

**Sectoral State Traditions – A Tool to Study Convergence of National Ideas in Policymaking**

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**ABSTRACT**

The sustainability of distinctive national policymaking traditions has been questioned in writings on ideas and their role in the policymaking process. This article proposes an operationalisation of national policymaking traditions that enables cross-national longitudinal comparison: sectoral state traditions, thus contributing to the ongoing debate about the role of ideas in policymaking. Sectoral state traditions are defined as a set of ideas about political authority and legitimate state action in the relevant sector, expressed and identified through public political discourse, which is a major vehicle to maintain and develop traditions in policymaking.

The concept is useful in analysing cross-national convergence of ideas as shown by an investigation of institutional reforms in the telephone policy area in the period 1876-1997.

Thus, the key findings in this article suggest that policy convergence does not equate convergence of ideas.

**Key Words:** sectoral state traditions, ideas in policymaking, convergence, political discourse

## **Introduction: The importance of ideas**

Ideas matter in politics. Exactly how they exert influence, induce change or maintain stability is less clear. One hurdle in the scholarly debate on ideas in politics regards operationalisation of ideas; which ‘set of beliefs’ to include as relevant, and which ones to disregard.

This article comprises five parts. First, it discusses some of the challenges of the literature on ideas and state traditions. Second, it argues the case for investigating change in sectoral state traditions. Third, it discusses the role of political discourse in maintaining and identifying sectoral state traditions. Fourth, it defines and details the concepts of ‘sectoral state traditions’. Finally, the article illustrates the usefulness of this concept based on a longitudinal study of sectoral state traditions in the telephone sector in France and Germany.

Political science analyses are increasingly paying attention to ideas, as interests and institutions alone are inadequate as full explanation of policy development (Majone 1992; Elster 1989; Schmidt 2000; Béland 2009; Kersbergen and Vis 2014). Rationalist and institutionalist models, which mostly see policies as a result of a process in which rational actors strive for outcomes that match their own preferences as closely as possible, generally do not seek to analyse the role of ideas (Marsden and Reardon 2017). However, “even if we accept the rationality premise, actions taken by human beings depend on the substantive quality of available ideas, since such ideas help to clarify principles and conceptions of causal relationships, and to coordinate individual behavior” (Goldstein and Keohane 1993: 5).

Moreover, ideas about what is politically legitimate in a particular national and sectoral setting “affect groups’ perceptions of their interest and foster in them a disposition to explain their positions in abstract terms, to fit their particular concerns into a larger framework” (Dyson 1980: 3). Ideas at this level thus influence the frames within which politics are to be conducted, i.e. rules for ‘what just is and isn’t done’, what factors should be included in relevant futures, and they help to identify who are members of a political community (Kvistad 1999; Andersen and Rasmussen 2014). In the political process, commitment to common ideas and purposes is useful because it “creates ‘will’, and widespread agreement produces legitimacy” (Orren 1988: 27).

According to Goldstein and Keohane (1993) ideas (defined as ‘beliefs held by individuals’)

principally have three functions in policymaking: they serve as roadmaps; they assist in consolidating outcomes in the absence of a unique equilibrium; and because they (sometimes but not always) become institutionalised, they sustain the influence of actors' interests even in cases where the actors themselves or their interests have changed.

However, their focus on the *effect* of ideas rather than the ideas themselves, i.e. their assertion that ideas influence policymaking when they fall into one of the categories cited above, complicates (indeed, renders questionable) the task of identifying ideas other than strictly programmatic ones. Ideas affect policy outcome, but the role of these ideas is confused because their impact may simply reflect the interests of actors. It therefore seems difficult if not impossible to separate cases where ideas exert their own independent influence from cases where a traditional interest analysis would provide adequate analysis. Moreover, in addition to the difficulty in showing any causal relationship between ideas and policy outcomes, their approach suffers from great difficulties in defining which 'beliefs held by individuals', of which there are many, are relevant to policymaking.

