

Convention Theory as a Framework for Discourse Analysis in the Field of International Relations: A Case Study of the European Union's Arctic Policy

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Abstract: *The effects of climate change are becoming increasingly evident in the Arctic. Consequently, and due to emerging economic opportunities, this region has become one of the world's main geostrategic hotspots. Arctic states, non-Arctic states and international organisations such as the European Union (EU) are seeking to access these opportunities. The theoretical frameworks about international relations have traditionally been used to understand relationships among states and between states and international organisations. This article leaves international relations theories aside and, divergently, uses sociology as an approach to analyse international relations. Additionally, it takes the analysis of the EU's discourse on the Arctic region as a case study. The primary objective of this research is to show that the sociological theory of conventions can be applied to discourse analysis in the field of international relations. This paper*

presents preliminary results derived from the use of this theoretical framework to analyse the content of EU's Arctic policy. The results are briefly discussed, and initial conclusions are drawn.

1 Introduction

Nowadays, it seems problematic to deny that climate change is a reality that is increasingly showing its effects more and more severely. The polar areas of the planet are the ones that are exhibiting the intensity of these consequences the most. A rise in meteorological hazards caused by heat sources, such as fires, as well as an increase in average temperatures, which are rising in the Arctic twice as fast as the global average, especially during the winter (IPCC, 2022, p.2324), are causing the loss of the ice sheet that covers the Arctic Ocean (Figure 1).

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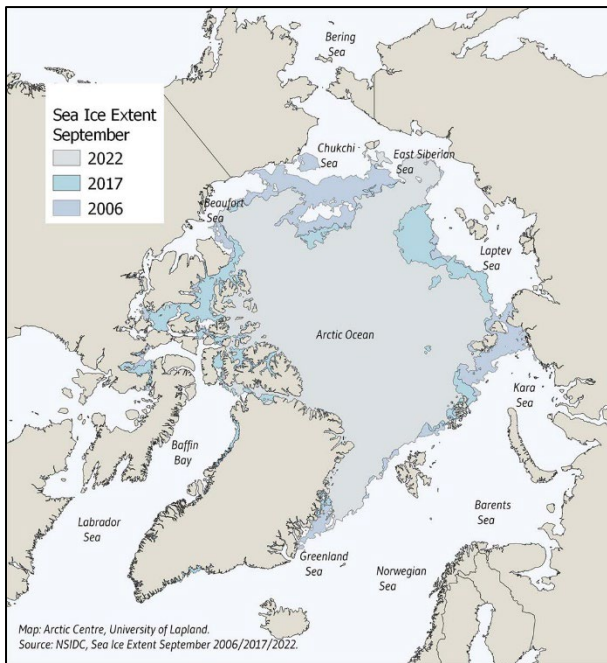


Figure 1: Comparison of sea ice extent in the Arctic Ocean in September 2006–2022. Source: Arctic Centre, University of Lapland (www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Maps)

These changes have turned the Arctic region into one of the world's major geostrategic hotspots due to natural resources, shipping routes and tourism (Dodds & Woodward, 2021, p. 95-100) found in the region. Factors that both Arctic states (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Russia, Iceland, the United States

and Canada) and non-Arctic states (such as China or India), as well as international organisations (such as the EU) seek to access. A fact that has been heightened at present due to the energy crisis (Kirchner & Koivurova, 2022, p.40) and Russia's aggression towards Ukraine (Kirchner, 2022, p.8).

The theoretical frameworks about international relations theory have traditionally been used to analyse relations - either cooperative or conflictual - between states. Considering that sociology is the science that studies the nature and development of society and social behaviour (Oxford, 2022), this article leaves international relations theories aside. Instead, it turns to sociology as a potentially useful science for analyzing international relations and it takes the analysis of the EU's discourse on the Arctic space as a case study.

Orders of justification	Definitions	Concepts				
Inspiration	This order is related to opportunities and discoveries (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p.87-161).	Opportunity, experimentation, innovation				
Domestic	This order is related to habits, culture and traditions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p. 164-247).	Tradition, habit, community				
Public	This order is related to popularity, fame and reputation (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p. 294-183).	Fame, reputation, prestige				
Civic	This order is related to security, cooperation and rules (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p.108-187).	Collectivity, common good, rules <table border="1" data-bbox="1011 891 1460 1151"> <thead> <tr> <th>Justification</th> <th>Concepts</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Security</td> <td>Cooperation, agreement, forum</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Justification	Concepts	Security	Cooperation, agreement, forum
Justification	Concepts					
Security	Cooperation, agreement, forum					
Market	This order is related to benefices, markets and utilities (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p.143-199).	Market, competition, profit				
Industrial	This order is related to efficiency and resources (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p.123-204).	Efficiency, resource, standard				
Ecological	This order is related to the environment and sustainability (Lafaye y Thevenot, 1993)	Sustainability, nature				

Figure 2: The orders of justification, definitions and related concepts.
Source: Author's elaboration. Data extracted from Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991 and López-Tárraga, 2022.

