

The Politics of Governance Architectures: Creation, Change and Effects of the EU Lisbon Strategy

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Abstract

Governance architectures are strategic and long-term institutional arrangements of international organisations exhibiting three features, namely, they address strategic and long-term problems in a holistic manner, they set substantive output-oriented goals, and they are implemented through combinations of old and new organizational structures within the international organisation in question. The Lisbon Strategy is the most high-profile initiative of the European Union for economic governance of the last decade. Yet it is also one of the most neglected subjects of EU studies, probably because not being identified as an object of study on its own right. We define the Lisbon strategy as a case of governance architecture, raising questions about its creation, evolution, and impact at the national level. We tackle these questions by drawing on institutional theories about emergence and change of institutional arrangements and on the multiple streams model. We formulate a set of propositions and hypotheses to make sense of the creation, evolution and national impact of the Lisbon Strategy. We argue that institutional ambiguity is used strategically by coalitions at the EU and national level in (re-)defining its ideational and organisational elements.

Keywords: European Integration, Governance, Institutions, Instruments, Open Method of Coordination, Lisbon Strategy

1. Introduction

During the past decade or so, several international organizations have launched ambitious strategies putting forward long-term goals like the reduction of poverty, social-economic development, or improving competitiveness. Perhaps some of the most emblematic examples of such strategies are to be found in the UN-system, like the “Millennium Development Goals” 2000-2015 (Akiyama 2005); the “Global Compact” of 2000 (Ruggie 2001; Thérien and Pouliot 2006); or the “Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme” processes of the IMF and the World Bank since 1999 (Vetterlein 2007). Common to all these strategies is their long-term, highly political, and holistic approaches to cross-cutting international policy problems. Common to them is also a strong emphasis on output-oriented goals as signalling devices, and the re-design of existing organizational structures for its implementation. It is therefore advisable to separate the analysis of these initiatives from the appraisal of their achievements (or lack thereof). In this paper, we are concerned with the analytics of this phenomenon as such, whilst most of the current debate, especially on the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union (EU), deals with the results of the agenda and its current re-launch as “Europe 2020”(Commission 2010a; 2010b).

In essence, the effort to provide global coordination has led several international organisations to engage with encompassing lines of action agreed in various combinations of formal and, sometimes, participatory decision-making fora. These lines are typically implemented through targets and indicators that guide voluntary or conditioned action¹. The ultimate objective of this international governance by blueprints is to generate coordinated action that addresses simultaneously multiple dimensions of collective and typically convoluted long-term problems. In the European Union, the Single European Market project 1985-92, the Economic and Monetary Union, and the Lisbon Strategy are the ultimate examples of such long term action-oriented strategies for economic growth, sharing several central traits with the UN examples above. However, in the fields of international organization and EU studies alike, these strategies have received relatively scarce scholarly attention. Heated debates about the implications of these strategies in terms of their (in)effective results, have tended to obscure a more profound and crucial set of analytical questions related to the nature of these new phenomena, their origin, their changing dynamics

¹ Some of them might have elements of conditionality if funding is related, like in the PRSP of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

in time, and their structural effects on the ideational and organizational dimensions of governance within international organisations. Although the toolbox of social scientists already contains a panoply of concepts, the nature of the 'beast' is different this time.

“Governance architectures” are strategic and long-term political initiatives of international organisations on cross-cutting policy issues locked in commitments about targets and processes. They are specific forms of institutional arrangements, characterized by three main features, namely, they address complex problems in a strategic, holistic long-term perspective; they set substantive output-oriented goals, and they are implemented through combinations of old and new organizational structures within the international organisation in question. They often entail a renewed approach to the *raison d'être* of the international organisation in question, with symbolic, normative and structural implications. Constellations of actors involved in the creation of a governance architecture engage in strategic and discursive interaction with the aim of defining a collective frame of reference for their action – a **référentiel** (Muller 1995)).

The definition of “governance architectures” as an object of study offers the opportunity to employ already established theoretically-based tool boxes to explain the phenomenon, its (changing) nature and its impact of international and European politics. It is important to reiterate that we do not pre-assign any specific properties regarding the governance architectures’ internal coherence, effectiveness or efficiency. Some architectures might be more coherent, effective, and/or efficient than others. These are empirical questions (see section 3).

Since in this collection we are concerned with the Lisbon Strategy, a few remarks on what this particular case of governance architecture is are in order. The Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs is perhaps the most high-profile initiative of the European Union (EU) in the first decade of the 2000s (Rodrigues 2003; Begg 2007), and one of the most prominent cases of “governance architectures” in EU politics. Launched in March 2000, its original goals covered competitiveness, employment and social cohesion, whereas the goal of becoming ‘world leader in sustainable development’ was added by the Gothenburg summit of June 2001. The catch-all goal, however, is competitiveness, a contested, wide and dynamic notion particularly from the point of view of policy-making (Hay 2007). In terms of governance, the strategy was set to encompass both policy areas where the institutions of the EU have treaty

competence and others where the classic Community method cannot be used or is politically unacceptable. This attempt to make use of novel modes of governance contained an element of coordination and policy exchange between member states through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) (Tholoniati 2010).

