

ON FAR RIGHT PARTIES, MASTER FRAMES AND DIFFUSION: A COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

The existing literature on far right parties (FRPs) emphasises a fertile breeding ground, open political opportunities and favourable internal supply-side factors as the primary explanatory factors for its development. This research continues to treat FRPs as discrete and independent entities, rather than to consider their interdependence, whereas current societal developments like globalisation make this unlikely. Due to its emphasis on the spread of innovations and various dynamic processes, the diffusion literature provides a useful starting point to analyse FRP development and the introduction of a new master frame. The proposed framework serves to complement the existing, more variable-oriented explanatory models. The author designs a theoretical framework of the trans-national diffusion of a new master frame between FRPs based on four core dimensions of diffusion: (i) the transmitting agent, (ii) the adopting agent, (iii), the object of diffusion, (iv) and the channel of diffusion. The paper uses the case of the FN and the master frame it designed in the late 1970s to illustrate the importance and utility of the inclusion of trans-national diffusion dynamics.

Introduction

Preceded by vigorous debates, most of the literature now agrees far right party¹ (FRP) development can be largely contributed to a successful combination of three different factors: a fertile breeding ground, open political opportunities and favourable internal party dynamics (Eatwell, 2003; Mudde, 2007). Such a variable-oriented approach has served as the basis of the vast majority of existing scholarship, however, it is important to not limit any explanatory

¹ I prefer the term *far right parties* to the more common *extreme right parties* and *populist radical right parties*. The term *extreme* comes from the German term *rechtsextremismus*, which is defined as an anti-democratic, anti-liberal and anti-constitutional ideological approach (Backes and Jesse 1993; Minkenberg 1998; Backes 2001). This term has often been deemed interchangeable with ‘extreme right’ (Weinberg 1993), whereas most parties referred to as ‘extreme right’ do not fit this definition since they accept democracy but oppose liberal democracy.

The term ‘radical’ was historically used to refer to the supporters of the French Revolution, i.e. the ‘left’ (Schwartz 1993; Mudde 2007). Today it is still an often-used term with respect to left wing and/or progressive parties (e.g. *Parti Radical de Gauche* and *Parti Radical* in France, *Politieke Partij Radikalen* in the Netherlands, *Partido Radicale Italiano* in Italy). Additionally ‘radical right’ refers to the Birch Society and McCarthyism (late 1940s, early 1950s in America), which are movements (not parties), and which are labelled extremely conservative (not extreme right). Therefore ‘radical right’ is too ideographic and too general to describe this particular phenomenon.

Therefore, I use the term FRPs, which is based on three broad criteria. Firstly, the spatial criterion refers to the party’s positioning to the right of the more traditional parties, but still to the left of extreme right parties. Secondly, the attitudinal criterion refers to the attitudes an FRP proposes. The focus here is put on ethno-nationalism (Barker, 1981), cultural xenophobia (Huntington, 1993), and authoritarianism (Adorno, e.a., 1950). Lastly, the systemic criterion refers to the party’s attitude towards the societal system as a whole. This focuses on anti-liberal democratic populism and a strong state. (Mudde, 2007). Additionally, the term FRP represents simplicity and is rather straight forward, something that is often not a primary concern in the contemporary literature.

models to this existing approach. More specifically, most of the existing literature ignores the important role the French FN and the diffusion of its master frame have played in the development of FRPs.

In the late 1970s, the FN innovated itself by adopting a new master frame, thereby leaving the old and stigmatised master frame behind. The spread of this master frame has served as the basis of the current wave of FRPs throughout Western Europe. Only few authors have included this notion as part of their theoretical framework when explaining FRP development, thereby rendering it incomplete. The inclusion of both *master frame* and *diffusion* allow for the analysis of FRP development as the European-wide phenomenon it is, and not as the independent development of different FRPs. In addition, its inclusion helps avoid any possible ad-hoc theorisations regarding FRP development.

Before emphasising the importance of diffusion, the paper provides an extensive conceptualisation of what a master frame refers to and puts this into relation with the more familiar concept of ideology. Subsequently the paper describes the master frame designed by the FN, and illustrates how it spread throughout (Western) Europe. This will lead to a discussion on trans-national diffusion, its importance for FRP development and the four core dimensions that compose it: the transmitter, the adopter, the object and the channel. To conclude, the paper briefly discusses its place in the current literature, and describes contributions, shortcomings, and future research avenues.

Since the concept of diffusion has rarely been studied related to party development, and it is not considered a variable but rather a process, it is not evident to study this using raw empirical data. The absence of a full (quantitative) dataset restricts the possibilities to analyse this phenomenon (quantitatively). Additionally, with the limited (descriptive) data we have, it is almost impossible to include the entire FRP family in this analysis. Therefore, the broader implications of this paper are not necessarily to provide causal explanations, but rather to add to the current theoretical models and to instigate further discussion and analysis of diffusion.

Far right parties and master frames

The original conceptualisation of FRPs is based on three criteria: a spatial, an attitudinal and a systemic criterion. The master frame of an FRP is based on the latter two criteria, and largely contributes to the spatial positioning of the FRP alongside the political axes (i.e. the first criterion). This indicates the use and operation of a master frame on a societal (i.e. more aggregate) level. However, originally, this concept was used on a more individual level.

The term frame was first used by the sociologist Goffman and defined as a “schemata of interpretations that enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (1974, p.21). In other words, a frame was used to capture and structure an individual’s experiences and perception of society. These frames are then used as guidance through, and organisation of the world out there. Such a cognitive construction of frames had been used widely in psychology (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981; Klandermans, 1997) and various other disciplines (Tannen, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; Triandafyllidou and Fotiou, 1998). However, in that format, frames were termed too restrictive by social movement scholars (Klandermans, e.a., 1999).

Collective action frames are not merely the aggregates of individual attitudes and perceptions (or individual frames). An addition of outcomes of negotiated shared meanings renders them more inclusive (Gamson 1992). Collective action frames were used as an interpretative function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the “world out there”, but in ways that are “intended to mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists” (Snow and Benford, 1988, p.198). It is an “action-oriented set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p.614).

Master frames play the same role as collective action frames do, only on a more aggregate scale. Or, as Snow and Benford state: “Master frames are to (...) collective action frames as paradigms are to finely tuned theories” (1992, p.138). They are not limited to the interests of a particular group or a set of related problems. Its scope and influence reach much further, and are designed to attract a broader audience or deal with a broader set of problems. Contrary to collective action frames, a master frame influences and constrains the orientations and activities of other parties and can be considered a flexible and all-inclusive framework that goes beyond a set of ideologies. In other words, a master frame can be considered rather generic, whereas a collective action frame is more exclusive and derivative (Snow and Benford, 1992).