The main objective of this research is to show that the sociological theory of conventions can be applied to discourse analysis in international relations. To this end, this paper presents preliminary results

obtained by using this theoretical framework to scrutinize the discourse and policy of the EU regarding the Arctic region. The results are briefly discussed, and initial conclusions are drawn.

1 Convention theory and literature review

The theory of conventions was developed by the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot in 1991. These researchers sought to understand the relationships between people and objects in different situations of everyday life. They constructed a scheme to analyse the coexistence between people, things and situations within multiple orders of worth, such as the orders of evaluation and, most relevantly, justification. These worlds of justification are coherent sets of values, principles and arguments that make it possible to evaluate people's behaviour in different situations and the objects involved in each case as justifiable or unjustifiable (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p.14). In everyday human life, according to the authors, it is possible to distinguish up to six principles or orders of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p. 77): inspirational, domestic, public, civic, market and industrial (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p. 87-204). Later, in response to the natural conflicts that were beginning to be perceived, the ecological world was incorporated (Lafaye & Thevenot, 1993, p. 521). Since this research goes beyond relations between people and objects to relations between states, where security¹ is

an essential matter, this subject has been categorised in this paper as an additional category of justification within the civic order. Thus, eight worlds of justification are considered in total. Figure 2 develops these concepts further and provides examples of the content of each order of worth.

As the authors explain, this theoretical framework can be used in a multitude of disciplines. Such approach enables the connection of issues that are often addressed from different perspectives and disciplines, such as the study of social relations or contracts, on the one hand, and technological constraints or product quality on the other (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991, p.9). For these reasons, this sociological theory is suitable to study conflicts and compromises by categorizing the different positions, objectives, and interests of the actors around the seven conventions outlined above. In democratic environments, policy making is always a process that involves compromise to address problems and conflicts adequately. Therefore, EU policies may be properly understood from this theoretical standpoint because their inception and practice involve very diverse actors in terms of their nature (public / private), their goals (for profit / not for profit) and their scale

¹ Emphasise that security issues are in the civic sphere.

(local, regional, national, and supranational).

With this goal in mind, a literature review was carried out. 21 publications² were selected and classified into six different topics according to their subject matter. From the highest to the lowest number of pieces, the first category is consumption/agri-food market (10 papers), followed by publications related to institutions and the environment (3 papers), culture/society and energy (2 papers), and education (1 paper).

The literature review shows that the convention theory, derived from economic sociology, has been applied mainly to case studies related to the market economy. No academic research has been found that uses this framework with states as the primary subject matter and international relations as the object of analysis. Therefore, this paper contributes to theoretical innovation by conceptualizing the state as an actor that, in the field of international relations, needs to deal with goals and interests related to the seven orders of justification, with a strong focus on security within the broader realm of the civic justification.

1.1 The EU Arctic Policy: case study and codification of results

The EU's Arctic policy, coordinated by the European External Action Service, has been taken as a case study for this research. It analyses the discourse developed by the international organisation over the years, and the different documents issued by European institutions from October 2008 to October 2021. During this time, 19 documents have been issued by the following institutions: European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the EU, Court of Justice, Committee of the Regions and Economic and Social Committee (EEAS, 2022).

All documents have been coded following the concepts related to the orders of justification. The document analysis software N-Vivo was used for this process. The results shown in this paper have been extracted from the primary documents issued by the European Commission: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'The EU and the Arctic Region' (COM (2008) 763 final); Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council 'Developing a EU Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps' (JOIN (2012) 19 final); Joint

² As this is an abridged version of the presentation of this research, the bibliographical review has not been expanded. However, the bibliographical references taken for the review are detailed in the references section.

Communication to the European Parliament and the Council 'An integrated EU policy for the Arctic (JOIN (2016) 21 final); Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions 'A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic' (JOIN (2021) 27 final).