In response to the mid-term review critical standpoint that the strategy was not achieving its goals (High level group 2004) the Lisbon Strategy was re-launched by the Barroso Commission in 2005 with a new focus on securing 'more and better jobs' in Europe: the 'Growth and Jobs' agenda. Most important in the 2005 re-launch was the re-organisation of the procedure into three major steps, namely, the definition of a set of European Integrated Guidelines, their implementation through 3-year national reform programs, and the monitoring of progress on a country by country basis and collectively. These procedural changes meant a significant re-definition of the roles of the Commission, the Council and member states (Borrás 2009). At the same time, though, an increased number of policy fields at EU level were made compliant with this agenda in a complementary Community Lisbon Programme. Policy areas such as regulatory reform and corporate taxation were 'Lisbonised', adding to the overall goal of 'competitiveness' and expanding the reach of this strategy.

Ten years after its creation, however, the evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy's impact on the economy and on national reform processes is not straightforward (Commission 2010b). Whereas it has managed to create a European consensus on reform contents, it has failed to deliver on several of its ambitious benchmarks and targets. The credit crunch of 2008 and the resulting economic recession of 2009-2010 seem to have enhanced a sense of urgency, making the strategy even more visible politically. Furthermore, the 2009 EP elections and the second Barroso Commission have contributed opening this window of opportunity for the re-definition of the strategy. The recently approved "Europe 2020" puts more emphasis on innovation, green technologies and social cohesion; and it keeps the procedures defined in 2005, based on common targets, national reform programs and monitoring (Commission 2010; Council 2010).

2. Why should we bother?

There are three main reasons for this unchallenged status of the Strategy on the EU agenda in the 2000-2010 period as well as for its future for the 2020 agenda. The first has to do with the fact that the Lisbon Strategy has broadened significantly the scope of EU public action for

economic growth. With its focus on competitiveness, and on the knowledge-based economy, the strategy has expanded the Single Market and has strengthened the economic dimension of the EMU, while going beyond them by emphasizing the importance of framework conditions for growth. In many senses, the Lisbon Strategy has been an extraordinary process of intellectual mobilization across Europe and beyond, traces of which are evident in several land-marking reports such as the Kok report and the Sapir report. Much of this intellectual mobilization has been related to the shaping of the agenda's contents and conceptual reach, as much as the generation of particular expectations about what is feasible to be delivered. In a sense, the competitiveness focus of the agenda has been conceptualized as the *raison d'être* of the EU.

The second reason why the Lisbon Strategy is so important in the political life of the EU is that this widened scope has been put into action in two complementary venues, namely by stressing the need of induce a series of widespread reforms at all levels of government, including the need to control and reduce red tape and unnecessary regulations; and by addressing in an interconnected way a wider set of areas in the unfolding of the efforts to improve competitiveness (for example life-long learning, innovation and ICT literacy).

Last but not least, the third reason why the Lisbon strategy is important in European politics is because it has widened considerably the form of EU public action. The ambitious agenda for economic growth is being achieved by combining the use of conventional EU regulatory and economic instruments, with a series of new policy instruments of voluntary nature, stimulating new interactions between public and private actors and in a different understanding and set-up for the interaction between the EU-level and the member state level. This has been recently enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Most of the scholarly work on the Lisbon Strategy, however, is based on either the economic outcome of individual policies (Archibugi and Coco 2005; Pisani-Ferry and Sapir 2006; van Pottelsberghe 2008) or on a specific governance instrument established at the Spring Council of March 2000, that is, the open method of coordination. Other studies (Bruno, Jacquot et al. 2006) have dealt with the Strategy tangentially, moving on from the theoretical premises of the Europeanisation framework or in the context of the analysis of the so-called Lisbonisation of individual policy areas.

If instead of policies we look at processes or modes of governance, we find yet again the tendency to look at only one mode in isolation from the others. Take the case of the open method of coordination. Although even to casual observer has noted that EU

governance in areas like employment or sustainable development is contingent on the interplay between open coordination and hierarchical modes (Armstrong 2005; Borrás and Jacobsson 2004; Radulova 2006; Zeitlin 2008), there has been a boom of studies looking at the OMC as a self-contained entity, with limited exploration of the inter-connections between OMC and other modes of governance in a single policy area. Recently, this literature has moved to the consideration of more ambitious analytical frameworks related to constitutionalism and governance (Bulmer and Padgett 2005; Armstrong 2008; Sabel and Zeitlin 2008). However, these deliberative and learning approaches have to be tested alongside other explanations, such as realist politics, neo-functionalism, and ideational analysis.

Likewise, if we look at studies of Europeanization (Radaelli 2003; Exadaktylos and Radaelli 2009), they tend to be concerned with the potential of EU public policy for domestic change, the different mechanisms at work in complex causal chains, the role of learning in bringing about transformations, and the substantive outcomes. However, they do not tackle the overall analysis of the Lisbon strategy as such. Finally, institutional analysis of EU politics is becoming popular (Aspinwall and Schneider 2000; Marks and Hooghe 2001), but this is yet another area where we have not seen projects on the complex institutional and multi-level actors constellation at the base of the Lisbon agenda.

