The Fields of Public Policy

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The notion of the field was conceived as a transposable tool capable of explaining the logics specific to each differentiated space of relationships and practices. As such, it is by definition applicable to all areas of sociological research, all the more so since the constitution of these areas very often replicates the differentiation of social spaces, as in the cases of sport, medicine, law, science, religion, politics, etc. It is, however, used to unequal degrees in the different cases. While it is central in sector sociologies, where it has given rise to many studies, such as the sociology of art or journalism, it is less present in transversal specialisms such as the sociology of work, occupations or deviance. My concern here is with what is commonly called public policy analysis. It is an area of social science research where the concept of the field is very little used[1]. My aim will therefore be not so much to draw up a critical assessment of its uses as to explore its potential contributions, from the more general standpoint of the sociologization of a research specialism whose dominant approaches are sometimes only distantly related to the conceptual and methodological tools forged by sociology. After a rapid presentation of the main competing concepts currently deployed in this area and their limits, I shall set out how the principles of field sociology can be applied to give an account of the space of production of public policies. Finally, on that basis I shall formulate propositions for a relational analysis that accounts for the modes of domination and legitimation at work in public policy.

I. Public policy without the field

Research in public policy analysis remains dominated by approaches that are remote from the concepts and methods of sociology (Dubois, 2009). Inherited from the *policy science* developed in the USA in the 1950s, it first concentrated on analysing processes (most

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[1] A few papers advocate the use of the notion of the field, mainly in education policy. (Thomson, 2005; Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor, 2005; Lingard, and Rawolle, 2008). See also Duffy, Binder and Skrentny, 2010 on urban policy.

commonly agenda setting, decision, development, implementation and evaluation), with the often pragmatic aim of improving governmental practices. It conceived policy as a chain of sequences rather than in terms of a sociological analysis of the groups involved in making it. Specifically sociological concerns mainly appeared in the analysis of the social construction of public problems, which represents a major contribution to the critical understanding of policies (Gusfield, 1981). This latter trend, working from a symbolic interactionist perspective, is however little concerned with systematic objectivation of the systems of positions of the actors. Public policy analysis is nonetheless rich in concepts devised to account for the configurations, systems and social milieux in which policies are produced. For lack of space, I shall give here only the main examples (for a fuller discussion, see Hassenteufel, 2008).

A. Public policy networks: empirical unfolding and normative assumptions

In the study of the production and implementation of public policies, analysis in terms of networks is no doubt the approach most frequently adopted. Developed in the 1970s in the USA and Great Britain, it has given rise to the concept of the *policy community,* which designates the set of actors, of varying status – politicians, civil servants, experts, representatives of interest groups, etc., who interact in defining a policy. Subsequently, the concept of the *issue network* has come to designate more specifically the network formed around the resolution of a certain type of problem (Le Galès and Thatcher, 1995). The initial intention is very simple. Essentially it is to underline that public actors are not the only actors who determine the orientations of policies, and to integrate into the analysis their relations with private actors, essentially the interest groups who, as is well known, are very present in the American political system of *lobbying*. From this flows a whole series of notions. Members of the specialist Congressional committees, civil servants in the relevant federal agencies and the corresponding interest groups are linked in *iron triangles*. The actors in heterogeneous positions brought together by a problem of which they share a common vision form *advocacy coalitions* (Bergeron *et. al.*, 1998). The experts, civil servants, politicians and other promoters of public policies who have the same ways of thinking and analysing make up an *epistemic community* (Haas, 1992), and so on.

The use of these concepts raises several problems. The variants that have been mentioned may serve as useful descriptive labels, but their analytical scope in the sense of the capacity to generate new hypotheses seems limited relative to the abundance of theoretical

discussions to which they give rise. The heterogeneity of their intellectual and disciplinary origins is compounded by the diversity of sectoral and national terrains and the distinctive dynamics of a scientific sub-field whose development and autonomization have grown considerably since the early 1980s. The proliferation of new ad hoc concepts has prevailed over the effort to transpose generic concepts that have already proved their worth in the social sciences.

In these theories, the overarching concept of the network is itself used in heterogeneous senses. They are descriptive or metaphorical, making little use of the conceptual tools and techniques of the sociology of networks (Mercklé, 2004). There is little recourse to quantification, which plays a decisive role both empirically and analytically in network sociology. Ultimately, these uses derive from a theoretical and political presupposition – that public policy stems from horizontal cooperation among weakly or non-hierarchized actors, whose hierarchization, so far as it exists, is in constant flux. Playing down the power relations and the phenomena of domination and concentration of power, this way of conceiving networks therefore has strong affinities with the thesis that a system of *multi-level governance* has replaced the State – or should do so. As such, the concept of the network may turn out to be more prescriptive than descriptive.

Analysis of public policies in France makes extensive use of these frameworks of analysis. It nonetheless has its particularities, notably the fact that it is strongly marked by two currents: Michel Crozier's strategic analysis and the cognitive approach stemming from the work of Bruno Jobert and Pierre Muller. Each has developed its own conceptualization of the systems of relationships that lie behind policies.

B. Concrete action systems in public policy making

The concept of *concrete action systems* occupies an essential place in the conceptual apparatus of the sociology of organizations as formalized by Crozier and Friedberg (1981). By drawing attention to the real relations between actors and so moving beyond the juridical analysis of formal organizations formal, it has shed light, in particular, on the modes of functioning of bureaucracies, the management of reforms and the power games behind local policies (Dupuy and Thœnig, 1983; Grémion, 1976).

