

The return of the Parthenon Marbles; Different agendas, frames and problem definitions

*Sofia Chatzidi**

1. Research objectives

This research is focused on agenda setting and how problem definitions determine policies. It also tries to identify whether problem definitions are in fact socially constructed. My main reason for choosing the specific theme is my interest in studying further in the domain of policy analysis. The way a problem is defined determines policies. That is why the interrelation between policy definitions and policies is one of the main aspects of the policy setting agenda (Parsons, 2003: 85-100).

This paper will be focused on analyzing firstly the context of the survey and secondly presenting the results and conclusions of this research.

2. The Research Question(s)

The research questions simply stated are:

Are the policies determined by specific public problem definitions?

Are the public problems socially constructed?

3. The Hypothesis

The central hypothesis is that the way a problem is defined determines policies and it is socially constructed. My argument will contribute in the context of existing literature in the sense that it will study policy definitions and policies in depth. This hypothesis will be tested by reference to the theoretical literature already identified and by undertaking a contrasting case study. The analysis of the case study will be based on discourse analysis.

* PhD Candidate in Cardiff University.

4. Theoretical perspective

Kingdon's model and Schön and Rein's frames model provide the theoretical perspective.

Kingdon's model is a new approach to the agenda setting that fits best to sub-system and policy discourse approach. Kingdon's model has been selected because it is the most suitable theoretical framework to be tested in order to analyze and prove my hypothesis. The elements that are going to be used from his theory are mainly these that are related with his analysis for agenda setting or problem definition.

The agenda is a list of problems that get the attention of the public and it is split into two types. These are the governmental agenda and the decision agenda, when an urgent action is required for resolving a public problem. The setting of an agenda is important as the whole policy-making process is based on this. The agenda setting provides the policy entrepreneurs with the basic instruments for analyzing the beliefs and the assumptions of the participants in a specific problem.

The analysis of Kingdon's model in relation to the definition of a problem is vital. According to it, policy-making procedure can be conceptualized as three main "streams": firstly, a problem stream with all the different perceptions of the actors and of the past experience over the problem. Secondly it can be conceptualized as a policy stream, consisting of the experts in the goal setting and the analysis of the different alternatives, thirdly as a political stream (Kingdon, 1995: 1-17).

Policy problems are constructed in all of the streams. In the problem stream, problems are conceptualized by indicators, or focal events, or by feedback of previous policy. Values, categories, comparisons, frames and interests determine policy definitions. In the policy stream, policy entrepreneurs define further public problems and they propose the most feasible solutions (Kingdon, 1995: 90-115).

As Kingdon's model supports, frames determine policy definitions. Schön and Rein also examine the role of frames. Frames in policy agenda have the sense of policy structures of beliefs, perceptions and values. The participants of a problem have a specific frame when they analyze a problem and make propositions. The reality is represented in a special way of seeing. Different actors see one thing as another and that is why it is very difficult to solve a problem and

to satisfy everyone. The differences in frames are seen by the use of specific language terms, which are the basements of policy definitions (Schön & Rein, 1994: 23-36).

The combined application of Kingdon's model with Schön and Rein's frames model would be a useful tool for studying agenda setting. This synthesized theoretical model that has been adopted for the analysis of the empirical material and the proof of the stated hypothesis will be examined through a number of parameters which are: belief systems, values, pressure groups, leadership/personality, interests, cultural features, the role of symbols in the construction of frames and the function of window of opportunity.

5. Methodology

The synthesized theoretical framework in combination with the qualitative empirical tool of the case study provides the methodology for the testing of the hypotheses. The selected case study examines the issue over the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" that has provoked controversy between the United Kingdom and Greece. The analysis of the case study is based on the collection of primary and secondary data. The primary data includes elite interviews, websites and official documentaries. The secondary information derives from the study of the related literature.

6. Empirical perspective

The setting of the case study is the following.

In 1799 Lord Elgin was appointed British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople. Two years after his appointment he obtained a firman (an official documentation) from the Turkish authorities that allowed him to remove sculptures from the Parthenon (Marijnissen, 2002: 8-17). The removed pieces were shipped to England in 1816, sold to the British Government consequent upon an Act of Parliament. Then they were placed in the British Museum where they are until today.