The strategic efforts to connect master frames to prospective constituents and resource providers, is referred to as frame alignment (Snow, e.a., 1986). There are four different processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation. Usually they complete each other, i.e. they are all present, be it in different degrees, and each process has a specific impact on the possible success of the newly implemented master frame. If an FRP want to successfully adopt a new master frame, it is absolutely crucial it aligns this master frame with its socio-political system (e.g. the VB, the FPÖ, the REP, the LN, the DF,

etc.). If this is not properly done, the likelihood of failure to adopt the new master frame increases significantly (e.g. the FNb) (see Coffé, 2005).

Ideology and master frame are two highly interrelated concepts, and both refer to general constructs within which more specific ideas are understood. However, analytically, master frame must be clearly distinguished from ideology. Whereas master frame refers to a cluster of fairly broad and inclusive rhetorical strategies on which FRPs can draw (Swart 1995; Carroll and Ratner 1996), ideology refers to support for more specific articulations of theory and value nested within more general ones (Oliver and Johnston, 2000). In other words, a master frame does not necessarily include the socio-political theory and normative value systems that characterise an ideology².

The FN master frame

Up until the 1980s, the FN was a stigmatised party, most notably due to its revisionist rhetoric. Based on pillars like biological racism (Proctor, 1988), anti-Semitism (von Beyme, 1988), and anti-democratic and anti-system rhetoric were only able to attract marginal support throughout a Europe that had just overcome fascism and Nazism. The old master frame lacked electoral appeal and change was indispensable. At the end of the 1970s, the FN innovated a new master frame, which would become one of the most important foundations for future FRP success (Mayer and Perrineau, 1989). Based on the constructs proposed by Eatwell (2003) and Mudde (2007), the FN's master frame is composed of four distinct elements: nationalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, and populism³.

Nationalism has deep historic roots in France and among French citizens and has always been exceptionally present in French political culture. It is something that is embedded in the French concepts of 'Republicanism' and 'laïcité'. With the Italian MSI as an important example, the FN (heavily influenced by the *Ordre Nouveau* faction) adopted this framework in order to appeal to a broader right-wing electorate. Contrary to the MSI, however, the FN abandoned all reference to a fascist or Nazi past and chose to focus on its innovative character.

Due to increasing mass immigration, post-industrialisation and globalisation (Kriesi, 1995), the salience of immigration increased. The FN perceived this as being in conflict with

² For an excellent example of the distinction between ideology and master frame, see Aarelaid's (1998), and Johnston and Aarelaid-Tart's (2000) studies on Estonian national movements.

³ Contrary to Mudde (2007), and for reasons that go beyond this paper, I do not combine xenophobia and nationalism into nativism. I believe nativism is too time- and context-specific to use as a simple contraction of xenophobia and nationalism.

the traditional French model of individual integration. This led to the increasing feeling by French citizens that immigrants invaded their country, their religion, and their neighbourhoods (Perrineau, 1997). Whereas traditional parties refused to include these challenges, the FN, led by the *Nouvelle Droite*⁴ faction, did not hesitate to do so. Regardless of its initial use in the 1970s by the French PC and the British Tories⁵, the FN easily established issue ownership as the issue became more salient in the 1980s.

Following the approach of the Frankfurt School (Adorno e.a., 1950), the authoritarian component is often connected to other attitudes and ideological features such as anti-Semitism⁶ and ethno-centrism (exemplified by the welfare chauvinism advocated by the FN). The focus on socially conservative values was on one side, a reaction to the rise of post-materialism (Ignazi, 1992), and on the other side a deliberate implementation of (successful) MSI strategies. The FN's proposals included extensive law and order policies (e.g. "sécurité et liberté" voted in 1980⁷) and scapegoating immigrants for unemployment and insecurity with for example the slogan "*Les Français d'abord*" (The French first).

Populism was adopted by the FN due to its successful use in the past, and as a response to demand-side processes. On one hand, Poujadism had successfully used populism in the 1950s to represent the middle-class and those suffering because of socio-economic change⁸. For the FN (in the early 1980s), it served to attract those who were considered the 'losers' of globalisation, industrialisation and modernisation. In addition, the FN rejected the heterogeneous nature of multiculturalism and the high degrees of elitism in French society. By adopting populism as a framework, rather than just a style, the FN became the crusader for the 'man in the street' against the political, economic and intellectual elites. This is largely considered to be the basis of the FN's appeal to protest and issue voters (Bréchon, 2009).

The combination of these four ideological frames, their subsequent rhetoric, and how they complement each other, provided the FN with a more moderate, less stigmatised and hence more attractive master frame. However, in order for this new master frame to be successful, socio-political factors needed to be favourable as well.

⁴ The Nouvelle Droite rejected biological racism but promoted a more moderate form of ethno-pluralism, or so-called cultural racism. Following this, it saw separate civilisations and cultures very much along the lines of Huntington's 'The Clash of Civilisations'

⁵ More specifically, the Tories' traditionalist conservative wing

⁶ Jean-Marie Le Pen (the person) used this on occasion in his rhetoric; however, this was never part of the ideological features of the FN (the party).

⁷ This law, enacted on February 2nd 1981, reinforces security and protects personnel freedom. It was implemented by Giscard d'Estaing, but Mitterrand abolished important sections of the law in 1983.

⁸ Poujade's *Union de Defense Commerçants et Artisans* (UDCA) was rather successful toward the end of the 4th Republic, obtaining 53 representatives in 1956, among whom Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Following the “*Trente Glorieuses*”, France experienced a period of economic and social crisis: Inflation, unemployment, lack of integration by foreigners, increasing small delinquency, decreasing importance of culture, and a decreasing quality of public life (Bréchon, 2009). Until 1982-83, French traditional parties failed to adjust, and incorporate these societal concerns. As seen in many West-European countries, France became a country of two speeds following post-modernisation and post-industrialisation (Wieviorka, 1992).

Following this, the original cleavage structure (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) lost some of its significance and gave room to new identification possibilities. The original economic bipolarisation disappeared and a new “*immense group central*” emerges (Giscard D’Estaing, 1976). In other words, the newly found social questions provided (new) parties, focussing on the socio-cultural dimension, such as the FN, with political salience. Traditional parties’ failed to respond properly, and general societal frustration opened up political space for populism and parties that were critical of the (democratic) system.

More specifically this was translated in a vast unhappiness with the PS (i.e. Mitterrand), and its inability to deal with the crisis, which eventually led to political dissatisfaction and disenchantment (Perrineau, 1997). Even compared to other European countries, France was characterised by a lower level of political confidence and a weaker partisan organisation (i.e. low party identification). The evolution from mass parties to cartel parties (Katz and Mair, 1995) has also been more prominent in France than in most European countries (Bréchon, 2005), thereby allowing the traditional left and right to crumble.

Until 1986, the French electoral system has been a two-round majoritarian system, with an effective threshold of about 37.5 percent (Lijphart, 1984), so the opportunities for smaller parties, like the FN, were limited. In 1986, the PS changed the electoral system to a d’Hondt proportional system to allow the FN to emerge and fragment the right. The effective threshold decreased to about 11 percent and allowed the FN to obtain 35 seats in the French *Assemblée Nationale*. The RPR-UDF⁹ obtained a majority after all, but the result gave the FN bargaining power and political legitimacy (DeClair, 1999; Shields, 2007).

