

The Road to Agenda-setting Success in the European Union

Studying Necessary Conditions and
Their Meaning in the Case of
Disability Policy

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Radboud University Nijmegen



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There is a growing awareness on the part of deprived groups concerning the importance of crystallizing their objectives into clear proposals so that they can claim agenda status. Indeed, in the continuing struggle to assure equality to blacks, some have realized that inclusion of the issue on an agenda is a prerequisite for any type of ameliorative action upon it. This can be seen in the following appeal: "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, 'I have a dream,' but today he is history. Black students today will not come to you and say, 'We have a dream.' We have an agenda. At the top of our agenda is an end to racism and its immediate manifestation, white skin privilege."

– (Cobb & Elder, 1971, p. 904-905)

Preface

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado (1875-1939) once said: “*caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar*”. Roughly translated this means: “*wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking*”. I think this phrase is perfectly adequate to describe the road to my research.

When starting to work on my thesis I barely had any knowledge of the theory on agenda-setting in the European Union – and I was not the only one. Thus far, only few scholars had dealt with this topic, making it a very intriguing field of research. So I started digging. Very soon I realized that by working on theoretical notions of EU agenda-setting I was able to combine two things I already devoted much time and effort to and I am also interested in.

For one thing, while exploring agenda-setting theoretically I came across a lot of conceptual notions I had already dealt with within my Master programme in Nijmegen. For instance, some of the explanations for agenda-setting success I had studied in previous courses and also the concept of multi-level governance had been examined and applied before. By working on my thesis I could recall the whole Master programme and I noticed how much I had learned from it – and how much I actually liked what I had been doing.

For another thing, I concentrated on the European setting. Despite my background in European Studies I made new discoveries. In fact, my research gave me the opportunity to study the European Union from a new angle. Exploring the EU will probably always be my focus of study and it is a good thing, both for science and for myself, to continuously start asking new questions.

While further walking on my research road I grasped yet another opportunity. During an internship at the State Parliament in Düsseldorf I saw, heard, learned and experienced so many things which I did not want to leave behind. I developed the ambition to include parts of them in my thesis, so I simply merged theoretical considerations with practical findings. This basically decided my case selection.

The project I was working on in Düsseldorf (and sometimes also Brussels and Strasbourg) focused on European disability policy and generally the situation of people with disabilities in European countries. I found this not only an interesting topic to study, but also an important one. People with disabilities enjoy the same (human) rights as people without disabilities. It is not the impairment per se but the environment that is disabling them. By including these people into society and decision-making processes we only ensure that human rights are respected. That is something everyone should become aware of when dealing with disability policy.

Moreover, social issues are often neglected for issues of economic or political nature within science. People need to realise, though, that social aspects like, for instance, the protection of human rights represent a cornerstone of contemporary democracies. They should get at least as much attention as other issues.

Overall, the road to my research turned out to be a perfect symbiosis of those three aspects: my Master programme, my internship, and my interest in the EU. While walking on this road

I was, however, not always alone. The knowledge I acquired and the findings I made would not have been possible without the people working with and supporting me all along the way.

I owe special thanks to Mr Josef Neumann, my supervisor at the State Parliament in Düsseldorf who simultaneously became my mentor (and future boss, as it turned out). Josef did not only involve me actively whenever possible, he also took me to various meetings (even various cities) and allowed me to get as much insight as possible in political everyday business (sometimes more related to European affairs, sometime more related to disability policy). He encouraged me to be curious, yet patient. The same holds true for Mrs Nicole Esser, another supervisor of mine at the State Parliament. She taught me how to accurately organise my work within the sometimes chaotic day-to-day business of the EU – and how to stay motivated. I very much appreciated both kinds of support.

I would also like to thank all the interviewees who took the time to sit with me and answer my questions. Especially Mrs Donata Vivanti Pagetti deserves my thanks. She illustrated with how much sincerity and eagerness an interest group can approach EU agenda-setting.

Moreover, I owe special thanks to Dr Ellen Mastenbroek, my supervisor at the Radboud University. She jumped with me on this research road with quite little background information herself (especially on the case under study) but still always gave me constructive feedback and, whenever necessary, a gentle push to encounter new thoughts. I feel as if I have grown under her guidance.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents who endured me and my temper with serenity and from time to time reminded me to take a breath.

Even though my research came to an end I will continue to work in the area of disability policy for a while, so I will extend one of the roads I was walking on. In fact, I am very much looking forward to new challenges to pass this road.

I also hope you, the reader, are looking forward to reading my thesis now. Thank you for your interest and your effort.

Victoria Krebber

Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany
December, 2014

List of Abbreviations

DG	Directorate-General of the European Commission
DI	Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament
EASPD	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities
ECI	European Citizens' Initiative
EDF	European Disability Forum
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
HU	Hungary
ILO	International Labour Organization
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MLG	Multi-level Governance
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UN	United Nations
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
US	United States (of America)
WHO	World Health Organization

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. An Introduction to Agenda-setting

Studying the European Union (EU) and related processes has become quite a fashionable practice. Most of the time, scholars aim to explain elements of either European integration or EU governance (Pollack, 2005; Rosamond, 2010). Some devote much time to questions like ‘why did the EU develop the way it did?’ and ‘how will it evolve in the future?’ (e.g. Haas, 1958; Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Moravcsik, 1998; Pierson, 1996). Others, in turn, examine how certain measures are introduced, specified and developed into strategies or action plans, thus focusing on EU *decision-making* and/or *policy-making* (e.g. Hix, 2005; Peterson, 1995; Wallace, Wallace & Pollack, 2005). Considerably less attention has been paid to the question of why certain issues appear at all on the radar of decision-makers, while others do not. This is precisely what *agenda-setting* is about, i.e. “having an issue considered by policy-makers” (Princen, 2011, p. 927).

Successful agenda-setting actually constitutes a prerequisite for both decision-making and policy-making. Princen (2009) explains that “if you want a policy to be adopted, you first have to get decision-makers to talk about it” (p. 1). If you want decision-makers to talk about an issue, you simply need to make sure that it appears on their agenda. That makes the process of agenda-setting a highly political and competitive one (Pralle, 2009; Princen, 2007; Princen & Rhinard, 2006). Various actors on the European level – may they be national politicians, private interest group representatives, or European lobbyists – try to influence the rise and fall of issues on the EU’s agenda and inter alia the strategies they pursue account for their actual success or failure in doing so. Hence, influence or power at the European level may be equated to a large extent with the capability to introduce new issues on the agenda – or simply with *agenda-setting success* (Tallberg, 2003).

Thus far, only few scholars have paid explicit attention to agenda-setting dynamics within the EU, though. In recent years some case studies have been conducted of how issues like anti-smoking policy or health care appeared on the EU’s political agenda (Princen, 2011; Stephenson, 2012). In spite of these contributions, however, this branch of literature remains quite scant compared to other fields of study, in particular compared to decision-making (Bache, 2013; Princen, 2007; Princen & Rhinard, 2006; Stephenson, 2012). That is probably why it is often equated with those other processes (Moschella, 2011).

Although the notion of agenda-setting has not gained as much attention within EU studies as other concepts so far, it does represent a rather old subject of study. It has, for example, been examined in the context of national politics in the United States (US) for more than 50 years now (Moschella, 2011; Princen, 2007; 2009). That is in fact where concepts like “policy streams”, “windows of opportunity” (both Kingdon, 1984), “policy images” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991) or “issue careers” (Cobb, Ross & Ross, 1976) originate from (see Stephenson, 2012). In the last couple of years, scholars started to apply these concepts to the European Union level. They used previous insights gained from analyses of the (national) US setting as a starting point and searched for similar or at least comparable patterns within the supranational setting of the EU.

The importance of agenda-setting theories for the EU is inter alia mentioned by Rosamond (2010) who noticed:

“[T]he EU is about rather more than ‘integration’. If we think of the EU as a policy system, then it follows that scholarship needs to explore the ways in which policy agendas are set [...].” (Rosamond, 2010, p. 113)

Princen (2007; 2009), in turn, argued that the agenda-setting perspective can actually help understand both European integration and EU policy-making:

“[T]he extent of European integration can be equated with the range of issues that the EU deals with [...]. In other words, the extent of European integration can be equated with the EU’s political agenda.” (Princen, 2009, p. 5)

The more issues appear on the EU’s agenda, the more integration seems to take place. Besides, a better understanding of agenda-setting can aid one’s general perception of the way policies and decisions are made in the Union, as these processes – albeit different in nature – are closely connected. A better understanding of agenda-setting will therefore also shed light on EU governance more generally.

1.2. Weaknesses and Open Tasks

That the process of agenda-setting has not been placed within the broader picture of EU integration and EU governance before (and that it has not been pointed to its significance in this context either) is one thing. However, other questions addressing this concept have been neglected as well within existing scholarship. As we just learned, agenda-setting has only recently become the focus of studies within the context of the EU. Stephenson (2012) emphasizes that it is still indefinite “why certain issues end up as topics for European Union policy-making, while others do not” (p. 798). Considering that successful agenda-setting constitutes a prerequisite for both decision-making and policy-making, it comes as a surprise that it has not been analyzed as extensively as these other concepts.

Princen (2011) indicates two further (and major) weaknesses with regard to the literature on agenda-setting (or rather the literature on EU policy-making). Firstly, scholars did not always base their ideas and typologies on a theoretical framework. Therefore, agenda-setting still lacks a strong theoretical foundation, a framework which may be applied to different European (policy) settings. Secondly, academics commonly focused on one particular type of actor. Although institutions like the European Commission or the European Council appear as the formal and thus most influential agenda-setters, many other actors are involved in these processes as well. The ‘big players’ are often just the tip of the iceberg, influenced by a much wider political context which includes, for instance, member state representatives and private interest groups (Princen, 2007; 2011).

Hence, what the literature lacks are the following things: (a) a common theoretical framework embracing the ideas of various scholars in this field of study; (b) a methodological framework with no actor bias for the ‘big’ EU institutions; and (c) more empirical data on the process of agenda-setting and in particular agenda-setting success. In other words, academics need to look deeper into the concept of agenda-setting and develop a distinct common ground

for further analyses. This will help overcome the mismatch between the few existing theoretical and empirical information that have been gathered so far.

1.3. Research Question(s)

As we have seen, previous efforts of academics leave room for further and especially more thorough analyses. Many of them regarded just a small piece of the puzzle within their works. Neither of them examined agenda-setting success in isolation and differentiated carefully between agenda-setting, decision-making and policy-making. Neither of them tried to elaborate in a comprehensive manner on those factors that may have an impact on agenda-setting success in the EU. These and similar thoughts lay the foundation for the upcoming chapters. The main research question will therefore be as follows:

What are the explanations for agenda-setting success in the EU?

This thesis deliberately focuses on a theoretical question. Theory gave the first impetus for conducting this study and thus serves as its main basis.

The previous section pointed out, though, that more empirical data on agenda-setting success is needed as well. That is why this thesis does not only study agenda-setting success theoretically, but also empirically by analyzing the agenda-setting success of disability policy. The reasons for choosing this particular case will be highlighted in the methodological section of this chapter (i.e. section 1.6.) and explained thoroughly in chapter three (see especially section 3.3.). It is definitely an interesting case to study because even though agenda-setting success may not seem very likely in a case falling under social policy it did in fact occur.

Still, those practical insights on the case largely serve as a means to an end; to be more precise, as a means to support the theory on agenda-setting success. That is why no reference is made to the case under study in the main research question. It is, however, made in the last two sub-questions. Sub-questions help to both structure a thesis (more) coherently and clarify the line of argumentation employed in it, and the following ones will be worked with in the scope of this research:

- *In what way does the EU's structure influence processes of agenda-setting?*
- *What does agenda-setting (success) in the context of the EU imply?*
- *What are necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU?*
- *How can we measure those conditions empirically?*
- *What are the most important facts on (European) disability policy?*
- *Which factors actually affected the agenda-setting success of disability policy?*

The thesis aims to secure a balance between novel theoretical and novel practical knowledge. The combination of research questions as mentioned above should take care of this two-sided approach. Together, hence, these questions will try to provide a clear picture of both agenda-setting success in the European Union and the agenda-setting success of one particular case, i.e. disability policy.

1.4. Scientific and Societal Relevance of the Research

The intended research has a theory-testing nature. This means that certain hypotheses which are based on existing scholarship and which regard the phenomenon of agenda-setting success in the EU will be tested empirically. These hypotheses will include *necessary conditions* for agenda-setting success, thus following an innovative approach on how to examine this concept (innovative because *necessary conditions* have not been applied yet before in the EU agenda-setting context by any scholar, as section 1.5. and chapter two will explain further).

In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the theoretical debate about agenda-setting success within the academic literature. Findings will be of relevance for a (European) public administration perspective. As already mentioned, the literature dealing with agenda-setting in the EU is quite scant compared to other fields of study. By incorporating as well as developing existing approaches further, this research will present a new way of comprehending EU agenda-setting dynamics. Hence, it intends to fill a general knowledge gap and to help provide a better understanding of EU processes.

In addition, the upcoming study has a great value for those actors who diligently engage in the promotion of an issue and want it to be discussed by EU high officials (these actors will be introduced as *issue entrepreneurs* in chapter two of this thesis). As it attempts to help solve the puzzle surrounding agenda-setting processes and outcomes, findings will hint at how actors need to behave (or what they need to do, what they need to take into account etc.) in case they aim at change and wish to alter the status quo. In this respect, the present research may support them in building up certain arguments. It may also help them understand processes of EU governance as well as European integration better.

Moreover, this thesis will contribute to a rather practical debate about European disability policy. There are not many scientific studies dealing with this subject. In fact, researchers tend to neglect social issues for those of economic or political nature. If the researcher manages to provide convincing arguments for why agenda-setting was successful in this case, these arguments may apply to an even wider spectrum of EU policies.

Overall, this thesis will come up with both a coherent theoretical and methodological framework as well as empirical data on one particular case of agenda-setting success in the EU. It will therefore make up for those weaknesses of existing scholarship mentioned by Princen (2007; 2011).

1.5. Preview: Theoretical Framework

The main concept dealt with in this study is *agenda-setting success*. In order to explore this concept properly, one initially needs to clarify what is meant by *agenda-setting*. In this respect, notions like *issue*, *agenda* and *issue entrepreneur* will be of importance. These will be explained by reviewing existing scholarship, thus presenting the state-of-the-art literature on agenda-setting dynamics in the context of international relations and, more specifically, the EU. All these insights will be provided within a multi-level governance perspective. The EU is incorporated in a multi-level governance structure and so are processes of agenda-setting.

Subsequently, one needs to turn to the notion of *success* in the context of agenda-setting. What does *agenda-setting success* imply; what does it mean? As already indicated in a previous section, Tallberg (2003) explicates that *agenda-setting success* at the European

Union level (i.e. the capability to introduce new issues on the EU's agenda) may be equated with *influence* or *power*. However, the question remains what actually influences this success (and thus influence or power). Which factors are central in this respect? Do actors alone play a leading role? Several independent variables will be outlined which may ultimately affect *agenda-setting success* in the EU. Due to the limited amount of available theories, those variables will partly be extracted from the context of national politics in the United States. By doing so, a broader base for analysis is ensured.

Overall, *agenda-setting (success)* will also be isolated from the theoretical notions of *decision-making* and *policy-making*, as these are separate processes and need to be regarded individually for that reason. In doing so, the study will make up for weaknesses of former research attempts (see Princen, 2011).

Existing approaches will finally be related to each other and combined. A new theoretical framework – developed explicitly for this research purpose – will embrace them comprehensively and thus allow for a better (and novel) understanding of agenda-setting success within the EU. This framework will present *necessary conditions* for agenda-setting success and formulate hypotheses on these. *Necessary conditions* traditionally imply that a certain outcome Y only occurs in the presence of a certain factor X. This idea has always been important within social science theory but it has not been applied yet in the context of EU decision-making or policy-making, not to mention in the context of EU agenda-setting. A new interpretation of rather old concepts and their integration into a rather new context (the one of the EU and more explicitly EU social policy) is in fact what makes this thesis unique.

Overall, as one may already assume after reading the first sections of this thesis, the theoretical framework to be presented will mainly draw on the studies conducted by Princen (2007; 2009; 2011). He is one of the leading scholars with regard to agenda-setting in the EU and devoted several pieces of work on this topic. That makes him particularly important for the analysis of the agenda-setting success of the case chosen. However, while acknowledging the great impact of his pieces on the intended work, he will certainly not be the only one whose ideas will be incorporated in this study. Other academics of importance in the context of agenda-setting (success) are Bache (2013), Cobb et al. (1976), Cobb and Elder (1971), Pralle (2009), Stephenson (2012), and Tallberg (2003), to mention just a few of them.

1.6. Preview: Methodological Framework

As already indicated, the research will test those hypotheses on necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU mentioned above for one particular case. Consequently, this thesis will carry out a *theory-testing case study*. Levy (2008) emphasizes that examining a single case “can be quite valuable for the purposes of testing certain types of theoretical propositions” (p.13). As this is exactly what the researcher intends to do, it was only logical to choose this kind of research design. Other scholars add that single-n case studies are useful to study unknown, complex phenomena and the variables at stake in detail (see e.g. Bennett & Elman, 2006a; 2006b; 2007; George & Bennett, 2005; Siggelkow, 2007). This, in turn, is of advantage with regard to internal validity claims.

The researcher chose to scrutinize a *positive case*, i.e. a particular policy that successfully entered the European Commission's agenda. She is aware of the fact that authors

are often criticized for selecting on the dependent variable. However, Bennett & Elman (2006b) explain that “the critique does not apply where cases are selected on the dependent variable in order to test claims of necessity” (p. 462). This thesis aims to investigate whether supposedly necessary conditions are operating, so there was a good reason to choose a case with a positive outcome on the dependent variable.

The focus of study will be (European) disability policy which includes measures to improve the situation of people with disabilities and to ultimately achieve their full inclusion into society.¹ Disability policy belongs to the broader field of social policy. Measured against this category, it constitutes a very interesting case. The European Commission usually appears reluctant to allow issues of social policy to enter its agenda. Disability policy still managed to do exactly that. Analyzing how it entered the Commission’s agenda thus appears as an intriguing thing to do.

Besides that, there are several pragmatic reasons for choosing this case and its category. In general, social policy represents one of the major issues to focus on in the (near) future (see e.g. Ferrera et al., 2002; Streeck, 1999). Especially the integration and inclusion of people of different backgrounds (may these different backgrounds be nationalities, ethnicities or physical conditions) will be a central issue for prospective policy-makers to deal with. It will not only require national solutions but also European (or international) ones.

Furthermore, the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in 2006 brought about a paradigm shift regarding the conceptualization of disability. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

“persons with disabilities are no longer considered unable to play an active role in society. Nor are they viewed as in need of ‘fixing’ to fit in. Instead, their capacity is recognized and emphasis is placed on society’s need to adapt to facilitate the full participation of these individuals.” (FRA, 2010, p. 1)

Disability indeed developed from a medical problem to a concern of law and human rights. It therefore appears particularly interesting to analyze how exactly this issue managed to appear on the agenda of a political entity like the European Union.

