

THESIS BOOKLET

for the doctoral dissertation titled

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

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I. Research Background and Justification for the Selection of the Topic

The 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). 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).

The dissertation relies on the theories of the 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 policy process theories.

The analysis is based on the empirical expectations that can be derived from a recent theoretical innovation, the concept of instrument constituencies (ICs). 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.

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?

II. The Methods Used

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).

Two methods were used in the empirical analysis to test the empirical expectations detailed above. First, a *historical analysis* was conducted using 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, and its structure follows the empirical expectations to provide evidence about the timing of observations related to specific propositions.

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 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.

III. Scientific Results 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.
- The findings show that the presence and activities of a transnationally active instrument constituency constitute a key factor behind the spread and persistence of entrepreneurship policy. 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.

- 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.
- 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.

IV. Main References

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V. 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.