Before the change back to two-round majority in 1988, there were no substantial subsidies available for the FN. Only if a candidate obtained more than five percent of the regular vote on the first ballot, which the FN did not, they would be reimbursed for the costs of the campaign (i.e. letters, flyers, posters, propaganda, etc.). Additionally, they would be

⁹ The coalition between the *Rassemblement pour la République* (Rally for the Republic) and the *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (Union for French Democracy), together comprising the traditional right in France at that time.

reimbursed for their deposit of FFr. 1.000 (about USD 330 in 2012), which was lost for those candidates who did not reach the five percent threshold. Generally, in France, public funding and state subventions to political parties were non-existent until 1988.

Regardless of these limitations, the FN did take advantage of the available political space. The change to a proportional system, and the coalition of the RPR and the UDF on the right opened up political space for a nationalist and populist right. The 1983 coalition with the RPR-UDF list in the second round in Dreux¹⁰ provided the FN with needed legitimisation and decreasing stigmatisation. A Figaro-SOFRES barometer substantiates this in 1985, and shows that nine percent of French citizens declare they have a good opinion of Le Pen, and a same percentage would like him to play a bigger role in French politics¹¹.

Generally traditional parties had difficulties how to approach this new phenomenon. On one hand, the traditional left demonised the FN (e.g. via *SOS Racisme*), and used anti-racism campaigns to fill the void of its empty ideology during the early 1980s. At the same time it was perfectly content to let the FN compete with for the ‘rightist’ vote. Following Meguid (2008), we can see the traditional left took an ‘adversarial’ strategy toward the FN. The traditional right, on the other hand, took a more diversified approach. On the national level it opposed any kind of coalition with the FN, thereby (also) taking an ‘adversarial’ approach. On the subnational levels though, the traditional right did get into coalitions with the FN, thereby taking a more ‘accommodating’ approach. Following Meguid’s theoretical framework, this combination (on the national level) is beneficial for the FN, and eventually leads to an increasing vote share for the FN (which it did up until the early 2000s).

In France, media access is generally very difficult and restricted for political parties. Even though paid political advertising used to be possible (until the early 1990s), media access for the FN in the early 1980s was difficult and minimal due to specific requirements and limited financial resources. In periods between elections, 20 minutes of free time was available every month for those parties represented in parliament (which the FN was not). During election campaigns, parties represented in parliament received additional airtime¹².

Up until 1982, French media actively refused the FN and its leader Jean-Marie Le Pen any kind of access. In May and June of that year, Le Pen addressed several letters to president Mitterrand discussing the media boycott the FN suffered. Subsequently Mitterrand instructed French media to “devote equitable coverage to the FN” (Shields, 1997, p.196).

¹⁰ This was followed by several other coalitions on the local and municipal level in 1984 and 1985

¹¹ SOFRES, 1985, *Opinion publique*, Paris, Gallimard, pp. 182–83

¹² Until 1986, this was about three hours of free airtime, which was equally distributed among the parties prior to the first ballot

This was followed by a number of media appearances by Le Pen, with as milestone his prime time interview in *L'heure de la vérité*¹³ where he presented himself as a politician rather than a social pariah, and described himself as a 'Churchillian democrat'. In hindsight, both Le Pen and Mitterrand acknowledged the importance of this emission, and the more general presence in the media scene¹⁴, for the FN's credibility and future success.

The adjustment of the FN and its new master frame to the specific socio-political characteristics of the French political system contributed to the FN's development. In other words, frame alignment processes, and the proper adjustment to breeding ground factors and political opportunities are crucial factors for the successful development of the master frame, and the FRP. As a result of the FN's innovative character, the initial success of the new master frame and the limited intellectual background and financial resources of most FRPs (Rydgren, 2005a), the FN and its master frame served as an example for other FRPs. Typically FRPs will draw on an existing (and successful) master frame, strategically align this and adopt it. The goal is to maximise the compatibility of the master frame with its specific socio-political environment (Benford and Snow, 2000).

The spread of the FN master frame

Since the 1970s, we observe important transformations in West European political systems¹⁵. The most significant change was undoubtedly the development of a cultural axis in the political spectrum, mostly resulting from the increasing salience of issues related to this axis (Inglehart, 1990). Examples are immigration, law and order, globalisation, European integration, social rights, etc. This changing societal framework was an important part of the institutionalisation of FRP success in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, the adoption of a more moderate master frame changed the image of FRPs as well. Only few West European political systems continued to perceive FRPs as political pariahs (de Lange, 2008).

¹³ Broadcasted on France's public channel France 2 (then *Antenne 2*) on February 13th 1984.

¹⁴ In May 1984, SOFRES findings showed 18 percent of respondents declaring themselves 'very or somewhat sympathetic to Le Pen', while levels of support for Le Pen's ideas on immigration, law and order, and anti-communism reached 28 percent, 26 percent and 25 percent respectively (SOFRES, 1985, *Opinion publique*, pp. 178-180 and 182-183).

¹⁵ Since the 1970s, several European-wide societal phenomena have played an important role in European politics. Most importantly, Western Europe has experienced the 'defreezing' of Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) four original cleavages (Mair, 1993; 1997). Undoubtedly the most important consequence of this was the emergence of cultural cleavage structures (Inglehart, 1990), based on issues like gender, globalisation, law and order, immigration, etc. This transition was accompanied and facilitated by decreasing partisanship, cartelization (Katz and Mair, 1995), increasing electoral volatility (Franklin e.a., 1992), decreasing electoral participation, realignment processes (Key, 1955), increasing individualisation (Bauman, 2001), growing importance of mass media, increasing professionalisation and the personalisation of politics (Karvonen, 2010).

On one hand, the rise of new parties (such as Green parties and FRPs) was (among others) a consequence of traditional parties' failure to adjust to the ongoing socio-political evolutions. On the other hand, the changing perception of FRPs and their growing popularity invoked a reaction from traditional parties. A general decrease in success, power and potential of traditional parties led to increasing political and electoral competition between traditional parties and FRPs (Minkenberg, 2001). To such an extent that not only traditional parties increased the adoption of FRP master frame components, but they also increased the accommodative strategies vis-à-vis FRPs (Meguid, 2008). Examples of this are increased cooperation and collaboration between traditional parties and FRPs in France, Germany, Austria and Italy. This shift of traditional parties to the right, together with the increasing number of parties on the right (mostly FRPs), has been referred to as “*Verrechtsing*” (Heinisch, 2003; Bale, 2003).

Throughout the past three decades, each West European political system has experienced the presence of at least one FRP¹⁶. Several of those FRPs have successfully emerged (and gained electoral and/or political power), and some of them have consolidated (i.e. successfully sustained). More specifically, in France, these societal evolutions contributed to the emergence of the FN, as it is known today. Based on the empirical evidence provided by Rydgren (2005b), and in line with the majority of the literature, it would be justified to consider the FN as a *primus inter pares* – the *pater familias* of FRPs (see also Backes, 1996; Ignazi, 1997).