In addition, what is striking is the fact that there are different definitions of ‘disability’ used in different countries. As being defined differently, approaches and measures targeting this concept also vary across countries. Integrating people with disabilities seems to be more difficult (and even contested) than one may initially expect. This, in turn, makes it an appealing focus of study in general.

To analyze this policy case in a comprehensive manner, the thesis will stick to three main investigation techniques. A *deductive content analysis* will provide detailed information about the case and the context in which it gained agenda status. This information will be supplemented with *participant observations* as well as *expert interviews*. Taken together, these methods should provide a clear picture of the agenda-setting success of disability policy in the EU by providing an in-depth examination of the context and causal relations.

¹ For convenience, the focus of study (i.e. the case) will simply be termed ‘disability policy’ within the scope of this thesis. This is by no means a popular term within Europe, though.

1.7. Scope of the Research

The most recent policy measure addressing disability policy in the EU was adopted in November 2010. It was the so-called “European Disability Strategy 2010-2020” (introduced under reference number 2010/EMPL/027). Roughly one year before its introduction the European Commission had launched a public consultation on the matter. Hence, the subject must have successfully entered the EU’s agenda around that time.

The thesis will focus on the period prior to the launch of that policy (more or less mid 2009 until mid 2010), as those driving forces are of interest which ultimately led to the issue being placed on the agenda (recall that successful agenda-setting is considered a prerequisite for actual policy-making). In this respect, a certain policy measure initiated by the European Disability Forum (EDF) in 2009 will be central. It will in fact be the agenda-setting endeavour to be analyzed later on.

1.8. Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis follows the research questions mentioned earlier. The thesis will start by describing theoretical notions on the main concept, i.e. *agenda-setting success*, and related subjects of importance in chapter two. This section will not only review the state-of-the-art literature but also develop a new approach of how to regard and analyze agenda-setting success. In addition, it will present several hypotheses on *necessary conditions* for successful agenda-setting in the EU.

Chapter three will then explain the study’s methodological framework. It will elaborate on the way the hypotheses will be tested for the case of disability policy. It will also elaborate on the methods which will be applied in order to scrutinize the chosen case.

Chapter four will offer more information about this case, i.e. disability policy, which succeeded in finding its way onto the Commission’s agenda. It will clarify the most important terms and thoughts used when talking about disability policy in general. It will also elaborate on the idea of a European disability strategy and describe a particular issue entrepreneur, i.e. the European Disability Forum (EDF). Last but not least, it will briefly describe the issue’s agenda-setting success. All these sections will help the reader to better understand the issue under study.

In chapter five the theory introduced before will finally be applied to the policy case. In order to gain new insights into agenda-setting dynamics in the European Union, the hypotheses on necessary conditions will be tested for the case of disability policy. The researcher will also elaborate on one additional factor which played a crucial role in this case. This allows for a comprehensive answer to the last sub-question.

Last but not least, a concluding section will present a summary of the findings and answer the main research question. It will also enlighten on the theoretical value of the thesis and come up with ideas for further research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

The central concept examined in this study is *agenda-setting success*. In order to fully comprehend it, one basically needs to clarify what is meant by (a) agenda-setting and (b) success in the context of the polity to be studied, i.e. the European Union. Several questions arise when considering these terms. What does the process of agenda-setting imply in an international organization like the EU? What actually is the EU's 'agenda'? What characterizes those 'issues' to be considered by the EU? Where do they come from and when do they make it onto the agenda? In which ways does EU agenda-setting differ from domestic agenda-setting? And, most importantly, what causes issues to rise and fall on the EU agenda; hence, what causes *agenda-setting success*?

The following chapter will address these questions and explain the theoretical background of the analysis to be conducted later on. To this end, it will elaborate on the most important theories of existing scholarship which are used to explain both *agenda-setting* and *success* in the European Union. Moreover, it will link those prevailing approaches and develop a coherent and comprehensive framework of its own.

2.2. A Multi-level Governance Perspective for Analyzing the EU

Before turning to the conceptualization of *agenda-setting* and *success* in the context of the European Union it is important to highlight the polity's unique character. Only if one understands the structure of the EU one can understand processes within it. That is why basic theoretical notions on *multi-level governance* need to be explained briefly.

In fact, the term *multi-level governance* (MLG) originates from European Union studies (Bache & Flinders, 2004; Rosamond, 2010; see especially Hooghe & Marks, 2001). The EU does not represent a classical international organization. Nor may it be labeled a domestic political system. It rather evolved as "a new and unique experiment in governance beyond the nation-state" (Pollack, 2005, p. 358). It has intergovernmental and supranational traits at the same time and actors on both the European and the national level play an important role. Scholars, led by Hooghe and Marks (2001), used the concept of MLG to capture those distinct characteristics of the EU's system and processes within it which make it very unique. In the past years MLG developed into one of the most prevalent theories on EU governance (Bache & Flinders, 2004; Rosamond, 2010).

Changing relationships between intergovernmental bodies within the EU made academics draw attention to the idea of a multi-level governance structure (Peters & Pierre, 2001). They realized that different actors at different levels became part of interwoven policy networks. Authority became dispersed. It was shifted from the nation-state both upward to supranational institutions of the EU and downward to lower levels of government i.e. regions and/or municipalities (or simply: subnational authorities) – and even within the national administration itself (Bache & Flinders, 2004; Jordan, 2001; Marks et al., 1996a; Pierre & Peters, 2000). Marks et al. (1996b) explain:

“The point of departure for [the] multilevel governance (MLG) approach is the existence of overlapping competencies among multiple levels of governments and the interaction of political actors across these levels. Member State executives, although powerful, are only one set among a variety of actors in the European polity. States are not an exclusive link between domestic politics and intergovernmental bargaining in the EU. Instead of the two-level game assumptions adopted by state-centrists, MLG theorists posit a set of overarching, multilevel policy networks. The structure of political control is variable, not constant, across policy areas.” (Marks et al., 1996b, p. 167)

Hence, MLG is about interlinked processes of supranational, national and subnational governance. An important point here is that there is no real hierarchy between these levels. Subnational entities may influence supranational bodies just like national entities may do; no intermediary level is needed (Peters & Pierre, 2001; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2008). Likewise, none of these actors has the competence to simply rule over the other. The notion of MLG rather underlines some kind of fluidity between these tiers of authority (Rosamond, 2010).

Obviously, this multi-layer structure makes the EU very complex. It creates many access points (at different levels, in different bodies) for issues to appear on the radar of actors involved (Moschella, 2011; Princen, 2009). MLG thus indicates that several theories need to be referred to in order to explain a phenomenon like the EU and processes related to it. This will probably hold true for the notion of agenda-setting as well. The next section will address this concept in more detail.

2.3. Agenda-setting: An Overview of the State-of-the-art Literature

The following section will review existing scholarship on agenda-setting. Explanations will be based on studies of both domestic settings and the EU itself. However, as agenda-setting constitutes a multifaceted concept, this thesis will highlight only the most important notions on it. Some theories on domestic agenda-setting will deliberately be left out (e.g. Kingdon’s multiple streams model) because they do not entirely fit this research from a theoretical point of view.² However, there are several models that provide particularly valuable insights into agenda-setting dynamics in the EU and these will be presented in the following.

Agenda-setting is quite a complex, sometimes even chaotic process, and so appears defining it. In the context of domestic and international politics alike – albeit sometimes termed differently (like e.g. agenda-building; see Cobb et al., 1976; Elder & Cobb, 1984) – it is about introducing (new) issues on the agenda of policy-makers and thus getting them to pay serious attention to these issues (Cobb et al., 1976; Elder & Cobb, 1984; Princen, 2011; Tallberg, 2003). These issues may then become future matters of both decision-making and policy-making.

An important observation by Princen (2009) is that “agenda-setting is a matter of degree, rather than a matter of simply being ‘on’ or ‘off’ the agenda” (p. 21). Actors involved do not only try to place an item on the agenda but they try to place it *high* on the agenda by

² Applying those other theories would hypothetically be possible, though, what just shows that a discussion of agenda-setting (success) belongs in this research domain and is long due.

exerting as much influence as possible on responsible EU officials. These efforts to arouse attention and convince others of a certain viewpoint make agenda-setting a political process, with every individual having just a limited amount of control at her disposal (Elder & Cobb, 1984; Princen, 2007). That also explains why agenda-setting may proceed in a slow fashion and take time (Bache, 2013; Stephenson, 2012; Wood & Peake, 1998).

Existing scholarship distinguishes between various models of agenda-setting. Within his study of the European Community Pollack (1997), for instance, makes a distinction between *formal* and *informal* agenda-setting. The former concerns the official agenda-setting competence of ‘big’ institutions like the European Commission and the European Parliament. This competence (or power) depends on the institutional rules governing the EU (i.e. the treaties). *Formal* agenda-setting may therefore also be labeled procedural agenda-setting. *Informal* agenda-setting, by contrast, involves issue entrepreneurs. Despite a lack of formal power, issue entrepreneurs define and present issues, related problems and various solutions. In this way they can influence the EU’s agenda as well; to be more precise, its substantive agenda. As one can see, in the context of an international organization like the EU, different actors can make use of different instruments (both formal and informal ones) to have an impact on the agenda.

Cobb et al. (1976), in turn, refer to three other models. Their models differ in terms of where issues come from, which actors are involved and what these actors do with available issues. Within their “outside initiative model” issues arise in nongovernmental groups (outside of government) and evolve until reaching official agendas. The “mobilization model” portrays issues initiated inside government itself and automatically achieving agenda status. The “inside initiative model” carries issues from within government. In contrast to the first model (the “outside initiative model”), issues are not expanded and made public here.

All those models described are very conceptual, though. In reality, agenda-setting appears to be much more intricate and allows for combinations of different models and/or approaches (Cobb et al., 1976). In the context of the EU this holds even more true than in the context of a nation-state. EU agenda-setting and domestic agenda-setting are quite alike but the Union, due to its MLG structure, offers many more access points for issues to be introduced as well as arenas for them to be deliberated on.

Nevertheless, there is a clear connection between the theory just presented and the research to follow. This thesis will concentrate on *informal agenda-setting* (c.f. Pollack, 1997) and the role of issue entrepreneurs. Other studies thus far only focused on the ‘big’ institutions as formal agenda-setters and ignored other forces at stake. This study aims to overcome the existing bias by focusing on ‘smaller’ actors, i.e. issue entrepreneurs from outside the EU institutions. Hence, it also concentrates on an *outside initiative model* of agenda-setting (c.f. Cobb et al., 1976).

Overall, agenda-setting revolves around (a) agendas, (b) issues and (c) actors. These terms will briefly be dealt with in the following sub-sections.

2.3.1. Agendas

The *agenda* is commonly regarded as “the set of issues that are seriously considered in a polity” (Princen, 2007, p. 28; see also Cobb & Elder, 1971; Princen & Rhinard, 2006). Agendas are needed simply because people can focus only on a limited number of issues at

the same time. Agendas themselves have a so-called “carrying capacity” limiting the number of issues that may appear on it (Pralle, 2009, p. 782).

In general, scholars distinguish between three types of agendas in democratic political systems: the media, the public and the political agenda (see e.g. Bache, 2013; Cobb et al., 1976; Princen, 2009; Princen & Rhinard, 2006). Depending on the context, these are sometimes termed differently. The *media agenda* refers to those issues appearing in the media. The *public agenda* includes the set of issues considered by the general public. The *political agenda* contains the set of issues considered by official policy-makers. Here academics make a distinction between a broader *governmental agenda* (with issues merely receiving attention) and a narrower *decision agenda* (with issues lined up for decision-making). However, one needs to take into account that issues may generally enter different kinds of agendas at the same time (Cobb et al., 1976).

For the purpose of this study, the distinction between the political, the public and the media agenda is not significant, though (see Princen & Rhinard, 2006). Public involvement in EU agenda-setting is rather limited. People tend to be more concerned with national than with European politics. Besides, there is no common EU news channel or newspaper. Assessing the EU’s public or media agenda would therefore be difficult. That is why this thesis will focus on the EU’s political agenda. To be more precise, it will concentrate on the political agenda of one of the ‘big’ European institutions i.e. the European Commission.³ The Commission is the institution to introduce official legislative proposals. As we are interested in how an issue entered the official (political) agenda, it seems to be the appropriate setting to examine. In addition, the Commission is probably one of the most transparent entities of the EU so that gathering data will not be too difficult.

2.3.2. Issues

After having mentioned *issues* a number of times already, it is time to finally examine this notion in more detail. Princen (2007) defines an *issue* as “a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources” (p. 24). This phrasing may be a bit misleading, though, and requires clarification. In very simple terms, Princen describes an *issue* as a “matter”. This matter arouses interest among a wider population. This population splits into “two or more identifiable groups” who have slightly different opinions on how the matter should be addressed. They do, however, agree that something should be done about it. Hence, the “conflict” mentioned by Princen does not relate to the matter as such (the matter does not need to be a conflict) but to the views on and proposed solutions regarding the matter (which are usually conflicting to some extent, albeit agreeing that measures need to be taken generally). This may become more reasonable when further reviewing Princen’s work. In that same paragraph he explains that issues are often equated with ‘topics’. However, topics only “become issues [...] when political actors have different ideas as to what should be done about them” (Princen, 2007, p. 24). That makes the connection with conflicts (as in opposing views on the matter) crucial for the definition of issues.

³ The thesis will focus on the European Commission’s agenda, but not on the Commission shaping its own agenda. In this respect, as mentioned at the end of section 2.3., the thesis will concentrate on issue entrepreneurs. Overall, for reasons of convenience, we will simply refer to ‘the agenda’ within the scope of this research when talking about the European Commission’s agenda.

Apart from defining them it is also important to clarify where issues actually come from, where they are created. It is again Princen (2007; 2009) who provides a very clear answer to that. According to him, issues can arise either from the international environment or from the interests and activities of actors. In the former case, issues may result from inter alia focusing events, international collective action problems or cross-border externalities (see also Birkland, 1998; Stephenson, 2012; Wood & Peake, 1998). They thus externally present themselves to actors. In the latter case, issues are formed internally and stem from the political activism of entrepreneurs (e.g. policy-makers or interest groups) who try to gain attention for their ideas (see section 2.3.3. below).

Another question with regard to issues is how they appear on the agenda when being ‘there’ (as in when ‘existing’). Princen and Rhinard (2006) explain that issues may enter the agenda either from above (introduced by political leaders like e.g. the heads of state) or from below (introduced by officials and experts). Only a limited number of issues succeed in doing so, though. Why that is the case will be explained in more detail later on in this chapter (see section 2.4. on agenda-setting success). In general, as already mentioned earlier in this thesis, people can focus only on a restricted amount of issues at the same time. The main reason for this is that there is always “a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others” (Cobb & Elder, 1971, p. 901-902). This again stresses the important role of actors when it comes to agenda-setting; after all, issues are socially constructed.

2.3.3. Issue Entrepreneurs

It obviously requires activism to place issues on the agenda. In fact, agenda-setting falls under the responsibility of *issue entrepreneurs* who serve as agenda-setters. *Issue entrepreneurs* are organizations or bodies which “are willing to invest their time and energy in promoting a particular issue” (Elder & Cobb, 1984, p. 121; see also Bache, 2013; Tallberg, 2003). Their willingness and commitment can have different origins. It may spring from personal conviction or self-promotion; it may be based on ideology or simply an assignment for work (Elder & Cobb, 1984). Their influence is indisputable, though. They develop or facilitate the emergence of new issues, gather support for new issues, draw attention to certain problems and provide necessary information on such (Tallberg, 2003).

Moreover, they can have distinct backgrounds. Issue entrepreneurs may well be people, but can also be companies, interest groups or other kinds of associations or units. They may be within or outside of government; they may be supranational, national or subnational actors (Elder & Cobb, 1984; Tallberg, 2003). Amongst the most typical issue entrepreneurs are probably advocacy groups, scientists, journalists, agency personnel, legislators, cabinet members, and perhaps even leaders (see Pralle, 2009).

Those terms hint at yet another important characteristic of issue entrepreneurs – a characteristic which in fact isolates agenda-setting from the theoretical notions of decision-making and policy-making. Issue entrepreneurs (i.e. agenda-setters) are not to be equated with decision-makers or policy-makers. Issues are supposed to gain access to the formal agenda of the latter but are usually not initiated by them. That is the task of issue entrepreneurs. They try to get decision-makers and/or policy-makers’ attention and arouse their interest. Hence, activism of issue entrepreneurs is needed way before decision-makers and/or policy-makers play a role within the process of agenda-setting.

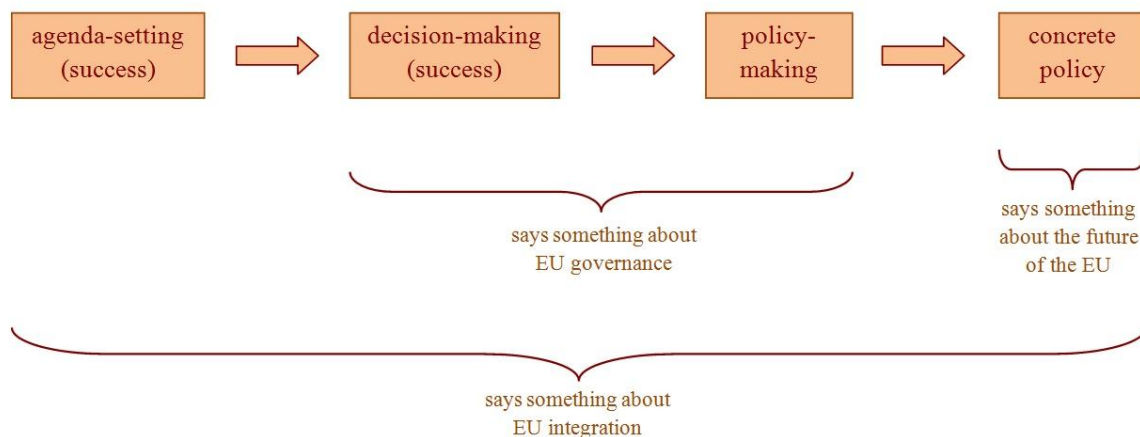
2.4. Agenda-setting Success

After having examined *agenda-setting* we can now turn to the notion of *success*. What does *agenda-setting success* imply and how can it be achieved? The following section will again review existing scholarship, focusing on the context of the European Union.

To put it simply, *agenda-setting success* refers to successful agenda-setting. Even though this may sound too obvious or may even appear unnecessary of explaining, it is worth mentioning. In the previous section, *agenda-setting* was defined as introducing (new) issues on the agenda of policy-makers and thus getting them to pay serious attention to these issues. Hence, it is about the attempt, about the process of trying. *Agenda-setting success*, however, is about actually succeeding in doing what agenda-setting intends to do. Instead of ‘agenda-setting success’ one may also say ‘gaining agenda status’ or ‘gaining agenda access’. Within the existing literature different terms are indeed used (compare e.g. Princen, 2007, and Cobb et al., 1976).