To sum up, very little work has been done on the key political questions involved in the Lisbon Strategy, like the role of different institutions in the ‘initial framing’ and then the re-definition of the main aims through time, the interplay between different modes of governance in individual policies and across policies, and the institutional effects brought about by the novelties of the Lisbon strategy. Furthermore, we need to approach these topics from theoretical considerations, integrating the analysis of the Lisbon Strategy within the theoretically-based studies about the EU governance at large.

The motives for this neglect of the Strategy as a unit of analysis are not clear to us. One reason may well be a kind of null hypothesis or conjecture at work, at least implicitly, in the minds of political scientists that this time the whole is nothing more than the sum of its components. It is an important conjecture and should not be under-estimated in the current study. Indeed, we have heard at many academic conferences the claim that the Lisbon Strategy is only a discursive veneer on substantive policy domains that have their own history and logic. Even so, one has still to explain the reasons behind the amount of discursive, administrative and political coordination work in Council formations, the Spring Council, the

preparation of three-year cycles of integrated guidelines and lower down in the Commission's annual work programme and the national plans. This is where the explanatory job begins.

We therefore propose a conceptual framework for the study of the Lisbon Strategy as a case of governance architecture. Employing such a conceptual prism will permit to see the architectural dimension of the Lisbon Strategy, examining its nature, its effects and its implications for EU politics. Furthermore, understanding that the Lisbon Strategy is a case of a general type of object of study (rather than a *sui generis* – incomparable case), means that the specific findings of our analysis could be amenable to preliminary generalizations. Future comparative studies with similar cases of governance architectures will provide empirically solid answers to broader questions regarding the extent to which these governance architectures in Europe and elsewhere are epitomes of the changing nature of international and European politics, becoming much more strategic, output-oriented and goal-seeking in wider political agendas.

3. The Lisbon Strategy as a governance architecture

When defining a new concept in the social sciences, it is paramount to determine the analytical context where that concept belongs, its level of abstraction, and the criteria that define it vis-à-vis other concepts. The notion of governance architecture draws on institutional perspectives in comparative politics, EU studies, and in international relations. The basic logic of the governance concept, is that a society needs mechanisms to identify some common problems, deciding a set of goals in order to address those problems, and then designing and implementing the means to achieve those purposes (Pierre and Peters 2000). In the area of international organizations, the governance concept has mostly been associated with multi-level governance, referring to processes of problem-identification, goal-setting and implementation which are deeply interconnecting different territorial levels, and are transforming the traditional form of state-controlled two-level games in the international realm (Piattoni 2010). However, taken at face value, multi-level governance is a rather abstract concept, with maximal conceptual extension (ample empirical coverage) and minimal conceptual intension (it is defined mostly by negation) (Sartori 1970). However interesting, multi-level governance is far too abstract to capture analytically the phenomenon we are aiming at studying, namely, the more strategic output-oriented type of governance activities in the international context.

In the introduction of this paper we defined ‘governance architecture’ as a specific form of institutional arrangement, characterized by three main features, namely, it addresses complex problems in a strategic, holistic long-term perspective; it sets substantive output-oriented goals, and it is implemented through combinations of old and new organizational structures within the international organisation in question. Our starting point is an inductive one, as we have observed a new set of phenomena within the governance of international organizations that do not suit well with pre-existing conceptual definitions. These three analytical criteria of ‘governance architectures’ cannot be found in other types of governance arrangements of multi-level character.

Table 1: Levels of governance arrangements within international organizations and their features

Concept	Scope of problem identification	Type of goal-setting	Implementation design
Multi-level governance	Generic & unchanging problems associated to core values of the international organization (i.e. peace, prosperity)	Broad & implicit goals	Multi-level distribution of authoritative decision making across multiple territorial levels
Governance Architecture	Strategic, holistic, cross-cutting, long-term problem-definition (i.e. improving competitiveness, job-creation, reducing poverty)	Goals and output-oriented targets in different dimensions of the strategic problem, often time-limited (i.e. 2000-10)	Combinations of new/old organizational arrangements at different levels, set up for the specific fulfilment of the strategic goals
Policy program	Problem definition within one single policy area (i.e. reform of EUs Common agricultural policy)	Precise goals within one single policy area	Mix of policy instruments within the same policy area

Table 1 locates the concept ‘governance architecture’ as a specific concept in between ‘multi-level governance’ and ‘policy programs’. This corresponds to the ladder of conceptual abstraction defined by Sartori, where ‘multi-level governance’ is the highest level of

abstraction (definition by negation), 'governance architecture' is the medium-level (definition by analysis, i.e per genus et differentiam), and 'policy program' is the lowest (contextual definition).