The FN adopted its master frame in the late 1970s and emerged in the early 1980s. Formally, it can be seen as the innovator of the new master frame (for West European FRPs¹⁷). Following this, the master frame spread to a small number of early adopters in the mid 1980s. Some of these FRPs turned out to be successful (e.g. Flemish VB, Austrian FPÖ), whereas others did not (e.g. German REP, Spanish FN). Following this initial adoption by a small number of FRPs, the new master frame spread to a multitude of West European FRPs in the 1990s (e.g. Walloon FNb, Italian LN, Finnish TF, Danish DF, Swedish SD, British BNP, and French MNR)¹⁸. Therefore, the past decade has seen fewer FRPs emerge, mostly due to

¹⁶ There is one notable exception to this observation, and that is Ireland. In its entire history, Ireland has not experienced even an attempt of an FRP trying to emerge.

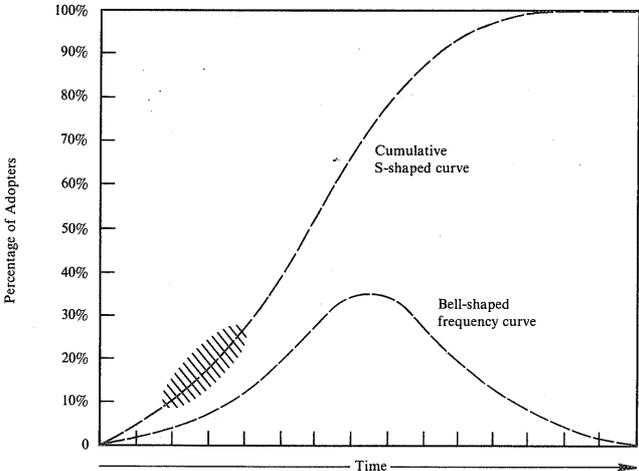
¹⁷ In Eastern Europe, the German REP originally functioned as the role model for aspiring FRPs. However, since the REP used the successful master frame provided by the FN to emergence, this project refers to the FN as the primary and principal innovator of the new master frame.

¹⁸ This included also a large number of FRPs in CEE (e.g. HSP, MIEP, PRM, etc.).

saturation. However, there have been some important exceptions, usually referred to as laggards (e.g. Austrian BZÖ, Swiss SVP¹⁹, and Norwegian FrP).

The number of FRPs using the new master frame the FN designed has been increasing steadily over the past three decades, both in Eastern and Western Europe. There is one innovator, few early adopters, a large group of adopters and a limited number of late adopters. If one would plot a frequency curve of this phenomenon, it would have the shape of a normal curve. If one would plot the cumulative adoption patterns, the curve would have an S-shape. These curves are associated with the diffusion of innovations, or in this case, the diffusion of a new master frame (see Figure 1). In the end this leads to a new equilibrium where all FRPs will have adopted this new master frame (i.e. convergence).

Figure 1: A bell-shaped frequency curve and an S-shaped cumulative curve for an adoption distribution



Source: Rogers, 1983, p.243

Following the normal distribution of the master frame adoption, the time of adoption is determined by a large number of socio-political variables and processes²⁰ that are not necessarily restricted to the political system in which the new master frame is adopted. The cumulative distribution has the same S-shape as an individual’s learning curve (Gray, 1973). This indicates that the master frame adoption process is similar to an individual’s learning process (Rogers, 1983, p.243-45) and that FRPs do make mistakes in the early stages of adoption. However, they learn from the process and respond to its challenges and shortcomings. The curve indicates an interaction between FRPs because those who have

¹⁹ Due to a right mainstream history and issues of factionalisation, it is difficult to place the Swiss SVP in the political landscape. Some scholars claim the SVP is a traditional party (e.g. Hennecke, 2003), whereas others consider it an FRP (e.g. Husbands, 2000; Betz, 2004). From 2005 on, Christoph Blocher entered the Swiss government, thereby severely limiting the power of the more moderate Bern-faction of his party and expanding the power of the Zurich-faction (i.e. the FRP faction) (Skenderovic, 2005; Mudde, 2007).

²⁰ This fits the requirement of a normal curve that “the value of each event is the result of the chance combination of a great many minutes and relatively equal factors” (Pemberton, 1936, p.549-550).

already adopted the master frame influence those who have not (yet). In other words, those who have not (yet) see those who have already adopted as examples. The more FRPs adopt the new master frame, the greater the effect on non-adopters will be (Rogers, 1983). Rogers (1983) argues that the first inflection point is the result of interpersonal networks spreading subjective evaluations of the new master frame between FRPs.

Defining (trans-national) diffusion

In its most basic form, diffusion is but a function of connections between different organisations (Soule, 2004). However, the conceptualisation of diffusion has always been complex (e.g. Walker, 1969; Collier and Messick, 1975; Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett, 2006). Originally, Rogers claimed diffusion occurs when “an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (1983, p.14). Similarly, Strang and Meyer refer to diffusion as “the flow of social practices among actors within some larger system” (1993, p.488).

The dilemma of these three descriptions is that they are relatively all-inclusive and universal, which eventually leads to a tautological approach to diffusion. Additional information is therefore required. More specifically, it is important to identify the different dimensions of diffusion. Michaelson defines diffusion as “the process by which an innovation (any new idea, activity or technology) spreads through population” (1993, p.217). Rogers later specifies this by referring to diffusion as “the spread of abstract ideas and concepts, technical information, and actual practices within a social system, where the spread denotes flow or movement from a source to an adopter, typically via communication and influence” (1995).

Rogers emphasises the possible abstract nature of the ‘what’ and differentiates between communication and influence, which indicates an agent’s involvement in the process also needs to be taken into consideration. Katz (1968), however, is the most complete when describing diffusion as the acceptance of some specific item, over time, by adopting units – individuals, groups, communities – that are linked both to external channels of communication and to each other by means of both a structure of social relations and a system of values, or culture.

This definition by Katz is narrow enough to specify the necessary dimensions of diffusion, and general enough to allow for multiple categorisations within it. At the same time it manages to be non-tautological and non-trivial, while being adequate and plausible enough to give the concept of diffusion explanatory power. To justify the use of diffusion in

the discussion on FRP development, however, it is necessary to make one additional specification. Similar to the claim made by Rydgren (2005a), and given the dynamics of party change, it is necessary (and sufficient) that the adopter is active in the process²¹.

Much of the early diffusion literature focused on individuals and micro-level diffusion²². In the past two decades, however, diffusion scholars are taking a more macro-level approach, focussing more on organisations, social movements and protest. More specifically and more relevant to the field of FRP research, diffusion started playing an important role in the explanatory frameworks of collective action, symbolism and (technological) innovations. These applications differ from the classic diffusion literature because (i) it focuses on behavioural strategies and structures, (ii) it works with a larger historical and spatial canvas, and (iii) it sees diffusion as an explanation and not just some overarching theoretical framework (Strang and Soule, 1998).

