epidemic right now, maybe we should disband the office of Epidemiology and the Public Health Service. And to me, that's really not the right answer. (INT02)*

Nevertheless, historically, high unemployment levels could have played a key role in the proliferation of entrepreneurship policies. An interviewee highlighted that the high unemployment in Europe in the 1990s was an important reason why EU countries started to promote entrepreneurship and it also shaped the way the policies were designed. In that context, entrepreneurship policy was, and possibly still is, seen as primarily a remedy for employment problems.

*“Then a lot of public policies started to focus on getting more people to start businesses. You know, “let's get another million people”... and in Europe at this time, you know there was a huge economic disruption with lots of unemployment, and so the Europeans became very interested in the unemployed starting businesses. So public policy became one of encouraging people to be like what I call self-employed...*

*...this is in the 90s now right? And then goes into the 2000s. It was really about getting people to be self-employed and start small businesses. It really wasn't about entrepreneurship, but they started calling it so. By the end of the '90s and early 2000s the term small business sort of disappears, and all the literature starts talking about entrepreneurship. So now you had the term entrepreneurship sort of losing its meaning as an activity that's about starting young firms that are trying to have major impact on the economy.” (INT01)*

Using entrepreneurship policy to tackle employment problems was also strongly criticized by some other interviewees. Generally, those who were critical of this understanding contrasted it with economic growth, which they have been more focused on. One interviewee who is involved in implementation in Italy, went as far

as expressing that, in their opinion, promoting self-employment might not only be ineffective, but could actually hurt the economy:

*“Myself, I'm convinced that enterprise is not for everybody, so I'm not... not so enthusiastic about telling everybody to start your own business. Not everybody can do that. I'm against it. I personally think that, people should... We would need again large companies in order to raise employment....*

*...for instance, now in Italy, what is happening is that the new government... made, promoted a lot the self-employment and the VAT, what we call the “partite IVA” so the fiscal treatment for VAT is more advantageous today than the fiscal treatment for employed people. And so, it tells you a lot, it says a lot about the future that is, there will be... They encourage to start to be on their own to make their own business rather than being... And so companies, large companies disappear. Move away, go to eastern... to Asia, to all the places where taxation is better and so we are losing industries, we are losing companies, we're losing all the big players because of this” (INT09)*

There was also a different type of claim from an interviewee who advised caution against overusing employment as a policy objective, on the basis, that logically, wealth creation always comes first in firms:

*“I do think there is a role, there is important role in sort of in job creation as well. I think my second doubt associated with that, that it is a bad metric for policymakers. And what I mean by that is, it's easy to create jobs if someone's creating the wealth and the value right, you can always find a reason to create jobs. You can always do it if you've got enough value creation somewhere in your system. But the important point shouldn't be the job creation, it should be the value creation...*

*...We should not look at those startups and go you're a bad startup because you're not creating jobs, right? If they wanted to, they could easily create a dozen jobs by like taking stuff that's currently automated and making people do it, right? That's not what we should be driving towards. We should be driving towards the value creation first and then the job creation secondly” (INT04)*

### 6.4.3 Innovation as a Rationale

The need for more innovation is another often-cited reason for entrepreneurship policy, and it was also mentioned by some of the interviewees as the most important reason for the programs. The desire to have more innovation in an economy seems to be universal, but seeing entrepreneurship as one of the main ways toward more innovation is not necessarily shared by everyone.

According to some interviewees, before the Silicon Valley IT revolution, the idea that innovation can come from small businesses or entrepreneurs was not at all widespread. This idea only became popular after this breakthrough in information technology took place in the 1960s, in which very small firms played a pivotal role with their innovations. Before that, people, including political decision-makers expected innovation to come from the R&D divisions of large firms with hundreds of people working at the same place.

*“If you're going to have entrepreneurship policy, it's really about, the question is, can you help these new firms? And then this led to another cut of the data, that really doesn't come till the '80s. Before, we were looking at small firms and big firms... and all of a sudden the question emerged of new firms. So, and that was, you know, not a terribly well... 'cause we hadn't really studied, nobody knew about this. And so the public policy issues, in retrospect, were about making it easier for an individual to start and grow a business, that was basically an innovative business, not another pizza shop....*

*...Entrepreneurship policy focuses on individuals, maybe places and then figuring out what you need to do to make it easier to grow businesses in a technologically fertile environment, that leads to innovation and ultimately to the growth of bigger and larger businesses and new industries“(INT01)*

Those who connect innovation with entrepreneurship might also be more likely to think about it as something that should be separate from small business policies and the fostering of self-employment. In the case which the objective of entrepreneurship policy is to foster innovation, that can even run counter to those objectives.

*“I do think that entrepreneurship policy is different than small business policy. So let me go back and add a little more color on all of those top line answers.*

*The last question is actually the shortest and easiest, which is the difference between small business and entrepreneurship policy. You know, my definition of an entrepreneur is somebody who finds or develops a new product or process and then builds a business around that.” (INT02)*

*“In my view, startups are important for a few different reasons. One reason is that they directly bring innovation to life. They directly bring new ideas, innovative ideas into the world and innovation as we know is the sort of primary driver of sort of productivity growth” (INT04)*

*“certainly I can appreciate at a more gut level the innovation side of things. And do big companies innovate, or our big companies stuck in the way they've always done things? And there's value in that, but there's also less innovation and do we want innovation in our society. And so I think that we need to tell those stories better about the innovation and the creativity that comes out of small companies to let people know that there is a return on that” (INT11)*

Since then, however, more entrepreneurship, or more of the "right kind" of entrepreneurship, is thought of as a necessary component of more innovation. Aiming to deliver more innovation through public policies that aim to foster entrepreneurship can also focus the implementation differently from other cited rationales. Those who claimed that innovation is the most important rationale are more likely to narrow down the targeting of the programs to specific sectors or specific kinds of entrepreneurs from whom more innovation is expected.

Nevertheless, even if this rationale induces a different logic for the program, the instruments applied can remain the same. Even when the end goal is different, instruments hardly change, except for some changes in the targeting of the programs. The challenges associated with these kinds of policies also remain the same. The key question of whether the policies actually create more of the associated benefits is still there in this case.

#### **6.4.4 Equal Access and Inclusion of Marginalized Groups**

##### *6.4.4.1 Equal Opportunities to Become an Entrepreneur*

A number of respondents described that the most important rationale for entrepreneurship policy is that it should provide opportunities to those who otherwise

have less chance to become entrepreneurs. In this understanding, the role of the policy is to support service provision for those who have comparatively more difficult access to services or resources that can help them to become entrepreneurs. They can, for example, have less access to services because they live in an area where these services are less available, or they simply cannot afford these services.

This problem definition puts forward a logic in which the policy should be targeted toward individuals who are disadvantaged in becoming entrepreneurs. This logic does not necessarily mean that these individuals are necessarily in a disadvantaged situation in other areas of life. Even a person with a solid middle-class/middle-income background can be thought to have considerable disadvantages in this regard compared to those who are from wealthy or elite families. An interviewee enthusiastically explained the importance of this aspect to them:

*“It's public money and public programs. They also help making sure that nobody is excluded. Otherwise, we end up in the other situation where only rich people can make a start-up. Because I mean, if you have to stay a couple of years without working or with little revenues, and maybe you have to pay upfront the rent for a laboratory or an office space or something, then if there is no public support, we end up in a situation where only people with rich families can afford to do startups and to launch new ventures” (INT17)*

This definition is also relatively flexible in the specifications of policy implementation, as it implicitly contains the assumption that the target group should receive all the services that those who have good access receive, therefore, the provided services can be flexible over time. This logic is also relatively agnostic about the results. If the main goal is to provide access to services, then it is less important how efficient those services are in general, as long as they match what is available to those who receive the services without government support. The focus is on access to services, or maybe on the equal quality of services, and not on the effectiveness of services per se. Any number of additional people reached by the programs who otherwise would not have participated in incubation, entrepreneurship education, consultancy, etc. can be a positive result as long as the program was also reasonably efficient cost-effective. This logic is in many ways straightforward, and it also does not create a large burden on

those who are involved in the implementation, and can largely be in line with popular ideas of equality and equal access.