Favell (2001) envisages ideas as systems of meaning. For political debate to be meaningful, actors need to agree on certain basic assumptions. Favell's 'official political theory' is a consistent argument about a political issue that actors adhere to. Such a theory includes guidance on how to interpret basic facts (epistemological claims); causal beliefs about means and ends (explanatory claims); and core values specifying the ideal end-goal (normative claims). An 'official political theory', however, is not a theory in a strict scientific sense, but rather a 'workable compromise' resulting from the political process. It thus shares important similarities with Hall's (1993) policy paradigm, "a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goal of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing" (Hall 1993: 279). Like Hall's paradigms Favell's 'official political theories' can change, under similar conditions of long-term sub-optimality or political crisis. Favell's definition of an 'official political theory' is useful because it provides an analytical tool that operates on a 'medium level' of ideas: his 'official theory' is wider than simple programmatic statements, but because of its quality of 'workable compromise' remains less extensive and less abstract than a fully-fledged political theory.

The 'advocacy coalition framework' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Jenkins-Smith and

Sabatier 1994; Sabatier and Schlager 2000) distinguishes between ‘core’ and ‘secondary’ beliefs, where the core beliefs comprise elements such as scope for government intervention in the economy, and for degree of centralisation in government functions. Core beliefs, similar to ‘sectoral state traditions’, are hypothesised to be relatively stable over a decade or more, and form the basis around which policy coalitions are formed. The basic assumption about long-term stability of core beliefs is not tested in the advocacy coalition framework, mostly because the focus of the advocacy coalition framework is on explaining policy output and policy change.

Thus, the introduction of ‘ideas’ into political sciences analyses has not always resulted in increased clarity regarding the ideas themselves or their role in policymaking. There are two main reasons for this. A major problem with the body of political science literature concerned with ‘ideas’ is that there is no general agreement as to the *content* of relevant ideas. A wide range of ideas has been studied, from relatively narrow ‘programmatically ideas’, or policy programmes (Jacobsen 1997; Notermans 1998; Woods 1995; Goldstein 1989; Blyth 2001), to broad ideas about the nature of the state and political theories. Studies on narrow, programmatic ideas suffer from an inherent difficulty in distinguishing between the role of the ideas themselves, and the power of their advocates, thus questioning the potential value added to traditional interest based models. The broader concepts of state traditions and political theory, however, are difficult to operationalise in a specific policy setting, and it remains unclear how such broad ideas could be seen to influence either the policy process or the outcome.

The second major difficulty for the literature on ideas is related to how ideas have been studied. Much literature on ideas has been criticised for failing to show what role ideas have in the policy process (Kohler-Koch 2002), which is not surprising, given the imprecise nature of much of the ‘ideas’ under investigation. However, most analyses of ideas and their effect on policymaking use *policies* as indicator of whether ideas have influence the policy process, instead of studying the arena where ideas are likely to be used more determinedly by policymakers, i.e. in political discourse.

Recent studies of ideas thus often suffer from a difficulty in identifying and analysing the ideas themselves rather than their probable effect on the policymaking process and on policies. This contribution suggests using public political discourse rather than policies as an indicator of sectoral state traditions.

## The 'State Traditions' Concept

Studies on 'state traditions' narrow the range of ideas under investigation, from broad definitions such as 'beliefs held by individuals' to conceptions about the role and authority of state in society. The term 'state tradition' has been used by scholars to emphasise aspects of political life that are directly related to the existence of cognition of a 'state', and as such finds its place in the wider literature on the role of ideas in policymaking. 'State tradition', as opposed to 'national traditions', has an immediate interpretation of 'something belonging to or emanating from the state apparatus', and most analyses involving state traditions emphasise the cognitive aspect.

Dyson's (1980) seminal work contrasts 'state societies' (typically found in Continental Europe) with 'stateless societies' (Britain and the US being his foremost examples) and identifies a set of characteristics for 'state societies':

- 'State societies' have a conception of 'public power';
- They deny that the public interest is only the sum of private interests, and so exemplify non-economic, non-utilitarian attitudes to political relations;
- They stress the distinctiveness of state and society, whether in terms of the special function of the state or in terms of the peculiar character of its authority;
- They have a concern with institutions, reflecting legalism and codification, as well as de-personalisation of the public power;
- They display a moralistic view of politics which involves strongly collectivist and regulatory attitudes (Dyson 1980: 51-52).

The 'state' thus functions as a *generalising*, *integrating*, and *legitimizing* concept. It is *generalising* because it combines political society with ideas of collectivity and the general good, *integrating* because it integrates an array of institutions either through centralism (as in France) or through co-ordination of autonomous units loyal to the federation (as in Germany). Its *legitimizing* aspects imply that institutions and individuals are seen as elements in a political community whose coherence and unity are established by the explicit articulation, identification, and ordering of certain principles and norms (Dyson 1980: 208-214).