When conceptualising diffusion, it is important to make the following important distinction. Diffusion is either studied as an outcome (a dependent variable) or as a process. It is less interesting to study diffusion as an outcome since there are too many possible variables that can have an effect on it. In other words, it is almost impossible to parsimoniously model and explain diffusion as a dependent variable. In addition, diffusion has a dual character; it can be both a cause and a consequence (Elkins and Simmons, 2005). Therefore, this paper treats diffusion as a process. On one hand, diffusion is seen as an environmental process that shapes both the agents and the object of diffusion. On the other hand, diffusion is seen as a decision consciously taken by the adopter as part of a rational choice process where benefits outweigh costs (Rogers, 1983). Diffusion of an innovation will only occur when its adoption appears beneficial compared to the current situation²³.

FRPs and diffusion: Why is this essential?

The applications of diffusion are widespread throughout the general academic literature (Rogers, 1983) and the political science literature more specifically (Walker, 1969; Gray, 1973; Berry and Berry, 1990). Even in comparative politics, its use has become more

²¹ Some scholars refer to the existence of ‘forced diffusion’ (Peters, 1997) or coercion (Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett, 2007), where the adopter is either passive or even resistant. Following a rational choice perspective, this does not stroke with the reality of FRP development, and the dynamics involved in the diffusion of a master frame.

²² This was especially the case in natural sciences like physics and molecular biology (Rogers, 1983).

²³ A FRP will only adopt a new master frame if the aggregated benefits of this new master frame outweigh the value of the currently adopted master frame. This dilemma is extensively discussed and modelled (through the combination of a change and a threshold model) in the following paper, where it will contribute to the answer to ‘why’ master frames diffuse.

and more widespread (Collier and Messick, 1975; Bennett, 1991; Simmons and Elkins, 2004). However, its application in the FRP literature is most often overlooked. The question remains why this is the case? Given the importance of diffusion in social movement literature (e.g. Tarrow, 1994), and the imperative similarities of social movements and FRPs (Goodwin and Jasper, 2009)²⁴, disregarding diffusion can lead to a partial and incomplete theoretical framework. This paper attempts to complement the existing framework by introducing diffusion as a significant and important process in FRP development.

The existing literature points to a fertile breeding ground, or so-called demand-side factors (Eatwell, 2003; Mudde, 2007), as the catalysts for FRP emergence. These factors point to general economic, historical and social processes that take place on a broader level²⁵. However, a fertile breeding ground alone cannot explain cross-country differences in FRP development. Political opportunities²⁶ can explain such differences due to their cross-national variation, and their facilitating or impeding nature²⁷. Despite conceptual and operational difficulties, however, “the majority of studies agree that fixed or permanent institutional features combine with more short-term, volatile or conjectural factors to produce an overall particular opportunity structure” (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006, p.422).

Most of the literature looks at FRPs as developing independently from one another. In the diffusion literature, such a myopic situation is often referred to as the “null hypothesis” and serves as a benchmark against which we portray the situation of diffusion. This myopic situation assumes that any possible adoption patterns or similarities between FRPs are a direct consequence of FRPs facing similar challenges at about the same time. In other words, the null hypothesis assumes FRPs adopt the same new master frame irrespective of their interactions with one another (Berry, 1994; Volden, Ting and Carpenter, 2008).

However, globalisation (Mudde, 2003) and internationalisation (Swank and Betz, 2003) make this highly unlikely. After all, FRPs are not inward looking and narrowly defined

²⁴ For a more expanded discussion of this argument I refer to the previous paper.

²⁵ The shift to post-modernism (Ingehart, 1977), the development of multiculturalism, economic crises (Stoss, 1991; Zimmerman, 2003), political crises (Daalder, 1992), demographic changes (Veugelers & Chiarini, 2002; Wendt, 2003), authoritarian background (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005), far right attitudes like resentment and xenophobia (Fennema and Tillie, 1998; Van der Brug e.a., 2000), insecurity (Dehousse, 2002; Christofferson, 2003) are just a few of the possible demand-side factors mentioned in FRP literature.

²⁶ For an overview of the different conceptual definitions of the political opportunity structure see the following: Eisinger, 1973; Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi e.a., 1992; Gamson and Meyer, 1996; Tarrow, 1998; van der Heijden, 2010.

²⁷ Throughout FRP literature, several dimensions of political opportunities help explain its emergence: political culture (Almond and Verba, 1965; Inglehart, 1990), fascist history (Coffé, 2005; Art, 2006), the rising levels of immigration (Husbands, 1992; Maddens and Hajnal, 2001), electoral and party system dynamics (Jackman and Vopert, 1996; Knigge, 1998; Golder, 2003), party positioning (Carter, 2005), the institutional framework (Evans, 2001; Abedi, 2002; Arzheimer and Carter, 2003), the degree of elitism (Jenkins and Schock, 1992; Decker, 2003), the media (Norris, 2000; Eatwell, 2003), and many more.

unitary agents²⁸. Rather, they are a collection of organisations, networks, frames and individuals all striving toward party change²⁹ (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Staggenborg, 1989; Buechler, 1990), but not limited to one political system. FRPs can affect other FRPs when tactics, ideas, styles, participants, organisations and more importantly master frames diffuse and spill over (Meyer and Whittier, 1994; Oliver and Myers, 1998).

When analysing FRP development, cross-national explanations are not accounted for in an extensive or systematic way³⁰. However, it is important they are properly included because if they are ignored or neglected, which is often the case for in-depth case studies (Gerring, 2007), ad-hoc theorising can become a genuine problem³¹. In order to avoid this, many comparative studies focus on macro-structural variables. Developmental clustering in time and the ambition to avoid ad-hoc theorising (Hedström and Swedberg, 1998) can therefore result in a bias toward finding one universal cause (e.g. Betz, 1994; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). Ultimately, one should find a middle ground, and look for causal mechanisms with a certain degree of generality.

Such analytical pitfalls require an adjustment of the existing theoretical framework for FRP development. Most importantly, similarities between different FRPs are not only contributed to macro-structures forming the demand-side factors, but also to diffusion processes from successful FRPs to embryonic ones in other political systems. Following this, the trans-national nature of diffusion, and the emphasis on the explanatory value of diffusion bring time and agency back into the analysis (Rydgren, 2005a). As Tilly (1984) points out, when things happen affects how things happen. Simultaneously, the inclusion of diffusion results in a renewed emphasis on FRPs, instead of macro-structures, as the primary focus.

Trans-national diffusion is therefore an overlooked, yet important, process that can complement the existing analyses of FRP development. In the existing FRP literature, only three instances are found in which diffusion had been incorporated in the study of (West European) FRPs. Husbands (1996) claims the levels of support for 'racist' parties are

²⁸ Choices made by developing FRPs should be seen as interactions with ex-party, or even ex-system, events and developments, not just as within-system developments.