Despite the rather complex process preceding it, agenda-setting success as such can be easily detectable in certain cases. We can be sure, for instance, that an issue found its way onto the Commission’s agenda when a concrete EU policy measure tackling it exists. If it had not appeared on the EU’s agenda, officials would not have made the decision to develop a policy measure on it. The notions of agenda-setting (success), decision-making (success) and policy-making are therefore closely connected – albeit different in nature. Agenda-setting success regards the placement of an issue on the agenda but not necessarily other processes afterwards like successful decision-making (Cobb et al., 1976). However, once an issue entered the formal agenda of decision-makers it is likely to also be subject to decision-making. Successful decision-making on the issue, in turn, leads to the creation of an action plan, a strategy, a recommendation or the like. It thus leads to policy-making and finally a concrete policy.⁴ The following figure illustrates these connections (by simultaneously isolating the notions from each other):

Figure 1: Linkages between Agenda-setting, Decision-making and Policy-making



⁴ Note: That concrete policy is then again subject to ‘decision-making’, but not in the European Commission anymore. After the Commission proposes a policy measure it goes to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. Those two kinds of decision-making must not be confused. As this thesis focuses on the European Commission only, the researcher refers to the former kind (hence, decision-making within the Commission) and does not further elaborate on subsequent processes within other ‘big’ European institutions.

Roughly speaking, one could say that agenda-setting precedes both decision-making and policy-making (see also Bache, 2013). Decision-making and policy-making, in turn, say something about how the EU is governed. The final policy outcome then hints at what the EU will develop into or in which areas it will increase cooperation between Member States. Therefore, the whole process of agenda-setting, decision-making and policy-making gives detail about European integration. The EU is likely to develop (more) concrete policies in areas which it will further dive into. These linkages are probably the reason why agenda-setting success is often associated with general influence or power at the European level (see Tallberg, 2003).

Overall, it comes as no surprise that agenda-setting success is the product of a complex and often loosely structured process (i.e. agenda-setting) and surely not something happening by coincidence. Success as the final outcome depends on several factors, all revolving around people, problems, solutions, and choice opportunities – and all being “potentially uncertain. The scope of these uncertainties, however, may be reduced by a variety of contextual factors that serve to structure the process and constrain the range of potential variability involved” (Elder & Cobb, 1984, p. 118). Some of these factors will be presented in the following.

2.5. What Explains Agenda-setting Success?

Possible explanations for *success* are wide-ranging. Some focus on individuals and their strategic choices. Some stress the role of specific external events. Others concentrate on the institutional environment, emphasizing general barriers and facilitators to agenda-setting success within the system as such (Green-Pedersen & Wilkerson, 2006). What these explanations have in common, though, is that they all shape issues and influence an issue’s development.

The subsequent paragraphs will introduce eight possible explanations for agenda-setting success. These eight explanations have either been frequently mentioned within existing scholarship or appeared as most crucial and/or reasonable to the researcher when conducting the literature review.

Firstly, scholars commonly agree on the importance of issue framing in the context of gaining agenda status (see e.g. Elder & Cobb, 1984; Princen, 2009; Stephenson, 2012). Framing involves the intentional definition and redefinition of an issue. By underlining certain issue dimensions while downplaying others, a different truth or a different image may be created. This truth or image must obviously be credible and politically acceptable. Elder & Cobb (1984) explain that “the greater the agreement on the definition of a problem, the broader its scope, and the greater the moral outrage it provokes, the more likely it is to command a prominent place on the governmental agenda” (p. 123). In the context of the EU, framing can also involve what Stephenson (2012) terms “issue internationalization” (p. 799). National problems may be framed in such a way that they appear as community (and thus international) ones, calling for broader attention.

Issues may not only be framed, they (or rather their scope) can also be amplified. Conflict expansion is the second actor strategy influencing agenda-setting success. An issue

(or a conflict), through publicizing and politicizing, can deliberately be expanded to wider circles of participants (Princen, 2007; 2009). The more people are confronted with it, the higher the chance of agenda-setting success.

Thirdly, when aiming to achieve agenda status, recent incidents may be of help. Birkland (1998) explains that so-called focusing events can help advancing issues on the agenda and might even serve as triggers for policy reform. He describes them as follows:

“A focusing event is an event that is sudden; relatively uncommon; can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms; has harms that are concentrated in a particular geographical area or community of interest; and that is known to policy makers and the public simultaneously [...].” (Birkland, 1998, p. 54)

As focusing events always concern something dramatic, they arouse more awareness more suddenly as mere ‘topics’ like environmental protection or terrorism. They draw attention to problems which political actors will probably address within debates or meetings. For example, after the nuclear disaster of Fukushima in 2011, nuclear power and its dangers became the center of attention worldwide. Henceforth, power generation in combination with environmental sustainability appeared on the agenda of various international organizations and nation-states, leading to the introduction of the “Energiewende”.

Such incidents and also any other issue certainly require some backup. As the fourth factor presented in this section, expertise is essential for developing credible arguments and convincing either politicians or the general public that a matter needs to be dealt with. Expertise is usually provided by issue entrepreneurs and, hence, about securing organizational capacity. Networks both inside and outside of the EU can help foster expertise and additionally allow exchanging best practices (Princen, 2011).

A fifth explanation for success is general support. Princen (2011) explains that policy entrepreneurs basically have to convince (potential) supporters and at the same time discourage (potential) opponents – after all, “controlling agendas is about controlling participation” (Princen, 2011, p. 929). This holds true especially in the context of the EU, due to the Union’s complex decision-making structure. The more actors involved are in favour of a policy introduction or a policy change, the easier it gets for the issue to gain (high) agenda status. The most obvious starting points for acquiring support are political parties and the media. In this connection the ‘age’ of an issue may well play a role. History has shown that there is a great tendency to give priority to items which already exist for quite some time. Getting relatively new issues onto the agenda has proven fairly difficult (Cobb & Elder, 1971).

There is a sixth explanation for success which is connected to most of the factors mentioned so far. The EU’s multi-layer structure does not only provide entrepreneurs with various access points, it also offers numerous venues for issues to be discussed. Baumgartner and Jones’ (1991) theory of venue-shopping explains how actors strategically choose one venue over another (see also Stephenson, 2012; Pralle, 2009). They try to introduce an issue to the venue which appears most receptive to their claims and ideas. This, in turn, depends on the issue’s definition (issue framing), the conflict expansion, and also general support for it. In general, venue-shopping offers “an opportunity to keep issues on the agenda of government

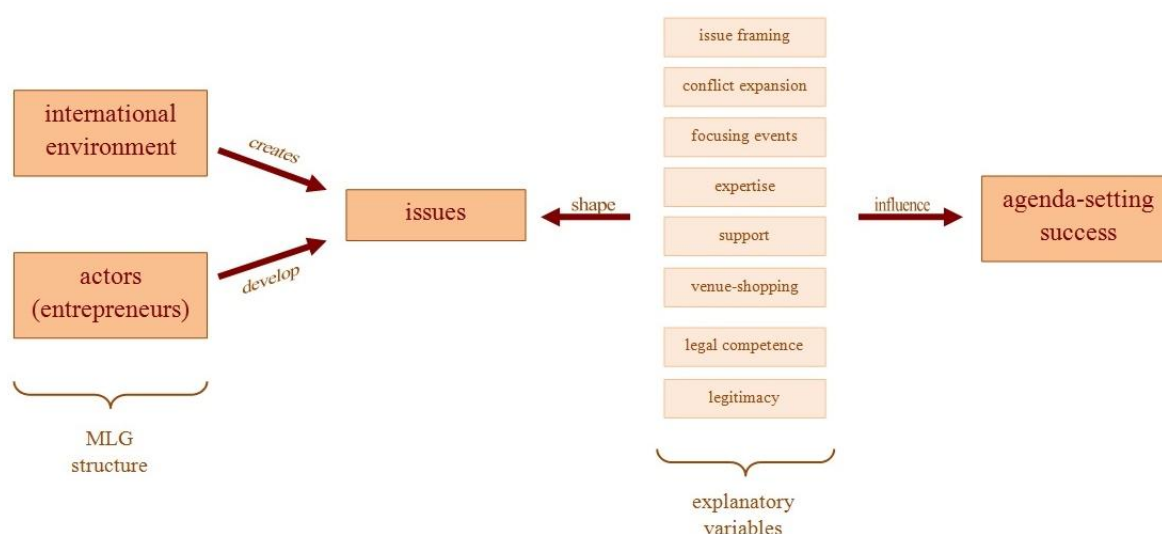
by shopping among the various governmental institutions and urging them to address the issue even when others are ignoring it” (Pralle, 2009, p. 797).

The explanations presented so far were all about what entrepreneurs (can) make of an issue, an event, a venue etc. There is one additional factor (overall factor number seven) which is directly connected with involved actors. Questions of legitimacy always play an important role within the EU. Entrepreneurs therefore need to do two things: (a) prove the EU’s legitimacy to deal with a certain issue, and (b) illustrate that it is the appropriate venue to tackle it (Princen, 2009). Whether it fulfills these aspects basically depends on the nature of the issue and the arguments provided by issue entrepreneurs. Hence, legitimacy is a rather informal explanation for agenda-setting success, as an issue can be regarded from various angles.

Last but not least, there is an eighth explanation for agenda-setting success which is not directly linked to the behaviour of actors or entrepreneurs. The prevailing institutional rules may provide particularly favourable or unfavourable conditions respectively for an issue to gain agenda status (Princen, 2009). Institutional rules in this context simply refer to the legal competence which the EU needs to deal with an issue. In cases where the EU does not have any competence at its disposal it will be difficult to call for action. Hence, the availability of instruments plays an important role, which is established in the EU treaties. From a theoretical point of view, this is a very formal explanation for agenda-setting success. Overall, this legal competence factor may not be confused with the previously explained one i.e. legitimacy. The EU’s legal competence to act is purely about treaty provisions, while its legitimacy to act is based on arguments.

When taking the eight factors for success together and linking them with what we learned about MLG and agenda-setting (hence, when combining existing approaches with each other), the following picture emerges:

Figure 2: Linkages between Issues and Agenda-setting Success in the EU



Issues are either created by the international environment or developed by actors, so-called issue entrepreneurs. Both ‘issue origins’ are rather broad of scope: the international

environment includes the whole global sphere, while actors may come from the supranational, the national or the subnational level (owing to the complex MLG structure of the EU).

After being created or developed issues can be shaped by various explanatory factors. According to existing scholarship, the choice of strategies and the behaviour of actors ultimately decide whether agenda-setting is successful or not, as do external factors (like e.g. legal competences). These external factors as such cannot be influenced by actors, but actors may well use them to their advantage. Entrepreneurs thus play a central role, because they are the ones who push something onto the agenda (or prevent something from appearing there, respectively).

Hence, several scholars have already addressed the question of why some issues manage to enter an agenda while others do not. What they omitted to do, though, was to present a common tangible framework (1) for the unique EU structure and (2) incorporating fixed variables which are likely to account for success. The subsequent section will fill this knowledge gap. By enhancing existing approaches it will develop a novel (theoretical) framework to explain which factors really matter in the context of the EU, why they do so, and what issue entrepreneurs need to take into account when striving for success. Later on, this thesis will test that framework and elaborate on its usefulness.

2.6. Beyond Existing Scholarship: Necessary Conditions for Agenda-setting Success

Section 2.5. presented those explanatory factors which were deemed most central with regard to agenda-setting success, including both actor strategies and external features. It was important to mention all of them in order to provide the reader with an idea of how agenda status may be achieved. We discovered that a variety of factors may shape issues and thus influence agenda-setting success. At this point, however, we need to get more specific and ask ourselves: Are all of those introduced explanatory factors equally important for gaining agenda status in the EU? The answer is no. Due to the unique structure of the Union, several factors always need to be present before an issue can appear on the agenda (otherwise the chance of succeeding technically equals zero). They are a requirement for success and can therefore be termed *necessary conditions* (c.f. Braumoeller & Goertz, 2000; Goertz & Starr, 2002) for agenda-setting success in the context of the EU.

Necessary conditions can be formulated in various ways but traditionally imply that a certain outcome Y only occurs in the presence of a certain factor X: “Y only if X”, “X is needed for Y” or simply “X is a necessary condition for Y” (Braumoeller & Goertz, 2000; Dul et al., 2010; Goertz & Starr, 2002; Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). A necessary condition usually represents an event or a situation, but may also be a combination of a set of variables. For any phenomenon there is a huge range of necessary conditions (Braumoeller & Goertz, 2000). These, however, do not guarantee that a certain outcome will occur; they only ensure that the outcome is generally possible. Hence, these conditions are “necessary but not sufficient” (Dul et al., 2010). Only in combination they can facilitate an outcome ($X_1 \rightarrow Y$ and $X_2 \rightarrow Y$ and $X_3 \rightarrow Y$ etc.). When multiple causal paths lead to the same outcome, scholars term this “equifinality” (see e.g. Mahoney & Goertz, 2006; George & Bennett, 2005). Equifinality, in other words, occurs when multiple independent variables influence the

dependent variable (see e.g. figure 2 on page 24 for the case of EU agenda-setting where multiple variables influence success).

Goertz and Starr (2002) emphasize that necessary conditions have always been important within social science theory. Does the same hold true for theories on agenda-setting? Not really. Surprisingly, necessary conditions have not yet been applied in this context – despite their long history.⁵ We therefore need a new interpretation of this concept, adapted to the unique EU structure.

So what constitutes a ‘necessary condition’ in the context of EU agenda-setting? Based on the traditional definition given above, agenda-setting success is only possible when certain factors are present. When reviewing the explanatory variables introduced in section 2.5. not all of them stand out as necessary conditions, though. All of them can have an influence on agenda-setting success in the EU but only some of them appear as real requirements for the same, and these are **expertise**, **support**, **legal competence**, and **legitimacy**. The following paragraphs will outline why these factors are treated as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success within this study.

Firstly, expertise substantiating an issue is a necessary condition for gaining agenda status because it is essential for developing credible arguments. Credible arguments, in turn, get serious attention as they underline the importance as well as authenticity of an issue (see e.g. Princen, 2011). Experts are the people who one turns to for advice; their opinion and judgment is what we rely on and trust in – both within science and within (EU) politics and within everyday life. A discussion about, for instance, drug trafficking would not make sense without considerable knowledge on the matter – knowledge offered by those people who somehow deal with the matter and have enough background information to stimulate a fruitful discussion on the same (in this context experts like e.g. policemen, physicians, customs officers etc.). Especially in a contested construction like the EU experts play a leading role as they foster values like credibility, authenticity and trust (Princen, 2011). Proposing a new policy would be pointless without having strong expert arguments. ***An issue can therefore only enter the EU’s agenda if expertise on it is available among EU officials.***

Secondly, credible arguments provided by experts are crucial for convincing others of a subject. In fact, support for the issue is yet another necessary condition for its agenda-setting success (see e.g. Princen, 2011). A group can always achieve more than a single person – this holds true for the EU just like for any other political system and even everyday life. In democracies the majority plays an important role; it needs to be respected and heard. Issue entrepreneurs thus need to look for support amongst fellow politicians, interest groups or comparable units. They need to assure that a majority favours the issue to be placed on the agenda; after all, the majority is ‘in power’. ***An issue can only achieve agenda status if issue entrepreneurs find and secure support for the issue.***

Thirdly, the EU’s legal competence probably represents the most evident necessary condition for gaining agenda status (see e.g. Princen, 2009). The EU as a political system is defined by rules; rules guide its actions. These rules are laid down in two official treaties: the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Especially the latter defines Union competences which determine any kind of action

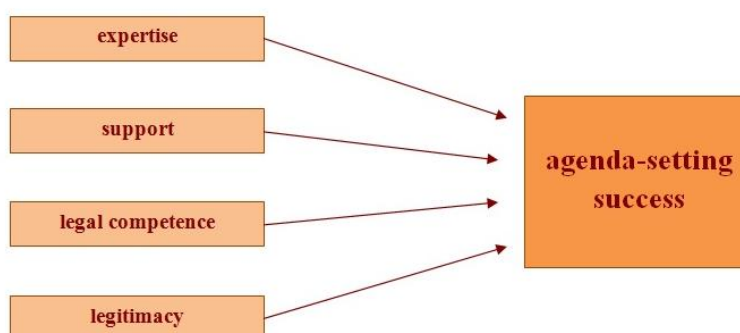
⁵ One may have heard phrases like “necessary condition for membership”, “necessary accession criteria”, or something comparable (see e.g. European Commission, 2012; European Commission, 2013a). When talking about agenda-setting success, however, no academic has considered necessary conditions so far.

the Union undertakes. If the EU wants to take action of any kind it needs the appropriate instruments. Hence, the Union's legal competence could be termed 'most necessary condition', if something like this existed. Technically speaking, of course, a condition is either necessary or not. But as nothing is possible without rules, this variable definitely leads the list of necessary conditions for agenda-setting success and should always be controlled for by researchers. ***Overall, an issue can reach the EU's official agenda only if the EU has the legal competence to tackle that issue.***⁶

The fourth (and presumably last) necessary condition for agenda-setting success regards the EU's legitimacy to tackle an issue. The EU always has to justify that it is legitimate to act in certain policy areas. This primarily depends on the issue interpretation of entrepreneurs and actors. Hence, legitimacy is a matter of arguing about or approaching an issue. This, in turn, depends on norms and values. Entrepreneurs need to ask themselves whether the EU has an (e.g. moral) obligation to act. This may, for example, be attributed to general Union aims or its role within the international community. ***In general, an issue can only enter the EU's agenda if the EU is proven legitimate to deal with that issue.***

All in all, those four necessary conditions will serve as independent variables within this thesis. The following figure illustrates their relationship with the dependent variable (i.e. agenda-setting success):

Figure 3: Conditions Necessary for Agenda-setting Success in the EU



The researcher assumes that the other four factors presented earlier (i.e. issue framing, conflict expansion, focusing events, and venue-shopping) have a much weaker influence on the dependent variable, or rather an influence of second rank. They will therefore not be considered within the analysis to be conducted. This is, on the one hand, because issue framing, conflict expansion, focusing events, and venue-shopping all relate to what actors make of a situation, how they see and exploit a situation – or simply how they frame issues, expand issues, use events, and venue-shop. As revolving around actor choices and strategies, these factors may be perceived and interpreted in different ways by different researchers, making them (and their analysis) vulnerable to researcher bias. Subjective interpretations do not help gain new insights into agenda-setting dynamics in the EU and weaken the whole

⁶ Whether or not there is an actual legal competence might be disputed. A discussion of this circumstance will be provided later in this thesis in the analysis chapter. At this point, based on the arguments presented within existing scholarship, we simply assume that the legal EU competence constitutes a necessary condition for agenda-setting success.

research in terms of both validity and reliability. On the other hand, it would probably be difficult to measure those rather subjective (and vague) mechanisms. At this point there is neither enough knowledge nor enough information available on these terms within the context of the EU.