Dyson's study (1980) also outlines a conceptual model to classify states where the perceived legitimate political action is closely connected to the nature of authority in a society. For continental European countries, the 'state' is seen as the "institution of political rule" (Dyson 1980: vii), so that an increased understanding of the nature of the 'state' can be said to increase the understanding of the political processes. The state concept has some common elements across countries: it "identifies the leading values of the political community with reference to which authority is to be exercised; emphasizes the distinctive character and unity of the 'public power' compared with civil society; focuses on the need for depersonalisation of the exercise of that power; finds its embodiment in one or more institutions and one or more public purposes which thereby acquire a special ethos and prestige and an association with the public interest or general welfare; and produces a social-cultural awareness of (and sometimes dissociation from) the unique and superior nature of the state itself" (Dyson 1980: 206). The values, institutionalisation of the depersonalisation of power, and public purposes themselves, however, vary between states, and can also vary within states over time.

Other authors have applied the term 'state traditions' in their analyses. Grimm (1991) gives an overview of the major political and intellectual events from the sixteenth century onwards as they relate to central characteristics of the state in continental Europe, in which he focuses on the intellectual reasoning and ideas behind state authority and sovereignty in relation to society. Rohe (1993) analyses the German state traditions as political culture, emphasising the existence of three different sub-cultures (dominant, Catholic and Socialist), the relative weakness of '*Gesellschaftskultur*' ('society culture', or the allegiance to the macro-level in society) compared to '*Gemeinschaftskultur*' ('community culture', or allegiance to smaller, club-like entities) and maintains that the problem of mediating between the political system and civil society remains in German political culture. Laborde (2000) reassesses the importance of the concept of state in British and French political thought. Her study primarily argues that the 'statelessness' of Britain is greatly overstated, but it also contributes to the refinement of the picture of the existence of a strong state concept in France.

State traditions therefore, as presented in literature, contribute to the study of ideas a precision of the ideas under investigation. *State traditions are thus a specific set of ideas relating to the normative distribution of power and authority in society, and to the institutionalisation of such*

*norms*. State traditions are seen to contribute to individual policymakers' perception of politics, to socialising policymakers and to providing shared norms for a policy community. State traditions confine the range of policy options because of the limits they set on cognitive processes. Policies that are perceived as contradicting the state tradition will be seen as lacking in legitimacy and thus be difficult, or even impossible, to implement, if indeed they are even considered. State traditions are expressed as values in political discourse. However, a state tradition is not necessarily unchangeable and static; it can be manipulated and changed from within, as well as altered in response to exogenous forces.

The major difficulty with analysing state traditions is their level of generality, which complicates the operationality of the concept. Ideas on the role of the state and on the ideal distribution of authority and power in society are so vast and so complex that analysis must remain general. This article proposes to meet this problem by applying the general state traditions model to a sector-specific setting. The sectoral state tradition concept used here is therefore a subset of state traditions that is relevant to a particular sector. It embodies a notion of authority and of who should be the relevant actors in the policy process and what should be their relevant power. It also encompasses public ethos of the state and of sectoral policies, as well as criteria for legitimate decision-making procedures and discourse.

### **Change in Ideas and State Traditions**

State traditions are not static. They 'idea of the state' is by its very nature open-textured (Dyson 1980: 2), and its meaning depends on the context in which it is used. Although the chronological change in the idea of the state is not the major part of Dyson's work (his main focus being the link between the idea of the state and society), he nevertheless concludes that "a sense of direction [of the development of the idea of the 'state'] is only likely to be achieved if philosophy is prepared to marry conceptual analysis to a more comprehensive, historical understanding of social and political experience" (Dyson 1980: 287). Despite this call for further research, he sketches a development where the Western European 'state' can be said to experience (in the late 1970s) a sense of 'crisis'. He illustrates this tendency with growing international interdependence, both economically and politically, partly through the increased sense of the

failure of the traditional state to tackle contemporary problems.

Other approaches to change include Hall's (1993) work on policy paradigms and social learning. If policy paradigms (defined as a framework of ideas and standards that specify policy goals, the appropriate instruments, and the nature of the problem) are to change, the change is likely to be associated with a process in which the overarching terms of policy discourse radically change. A movement from one paradigm to another is also likely to be preceded by significant shifts in the locus of authority over policy. Since ideas form a major part of a policy paradigm, a paradigm change can be seen to indicate a change in ideas, and potential paradigm changes are thus identified by radical changes in the political discourse, by politicisation of the issue, and by a change in locus of authority (Hall 1993: 279).