²⁹ According to Harmel and Janda (1982), all political parties are conservative in nature when it comes to party change. However, since the socio-political environment is constantly changing, political parties need to change if they want to survive politically and electorally. Therefore, all political parties constantly change, albeit not because of internal desire, but because of external pressure.

³⁰ For the discussion of trans-national diffusion processes in social movement literature see McAdam 1982; Jenkins and Eckert 1986; Olzak 1992; Rucht 1992; Olzak and Olivier 1994; Olzak, Shanahan, and West 1994; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak and Giugni 1995; Olzak, Shanahan, and McEneaney 1996; Rucht, Koopmans and Neidhardt, 1998.

³¹ Some examples of such in-depth case studies are Ignazi (1996), Mudde (1996), Declair (1999), and many more.

partially caused by so-called ‘contagion-effects’. However, his results are rather mixed, and he does not account for cultural differences in his framework, which could also be a reason for differences in support. DeClair (1999) present a model connecting the FN (so-called ‘mother party’) and other FRPs. However, his framework is rather narrow and cannot be applied more widely to study the extent and the scope of possible connections between FRPs. Rydgren (2005a) presents diffusion in a rather abstract manner and he does not present a tool to explain the differences in diffusion between FRPs. He does pose interesting questions, but he leaves them unanswered.

In general, one can see “independent development” as the null hypothesis of this project. Most comparative FRP literature use a variant of this null hypothesis, and develop explanations based on specific, ad-hoc factors. They often assume FRP development happens in isolation from other FRPs. This paper advocates a more process-oriented approach to this phenomenon. According to Katz’s definition (1968), following the theorisation of Rydgren (2005a) and applied to FRPs, diffusion involves four core dimensions: (i) a transmitter, (ii) an adopter, (iii) an innovation, and (iv) a channel. In the following sections, each of these dimensions will be carefully discussed and analysed.

The agents of diffusion: Who diffuses?

This section is often theoretically underdeveloped because agents are usually considered of lesser importance than the object of diffusion. However, the theoretical emphasis on and the specification of both the transmitter and the adopter bring agency back into a discussion that has long been structure-oriented. Therefore it is not only important to consider agents’ different roles in the different developmental phases (Coffé, 2005), but also to differentiate between those considering adoption and those looking to diffuse³². Each process of diffusion has these two sets of agents: a transmitter and an adopter.

Based on Snow and Benford (1999), four different agent combinations can be observed. Theoretically, both agents can play either an active or a passive role in the diffusion process. However, an adopter cannot be passive in this process. Snow and Benford (1999) state a passive adopter does not make sense in social sciences³³. When both agents are actively involved in trans-national diffusion, this process is referred to as “reciprocation”.

³² Sometimes the literature indicates a third group of agents, more specifically go-between agents (Stone, 1999), which provide a vertical dimension to the generally horizontal diffusion process (e.g. Shipan and Volden, 2006). In other words, go-between agents provide elements of pressure to the diffusion process. It is exactly for this reasons, they are not considered in the process of master frame diffusion.

³³ In the natural sciences, this is much more common (e.g. diffusion as contagion). Certain biological and physical processes such as the spread of an illness or genetic mutations can best exemplify this type of diffusion.

When only the adopter is actively involved, and the transmitter remains passive, the trans-national process is referred to as “adaption”.

Transmitting agents

FRPs that have already adopted the new master frame are called transmitters. In several diffusion studies, such agents are neglected exactly because they have already adopted the innovation. This, however, is a misconception of the explanatory value of diffusion. Every master frame has roots somewhere and it is important to know where these lie, especially for those FRPs who adopted early, without much information and without outside pressures. For early adopters it is perhaps even more important to understand the origin of the master frame as this provides the opportunity to identify those adoption processes that exist regardless of diffusion. By making this analytical distinction, one can minimise the confusion between trans-national and spurious diffusion (Volden, Ting and Carpenter, 2008).

It is also possible a transmitter plays the role of innovator, as opposed to spin-off (McAdam, 1995; Tarrow, 1998). Typically the former serves as an example for other FRPs (i.e. a *primus inter pares*). Such a role is usually for an FRP with sizeable expertise, leader capacities and a strong organisation. While one might be unaware of its innovator status, the creation of (successful) spin-offs and active diffusion will give the innovator increasing legitimacy. In advanced stages of diffusion, spin-offs can become innovators themselves because certain adopters might prefer the altered to the original version³⁴.

Adopting agents

FRPs willing to implement the new master frame are called adopters. Their characteristics, together with their preferences, goals, capabilities and the overall environment they operate in, are crucial for the diffusion process. Often, these factors, combined with the need and will to change a master frame, are referred to as “*prerequisites*” of diffusion (Collier and Messick, 1975). Without the appropriate prerequisites, diffusion, and the successful adoption of a new master frame, are impossible.

The preferences of an FRP originate from several different angles, the most important one being from the individuals comprising an FRP. Their attitudes, judgements and experiences form the core of its preferences. In addition, other individuals (from traditional parties, other FRPs, etc.), institutions, or even the general electorate might also influence an

³⁴ This has been the case for the REP, which has aligned the FN master frame, but has also served as the primary example for most FRPs in CEE, most notably Jobbik (Hungary) and ATAKA (Bulgaria).

FRP's preferences. In general, an FRP's preferences provide a solid indicator of the components of its master frame, and can therefore influence the likelihood of master frame diffusion (Walker, 1969; Collier and Messick, 1975).

The goals of an FRP have a direct influence on its attitudes and preferences. Based on Strøm (1990) and Deschouwer (1992), an FRP can have four possible party goals: vote-seeking, office-seeking, policy-seeking and/or inter-party democracy³⁵. Depending on which goals are being pursued, an FRP will adjust its preferences and subsequently adopt or not adopt a new master frame. This process can be influenced by several institutional and environmental factors, referred to as an FRP's capabilities. Institutional constraints, such as cognitive shortcuts (Weyland, 2005), and the general political environment (e.g. political opportunities) can influence the adoption process in all its aspects (Volden, 2006).

Agent characteristics

Additionally, six general FRP characteristics also influence diffusion (Wejnert, 2002). First, the societal character of an agent (i.e. its societal role) can influence the process of diffusion. More specifically, the mechanisms of diffusion, the characteristics of the master frame, whether strong or weak ties are most prevalent, whether outcomes are mostly found on the micro- or the macro-level, etc. FRPs look to maximise electoral outcomes and influence policy as much as they can. Therefore, early in an FRP's development, when structures have not yet been established and social ties between FRPs are still weak, indirect diffusion (e.g. through media processes) is more prevalent. In general, sizeable collective agents, like FRPs, usually look to indirectly diffuse or adopt innovations with public consequences.

