

# FROM 'CONTEXTS' TO CONCEPTS: INDUSTRIES, THEIR INSTITUTIONAL ORDERS AND PUBLIC POLICY

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# DOWN WITH 'CONTEXTS'

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In social science, 'contexts' are the 'Lazyboys' of research (*oreillers de paresse*: Thoenig) :

- They provide comfort ('there are things you cannot explain'), but no support
- They evacuate the causes of change or stasis to 'exogenous factors'
- They give you temporary relief and long-term grief (non-analytical thinking, publishing problems ... and back ache!)



# CONCEPTS AS SHARP TOOLS FOR TACKLING THE STRUCTURE-AGENCY RELATIONSHIP

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## Structure

- Institutions
- Power relations

## Agency

- 'Political Work' to analyse the change or stasis of institutions and power relations
- And to discern the role public policy *may* play within these processes
- 1) My analytical framework
- 2) Illustrated by examples from research on short food chains and the wine industry

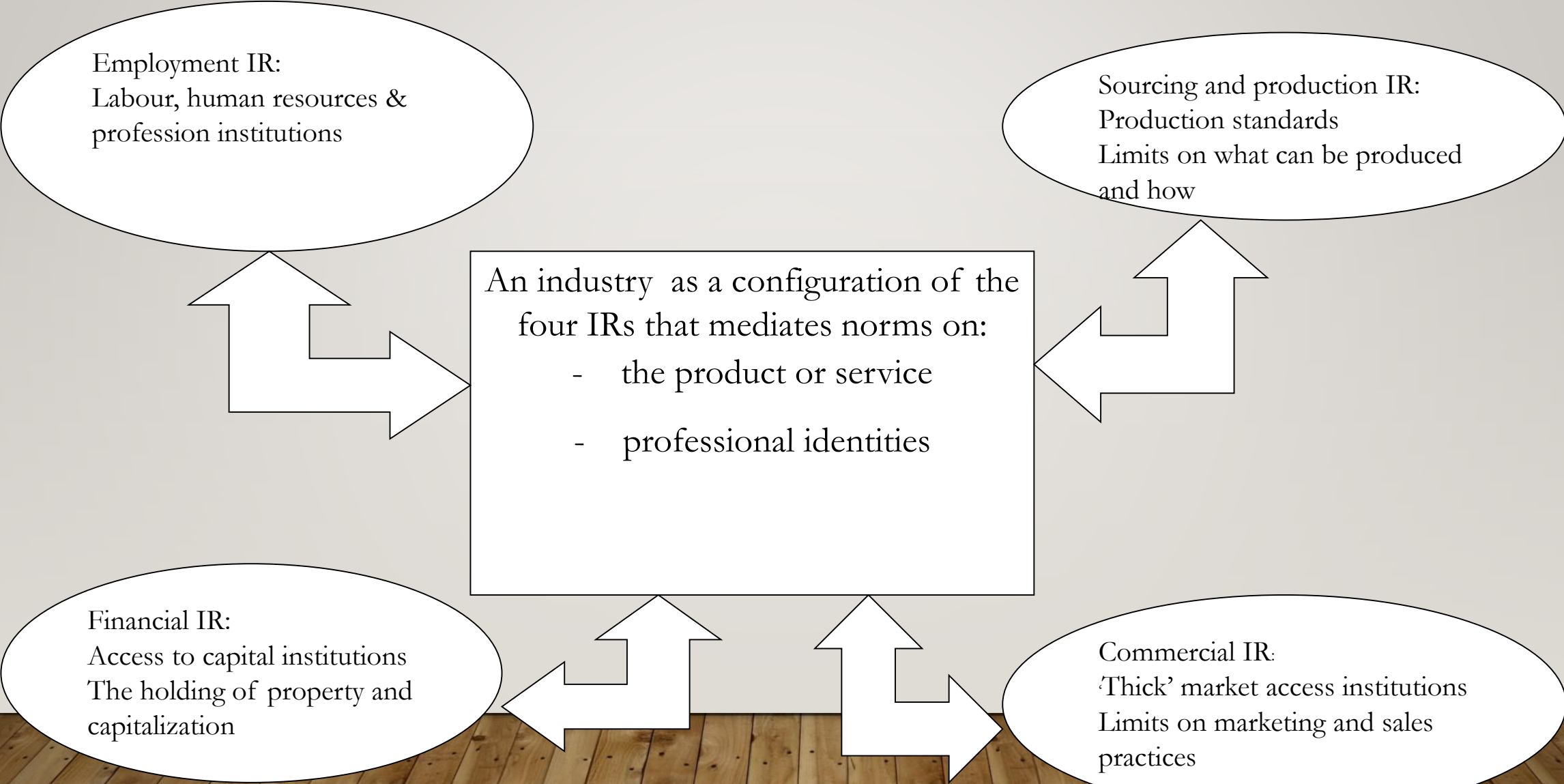
# 'THE POLITICS OF INDUSTRY' FRAMEWORK

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## Key concepts

- Institutional orders
- Fields
- Political work

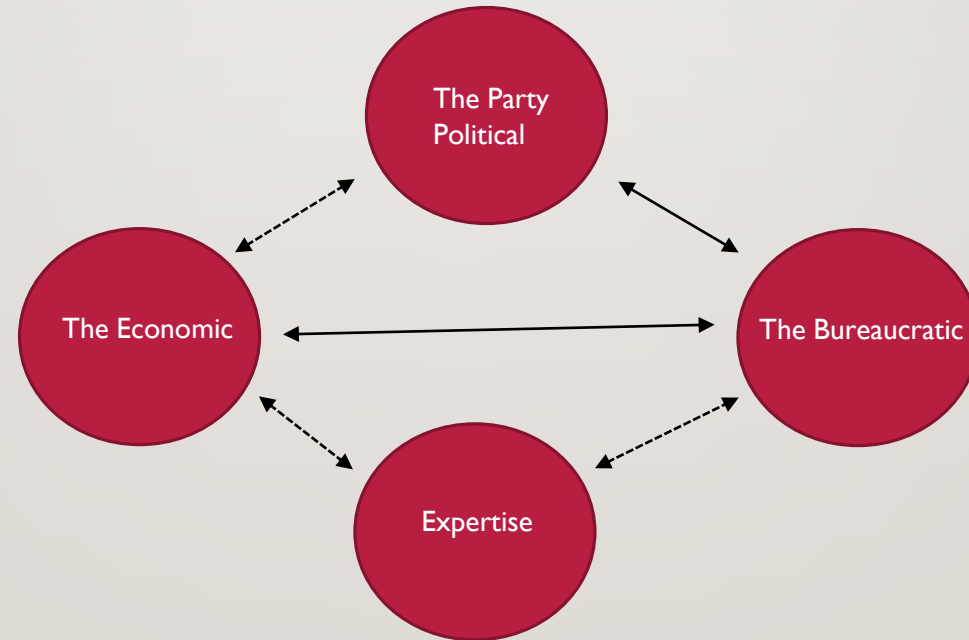
**An industry as an Institutional Order of Four Institutionalized Relationships (Jullien & Smith, 2008)**