*“Simply to make sure that each and every student in the university at some point during their education will be exposed to entrepreneurial thinking”*  
(INT10)

Others have highlighted the reach of the policies as a success in itself. Indeed, as equal access to services was often cited among the most important rationales, based on this logic, the programs can be considered effective if they reach certain groups of society.

*“Encouraging people to be entrepreneurs, so there is a little bit of a debate of this, which I have seen, and been involved in and you know, some of this in the UK, some of this other places. I think this though is overblown, and I think some of this comes down to phrasing. So do I think that everyone should be an entrepreneur? No. Do I think that everyone has what it takes to be an entrepreneur? No. Do I think that everyone should at least be exposed to the idea of entrepreneurship and consider it as a career option? Yes, yes, I do.”*  
(INT04)

Equal access can be understood as access for those who are part of a disadvantaged group of society, such as people from low-income backgrounds, ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged groups. It is also often understood as equal access for different geographies and jurisdictions. More than one interviewee, for example, described that in their view, those who live in a big city can have better access to services if they want to become entrepreneurs, and providing access to those who live in other areas can be an important justification for government intervention. Remarkably similar reasoning of this kind was mentioned by people from places far away from each other: the cases of Warsaw, Poland and Chicago, Illinois seemed to be similar in the description of the interviewees.

Interestingly, this is in contrast with the understanding of some other interviewees, according to whom entrepreneurship policy should actually target these economically powerful cities, as those are the ones that can produce an innovation ecosystem capable of fostering the creation of highly innovative enterprises. These differing opinions are a good illustration of how disagreements around the rationale for the policy can create conflicting ideas about policy design, as well as the evaluation of the results. In the

case that equal access is the primary rationale, wide outreach is of key importance, in case of a different logic, the opposite, namely the concentration of the interventions is desirable.

#### *6.4.4.2 Inclusion of Marginalized Groups*

There is another, related problem definition that came up repeatedly in the different interviews: that entrepreneurship policies can serve as vehicles for the inclusion of marginalized groups in society. In this logic the problem is not that some parts of society do not have access to entrepreneurship as a career option per se. Rather, it is the increasing the number of entrepreneurs in a certain group can have additional positive effects on the group's inclusion in society. Here, the problem can be defined as a group not being integrated well enough into society in general, and it is assumed that increasing the number of entrepreneurs can mitigate this lack of integration. While in this logic the targeting can be similar to the separately described equity-based logic, the different problem definition still posits a different causal logic of how the policy instrument can deliver the benefits. As some interviewees expressed this rationale:

*“If the government wants to do a better job at, you know, doing outreach to people that do in fact need these training schemes, then maybe the training would have an impact. So you know, I have in mind, you know, the people there are in, you know, serious need of the type of training and in need access to financing are so-called hard to reach communities and it's, you know, migrants, female... you know, people in deprived parts of society.” (INT19)*

*“You can look at it from an empowerment angle. If you're in business owner in some senses, you can progress in society. That you do have the control. The other one is wealth generation, that you can improve your wealth generation usually not in the first few years, but after that” (INT16)*

In this logic, there should be more focus on the number of entrepreneurs from that group as opposed to the number of people who have access to services. The larger the number of entrepreneurs in the disadvantaged group, the better, as it advances the inclusion of the group in the society at large. In this rationale, however, it is not strictly required that these entrepreneurs are very successful economically. According to this logic, the number of entrepreneurs who can reasonably sustain their businesses

benefits the group as a whole. Then, it can be justified to support those who are only moderately successful or could even fail without some government provisions.

The marginalized groups in question are typically ethnic or immigrant communities, and other groups living in poverty or adverse conditions. The rationale differs from the equal access based rationale, in that in this case the rate of entrepreneurship within these communities should not only be raised to levels equal to the majority society, but even higher target rates can be desirable. As an interviewee described this logic:

*“with entrepreneurship, it's a lot about the individuals, a lot about the target groups you know where does the data show you this underrepresentation in terms of entrepreneurs, people starting businesses. You know, in some countries it's women, are not there, the startup rate is a lot lower, or the business ownership rate is a lot lower. What can you do then to enhance that? In some countries, that's ethnic minorities...*

*...if certain target groups in your population have difficulty with employment because of systemic barriers, discrimination, et cetera, you know for ethnic... for immigrants for example, they have a very difficult time getting integrated into the economy of the new country. So the easiest way for them to become CEO is to start their own business... or they see opportunities as well to serve new markets” (INT03)*

#### **6.4.5 Promotion of Values or Attitudes**

Frequently those who are involved in entrepreneurship policy cite the promotion of "entrepreneurial values" as the rationale for the policy intervention. It is possible to consider entrepreneurship support as something that economics recognizes as "merit good" (Musgrave, 2018). The provision of a merit good is desirable in itself, without further expectations from it for the society. Entrepreneurship is indeed, currently a very popular idea in most societies. The presence of entrepreneurs in society can even be a phenomenon that is simply desirable, without any further benefits. Entrepreneurial values were seen as beneficial not only for entrepreneurs, but also for those who never even start a business venture. This claim was made in some of the literature, and some of the interviewees also echoed this sentiment:

*“There is a point about entrepreneurial culture. So sometimes the point of entrepreneurial policies, in my view, isn't always to form startups. So if I think about things like entrepreneurial education, for example, I don't necessarily think the point of entrepreneurial education is to produce a whole load of entrepreneurs...*

*...In my view, some entrepreneurial policies actually are about sort of inculcating that deeper idea of innovative entrepreneurial thinking among a wider set of people who might not form their own businesses” (INT04)*

*“I think it's a meritocratic process, which is not very common in Italy because we also have a problem of old entrepreneurs passing the companies to their sons slash nephews. And this is a huge problem. There are also plans of the government of the regions and so on, to try to facilitate these generational transfer of management in the companies. But in the end it's often a family line. Uh, which is uh, of relatives who take over the company from an older relative. While I think the start-up environment and new forms of entrepreneurship can also be more democratic and reward those that really deserve it. So, this is my personal vision” (INT17)*

While this is rarely cited as a rationale in more technical of policy, there is no reason to dismiss this as a reason why at least some of the policy programs get adopted. It is not at all impossible to provide a formal rationale on this basis for welfare-maximizing policy. Considering that entrepreneurship exists without government intervention merely for the benefit of the participating individual, yet many in the society would desire more entrepreneurial activity, then the level of entrepreneurship can be considered suboptimal, which can warrant some government support.