'Architecture' refers to the cognitive as well as in organizational dimensions of these strategic decisions, claiming that both dimensions are intrinsically related to each other in the process of defining and unfolding international organizations' public action. Borrowing from a framework in contemporary theory of architecture, "the pattern language approach", timeless construction of towns and individual buildings is based in a process of creating and recreating a language which is based on certain changing patterns of problem-identification and their assigned solutions. Problems and solutions are constantly changing as they are embedded in cognitive and organizational parameters which are essentially social and political in nature (Alexander, Ishkawa et al. 1977). From our current perspective, the notion 'architecture' brings other important aspects to the fore, namely, the holistic and the highly political nature of new constructs (political or physical). The "language pattern" approach in construction theory underlines that construction occurs in a natural and social context, and that new buildings seek to bring more coherence and more holistic answers. 'This is a fundamental view of the world. It says that when you build a thing you cannot merely build that thing in isolation, but must also repair the world around it, and within it, so that the larger world at that one place becomes more coherent, and more whole; and the thing which you make takes its place in the web of nature, as you make it' (Alexander, Ishkawa et al. 1977) p. xiii.

These remarks from architects and urban planners above tell us that the 'architecture' notion refers to a patterning process which has ideational and language-related as well as organisational dimensions. Following this logic, we understand governance architectures to be made up of ideational and organisational components.

The *ideational component* comprise:

- a) A set of fundamental ideational repertoires, expressed in notions such as 'governance', 'competitiveness', 'sustainability', the 'knowledge-based society', and, last but not least, the 'market'. These ideas do not have a clear-cut meaning. They are

discursively malleable. They are infused with norms that can be contested, changeable, or purposefully created (see Donnelly, this issue). To build a strategy around them, political actors have to orchestrate the attribution of meanings and create consensus around meanings via coalitional politics. Indeed, the social construction of strategy (around these prismatic repertoires) is the essence of ideational politics in the EU (Jabko 2006). Ideational repertoires have at least two important features. Firstly, they are ‘grand’ and ‘constitutive’ in the sense that they make a direct appeal to the core *raison d’être* of the international/supra-national polity in question (in our case, the EU). Secondly, ideational repertoires represent an element of novelty in the political agenda. Novelty does not mean necessarily that they are created from scratch. They often bring about a novel understanding or re-interpretation of existing issues, sometimes with different interpretations associated to different actors, in the context of a new political thrust of international and supra-national politics.

- b) A discourse that uses the ideational repertoires in order to discipline, organise and legitimise the hierarchical relationships between the goals of a high-profile initiative and the policy instruments. With this component we go beyond the simple attribution of one meaning or another (or different meanings for different publics). We enter the dimension of defining the semantic territory of concepts, the hierarchical organisation of ideas and norms, and their relation with the policy instruments used by the policy makers. Think of the goal of competitiveness as master-discourse in the Lisbon Strategy, or the priority given in the EMU to certain mechanisms for the control of inflation (Radaelli 2003). More pertinently perhaps, discourse is a form of social interaction that contains both causal ideas and norms that have the effect of coordinating and communicating policy choices. The discourse embedded in governance architectures contains normative beliefs about the institutional frameworks that supposedly enhance competitiveness and the most suitable politico-economic regimes or varieties of capitalism. They contain as well causal beliefs as how modes of governance work (and how they affect policy outcomes) and beliefs about accountability, transparency, participation and so on (Schmidt 2002).

Taken together, ideas and discourses give shape to the overall attempt to socialise actors to a specific frame of reference that is supposed to make sense of a complex world of cross-cutting policy problems (*a référentiel*, Muller, 1995). Since ideas are malleable and

enacted by constellations of actors with different capacity to build coalitions and use discourses successfully, there is variation on this component. The ideational component of a governance architecture can either socialise actors to a new frame of reference or fail to do so.

The *organisational components* comprise:

- c) Formal and informal organisational arrangements through which overall political decisions concerning the architecture are taken. In other words, the explicit politico-organisational machinery where the ideational repertoires and discourses are in fact defined and patterned through complex political processes of multi-level nature. In the Lisbon strategy context, this refers to the Spring Council and the other Council formations; to the roles of the Commission, European Parliament and the other EU institutions; to the corresponding bodies at the national level; and to horizontal transnational interactions across borders. In the Single European Market project, this organisational arrangements were largely based on the inter-institutional balance of powers in the different legislative procedures (particularly co-operation and co-decision procedures) and distribution and forms of voting powers in the Council (qualified majority voting), as defined by the treaty reforms of the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty. In the case of EMU, these organizational arrangements are related to the independent role of the European Central Bank (ECB), and its relations to the Eurosystem (formed by the ECB and the central banks of Euro-countries), as well as to the European System of Central Banks (formed by the ECB and central banks of EU Member States inside and outside the Euro).

- d) The selection of policy instruments and their procedural requirements is the fourth and last organizational component. This has to do with the selection of policy instruments among the panoply of possibilities, and with the definition of specific procedural requirements as a consequence of this choice. The ideational repertoire regarding the nature of ‘governance’ and ideal models of ‘good governance’ is articulated organisationally in a set of practical arrangements. The procedural requirements are particularly important because they constrain and enable organizationally the different governmental levels involved in the political and administrative process, which is essentially a multi-level process. In the Single European Market, the policy instruments chosen were a series of 300 directives and

the creation of European-wide technical standards, both directed towards the creation of a single market through de-regulating and re-regulating at EU level. For EMU, the instruments chosen have been a set of secondary legislative acts defining the specific technical aspects related to monetary policy, and the creation of a Stability Pact and the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines for coordinated economic and fiscal policies of the Euro-members. In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, public action has been based on a specific combination of legislation, procedural instruments such as systematic consultation and regulatory impact assessment (Radaelli and Meuwese, 2010) and somewhat decentralized policy instruments (with the OMC and benchmarking instruments at the forefront). In consequence the procedural requirements have re-defined in important ways some administrative *modus operandi*, at the EU and at the Member State level.