How can we now measure those factors that we actually do consider within this thesis, based on the description and explanations provided in the previous section(s)? How did issue entrepreneurs use those four factors to achieve agenda-setting success in our case? Who were they? Exactly these questions will be addressed in the chapters to follow.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of those concepts most central with regard to agenda-setting success in the EU. It emphasized linkages between *agendas*, *issues*, *entrepreneurs* and *success* and developed a framework for analyzing these linkages, thereby filling a knowledge gap. It also related those concepts to decision-making and policy-making as well as EU governance and European integration, as these are key notions within common EU studies. Finally, it introduced and explained *necessary conditions* on agenda-setting success. Generally speaking, this chapter paved the way for the analysis to follow in chapter five of this thesis. It constitutes the heart of the thesis and further parts will probably refer back to it.

Chapter 3: Methodological Framework

3.1. Introduction

After having specified the conditions for agenda-setting success, the following chapter now aims to explicate the research methods used in this study for examining those conditions. It will start by elaborating on the chosen research design: a qualitative case study which tests hypotheses and builds on causality and deduction. The subsequent section will explain the case selection. It will clarify why exactly disability policy was chosen as the focus of study and what broader category it represents. Afterwards, the manner of collecting and analyzing data will be dealt with. A careful content analysis will serve as main investigation technique and will be supplemented with participant observations as well as expert interviews. Taken together, these methods should provide a clear picture of the agenda-setting success of disability policy in the EU. Finally, the operationalization of the main concepts will be tackled, thus showing how the (theoretical) variables embedded in this thesis can actually be measured. This section will be followed by a discussion of internal and external validity, which in turn will highlight strengths of the upcoming research (and possibly weaknesses as well).

3.2. Research Design

In order to guarantee the quality of a research project it is of utmost importance to clarify its design. This requires explaining what kind of a study is to be conducted exactly and what advantages this brings about.

This thesis employs a *qualitative research* with two main features: it (a) tests hypotheses and it does so by (b) carrying out a case study. Both aspects are closely connected and will be elucidated in the following paragraphs. Overall, it should be emphasized that the thesis aims to enhance both our theoretical and practical understanding of agenda-setting success and thus combines two approaches. Theoretical insights will be gained on agenda-setting dynamics in general, while empirical insights will be gathered for the case of disability policy⁷ (so one particular policy that successfully entered the Commission's agenda). In order to meet these twofold demands it was only logical to choose a qualitative design. A qualitative research generates a deep understanding of causal mechanisms and thus has the "potential for contributing to the cumulation of knowledge" (Levy, 2008, p. 2; see also Bennett & Elman, 2006; Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). Considering the circumstance that we know little about agenda-setting success in the EU, it appears as an appropriate approach to pursue; and hence as a convincing argument for choosing qualitative over quantitative research.

Another logical choice was conducting a case study (both against the backdrop of methodological considerations as just explained and the lack of empirical data mentioned in section 1.2.). Even though the usage of case studies within social sciences is highly disputed amongst academics, Bailey (1992) underlines that "public administration theory could not

⁷ Why exactly this case has been chosen will be elaborated in section 3.3. (case selection). More information on the case as such will follow in chapter 4.

have developed as it has without the theory building derived from case studies” (p. 52). Before highlighting their advantages and before explaining why employing a case study in the context of this thesis is appropriate and offers relevant insights, one first of all has to provide a proper (and narrow) definition of the term.

According to several scholars, a *case study* is a “detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 220; see also Hammersley, 2012; Levy, 2008; Seawright & Gerring, 2008). That “single example of a class of phenomena” is actually the *case* and may comprise an event, a group of people, organizational processes, but also a period of time or something comparable. It does not need to be a ‘thing’ or a piece of data; it rather constitutes a theoretical category (Vennesson, 2008). This category, in turn, is not naturally limited. Its boundaries stem from choices on certain pieces of theory, choices made by the researcher. Hence, researchers create cases; they are “casing”, as Vennesson (2008, p. 230) calls it. It is in fact this “limitation of attention to a particular instance of something” which is typical of a case study (Babbie, 2007, p. 309).

However, that bigger “something” (see above Babbie, 2007) or that “class of phenomena” (see above Flyvbjerg, 2006) may not be ignored. It is important to keep in mind that one usually examines something “as an instance of something else” (Levy, 2008, p. 2; see also Hammersley, 2012) when conducting a case study. Hence, the case belongs to a broader category, a broader phenomenon of interest.⁸ A well-known example of a case study is Allison’s (1969; 1971) analysis of the Cuban missile crisis. The Cuban missile crisis is actually not the ‘case’, though. As Levy (2008) explains, “different aspects of the Cuban missile crisis are cases of broader, theoretically defined classes of events, such as coercive diplomacy, crisis management, the operational codes of political leaders, etc.” (p. 2). So a fundamental question for a case study researcher to ask is: “what is this a case of?” (Levy, 2008, p. 2) This question will be further dealt with in section 3.3. on the case selection.

At this point we need to go back to the discussion of case studies as such and ask ourselves what advantages we have from doing this kind of research. Existing scholarship emphasizes several strengths when discussing (the value of) case studies. First of all, case study research is well-suited to examine a variety of complex phenomena – which are typical in the context of social sciences (Bennett & Elman, 2006a; 2006b; 2007). A careful analysis of small settings allows for the identification of ‘hidden’ or unique facets, and it may even uncover the circumstances of uncommon or exceptional events. Studying (complex) phenomena in detail also involves capturing complex causal relations. In fact, by closely examining particulars and thoroughly considering contextual factors case studies offer the advantage of “assessing whether and how a variable mattered to the outcome” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 25; see also Bennett & Elman, 2006b; Siggelkow, 2007). This, in turn, increases the likelihood of achieving high conceptual validity⁹ (George & Bennett, 2005).

Furthermore, a case study can involve various research activities and methods.¹⁰ By doing so, it can address a range of different research questions and may help understand theory-practice bonds which characterize especially Public Administration research. It can

⁸ Of course, there are also exceptions to this. For instance, one may describe idiosyncratic cases which stand alone and do not represent any broader category. Within this thesis, however, such cases are not of interest and therefore not further elaborated on.

⁹ A discussion of validity will follow in section 3.6.

¹⁰ An explanation of the research methods chosen for this thesis will follow in section 3.4.

provide a picture of extensive time periods or large contexts – which are both typical of social processes and human beings (Bailey, 1992; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In general, case studies pursue two objectives, just like all other types of research do: they aim to add knowledge and/or improve the status quo (Bailey, 1992). To this end, case studies may use distinct strategies. They may simply describe a particular phenomenon; they may test and evaluate existing theory; or develop and explain theory on their own (see Eisenhardt, 1989; Vennesson, 2008). The present research serves the second purpose; it may therefore be termed a *theory-testing case study*. In other words, the main focus of this thesis is the theory on agenda-setting (success). The case study is supposed to serve as a means of testing that theory.

With its theory-testing character this case study lays emphasis on causality and deduction. It moves from theories to observations, thus following a rationalist approach of doing research (as opposed to an empiricist approach which goes from observation to theory, hence focusing on induction). This is only typical of hypothesis-testing studies which generally have a theory-informing or even theory-confirming character (see Levy, 2008).

All in all, as explained above, the main advantage of doing a case study is the depth of analysis, while a missing breadth of analysis constitutes its main disadvantage. Like any other type of research it has strengths as well as weaknesses; it “can be done well or poorly” (Vennesson, 2008, p. 239). Every method serves a purpose, though, and researchers should choose what they consider to be the best option available. In the context of the EU, case studies have actually proven very useful and provided important insights into the Union’s structure and functioning. Bache (2013) stresses that they may reveal “overlapping national, European and other international policy networks through which ideas are developed and diffused that are key to understanding EU agenda-setting” (p. 22). That is exactly what this thesis intends to do: acquiring valuable knowledge which ultimately aids our understanding of agenda-setting success in the EU.

3.3. Case Selection

The previous section already mentioned that a case stands for a broader category containing several cases of the same sort. Hence, the goal of a case study is not only to understand the case itself but also the broader category the case belongs to (see Seawright & Gerring, 2008). The section to follow will explain which case and which category are to be dealt with in the scope of this thesis and why these were chosen.

Seawright and Gerring (2008) explain that academics commonly refer to pragmatic considerations (like time, money, expertise or access to data) when justifying their case selection. They further state that “these are perfectly legitimate factors in case selection [but] do not provide a methodological justification for why case A might be preferred over case B” (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 295). That is why researchers need to combine pragmatic with theoretical as well as methodological arguments when choosing a certain case (Levy, 2007). This is in fact what the researcher did for her thesis.

The focus of study (and thus the *case*) will be one particular policy that successfully entered the European Commission’s agenda. Choosing a *positive case* – i.e. a case where the outcome under study (agenda-setting success) actually occurred – was a necessary and

convenient step. The thesis intends to test a certain theory on agenda-setting success in the EU – and it can do so only if agenda-setting success really occurred in that particular case. Hence, the outcome constitutes some kind of prerequisite for being able to make inferences about the theory (see Levy, 2007; Mahoney & Goertz, 2006).

Moreover, George and Bennett (2005) explain that “cases selected on the dependent variable, including single-case studies, can help identify which variables are not necessary [...] conditions for the selected outcome” (p. 23). In arguing so, the authors hint at an advantage that also applies for the upcoming analysis. A positive case in the context of this thesis implies that agenda-setting was successful; hence, it appears likely that the proposed conditions hold. However, if one of them does not hold, the researcher is provided with a strong argument for disconfirming that variable – not only for the one case analyzed but also every other case. Selecting on the dependent variable thus helps examining whether certain presumably necessary conditions hold or not. This argument also plays an important role with regard to external validity claims and will be taken up again in section 3.6.2.

Disability policy was chosen as the case to be examined, referring to a policy measure which addresses the integration of people with disabilities in political and public life. This policy measure belongs to the field of social policy. Consequently, social policy represents the broader category the case belongs to. Measured against this category, disability policy constitutes a very interesting case. For the member states of the European Union social policy is a rather new area to cooperate in. Only since the Treaty of Lisbon of 2009 social policy constitutes a shared competence between the EU and the member states (Art. 4 TFEU). With regard to disability policy, the Treaty prohibits any “discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation” (Art. 10 TFEU). A similar provision can be found in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights. Still, the EU often appears reluctant to push through legislation which does not address ‘traditional’ cooperation fields like, for example, the internal market or the customs union (hence, economic policy). Due to the EU’s traditional focus in policy-making, it does not seem likely that an issue like disability policy enters the Commission’s agenda. However, we know that it did and we still expect our theoretical framework to apply. Its theoretical implications may therefore be of much more importance: if we can convincingly explain this rather ‘surprising’ case of success, we can probably also explain others.

In addition to these methodological considerations, some content-related (and probably pragmatic) reasons influenced the case selection as well. These mainly refer to the policy’s meaning or implications and have already been touched upon in the introduction. Overall, social policy represents one of the major issues to focus on in the (near) future (see e.g. Ferrera et al., 2002; Streeck, 1999). Especially the integration and inclusion of people of different backgrounds (may these different backgrounds be nationalities, ethnicities or physical conditions) will be a central issue for prospective policy-makers to deal with. It will not only require national solutions but also European (or international) ones. Keeping an issue like this on the agenda of political actors is actually essential because it represents a long-term problem requiring long-term solutions which, in turn, need to be incorporated in a multi-level governance structure.

Furthermore, over the past couple of years the issue has been given some more attention by policy-makers. For instance, the EU launched a European Year of People with Disabilities in 2003. The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in 2006 then brought about a paradigm shift regarding the conceptualization of disability or ‘the disabled’. Disability developed from a medical problem to a concern of law and human rights. Nevertheless, it may still be termed a rather ‘unpopular’ topic within politics. Why did it then manage to appear on the agenda of a political entity like the European Union? The thesis will subliminally address this question (next to the formal research questions), thus making the issue an appealing focus of study in general.

So all in all, a non-random selection has taken place. The case (disability policy) stands for a population of cases (social policy) and will thus not only offer concrete knowledge about itself (and its agenda-setting success) but will also allow drawing some broader conclusions. This is simply a consequence of conducting a case study; the initial intention of this research is still to test hypotheses about necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The upcoming theory-testing case study will primarily be based on qualitative data. In order to gather these, the researcher will make use of various data collection techniques. These will be outlined in the following.

3.4.1. Deductive Content Analysis

A *content analysis* is a research method which scrutinizes any kind of written text (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Weber, 1990). Even though it has been used in different areas of study for a long time (including social science), only few academics have commented on how to apply this technique. In general, content analyses imply a systematic, objective and comprehensive description of a phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). As the name already hints at, they represent content- as well as context-sensitive methods. Therefore, a content analysis very well matches the theory-testing case study to be conducted in this thesis, as both demand an in-depth study of contextual factors and thus highlight causal relations.

This thesis in fact employs a *deductive content analysis*, meaning that “the structure of analysis is operationalized on the basis of previous knowledge and the purpose of the study is theory testing” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109). Deductive content analyses move from rather general theories to specific observations, thus emphasizing causality. This approach fits the overall research design of a hypotheses-testing study.

In order to gather the necessary data and provide in-depth knowledge, official documents and articles dealing with the issue of disability policy will be reviewed and analyzed. The thesis will especially focus on reports, opinions and position papers prepared by issue entrepreneurs highly involved in the debate on a European approach towards disability policy. This underlines the importance given to entrepreneurs in this and the focus on ‘small’ actors. Especially interest groups like the European Disability Forum (EDF) or the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) seem to play a major role in this respect. Moreover, documents from other international organizations involved in or rather active on the issue will be studied as well. Next to the EU, the UN represents yet another important organization trying to improve the situation of people with disabilities, as does the Council of Europe.

3.4.2. Observation

During an internship at the German State Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia in Düsseldorf the researcher had the opportunity to study the two main issues this thesis deals with: EU affairs (in particular agenda-setting) and disability policy.

On the one hand, she accompanied, supported and worked for several Members of State Parliament who currently fill out either a position as German regional delegates in a European institution or a national institution which is directly connected with and relying on EU business. During various meetings on the spot in Düsseldorf she followed discussions about which topics the State Parliament wanted on the EU agenda, thus getting an impression of which factors national actors consider to influence agenda-setting in the EU. During various meetings in Brussels and Strasbourg she gained first-hand insights into EU business. She was able to observe EU officials while they were coordinating agenda-setting processes, as well as NGO officials while they were promoting certain issues. This gave her some kind of ‘feeling’ of the work, the actors, their motivations etc. in the EU.

On the other hand, she worked on a specific project dealing with disability policy in Europe. For this project she carefully studied the issue. She met representatives from different European lobby groups and examined their ideas and actions. This allowed her to gain extensive knowledge on the issue as such (both in a European and a national or rather regional context).

Overall, these participant observations had no influence on the things said during meetings or the subjects talked about. The researcher took over the role of a reserved and cautious observer, thus remaining in the background. Often the researcher’s presence even remained unnoticed. Since she neither had the opportunity nor a reason to influence the actors involved or topics discussed, the data obtained should be unbiased and valid.

3.4.3. Elite Interviewing

The third research tool to be employed is elite interviewing. It is indeed very common to conduct interviews when doing qualitative research. For case studies it is as much relevant as it is convenient.

Interviews may be carried out to support information that has already been collected from other sources; to highlight what exactly a certain group of people think; to expand previous inferences so that these regard a broader category; or to trace details step by step (see Tansey, 2007). Overall, it is their additive role which is most crucial for gathering data, as interviews “can compensate for both the lack and limitations of documentary evidence” (Tansey, 2007, p. 767); hence, for the limitations of a content analysis.

To this end, two things are of importance: (1) the researcher needs to have a clear focus on the components of the issue under study (like e.g. certain actors, events or processes) in order to know what to ask; and (2) the researcher needs to make sure that she questions the right people about those components and the issue in general. In this respect, the ‘right people’ mean the most important and influential actors with regard to the subject under study. The purpose of interviewing is after all “to obtain specific data to fill in a specific gap, and not to abstract to a wider population of interviewees” (Tansey, 2007, p. 771).

Both aspects have been adhered to with regard to the interviews held within the scope of this thesis. On the one hand, due to fundamental background knowledge, the researcher knew exactly what to ask and how to ‘guide’ the interviewees when digressing from the topic.

The interview questions were directly linked to the theory and/or methodology applied within the scope of this thesis.¹¹ Hence, some questions focused on theoretical notions (e.g. in terms of possible factors influencing agenda-setting success; c.f. annex II), while others explicitly concentrated on the case (i.e. disability policy; c.f. annex II). In some cases the researcher deviated from the interview guide, thus staying flexible and receptive to all kinds of answers.

On the other hand, the researcher carefully selected the participants¹². These were chosen based on either their connection with the issue under study or their understanding of and involvement in EU processes. This approach allowed for a balance between theoretical and practical insights, thus supporting the general two-sided idea behind this thesis. The researcher conducted a total of nine interviews. All interview respondents had distinct backgrounds in order to facilitate diverse answers to the questions asked as well as insights on the subjects dealt with. They should therefore constitute a representative sample of relevant respondents.

Moreover, the interviews were conducted face to face (only one was held via Skype). They were also recorded, making it possible (and easier) for the researcher to go through her material again several times when writing the final analysis. This also allowed for direct citing within the analysis (references include the name and the date of the interview), which in turn makes the whole study appear more vivid.

Overall, in posing the interview questions, the researcher stayed neutral. She did not mention anything about her own hypotheses or the knowledge gained so far. In doing so, she assured that the given answers would be free of bias or any comparable external influence; they were solely derived from the interviewees' ideas and understanding. That is in fact what made them so valuable and helpful for this study.

In sum, the function of the interviews was to (1) confirm or disconfirm the theory; (2) provide insights into the case under study; and (3) provide insights into the general EU business.

3.4.4. Triangulation

Since this thesis combines several data collection techniques, it applies methodological triangulation. Triangulation in general implies the combination of two or more research methodologies when studying a certain phenomenon (Flick, 1992; Jick, 1979; Thurmond, 2001). Methodological triangulation specifically entails the usage of different methodological approaches; hence, either different data collection methods or different research designs (Thurmond, 2001). For the upcoming study the former applies, as a content analysis, participant observations as well as elite interviews complement each other. Such an approach can be referred to as within-method triangulation (using three data collection techniques) with qualitative approaches (employing qualitative research methods).

Methodological triangulation allows the researcher to conduct both a broader and a deeper analysis of a phenomenon. To be more precise, it “has the potential of exposing unique differences or meaningful information that may have remained undiscovered with the use of only one approach or data collection technique in the study” (Thurmond, 2001, p. 255). That is exactly why the researcher employs it. By retrieving data from various origins, she hopes to

¹¹ For an overview of the interview questions please see annex II.

¹² For an overview of the interview respondents please see annex I.

gain more and more detailed insights into agenda-setting dynamics as well as disability policy in the EU. Combining distinct techniques may in fact compensate for methodological weaknesses, as these techniques can complement each other. A flaw of one may then be counterbalanced with the strengths of another (Jick, 1979; Thurmond, 2001).

All in all, methodological triangulation provides a way to increase a study's internal validity and internal strength. Simultaneously, it decreases the possibility of investigator bias (Thurmond, 2001). That makes it particularly valuable for the purpose of this thesis.