*“Of course, there's always the discussion, the academic discussion which filters into the public policy arena about what is an entrepreneur. And is a small business owner, an entrepreneur? Is somebody who has a lifestyle business, somebody who starts a lifestyle business are they? You know, we don't care about those people. We want the ones who are real, real entrepreneurs. You know the way we define them, you know they've got high growth firms and they've got... I never really liked that argument very, very much. So in terms of defining what an entrepreneur is... I wouldn't diminish the role of the lifestyle*

*entrepreneur because research will show you that the first business you start may not be the final one you have” (INT03)*

*“So if you want a pool of entrepreneurship, then you've got to create awareness of it. Because not all countries entrepreneurship is seen as a status activity, right, still in some countries that, mean even Eastern Europe, for example, had to work hard to create an environment where entrepreneurship is seen as a good positive thing” (INT03)*

It is also possible that it is not even entrepreneurship, that is desired by the society, but the existence of *governmental support itself* for entrepreneurship. This is also not at all difficult to imagine. In the case entrepreneurship embodies something positive for many people (such as innovation, progress, hope for a better future, etc.), then its promotion by the government can be a signal that these positive things are supported within society. Or it can also at least mean that the government will be less likely to go against entrepreneurship and the positive ideas that are associated with this economic activity.

#### **6.4.6 Surfing for Problems**

In some cases, the interviewees themselves explained that they need to adjust problem definitions to make the policy instrument fit current trends in public policy. Currently, what is known as the "twin transition", the green and digital transformations of the economy, is high up on the EU and OECD agenda (see, for example, Calvino, Dechezleprêtre and Haerle, 2025; European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2022). The models of entrepreneurship programs are also adjusted to be in line with these objectives or intervention models. As some interviewees noted, they are now adjusting their work to be in line with these new developments:

*“from the transition from the crisis from post COVID... The entrepreneurship to me is one of the possible solutions, and I don't see an emphasis, so I'd like to see it an emphasis more on it at the political level. So, in a sense right now entrepreneurship policy is not so popular. It's not. You won't hear politicians talk about it because it doesn't bring votes. And I'd like it to become more popular and one way to do it, so the way I do it now, is to couple it with other competencies, with digital competencies because entrepreneurs need that too and with sustainability, green competencies to link them. So now when I do*

*training, then, If I put them together and when you put them together and entrepreneurship coupled with green and digital, it's more interesting, so that's popular, because it's you know, the trend so to speak” (INT12)*

*“There's a real emphasis on what we call the digital and green transitions, these dual transitions, which of course are hugely important, but I always liked the idea and it's it's certainly a language that I use” (INT14)*

This kind of adjustment of entrepreneurship policy programs is not necessarily seen as a good thing. One interviewee explained, that they are personally rather annoyed with the fact that there is a constant need for updating policies, which is seen as unnecessary:

*“I just say one thing, the desire to have a new initiative is often what drives the next thing you know. It's like you can't call it the same thing. It has to be a new thing. That's also very annoying in policy.” (INT06)*

There was also another person who shared a similar sentiment. They described how, in their opinion, these reinterpretations and new models do not signify meaningful change, and civil servants can even twist these developments in ways that are beneficial for them:

*“I think what we have to realize is what these organizations give [the recommendations of international organizations] are used strategically by civil servants, mainly to legitimize their, you know, the messages they're putting out, the narratives they're creating around a specific policy area. As opposed to action, as opposed to the delivery of policy [where] I don't think they really have much sway. I mean the practices of how training, for example is given or advice is given or in terms of the grants that are given to enterprises, really there's not been innovations, changes, new practices, for as long as I've been involved, such as 10 years, we still do the same kind of right delivery” (INT16)*

There was however someone who felt that these agenda changes can actually steer the programs in a direction that has an impact on the activities of the entrepreneurs, explaining that, in their opinion, the green agenda of the EU can affect the activities in Poland:

*“During the grant writing, we have to be up to date with all the latest news from the Commission or their initiatives. And probably if there wasn't like, yes, this grant also probably entrepreneurs wouldn't read it. Or maybe just a small... not everyone, of course. Just it gives more motivation than, no okay, if I will introduce this and this then I can apply for a grant. For example, if I develop my service in a more sustainable way, I can develop my business and receive some funding” (INT07)*

Another interviewee who also works for the European Commission, mentioned that now there is a shift towards a more protectionist approach within Europe, there is some reversal from the previously globalist approach to make the supply chains more resilient against global problems. While this is not explicit in the agenda of the Commission, this new problem of supply chain resilience is certainly a factor in program design, and entrepreneurship-related interventions are now also tailored to include this as a problem that can be addressed through them. Looking back in time, another example of problem surfing can possibly be the attachment of these programs to the problem of unemployment in the 1990s in Europe. Different interviewees independently mentioned that the reason entrepreneurship policy was able to make it to the European agenda was because it was attached to the unemployment problems European countries had at the time.

## **6.5 Evaluation and Modeling**

### **6.5.1 Evaluation and Results**

Some of the interviewees noted that the evaluation of these programs is difficult, and some also highlighted that there more could be done in evaluating these programs. Interviewees made mention that evaluations in general cannot provide good information about whether it was the programs that created the socio-economic benefits, or not. Some examples of these were phrased as the follows:

*“It's a good question because frankly there is not much evidence about what works. For a lot of entrepreneurship policy and a lot of innovation policy, right, we kind of do things and we sort of assume they work, but there's in terms of robust evidence of what works for innovation policy it is pretty meagre  
“(INT04)*

*“It's the hardest thing to evaluate the programs and the policies, and this is definitely one thing, at least at European level, we try, but I'm not so sure we're so good yet. Because we don't know when somebody takes a decision to be an entrepreneur. We don't know exactly, is it the policy that made an impact? Is that specific individual's condition, environment? ...*

*...OECD actually puts that in the... that evaluation is very difficult, and we haven't done a good job globally to evaluate this policy to say exactly what is the result of the policy, it has led to, what exactly? So that, I cannot tell you”*  
(INT12)

There were experts who highlighted that it is important the evaluation is conducted, and that the design of the evaluations is an important factor. They mentioned that counterfactual evaluations or randomized controlled trials (RCT) would be the "gold standard" to determine the effectiveness of the programs, but there are limited possibilities to conduct such evaluations:

*“You improve the study a lot if you use counterfactual. And this is quite tricky. So not every institution... it's quite laborious too, to undertake a study, even with a counter, with a counterfactual, so it's not the case of all the studies. So some might have only partial results, so to say since they are not checked against counterfactual”* (INT05)

*“The number of RCTs in innovation policy and entrepreneurship policy is pretty low and when I was working at [project name redacted], one of my colleagues was trying to improve that“* (INT04)

Others have highlighted that while they feel that the programs could work well in general, the targeting, or the design of the programs distorts them in ways that prevents them from making an impact:

*“In terms of the effectiveness of an enterprise policy, it's predominantly, now I'm going to look at the Scottish context because that's what I know, slightly, it's mixed, but on the lower scale of the mix, lower impact, lower effectiveness in the mix. There are some successes. Like how are you looking at success in terms of a publicly funded, or a policy is meeting its objectives? Few do a good job. A lot of the policy is, I think, are flawed in their rationale.”* (INT16)

*“So there's a misunderstanding I think of how big the market failure is with regard to access to financing. And so sometimes you can have the government cannot... [they are] trying to over overcompensate. Right. And that's why a lot of intervention schemes do not work, because the issue isn't as big as you would imagine. The other thing is, you know, with the training schemes. I think they work really well. But if the thing if they were removed, I don't actually know how much a dent that would make because they don't access a lot of people anyway. And the opportunities for this type of programs, like training programs, they tend to circulate amongst people that are and have already good anyway, that's why they're in those networks...” (INT19)*