Hall's model is of interest here because it uses discourse as the main indicator of a policy paradigm, and because the ideas he includes in his 'third-order change' resemble those in the sectoral state tradition. It does however remain unclear from his model whether a paradigm shift (and thus change in ideas) is possible without major change among the policymaker individuals, and without a change in the governing political parties. If ideas (paradigms, sectoral state tradition) cannot change while the actors remain constant, it might be impossible to draw conclusions about the independent power of ideas.

'Ideas' are also referred to, albeit less stringently, in a host of studies on policy convergence (Dolowitz and March 2000; Bennett 1991; Peters 1997; Eatwell 1997; Levy 1997). Although the 'ideas' mentioned in these works mostly are not the type of ideas included in a sectoral state tradition, there seems to be a 'common (mis)belief' that ways of thinking about the nature of a problem (i.e. ideas) become increasingly similar as policy converges across countries. Ikenberry (1990), in his study of the spread of privatisation policies, argues that change in policies can indicate either a change in the state's goals, or a change in what instruments it sees as appropriate to reach its goal. The 'wave' of privatisation in the 1990s was evidence that governments from across the world increasingly valued efficiency as one goal of public policies, although they previously had (supposedly) different ideas about the value of efficiency. This emphasis on efficiency across the world can thus be interpreted as a convergence of (certain) ideas.

The argument that convergent policies indicate convergent ideas becomes even more pronounced

in writing on ‘globalisation’. “Globalization is not undermining the state system, but it is producing increasingly strong pressures for states to be of a certain sort – open, democratic, flexible, and respectful of the rule of law” (Ikenberry 1997: 2). Economic imperatives linked to an open world economy (e.g., similar socio-economic environments, common pressures through transnational networks of interest groups or politicians) give governments less room for choice, and their policies become more similar (Eatwell 1997; True and Mintrom 2001; Cerny 2000; Wolman 1992; Dolowitz and March 2000; Mahnig and Wimmer 2016). Globalisation, promoting change through economic and industrial interdependence, is thus seen to foster not only similar solutions across countries, but indeed similar policy goals, such as economic efficiency and international competitiveness.

Thus, although only rarely explicit, studies on policy convergence have shown a tendency to assume that convergent policies indicate convergent ideas, not only about policy measures, but also about goals for state activity.

### **Discourse as Indicator of Sectoral State Traditions**

Political discourse is an important vehicle for the communication, maintenance, and development of state traditions. As Dyson (1980: 1) comments, “[l]anguage is part of the social and political structure; it reveals the politics of a society”. Language is an active tool in the political process. The way in which issues are approached, and what concepts are employed, helps to determine the ensuing politicking, the issues’ chances of reaching the agenda of a particular institution, and the final outcome (Rocheffort and Cobb 1994: 9). “Issue definition is central to studies of (...) politics (...) because different definitions generate different cleavages in society. Public debate and policymaking concerning important policy issues rarely consider all elements of an issue at once” (Baumgartner and Jones 1994: 50).

Discourse is therefore a good indicator of sectoral state traditions. Although political discourse should not be taken *prima facie* as expressing the ‘true’ beliefs and values of the speaker, or be seen to be solely produced (as a cynic might suggest) in order to manipulate the policy community or the general public into accepting prominence of certain interests, it nevertheless

reveals the speaker's perception of the environment's requests for legitimate behaviour. Discourse is also increasingly used as a tool in policymaking analysis (Wilkerson, Smith and Stramp 2015; Winkel and Leipold 2016).

Using 'discourse' as an indicator of sectoral state traditions is, however, not limited to study the concepts used in public debate, which essentially (although not exclusively) focus on public ethos. The *form* of discourse is a good indicator of the relative power of policymakers. In her analysis of how discourse impacts on the political process Vivien Schmidt (2002; 2000) distinguishes between communicative and coordinative discourse. The former is prevalent in states where policymaking is predominantly centralised, determined among an inner group, and communicated to the public only when the decisions have been made. Conversely, the coordinative discourse is more common in countries where policymaking is more dispersed, and where larger parts of the population are involved in negotiating reform. Coordinative discourse is mainly aimed at knowledgeable co-deciders, and tends to be more technical than communicative discourse. Thus, a public discourse of either of these types indicates how policymakers perceive rules for legitimate decision-making. A communicative discourse indicates that policymakers are confident that policies, once agreed upon by the relevant actors (which, because of the communicative nature of the discourse, excludes the general public), are legitimate. A coordinative discourse, however, points to greater dispersion of power among the relevant actors, and (ideally) greater possibilities for the general public to participate.