2 Results

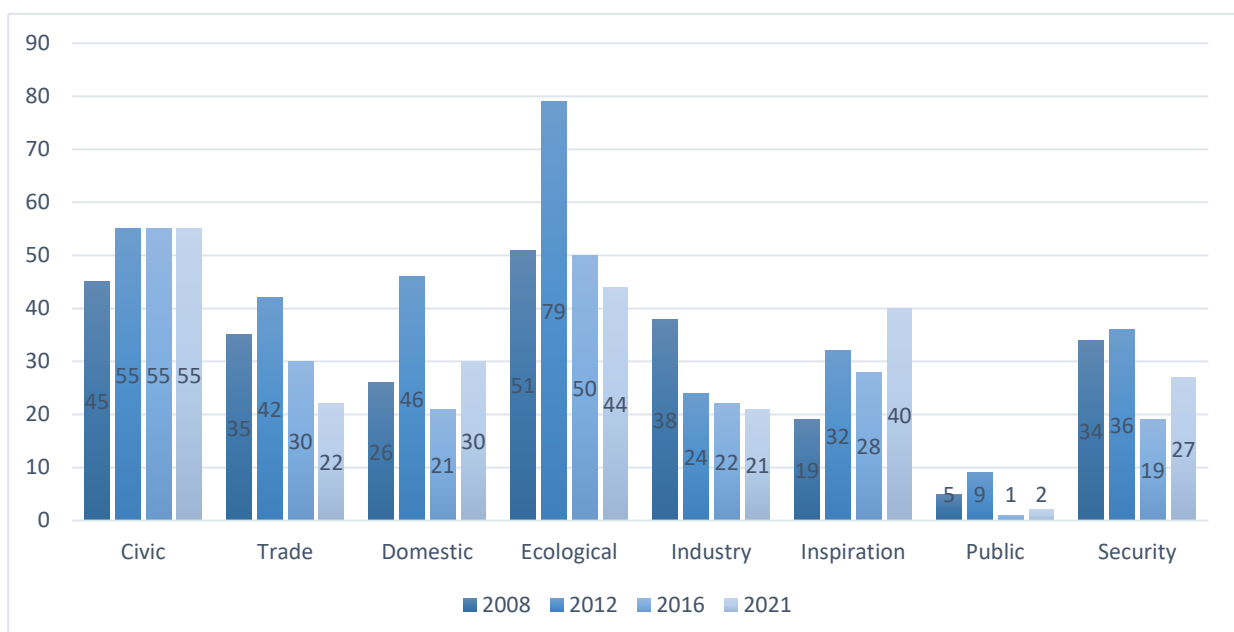
The general results (Figure 3) obtained from analysing the documents mentioned above are presented below. It should be noted that more than one type of convention can be coded in the same paragraph if it contains arguments concerning different issues.

The average number of references to each agreement in the documents cited during

Orders of justification	Average number of mentions in the main documents (2008-2021)
Civic	52.2
Market	32.25
Domestic	30.75
Ecological	56
Industry	26.25
Inspiration	29.75
Public	4.25
Security	29

Figure 4: Average number of mentions to each type of convention in the main EU Arctic policy documents (2008-2021). Source: Author's elaboration. Data extracted from López-Tárraga, 2022

Figure 3: Number of mentions of each type of convention in the EU's main Arctic policy documents (2008-2021) Source: Author's elaboration. Data extracted from López-Tárraga, 2022



the period under consideration was also calculated (Figure 4).

For a better understanding of the content of these documents, the results and specific excerpts that illustrate each argument are presented below. It should be kept in mind that different orders of worth are usually interlinked, and that the actions promoted by the EU have a cross-cutting nature. Therefore, a specific activity may impact several orders or conventions.

The civic convention, which refers to collectivity, legislation, and the achievement of the common good (in this particular case, in the Arctic region), is among the most important ones in the evolution of EU policy documents. This convention is complemented by the ecological justification, which is the most influential according to data (56 mentions in average). The connection between the two orders of justification can be seen in the following paragraph from the 2016 Communication (JOIN (2016) 21 final, p.8):

“The EU aims to protect, preserve and improve the environment, including in the wider region, for present and future generations. The EU should continue its engagement in multilateral environmental agreements that also have particular relevance to the Arctic, and encourage their implementation. The EU should encourage full respect for the provisions of UNCLOS, which is considered customary international law, including the obligation

to protect and preserve the marine environment”.

A clear example of the cross-cutting nature of the civic and ecological conventions can be found in how tourism is addressed in a way that respects the environment and local communities (COM (2008) 763 final, p.13). This is a field that countries such as Finland, Sweden and Norway have been promoting since 2008, through developing sustainable tourism projects supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme. Apropos of the blue economy, the European Commission expressed (JOIN (2016) 21 final, p.11) that the organisation is highly committed to the promotion of sustainable practices in fisheries, a field of its exclusive legal competence. The reflection of these actions can be seen in the EU Water Framework Directive, which since its issuance in 2000 and its subsequent updates, aims to ensure good quality water throughout the EU by managing river basin systems in a coordinated manner at regional and national levels (2000/60/EC, 2000). This is a prime example of the transversal nature of these issues in which the industrial and commercial conventions can be observed.