### **6.5.2 Models and Non-Argumentative Materials**

There are statistical datasets, models and other non-argumentative materials in entrepreneurship policy. All of these, in some ways, contribute to the modeling of the causal relationship between the policy intervention and a future, desired state of affairs that the policy can bring about. These are indicators, guidelines for implementation and other materials that are designed to inform policymaking or policy implementation. We can consider these as part of the policy models, and in this sense, closely related to the problem definition and the targeting of policy. Some of these were referred to by the interviewees as well, but their use still seemed to be limited. Only those who were in direct personal connection with each other have referred to the same model or statistics. The general picture in this case seemed to be similar to that of the networks, the usage of the materials was in a similar manner limited to the venue where the actor is active. The different interviewees judged rather differently the extent to which these policy papers, statistics, and other publications of the international organizations are utilized. In the opinion of an interviewee in Austria, they receive considerable attention in the country:

*“I think they're important. [the publications and statistics of international organizations] Yeah, especially we like things like scoreboards, like the European Innovation Scoreboard. The things you know, that's always, we always have these rankings, also at GEM, because people are crazy about rankings... or the politicians. So when we have [Austria as] the number one somewhere, on the podium, that's a big thing. Although sometimes, yeah, you*

*have to look at it more closely and you know to understand better. But yeah, I think it's important and it's always I think that's the only way, if we do not have these comparisons, and I think that's the strong point of GEM and other like OECD indicators or like the scoreboard from the European Union. This is what matters, you know, to be one of the innovation leaders, you know. And if we are not? I think then something happens, yeah... I think it's important. And especially this comparison, yeah. If you just collect the data, we don't know if it's good or bad, or... if the entrepreneurs complain. But... a lot of groups complain all the time [laugh] but if we have the comparison I think that's something which is making a difference for policymakers.” (INT20)*

*“I would say not much. Only inside programs which are co-financed by the European Union, and so we need to check on the quality manual, the grant agreement, the guidelines for claiming costs, the updates on the projects and so on. But outside of co-financed initiatives. I can't recall anything to my mind now of checking statistics, reports, think tank work...” (INT17)*

A respondent from the European Commission also highlighted that some of their recommendations are actually legally binding for the EU member states, and that is how they can influence policy within the member states:

*“...we sit on a database of 100 plus indicators for each [EU] member state covering different aspects of SME policy including also entrepreneurship policy. So, that's the first purpose. Second purpose is that this information is also this assessment is used in the more broader and sort of a level higher located policy dialogue, which is called the European Semester, which you may or may not heard of, that is the most important policy dialogue, economic policy dialogue that the Commission has with Member States, where we essentially not just the degree the whole Commission is involved in assessing member states' economic framework. And, as a result of that process, it's an annual process, the Commission issues what's called country specific recommendations, which also have some legal heft to it, because those recommendations are discussed in the European Council and then eventually also adopted by the Council” (INT13)*

## 6.6 Political and Public Support

According to the feedback from the interviewees, there is no significant opposition to entrepreneurship policy measures. The interviewees were unanimous in their feedback that they had not encountered structured opposition to the measures and that, in general, the idea of these interventions enjoys a broad support. Even though, according to the feedbacks, the general public typically has little or no knowledge of these policy programs, when they do encounter them, they like the idea of supporting or promoting entrepreneurship.

In a similar manner, the interviewees agreed that there is little to no political conflict around the topic. Entrepreneurship support seems to enjoy broad political support across different parties in both Europe and North America. Politicians do not seem to be divided on the issue based on their affiliations and ideologies. Interview answers all shared this same observation, which is also in line with previous research findings. Answers were rather confident in stating this general point:

*“Well, one thing I think that's very, very interesting about entrepreneurship. It's one of the many reasons I love the field, is that it's what we would call in this country very bipartisan, both left and right are usually supportive.”*  
(INT02)

*“It's probably one of the few areas where, you know, all sides sort of agree. I mean, entrepreneurship is, I wouldn't say universally, but like, it's as close to universally viewed as a positive thing, as you can probably get, like in a in a political sense.”* (INT18)

Some of the interviewees mentioned that ad hoc opposition can exist from those who would like to have less government spending. This opposition, however, is not directed at the programs per se, rather, it more generally reflects opposition to additional government programs.

*“In my experience, I don't know anyone who opposes it other than for the reason that it's a bit of a waste of money. I don't think there's anyone who thinks we shouldn't have more businesses and we shouldn't have more people trying to start businesses, so the only reason I've ever seen for people opposing this has been it's a waste of money. And you know the thing is, you can say this*

*about almost any government policy. I'm not saying that they aren't wasting money, government clearly does waste an awful lot of money, but it is not enough of a coherent argument in my view to create a counter movement”*  
(INT04)

Only a few of the interviewees mentioned that, when they had ever encountered skepticism from the public or the prospective beneficiaries, that skepticism was directed at the general effectiveness and credibility of governmental programs. The idea of fostering entrepreneurship with public programs is also almost undisputedly popular in the eyes of the public according to the accounts of the interviewees.

Two of the most experienced interviewees, with some of the longest careers, added remarks that this current popularity was not always the case, or at least was not this strong. In earlier decades, some more skepticism existed toward entrepreneurs from certain political groups, or from some parts of the public. There was an era during which more faith was placed in large corporations, and even in large publicly owned firms, as actors that could better provide the additional expected societal or economic benefits that are now more associated with the creation of new firms. They also noted, however, that these views faded over time, and these voices have disappeared from mainstream political and public discourse. As one of the interviewees phrased it:

*“In pretty much all countries, if you look at the programs of political parties from the right to the left, there is, we always find something on promoting startups and helping entrepreneurs...”*

*...I can really say, I mean certainly, what was then Western Europe, there was a time, phase, where you know entrepreneurship certainly not seen as important. Or sometimes people even by a good part of society and also political parties, as you know, a bit suspicious. You know, exploiting people, blah blah blah. But that has vanished, and if anything, people are of course now more, being more critical about big companies, big firms and so on. All the criticism that is related to businesses, I think it's now really focused on big businesses, big banks, you know.”* (INT13)

The popularity of entrepreneurship can be influenced by the media portrayal of successful tech companies, which can generate a considerable public interest. One of

the interviewees described how this arrived later to Austria, but in their opinion, it is a strong influence behind the policies because it motivates politicians to support the issue:

*“The topic was not that prominent in the media in the 2000s in Austria. It took a lag, a time lag, because first we had this, I think in the in the 2008 financial crisis, there was these stories... before, maybe even Elon Musk, and then we had the Airbnb and Uber. And that's created this hysteria, or, you know, like media attention on start-ups. I think since 2012-14 this topic has arrived in Austria as I think all over Europe also with shows on TV, you know like this Sharks tank, I think you might have similar TV shows. So that was like more this like entrepreneurship becoming more like a “rock star phenomenon” and this also was I think vice versa with politicians that they wanted to support this” (INT20)*

## **7 DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

This chapter discusses the empirical findings of the analysis, bringing together the results of both the historical analysis and the expert interviews. It begins with a discussion of the findings in relation to the empirical expectations detailed in Chapter 4, on the basis of the theoretical background introduced in Chapter 3. It then offers further reflections on the findings in relation to the theory, and the final subchapter discusses the practical relevance of the findings.

### **7.1 Entrepreneurship Policy in Light of the Theory**

#### **7.1.1 Background Conditions and Policy Outcome**

The temporal dynamics of entrepreneurship policy were found to be consistent with the propositions about instrument constituencies: after a period of rapid evolution, the policy shows a period of persistence, marked by widespread application. This persistence is broad, reflected in the application of these policy instruments across different geographical jurisdictions, levels of governance, and policy domains.