Yet again, there is variation as to how successfully a governance architecture manages its organisational components. It may be more or less efficient on this dimension.

Based on these four analytical components, ‘governance architectures’ might show interesting degrees and forms of variation according to their ideational and organizational features. The table below offers a succinct description of most relevant examples of other Governance Architectures in the EU. This analytical framework might allow for a possible cross-case comparative exercise about the factors determining their distinct dynamics and effects.

Table 2: Examples of Governance Architectures in the EU, and their components

Governance Architecture	Ideational component		Organizational components	
	Ideational repertoire	Discourse	Political & organizational machinery	Policy instruments
Lisbon Strategy (EU)	Competitiveness, knowledge-based economy and society	Welfare state reform /domestic structural reforms, flexicurity reforms	Spring Council, Competitiveness Council, National Lisbon coordinators, National programming & reporting	Open Method of Coordination, legislation, procedural instruments
Single Market (EU)	Economic growth, liberalization, market competition	Economies of scale, costs of non-Europe, efficient allocation of resources	Qualified Majority Voting in the Council, mutual recognition, harmonisation techniques	Directives and regulations; new approach to technical standards
Economic & Monetary Union (EU)	Paradigm of macro-economic stability	Central bank independence	European Central Bank, European System of Central Banks.	Monetary policy instruments, and coordination of national economic policies

In a single paper, we cannot generalise about the properties of governance architectures, nor undertake a major comparative exercise. However, we introduce two main research questions which, although have been elaborated with the Lisbon Strategy in mind, have potential for comparative research on governance architectures. The questions are portrayed in box 1 below.

Box 1- Research Questions

Q1: How did the Lisbon Strategy (ideational and organisational components) emerge? Once created, how was it maintained and adapted over time?

Q2: How has the Lisbon Strategy affected patterns of EU and national governance (policy effects, institutional effects, administrative effects, and /legal system effects)?

The first question considers a given governance architecture as a dependent variable, or the object to be explained by using a wide range of possible theoretical frameworks. The second question looks at the governance architecture as independent variable, tracing its effects on several aspects of European governance.

4. The emergence and re-definition of the Lisbon Strategy

Our first question is about the emergence of the Lisbon Strategy and then its evolution over time. As mentioned, there are several possible pathways to an explanation of Lisbon Strategy as a dependent variable according to the myriad of theoretical frameworks in comparative politics, EU studies and international relations. Our choice here is to take inspiration from institutionalism (historical and discursive) and strategic constructivism, and develop their insights within John Kingdon's theoretical framework on multiple streams (Kingdon 1995). At the outset, we note that governance architecture are institutional arrangements. Our concept shares with historical institutional approaches (be it rational-choice or sociological, see Hall, 2010) the idea that institutions are the product of coalitional politics and power relations that play a role both in abrupt changes and, more often, in slow processes of institutional emergence and change. But - this is the second point made by recent institutional scholarship - institutions are not un-ambiguous rules that guide action (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Institutional ambiguity is refracted among other things by the fact that ideational repertoires are not stable over time and may have different meaning for different actors.

If there is ambiguity, there is room for political manipulation. One model that is well-suited to connect ambiguity, coalitional politics, and manipulation is the multiple streams model (Kingdon 1995). With its emphasis on 'primeval soups' of ideas and gradual definition of problems over time, it is also well-suited to make sense of gradual, incremental institutional emergence. The theme of long causal sequences reminds us that the Lisbon architecture was not created in March 2000 from scratch. Some of its instrumental components pre-date the Lisbon summit. Turning to ideational components, the discursive struggle over the notion of competitiveness has a long history, rooted in institutional and evolutionary economics as opposed to neo-classical economics. Indeed, one can think of the Single Market and Lisbon as two moments in which the EU tried to define its own distinctive approach to competitiveness without however settling the ambiguities and differences implicit in the persistence of different models of capitalism. Whereas the Single European Market focused on economies of scale and unleashing market forces across national borders, the Lisbon strategy has paid more attention to institutional framework conditions. Besides these general treats, both governance architectures have remained relatively normatively undefined as to its preferred model of capitalist organisation. Yet different interpretations and emphasis on the principles and ideational repertoires structuring the governance architecture might lead to substantial changes though time. Much of the ideational and organisational dimensions in the re-definition of the Lisbon strategy in 2005 and 2010 have dealt precisely about this. Acknowledging the presence of purposeful actors with coalitional strategies at work in the process leading to the creation of the Lisbon Strategy and in its re-definition over the years, this approach also acknowledges the existence of two other crucial factors, namely:

- a) the ambiguity and tensions about policy substance (i.e. the role of the market implicit in the Lisbon strategy (Alesina and Perotti 2004)) due to the presence of persisting and fundamental disagreements about core notions like 'competitiveness' or 'market liberalization', potentially resulting in some degree of inconsistency and incompleteness (van Apeldoorn, Drahokoupil et al. 2008); and
- b) the procedural nature of the governance novelties like the OMC, a manifestation of the tendency to defer controversial choices, avoid hard questions of governance² and skirt around a decision about what Jabko calls 'the ultimate direction of change' (Jabko 2007: 13).