However, beyond its general limitations (such as weak historicization or the failure to take account of the social characteristics of the actors), the action system concept raises a

whole set of problems when applied to public policy. Some of these limits have long been made clear (Jobert and Leca, 1980). Three will be mentioned briefly here.

First, while strategic analysis, through the concept of the concrete action system, has an undeniable critical strength in comparison with conventional decisionist models and the over-politicized vision generally associated with them, it has the vice of its virtues. Twisting the stick in the opposite direction, it postulates that everything derives from a play of interactions and power within which the political is only one actor among others and where party affiliations, the specific constraints of the craft of politics and ideological orientations are not pertinent variables. It thus presents a depoliticized vision of public intervention, detached from the electoral game and more generally from relations of political exchange. This may in some cases result from empirical observation, but it is a debatable preconception if taken as an initial postulate.

Secondly, the conception of a power present at the level of each relationship among actors and the postulate of the non-hierarchization of action systems (it is posited *a priori* that no system can exert pressure on the others) make it impossible to account for the phenomena of the concentration of powers. The notion that the State only exists in the diffraction of the games of concrete and localized powers constitutes an advance on demiurgic visions that make it an abstract, homogeneous entity (the vision of jurists and also of one strand of marxism), but masks the general structuring of the relations of domination in and through the historical process of accumulation of the resources that constitute it.

A third limitation can be added: it lies in the fact that the strategic and interactionist vision prevalent in the concept of the action system leads to neglect of the symbolic dimension of the exercise of power and therefore of the conduct of policies. It is however an essential dimension, both because public intervention also consists to some extent (which varies from case to case) in acting on social representations (accrediting the vision of a problem and thereby orienting behaviours) and because it is bound up with the symbolic exchanges in which the political process is played out par excellence: the legitimation of political power and of those who claim the right to exercise it (Lagroye, 1985).

C. Sectors and frames of reference

The symbolic dimension (which in this case is termed "cognitive") is, by contrast, central to the model of analysis formalized by Jobert and Muller (1987). Without entering into the detail of a system of interpretation that has given rise to many commentaries (see in

particular Desage and Godard, 2005), I shall focus here only on what is directly relevant to a possible comparison with field sociology. Jobert and Muller's analysis shares with field sociology – and indeed with many others – the initial hypothesis of a growing differentiation of spheres of social activity inspired (distantly, in this case) by Durkheim's thesis of the progress of the division of labour. Thus the authors consider that, under the combined effect of the industrial revolution, the development of the means of communication, the proliferation of specialist occupations and the growth of a State apparatus that is both centralized and internally specialized, territorialized societies (where social identity, the representation of interests and the regulation of conflicts had a local base) have been replaced by sector-divided societies (in which identities and interests are more occupationally defined and where social regulation is conducted more by sector of activity, at national level, or at least is no longer strictly attached to a place). One example would be the substitution of the farmer, a member of an occupation organized into unions and a specialized actor in an economic sector regulated as such, for the peasant, a polyvalent social figure defined by his attachment to a territory that constitutes his social and political horizon. Another would be the transformation of the systems of solidarity, with the creation of the Welfare State substituting national redistribution based on social, generally occupational, status for public or private charity operating on a local basis – prolonging in this respect the church aid dispensed to the parish poor.

In a sector-divided society such as France, the political risk is no longer so much a break-up through the secession of territories, as disintegration, since each sector tends to function by imposing its own logic.[2] Beyond the handling of the problems specific to each sector, the function that defines public policies consists in "managing the relationship between the sectors and the whole," i.e. regulating the relations among interdependent sectors (such as industry and transport), dealing with the effects of each sectoral policy (the modernization of agriculture in the 1950s accelerated the rural exodus, creating new housing needs in the cities, the fulfilment of which led to urban planning problems with their own social impact), and finally and most importantly adjusting each sector to the dominant social and political model (winding down traditional agriculture when society required "modernization", making the universities "efficient" to fit the model of competition and the market).

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[2] The fact that this contribution is part of a collective reflection conducted with Belgian colleagues immediately brings to light the nationally situated character of this type of analysis.

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This analysis, while in many respects compatible with the tools of field sociology, makes no reference to it. The authors use the term "sectors" to broadly designate spheres of activity that could be analysed as fields. They define a sector as "a vertical structuring of social roles (generally occupational) that defines the rules by which it functions, selects its elites, develops its specific norms and values, and draws its boundaries" (Jobert and Muller, 1987, for this and subsequent quotations). While they note that a sector is riven with dissensions, they do not, as one would for a field, establish the polarities that structure it or explain the logics of its internal competitions. To designate the actors intermediate between a sector and the public authorities, who play a decisive role in the orientation of policies, they use the concept of the mediator, a kind of organic intellectual of sectoral policies who produces a system of representation (a "sector frame of reference [*référentiel*]"), linked to power relations and practices of intervention. But by limiting themselves to identifying a few individual mediators, whose decisive role is deduced intuitively rather than systematically demonstrated, they avoid the need to reconstruct the system of positions specific to each sector, which is the only way to understand sociologically the structure of the kinds of capital and the relationships that underlie the positions of influence.