The domestic order of worth, which is related to habits and traditions and the conservation of local communities, appears in an average of 30.75 mentions in the sample of documents. The following text

excerpt from the 2012 Communication (JOIN (2012) 19 final, p.15) exemplifies this convention:

"The EU has been actively involved in working towards the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The EU seeks to integrate human rights and indigenous issues into all aspects of its internal and external policies, including its political dialogues with third countries and regional and multilateral organizations. The EU also provides financial support to civil society organizations working on indigenous issues, in particular through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)"

In this regard, and as an example of EU actions under this convention, the organisation has been engaged since 2008 in a regular dialogue with indigenous peoples of the Arctic coordinated by the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (COM (2008) 763, p.5). It also supports local communities through several funding programmes, such as the INTERREG Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme mentioned above.

The commercial (market, profit, 32.25 mentions) and industrial (resources and efficiency, 26.25 mentions) worlds of justification orders appear to a similar extent in the original texts. Both worlds of justification are interconnected on several occasions, including the conclusions of the 2008 Communication, where the civic and

ecological conventions also appear in a dialectic manner (COM (2008) 763 final, p.13):

"The suggestions contained in this Communication aim to provide the basis for a more detailed reflection. This will be useful for implementing the EU's strategic initiatives, including the Integrated Maritime Policy. The present Communication should also lead to a structured and coordinated approach to Arctic matters as the first layer of an Arctic policy for the EU. This will open new cooperation perspectives with the Arctic states, helping all of us to increase stability and to establish the right balance between the priority goal of preserving the Arctic environment and the need for sustainable use of resources".

With the 2021 policy update, the convention to which all innovation is attributed (29.75 mentions on average) refers to the EU's investment in technology and science and relates mainly to innovations in security. This can be seen in what follows in the next paragraph of the 2021 Communication (JOIN (2021) 27 final, p.6), where the green convention is also highlighted:

"Timely and efficient search and rescue (SAR) operations are crucial in the Arctic because of its severe climate, unpredictable weather, and the huge distances involved. Galileo SAR significantly reduces the time needed to rescue people at sea. The new Galileo Return Link Service offers new

functions for sailors and pilots operating in hostile environments and is currently offered uniquely by Galileo, worldwide and free of charge".

In a cross-cutting manner, and to illustrate what the actions concerning the industrial, commercial and innovation conventions translate into, two EU financial contributions described in two different periods may be mentioned. Firstly, in 2012, to monitor changes in the region's natural environment, the EU earmarked €200 million for research activities under the Seventh Framework Programme (JOIN (2012) 19 final, p.4). Secondly, in the latest policy update in 2021, the EU stated that it will provide, through the InvestEU Fund, €370 billion in public-private investments to finance projects such as green and digital transitions, research and innovation, new fields of action in the health sector and the strategic technologies sector (JOIN (2021) 27 final, p.16).

There is a scarce presence in the documents of references related to the search for public recognition, reputation or fame (4.25 mentions on average). The manner in which the EU disseminates its obtained results to the public directly influences the reputation that it seeks to acquire among the public as an actor operating in the Arctic region. This matter is addressed in the following quote, where the convention of innovation also coincides (COM (2008) 763 final: 7):

"Ensure open access to information from Arctic monitoring and research based on the principle of the Shared Environmental Information System. Facilitate and support outreach to the broader public".

Lastly, all aspects related to security are mentioned an average of 29 times in the four documents. Throughout the development of the policy, security issues are addressed in relation to the environment (COM (2008) 763 final:11). No mention is made of possible military conflicts on the ground. A situation that changes entirely with the publication of the new Communication, which alludes directly to geopolitics and puts the focus on Russia and China (JOIN (2021) 27 final:3):

"Military build-up across the Russian Arctic seems to reflect both global strategic positioning and domestic priorities, including dual use of infrastructure. In addition to increasing security challenges, it could also further aggravate the consequences of climate change. It is likely taking place partly because the long northern coastline is becoming much more accessible but is largely related to non-Arctic issues¹⁰. Many countries, including the US, Norway, UK, Denmark, Canada and Iceland, are following these developments closely, as is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), with a view to responding to Russia's increased assertiveness in Arctic waters and airspace. There has also been an upturn in the activities of other actors, including China,

and growing interest in areas like ownership of critical infrastructure, the construction of sea cables, global shipping, cyberspace and disinformation".

As illustrated, the mentions of the different orders of justification vary over time, as they adapt to the relevant facts or events along the years. The interconnection of the orders and further analysis around it are not covered in this paper because it is only intended to show the research carried out. However, it will be addressed in future works of greater length.

3 Conclusions

The results of the analysis show how the different conventions are interconnected. It can be observed that behind the EU's pro-environmental vocation for the Arctic area, there is a strong economic purpose related to industrial and commercial activities. The results also show how security is present throughout the development of the policy. However, in the latest update in October 2021, the EU addresses the issue more evidently, pointing to Russia and China as specific countries to focus on. This issue is expected to increase in subsequent updates due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 and the resulting energy crisis.

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