

Reviewing theories of deborah stone on policy making politics essay



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I name my answer to question as " Idea and Deborah Stone", I want go through her book and explain why ideas are so important. According to Deborah Stone, ideas will help people to define alliance, strategic considerations also ideas will help people to get the legitimacy and draw policy boundaries. (Deborah, P 34). According to Deborah Stone, ideas will decide " who will be affected", " how will they be affected" and " will they be affected legitimately" (Stone, P. 34).

In the first Chapter, Stone starts her analysis at the city-state (the Greek term polis) level. The public policy is considered as an attempt to achieve a certain community goals (Deborah, P 21). However, due to the fact that everyone has his own understanding of ideas, therefore the political community has become a place for internal debates over " who will be affected", " how will they be affected" and " will they be affected legitimately"(Deborah, P 34) . The policy-making process has thus become a continuous interaction between the conflict and cooperation.

In Stone's model, individuals may pursue their goals through collective action. The motivation is not only based on self-interests but also based on public concerns. This is because the public interest is be related to the goal of survival (Deborah, P 33). However, when there is a contradiction between self-interest and public interest, the policy process will be more complicated (Deborah, P 33). When the group is motivated under common ideas, the group will get more strength, and there will be a balance between private interests and public interests in the conflict.

Stone directly uses the "idea" as the core concept of this book. In her construction of "polis community vs market individual" (Deborah P 33) model, ideas have become the focus. Stone tries to use struggle of idea to explain all stages of policy-making process. Policy-making is followed by a continuous constantly struggle to fight for the classification of standards, types of boundaries, and guide people to conduct the ideal typical definition.

The struggle of idea can be seen in several policy levels. According to Stone's theory, idea defines what people want from the policy; it is the foundation for people to cognize and understands what the policy is. Idea provides a relationship between advocators and advocacy coalitions; Idea provides "causal relationship" for these people and groups, and ideas will be reflected to their policy objectives through their actions of obtaining support. And these people with the shared idea will persuade decision-makers to meet their preferences. As mentioned above, Stone sees idea as a constantly changing dynamic and resources of construction. And by given different interpretations of ideas, the concept of the ideas will also change. She points out that the politics of policy is to choose the interpretation (Deborah P 75). Stone argues that the authority to interpret idea is the key factor in the policy-making process. Only legitimated idea can be transformed into policy. And using the legitimacy, people's knowledge or behavior can be changed. And policy change can also be made through this interaction of ideas. Ideas affects how people cognized politics, and the change of politics will also feedback on ideas. To Stone, idea is not static; idea is an ongoing of constructing and reconstructing process of concepts.

Now I will try to exam whether Deborah Stone's idea theory can fits with other policy process theory.

In the punctuated equilibrium theory, Baumgartner and Jones also argue that idea is a potential power in the policy making process. According to their book " Agendas and Instability in American Politics", " a powerful supporting idea is associated with the institution" (Baumgartner and Jones, P 7); In page 16, they also write" the tight connection between institution and idea provides powerful support for prevailing distribution of political advantage". These statements mean that idea will help people understand " what is at stake and how will they be affected (Stone, 2002)", policy advocators will use institution arrangement to make their idea be legitimate. Also, in order to gain more power those policy actors will manipulate images and ideas. To Baumgartner and Jones, ideas are important because they provide some potential undergirding institutional arrangements; and the struggle of idea is the struggle over legitimate institution arrangements.

In the book Agendas, alternatives and public policies, Kingdon also discusses the importance. In order to make useful policy suggestions, participants in the policy process are competing to develop new ideas; and they are trying to provide their ideas in the form of potential solutions to policy makers. According to Kingdon, policy entrepreneurs " lie in wait in and around government with their solutions [already] in hand, waiting for problems to float by to which they can attach their solutions, waiting for a development in the political stream they can use to their advantage" (Kingdon, P 165).