This approach is called "cognitive" in that it puts social representations, regarded as the matrix of policies, at the centre of the demonstration. "To devise a public policy," write Jobert and Muller, "amounts to constructing a representation, an image of the reality on which one wants to intervene. It is by reference to this cognitive image that the actors organize their perception of the system, compare their solutions and define their proposals for action." It is the frame of reference of policy, defined as "the set of norms or images of reference by which the criteria of State intervention and the objectives of the public policy in question are defined." The "sector frame of reference" is deduced empirically from the discourse of the mediators, which is then akin to the shorthand for a representation articulated with practices, which has primacy over at a given moment over rival representations because of its compatibility with the "overall frame of reference"; by contrast, field sociology would seek to reconstruct systematically the genesis of the norms and rules that specify it. The "overall frame of reference" has a still more uncertain status and empirical foundation. It corresponds to very general principles (modernization in the period 1945-1975, then the social market economy), for which a social history would have to reconstruct precisely that which is here only alluded to: the producers, the sites of production, the forms in which are presented,

through a methodical study of a clearly identified corpus – as Bourdieu and Boltanski did in their article on "the production of the dominant ideology" (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1976).

In short, not only is field sociology almost totally ignored by Anglo-American work in this area, but it is also neglected by French research that claims to analyse public policies, even when, as has been seen, it could at least provide some useful complements and correctives.[3]

II. The space of production of a policy

The approach in terms of field can, more ambitiously, be mobilized to ground a truly sociological analysis of public policy. This will become apparent as I give a first glimpse of how it might be used to construct the space of policy production.

A. Propositions

1. One postulate and two initial hypotheses

The mobilization of the concept of the field in order to construct the space of production of a policy is based on a postulate that makes it possible to construct the policy as a sociological object. This postulate breaks as much with the classic conceptions of public policy as the product of a "will", a decision, and/or of a rational progression of thought, as with contemporary analyses that see it as an unpredictable effect of interaction – the "garbage can model" (Cohen et. al., 1972) – or of ideas considered as matrices of action (*Revue française de science politique*, 2000). It consists in regarding public policy as the product of the practices and representations of the agents involved in it, these practices and representations being determined by the social characteristics, interests and objective positions of the agents, and therefore the structure of the relationships among them. By making it possible to objectivate the structure of the positions, of the corresponding position-

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[3] Beyond the concept of the field, Pierre Bourdieu's whole sociology is generally neglected by this work, almost the only exception being episodic reference to *The State Nobility* for the sociology of the *grandes écoles* and the governing circles (Bourdieu, 1996). It would take too long to examine here the reasons for this exclusion, which stem alternately (or simultaneously) from a demarcation from French political sociology (where reference to Bourdieu is very present), the potency of English-language references or competing sociologies such as Crozier's, and struggles between institutions (with for example the central role of the Paris *Institut d'Etudes Politiques*). Its consequence is that generations of researchers are trained not knowing and/or with an intellectual and/or political aversion to Bourdieu's sociology.

takings and the relationships, analysis in terms of field enables one to bring to light the social foundations of a policy and so put forward a sociological analysis.

This postulate leads to the formulation of two main basic hypotheses. The first takes up one of the axioms of field sociology, positing a relation of homology between positions and position-takings, and consists in relating the options and orientations competing in the definition of a policy (reducing costs for employers or reducing working time to create jobs, preferring road or rail transport) to the positions and interests of those who advocate them (employers' representatives or senior civil servants and activist experts in the Ministry of Labour; auto industry lobbyists or ecologist politicians). A second hypothesis, more original and rarely tested empirically, consists in establishing a correspondence between the content of a policy (its orientation, its style), and the relational structure of the space of the agents involved in its production. It is this hypothesis that I propose to develop by considering a policy as the objectivation, in a politically legitimated mode of intervention, of a provisional state of the power relations within the field of struggles over the legitimate definition of this intervention.

2. Applications and scope of a concept

Pierre Bourdieu gave an example of this in his work on housing, analysing the space of positions and position-takings underlying the production of housing policies (Bourdieu, 2003). He shows how change in the relative values of the kinds of capital within the bureaucratic field (cf. *infra*) in the latter half of the 1970s, during the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, facilitated a conjunctural alliance between young technician graduates of the École Polytechnique and young financial administrators from the École Nationale d'Administration to gain the upper hand over the positions previously established in housing policy making – civil servants in the *Ministère de l'Equipement*, local politicians and representatives of joint public-private undertakings. The former were thus able to impose the "modern" and "liberal" vision attached to their own position and interests, relegating the ideas of the latter as "archaic". One then understands the social and also ideological foundations of the decline of building subsidies (*aide à la pierre*) in favour of personal subsidies (*aide à la personne*), the technical translation of an individualization of the housing question (financial support for households rather than building social housing), signalling the start of the move to neo-liberalism.

The same framework of analysis can be applied to French language policies in France in the late 1980s (Dubois, 2006a). Since their development in the mid-1960s, the making of these policies had been dominated by agents with traditional positions, in particular members of the Académie Française who found there a way of reinvesting a capital that was being devalued within the literary field. Their orientation was then purist or at least defensive, against the "invasion" of English. The occupants of "progressive" positions, more open-minded and hostile to purism, were found in particular among the linguists, who were more or less excluded from the space of production of language policies, just as they were kept out of the Académie Française. It was the valorization of the scientific capital of expertise within the bureaucratic field, in the reformist moment that corresponded to the appointment of Michel Rocard as Prime Minister in 1988, that for the first time allowed linguists to be brought into influential positions: advisor to the Prime Minister (Pierre Encrevé), vice-president of the *Conseil supérieur de la langue française* (Bernard Quémada), *Délégué général à la langue française* (Bernard Cerquiglini). And it was the incoming of new personnel that lay behind the – partially abortive – shift to a policy that sought to be more open to change (spelling reform, feminization of the names of occupations) and linguistic diversity (recognition of regional and minority languages).