3.5. Operationalization

As we have seen, a wide range of data will be collected in order to test the formulated hypotheses. But how can we actually measure those explanatory factors proposed as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU, i.e. expertise, support, legal competence, and legitimacy?

The following section will address this question and tackle the operationalization of the four independent variables included in this study. That is quite a complex endeavour. First of all, it requires the researcher to provide a context-specific definition of each variable. Even though this might be difficult it is essential in order to clarify what one is talking about when, for example, analyzing 'expertise' on an issue. That context-specific definition probably includes certain indicators for the concepts (the variables) under study, as these concepts themselves are rather hard to grasp (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; see also Powers & Goertz, 2011). Hence, operationalizing variables also involves highlighting these indicators and, based on them, assigning scores to the single variables. Indicators and scores will later help the researcher argue that, for instance, a high or low degree of expertise was present in the case under study. Last but not least, the researcher needs to clarify the units of analysis – so those 'things' (or actors) to be examined later on in order to say something about the variables ultimately.

We will carefully review each of the four necessary conditions (i.e. the independent variables) in the following paragraphs. The dependent variable, in turn, does not need to be measured anymore. Section 3.3. presented disability policy as a positive case. A positive case implies that the outcome under study has actually taken place in that special case. We therefore know that agenda-setting was successful for the case of disability policy and do not need to elaborate on how to measure this circumstance at this point.¹³

Expertise is assumed to constitute the first necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. Before presenting a context-specific definition let us go a step back and review what literature generally says about the definition of expertise.

Cognitive psychologists have extensively examined this concept in areas like chess, taxi driving, algebra or medicine. Within these studies, experts were simply defined as people who perform particularly well in some domain. An expert chess player, for instance, wins a huge majority of her games and an expert taxi driver manages to bring her customers to their destination as quickly as possible (Krosnick, 1990; see also Hsu & Price, 1993). It is difficult

¹³ The agenda-setting success of disability policy will be tackled in chapter four, though, in which the researcher will provide more information on the case.

to find comparable performance indicators within politics, though. Scholars therefore argue that political expertise cannot be described by one attribute alone but only by a combination of them. Krosnick (1990) explains that political experts (1) show great interest in political affairs; (2) gather much political information (both directly by participating in events and indirectly by following the news); (3) pay close attention to the political information they encounter; and (4) reflect on the information they gather (Krosnick, 1990, p. 4; see also Hsu & Price, 1993, p. 672-673). To put it in very simple terms, political experts think and know a lot about ongoing politics which is why Krosnick (1990) refers to them as “political information junkies” (p. 4).

These characteristics are also important for the upcoming study of agenda-setting success in the EU, even though they need to be adjusted to the policy environment a little bit. Expertise is generally understood as the fundamental knowledge base which substantiates an issue (in this case disability policy). It originates from certain actors that acquired an understanding of the issue and think much about it. Based on this understanding these actors, ordinarily called experts, gather information about the issue which they ultimately provide to the outside world (either to non-experts as some kind of educational measure or to other experts with the intention of exchanging thoughts). Experts are usually people, but may be companies, interest groups or other kinds of associations as well (just like issue entrepreneurs; c.f. section 2.3.3.). Even though they can have distinct backgrounds, all experts get involved in issue affairs and show both interest and commitment to their field of expertise.

With regard to European disability policy, expertise can be measured by checking for exactly those attributes. Given that a great amount of information is available on the case, it should not be difficult to uncover the most important expert(s) who knew a lot about the issue and therefore became engaged in issue affairs. Hence, those people behind the fundamental knowledge base that shapes an issue are the units of analysis (either independent individuals or members of certain organizations). Their knowledge base can either be low, average or high, what will be assessed later on in the analysis.

Support is assumed to constitute the second necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. Just like expertise it is about dealing with an issue, even though in different way. Support is less about having much knowledge about the issue; it is rather about being in favour of it and therefore promoting it (either actively or passively). In fact, extensive knowledge is not necessarily required for supporting something (even though it should, especially in the context of policy-making). How many people support, for instance, a certain political party without actually knowing what the party’s ideology and objectives are?¹⁴

Just like in the case of experts, supporters may be interest or lobbying groups, NGOs or comparable entities, politicians or general advocates. They either promote an issue independently or because they are asked to do so. In the latter case it is usually issue entrepreneurs who draw their attention to the issue and thus stimulate their support. In the EU context one needs to keep in mind that support can have different origins. It may, for instance, stem from different levels, due to the EU’s MLG structure.

¹⁴ This is more a general example from everyday-life happenings and, obviously, not related to scientific research or this study.

For analyzing the agenda-setting success of disability policy it is thus important to ask who exactly supported the issue (those people, i.e. the supporters, are our units of analysis) and based on what motive they supported it (e.g. own interest, a request etc.). Every supporter can provide the necessary impetus for pushing an issue to important (higher) institutions and calling for attention. The intended analysis must consider every one of them and, in case existing, review their publications on the matter in search of favourable comments (e.g. publications of party groups/members, publications of Commission officials, or media publications).¹⁵ The latter will help the researcher argue whether support for the issue was low, average or high.

Both necessary conditions operationalized so far were directly linked to actors, as actors individuals are the ones providing expertise and support. The presumably third necessary condition for agenda-setting success, though, has a completely different background.

The EU's legal competence refers to those measures governing the EU; measures that have formally been decided upon by all EU member states. Uncovering these requires the researcher to have a look at the legislative base of the EU, meaning the major treaties (TEU and TFEU) which constitute our units of analysis. What do they say about the EU's competence(s) in the field of social policy and more precisely disability policy, if at all? Are there special treaty provisions demanding Union action? In this case assigning scores is a very easy task, since there either is a treaty measure existing or not.

Proving the EU's legitimacy to tackle an issue implies illustrating that the EU is the appropriate venue to tackle that issue, that the EU has the obligation to do so (next to the capacity, which is expressed through the legal competence). This is very much a matter of argumentation and interpretation. Therefore, gathering information about the EU's legitimacy to tackle an issue (which is assumed to be the fourth necessary condition for agenda-setting success) requires the researcher to have a look at the arguments of entrepreneurs, experts and supporters. These arguments will clarify whether and how they tried to legitimize the issue under study.

Since actions need to be justified, entrepreneurs need to prove that the EU is legitimate to undertake them. Whether they succeed in doing so ultimately depends on how they get their message across. Hence, actors play again a crucial role and constitute our units of analysis. They are responsible for expressing and demonstrating that the EU is weakly, moderately or highly legitimate to tackle an issue.

All in all, a wide range of data from various sources will be needed in order to measure the independent variables comprehensively. This will probably make the analysis very extensive (even though this is only a typical characteristic of a qualitative case study). As the operationalization of the variables represents an important undertaking, especially with an eye to the upcoming discussion of validity, it needs to be clarified once more. The following figure therefore summarizes this section and provides an overview of the variables, their definitions and their respective indicators (hinting at what to analyze for each variable).

¹⁵ Note: Studying support often includes reviewing voting patterns. Supporting an issue then equals voting in favour of it. Agenda-setting, however, does not include any kind of voting. That is why we will not have a look at this detail in the upcoming analysis of agenda-setting success.

Figure 4: Operationalization of the Variables

Independent Variable	Definition	Indicators (what to analyze)	Scores
expertise	the fundamental knowledge base substantiating an issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ gathering information about the issue ▪ providing information about the issue ▪ being involved in issue affairs ▪ showing commitment to the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ low ○ average ○ high
support	being in favour of and promoting an issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ speaking favourably about the issue ▪ writing favourably about the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ low ○ average ○ high
legal competence(s)	treaty measures governing the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ competences of the EU ▪ treaty provisions on social policy ▪ treaty provisions on disability policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ non-existing ○ existing
legitimacy	the status of being legitimate and the appropriate venue to deal with an issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ arguments provided by entrepreneurs, experts and/or supporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ weak ○ moderate ○ high

3.6. Questions of Validity

The subsequent section will entail a discussion of validity. By doing so, it will highlight general strengths of the upcoming research and possibly point to weaknesses as well. All methodological choices presented so far have implications for the analysis to be conducted and this section addresses these implications. It will start by considering internal validity, followed by external validity in a separate subsection.

3.6.1. Internal Validity

Case studies tend to achieve high levels of internal validity because they thoroughly examine and explain all details of the case (Bennett & Elman, 2006b; George & Bennett, 2005). Case studies take a variety of contextual factors into account and thus review causal relations.

This should also apply to the upcoming study, since it uses context-sensitive indicators for the measurement of the major concepts involved (see section 3.5.). The context here refers to both the general setting (the EU) and the specific case under study (disability policy) and the broader category of the case (social policy). All these specifics have been chosen deliberately. Being ‘close’ to a case implies having knowledge of it and knowledge, in turn, implies that one can better understand and scrutinize contextual factors. Besides, Siggelkow (2007) explains that “it is often desirable to choose a particular organization precisely because it is very special in the sense of allowing one to gain certain insights that other organizations would not be able to provide” (p. 20).

As a positive case was needed to study necessary conditions for agenda-setting success, the researcher accurately followed this line of argumentation (see also Bennett & Elman, 2006b). Due to her internship she already had much background information on it and knew what she needed to take into account. It should therefore be possible to analyze and measure what was really intended to be analyzed and measured.

3.6.2. External Validity

Overall, case studies are said to score rather low on external validity. They analyze (even though extensively) just a small setting and conclusions from the analysis can only be drawn for that one case ultimately.

However, even though case studies cannot generalize to other cases, they can generalize to the broader category which the case belongs to. As explained before, the intensive analysis of a single unit (disability policy) is not only supposed to aid our understanding of that unit itself; it is also supposed to help understand a larger class of similar units (social policy). Based on this understanding, a case study does not imply a simple self-contained investigation anymore. As Seawright and Gerring (2008) put it, case studies are meanwhile “about something larger than the case itself” and that case is in fact “asked to perform a heroic role [i.e.] to stand for (represent) a population of cases that is often much larger than the case itself” (p. 294; see also Hammersley, 2012; Levy, 2008; Mahoney & Goertz, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2010).

This also applies to the upcoming study. Conclusions will be made with regard to both disability policy and social policy – and agenda-setting success, obviously, as well. In fact, if the presented framework helps explain even a surprising case like disability policy, it may very well have an even greater theoretical value than initially expected.

Moreover, there is an intriguing nexus between case study research and necessary conditions. When analyzing necessary conditions it suffices to find one case in which a condition is not present to refute the theory about that exact condition (see e.g. George & Bennett, 2005). Hence, if one condition does not apply to the case under study it does not qualify as a necessary condition for other cases after all. This is a great advantage of combining necessary conditions with case study research and just in line with Popper’s (1953) falsification approach.

The upcoming analysis will try to follow these ideas. It will not be able to verify that a condition for sure is necessary for all other cases existing; it can do so only for the case chosen, i.e. disability policy. However, it can help refute a hypothesis. Collier (1995) underlines that eliminating some hypothesized cause(s) constitutes “a useful first step in causal analysis” (p. 464) and the researcher agrees. If the analysis reveals that one (or even some) of the factors proposed as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU does not (or do not) apply in the case under study, the hypothesis (hypotheses) on this factor (these factors) will be refuted. In order for a condition to be really necessary it needs to pertain to all cases sharing certain traits. This is a point where inferences about a wider population of cases can be made then.

There is one more argument for the (external) relevance of this study’s findings. As only few case studies have been carried out so far, this thesis will add some empirical data to existing scholarship. It will even provide data on a surprising and interesting case of agenda-setting success, as explained earlier.

Overall, this study already added theoretical ideas on EU agenda-setting and will probably present more within the analysis. So despite some obvious limitations it still represents a valid (and useful) study, both externally and internally.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to clarify the research methods used in the study to be carried out. It elaborated on the chosen research design, i.e. a theory-testing, qualitative case study, and explained the case selection. Disability policy was chosen to be analyzed because it (a) represents a positive case, (b) is a surprising case when measured against the category it belongs to (i.e. social policy), and (c) appears as an appealing focus of study in general. The chapter then clarified that a careful content analysis will serve as main investigation technique and will be supplemented with participant observations as well as expert interviews, both valued for their additive role in the context of case study research. Finally, the operationalization of the four independent variables was tackled. The chapter ended with a short discussion of the study's internal and external validity.

Overall, this particular combination of research methods is supposed to help the thesis offer valuable (theoretical) insights on agenda-setting success in the EU. Likewise, it will aid our (practical) understanding of disability policy as well as social policy in the EU. This dual objective actually conforms to an important observation made by Siggelkow (2007, p. 23): "it is much harder to make a paper interesting whose findings or conclusions only address theory. A paper should allow a reader to see the world, and not just the literature, in a new way."

Chapter 4: The Case of Disability Policy

4.1. Introduction

The following chapter will provide more background information on the case to be examined within the scope of this thesis. It will start by clarifying the most important terms and thoughts used when talking about disability policy in general. It will then elaborate on the idea of a European disability strategy. What is it about and why is it necessary, according to proponents of the issue? Afterwards, this chapter will turn to a particular issue entrepreneur, i.e. the European Disability Forum (EDF). Last but not least, it will briefly describe the issue's agenda-setting success. In this context, it will explain why throughout this thesis we claim that agenda-setting actually took place in this very special case (what made it a positive case as mentioned in chapter three). All these aspects will help to better understand the analysis to follow in chapter five.

One thing needs to be clear, though: as we are interested in the issue as such and its appearance on the agenda of the European Commission (hence, its agenda-setting success), this chapter will not describe the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 which was officially adopted in November 2010 under reference number 2010/EMPL/027. This policy measure was a consequence of the issue's agenda-setting success and portraying it would in fact belong to a study of policy-making success.

4.2. Disability: Definition, Views, and Matters of Concern

The terms 'disability' and 'disabled' are widely used in common parlance. But what do they actually mean? How are they officially defined? Whom do they address? What kinds of problems are connected to them? Or to put it very simple: what do we need to know when dealing with the subject of disability (or people with disabilities respectively)?

Throughout the EU around 15% of the working-age population are estimated to be disabled, meaning that at least one in six working-age Europeans faces some kind of handicap. In Eastern Europe proportions of persons with disabilities are even higher (European Commission, 2010a). Gathering data on this part of society is not as easy as it may initially seem, though, because there are different definitions prevailing in different countries. To begin with, there is no universal definition of disability in the international community and there is none in the EU, either. It represents a complex, multidimensional concept which lacks a neutral language for discussions (Altman, 2001; Degener, 2006; WHO, 2014). Even within single countries there can be contradictions. Taking Germany as an example, Degener (2006) explains:

"Like many other countries, Germany has various definitions of disability within its legal order. The concept of disability varies according to German criminal, civil, education and social law, to name but a few subject areas. Even within one legal subject area, such as social law, there is no universal definition of disability covering all social welfare and social security laws." (Degener, 2006)

With her study of the definition of disability within German and international law Degener (2006) only focuses on one angle to discuss the subject. Disability can be described from various perspectives, though, with law being just one of them. Other perspectives to define or analyze disability include areas such as medicine, economics, public administration or human rights. According to the UN, it may very well be that a person is classified as having a disability in one context or setting but not in another (United Nations, 2007; see also Altman, 2001). Moreover, it is not only the perspective (or policy area) which influences the definition of disability; this also depends on technologies and services available. Well equipped societies will probably also have well (as in more extensively) elaborated definitions prevailing (United Nations, 2007).

Overall, there are two distinct approaches of how to consider disability. One approach focuses on the medical dimension of disability (or in this case impairment), while the other stresses the social dimension of disability (ECOTEC, 2009). Within the medical dimension disabilities are directly linked with the people concerned and their health; those people are the ones being ‘disabled’. Within the social dimension, however, it is not the people who are disabled but their environment: “disabilities result from the failure of the physical and social environment to take into account the needs of particular individuals and groups” (ILO, 2007). Hence, society itself (with its norms, values, rules etc.) draws a line between ability and disability, thus creating some kind of benchmark for each person to be evaluated against (for further explanations see ECOTEC, 2009; ILO, 2007).

These distinct views, chosen and reinforced independently by nation-states, make it particularly difficult to compare different countries and their statistics.¹⁶ What all of the EU member states did do, however, was accept and ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in the late 2000s. This piece of international legislation, by now serving globally as a point of reference, includes the following description:

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (UN CRPD, Article 1)

Even though this formulation sounds rather open and vague it is the most commonly quoted paragraph when talking about international standards for disability policy. Besides, it combines both dimensions described above by recognizing that disability “results from the interaction between persons with impairments [the medical dimension] and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others [the social dimension]” (UN CRPD, Preamble, Paragraph e). This emphasizes the complexity of the concept again (see also WHO, 2014).

In addition to its multidimensional character there are two other things one should keep in mind when dealing with the subject of disability (or people with disabilities respectively). For one thing, the topic gains growing attention and becomes more apparent in everyday life than ever due to increasing proportions of persons with disabilities. According to both the EU and the World Health Organization (WHO), this trend can mainly be attributed

¹⁶ For an overview of which European countries adhere to which view please have a look at ECOTEC (2009).

to population ageing and increases in chronic health conditions (European Commission, 2010a; WHO, 2013). For another thing, one needs to be careful with the language used when discussing the subject. There are a lot of stereotypes connected to the term ‘disability’ which fostered a negative image of as well as attitude towards persons with disabilities over the years (United Nations, 2007). Vocabulary like ‘invalid’ or ‘handicapped’ may be perceived as offensive, and formulations like “wheelchair-bound person” or “disabled person” point to the disability even before pointing to the person herself (ILO, 2007; United Nations, 2007). It is therefore important to carefully choose one’s wording – not only to pay respect but also to overcome prejudices.

4.3. The Idea of a European Approach towards Disability Policy

The idea of a common European disability strategy initially may not sound as reasonable as other proposals for Union policy measures. Chapter three already pointed out that social policy constitutes a rather new field of cooperation within the EU and due to that a rather unpopular one (at least so far). Still, proponents offered (and still offer) a variety of arguments in favour of a European approach towards disability issues and emphasized its value for Union policies on the whole. The following section will present some of these arguments, thus clarifying the intention behind the idea of a European approach as well as the necessity of the same. In doing so, we will take up a supporter’s point of view.

European demands for a coherent disability policy followed the UN’s initiative of establishing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. At that time the issue was not yet on the EU’s agenda, but it had already been tackled by the UN. By signing the Convention, all EU member states as well as the Union itself committed themselves to the reinforcement of values and aims laid down in the UN CRPD (European Commission, 2013b). Hence, the initial idea behind a European approach towards disability policy was that it would complement national efforts and strengthen the UN’s approach to disability (which all member countries agreed on).

A European approach would not only underpin UN values, though, but it would also strengthen EU values. Human dignity and equality, for instance, represent central precepts within the EU and these require repeating whenever possible. The same holds true for human rights. The EU’s Treaties as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability and recognize the rights of each individual, including persons with disabilities (European Commission, 2013b; FRA, 2013). Therefore, the idea of a European disability strategy traced back to the EU’s foundation, aiming to protect fundamental rights and freedoms.