There have been requests by Greece for the return of the Marbles after their independence from Turks in 1832. The Greek Minister of Culture Melina Merkouri made the first Greek official request in 1983 during a meeting of Ministers of Culture in Mexico City sponsored by UNESCO. At that point the British Government declined the official Greek request of the return

of the Parthenon Marbles. Nowadays there is a great dispute between the two countries about the return of the Parthenon Marbles and they define it in different ways.

7. The results

The application of Kingdon's model

The case of the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" has been an issue or a condition not only for the Greeks but also for the whole world soon after their removal. Therefore, the issue has already been recognized as a condition from the beginning of the 19th century. But it has been placed as a constructed public problem in the policy agenda after 1982 with the Greek official initiative for confronting it (the issue has been transformed to a problem). In this case, the institutional agenda could never be developed without the aid of the systemic agenda where the public opinion plays the most significant role. This problem has a variety of dimensions and not all of them have been used by the Greek side to the development of the problem definition. When they emphasize different dimensions of the problem that doesn't mean that they define the problem differently. Hence, the frames are more or less the same but the way they are used may differ over time. For the British side the same problem has always been presented in a more concrete frame.

There have been several windows of opportunities that could provide a change in the situation since the placement of this problem on the official policy agenda. The first (problem) window of opportunity came during the post-colonial era of the 1980's, this presented a great opportunity which Melina Mercouri grasped and with her radiant personality introduced the issue of the Parthenon Marbles as a problem that needed to be solved. The international conventions and the European Union regulations about the illicit cultural trade have played also a crucial role in the problem construction of our case. The British and the Greek Government have acceded to the UNESCO convention which has led to many changes in the existing policy attitude in both countries. For example, the British Government has recently enacted two acts (the Treasure Act of 1996 and the Act of Dealing in Cultural Objects 2003) which signify a change in its attitude towards the illegal trade of arts objects. This change in British policy in connection with a change of British public opinion (a quite respectable amount of the British public is now in favour of the return), has led the Greek side to adopt a more profitable policy line, that of a reunification. Going

from a policy of restitution to one of the reunification represents a refinement of the policy, a developmental process.

Another window of opportunity in this case has been the hosting of the Olympic Games by Greece; this was used extensively as an argument but in the end was largely ineffective. Nonetheless, the event of the Olympic Games gave an opportunity to Greece to publicize the argument for the return of the Marbles. One possible political window of opportunity may result if the British Government enacts an Act of Parliament governing the restitution of human remains; this could produce a precedent for cultural objects as well (spillover effect).

It is obvious from our analysis that we have identified several windows of opportunities in the past that have strengthened the Greek argument but they haven't lead to a change into the policy and the political stream as Kingdon argues. There must be a sequence of windows of opportunities from which the most important is the zeitgeist, the feeling of the times, which could create the right environment for the development of a solution to the problem. It is very difficult for a window of opportunity to be so effective because at the same time there are other external factors that interact in a problematic case which Kingdon hasn't taken them into account.

Concerning the criticisms that have been imposed to Kingdon, it has been identified by the application of this theory in analyzing our case study that there have been a number of problematic incidents. The problem of the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" does not preexist but it has been appeared after the actions of Lord Elgin. This case is the most representative example that signifies the difficulty of concluding in the same unarguable problem definition. Moreover Kingdon's model cannot explain the multidimensional concept and the change of the used language of the examined problem. Furthermore, the problem is defined through the three streams and not only in the problem stream.

The analysis of the suggested parameters

The differences in British and Greek frames are many but their principal difference in the structure of the expression of their arguments is the fact that in the British side the main actor in this case is the British Museum (an independent organization) whereas in the Greek side is the Greek Government. There are also other influential actors that influence in their way the process of the problem definition. The frames, a basic element of problem definition, are going to be examined through the following parameters.

1) Belief systems

The belief systems constitute the basic element of the definition of the problem of the removal of the Parthenon Marbles because they shape it with their general frame. Each country has its own beliefs and even in the same society there could be a wide diversity in them. They are more subjective in their first stage and they become more stable and objective only when they are recognized by the society as common shared values.

In the British side, the British Museum and the British Government base their views upon the issue of the marbles on the following beliefs: the rightness of obtaining them, the contribution to the whole humanity by exhibiting them in a world cultural institution like the British Museum. The beliefs of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles that represent a respectable part of the British public opinion contradict the official British side. They think that the marbles should be reunited with their natural place where they could be studied in their entirety. The main participants of the Greek side have no conflicting beliefs and their belief for the reunification of the marbles with their birthplace is this of a demand of the Parthenon itself and of world cultural heritage.