Through these examples it can be seen that, considered in this light, the contribution of field sociology to the analysis of public policy goes far beyond the simply morphology of the governing groups, the elite "decision-makers" with social properties that can be established. It is much more a matter of showing what the properties of the agents and the logic of their relationships induce in terms of position-takings, i.e. symbolic productions (expert opinions, ideological constructions, legitimate visions of the world) and, inseparably, practices of intervention (laws, regulations, budget decisions, reforms, institution building, resource allocation, etc.).[4]

It can also be seen that this application goes far beyond the slightly sophisticated version of marxism to which the critics of field sociology often try to reduce it (see for example Alexander, 1995). What the empirical mobilization of this sociology shows in this case is that the field of production of a policy is rarely reducible to the mechanical reflection of a class relation, and that the dominant groups in established positions have not always won

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[4] The currently fashionable theme of the instruments of public action, though aiming to bring together the symbolic or cognitive dimensions ("political theorization") and the practical uses of the apparatus, ignores the social characteristics of the groups who produce and use these instruments (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2005).

the game in advance. One frequent characteristic of such a field is that it is composite: civil servants whose hierarchical positions, the generations, corps and institutions they belong to are different: experts, representatives of industries, trade unions and diverse interests, etc. Alliances are constantly made and unmade, and these fluctuations can explain the changes of orientation.

Finally it can be seen that objectivating the structure of such a field does not lead to a fixist vision of an immutable order whose reproduction consists in a replication of the *status quo ante*. Giving an account of its successive states makes it possible, on the contrary, by identifying the shifts in the power relations, to better understand political changes that can no more be ascribed to the individual "wills" of the decision makers or their replacement than to a simple "adaptation" of public choices to the objective development of the situations on which they bear.

B. Questions

The perspective of which the main foundations have just been outlined leads one to formulate a set of questions that make it possible both to test the rigor of the use of the concept of the field and make it function as a tool for the formulation of empirically oriented hypotheses. Starting out from five classic questions in field sociology (Bourdieu 1992; 1993) I shall reformulate them and apply them to the space of production of public policies.

A field constitutes itself by defining a stake that is specific to it, irreducible to those of other fields. A first question consists in establishing what stake specifies the space of production of a policy. One can answer this by positing that it is the power to regulate a particular sphere of practices (immigration, housing, education, health, etc.) by mobilizing resources (financial, legal, administrative, etc.) specific to a public institution (national government, local authority, European Union, etc.), or one linked to the public authorities (a joint public-private agency, a para-public body, an association financed with public funds, a social security body, etc.).

How, secondly, does one define and delimit this space? As with any field, its periphery cannot be posited *a priori*, but results from the reconstruction performed in the course of the study. In his research on housing policy, Pierre Bourdieu starts by identifying those whom he calls the efficient agents, on the basis of institutional positions, a reputation analysis and a survey of position-takings; this then serves as a basis for a systematic reconstruction of the whole through successive crosschecks and additions. In many cases, the

ad hoc committees set up to address a particular problem or domain can be analysed as the objectivation of the "hard core" of the field in question and as such can be the object of a specific study. This is for example what I set out to do in reconstructing the formation of a legitimate space for the working-out of cultural policies in France in the 1960s starting from the cultural committees of the National Plan (Dubois, 1999). Here as elsewhere, indeed more so, the definition of the limits of the field is a stake in struggles, because being "inside" or "outside" here corresponds to obtaining, or not, official recognition of the right to intervene in the regulation of a sphere of activity and the potentiality to contribute effectively to it. In the case in question, it was thus possible to establish how and for what reasons artists were – counter-intuitively – initially excluded from the field of production of cultural policies.

The existence of a field presupposes a degree of autonomy, short of which a field ceases to function as such, because it is subject to external logics. Far removed from the theoretical debates of the marxist tradition (see in particular Poulantzas, 1973) on the autonomy of the State relative to the dominant classes, field sociology invites one to reconstruct empirically the historical configurations of the power relations internal to each field and the respective chances their different fractions have of bearing on the orientation of the policies. In complementary fashion it invites one to establish the state of the political and bureaucratic fields that determines the possibilities of alliances and the types of exchange with these different fractions, the regulation of their differentiated access to the sites of power and public resources, the capacity or propensity to gain the upper hand over them or to convert their demands into official policy. In other words, it is a matter of establishing the systems of relations among different systems of relations (or fields), following the logic of a conception of the State as a meta-field (cf. *infra*), which clearly opens more on to sociological research than to general, abstract discussion of its autonomy.

Fourth question: what are the principles of opposition that structure the field of production of a policy? The answer has to be established case by case, but some recurrent principles can nonetheless be identified. The pole of the agents who successfully claim to speak for the general interest (e.g. senior civil servants, "qualified persons") is opposed to the pole gathering those who are thrown back on the defence of particular interests (e.g. trade union representatives, locally elected politicians); this opposition may overlap with the one that separates generalist agents from sector specialists. The two competing principles of legitimacy – competence and political legitimacy – oppose the experts to elected representatives, in a game of mutual delegitimation between "technocrats" who are seen as

aspiring to take over power and "politicians" chiefly concerned to be re-elected (Dubois and Dulong, 1999). Within the bureaucratic field, one generally observes a combination of hierarchical, vertical oppositions (central State versus local authorities, senior versus junior civil servants), functional oppositions (e.g. financial departments versus spending departments) and institutional competitions between "bureaucratic fiefdoms" (Allison, 1969) defending divergent interests and orientations. At the level of the individual agents, this corresponds to competitions between different kinds of bureaucratic capital, also linked to generational oppositions: experience versus technical knowledge; internal competences and legal or practical mastery of the rules of the game versus sectoral competences, transposable outside of the bureaucracy.