Historical analysis has shown that the emergence of entrepreneurship policy was relatively sudden and happened roughly during the 1990s. By the millennium, it became widespread, and it secured a permanent place on the agenda of international organizations. The accounts of those interviewees who had the longest professional experience have also strongly confirmed this pattern of evolution. Notably, they gave details about how decades ago, the promotion of entrepreneurship was absent from the toolkit of governments to an extent that is hard to imagine for those who are only familiar with the current prevalence of entrepreneurship policy measures. The policy actions remain widespread today, with little to no signs of abandonment in terms of the implementation.

Entrepreneurship policy was also confirmed to be widespread across the developed world, reinforcing the expectations associated with the concept of instrument constituencies. Basically, all the governance levels tend to be involved, even in the implementation and initiation of these policies. It seems universal in developed countries that municipalities, regions, states, federal levels, and even supranational entities have programs of their own that aim to promote entrepreneurship. This

proliferation of entrepreneurship policy was also clearly recognized by the interviewees, regardless of which geographies or levels they had their experience in.

The existence of "structural promises" is also an important proposition related to the concept of ICs (Simons and Voß, 2018, pp. 20–22). On the one hand, the widespread popularity of entrepreneurship support and the large number of initiatives uncovered certainly can provide organizational structures that can motivate policy actors to advance the instrument. The fact that those who were interviewed also typically spent decades working on the topic itself proves that there are numerous opportunities attached to the area, even at the international level. A hypothetical lack of organizations, jobs, programs, etc. could have been a strong disconfirmation of the presence of an instrument constituency, and this certainly was not the case.

It is, however, difficult to judge whether these opportunities provide more benefits for the members of the transnational instrument constituency than other alternatives. This study faces limitations in this regard, as this is something difficult to strongly prove or disprove. During the interviews, there were mentions that some people are motivated by material benefits and have chosen solutions that are not optimal for the public good. However, only a few of these mentions were made.

Other, non-material benefits may play a larger role, and those are also in line with the theoretical propositions. It is plausible that personal convictions play an important role for many who engage with this policy, and that the structural promises provide an opportunity for the actors to fulfill these noble personal motivations. Several of the interviews point toward this, as many of the interviewees highlighted that they personally find important value-based motivations in entrepreneurship policy, such as providing opportunities for disadvantaged groups to learn about entrepreneurship or promoting entrepreneurial values that they find important in society. The instrument can bring different kinds of benefits for different members. The diversity of motivations is an observation that differentiates the concept of instrument constituencies from other theorized collective entities, as advocacy coalitions and epistemic communities theorize more uniformly shared motivations.

These results are also connected to positive policy feedback recognized by Policy Feedback Theory (Béland, 2010), as well as to the importance of the intensity of the preferences of actors (created by their interests) recognized in Punctuated Equilibrium

Theory (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p. 19). Whether the interests are material or not, their intensity can create strong incentives for the instrument constituency to act in ways that foster the maintenance and expansion of entrepreneurship policy. The dynamic in which the establishment of a new policy generates incentives for its continuation is recognized as one of the most important ways through which policy feedback operates. As in this case the interest comes from those who are involved in the implementation, this feedback effect is similar to what is recognized as “state-building” in the literature (Béland, 2010, pp. 570–572).

### **7.1.2 Active and Influential Transnational Community of Experts**

It was also confirmed by the results that there is an active community of experts associated with entrepreneurship policy who are active at the transnational level. This transnational landscape of entrepreneurship policy actors is dominated by some key institutional players, and there are several regular events and forums available for them to stay connected. They are most notably the OECD and the European Commission as international organizations, and there are notable not-for-profit initiatives as well, like the GEN (Global Entrepreneurship Network), the GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor), and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. There appear to be many personal and professional linkages between these international actors, and we can indeed describe them as a community. These institutions regularly work together, and they are well connected with academia and national policymakers. They also work together with consultants and private firms for modeling, as well as for the implementation of some programs.

This finding is strongly in line with the propositions about instrument constituencies, and the empirical landscape is similar to what other authors found in their case studies of other instrument constituencies. Instrument constituencies were first theorized as international or supranational, and they spread transnationally when crossing jurisdictions (Voß and Simons, 2014) The international or transnational relevance of instrument constituencies is further validated by the evidence found during this research.

An important question and a key proposition was to establish what provides the cohesion of this community of policy actors, which is considered to be an instrument constituency. Nothing pointed to the fact that there are common beliefs and shared

political or ideological convictions among the participants beyond a trivial degree. Written sources and interviews unanimously characterized entrepreneurship policy as a topic without political conflict and with broad political support. This was true for all the different contexts the interviewees were familiar with. This was a strongly confirmed point of the analysis: that the cohesion of the community of policy actors does not come from beliefs, and this also contradicts the predictions of a rival policy process explanation, the Advocacy Coalition Framework.

The large number of associated socio-economic problems, the relatively high ambiguity around the results of the policy, as well as the generally low level of awareness about alternative policy actions and the intense preoccupation with implementation rather than problems, exclude another often proposed possibility that the cohesion comes from a shared preoccupation with certain problems. That would be the prediction of the epistemic community theory, and again, in this regard, the explanation provided by the concept of instrument constituencies proved to be more plausible. In relation to the broader theoretical frameworks, these findings also highlight how instrument constituencies can be considered as “transfer agents” or “innovation vectors” in Policy Diffusion and Innovation theories. (Oliveira et al., 2023, pp. 246–247). Connecting the studies of transnational instrument constituencies with existing policy diffusion research can be a fruitful future direction in the scholarship.

### **7.1.3 Policy Objectives and Problems Are Detached from the Solution**

A key prediction associated with ICs is the flexibility to attach problems to the policy instruments and, subsequently, the variety of claimed policy rationales for the interventions. This broad variety was strongly confirmed in the case of entrepreneurship policy. The strength of the evidence found exceeded prior expectations, making the related observations the strongest proof for the relevance of the IC based explanation. Different ideas coexist about what problems entrepreneurship policy is supposed to address. This became clear from the available materials, but the interviewees also cited a large variety of different rationales, and they attached different importance to those as well.

There was a remarkable variety of these rationales and objectives mentioned by the experts, which exceeded even prior expectations. This strongly proves the lack of a

clear narrative of what exact benefits societies can expect from the implementation of entrepreneurship policy measures. The mentions of the different problems and rationales also failed to show a clear geographical or temporal pattern; in other words, it was unclear how rationales followed the changing variations of socio-economic realities (like different unemployment levels, economic conditions, etc.). This finding is also in line with what the OECD experts stated in the most recent extensive analysis of available SME and entrepreneurship policy evaluations (OECD, 2023). One of the key findings of that document, based on the evaluations, is that policy objectives are often not clearly specified and are even missing in many cases.

While it is possible to categorize the associated policy objectives and socioeconomic problems, even by organizing them into clusters, I was left with half a dozen largely different main policy rationales that were mentioned by the experts. These are markedly different and can easily conflict during the planning and implementation of the policies. I also failed to find a clear pattern in terms of what kind of experts tend to favor which rationale. The only clearly emergent pattern I found is that associated problems can rather flexibly follow salient problems, which was an important proposition associated with the concept of ICs. It was unambiguously described in some interviews how some actors associated with the policy actively try to attach the policy instruments to problems that became prominent over time. This “solutions surfing for problems” phenomenon is also recognized in MSF studies (Boscarino, 2009), and can also link the findings to the MSF literature.