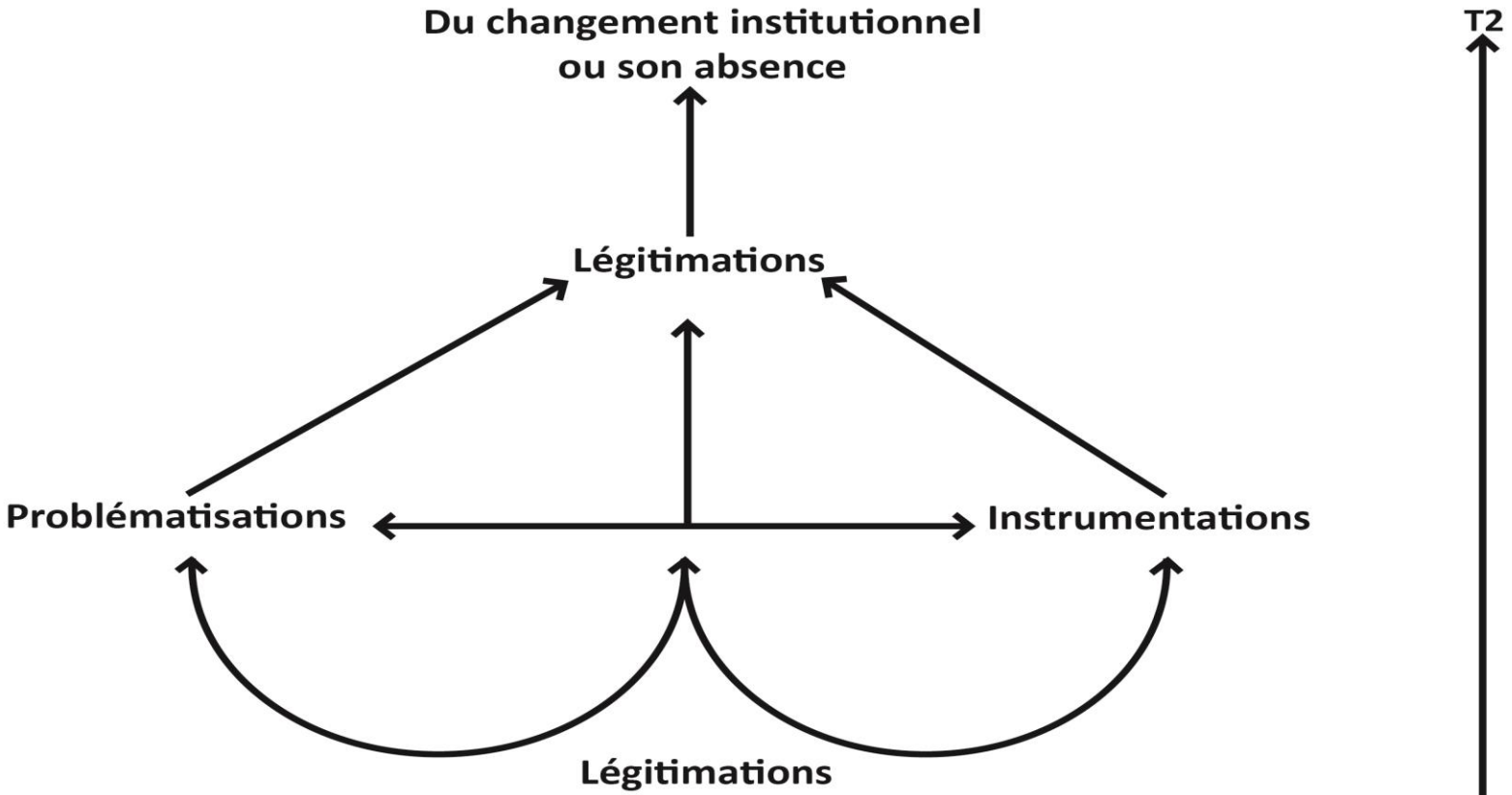
# FOUR FIELDS WHICH THE REGULATION OF INDUSTRIES TYPICALLY ENTAILS

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Key: \_\_\_\_\_ = regular contact & information flows; - - - - - = intermittent contact and flows of information



# POLITICAL WORK



# TO SUM UP

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An approach that is both structuralist (institutions and power relations) and constructivist (political work)

And designed to explain change or its absence in the structural conditions under which socio-economic activity takes places:

- By clearly identifying the politics involved
- By examining the role played by public policies, but not just assuming they have impact
- And refusing any explanation of change or stasis that deploys the term 'context'



# EXAMPLE 1: PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FOOD CHAINS, THE CASE OF *FOIE GRAS*

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- Local food chains provide possibilities for differentiating prices and thus increasing producer revenue and freedom from domination and dependence on public policy
- But our analysis shows that they are seldom as ‘autonomous’ as they seem because:
  1. Prices remain interdependent, even if niche chains stabilize
  2. An industry’s institutions apply to all: hygiene, labelling (IGP, ‘fermier’)
  3. Access to land and capital is dominated by ‘long chain’ producers
  4. And public policies i) provide little support to ‘short chains’; and ii) constantly shore up the long

## EXAMPLE 2: PESTICIDE REDUCTION IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

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- Enigma: Despite compelling research on pesticide damage, and the existence of alternative production methods, the wine industry in Bordeaux has yet to change
- And public policy is merely incitative, e.g. CERTYPHYO = *L'Etat petit bras*. Why?
  1. Strong change has not been sought through the commercialization and Finance IRs, i.e. through strict rules on labelling of production methods and access to capital and finance > virtually no structural change
  2. Instead, just minor measures on training, HR (employment IR) and restrictions on certain pesticides (sourcing IR)
  3. Thus reflecting domination in all 4 key Fields: the Economic, Bureaucratic, Expertise and Party Political

# CONCLUSION

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- Public policy analysis has undoubtedly enabled social science to better explain public decision-making
- However, too often it forgets that public policy is only one part of the regulation of socio-economic activity, and thus of capitalisms
- By refusing to treat the latter as ‘contexts’, or public policy as always socio-economically causal, research can better identify:
  1. The deep causes of socio-economic conflicts: the domination of institutions and power relations
  2. Contingencies: How things could have been different, and could still be!

# SOME AUTO-REFERENCES

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