These principles of opposition combine with principles of grouping and solidarity, such as the classic *esprit de corps* observed among senior members of the different branches of the French civil service. These often confer a strategic importance on the intermediate positions that emerge at the interface between these polarities, such as those of the "mediators" mentioned above in Jobert and Muller's analysis – multipositioned experts, the professionalized trade unionists close to administrative circles, those who move from one branch to another, and the ex-civil servants who have been head-hunted by the private sector (the "*pantoufleurs*"). No less strategic are the intermediate spaces – conferences, think tanks and "neutral sites" (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1976) where employers and civil servants, experts and trade unionists, or elected officials from different camps meet and forge a common language.

Fifth and final question: what are the products of these competitions? They are politically legitimated ways of seeing a "problem" or a sphere of activity (objectivated, for example, in speeches and official reports) and handling it (materialized in projects and reforms). These products are formally legitimated by their endorsement by an agent endowed with political authority (a mayor, a minister, etc.) or sanctioned by a vote. They are also legitimated by the very logic of the functioning of the field, by observance of the procedures, by the claim to technical or scientific competence, by the accumulation of symbolic capital, by recourse to public opinion, by more or less theatrical consultation or the regulated confrontation of rival points of view aimed at producing a more or less illusory consensus – similar to what happens in the committees discussed above, which are nothing less than "power technologies", machines for generating legitimacy. For example, Pierre-Édouard Weill shows with reference to the expansion of home ownership and the "100,000 euro

house" scheme that the creation of a space of deliberation mobilizing "civil society" in the name of the "mutualization of competences" was accompanied by a quasi-monopoly retained by the traditionally dominant agents (the minister and his *cabinet* of advisors) in the orientation of the scheme and by strongly personalized political profits (the dwellings were known as "Borloo houses", named after the minister). The case reveals the more general invention of an apparently paradoxical mode of "authoritarian consultation" that disguises a very conventional centralist State interventionism under the modernist trappings of neo-liberal governance (Weill, 2007).

Mobilizing field sociology in order to reconstruct the space of production and the modalities of production of public policy thus makes it possible to understand the product (public policy) and, most importantly, the conditions and modalities of legitimation.

C. Clarifications

At this point three clarifications regarding method are called for. First, the objectivation of the fields of policy production is not limited to an approach by sector (family, transport, tourism, etc.) but can be used to identify spaces that have a transversal role in as much as their products affect all fields of public intervention or at least several of them. Once again I am thinking of Bourdieu and Boltanski's seminal article on the dominant ideology (1976), or studies that objectivate the spaces of production of the praxeologies of public policy, neo-liberalism (Denord, 2007) or thinking in terms of risks (Daccache, 2008).

Secondly, while for the purposes of presentation the preceding pages set out a "hard" or "orthodox" version of analysis in terms of fields, it should be noted that mobilizing field sociology does not mean seeking at all costs to demonstrate the existence of a field, by subjecting each and every space to a *multiple correspondence analysis* (MCA) from which polarities and systems of opposition can always be derived. Likewise, it is not a matter of posing in this respect a quasi-theological question (is this or is it not a "true" field?), but of formulating it in and for a sociological reasoning in practice (what can one see by analysing this space as a field that one would otherwise not see?). This implies that one should neither forget the demands imposed by the rigorous use of a concept that takes on its full meaning only when the whole set of concepts with which it is logically articulated (in particular, autonomy, habitus, capital, rules, stakes, specific principles) is mobilzed, nor forgo the contributions that field sociology can make (in particular, understanding positions

relationally, establishing polarities, associating positions with position-takings so as to analyse spaces that strictly cannot usefully be designated as fields).

Finally, the foregoing presentation could give the impression that analysis of public policy in terms of fields is limited to the dominant positions and to the – admittedly essential – phase of the social genesis of public policies (called "elaboration" in public policy analysis). On the contrary, this analysis also makes it possible to account for the concrete production of policies "on the ground", involving agents at all levels (what is generally called "implementation"); Bourdieu's work on housing again gives a good example of this (Bourdieu, 2003). One could go even further and imagine a sociology of public policy that would take the programme of field sociology to its logical conclusion and articulate the reconstruction of the space of policy producers with that of the space of its "recipients" – beneficiaries, target populations, groups indirectly affected, etc. In short, this sociology can be useful in the analysis of policies far beyond the analysis simply of dominant groups and the moments of genesis.

III. Public policy from the inter-field to the meta-field

It is clear, then, that while systematic reconstruction of the space of production of a policy is a first essential contribution from field sociology, it would be reductive to stop there. This sociology also invites one to account for the relations between social spaces that are constitutive of public policy and, in doing so, to grasp the complexity of the relations of domination and legitimation that characterize the intervention of the public authorities.