Shared ideas make policy entrepreneurs into alliance; and these alliances are trying to make their ideas become legitimate. Kingdon's " primal policy <https://assignbuster.com/reviewing-theories-of-deborah-stone-on-policy-making-politics-essay/>

soup" (Kingdon, P 139-143) model provides us a picture of how decision makers accept idea through coherent narrative process (ideas are flowing in the streams just as molecules flowing in the soup). According to Kingdon, a policy community creates a short list of ideas. If the ideas can go through the selecting process, softening up process and if they can pass the exam by specialists and policy makers, they may finally become policies. The whole process can be viewed as a continuing struggle of ideas. In this case, ideas are not only competing with other ideas, they are also struggling to survive in this primal soup. I also think Kingdon's policy window model is another improvement to Deborah Stone's arguments. People are now struggling to make their idea in front of the policy window at the correct time. This model discovers that the during the policy process, critical time is also important for ideas struggling.

However, I think there are also some theories which do not fully support Deborah Stone's argument. In the garbage can model, because the nature of unclear, policy is not necessarily to be the consequence of the idea's struggling. In Kingdon's *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, he describes that as "garbage can into which various kinds of problems and solutions are dumped by participants... removed from the scene" (Kingdon, P 85). In some sense, Deborah Stone's "Struggling of ideas" assumption is more based on a goal-oriented policy making process, in order to make it work, there should be a clear policy goal from all participants; while the classical garbage can model is more like a method-oriented policy making process, it doesn't require a clear goal or solution at the beginning. In the garbage can model, people are not fighting with each other over ideas in the

final solution selecting stage, however it is still correct to say that each solution in the garbage can is a result of deliberative idea thinking. I think there is a slight difference between Deborah Stone's theory and the garbage can model.

Another policy theory which doesn't fully consistent with Deborah Stone's theory is the incrementalism theory. According to Lindblom, the incremental policy process is more relied on former existing policies. According to this model, the policy environment generally remains stable. Because the incremental nature of the policy, the new policy will inherit the policy environment from previous policy, if the former policy has resolved the struggling of idea, then there will be less struggling of ideas in the new policies. Since the policy environment is stable, it will be unlikely for us to speculate a violently struggle over ideas.

The last policy process theory I want discuss in the context of "struggling over idea" is the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) theory. The central idea of this theory is that people or groups with the same beliefs (core/policy/secondary) will form a coalition. I think Sabatier's concept of belief is similar to Deborah Stone's concept of idea. Especially, I think the concept of policy belief is playing the role of idea in the policy process. I think his core belief is rooted even deeper than idea. The core belief will sometimes become unnoticeable. And using the ACF model, we can find out that the policy process is a competition among different policy beliefs, and I think this observation is close to Deborah's "struggle over ideas the 'essence of policy making.'" But it does not mean that the change in the secondary belief level is also a result of struggling, according to Sabatier's <https://assignbuster.com/reviewing-theories-of-deborah-stone-on-policy-making-politics-essay/>

theory, such change is more like the result of an incremental learning process.

In conclusion, I think Deborah Stone's argument is useful for us to understand some policy process. However, by using different theories we should also notice whether "policy processes are struggle over ideas" should be analyzed in situations. The Punctuated-Equilibrium model, ACF model and Multiple Stream model indicate that Deborah's argument is valid. In the P-E model, the change of existing idea or appearance of new idea will bring turbulence to the policy process; in the ACF model, the learning process can change beliefs at different level, and these changes will bring feedbacks to the policy process; in the M-S model, policy entrepreneurs will use the opportunity to propose their ideas, and when critical time is come, the coupled stream will become policy.

Incremental Model suggests that policy process is not necessarily linked to struggling when the time span of the policy is very short. There could be no struggle when the whole policy process is already fixed. However, I think the origin/first policy in the incremental model is a result of idea struggling.

The Garbage Can model suggests that the choosing process within the policy process may appear as a random process, it is not necessarily to be the consequence of the idea struggling.