Second, an FRP will more easily adopt a master frame as its perceived novelty decreases and its familiarity increases (Greve, 1998). Two crucial factors influence an FRP's perception: the media and peer observation. The former refers to the influence media and expert opinions may have on the perceived risk of adoption (Newel and Swann, 1995). The latter indicates that familiarity with possible outcomes of diffusion can also influence the perceived risk of adoption (Rogers, 1995). Since FRPs are general conservative entities, their risk-taking behaviour is low. Therefore, perceived familiarity with the master frame should be high and uncertainty of outcome should be low in order for an FRP to adopt.

³⁵ Since all FRPs are authoritarian and hierarchic in nature (DeClair, 1999; Gomez-Reino, 2001), internal party democracy is not often considered one of the primary party goals of an FRP.

A third important characteristic is an FRP's social significance, which refers to its relative position within the FRP family³⁶. When an FRP scores high on social significance, it is more likely it will be an innovator or adopt the master frame in an early stage, which increases the likelihood of becoming a transmitter. In other words, an FRP's social position (determined by its status, wealth, legitimacy, success, etc.) significantly influences the diffusion decision. The media play an important role and they primarily affect those FRPs with a high degree of social significance (i.e. innovators and early adopters), which subsequently shape and diffuse the master frame among other FRPs (Weiman and Brosius, 1994). The new master frame is aligned with the existing norms and values because socially significant FRPs do not want to lose this status (Heyman and Mickolus, 1981).

Previous research indicates that an agent's socio-economic conditions can also account for a variation in adoption rate (Hedström, 1994). In other words, they can influence how predisposed FRPs are to adopt a possible master frame. This indicates that macro-, meso- and micro-level demand-side variables influence the susceptibility of potential adopters to the new master frame³⁷. Research has shown that for collective agents, like FRPs, economic variables are more prevalent than spatial or institutional factors (Hedström, 1994). Therefore, the absence of financial and intellectual means for most FRPs is a major contributor to the individual adoption and the general diffusion of a new master frame.

One of an agent's more important characteristics is its position in social networks. After all, the timing and success of diffusion is highly dependent on the interaction between different agents (Rogers, 1995). Four distinct interaction patterns between FRPs can be differentiated: interpersonal networks, organisational networks (with other FRPs similar in structure, content and ambition), structural equivalence (i.e. identification with the transmitter and limited social distance between agents), and social density (i.e. the concentration of adopters within a certain target arena)³⁸.

³⁶ Even though there is more cross-country differentiation within the FRP family than there is within any of the traditional party families, the general literature still sees the FRPs as a party family (Mudde, 2007). Regardless of the continuous struggle to internationalise nationalist parties, and the academic disagreement on the parties constituting this family, they share variations of the same master frame and often depart from the same ideological background.

³⁷ For an extensive discussion on these three levels of demand-side factors, I refer to Mudde (2007, chapter 9).

³⁸ In the emergence phase, it is impossible to already speak of a structural network between individuals. Based on numerous interviews, most contact in the early developmental phases was limited to sporadic interaction between individuals, not FRPs as organisations. Such a network type is much more developed and prevalent once an FRP has emerged and is consolidated.

For diffusion to occur, a certain form of identification is necessary. Directly connected to this, and facilitating diffusion, is structural equivalence³⁹, which indicates the tendency of organisations to identify with cross-national counterparts as potential transmitters. Here, more homogeneous FRPs may see their trans-national counterparts as salient transmitters (Strang and Meyer, 1993). This process becomes easier, more likely and facilitates diffusion when the distance between the adopter and the transmitter is small, i.e. there is homophily⁴⁰ between the two agents (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Burt, 1987)⁴¹. If the social distance between FRPs is limited, the diffused master frame is unlikely to be in conflict with the adopter's predispositions and will increase the likelihood of diffusion.

Lastly, the personal characteristics of the individuals who comprise FRPs also influence diffusion, especially those with authority. Compared to the characteristics discussed above, little research has been done on this and its overall value has been underestimated. Additionally, many of the personal traits are most important for diffusion between individual agents (e.g. self-confidence, independence, strength, etc), and to a lesser extent for organisational networks. In the case of FRPs, this means that the personal characteristics are more important in the emergence phase when no (direct) structural relations between FRPs have been formed yet.

The object of diffusion: What diffuses?

In order to discuss the diffusion of a new master frame, Kriesi e.a. (1995) provide the most appropriate and complete categorisation of possible objects of diffusion. Unlike other scholars, they emphasise that an agent cannot implement an innovation in a different socio-political system without any adjustments, i.e. processes of alignment. Each socio-political system is different; therefore each innovation requires careful modifications in order to be successfully adopted. In other words, when a master frame is diffused, it needs to be salient, familiar and compelling in order for it to be successful.

³⁹ This is defined as “an actor's perception of concordance with other members in a social and/or organisational network, particularly of comparable economic and social status” (Wejnert, 2002, p.308)

⁴⁰ Rogers defines this as “the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes, such as beliefs, education, social status and the like” (1995, pp.18-19).

⁴¹ Here, distance needs to be interpreted in a sociological meaning. Most scholars see geographical distance as a proxy variable for social distance (Hedström, 1994; Myers, 2000; Andrews and Biggs, 2006), however this operationalisation can be questioned. Theoretically, geographical distance is not socially relevant and the only relevant distance is sociological in nature. Recent literature has shown that once political, socio-economic and demographic measures of homophily are taken into account, geographical distance no longer matters, thereby suggesting geographical distance might not be so important (Braun and Koopmans, 2010).

Kriesi e.a. (1995) indicate five sorts of possible innovations when theorising about trans-national diffusion. The innovation can be the actual ‘content of mobilisation’, i.e. a particular ideology, goal, idea, etc⁴². Such an innovation allows for the introduction of new issues and repertoires. An innovation can be ‘the form of organisation’, i.e. the internal structure of an organisation. This includes an organisation’s hierarchical structure, its division of leadership and its extent of centralisation and institutionalisation. Besides tactical, an innovation can also be ‘a form of (collective) action’. This means an agent adopts a new form of action and adds it to its repertoire. An innovation may be ‘a model of action’, i.e. a transmitter’s mobilisation patterns can become an example for adopters in other political systems. Lastly, an innovation can be ‘the likely effect of collective action’. This refers to the general perceived chances of success the innovation has.

The former three categories of innovations refer to the adoption of particular features, and the entire diffusion process revolves around the adoption of these features. The latter two categories of innovations are more abstract and refer to a spread of collective action. Here, the transmitter of the innovation actually serves as an example for others. As discussed briefly before, FRPs pursue goals similar to those of traditional parties and, therefore, mostly need to work via institutionalised channels to achieve such goals (and maximise their utility). Therefore, FRPs’ collective action dynamics are relatively similar across different political systems and the characteristics of the master frame itself (i.e. the former three) are more important to describe diffusion.