A. Public policy as a product of the relations among fields

Like every social object, public policy has to be analysed as the product of social relations. In this case, the multiplicity of these relations and the diversity of the positions of the agents engaged in them are such that they cannot easily be circumscribed to a single field. While, as has been seen, there is a gain from reconstructing the specific space of the making production of a policy with the aid of field sociology, this approach must therefore be combined, at a second level, with an analysis of the relations among the fields or fractions fields mobilized in the pursuit of a policy. In other words, beyond a purely monographic use of the concept of the field, one has to establish (systems of) relations among (systems of) relations.

1. Bilateral relations

The simplest form that these relations among systems of relations can take concerns the exchanges, collaborations, confrontations, etc., that are established bilaterally between the fraction of the governmental space mobilized in the public handling of a particular domain (e.g. the civil servants and political agents at least temporarily in charge of a particular sector or dossier) and the corresponding field. What is called "cultural policy" can be analysed from this standpoint as the product of the relations between the field of culture and the group of administrative and political agents who intervene on cultural questions within the governmental space. The history of cultural policy is then defined as the history of these relations. Reconstructing them makes it possible, in particular, to understand the formation of inter-field alliances which could not have happened at other times, and in which one finds the principle of the major innovations or reorientations in this domain – even if credit for them may be claimed by or attributed to singular agents. The first political formalization in France of a "republican policy for the arts", for example, sprang from the encounter, in the late 19th century, between reformist administrators, the composite milieu of the "industrial arts" and the avant-garde of the artistic field; it was facilitated by political agents who were both novices and multipositioned and made possible by a political conjuncture favourable to innovation (Dubois, 2001). The institutionalization of policies for culture in the modern sense of the term corresponds to a moment when the field of culture was sufficiently established for the intervention of the State to be seen as a support rather than external interference, and when the central administration was strengthening itself in a modernizing direction that favoured the opening up of new areas of intervention. The collaborations that could then be established gave a social foundation to the principle of "cultural democratization" as a rallying cry whose dual political and cultural connotation clearly indicated its origin: a technocratic humanism taking up and neutralizing the political velleities of the artists in a compromise between agents of the bureaucratic and cultural fields – much more than in the "genius" attributed to the minister André Malraux, which is notto say that he played no part in the working out of these compromises, and then thanks to them (Dubois, 1999). Such a perspective enables one to reformulate in sociological terms the question of the role of "the State" in "culture" as it is naïvely posed in public debates and philosophical or legal essays, by orienting research towards identifying the objective, historically situated positions and relations rather than speculating on the desirable relationship between two abstract entities.

Beyond this particular case, this approach can be applied to any policy that touches on the functioning of a field constituted as such – education, science or sport, for example – even when this field is itself constituted within public institutions, as in the case of the field of justice. It is especially fertile when is seeking to account for the genesis of new categories. The notion of "mental health", for example, is in part the product of the relations established between the agents of the administrative field of public health and the agents of a fraction of the field of psychiatry, who had integrated the critique of anti-psychiatry and were arguing for a more social definition and an extension of their speciality (Courtin, 2006).

2. The concordance of fields

It would, however, be too simple to consider that a policy stems only from the binary confrontation between the political-bureaucratic space on one side and the field concerned on the other. That is a possible configuration, especially when the question is very specific and circumscribed and/or the field is strongly self-enclosed and its functioning has little effect on the functioning of other fields, as in the case of measures that are presented as "technical" and receive little publicity. This kind of closure is also found when governmental control is such that it restricts the relationships to face-to-face dealings with select groups, a case exemplified by the corporatist system of authoritarian regimes. In most cases, the multiplicity of the spaces and sub-spaces involved in generating a policy in fact entails a much more complex set of interrelations.

To confirm this, one only has to observe the production of the "reforms" that are now proliferating to the point of becoming almost synonymous with "government policies". At least as regards reforms on a certain scale, understanding their emergence and their conditions of realization implies not only reconstructing the field of the reformers or the "reforming nebula" (Topalov, 1999) but also establishing the state of the internal power relations in the various fields concerned and ways in which they became interrelated. Even a seemingly technical question, internal to the bureaucratic field, such as the reform of the State, originates and derives its logic from its handling in different spaces and through their interrelation: the airing of the administrative question in the press; its transformation into a stake in electoral competition; the intellectual and literary investments of senior civil servants in devising and diffusing reformist arguments (Baruch and Bezès, 2006). The "Juppé Plan" for reform of social security (Lebaron, 2000) and the closer checks on the unemployed in the "Social Cohesion Plan" in France (Dubois, 2006b) have been analysed in this way.

These reforms give rise to intense mobilizations in the political and bureaucratic fields. Their economic and social stakes mobilize the field of the employers (through its representatives) and the field of the trade unions, which together constitute the institutionalized space of power relations (known as the "social partners") in which the regulation of employment relations and the management of the "social State" are in part debated and defined. In a social and political system where both the legitimation of governmental reforms and the success of the mobilizations that try to inflect them are partly played out in the media, one has to add the specific contribution of the journalistic field. In a complex domain, and in an age where "competence" – especially in economics – is a major political resource, one finally has to add the composite space of the production of expertise, at the interface between the bureaucratic and scientific fields.

The dominant poles of these different fields are, for reasons that may differ, favourable to reform or have an interest in it. At the very least, as the case of the trade union field shows, the logic of relations with the governmental fields has the consequence that only the positions (opinions) that run in this direction can be heard, which in turn reinforces the positions (places) of those who express them in the power relations internal to this field. Reform projects that are attributed to the governmental "will" are thus possible only in and through the convergence of logics and interests that are (partially) specific to distinct but interrelated spaces of interrelation. To some extent, they arise from this convergence, in so far as the governing politicians (who are not necessarily their only or main initiators) have integrated them into the space of the politically possible only because they knew could count on a favourable convergence.