2) Values

The values in problem definition play a significant role as they shape the ideological frame of each participant. They are recognized by the Constitution (Written or Unwritten) or they are accepted as common shared values which are called norms. For the purposes of this research the values are going to be used indifferently as they are of equal importance whether being values or norms. The British story which expresses the point of view that is against the return of the marbles is based on the above values: this of the institution and its independence, the legality, the cultural diversity. The Greek part in 1980s focused on historical and legal values but nowadays the core principle of its argument is cultural ethics and humanitarian values. The case is a matter of architecture as well as sculpture which signifies an issue of cultural ethics. As it has been shown, the problem is a matter of an hierarchical order of values and when they are conflicting it is even more difficult for the two countries to conclude into a solution.

3) Pressure groups

The initiatives of the pressure groups play a great role in the construction of a problem. In our case the placement of the case of the Parthenon Marbles on the top of the Greek policy agenda has been accompanied by the establishment of two pressure non-governmental groups this of the Foundation of Melina Mercouri and this of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles. Over the years a numerous of different pressure groups all over the world have been developed that support either the reunification or the remaining of the marbles in the British Museum. The aims of these non-governmental organizations are to promote the campaign of the reunification of the marbles and to keep the public and the politicians well informed over the process of the case through the arrangement of conferences, opinion polls and meetings with the involved participants that shape in their way the formation of the public problem. These pressure groups, such as the Melina Mercouri Foundation and the British Committee define the case as a problem of reunification with the rest remaining sculptures in Greece.

For the British side the main pressure groups that have been identified during this research are the British Council Archaeology and the Portable Antiquities Group. These organizations influence the process of the agenda-setting indirectly through the expression of their positions to the public. The Chairman of the British Council Archaeology has expressed a more neutral position whereas the Authority for the Portable Antiquities Group agreed with the official position of the British Museum.

The media as in every case is a very influential pressure group for the outcome of a case in the policy-making process. In the examination of the case of the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" it has not been identified by the conducting of the elite interviews whether the media plays a crucial role or not in the problem definition. The interviewees have never referenced to the importance of the media and the only thing that could be stated is the fact that during the last years there has been a great interest by the part of the media by transmitting emissions about the subject and publishing articles. The information provided by broadcasting emissions and articles from the written press in both countries show how the same problem is formed differently and lead to opposite positions. Due to the limited time, a further investigation of the role of media and other influential pressure groups has been impossible.

4) Leadership/Personality

One of the most important parameters that has determined the problem formation of the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" has been this of leadership/personality. In 1982 Melina Mercouri, the charismatic Minister of Culture that acted in the most suitable environment this of the post-colonial era took the green light by the Greek Government to raise this issue on the top of the policy agenda as a problem that needed an immediate action for solving it.

Both sides have underlined the significance of Mercouri in the problem determination. It is supported by the British side that due to her impassionate and vigorously personal character, she was strategically placed in that environment. The role of Mercouri in the problem definition of our case was parallelized to a theatrical performance. She had a magical charisma of being able to be communicative and persuasive to the public and to the political community. Mercouri has guaranteed the public support and it was a good chance for uplifting her political career as it is argued by the British position (Addyman, Peter, Chairman of the portable antiquities group, face-to-face interview held 9.06.04). Her personal characteristics (her idealistic and dynamic character) have shaped this problem in a very ideological frame where the main arguments were the question of history and legality. The case has been characterized as imperialism by the president of the Melina Mercouri Foundation which is a very strong definition which summarizes the Greek attitude of the past.

The strong Greek formation of the problem in 1982 could be explained as a result of the actions of a charismatic person that formed with her personal characteristics the case and acted in the appropriate environment. The way that the problem was defined in that period (this is a very good example of a synecdoche where one egregious part, this of legality has defined at that moment the whole process) has lead to a certain position this of the return of the marbles to Greece.

The British Museum's argument has always been more stable and has never been determined by a certain leadership. The British Government's position has been transformed according to certain leaderships for example before 1997 it was certain that the problem would be solved, something that hasn't happened after the election of the Labour Party. Nowadays there are actions by the British Government that show a change in their attitude towards the illicit trade but their position about the case is still neutral and indifferent. It has not been found out by the research if the British definition of the case is linked with a specific personality. Through the years

the Greek policy has also adopted a more profitable line towards the case, this of the reunification of the sculptures by enlightening other features.