Discourse is thus used to indicate the way in which policymakers frame the issues at hand, and to decipher (hidden) assumptions; what is taken for granted and what remains unquestioned by policymakers. To the extent that state traditions are explicitly known and expressed, policymakers can manipulate the framing of emerging issues and certain preferred solutions so they are adhering to the principles of the state tradition, thus increasing their perceived legitimacy in a policy community.

### **Analysing Sectoral State Traditions**

The establishment of sectoral state traditions as analytical tool enables analysis of the persistence

(or not) of ideas in national policymaking. Three aspects are of particular importance if the concept is to be of analytical use: First, the types of ideas present in a sectoral state tradition. Second, the original sectoral state tradition must be established to give a starting point for analysis of change or continuity. Third, a method for identifying change must be established.

### ***Defining Sectoral State Traditions: Central Elements***

A sectoral state tradition is a sub-set of state traditions relevant to a particular sector. The constitutive elements are chosen based on the theoretical works outlined earlier, in particular the elements identified as belonging to the (Continental European) state tradition by Dyson (1980). However, focus on a particular sector necessitates adjustments to Dyson's model. The 'notion of authority' and 'public ethos' remain central for sectoral state traditions. Moreover, the ideas about state as legitimating concept, and its implications for practical decision-making procedures and political discourse, are included in a sectoral state tradition. But all elements are interpreted with respect to the particular sectoral setting. This does not imply that the sectoral state traditions would contradict the general state traditions, but rather, that the level of detail regarding actors, institutions and legal framework is greater than if general state traditions were being studied. Furthermore, similar studies of different sectors might require further adjustments to capture essential sectoral characteristics. The list of elements presented here is therefore not necessarily exhaustive for all possible empirical cases, but should provide sufficiently general to be of use in cross-national, as well as cross-sectoral, comparisons.

A sectoral state tradition includes:

- A notion of authority and of who should be the relevant actors in the policy process, and an institutional framework delineating power structures between these;
- A public ethos of sectoral policies;
- Criteria for legitimate decision-making procedures and discourse.

### ***Origin of a Sectoral State Tradition***

Identifying a point at which a sectoral state tradition is consolidated is central to the question of whether such traditions remain stable over time. The search for state traditions, and for explanations of social organisation and state structures, can be drawn far back into the past.

However, practicalities necessitate limiting empirical research. The consolidation of a sectoral state tradition is expressed through the establishment of a language common to all interested parties, through which problems are perceived and solutions defined.

### ***Determining Change in Sectoral State Traditions***

Sectoral state traditions are ideas about political authority and legitimate state action in a specific sector. Identifying change can be difficult, because the identification in many cases must depend on subjective measurements (ideas, norms and values, are in most cases implicit rather than explicit). To minimise the risk of subjectivity in the process of determining change in sectoral state traditions certain parameters should be used as a ‘checklist’ to indicate stability or change. The parameters proposed are:

#### ***The Notion of Authority, Relevant Actors, and Their Relative Power***

The formal institutional framework partly determines both relevant actors and their relative power. However, ideas about who should possess ultimate authority are not necessarily corresponding to the *de facto* power these actors have in practical policymaking. Because the essential elements of a sectoral state tradition are ideas about the ideal distribution of power, expressed in public political discourse, potential changes to such ideas must be evaluated by how policies are presented, rather than by how they were practically formed.

#### ***Public Ethos of Sectoral Policies***

Common agreement on the identification of the sector’s product is crucial to the maintenance of the state tradition. It establishes a common language for all interested parties and frames the relevant questions and issues in the sector based on shared values. If this consensus is questioned and a new consensus appears, the sectoral tradition can be said to have changed. It is, however, important to distinguish between the public ethos and its implications for policy instruments. A change in the latter (e.g., from direct state service provision to regulation of private service providers) does not necessarily imply change in public ethos, which depends on how the (new) policy instruments are legitimated in public political discourse.