This convergence does not, however, spring from pure chance or from the quasi-spontaneous alignment described by analyses in terms of "windows of opportunity" (Kingdon, 1984). Linked to the power relations internal to the different fields, it stems from the collusions that may be established between one field and another and the power relations among the fields. Examples would be the relations between employers, the press and politicians, or the exchanges between trade unionists and experts. And while it would once again be too simple to consider that these convergences are produced solely by a government capable of making and unmaking the positions within each field, this orchestration could indeed have a "conductor" – to reverse Bourdieu's celebrated formula– in so far (and only in so far) as the distinctive feature of the field of political power is its capacity to act simultaneously in several fields, in particular by distributing positions of power to agents

(appointing them to committees, entrusting them with missions, designating them as favoured interlocutors, etc.), thereby securing the means of exercising power over the internal equilibria of the fields to which they belong.

B. The complexity of the relations of domination and legitimation

The structural and relational approach of field sociology makes it possible to account for the specification of spaces endowed with their own logics of functioning (the bureaucratic or scientific fields) and to reconstruct the relationships in which they engage in a realist manner, i.e. in terms of systems of objective positions, thus avoiding the reifying abstractions that interrelate pure concepts ("State" versus "civil society"). Its use in analysing public policy makes it possible, in return, to shed light on the links between the socio-historical dynamics of the autonomization of social spaces and the transformations of the modes of exercise and legitimation of political power. Some partly counterintuitive hypotheses can be formulated about them: political power is not necessarily exercised at the expense of the autonomy of the social fields; this autonomy in turn is not necessarily an obstacle to the exercise of political power, but may on the contrary assist in its legitimation.

1. Paradoxes of the autonomization of fields and threats to autonomy

Public intervention in a field leads in the first analysis to action from outside on its functioning and therefore to a reduction of the autonomy that constitutes it as such, or even a threat to its existence. The limiting case arises in dictatorial regimes, where all spheres of activity are more or less subject to the rules of the political-bureaucratic apparatus – as in the Zhdanov model of scientific policy – to the point where the use of the concept of the field becomes problematic. Short of Beyond this limiting case, public policy, like any external intervention (by the Church, or economic power) represents for the field in question the risk of having heteronomous logics imposed on it, unless this intervention can be seen as a neutral support merely recording the state of its internal power relations. This can sometimes be the case but the instances can clearly not be generalized. The history of public policies is indeed strewn with examples where they play a decisive role in changing the internal power relations, such interventions being denounced as unacceptable political interference by those whose interests they compromise.

In contemporary liberal democracies, what more generally follows is the – at least partial – submission of public regulation of social relations to – at least formal – respect for

the principle of self-organization of the differentiated social spaces. This is no doubt the central element in the sociological definition of such regimes. The – again partially realised and never definitively established – extension of the principle of the separation of powers to fields that have not managed to impose their autonomy as a social norm to be respected (the "freedom" of the artist or entrepreneur, the "independence" of the journalist or scientist, the irreducible specificity of the rules governing sporting or medical activity) marks the dual history of these political regimes and of the differentiation of the societies in which they have developed. This extension also marks the conditions and forms of intervention by the public authorities – if only because they must therefore here in particular "observe the formalities", by following formal procedures and/or deploying all the technologies of power that distinguish their intervention from sovereign arbitrariness. This explains for example why, even if western democracies have created Ministries of Sport and their leaders regularly attend sports events involving their national teams, it is unthinkable for them to intervene in the game (unlike the brother of the Emir of Kuwait, who came on to the pitch in the 1982 football World Cup to overrule the referee…).

Historical analysis of the genesis of fields enables one to see public intervention from another angle than that of the potential or actual reduction of their autonomy. Contrary to the spontaneous image of pre-existent fields in which the public authorities intervene in a second stage, this analysis, coupled with that of the historical formation of the State, reveals a process that is very often blended. Pierre Bourdieu, among others,[5] has shown the limits of the opposition between the State and the market, which underlies the political denunciation of public intervention as an illegitimate *dirigisme*, pointing out what the historical formation of the economic field owed to the State, notably through monetary unification, a *sine qua non* for the creation of a national market (Bourdieu, 2003). The national academies, created under the aegis of the State and later denounced as the instrument of its interference in the artistic and literary fields, provided some of the earliest sites of debate, organization and consecration specific to literature and art, and were thus decisive steps in initiating their process of autonomization (Viala, 1985). The development of sports policies in France in the 1960s, in a period of strong centralized public interventionism greatly contributed to the autonomization of the sporting field in its contemporary forms (Defrance, 1995).

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[5] See for example the work of economists on collective agreements.