The literature focuses on different stages of the diffusion process (e.g. Kingdon, 1995), however most of the literature usually sets aside the early and latter stages in favour of the adoption stage and it looks at diffusion as a dichotomous process (e.g. Berry and Berry, 1990). Such assumptions limit the potential value of diffusion. The master frame plays a much more important role in the early stages of diffusion. However, including information on latter stages of adoption is not only necessary, but also provides a more complete and correct view of how a master frame diffuses from one FRP to another (Boehmke and Witmer, 2004). Additionally, it is also important to analyse the scope of master frame change since a master frame itself might change through time and depending on the political system.

⁴² This is in accordance with McAdam and Rucht (1993), who deal with the cross-movement and trans-national diffusion of some thoughts, ideas, goals, approaches, etc. between German and American new left movements.

Channels of diffusion: How does it happen?

After the 'who' and the 'what' of diffusion, the channel of diffusion describes how agents can be linked to each other (Soule, 1997). Direct channels suggest the rate and degree of diffusion is directly dependent on the levels of interaction: agents make their choices known to each other, develop shared understandings and explore the consequences of different innovations based on shared experiences (Strang and Meyer, 1993). The primary instruments that make this happen are (social) networks and the ties that facilitate inter-node interaction (Diani and McAdam, 2003). These channels assume interpersonal ties are present, these ties are relevant enough to serve as diffusion channels, and they facilitate the diffusion of information concerning the master frame.

To achieve this, direct diffusion can be either formal or informal. The former refers to official meetings or patterns of communication, usually on a higher level (e.g. participation at events, public speeches, international cooperation, etc.). The latter refers to non-structural communication, usually on a lower level (e.g. friendships, readings of others' publications, etc.). Typically, direct diffusion processes start out as informal and sporadic relations throughout the lower-level tiers of organisations. Such non-structural links between organisations are then possibly institutionalised, and made formal (Kriesi, e.a., 1995).

Direct diffusion, however, cannot account for the apparent post-diffusion similarities and resemblances between agents that do not have direct channels between them. If indirect channels are available to potential adopters, frameworks, ideologies, structures, themes, etc. can still diffuse between agents. An indirect channel requires the innovation to pass through a third-party, from which the adopter will implement the master frame. Very often, such third parties are go-between agents, such as international institutions (e.g. EU), elected officials, think tanks, research institutes, etc. Since its growing importance at the end of the 1960s, however, most (horizontal) indirect diffusion passes through the mass media (Dolowitz, 1997).

In the case of indirect diffusion, however, it is important the involved agents show a significant degree of structural equivalence (Strang and Meyer, 1993) with a certain degree of homophily (McAdam and Rucht, 1993). In other words, indirect diffusion depends much more on the interaction between the master frame, the FRPs and the socio-political environment. Most importantly, the degree of identification between FRPs needs to be significant. The social distance between FRPs, and between an FRP and its new master frame should be limited. There should be no conflicts between the master frame and possible predispositions an FRP might have.

Even though social distance and structural equivalence are important, agents are also selectively exposed due to the increasing importance of mass media. Koopmans and Statham (1999) describe mass media as a “discursive opportunity structure”, which Koopmans (2004, p.370) defines this as “a number of selective mechanisms (...) that affect the diffusion chances of messages in the public sphere”. Media can portray a certain issue or topic in various ways, regardless of its inherent characteristics. This refers to its societal functions such as agenda-setting, priming, status conferral, stereotyping, gate keeping and framing (Koopmans, 2001; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004).

Mass media’s role cannot be underestimated. Based on a theoretical framework provided by Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993), FRPs need the media in their development for three reasons: mobilisation (collective action), validation and scope enlargement. First, since most people are part of the mass media community, using mass media is much more beneficial than using party-oriented outlets, like party newsletters, to achieve maximum mobilisation. Second, media appearances provide recognition, credibility as a political party and increase electoral potential. Third, the media is needed to broaden the scope of discussion and the impact of its innovation.

Conversely, mass media has a double function as an indirect channel of diffusion. Many forget (or leave out) that mass media is also responsible for the channelling of the innovation in the reverse direction (Koopmans, 2004). FRPs depend as much on the mass media as other parties do. They need mass media to provide them with information on other political parties, the functioning of the socio-political system, new issues among the public, and most importantly, the public’s reaction to its master frame. Without any of this feedback, FRPs are not able to properly align their master frame with both the political needs and the electoral demands. Therefore, mass media is crucial as a source of strategic information and as an evaluation tool for the FRP’s proposed master frame (Koopmans, 2004).

Future research: When and where diffusion happens

Contemporary literature on FRP development is very widespread. However, after three decades of extensive research, authors still do not agree on a unified explanatory framework for FRP development. On one hand, ad-hoc theorising is often a problem, as a result of unnecessary generalisations from a small-n study. On the other hand, biased explanations are often a problem because many comparative studies attempt to provide an analysis of the FRP phenomenon by only looking at the external factors, and not necessarily at the FRP itself. Therefore, it is important to find a ‘third-way’ between these two routes.

One of the principal reasons why these two routes have not provided a satisfactory theoretical framework is because they both regard the FRP phenomenon to be country-specific. In other words, FRP development is often seen (and studied) as an independent phenomenon. The majority of the contemporary explanatory frameworks are too limited in their scope and focus too much on structural factors (Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Goodwin and Jasper, 1999; Rydgren, 2005a). They fail to provide any systematic evidence of possible cross-national explanations.

Therefore, this paper attempts to contribute to this debate and complement the existing literature in two different ways. Firstly, by reorienting the discussion towards the FRPs, it brings the often-overlooked processes of time and agency back into the analysis. And secondly, rather than accepting independence and focussing on explanatory variables, one of the main implications of this paper is the rejection of the original null hypothesis of no diffusion. Throughout this paper, several of the process' characteristics have been brought forward and have been analysed. In this process, and any future analyses of diffusion, it is important to also analyse interactions between the above-mentioned dynamics (Stone, 1999).

Furthermore, it is important to go beyond the question of whether diffusion is happening, who is involved in the process, and how it is happening. Even though such questions are still both theoretically and empirically understudied, the difficulty and the challenge lie in the analysis of when and where master frame diffusion occurs and/or is successful (Gray, 1973). For now, it remains unknown why certain FRPs adopted an FRP at a certain moment in time, and not another. Also, for the moment, it is unclear why the new master frame diffused to a certain political system before another. These questions are still relevant and open for debate in literatures where diffusion has been present for decades. The answers to these questions are thus not evident, however, this does not make them less relevant or interesting.

When one observed the evolution of diffusion research in other subfields of political science, it becomes clear that most of the conditional diffusion dynamics have been uncovered one at a time. This means that first one must create a systemic theoretical framework and only then engage in empirical studies. It is only beneficial to agree on a theoretical foundation so one can structure empirical analyses around it, and substantiate possible generalisations. Too many subfields either skip the first step, or are still in conflict concerning the theoretical framework. Therefore it is not a surprise that most diffusion models are rather complex and/or ad-hoc (e.g. Braun and Gilardi, 2006; Volden, Ting and Carpenter, 2008).

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