Moreover, it became strongly evident during the analysis that the recent rise of the “twin transition” (“green and digital”) on the policy agendas of the OECD and the EU affected the presented rationale of entrepreneurship policies. This is a finding that was not expected prior to detailed empirical work. The historical evolution of the policy also confirms the presence of flexibility to attach problems to solutions. Some key moments in the history of this public policy area clearly show this, such as the accounts of how the higher unemployment of the 1990s and early 2000s in Europe was reflected in the evolution of entrepreneurship policy in Europe. This was an example that was clear from written sources and was also mentioned in interviews.

#### **7.1.4 Evaluation and Modeling Are Closely Connected to Implementation**

It is also evident that policy papers, recommendations, as well as non-argumentative materials, statistics, and models are produced by this instrument constituency on a regular basis. This is once again in line with what the propositions predicted. It is important to note, however, that it is unclear how intense this influence is, and to what extent these “international materials” can influence public policy at national and lower levels. The extent of influence of this transnational instrument constituency is, however, not entirely clear from the results. While the international actors appear to be strongly aware of the activities of other international actors, this does not seem to be equally true for those who are active at national, regional, or local levels. During the interviews, those who were engaged with policy at the lower levels did not indicate that these materials are much utilized in national or local policymaking. According to these accounts, materials were used in the design and implementation of lower-level programs only when financial and legal arrangements were involved, as in the case of EU-funded policies.

National and local levels seem to have their own communities of experts, which are only loosely connected to higher levels. Whether these could be called instrument constituencies as well would require further research. Moreover, the linkages between the international sphere of entrepreneurship policy and national and local policies could be the subject of further research, as could their connection with federal and state policies in countries with federal administrative systems. Nevertheless, as I already mentioned, it was confirmed that this instrument constituency shows the activities predicted by the propositions about the concept of ICs. *Ceteris paribus*, we can expect that these activities contributed to the diffusion and persistence of entrepreneurship policy, and uncovering the intensity of this effect can be the subject of further research.

This connectedness of evaluation and modeling can also be important for different broad theoretical frameworks of the policy process, as the potential effects of these activities are recognized across various scholarly traditions. Evaluations are important sources of feedback, and feedback can strongly influence the problem perception in the problem stream of the MSF (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 100–101). Sustaining the prevailing interpretation of the results can also be recognized as mechanism for path-dependence in a policy feedback understanding (Pierson, 2004, pp. 20–22). It is also

related to PET, as the models, evaluations, and the associated processes can affect the flow of information, increasing the institutional friction that contributes to the persistence of the status quo (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012, pp. 8–9).

### **7.1.5 Broad Political and Public Support for Entrepreneurship Policy**

Functional promises provide the necessary acceptance for the policy instrument in the understanding of the instrument constituencies approach, and there is ample evidence that the entrepreneurship policy is viewed favorably in the eyes of the public. It is well established in the literature that entrepreneurship has been popular concept with the public since the emergent success of “Silicon Valley entrepreneurship,” which indeed had an enormous impact on Western societies and economies and possibly the whole world (see, for example, Audretsch, 2021). The interviews unanimously confirmed that entrepreneurship, and even entrepreneurship support funded publicly, are largely popular. There were only a few mentions of occasional disillusionment with the support services in the public eye, but this public popularity seems to be just as universal as the support of these interventions by politicians.

The questions that arise about the effectiveness of these policies do not seem to have created public attention, and even in countries where the effectiveness of public provisions is met with skepticism, this skepticism seems to apply only to a rather limited extent to entrepreneurship policy. The extent to which this popularity is at least partially caused by the activities of the instrument constituency, however, is unclear. There seems to be no evidence that the activities of the constituency such as materials, events, etc. ever reach a significant proportion of the public. As mentioned above, entrepreneurship support also enjoys almost universal “bipartisan” or “cross-party” political support in the contemporary era, although some interviewees highlighted that this was not always the case and that it was not as much supported by some political sides some decades ago. This is quite possibly related to the general public popularity of entrepreneurship and the related policies.

It is important to note that neither theory nor this case study was able to establish the direction of causation between these observable factors associated with policy instruments like entrepreneurship policy. The public popularity, the lack of political conflict, and the functional promises of the instrument constituencies can mutually reinforce and strengthen each other, which creates the problem of endogeneity in the

causal modeling of theory. This is a limitation of the concept of instrument constituencies that this study alone is not able to resolve.

It is also important to note that this situation is consistent with the phenomenon of lock-in, a concept in Policy Feedback Theory (Béland, 2010, pp. 574–546). It seems plausible that public popularity causes the policy to become locked in, as any attempt to considerably change entrepreneurship policies could be used by the political opposition to portray the actions in a negative way in the eyes of the public. This can cause an "apparent emptiness" of politics on the subject, as politicians would rather leave the topic alone than risk some popular backlash. The lack of political conflict, and the positive perception are also compatible with some key elements of the PET. First, the attention of policymakers is severely limited (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012, pp. 3–4), and that alone can explain why some policy areas receive limited political attention for longer periods of time. Also supporting policy images are considered important for policy monopolies, and it is emphasized that policy images are a mixture of both empirical information and emotive appeals (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p. 26). These point to the possibility that the positive policy image of entrepreneurship policy can be an interesting subject of future research, and also that functional promises related to ICs could be connected to the existing research on policy images in PET.

## **7.2 Further Theoretical Inferences**

Beyond understanding the case of entrepreneurship policy in the developed world, this case study has relevance for the development of theories of the policy process. Importantly, there have been only a limited number of case studies that have applied the concept of instrument constituencies so far; therefore, it is important to draw conclusions about what the case revealed about the theories of policy process and their applicability. The fact alone that the concept of instrument constituencies was applied and proved to have relevance in a case where it was not studied previously can contribute to the development of theory. Entrepreneurship policy as a policy theme was not studied much by policy process scholars before, which also makes it important to point out the differences between the predictions and expectations of functionalist (policy cycle) explanations and policy process theories. There is evidence that the observable realities of entrepreneurship policy are quite different from what simpler

functionalist depiction of public policy would predict. This reinforces the relevance of working with more nuanced policy process theories; it shows that there are considerable parts of public policy processes that even scholars do not understand well.

The extent of ambiguity around the rationale and results of policy, which could be seen in the analysis, shows the weakness of a functionalist policy cycle approach for the interpretation of the persistence of entrepreneurship policy. In general, this points to the importance of studying all policy themes in light of more realistic policy process theories. The fact that still larger swaths of public policy are left unstudied proves the need for further policy process research. Since the concept of ICs and other theories try to cover a large number of mechanisms, it is useful to find and test those points where the theories actually diverge in their expectations. Focusing the research on these points can also help scholarship move toward a "toolbox" usage of theories that were proposed before by Weible (2018a).

Some of the expectations related to ICs are also in line with broader theoretical frameworks, as I have described in previous chapters, and I already reflected on some of those in the earlier sections here in the discussion. These connections also mean that wherever related predictions were confirmed during the analysis, this can also reinforce propositions of other theories as well, since many of the policy process theories are not mutually exclusive. As the concept of instrument constituencies relies on some elements of the MSF); some key concepts of the MSF also been supported by the finding of this research.