To sum up, Mercouri was entitled with a magical charisma which in conjunction with the most suitable environment of a post-colonial era (it could be seen as a window of opportunity) she acquired the international aid and has put this problem into the policy agenda in both countries.

5) Interests

Interests, mostly economic, determine the process of agenda-setting. The identification of interests in both sides of the participants is a very difficult task *as the researcher has to go beyond the sayings of the actors* (Schön & Rein, 1994: 39).

The first argument of the British Museum that the "Parthenon Marbles constitute one of the most popular collections of the Museum to the public and they are seen by the 55% to 60% of all visitors" reveals indirectly an economic utilitarian perspective by the part of the British Museum which could lose one of its famous attractions to the whole world. The Museum is afraid also that if the marbles are returned, the repatriation could set a precedent for similar cultural objects and that will not be a profitable outcome for the future of the Museum. Hence the cost of the possible return of the marbles to Greece outweighs the benefit. For the Greek part the only interests are mainly ideological as the Parthenon Marbles are linked with the Greek cultural identity and the revolution of arts and culture.

6) Cultural features

The proof of the existence of cultural frames in the problem definitions of both sides could be a sign of the social construction of public problems. Because of the nature of the research, the cultural features that are going to be examined are enriched with archaeological and historical elements. In order to simplify the analysis, the cultural, archaeological and historical features will be examined indifferently. The selected political waves that are going to be used as frameworks are this of communitarianism and universalism.

The British Museum bases its beliefs on a universalistic concept where there is no common belief but culture could be confronted as a mixture of different cultures. As an

international cultural institution its "collection from different cultures and periods embraces the whole world which allows you to consider the whole world" (MacGregor, 2004: 4-6) signifies the universalistic role of the British Museum. The political ideology of universalism presupposes a utilitarian orientation which has been proved in the case of the British Museum where the collection of the Parthenon Marbles constitutes the most profitable acquisition for the Museum.

The Greek problem definition is characterized by both elements of communitarianism and universalism. The Greek argument underlines the importance of the case of the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" for the Greek nation and the kind of resemblance it has to the Greek cultural identity. These sculptures represent collective national values (particularism). At the same time as it was stated by the official Greek side, the examined case is also an issue of world citizenship which indicates a sense of universalism. The Parthenon marbles have developed not only the Greek ideal but the cultural heritage of humanity.

According to the British Museum, the Greek definition could be based only on a local perspective if the case is explained as an issue of their return to their birthplace (As the British Museum states in its website "In the British Museum the Parthenon Sculptures are part of a world museum. In a new Acropolis Museum they would be part of a local museum with a particular focus on the history of Ancient Athens" and the recent statement of Neil MacGregor who has characterized the case as an instrument of national politics).

7) Symbols

Each side of the two main participants expresses its beliefs on a specific fairy tale. For the Greek side the heroes for this story are all of these people who fight for the return of the marbles and the enemy is the British Museum. For the British part the hero is Lord Elgin who has saved with his action the Parthenon Marbles from further destruction. Inside these narrative stories the actors have adopted specific symbols which are expressed through the use of certain language terms. The Parthenon is considered to be a symbol on its own because of its great significance in world culture and that is why it has been adopted as the logo of UNESCO.

What differentiates each agent is the symbolic meaning that they recognize to the Parthenon. For the British Museum, the Parthenon Marbles represent the symbol of the development of the British nation and the European culture. This referential shows the way the British link their culture with these sculptures. The Greek side argues that "the Parthenon has a

symbolic value for the Greek cultural identity and the whole world (symbol of civilization), an ethnic memory as well, along with its uniqueness in the history of arts and culture. It is the symbol of the Athenian democracy and represents the revolution in arts and culture" (www.culture.gr/ / The memorandum for the Parthenon Marbles). The Greeks confront them as a nationalistic and universalistic symbol at the same time. The reunification of the marbles with their home place could act as "a symbol of EU unification in an era where the role and the ideological basis of the EU has been put into doubt" (Venizelos in UNESCO's booklet, 2003: 3-4). Initially in 1982, the particular problem has been linked primarily to its nationalistic symbolism so as to be more effective in its placement on the top of the agenda-setting.