Furthermore, striving for a European strategy on disability issues fosters the general idea of social inclusion which has not only been on the EU’s but also the UN’s agenda for quite a while already. Policy makers need to make sure that persons with disabilities enjoy the same rights as others and are equally allowed to participate in society. Enabling people to make use of these rights is a cornerstone of active inclusion. In fact, this would accentuate that disability is a matter of (human) rights and not discretion (see European Commission, 2013c). Any denial of equality or participation may then be classified as a breach of (human) rights (European Commission, 2013b).

In reality, these legal provisions do not prevent that people with disabilities are worse off, though. The European Commission acknowledges that they “are poorer than other citizens of the EU, fewer of them have jobs, their opportunities to enjoy goods and services such as education, healthcare, transport, housing, and technology are more limited” (European Commission, 2013b; see also EDF, 2010). In another source the Commission explicitly states that those people are “almost twice as likely to be [economically] inactive as non-disabled people” (European Commission, 2013c). A European strategy could give the impetus to improve the current situation. Mainstreaming of disability issues would be the first step in trying to achieve that.

After having heard some of the arguments in favour of a European approach, probably one now raises questions on the necessity of the same. Why is a European strategy needed? Or rather, why is a European strategy needed for a matter falling under social policy and thus only shared competence of the EU and its member states? This question requires a rather theoretical (and probably subjective) answer. The following section therefore aims to give an impression of how issue entrepreneurs may argue. It will not analyze the arguments which were prevailing in this special case, though, as that will be done in chapter five only.

A European approach to disability issues would establish more legal coherence – both externally and internally. It would (externally) fit with international legislation like, for instance, the UN CRPD or earlier pieces like the UN’s Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948 or the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Council of Europe from the early 1950s. Internally it would not only take up provisions of the EU Charter or Treaties but it would also be in line with a number of existing policies which broach the subject. Measures on, for example, employment policy certainly refer to the situation of employing someone with a disability (may it be only through a non-discrimination clause).

Moreover, it has been proven in other areas, too, that a European framework can set things in motion. There are still huge differences between single countries within the EU in terms of their respective disability policy. A common approach can create institutional coherence by adjusting standards to each other and diminishing national differences. A strategy implemented at the EU level is probably the only way to achieve that certain standards are adhered to, as it creates some kind of pressure for member states to act (at least this is how EU policy makers usually argue when defending EU policy).

Overall, the adoption of the UN CRPD brought about a paradigm shift from a charity-based to a rights-based conceptualization of disability. The implementation of a European counterpart may intensify these thoughts. This, in turn, would only help to better understand the subject of disability and its social components (see Degener, 2006).

4.4. The European Disability Forum

When it comes to promoting disability issues on the European level there is one organization which particularly sticks out in the context of EU disability policy: the European Disability Forum (EDF). The subsequent section will therefore provide a brief overview of this organization and its most important traits.¹⁷

¹⁷ Note: A direct connection between the EDF and the case under study will only be made in the next chapter.

The EDF is an independent international non-governmental organization (NGO) representing the interests of around 80 million people with disabilities in the whole of Europe (i.e. the geographical Europe), of which 65 millions are citizens of EU member states (Access For All, 2010; EDF, 2014a). It is the only platform on this continent which is run by persons with disabilities themselves or their families respectively (EDF, 2014a). The EDF was established in 1996 and ever since then it has been advocating and lobbying for the rights of people with disabilities. It demands the full inclusion of them in society as well as an involvement in EU policy-making processes (EDF, 2014b). Therewith, the EDF aims to ensure a direct access to as well as the reinforcement of fundamental and human rights (Access For All, 2010). It gives special attention to people with significant and multiple disabilities, as these are often confronted with multiple discrimination. However, according to the EDF's website, it refuses "the out-of-date charitable approach to disability" (EDF, 2014b). The EDF's work is thus much about removing barriers (both physical and non-physical ones) and building a strong, united lobby for disability issues.

The striking thing about the EDF is that it has a wide variety of members all committed to defending the rights of people with disability, ranging from full members to observer members. Among the 54 full members there are national umbrella organizations of each EU country (or to be more precise of the EU-27 countries, Iceland and Norway), as well as various European NGOs dealing with disability policy from distinct angles. The 15 ordinary members include other European or international NGOs which somehow touch the field of disability policy with their work. The three observer members are agencies from countries which are candidates for EU membership. Another 38 associate members include small national agencies from all over Europe. (EDF, 2010)

The diverse range of members and membership makes the EDF an umbrella organization, covering "the whole range of disability from physical and sensory disabilities, over chronic illnesses and rare conditions, to intellectual disabilities and mental health problems" (EDF, 2009b, p. 3). In addition, it allows for extensive networking and the sharing of both experiences and (best) practices. In doing so, the EDF works under and promotes two mottos: "Visibility of Disability Everywhere" (EDF, 2014b) and "Nothing about Us without Us" (EDF, 2010).

All in all, these traits make the EDF not only a very influential actor with a great network for information sharing, but also a truly European entity. It is as much involved in EU policy-making processes as it is possible for an interest or lobby group (or a comparable actor). Being an umbrella organization leaves it at the forefront of all organizations pursuing the same goal (i.e. the full and active inclusion of people with disabilities in society). In fact, this is true as much for the European level (including both the EU and the Council of Europe) as it is for the international, in particular the UN level. That is why the researcher chose to focus on this organization as the main player in the field of EU disability issues.¹⁸

¹⁸ In addition, the EDF was among the few actors who immediately responded to the researcher's interview request and it was actually the one who took the most time for the interview, making it appear truly concerned and 'deep' into the issue.

4.5. The Agenda-setting Success of Disability Policy

Throughout this thesis we claim that there is a positive outcome on our dependent variable for the case of disability policy. In other words, we claim that agenda-setting really took place in this very special case of disability policy. But how do we know that?

Answering this question is actually very simple. In November 2010 the Commission, under reference number 2010/EMPL/027, adopted the “European Disability Strategy 2010-2020” (see European Commission, 2010b). As the name already hints at, this strategy incorporated a European approach towards disability policy. Hence, the issue (i.e. disability policy) must have found its way onto the Commission’s agenda beforehand – otherwise no concrete EU policy measure tackling it would exist.

This thesis concentrates on the period prior to the launch of this strategy (more or less mid 2009 until mid 2010), as those factors are of interest which ultimately led to the issue being placed on the agenda (recall that successful agenda-setting is considered a prerequisite for actual policy-making). Whether certain factors can even be claimed to constitute necessary conditions for agenda-setting success will be the subject of chapter five.

Chapter five will also assess whether and how the activism of the EDF helped push the issue onto the Commission’s agenda. Central in this respect was a particular proposal made by the EDF: the organization’s 2009 “Proposal for a European Pact on Disability” (EDF, 2009b). The idea behind the EDF proposal was to create a common framework for disability policy at the European level so that a clear long-term direction would be given to the subject and cooperation between Member States would be enhanced (Access For All, 2010; EDF, 2009b; EDF 2010). The EDF president, Mr Yannis Vardakastanis, explained that such a pact would ensure “real mainstreaming of disability in the European Union by promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and by developing a strong agenda engaging both the EU institutions and Member States” (EDF, 2009a).

The EDF Proposal is in fact the endeavour to be analyzed in chapter five. In order to promote the pact and to be taken seriously, the EDF took several steps which can directly be linked to the variables proposed as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success. Let us therefore regard each of them in the following chapter and review in which way the pact was connected to them.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter clarified the most important terms one needs to be familiar with when dealing with the subject of disability or people with disabilities respectively. It also gave a concise overview of an important issue entrepreneur and explained what actually constituted the agenda-setting success in the case to be examined. After having presented this information, the reader should be well-informed enough as to understand the next section: the actual analysis of the proposed necessary conditions for agenda-setting success, examined for the case of disability policy.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1. Introduction

The upcoming analysis will test the hypotheses on necessary conditions for agenda-setting success, which were formulated in section 2.6.2., for the case of disability policy. This chapter will therefore revolve around the four independent variables central to this study: expertise, support, legal competence, and legitimacy. It will assess whether they indeed constituted necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in this special case – or not at all, respectively. Both scenarios will have implications for the newly developed (theoretical) framework of how to regard agenda-setting in the EU.

Overall, the analysis strives for a balance between novel theoretical and novel practical knowledge. Theoretical insights will be gained because those variables proposed as necessary conditions originate from a new perspective on agenda-setting (success). The main research question in fact demands following such a hypothetical approach. Practical insights, in turn, will be gained about European disability policy and its broader category of European social policy. That is what the methodology asks for. Hence, by covering two major themes the upcoming analysis will aid both our theoretical and our practical understanding of EU agenda-setting dynamics.

Each proposed necessary condition for agenda-setting success will be dealt with independently in order to analyze whether it indeed constitutes a necessary condition or not.¹⁹ After closely having examined the four variables of main interest, the researcher will turn to one additional factor which probably had an impact on the positive outcome of agenda-setting success in this special case of EU disability policy as well. To be more precise, leadership will be proposed as a new variable explaining agenda-setting success in the EU. This variable is in fact connected with both the theory (the key words being MLG and issue entrepreneurs) and the case (the key words being the EDF) under study. By proposing this new factor the analysis will make up for eventual weaknesses of the chosen theoretical framework, especially with regard to the variables selected as the focus of study.

Overall, the reader should bear in mind that a variety of data and sources has been studied for the analysis. This will make it a complex endeavour.

5.2. Empirical Results

The subsequent subsections aim to examine the four variables which chapter two of this thesis proposed as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU. In doing so, the researcher will concentrate on *informal agenda-setting* (Pollack, 1997) and the *outside initiative model* (Cobb et al., 1976), as announced in section 2.3. already. Both approaches implicate a focus on issue entrepreneurs instead of institutions (hence, a focus on ‘small’

¹⁹ For clarification: An analysis of the dependent variable is not necessary, since section 3.3. presented the chosen case as a positive one. A positive case implies that the outcome under study has actually taken place in that special case. Hence, we already know that agenda-setting was successful for the case of disability policy (c.f. section 4.5.) and do not need to elaborate on this circumstance anymore.

actors). Entrepreneurs are in fact the ones to introduce issues *from below* (Princen & Rhinard, 2006) to Commission officials and decision-makers.

The structure of each analysis section will be the same. The sections will first provide some general arguments for the importance of the respective variable. These arguments are primarily derived from the interviews conducted for the purpose of this thesis. Afterwards the sections will explain why the respective variable was important in the specific case of disability policy. Therefore, the actions of the EDF and the consequences of these actions will be looked into. Overall, this approach is supposed to merge theoretical and practical knowledge, just in line with the researcher's intention as explained in the very beginning of this chapter.

5.2.1. Expertise

Expertise was the first variable proposed to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. According to the experience of a majority of the interview respondents, expertise is indeed essential for convincing officials that an issue needs to be dealt with. Entrepreneurs need to present sound arguments. Sound arguments, in turn, can only be provided by experts beforehand. The Commission in fact relies on expert groups, as they increase both the effectiveness and the efficiency of processing an issue (e.g. D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014; M. Töns, personal communication, July 3, 2014). These experts may have distinct backgrounds, depending on the issue and the situation in which the issue is to be promoted. One interviewee stated that NGOs usually play a leading role, though, since they devote particularly much time to the promotion of an issue; after all, that is their one and only task and reason for existence (J. Neumann, personal communication, July 3, 2014).

So what about the case of disability policy? Can expertise be deemed to have played an important role in this respect? According to what the researcher found out it can. Let us recall what expertise actually means. Chapter three defined an expert as someone (1) gathering information about a certain issue; (2) providing information about this issue; (3) being involved in issue affairs; and (4) showing commitment to the issue (c.f. the table at the end of section 3.5.). We already came across an actor who matches this description and for whom all these indicators pertain: the EDF. As an important issue entrepreneur the EDF obviously invests much time and effort in the promotion of disability issues. However, the work of the EDF goes beyond the work of a simple entrepreneur; the EDF itself also qualifies as an expert. It includes more than 100 associations all dealing with disability issues and is run by persons with disabilities themselves or their families respectively. More attachment to and direct involvement in an issue is not possible. Hence, by presenting itself as a point of contact, by getting involved and vigorously demanding community action, the EDF itself made sure that expertise was available to Commission officials.

That the EDF's expertise played a crucial role for the agenda-setting success of disability policy becomes apparent when examining the pact this organization proposed in order for disability issues to gain agenda status on the European level. The sheer fact that it compiled such a proposal already indicates its efforts. Within this pact the EDF emphasized that there was "no long-term EU agenda on disability that involves a clear joint commitment from the Institutions and its Member States" (Access For All, 2010). It criticized that all EU member states developed independent measures and lacked a clear focus in doing so. That is

why it demanded a coordinated strategy and the establishment of common goals (EDF, 2009b). This, in turn, could create peer pressure and ultimately lead to an improvement of the situation, according to the EDF proposal.

The pact shows how much the EDF dealt with this issue, how it followed up on EU policies (or rather on the lack of such policies, like in this case), how much the EDF wanted the Commission to talk about European disability policy. The pact proves the eagerness of this NGO, as well as the seriousness with which it pursued its objective. The EDF did not only offer information on the status quo, it also pointed to necessary actions and changes. For instance, the pact informs about certain areas which require particular attention by policy-makers; areas which are of importance for people with disabilities and in which they face (severe) discrimination and thus need to be supported. These areas were regarded within six key priorities: equal access and opportunities in education; equal treatment and access in employment; minimum income and social protection; freedom of movement; independent Living; and access to goods and services, transport and built environment (EDF, 2009b). In order to achieve these priorities the following steps should be undertaken: reviewing EU legislation; mainstreaming disability; defining common objectives; and closely involving organizations of persons with disabilities (EDF, 2009b). Hence, the EDF did not only inform about weaknesses within contemporary systems, it also proposed actions to address these weaknesses. These actions, in turn, asked for more commitment of actors involved. Only an expert for disability policy could have made such well-elaborated propositions.

Moreover, the internal structure of the EDF as well as its manner of working showed (and still show nowadays) a high level of involvement in and commitment to European disability policy. The EDF frequently communicates and interacts with two main EU institutions, i.e. the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission. Within the Parliament the EDF organized a specific interest group, the Disability Intergroup (DI), in order to stick to its approach of mainstreaming disability issues (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014). The DI is an informal gathering of (currently around 100) Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) of distinct nationalities and parties who want to promote disability policy during their term in office in both the European and their respective national and political party contexts (Access For All, 2010). The EDF organizes meetings of this Intergroup and proposes topics for discussions. According the vice-president of the EDF, Mrs Donata Vivanti Pagetti, the DI serves as the EDF's voice within the Parliament by bringing ideas of the EDF to the MEPs (and thus members of an EU government body).

With respect to the European Commission the EDF is in constant contact with the special disability unit within this institution. Vivanti Pagetti explained that the EDF proactively sends input of any kind to this unit (e.g. information, proposals, remarks etc.) based on the Commission's general policy agenda. In return the Commission invites the EDF to meetings of its High Level Group on Disability (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014). Since the EDF is the only NGO which is allowed to participate in those meetings, the Commission obviously recognizes its important role and its expertise in this field. Hence, the Commission itself sort of 'marked' the EDF not only as most important entrepreneur, but also as providing valuable expertise on the matter. The EDF's active involvement in promoting a renewed European approach towards disability policy was in fact very important for the issue gaining credibility and authenticity. As already

mentioned before, the EDF is run by people with disabilities themselves (or their families respectively) so these people could directly point to their needs.

Overall, there is enough evidence to summarize that this variable was of significance for the agenda-setting success of disability policy, since the EDF provided a high level of expertise to EU officials. The case analysis thus highlighted that it is not necessarily the EU official who secures expertise on an issue for herself, but that expertise is offered to her by issue entrepreneurs. This only strengthens the role of entrepreneurs in pushing an issue onto the Commission's agenda. Based on both the theoretical and the practical insights gained, the researcher concludes that expertise cannot be rejected to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU.

5.2.2. Support

Support was the second variable proposed to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. All interview respondents confirmed that support for an issue is essential when aiming to push it onto the Commission's agenda. They emphasized that it is difficult for single actors to steer processes. Single actors rather need to address the crowd and look for allies. Two interviewees explicitly mentioned that support is not only needed for agenda-setting success, but in general if one aims to achieve something at the EU level. According to the secretary general of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)²⁰, Mr Luk Zelderloo, "it is always important to involve other organizations, other networks, if you want to be successful here in Brussels". Another respondent explained that this process of looking for support is just a natural component of democracies: "In a democracy one always needs to arrange some kind of majority. The better such a majority can express itself, the more it can eventually achieve" (S. Engstfeld, personal communication, July 4, 2014).²¹

There are, however, many possibilities to muster support. Several interview respondents agreed that one may turn to various actors or places when searching for allies. These distinct actors or places in fact trigger different kinds of support. On the one hand, issue entrepreneurs can look for political support. The most obvious option is then to go to the European institutions and contact, for instance, MEPs or Commission officials. Another option is to get in touch with national governments and look for support from member countries (e.g. I. von Boeselager, personal communication, July 3, 2014; M. Töns, personal communication, July 3, 2014). On the other hand, issue entrepreneurs can address interest groups when needing support for an issue. Lobbyists are particularly important, since they engage in networks and can make use of these to spread a message (e.g. N. Esser, personal communication, July 3, 2014; S. Engstfeld, personal communication, July 4, 2014). Zelderloo stated that even NGOs themselves cooperate with each other in order to address as many activists as possible.

²⁰ The EASPD, next to the EDF, is another important NGO for disabilities issues on the European scene, yet focusing on the angle of providers of services for people with disabilities instead of persons with disabilities themselves. The EASPD's headquarters is located in Brussels.

²¹ Note: The interview with Mr Engstfeld was held in German. This quotation is therefore the result of the translation of the researcher who tried to stick to the original German statement as closely as possible from a linguistic point of view.

These activists, in turn, ensure that topics also reach civil society. Addressing the public is yet another possibility to stimulate support for an issue. In this respect it may be helpful to involve the media (e.g. J. Neumann, personal communication, July 3, 2014). A recent example for including the public into issue promotion (or actually demotion in this connection) would be the “Stop TTIP” campaign, a European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) aiming to hinder the EU from further negotiating any trade partnership with the US (see e.g. Mehr Demokratie e.V., n.d.; for general information see European Commission, 2014).

On the whole, despite these different types of support, issue entrepreneurs always search for strategic allies when aiming to promote an issue appropriately. This often proves difficult, though. As Zelderloo underlines, “it is about network-building, trust-building; it is about exploring views and options” – and this, in turn, implies a lot of work.

So what about the importance of this variable in the case of disability policy? Is there proof that the EDF managed to stimulate support when promoting a renewed European approach towards disability policy? And is there proof that this support was necessary for the issue to obtain agenda status? The previous section already explained that the EDF was actively involved on the European stage and had several contact points with EU institutions (actually it still has), like inter alia the EP Disability Intergroup and the disability unit as well as the Directorate-General (DG) for Justice²² of the European Commission. The analysis showed that the EDF indeed looked for supporters among these actors. Within its annual report, the EDF claims to have presented its Proposal for a European Pact on Disability “to all key decision makers” and that these meetings “helped to keep disability rights at the top of the European agenda” (EDF, 2010, p. 16; 18). Among these people were de facto Herman Van Rompuy (European Council), Viviane Reding (European Commission), László Andor (European Commission), Andris Piebalgs (European Commission), Jerzy Buzek (European Parliament), and Nikiforos Diamandouros (European Ombudsman; EDF, 2010). Hence, the EDF’s statements were justified, as all of these actors represent top-class EU officials and provided very valuable support for the issue.