### ***Criteria for Legitimate Decision-Making and Discourse***

Legitimate methods for policymaking involve formal and informal rules about who are consulted for new policy proposals and about the style of communication between these actors. The nature of the public discourse changes if central concepts identified in previous time periods are no longer in use, or are used significantly less, or if new concepts are given prominent place; if the set of participants in the public debate changes; or if new technological possibilities are couched in terms different from existing ones.

### **Is the Concept Useful? Lessons from Empirical Analysis**

Determining whether sectoral state traditions converge require deep and broad analysis of policymaking discourse. The author has undertaken such analysis of the telephone policy regime in France and Germany for the period 1876-1997. Since sectoral state traditions are identified through public political discourse it is advantageous to use periods in which the policy area figures relatively prominently in public political debate. For this reason, the focus for the empirical investigation was on periods of institutional reform, more specifically: the consolidation phase up until c. 1900, when both France and Germany had achieved well-developed legislative regimes for telephone policy; the reforms of the 1920s, when similar exogenous pressures in the form of international calls for 'scientific management' were interpreted differently in the French and German case; the post-war regime; the corporatisation of the 1980s; and the privatisation of the 1990s.

For each of the five periods the sectoral state tradition was identified in both countries. Most of the elements of the sectoral state tradition remained relatively constant over time. The source of the ultimate authority remained *Parliament* in France (although it was challenged by the EU in the 1980s) and *legislation* in Germany. The French notion of *service public* retained its function as public ethos, despite its content being modified over time. The German ethos was slower to emerge, but revolved around principles of cost-efficiency and correction of economic dysfunctions. Criteria for legitimate decision-making (procedural correctness in France and bureaucratic correctness in Germany) remained stable throughout the period.

The major changes identified in the national sectoral state traditions were both on the French side, and both after the 1970s. The first change was that a new set of actors, namely those representing industry, became seen as relevant for sectoral policymaking in France. The second change was from communicative to coordinative discourse.

Can the identified changes in the French set of actors, criteria for legitimate decision-making and discourse, be interpreted as a convergence between the French and the German sectoral state traditions?

German policymaking traditionally involved business interests to a much larger extent than in France. German legal obligations to consult business interests and the involvement of the *Länder* ensured participation from a broader set of interests than the French centralist, elitist method. However, from the mid-1980s French policymaking incorporated more open consultation and more dialogue between government officials and business interest, similar to a German decision-making model. There were, however, important differences. Policymaking in France never reached the same degree of consensus-seeking as in Germany, and, more importantly, there were never any legal obligations on the public administration to consult the wider interests.

The use of open consultations in France was paralleled by a development in the type of French discourse. The increased level of specificity reflected that the relevant policymaking actors were perceived as knowledgeable interlocutors whose participation was important for the legitimacy of the new legislation, in line with V. Schmidt's model of a coordinative discourse. Thus, from the late 1980s onwards, a coordinative discourse was employed both in France and Germany.

Despite the use of coordinative discourse in both France and Germany from the late 1980s onwards, this is too weak evidence (in the presence of the stability in other elements of the sectoral state tradition) to conclude that the sectoral state traditions converged. French policymakers consistently referred to their *service public* whenever telephone policy entered public political debate, and German policymakers continued to view the state's optimal role in telecommunications policy as one of efficient manager of infrastructure provision.

## **Final Note**

All studies have their limitations. Sectoral state traditions enable a long-term empirical comparative analysis of ideas by making it possible to operationalise these ideas, as expressed in public political discourse, and therefore requires thick descriptions and contextual exploration to be useful, qualities that do not easily fit an article format. However, the long-term investigation makes it possible to identify continuation or reoccurrence of modes of discussion and form of arguments in national sectoral debates, as exemplified by the study of French and German telephone policy debates. It is also possible to assess how new ideas, which often had their intellectual origins in other countries, are shaped by national practice and traditions.

Sectoral state traditions can therefore be a useful tool in the on-going debate about ‘globalisation’ as well as the broader debate on the importance of ideas in policymaking because it allows for mid-level analysis that gives sufficient scope for detail whilst ensuring coherence with known, over-arching (national or other) principles. Further research using sectoral state traditions to discuss policy convergence in a variety of geographical and sectoral settings should be able to refine the concept’s central elements and contribute to a better understanding of the qualitative differences in national policymaking.

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