Other important features of symbols are the synecdoches, metaphors and the ambiguity. The British part defines the problem illuminating the great importance of their exhibition in the British Museum for comparison studies and the development of the Western culture but at the same time they have covered the less appealing part of the question of legality. The Greek part in its turn has forgotten the long period of British acquisition and illuminates nowadays the rightness from the point of cultural ethics. During the research it has not been discovered whether any of the parts use metaphors in the process of definition.

Finally the ambiguity is obvious in our case as the same problem has so many conflicting features which constitutes the problematic area extremely difficult to be solved. Nonetheless the diverse arguments between Greece and the United Kingdom could not be unified because of their ambiguity into one collective proposal as Stone has argued in her theoretical development. In my opinion, ambiguity could only lead to a collective argument only in the case of the participants that are linked ideologically with each other and not in the case of conflicting agents.

As it has been shown each side bases its arguments on different and many times on conflicting frames which has been identified through the use of the selected parameters. A question that may arise is why it has been decided to adopt the specific parameters instead of others. A possible answer could be the simple reason that these parameters could fit more with our case.

Each side defines the problem according to specific frames which have been examined through the use of parameters (belief systems, values, personality, interests, cultural features, symbols). The British side bases its beliefs on the rightness of obtaining them and their contribution in this way to the world cultural heritage. Despite the official British position upon the

case, a respectable amount of the British public supports the Greek argument which is expressed by the establishment of the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles. The main belief of the Greek side is that the reunification of the marbles constitutes a demand of the Parthenon and of world cultural heritage.

The values are another parameter that has been selected for the examination of our hypothesis. The British definition is determined by the value of the independence of the institution, the legality and this of cultural diversity. Contrary to the British position, the Greek part bases its beliefs on cultural ethics and humanitarian values. The role of pressure groups, such as the Melina Mercouri Foundation and the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, in the problem formation of the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" is quite important. Moreover it has been identified that the personal characteristics of Melina Mercouri, the Greek Minister of Culture have shaped the issue and have placed it on the top of the policy agenda. Another dimension of the problem is this of the interests, economic or not. For example the British Museum could not define the case as an issue of restitution of the marbles because it does not want to lose one of its famous attractions. Additionally, in a more general concept the British definition is based on universalism whereas the Greek one is a mixture of universalism and communitarianism. The existence of these cultural features constitutes an indication of the initial hypothesis; this of the social construction of public problems as culture is the basis of each society.

All the different frames that define the public problem are expressed through the use of certain symbols from each part (for the British part the Parthenon Marbles represent the symbol of the development of the European culture whereas for the Greek side constitute a national and international symbol of civilization). Nothing would be as it is, without the significance of some windows of opportunities. The diversity in frames has resulted in different problem formation in both sides and so in conflicting policies. For example the Greek problem construction has driven to a policy towards the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles with their birthplace whereas the British problem definition is linked with the maintenance of the current status quo, this of the exhibiting of the marbles at the British Museum.

1.8 Conclusions of the study

The analysis of our research has provided us with the main points of conclusions as far as concerning the examination of our hypothesis. The model of parameters that derives from a very careful study of Kingdon and Schön and Rein's theory, has been proved to be very useful as it combines the basic elements of a problem construction. The parameters that have been used are: the belief systems, the values, the role of the pressure groups, the interests, cultural features, symbols. The window of opportunity was examined as well.

It has been identified that each side defines the same problem of the "removal of the Parthenon Marbles" differently because they base their perceptions on specific frames. The same problem for the Greek side is defined as a case that involves architecture as well as sculpture and could be solved with their reunification with the remaining parts in Athens. On the other hand, the British Museum forms the problem as a legal action of that time and because of their importance as part of their collection they could not be returned to Greece under any circumstances. The frames represent in fact the culture and the social tendency of each society and that is why a problem definition which is based on frames is a social construction and so determines policies. Overall, the application of the theoretical framework in the context of the examined case study proved to be very useful for the testing of our hypotheses as it suited to the cultural dimension of the case.

Bibliography

Kingdon, J. (1995) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2nd edition (Little Brown, Mass)

MacGregor, N. (2004) "The whole world in our hands", *The Guardian Review* (London, Guardian, 24 July, 2004), pp.4-6

Marijnissen, R.H. (2002), *The case of the Elgin Marbles* (Ludion, Amsterdam)

Parsons, W. (2003) *Public Policy: An introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis* (Edward Elgar)

Schön, D. and Rein, M. (1994) *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies* (New York, Basic Books)

UNESCO (2003), *The unity of a unique monument Parthenon*, Booklet

www.culture.gr