The disconnectedness of politics, policy, and problem perception (the different "streams") has been found to be true in the case of entrepreneurship policy. The expert/implementation side of policymaking is considerably detached from politics, as political conflict or political interest has been proven to be notoriously low in entrepreneurship policy. In the case of problems, the "solutions chase problems" phenomenon has also been seen to be correct for this case of public policy. The overly optimistic view of the public on entrepreneurship also reinforces the disconnectedness between these different streams. The disconnectedness also posits the rare temporal conjunction of the streams when policy change actually happens, during a policy window. The evolution and other characteristics of entrepreneurship policy are also consistent with this proposition. The rarity of larger policy changes links up with path-

dependency in the policy process in Policy Feedback Theory, and with punctuations in PET.

The analysis also shows that it would require more research to understand the relationships between the different levels of governance. It is not clear to what extent the transnational instrument constituency can influence public policy at the lower levels. It seems clear that linkages between different levels depend on a few actors who are in contact with each other. A few smaller organizational units or individual experts sustain the connections, and most of the actors are not in direct contact with other levels of governance. It appears that there are some key actors in the networks who handle a disproportionately large number of connections. This observation can be in line with some theorized mechanisms related to how collective action is organized, and this is an important question for future research on ICs (see Weible, 2018a pp. 67–68). The connections between the different networks or communities, as well as the collective action aspects, are among the less developed aspects of the propositions about instrument constituencies. This research has further highlighted the need for more detailed theorized mechanisms to understand these aspects better. This can also become an important direction for future research.

### **7.3 Practical Relevance of the Findings**

#### **7.3.1 Implications of the “Social Life” of Entrepreneurship Policy**

The main lesson from the concept of instrument constituencies is that in certain conditions, a community can form around a public policy instrument by experts and other actors, who become interested and invested in the continuation and expansion of the policy. In the absence of political/ideological conflicts and related political interests this instrument constituency can largely be left alone and can develop a life on its own. It can largely become up to the activity of this community of experts how the policy continues and they have an interest in maintaining the status quo. According to this research, this is largely the case for entrepreneurship policy.

An associated risk of this situation is that, given the lack of interest from outside this closer community, there will not be sufficient coordination with other policy domains and alternatives. Consideration of alternative policy actions and coordination with other policy areas would be required for all policy programs to ensure effective public

policy. The fact that coordination with other policy areas was insufficient was mentioned several times even by interviewees from different contexts. It seems that this is a common experience of those involved in entrepreneurship policy across different countries. Thus, this situation can be both unsatisfactory for those who are engaged closely with entrepreneurship policy, possibly even for those who can be considered part of the instrument constituency, and also be suboptimal from a broader public policy perspective.

The lesson learned here is that entrepreneurship policy programs can be "locked-in" in an imperfect state from which they cannot easily change due to the lack of sufficient political attention. Clarification of policy objectives and better embeddedness into a broader policy mix would require a higher level of coordination. In the absence of this, the modeling and implementation are sustaining these policies in an "unsupervised" manner. It might be the case that while the situation is unsatisfactory, the actors also avoid larger changes because of the risks of losing the status quo for something even less desirable. This can limit the efforts any of the sides wish to exert. Therefore, it is important to consider that the usage of public resources here is less than optimal, even despite the fact that entrepreneurship policy remains popular, and there is almost no conflict around it.

### **7.3.2 The Practical Problem of the Variety of Policy Objectives**

There is a lack of clarity regarding the role of entrepreneurship policy, which is most prominently reflected in the fact that there are so many different socio-economic problems associated with it, which it is supposed to address. While it can be argued that it can address different problems at the same time, it would still be desirable to make it clear what is expected from a particular entrepreneurship support program in a given context. There seems to be a considerable ambiguity about rationales, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the interventions for their effectiveness. This was, as explained in more detail in Chapter 2, already highlighted by some of the research on entrepreneurship policy. A good example is how Román et al. (2013) stressed the importance of clarifying whether start-up incentives should be classified as active labor market policy or entrepreneurship policy, because the objectives and expectations of a policy program can change the interpretation completely.

To make the practical relevance of this clear, an example can be considered. Assume there is a local (municipal) entrepreneurship promotion initiative, in which the municipality contracts with consultants to provide free consultations for new or prospective entrepreneurs (these kinds of programs are common in real life).

- “*Option 1*”: One possible attributed aim can be to provide opportunities for individuals from marginalized groups to gain access to these services, which are thought to be out of their reach, thus providing equal access to disadvantaged individuals.
- “*Option 2*” Another attributed aim can be to increase the overall number of successful entrepreneurs who generate considerable additional local economic production in the city over a longer period, such as in 5 or 10 years.

While both rationales are commonly attached to the same kind of policy program, they can be evaluated very differently. In the first, equity-based “Option 1”, the overall number of successful entrepreneurs might be less important than the number of individuals from the disadvantaged communities that the services were able to reach. It might turn out that the disadvantaged groups are less likely to become successful entrepreneurs. That does not nullify the aim of providing equal access to the services of those who are in those communities, because the goal was to provide equal access, in the first place.

In the latter case “Option 2” however, evaluations should focus on the overall number of successful entrepreneurs, and conclusions can be drawn that different alternative policy actions might be more effective in reaching those aims (such as efforts to attract successful entrepreneurs to relocate from elsewhere, just to name an example). This is an illustration of why the effectiveness of any policy program cannot even be evaluated without being clear about its rationale (McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2016, p. 543; OECD, 2023, p. 36). In the case that there are no clear expectations *ex ante* about what a policy action is supposed to deliver, that creates considerable moral hazard for implementation, as those who are involved in implementation can have too much room to interpret any results in ways that are favorable for them.

It is of course possible that a policy community or instrument constituency remains prudent on its own, but there are certainly risks to accountability without clearly defined aims. Moreover, ambiguity around the goals can create coordination problems

even in a prudent situation: it can cause different actors and governance levels not to operate in adequately concerted ways that allow optimal use of resources. Actually, this latter is what many interviewees have mentioned as an issue with entrepreneurship policy, although in some cases moral problems have also been mentioned, so that should also not be excluded as a potential risk. This is also in line with the problems of “democratic accountability” (Weible, 2018a) that the concept of ICs points towards, and this accountability problem is one of the main practical implications of this study.

### **7.3.3 Mitigating Path Dependence in Public Policy**

The case study also highlighted that, among other limitations, public policy can easily become path dependent. The path-dependent nature of public policy might warrant caution for the future, it can be worthwhile to set the rules in ways which set limits to these path dependent processes. *Sunset provisions* (McCubbins, 2005, p. 134) and more comprehensive requirements for evaluations can be examples for institutional solutions that aim to mitigate this problem of path dependence. These attempts, however, can be limited exactly by those characteristics of policy programs this study uncovered. First, these provisions usually apply only to specific kinds of legal arrangements in some jurisdictions. Legal arrangements have limitations in affecting policymaking, as, according to Kingdon (2014) for example, the specification of alternatives tends to happen within the policy stream of policy making. A legal provision can try to place the issue on the policy agenda, but the discussion around the alternative policy actions would still remain in the control of those experts who quite possibly have interests in sustaining the status quo. Their policy dialogues, especially within communities of experts naturally are not subject to these kinds of provisions.

Moreover, international organizations, and international NGOs in particular, operate separately from jurisdictional levels, so they can be even more out of reach for sunset provisions. In addition, as we have seen, the creation of policy models, statistics, and other materials that can be used during the evaluations of these programs, can be created by the exact same community. Creating new statistical datasets can be costly, and even more importantly could require several years. This is an impossible task for a legislative committee that has a few months to review a policy program and submit a report. Therefore, there are serious inherent limitations to these kinds of approaches.