² Typical here is the discussion around impact assessment, as explained by Radaelli and Meuwese (2010)

The combination of these two factors means that this approach is not confined to a perspective uniquely based on preference-seeking agents nor to the simple understanding that 'ideas matter' in the sense of deriving choices from a neat, orderly set of ideas. In the Lisbon Strategy, and in most other governance architectures, ideas such as 'competitiveness' or 'knowledge-based economy' have the nature of multi-semantic repertoires for action described by strategic constructivism (Jabko 2006). In line with the strategic constructivist template, the political actors involved in the emergence of the Lisbon Strategy (and its re-definition over the years) were more engaged in *gambling* rather than *bargaining*.

Once we have established that, we argue that empirical analysis can be informed by the multiple streams (MS) approach. Kingdon's streams relate to problem recognition, the formation and refining of policy solutions, and how political parties and governments process policy issues and take decisions. MS has been identified with the triad of problems, policy solutions, and politics – the three streams originally identified in US public policy and more recently applied to the analysis of EU public policy (Zahariadis 2008). When the three streams are coupled – a problem is recognised, a solution is available and the political climate is propitious – a policy window is opened. In the multiple stream theory, *time is not a single entity*. There are three types of time:

- (a) the time of politics, elections, public opinion movements and campaigning on issues, based on the electoral cycle.
- (b) the time of policy ideas and solutions that gradually soften up in communities of experts, and are stabilised within coalitions for change or in defence of the status quo; and
- (c) the time of policy problems, often characterised by crises and how collective problems are portrayed or identified (e.g. through indicators, new analyses and focusing events). More broadly, this is the territory of the politics of attention (Rochefort and Cobb 1994; Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

Thus, (a) is relatively cyclical – in the EU we have EP elections, Council summits, and the renewal of the European Commission at regular intervals of time. Instead, (b) is a much slower kind of time, based on different filters (epistemic, but in the EU there is also the classic filter of committee governance) through which policy solutions have to go through. As for (c), this may be more erratic, with long periods of inertia characterised by abrupt change. Multiple Streams provides theoretical leverage to make sense of these different types of time. Hence, the multiple stream/ approach enables the researcher to perform process-tracing in a three-dimensional space (i.e., politics, solutions, and the politics of problem

definition), and to see the role of agency as policy entrepreneurship exploiting specific policy windows (Natali 2005). The process of choice that takes place in these short-duration policy windows is further affected by the scarcity of attention as policy makers and policy communities tend to ration their attention; the density of policy communities determining the wider or narrower search of solutions; and the policy entrepreneurs ability to manipulate selection process by framing the problem and solutions in narrow perspectives typically emotionally-laden (Zahariadis 2007).

This approach needs to link these ideational dynamics to the organizational components of governance architectures. To this purpose, Vivien Schmidt suggests that the process of softening-up solutions (the so-called shortlist of ideas to be considered by policy-makers) is connected to processes of discourse construction – what Vivien Schmidt calls ‘coordinative discourse’ (Schmidt 2001), as ideational changes have to be communicated to citizens and society in order to gain social legitimacy (Schmidt 2002; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004). It is this coordinative and communicative dimension that relates to the organizational components of the governance architecture, namely, those formalizing and embedding these ideational changes into specific organisational changes.

Drawing on the all the theoretical assumptions above, we can formulate two overall propositions regarding the emergence, maintenance and change of the Lisbon Strategy. Following recent theoretical advances in institutional change, we build a set of propositions on the assumption that institutional emergence and change is eminently a gradual process base (Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Hall 2010).

Firstly, we argue that the creation of the Lisbon Strategy is the product of coalitional politics that took advantage of a narrow policy window in the late 1990s. The process of coalitional politics and institutional choice that took place in this window of opportunity was defined by the opening of political attention to these matters by the Finnish and Portuguese Council presidencies (second half of 1999 and first half of year 2000) and by the European Commission (putting forward some visions originally aired in the White Paper on competitiveness of 1993 (Commission 1993). Hence our first proposition is that the creation of the Lisbon Strategy happened at a specific point in time when the problem-stream of economic growth and welfare state reform in Europe, was coupled to the eclectic policy solutions offered by the rapid influence of institutional and evolutionary economic theory,

and to the political stream of a broad left-right wing consensus on the third way. . The institutional choice coupling the three streams (problem, policy and politics) did not only have an ideational dimension, but also an organisational one, as the creation of the Lisbon Strategy seems to be rooted in the experiences of pre-dating organisational experiences of some 'processes' in the late 1990s (like the Luxemburg process in employment policy) which can be seen as prototypes of what later would be developed and dubbed as the Open Method of Coordination. This remark corresponds to the assumptions of historical institutionalism that substantial institutional novelties tend to be the outcomes of incremental transformations accommodating some pre-existing elements (Mahoney and Thelen 2010).