Limiting ourselves to recent times, we can say that for half a century – broadly from the inter-war period to the mid-1970s, and in ways that vary between countries and between fields – when the contemporary modes of public intervention were shaped, this intervention made a paradoxical contribution to constituting or preserving the autonomy of fields. It contributed to this autonomy, because political-bureaucratic structuring ratifies the differentiation of fields and strengthens it, reproducing the distinction of the different fields (sport, science, health, culture) in institutional structures (such as the sectoral ministries). It also contributed to autonomy because it is generally conducted at least in part in the name of the defence of the logics specific to these different fields, in particular against the risks of domination by the heteronomous logics of the economic field. The cultural policies of the 1960s were devised in the name of the principle of an artistic creation shielded from the laws of financial profitability, and a democratization of access to genuine art, which was thought to be unattainable purely through the free play of the market, and even blocked by the domination of the products of "mass culture" imposed by the "cultural industries". The same observation could be transposed to a number of other sectoral policies.[6]

This contribution of public intervention to autonomization is at the same time paradoxical, in as much as the autonomy of fields is both won partly against the State and granted by the State. Moreover, at the same time as the State contributes to the autonomization of a field, its intervention is accompanied by the imposition of heteronomous principles (i.e. specific to the political and bureaucratic fields) or the formation of hybrid principles and beliefs, produced in the transactions between a specialist field and the political and bureaucratic fields. Belief in economic progress driven by science, social integration through sport, the democratization of culture, the principles of public health or equal opportunity in education, for example, are norms worked out in these relations between fields in the course of the development of public intervention and partly absorbed within each of the fields concerned.

In contrast to this paradoxical contribution to their autonomy, what is too hastily and in part wrongly called the withdrawal of the State – it is rather a neo-liberal swing in public policies sometimes accompanied by a return to traditional forms and forces of the State, e.g. in security matters – has very largely consisted in imposing the logics of the economic field on the other fields. This can be seen in the areas of health, with the managerial reforms of the

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[6] One would need to be able to establish systematically the set of conditions required for public intervention to favour the autonomy of fields, which is beyond the scope of this article.

Vincent Dubois, "The Fields of Public Policy", to be published in Hilgers (M.) and Mangez (E.), eds., *Social Field Theory: Concept and Applications*, Cambridge University Press (forthcoming, 2012), p. 20.

hospital system (Pierru, 2007), higher education and research (Montlibert, 2004; Bruno, 2008), sport (Smith, 2000) and culture, with the encouragement of corporate sponsorship and the growing submission of cultural activities to the needs of economic development at local level in EU cultural programmes – and the list is clearly not closed. The redeployment of public intervention is leading this time more to the heteronomization of the various social fields. The paradox previously identified may then be pushed to its extreme, since, contrary to common conceptions, it is "interventionism" that, in certain conditions, favours the autonomy of fields and "liberalism" that works in the other direction.

2. Longer legitimation circuits and more complex relations of domination

The question whether public policy is produced in bilateral relations between two spaces of positions (the governmental field and the specific field) or results from a much more complex system of interdependence involving several fields, sub-fields or fractions of fields is less theoretical than empirical. The situations vary from one case to another and according to the historical configurations. One can however hypothesize a long-term trend towards the multiplication and diversification of interrelations in the conduct of public policy, corresponding to the lengthening of the circuits of legitimation, itself associated with a growing complexity of the relations of domination in contemporary societies (Bourdieu, 1996: 382-9).

From this standpoint the intervention of multiple agents is a necessary condition for the legitimation of a public decision that could not easily be envisaged solely on the basis of the political legitimacy of the person who endorses it. This is seen in particular in the mechanisms for the delegation of judgment. When a government sets up a "committee of wise persons" to clarify decisions with an ethical dimension, panels to choose an architect or artist from whom a work is to be commissioned, or a group of experts to settle an environmental controversy, it does so to avoid taking political responsibility for the choice, not so much because the questions are intrinsically complex but rather because they touch on fields of struggle over the definition and possession of the legitimate competence needed to handle them. The "Borloo houses" mentioned earlier certainly sprang from the personal initiative and self-promotion of a minister, but their (relative) political success derived from the production of a consensus only made possible by the (relative) convergence of agents and groups in very different positions (local politicians of various hues, construction companies, financers of

social housing, journalists, etc.) around home ownership as an ideal and as an answer to social and urban problems.

This intervention by agents in multiple positions, i.e. situated in different social spaces, does not so much lead to the dilution of the exercise of political power as constitute a condition and modality of its legitimation. It is by demonstrating their capacity to gather "competent persons" around themselves and "organize the widest possible dialogue" that governments demonstrate their aptitude to govern and their legitimacy to do so. The agents appointed for their competence or intervening in various capacities in the making of a policy are all the more effective as auxiliaries of political power when they do not appear in that light but present themselves as independent of it, i.e. as the agents of a field whose rules and logics are irreducible to those of government. Just as the autonomy of the legal field permits the neutral translation of social power relations and so helps to perpetuate domination, and just as the autonomy of the cultural field permits the denial of the social that makes the strategies of distinction possible and effective (Bourdieu: 1984), so the autonomy of fields is from this perspective not merely a constraint limiting interventionist velleities but also a resource for the exercise and legitimation of political power.

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Public policy can thus be seen sociologically as a politically legitimated mode of regulation of the relations between fields, favouring their autonomy or not, correcting their relations of subordination or not – so long as this regulation is not seen as a form of centralized piloting but analysed as the product of power relations among these fields and between each of them and the field of policy production. Here the sociology of public policy joins up with the sociology of the State as a "meta-field" (Bourdieu, 1994; Dubois, 2007), whose power can be exerted by means of the accumulation of the resources available in the different fields, enabling it in return to intervene in them. Just as this analysis enables one, as has been seen, to avoid a simplifying vision of the relations between public intervention and the autonomy of social fields, so it allows the classic question of the autonomy of the State and its intervention to be examined in a less univocal and theoretical way than that of, for example, the "armchair marxists", one which brings to light the practices and objective relationships that underlie the system of generalized interdependence that characterizes contemporary western societies.

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