*“Self-regulation”* of expert communities can be another way to address these issues (Adams, 2016). Moral hazard created by the fact that groups of experts control many different activities, have better information, and have privileged access is not a new phenomenon at all. Problems of asymmetric information and corruption by experts have been with for a long time, we can think about the medical and legal professions for example. One way to address these problems is for the expert community to adhere to strict norms regarding these issues. This can include the issues of path-dependence or lock-in in suboptimal policy arrangements: there can be self-imposed requirements that the community, from time to time, comprehensively reevaluates its own activities.

We have seen that there actually is some discussion within the community about the effectiveness and alternatives of entrepreneurship policy. That happened within their preferred scholarly journals, and to some extent in their other platforms such as OECD events and publications. One possibility is to amplify and broaden these attempts, and also for other kinds of actors, such as legislative committees, to try to monitor these attempts of the expert community. Overall, a more realistic view of policymaking and the recognition of how much influence expert communities can carry could help the situation. Nevertheless, it is also important to realize that public policy has inherent limitations that might not be possible to mitigate effectively, and that these simply need to be taken into account in all of the processes related to policymaking.

#### **7.3.4 Public Perception**

It is also important to note how public perception plays a role in formulating policy. It looks like the public associates a lot of positive things and many benefits with entrepreneurship. A positive public perception can then indirectly influence politics, as I have described how that can lead to a political lock-in of a policy. Public perception can be considerably disconnected from the reality of public policy, according to the accounts. It is understandable that the public is not aware of many details about public policy, but as we have seen, this can contribute to a feedback effect that can make the policy dialogue even more technical over time, and more difficult for non-experts to access.

The possibly overly positive public image of entrepreneurship can result in overconfidence in these programs, and some other alternatives might suffer from a less positive popular image. Related to accountability, making policy information more

accessible and transparent could possibly mitigate this effect. We have seen that some information about entrepreneurship policy is not only difficult to access, but also not available at all. Due to the large number of different government entities involved, there are no readily available figures about how much governments spend on these services. This is exacerbated by the complicated arrangements where private and public service provision and funding are intertwined. It is notoriously difficult to see clearly how much resources are allocated to this area. This makes it inherently difficult even for journalists or rapporteurs to interpret the situation for the public. The better involvement of those who at least could summarize information that could reach a broader audience should be considered.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation is to explain the emergence and persistence of entrepreneurship policy in the OECD countries. The central puzzle is that, after a rapid emergence, entrepreneurship policy became a stable and widely applied part of public policy despite considerable ambiguity around its objectives, mixed evidence about its effects, and limited comparison with alternative policy approaches. The analysis has shown that this persistence is difficult to explain by a simple functionalist model in which policies remain in place because they clearly solve well-defined socioeconomic problems. Instead with the help of policy process theories, key factors behind entrepreneurship policy's persistence have been uncovered: the activities of a transnational expert community, the disconnectedness between solutions and problems, a broad public and political support, limited political conflict, and path-dependence in the modeling and interpretation of the policy.

The main theoretical contribution of the dissertation is the application of the concept of instrument constituencies to entrepreneurship policy. The findings show that a transnational instrument constituency has emerged around entrepreneurship policy. This instrument constituency consists of experts, consultants, academics, employees of international organizations, and participants in non-profit initiatives, whose work is specialized around the promotion, modeling, implementation, and evaluation of entrepreneurship policy measures. The activities of the instrument constituency are visible in the availability of highly specialized forums, events, projects, modeling initiatives, and policy recommendations. These activities help sustain entrepreneurship policy as a set of policy instruments that are widely and persistently applied.

The findings support key empirical expectations related to the concept of instrument constituencies. Entrepreneurship policy experienced a relatively rapid emergence followed by sustained persistence. It is applied not just across different countries, but also across different levels of governance and across policy domains. It is promoted by a specialized expert community, whose cohesion comes from its interest in a set of policy instruments known as entrepreneurship policy. Its members do not have a shared belief system like advocacy coalitions, and they are more concerned with the

implementation than epistemic communities, which makes them distinct from these other theorized collective entities of the policy process.

One of the stronger findings of the dissertation is the disconnectedness between entrepreneurship policy and the problems that it is supposed to mitigate. Entrepreneurship policy is connected to a range of different rationales, including job creation, economic growth, innovation, social inclusion, equal access to entrepreneurship, and the promotion of entrepreneurial values. These rationales are not only diverse, but in some cases, they can generate contradictory expectations. The expert interviews also showed that there are instances in which entrepreneurship policy was actively attached to newly salient policy ideas, such as the green and digital transitions, which became a prominent theme in recent years. This supports the proposition that instrument constituencies may actively try to attach their preferred solutions to different problems, and that this can limit the consideration of a broader range of solutions as responses to specific problems.

The analysis also showed that entrepreneurship policy is supported by a favorable political and public perception. It is characterized by broad cross-party support, almost non-existent political contestation, and a positive public image. These conditions are not necessarily produced by the instrument constituency itself, but they create a supportive environment for it, and its activities contribute to the maintenance of favorable conditions. Entrepreneurship policy appears to benefit from a positive policy image in which entrepreneurship is associated with innovation, opportunity, meritocracy, economic growth, and social mobility. This popular image helps explain how the policy remains persistent, even amidst ambiguity around its objectives.

The findings are also connected to the broader literature on the theories of the policy process. While the concept of instrument constituencies is useful for explaining a key factor behind the persistence of entrepreneurship policy, insights from other theoretical frameworks can help to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the factors behind this phenomenon. The results are consistent with the Multiple Streams Framework's claim about the general disconnectedness of policy, politics, and problem streams, showing how detached policy instruments can be from both problems and politics. They also support policy feedback and institutionalist accounts of path dependence, as entrepreneurship policy created structures, roles, and

expectations that can contribute to its own continuation. The case can also be connected in various ways to the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory: policy punctuation and stasis dynamics, the importance of a positive policy image, and the limitations of political attention are all consistent with the persistence of entrepreneurship policy. Considering how the concept of instrument constituencies can be used to explore the agency behind different theorized mechanisms in broader policy process frameworks can be a fruitful direction for research and can generate insights into complex policy phenomena.

The practical implications of the findings are also significant. Unclear objectives, confusion around the expectations, and limited consideration of alternative actions can make it difficult to find the appropriate place and weight for entrepreneurship policy instruments in a portfolio of public policy programs. The results underline that these limitations of the policy process should be taken into account in the decisions related to entrepreneurship policy. When specialized expert communities have privileged access to modeling, implementation, and evaluation, there is a risk that the discussions become somewhat myopic and that the status quo receives disproportionate support. This risk is increased when the policy enjoys a generally positive public image and attracts little political conflict. Increased transparency about policy objectives, costs, evaluation results, and alternative uses of public resources can help better clarify the role of entrepreneurship policy in the future.

Overall, the dissertation has shown that the emergence and persistence of entrepreneurship policy are better explained by the complex interplay of different factors recognized by the theories of the policy process than by straightforward functionalist models. The concept of instrument constituencies offers a valuable perspective for understanding this phenomenon, especially in combination with other theoretical elements from overarching theoretical frameworks of the policy process. The results contribute both to the study of entrepreneurship policy and to a broader understanding of how policy instruments can emerge, stabilize, and continue to shape public policy over time.

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### **List of the author's publications on the topic**

Piross, A. (in press): Instrument Constituencies in the Policy Process – What Makes Them Unique? *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics*.