The EDF’s active search for support did not stop at those high-class leaders by any means, though. The organization also turned to ordinary MEPs. In January 2009, the EDF together with the DI presented the Disability Pact to around 20 MEPs as well as a hundred of activists (Access For All, 2010). Ádám Kósa (HU, EPP), MEP and president of the DI, expressed the importance of the pact and the eagerness with which lobbyists promote it:

“I have a dream that persons with disabilities will finally decide for themselves. The full ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as the adoption of the Disability Pact by the EU Member States are the necessary steps to achieve this dream that I share with 65 million persons with disabilities in Europe.” (Access For All, 2010)

To substantiate this message, the EDF additionally encouraged its own members to get involved and promote the pact. That is why, for instance, also the spokesperson of the Swedish Disability Federation, Mrs Ingrid Burman, emphasized that the pact would be “a

²² In the past, disability issues fell under the jurisdiction of the DG for Employment and Social Affairs. In the meantime, however, they moved to the DG for Justice, since disability is nowadays regarded as a rights’ issue (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014).

driving force which will allow the EU and its members States to sail off to a barrier free Europe for persons with disabilities” (EDF, 2009a). As a consequence of these statements and the meeting described above, various MEPs called on the Commission to support the proposed disability pact, thus closing the circle and adding to the EDF’s initial pressure (EAPN, n.d.).

The move to involve own members, and hence an actor from the national level, only underlined the EDF’s smart ‘exploitation’ of its own internal structure (as already indicated in section 5.2.). This MLG approach was also followed when organizing meetings with, for example, the Prime Minister of Romania (Emil Boc) and Her Majesty Queen Sofía of Spain (EDF, 2010). By doing this, the EDF assured that support (and thus pressure) for its disability pact would come from all levels and angles possible.

At the European level the EDF made an effort with other NGOs. On the one hand, it cooperated with other social organizations like those representing children, women or the elderly. These groupings often face double discrimination and their rights need all the promotion and protection they can get (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014). By joining forces, NGOs can build a mutual support network and are more flexible in their work.

On the other hand, the EDF looked for support from within the disability movement as such. The EASPD, for instance, proved to be a valuable partner. The interesting thing about this partnership is that even though the two organizations often agree there is also a certain level of tension between them (L. Zelderloo, personal communication, June 27, 2014). This tension stems from a difference in perspective, since the EASPD focuses on the angle of providers of services for people with disabilities instead of persons with disabilities themselves (like the EDF). However, despite sometimes different opinions, they joined together for the sake of their common goal, i.e. the creation of a common European framework for disability policy (EASPD, 2013). The secretary general of the EASPD explained that this tension actually pushed the organizations to work harder and better. According to him, it is sometimes good to disagree when cooperating, because this manner of working ensures that the best outcome possible is reached (L. Zelderloo, personal communication, June 27, 2014).

Hence, support may not be equated with consensus. While cooperating, involved actors may very well have different views on the matter. They do need to focus on a common objective, but do not have to agree on the means of how to get there. Overall, the importance of inter-NGO cooperation and support was confirmed by Zelderloo when stating: “my drive for the coming years is to make sure that we reach out and that we work together with other actors in society; because today’s society is complex and if we want to change something we have to work together, otherwise it will not work.”

All in all, the case analysis showed that the EDF organized a high level of support. The organization did not only turn to top-class EU officials but also addressed ordinary MEPs, own member organizations, national officials, and other NGOs on the European level. Based on the huge number and also the variety (the key word being MLG) of contact points with possible supporters, there is strong reason to conclude that support was indeed crucial for the agenda-setting success of disability policy. In addition, the interviewees convincingly expressed the necessity of support for agenda-setting success as well. Hence, taking into account both the theoretical and the practical insights gained, the researcher concludes that

support cannot be rejected to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU.

5.2.3. Legal Competence

A legal competence to act was the third variable proposed to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. Again all interview respondents confirmed that this is indeed essential when aiming to push an issue onto the Commission's agenda, since law serves as the basis for every decision the EU takes. During a meeting of the Committee on European Affairs, the Minister for Federal Affairs, Europe and the Media of the German State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Dr Angelica Schwall-Düren, clarified that the EU can only act in those areas in which there is some kind of competence for EU involvement. If this is not the case, there is hardly any chance to become involved (Schwall-Düren, June 27, 2014). Hence, when aiming to promote EU action for an issue, one formally needs to make a connection to the EU's primary legislation (e.g. I. von Boeselager, personal communication, July 3, 2014; Prof Dr M. Kaeding, personal communication, June 26, 2014). Just like in any other legal system, the EU's competences may not be exceeded; formal agreements need to be adhered to. Zelderloo, as secretary general of the EASPD actively involved in European affairs, confirmed that the EU focuses a lot on legal entitlements – not only in theory but also in day-to-day practice. Therefore, issue entrepreneurs need to come up with strong arguments when demanding EU action.

However, it is very well possible to interpret the law, as there is often some leeway within the jurisdiction (e.g. D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014; Dr I. Wolf, personal communication, July 3, 2014). Prof Dr Michael Kaeding, professor of European integration and European politics at the University of Duisburg-Essen, explains that it is for example possible that the EU pushes through an environmental directive not by referring to a treaty article on environmental measures, but by referring to one on internal market measures due to specific objectives this directive is meant to achieve (or certain things this directive is meant to prevent from happening respectively; Prof Dr M. Kaeding, personal communication, June 26, 2014).

In the case of disability policy it seemed difficult for the EDF to find an appropriate legal basis for EU action in the first place. Social policy is categorized as a shared competence between the EU and its member states (Art. 4 TFEU) so the EU as such can only act in consultation with the 28 member countries. However, neither the TEU nor the TFEU explicitly mention a competence in the field of disability policy. In the TEU the term 'disability' does not appear at all. The TFEU, in turn, only refers to disability in the context of discrimination. Article 10 TFEU expresses the Union's aim to combat discrimination *inter alia* based on disability and Article 19 TFEU allows the Council to take appropriate action to fight such discrimination. If there is no direct link between the EU treaties (serving as the main legal basis for EU actions) and disability policy, which legal basis did the EDF then refer to when demanding a European approach towards disability policy?

The EDF was required to have a much closer look not only at the EU's primary legislation, but also at other legally binding (and involvement-demanding) arrangements, i.e.

EU secondary and supplementary law.²³ There were in fact some reasonable arguments within all these sources of law which justified an EU involvement in disability affairs, and it was the task of the EDF as the leading issue entrepreneur to find and present these to the Commission. First of all, the EDF demanded EU action by referring to other treaty measures which somehow touch upon or involve disability issues. As stated above, the EU aims to combat discrimination of all kinds, including discrimination based on disability (Art. 10 TFEU). This does not directly allow for a European disability strategy per se, but it does justify measures related to the protection of people with disabilities. Besides, Article 3 of the TEU states that the EU “shall combat social exclusion and discrimination”, making an EU involvement sound quite reasonable after all. During the interview, the vice-president of the EDF explained that the disability movement indeed started in the field of non-discrimination, as this was widely recognized as a competence of the EU. The EDF demonstrated that people with disabilities were discriminated against, thus giving the Commission a (legal) reason to deal with the issue (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014).

The EDF was provided with just another strong argument in favour of its idea of a European disability pact due to the paradigm shift taking place in the field of disability policy. Earlier in this thesis we argued that disability is commonly regarded as a matter of human rights nowadays. Article 2 of the TEU explains that the EU “is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities”. Protecting persons with disabilities is thus linked to a fundamental principle and a core task of the EU. This is in fact what several interviewees expressed as well (e.g. J. Neumann, personal communication, July 3, 2014; M. Töns, personal communication, July 3, 2014).

Last but not least, Vivanti pointed to yet another indirect justification for an EU involvement in the matter. The vice-president of the EDF explicated that the Union is supposed to standardize goods and services throughout its member countries. The EDF connected disability with this topic by, for example, pointing to the fact that accessibility is a big issue in this respect. If goods and services are to be standardized, decision-makers also have to take the needs of those into account whose situation requires a special standardization. For instance, it would not make sense to bring elevators within the EU on a common standard when these were not accessible for wheelchair users. Hence, when discussing minimum standards the Commission should also take such practical considerations into account. (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014)

These three examples (non-discrimination, human rights, and standardization) are supposed to clarify what kinds of arguments the EDF presented in order to promote its disability pact. All of them go back to primary legislation, even though EU primary law as such lacks a direct reference to disability policy. The EU apparently does not need to have an explicit competence for action; it simply needs to use the competences it has wisely. This implies that issue entrepreneurs claim some component of their topic of interest to be linked to the treaties (c.f. Prof Dr M. Kaeding, personal communication, June 26, 2014).

Arguments for an EU involvement do not necessarily need to be linked to primary legislation, though. There is also the possibility of referring to secondary or supplementary

²³ EU primary law comes from the founding treaties, while EU secondary law comprises unilateral acts and agreements. EU supplementary law, in turn, is meant to bridge the gaps left by primary and/or secondary law and includes for example international law (European Union, 2010).

law. In the case under study, for instance, the EDF justified the need for a European strategy on disability issues by drawing attention to an international agreement to which both the Union as such and its member states committed themselves: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).²⁴ For the first time in history the EU itself acceded to an international human rights treaty. The EDF regarded this as a “strong signal” to the member countries to devote more attention to disability issues and explained: “Such a political context implies a real need for coordinated actions. It is crucial for the European Commission to synchronize its disability strategy with Member States: the European Disability Pact is therefore the essential tool.” (EDF, 2009a) Hence, the EDF’s proposed pact was supposed to serve as a means to appropriately implement the UN CRPD. By signing the Convention, the EU promised to deal with disability issues within its own policies and the EDF used its pact to remind the Commission of this commitment (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014).²⁵

The importance of the UN CRPD as an explanatory factor for agenda-setting success was ultimately also confirmed by several interview respondents. From what the researcher found out, they did not regard it as a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the case of disability policy per se, but simply as an important component of the EU’s legal responsibility to address the issue.

Another possibility for proving the existence of some kind of legal competence is referring to previous EU policies or general EU objectives serving as a guideline for future actions. In fact, the EDF declared that its Proposal for a European Disability Pact did not only carry a huge value as such; it was also supposed to serve a bigger purpose, i.e. to serve as a means to accomplish the objectives laid down in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Europe 2020 Strategy contains the Union’s overall aim to encourage smart, sustainable and inclusive growth until 2020 and specifies certain measures of how to get there. The EDF’s pact was put forward as a means to meet especially the objective of inclusive growth (EAPN, n.d.). According to the EDF (2010), the strategy’s objectives can only be reached if persons with disabilities, representing around 16% of the working-age population in Europe, are considered within the measures of the strategy. Therefore, both the EU and its member countries need to “recognise the economic potential of workers with disabilities” (EDF, 2010, p. 22). Hence, by linking the proposal to the Europe 2020 Strategy (which is supposed to guide EU policy until 2020) the EDF also linked its ideas to the Union’s general policy agenda. This made it appear essential for the overall well-being of the EU and for improving internal consistency.

All in all, this variable is not necessarily about primary EU competences as such; it is rather about underlining the requirement to take action as the EU in a certain policy area based on some kind of legal arrangement. There are in fact different kinds of legal bases to refer to, with the EU treaties being just one of the. Other options include general treaty provisions which somehow touch upon the issue, and secondary or supplementary law (either international agreements or general Union policies). All interviewees agreed that the EU

²⁴ The UN CRPD may also qualify as another variable, i.e. an event which forces politicians to devote attention to disability issues on the EU level (see e.g. Green-Pedersen & Wilkerson). This variable has in fact been introduced in section 2.5. of this thesis. However, it was not proposed as a necessary condition for agenda-setting success. That is why in this context the researcher focuses on the UN CRPD as an international agreement (and not an event).

²⁵ The ratification of the UN CRPD was scheduled for 2011. The pact was proposed in 2009, leaving enough time for the Commission to think about an own disability strategy and fulfilling its commitment until then.

institutions have to follow the treaties and official agreements, but that these provisions can eventually be interpreted and law can be ‘exploited’. As a consequence, it often comes down to presenting the right arguments.

Based on the findings presented above, the researcher concludes that proving the EU’s legal competence to act was indeed crucial for the agenda-setting success of disability policy – but in a different way than initially expected. Presenting those legal arguments came in practice very close to what was referred to as ‘legitimacy’ within the theory. Hence, we encountered a theoretical misconception. Within the theory (as described in chapter two), legal competence is presented as something very formal, being based on institutional rules and treaty provisions. In practice (i.e. in the case under study), however, it proved to be much more informal. When taking together the theoretical and the practical insights gained, the researcher concludes that the third variable cannot be rejected to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. It should be treated with caution, though, in order to avoid future confusion. In fact, it should be viewed ‘broader’²⁶, i.e. in conjunction with legitimacy, which we conclude to not represent a variable of its own anymore. Analyzing this last variable proposed to constitute a necessary condition will therefore be difficult, as the following section will show.

5.2.4. Legitimacy

Legitimacy for actions was the fourth and last variable proposed to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. Chapters two and three, with reference to existing scholarship, defined this variable as the status of being legitimate and the appropriate venue to deal with an issue. Legitimacy thus comes down to providing the right arguments when demanding action for an issue. The previous section, however, characterized exactly these aspects as belonging to legal competence as a variable. The case analysis showed that in practice the legitimacy to act cannot be separated from the legal competence to act. This is attributable to the unique setup of the EU. The EU is a very formal and rules-abiding construct to the outside, so arguing for legitimacy always involves arguing that some kind of legal competence exists. In fact, when analyzing the latter the researcher indirectly already checked for the indicators which chapter three originally ascribed to legitimacy. Hence, it would not make sense to go into these again at this point.

Since one case in which a condition does not hold true is enough to refute a certain theory, the circumstances allow us to refute the initial hypothesis on this variable. Legitimacy on its own does not seem to represent a necessary condition for agenda-success in the EU after all, but needs to be viewed in conjunction with the third variable under study, i.e. legal competence.

That legitimacy as a variable of its own can cause confusion became apparent during the interviews as well. When asked about this factor, interview respondents gave different and above all rather vague answers. Some said that the legitimacy of tackling an issue was based on the issue’s connection with the EU; that an issue required some feature making it an EU

²⁶ This ‘broader’ character of legal competence as a variable influencing agenda-setting success may indicate that it is indeed the ‘most necessary condition’, as expressed in section 2.6.2. If entrepreneurs take as many steps as they can and go beyond strictly defined legal borders in order to prove the EU’s obligation to tackle an issue, then the general idea of providing some legal argument must be of utmost importance within the EU. This was in fact confirmed by all interviewees.

topic (e.g. J. Neumann, personal communication, July 3, 2014; N. Esser, personal communication, July 3, 2014). Others were convinced that legitimacy originated from reason and rationality; that it sometimes just made sense to tackle certain matters on the EU level (e.g. Dr I. Wolf, personal communication, July 3, 2014). Again others claimed that an issue needed to concern many people; that it needed to have an impact on them (like e.g. the climate change; e.g. S. Engstfeld, personal communication, July 4, 2014). All these proposed indicators for legitimacy as a separate variable are rather hard to grasp. Besides, they largely depend on individuals' viewpoints (for instance on a person's political party orientation).

However, when reviewing legitimacy in the context of legal entitlements, there is a clear focus in its conception which, in turn, can avoid confusion. Merging the third and the fourth initial variable can thus improve internal validity, or to be more precise construct validity.

5.3. Summary of the Findings

In order to avert any confusion, a table will provide an overview of the main findings. It will summarize both the theoretical insights (referring to the theory on agenda-setting success) and the practical insights (referring to the case of disability policy) gained within the scope of this study. Both theoretical and practical conclusions will then be drawn for each variable.

Figure 5: Summary of the Analysis

Variable	Theoretical insights gained	Practical insights gained	Conclusion
expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> experts provide important arguments both issue entrepreneurs and the Commission rely on experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EDF qualifies as an expert in the field of disability policy EDF gathered much information and provided it in its pact EDF interacted with the Parliament and the Commission (involvement + commitment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a high level of expertise was available among both the issue entrepreneurs and EU officials expertise cannot be rejected to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU
support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> entrepreneurs need to look for allies there are different kinds of support: political, lobby, and public support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EDF presented its pact to various EU-leaders + MEPs EDF ensured national support (member organizations + national officials) EDF cooperated with social organizations EDF cooperated with EASPD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EDF secured a high level of support among various groups support cannot be rejected to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU

legal competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ legal competences serve as the basis for every decision or action the EU takes ▪ jurisdiction leaves room for interpretation and argumentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ no direct EU competence for disability policy ▪ only shared competence for social policy ▪ EDF still demanded an EU involvement, based on (1) general treaty measures, (2) an international agreement, and (3) previous EU policy setting out general guidelines and targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strong arguments for a legal competence existed ▪ a legal competence to act is still assumed to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU, but this variable needs to be viewed 'broader' as initially operationalized
legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the line between the variables 'legal competence' and 'legitimacy' is in practice blurred ▪ legitimacy as a separate variable could not be validated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ providing arguments of legitimacy is closely linked with arguing for the existence of a legal competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the hypothesis on legitimacy as a separate necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU is refuted ▪ legitimacy forms part of the legal competence in the EU context

5.4. Beyond the Initial Hypotheses: Leadership as a Variable of Influence

After having examined the four variables of main interest, we will now turn to one additional factor explaining the positive outcome of agenda-setting success in this special case of EU disability policy: leadership. This variable is in fact connected with both the theory (the key words being issue entrepreneurs) and the case (the key words being the EDF) under study; only that is why the researcher decided to elaborate on it as well. Besides, it will help better understand the agenda-setting success of the case and thus help answer the last sub-question of this thesis in a more coherent manner.

From a theoretical point of view, leadership springs from issue entrepreneurs. Their importance was not only confirmed by existing scholarship (see e.g. Ackrill & Kay, 2011; Elder & Cobb, 1984; Kindgon, 2003; Tallberg, 2003), but also during the interviews conducted for the purpose of this analysis. All of the respondents underlined that entrepreneurs are the ones to initiate discussions about an issue and that their activism is decisive for successful agenda-setting. According to the interviewees, it does not even matter where an entrepreneur comes from (e.g. from a political party or a lobby group) or where she gets involved exactly (e.g. on the national or the European level); what only matters for agenda-setting success in the EU is her eagerness to arouse great attention for the issue and eventually enter the European stage with her ideas.

Hence, issue entrepreneurs play a crucial role within the process of agenda-setting. Why then should not their activism also explain successful agenda-setting? The leadership of a certain actor has been described as a facilitator of inter alia policy reform already (see e.g.

Bannink & Resodihardjo, 2006; Goldfinch & 't Hart, 2003), so it could very well also have had an influence on the agenda-setting success achieved in this case.