We add that ideational ambiguity, political manipulation, and uncertainty about institutional roles (for example, on who manages and who communicates, (Borrás 2009)) were not settled once and for all in Lisbon in March 2000. The unclear division of tasks between the Council and the Commission in the first years of the strategy (2000-5) was a source of ambiguity that the Commission used to define its role in mainly administrative terms. This changed in the 2005 re-launch of the strategy, when those tasks became clearer and the Commission assumed a broader spectrum of roles. Yet, institutionalisation is never a complete process - slack and ambiguity over the interpretation and enactment of the Lisbon rules did not evaporate. Compliance - institutional theory suggests - "is inherently complicated by the fact that rules can never be precise enough to cover the complexities of all possible real-world situations" (Mahoney and Thelen 2010): 11. The second proposition, therefore, has to do with the changing nature of this governance architecture after its official creation in 2000. Since the ideational or organisational components were not clearly defined at the onset, but were deliberately ambiguous, the second proposition states that changes in the Lisbon Strategy are fundamentally attributed to coalitional processes concerning compliance with the strategy. Specifically, coalitional politics around the (re)definition of ideational and organisational arrangements, through discourse coordination and communication involving rational and purposeful as well as non-purposeful action by different sets of actors. As the political context of this governance architecture was changing through time (from a weak veto possibility to strong veto possibility), different coalitions have shaped the institutional outcomes given the constantly high level of discretion in the interpretation and enforcement of the ideational and organisational arrangements. This means that, following Mahoney and Thelen, the gradual changes of the Lisbon Strategy since its creation in year 2000 can be

mainly characterized as a form of ‘drift’ and of ‘conversion’³, ultimately determined by coalitional processes dominated by different types of actors.

5. The Effects of Governance Architectures

Following our second research question, it is worth considering the extent to which the Lisbon strategy is likely to have affected the patterns of public policy, particularly at the national level. Here we have to be cautious. In a sense, it is up to the papers of this collection to shed light on the policy effects. With this caveat, it seems useful to consider the ideational and organisation pressures on the domestic systems generated by the Lisbon architecture.

Ideational pressure refers to the difference between policy paradigms contained in the Lisbon agenda and the prevailing domestic policy paradigm, both in terms of ideational repertoires and political discourses. Explicit in the Lisbon strategy is the intention to generate an alignment of national policy objectives with the EU-level overreaching goals. Organisational pressure is about the politico-administrative dimension of this pressure, which in our case refers to the institutional opportunities offered by the specific forms of political organisation and the procedural requirements of policy instruments. We can start from the null hypothesis H^0 that there have been no ideational or organisational impacts. This may be the case because (a) the Lisbon architecture has not created ideational or organisational pressure in spite of its ambitious goals, political configurations and policy instruments, or because (b) the ideational and/or organisational clash between Lisbon and domestic policy is too extreme to accommodate change, hence Lisbon has been ideologically and politico-administratively ‘resisted’ at the level of member states.

A set of hypothesis H^{1-4} can be drawn by the literature on Europeanization and compliance with EU rules. One classic proposition in this field is that, given pressure on national system arising out of EU commitments, the impact at the national level is largely associated to the presence of national-specific institutional variables that define the intermediate level of pressure (Börzel and Risse 2003). Degree and forms of national impact can be predicted on the basis of these nationally-specific intervening variables. Given non-extreme degrees of Lisbon-generated pressure (a precondition for Europeanization to occur), domestic change depends on the following *intervening variables*:

³ “Drift: The changed impact of existing rules due to shifts in the environment; Conversion: the changed enactment of existing rules due to their strategic redeployment” Mahoney & Thelen, 2010: 16.

- 1) *The degree of discretion in the implementation of Lisbon goals.* This is a crucial intervening factor at the national level. Earlier we have referred to the relative open-ended nature of the Lisbon strategy both in terms of the definition of meta-goals following a set of ideational repertoires ('competitiveness') and in terms of the cyclical and changing contents of the Lisbon strategy itself. We assume that this relatively open-ended nature has in principle allowed to accommodate better these overall goals and principles within different traditional national policy goals according to different interpretations of ideational repertoires. However, across Lisbon policy areas, the stringency and clarity of prescriptions set at the EU level vary, and so do the expected levels of learning 'from the top' down to the national and local level. This leads us to the following hypothesis, namely, (H1) the more open the Lisbon strategy goals are, the greater the possibility to accommodate and make compatible the pre-existing national goals with EU-goals, inducing domestic change gradually.
- 2) *The communication and coordination of the discourse at national level* (Schmidt 2002). This refers to who has entry and voice in the Lisbon-related articulation of the national discourse that motivates change, as well as the associated dynamics of communication and coordination. For example, the Lisbon debate on innovation may have suddenly empowered the voice of evolutionary economists, since they seem to have more to say about innovation than traditional economists, a cornerstone of the 'competitiveness' notion.⁴ The distinction between coordinative and communicative discourse is useful here, leading our way to the following hypothesis. (H2) For reform coalitions, policy entrepreneurs and politico-administrative organisational leaders pushing for changes to bring policy in line with the Lisbon templates, a thin coordinative discourse facilitates the adoption of new policy ideas or organisational platforms. As explained by Vivien Schmidt, thin coordinative discourse implies thick communicative discourse meaning that a large number of actors are involved in the construction of a discourse that convinces public opinion that the change is legitimate and serves the interests of the country.
- 3) *The national traditions of political and administration organisation.* This intermediate variable refers to the overall principles and structures defining the politico-administrative organisation at the national level. The Lisbon strategy political

⁴ We are grateful to Jakob Edler for this comment.

organisation is based on a specific constellation of formal and informal arrangements (Spring Council, Competitiveness Council, etc) likely to influence the political organization at the national level. Likewise, the Lisbon strategy is largely inspired by new public management organizational forms, which contrast with the Napoleonic or Weberian type of political-administration traditions of state-society relations. The politico-administrative organisation at the national level is highly embedded in a specific historical context, and therefore it tends to change gradually and following strong path dependencies. For that reason the hypothesis here is that (H3) the more similar the pre-existing forms of national organisational structures are to the political and administrative organizational structures and principles of the Lisbon strategy, the more likely domestic change will be the product of a synergy between the Lisbon-induced change and the country's own drive for change. Yet, the absence of this structural similarity would invariably mean a more problematic domestic change because it implies a more radical/disruptive pressure for change, challenging historical path dependencies.

- 4) *The presence-absence of institutional opportunities for coupling and entrepreneurship.* Institutions enable or constrain policy entrepreneurs. In consequence, the amount of change depends on the institutional position of the reform coalition or policy entrepreneur (inside or outside the core executive; see Chiattelli 2008). This is related to the degree of empowerment of core executive authority at national level in terms of the relationship between Prime Ministers' offices and sectoral ministries, the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians, the relationship between executives and parliaments, and the openness to external advisors and experts. The seventh and last hypothesis is therefore related to the literature dealing with the Europeanization of national political systems (Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008) which examines the role of national political systems' organizational features as variables explaining diversity in the degree and forms of the EU's national impact. Hence our hypothesis reads that (H4) the institutional position of the entrepreneur (individual or reform coalition) within those national organisational structures determines the amount of change at the domestic level that is related to the Lisbon Strategy ideational and organisational features.

7. Final Remarks

During the past few decades the literature of EU studies has focused overwhelmingly on treaty reforms and their associated socio-legal dynamics. Other sets of studies have also provided single policy change perspectives, focusing on the day-to-day EU politics. To a large extent the intellectual agenda focusing on these two (the legal and constitutional dimension of EU integration and the day-to-day individual policy change) has tended to disregard important political aspects of EU integration beyond issues of delegation and legal constitutionalization, and beyond specific policy dynamics. We suggest that governance architectures are another focal point in the study of international politics and regional integration, as these objects of study reflect new ways of doing politics in the international context.

This analytical perspective differs, but complements, the Treaty and the day-to-day based views on what is the relevant concrete object of study as a proxy of the dependent variable which is ultimately the integration and governance process in the EU. Governance architectures can be seen as long-term ambitious political initiatives articulating specific sets of public action that address a core goal of the European project.

They also have a constitutional dimension, not only in the strict terms of the enshrinement of legal means in the Treaties, but essentially in terms of their far-reaching political ideals which become concretely articulated in policy and in organizational terms. This is the reason why, when studying these governance architectures, scholars of EU integration should not only look at the means (legal or otherwise) but also at the overall political and structural nature of such long-term strategies.

Governance architectures mobilize actors and create the conditions for engagement in different policies. The EU succeeds in mobilizing and in attracting political attention mostly in relation to grandiose, long-terms projects. However, over time these governance architectures seem to have become less specific: the single market was eminently a project linked to a large bundle of directives and the principle of mutual recognition. In comparison, Economic and Monetary Union was more open-ended in terms of membership and final point of arrival, but concretely it meant a single currently for those

willing and able to join. It was and remains vague on moral hazard and other post-implementation problems. The Lisbon Strategy has not settled the ambiguities and contested dimensions of the competitiveness project. The end-point (the most competitive, sustainable, socially inclusive knowledge-based society) is either perceived in different ways by key member states and remains in any case difficult to achieve given the current performance of the European economies and societies. The ideational components of governance architectures do not invariably achieve their official goals, but just like Pierre Muller (1995) noted in his référentiels, they might serve other functions, especially the function of creating consensus around the cognitive and organisational aspects of public policy. The Lisbon Strategy has been an attempt to socialize a large number of players to new paradigms of public policy and to engage them in new forms of organizational procedures. Today, it is still an incomplete process since competitiveness remains a challenge for the European economy and society. The current economic and financial upheavals may create the shock for a re-alignment of cognitive beliefs and policy norms, or may trigger more divergence than before. This is the terrain on which Europe 2020 represents a key opportunity for the EU and its Member States.

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