In fact, when reviewing the case study again, a connection can be made between the EDF as an entrepreneur and leadership. It is the EDF's task to follow up on policies and initiatives launched by the European Union, inform its members about these, generate proposals of its own, and draw attention to disability issues in general. Over the past years, these efforts developed into a movement called "mainstreaming disability" (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014). The term actually hints at the more popular movement of *gender mainstreaming* and is about raising awareness in every area which may be of importance for or which may touch upon the issue in some way, just in line with the EDF motto "Visibility of Disability Everywhere" (EDF, 2014b).

It therefore comes as no surprise that the EDF does not only play a central role within the field of disability policy, but also within inter alia social rights discussions (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014). This makes the EDF's work more complex and more difficult; yet it also makes it more influential and far-reaching. Since the EDF takes a lot of action to make a difference, it qualifies as a leader for disability issues. Even the European Commission itself identified the EDF as such. It supports the NGO financially and recognizes it internally as "the one entrepreneur for disability issues" (D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014).

All in all, the EDF's leadership can be argued to have had an impact on the positive outcome of agenda-setting success in the case of disability policy. This variable only caught our attention after conducting the actual analysis, though, so it does not seem to constitute a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. The researcher still found it important to elaborate on it briefly. In fact, this section did not only underline the role of issue entrepreneurs once more; it also underlined the complexity of agenda-setting dynamics. It is an intriguing field of study and can (even should) be examined from various angles, all providing new insights into EU dynamics.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter tested the hypotheses on necessary conditions for agenda-setting success, which were formulated in section 2.6.2., for the case of disability policy. The analysis showed that the European Disability Forum showed a great eagerness to push its ideas for a European disability policy, incorporated in the organization's Proposal for a European Pact on Disability, onto the Commission agenda. This eagerness was mirrored in the EDF's actions, which in turn directly related to the variables proposed as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success. The EDF gathered and embodied expertise. It included its knowledge in the pact and offered it to the 'big' EU institutions. It mustered support for its ideas by interaction with EU officials and ordinary MEPs. In fact, even though issue entrepreneurs do not necessarily need to be experts or supporters but only have to encourage them to get involved, the EDF as the leading issue entrepreneur was simultaneously an expert and a support of the issue in this case. This made it even more influential.

Hence, it was not very difficult to find evidence for the importance of those first two variables, i.e. expertise and support. All interviewees also agreed on this point. Since they

were confirmed, there is a chance that these variables indeed constitute necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU – at least no arguments against this proposition were uncovered when conducting the analysis.

Furthermore, the EDF argued for an EU legal competence to be existent. It could not directly refer to Union competences within the field of disability policy (not even social policy) because they do not explicitly exist; however, it could and very well did make use of different legal arguments. The EDF demonstrated that both general treaty measures (like e.g. non-discrimination, human rights, or standardization) and an international agreement (the UN CRPD) and a previous EU strategy (Europe 2020) all justified an EU involvement in disability affairs. In general, interview respondents confirmed that it rather depends on the arguments than the legal provisions themselves whether EU action is claimed to be legally correct or not. Providing the right arguments is also about proving that the EU has the legitimacy to take action. Therefore, the researcher refuted the hypothesis on legitimacy as being a separate factor influencing agenda-setting success. Legitimacy was found to be too closely linked with the third variable, i.e. legal competence. These should be treated as one factor in future studies of agenda-setting success.

All in all, the EDF appeared as the leading issue entrepreneur. Agenda-setting as a process, in turn, proved to be quite complex. It requires much effort and an early involvement by entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, it is a very important endeavour. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of data when studying agenda-setting dynamics, making it a rather non-transparent and sensitive area for studying. It should still receive more attention within academic research, as it can tell something about subsequent processes of decision-making and policy-making.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The following chapter will start by presenting the main findings of the analysis. These findings revolve around several central themes of this thesis: agenda-setting success in general; the variables proposed as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU; the role of issue entrepreneurs within agenda-setting dynamics; and the case under study, i.e. disability policy. Afterwards, the chapter will discuss theoretical implications of this thesis. It will emphasize its strengths and make a connection with existing scholarship. Last but not least, the researcher will present several ideas for further research. Again these suggestions revolve around exactly those central themes of this thesis which were mentioned above already.

6.2. Main Findings

This section will provide a summary of the most important results of the analysis and generally a summary of what was revealed within the scope of this thesis. Let us therefore recall the main research question this research project pursued: *What are the explanations for agenda-setting success in the EU?*

The researcher on purpose started with a theoretical question. Theory served as the main basis for this study and the researcher aimed to end up with some theoretical conclusions as well. The practical insights into the case rather served as a means to an end in this respect; as a means to support the theory. That is why disability policy is not mentioned in the main research question at all, but only in a sub-question.

Since the branch of literature dealing with agenda-setting remains quite scant compared to other fields of study, this thesis had a closer look at this concept. Chapter two started by providing some definitions of, for instance, *agenda*, *issues* and *issue entrepreneurs*. It then introduced possible explanations for agenda-setting success. Four of these factors (expertise, support, legal competence, legitimacy) appeared to have quite a strong influence on the concept; that is why they were proposed as necessary conditions for it. Hence, the aim of this thesis was to both explore these possible necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU theoretically and to test them for one particular policy case (thus checking whether they can indeed be deemed to constitute necessary conditions or not at all, respectively).

Chapter three explained how exactly this would be done, i.e. via a hypothesis-testing, qualitative case study, building on causality and deduction. Disability policy was chosen to be the case under study because it (a) represents a positive case, (b) appears as an appealing focus of study in general, and (c) is a surprising case when measured against the category it belongs to (i.e. social policy). The case, in turn, was meant to be examined by conducting a careful content analysis as well as participant observations and expert interviews. Overall, this combination of research methods was supposed to help the thesis both offer (theoretical) insights on agenda-setting success in the EU and aid our (practical) understanding of

disability policy as well as social policy in the EU. This dual objective was emphasized throughout the whole thesis.

The subsequent chapter offered more background information on the case to be studied. This information was meant to help the reader better understand the context to be analyzed in the following. Chapter five then presented the centrepiece of this thesis: the actual analysis of the proposed necessary conditions for agenda-setting success, examined for the case of disability policy. So what did we find out?

Three of the four proposed necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU were substantiated. Expertise, support and legal competence were all argued to be existing and of high significance in the case of disability policy. The last one in fact proved to be particularly important, as it had broader implications in this case than initially expected in the theory on agenda-setting success. Legal competence as a variable was presented as less ‘strict’ and rigid as it may initially sound. A legal competence is certainly needed in order to achieve something in the EU but there are in fact different kinds of legal bases to refer to, with the EU treaties being just one of the. Other options include general treaty provisions which somehow touch upon the issue, and secondary or supplementary law (either international agreements or general Union policies). These provisions can eventually be interpreted and law can be ‘exploited’.

When combining the insights gained from the distinct data collection techniques, the researcher is left with enough reason to believe that these three variables indeed constitute necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU. Of course we can never be certain whether a factor indeed holds true for other cases as well; we can only be sure that something does not apply. However, the expert interviews provided very strong arguments as to believe that all factors constitute necessary conditions also in other cases and, hence, in general.

Legitimacy as the fourth variable under study was finally rejected as representing a separate necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. It was found to be too closely linked to the third variable, i.e. legal competence, since proving the legal competence of the EU always involves providing arguments of legitimacy. As these aspects cannot be separated from each other in practice, they should not be separated within the theory either. For future studies, the EU’s legal competence to act should be defined by referring to (a) actual treaty provisions and (b) legal arguments on why it is legitimate to act (legal arguments which may refer to different kinds of legal bases, as indicated in the analysis). By uncovering this circumstance, the thesis actually helped dispose of a theoretical misconception prevailing in contemporary scholarship.

This research project uncovered yet another theoretical misconception. Chapter two, based on an argument presented by Princen (2007), explained that conflicts (as in opposing views on the matter) are crucial for the definition of an issue (c.f. section 2.3.2.). The analysis of this thesis showed, however, that this is not correct. In the case of disability policy there was one major idea on what should be done (the EDF proposal) and this idea managed to get through to the Commission’s agenda. Hence, there does not necessarily need to be a conflict; there only need to be active and committed entrepreneurs. It is always the issue entrepreneur who gathers expertise, who secures support, who argues for a legal competence; so it is the issue entrepreneur who makes sure that those variables assumed to constitute necessary conditions pertain. Issue entrepreneurs are therefore central for the study of agenda-setting dynamics; success and failure depend on their activism.

A general discovery made in this thesis was that the line between entrepreneur, expert and supporter is very thin, though. One must not confuse these terms; explicit definitions are needed to avoid an equation of them. The researcher in fact assumes, based on the obvious connections that exist between them, that expertise and support may simply be referred to as different facets of entrepreneurial activity (c.f. Ackrill & Kay, 2011).

As difficult as it sometimes seems to distinguish between an entrepreneur, an expert and a supporter it is also difficult to draw a line when studying agenda-setting. The borders of the topic under study are thin, sometimes even blurred. A careful definition of agenda-setting (or agenda-setting success respectively) is important in order to avoid confusion. That is why so much emphasis was put on the theoretical framework of this thesis. In the end, agenda-setting still proved to be difficult to examine. We ended up with analyzing just a piece of the puzzle (necessary conditions) instead of the broader picture. However, that is the first step of doing research within a rather unpopular and unexplored area of study. Before examining all, one needs to start with some smaller things, some facets of the phenomenon.

6.3. Theoretical Implications of the Thesis

The subsequent section will question the theoretical value of this study. In order to say something about this, we have to ask ourselves what this thesis offers and in which way it contributes to the prevailing literature.

The very beginning of this thesis hinted at several things which contemporary scholarship on agenda-setting dynamics lacks. Amongst these were a common theoretical framework, a methodological framework with no actor bias, and empirical data on the process. The present study fills exactly those knowledge gaps.

Firstly, the researcher developed a theoretical framework for analyzing the linkages between *agendas*, *issues*, *entrepreneurs* and *success*. This framework was based on both already existing scholarship and new connections made by the researcher herself. It even proposed necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU – an approach which so far has not been followed by any other researcher before. That the thesis also examined a case in which three of the proposed four factors applied underlines the general usefulness of such an approach.

Secondly, the researcher presented a simple methodological framework for analyzing success or rather the variables assumed to explain success. Within this framework itself there was no actor bias, but the analysis ultimately focused on issue entrepreneurs in general and not on a big player like the Commission (as was criticized by Princen, 2007; 2011; c.f. section 1.2.). That had more to do with the case under study, though, than this research project's initial methodological framework.

Thirdly, the analysis of the case then presented more empirical data on the process of agenda-setting and in particular agenda-setting success in the EU. It even focused on a surprising and interesting case of successful agenda-setting, thus presenting arguments which appear especially convincing for the broader context.

The last point hints at another advantage of this study (next to the three obvious ones). Since the theory was tested for a surprising case of success, its theoretical implications can be deemed to be of much more importance: if we can convincingly explain the case of disability

policy, we can probably also explain others. The analysis indeed provided strong arguments for the presented theory so we can assume that it is useful for further research at least to some extent.²⁷ An appeal at this point to fellow researchers would be to focus more on (a) surprising cases (like e.g. cases falling under social policy) and (b) agenda-setting as a separate process within the EU (not to be confused with decision-making and/or policy-making).

Yet another value of this thesis relates back to its methodology. Due to an intriguing nexus between case study research and necessary conditions it appears particularly interesting to combine these techniques. When analyzing necessary conditions it suffices to find one case in which a condition is not present to refute the theory about that exact condition. Hence, if one condition does not apply to the case under study it does not qualify as a necessary condition for other cases after all. This proved to be useful with regard to disability policy as the researcher was able to rule out legitimacy as a necessary condition for agenda-setting success in the EU. In doing so, the researcher actually followed Popper's (1953) falsification approach which belongs to the ground theories of how to conduct academic research.

On the whole, the researcher feels the need to stress the importance of the agenda-setting perspective for the EU once more. It may offer very useful insights. It underlines the importance of social processes (revolving around people and problems) for understanding decision-making and policy-making. These processes are often very static due to fixed rules and procedures. Agenda-setting, in turn, is more dynamic. This concept can therefore reveal "patterns of participation in policy formation [usually] obscured by a focus in decision-making alone" (Cobb et al., 1976, p. 138).

Finally, this research contributes to the prevailing literature by following a new approach for studying entrepreneurship. In contrast to other studies this thesis was less about entrepreneurs using or exploiting windows of opportunities (like e.g. Pralle 2009), but about entrepreneurs doing their job. Unconsciously, it dealt with questions like 'what does it mean to promote an issue actively and successfully?', 'when agenda-setting success is the aim, how to strive for it?', and 'what do issue entrepreneurs need to do and to keep in mind when doing so?' When examining the variables proposed as necessary conditions for agenda-setting success and their connection with issue entrepreneurs we automatically came across the answers to such questions.

As a consequence, the analysis does not only offer a theoretical value as such; it also helps understand the behaviour of issue entrepreneurs. The main findings are thus not only important for academia but also entrepreneurs, since they get to know what to do when aiming at agenda-setting success in the EU. Ackrill and Kay (2011) indeed explain that entrepreneurs cannot cause policy reform alone. The authors speak of certain "background conditions" (Ackrill & Kay, 2011, p. 76) which are required to achieve something. Even though the article deals with a different subject, the authors agree with the conclusion drawn within the scope of this thesis by hinting at the existence of certain factors which both explain a successful engagement and are directly connected to entrepreneurs.

Some scholar may argue that the (methodological) approach pursued in this thesis is rather weak. However, this section provided several arguments against such a claim by highlighting those aspects which made it an intriguing (and challenging) study, its major strength being the depth of analysis.

²⁷ Concrete ideas for further research will be presented at the end of this chapter in section 6.4.

6.4. Ideas for Further Research

It is in fact a pity that agenda-setting (success) has not received much attention within existing scholarship yet. There are so many things to explore and so many things that may offer completely new insights into European policy-making dynamics (of which agenda-setting somehow forms part, even though it is a separate process). Even small findings can add knowledge and aid our understanding of something unique like the EU. The following section will therefore make some suggestions for future possible investigations either in the (theoretical) field of agenda-setting or the (practical) field of social policy.

The most obvious thing to do in a follow-up study would be to test the theory developed in chapter two of this thesis (and revised in chapter five) for other cases; hence, to conduct additional case studies in order to underline (or deny) the usefulness of the framework. This would imply testing the hypotheses on the three remaining necessary conditions for agenda-setting success in the EU for other cases of EU policy-making. In doing so, one would need to choose positive cases again in which both agenda-setting and policy-making already occurred. After all, in order to apply the present framework and in order to compare those future studies with the present one would need to examine cases with a similar background. As Mahoney and Goertz (2006) explain:

“Ideally, an explanation of an outcome in one or a small number of cases leads one to wonder if the same factors are at work when a broader understanding of scope is adopted, stimulating a larger-N analysis in which the goal is less to explain particular cases and more to estimate average effects.” (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, p. 231)

Researchers could therefore conduct within-case and/or cross-case analyses, asking whether the same variables as used in this framework apply to other cases as well. This would be a crucial step for both theory-testing and theory-development in the field of agenda-setting.

Researchers could also try to complete this thesis’s approach. They may, for instance, expand the framework incorporating necessary conditions and add sufficient conditions to it. Another option would be to combine qualitative with quantitative methods of data collection. This thesis only focused on qualitative data and ignored quantitative data. When comparing several cases, however, such data could be incorporated in the study. This may create new kinds of methodological triangulation.

Moreover, new explanatory factors for agenda-setting success in the EU might be explored in future studies. Those introduced in section 2.5. are certainly not all researchers can come up with when dealing with the subject. What about, for instance, a correlation between national government interests and the agenda-setting success of certain issues? What about a correlation between the concept of (social) spillovers (see e.g. Ackrill & Kay, 2011) and the agenda-setting success of certain (social) issues? What about a correlation between facilitators to policy change (see e.g. Bannink & Resodihardjo, 2006; Goldfinch & ‘t Hart, 2003) and the agenda-setting success of certain issues? What about a correlation between the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the agenda-setting success of certain issues? All these factors have been touched upon within the scope of this thesis. They will be left to other scholars for an examination, though.

Interested scholars could also make a connection between different strands of theory. When conducting the research for this thesis, the researcher read a lot about ‘classical’ theories like, for instance, Kingdon’s (1984) multiple streams model. Even though she decided not to use them for the theoretical framework, other scholars very well could. This might in fact draw more attention to studies of agenda-setting. It may also help to better integrate the concept of agenda-setting success into discussions of decision-making and policy-making. The linkage between these processes is still a bit blurred and leaves room for further analyses.

Last but not least, one may analyze the effect of single events on the Commissions agenda – events like, for example, crises. Can crises serve as events triggering a change in policy course, as suggested by several interview respondents (e.g. Prof Dr M. Kaeding, personal communication, June 26, 2014; M. Töns, personal communication, July 3, 2014)?

All in all, there is still a lot of room left for further questions and analyses. Deepening these thoughts was not the task of the present thesis but it may be the task of upcoming studies. Researchers should feel encouraged to take up some of the ideas presented above – after all, “an open mind is good; an empty mind is not” (Siggelkow, 2007, p. 21).

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Annex

I. Overview of the Interviewees

Mr Stefan Engstfeld

Member of the State Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia
Member of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union
Spokesman of the Parliamentary Group of the Greens on European Affairs
Social Scientist
July 4, 2014

Mrs Nicole Esser

Staff of the State Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia
Responsible for Members of the State Parliament who are representing Germany in European Institutions
July 3, 2014

Prof Dr Michael Kaeding

Professor of European Integration and European Politics
University of Duisburg-Essen
June 26, 2014

Mr Josef Neumann

Member of the State Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia
Member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
Commissioner for Social Inclusion of the SPD Parliamentary Group
July 3, 2014

Mr Markus Töns

Member of the State Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia
Member of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union
Spokesman of the SPD Parliamentary Group on European Affairs
Political Scientist
July 3, 2014

Mrs Donata Vivanti Pagetti

Vice-president of the European Disability Forum (EDF)
Vice-president of the Italian Forum on Disability (FID)
June 11, 2014

Mrs Baroness Ilka von Boeselager

Member of the State Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia

Spokesman of the CDU Parliamentary Group on European Affairs

July 3, 2014

Dr Ingo Wolf

Member of the State Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia

Spokesman of the FDP Parliamentary Group on European Affairs

Lawyer

July 3, 2014

Mr Luk Zelderloo

Secretary General of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)

June 27, 2014

II. Overview of the Interview Questions

General questions

- Who are you?
- What is your profession/position?
- Which organization do you work for and since when?
- In what way are you involved in policy-making or decision-making at the EU level?
- In what way are you involved in agenda-setting at the EU level?

Questions on issues

- What do you think makes an issue more important than others?
- What do you think determines whether an issue is talked about or not?
- Which topics do you think will increasingly be discussed by the EU in the future?

Questions on agenda-setting

- Which factors do you think determine whether an issue appears on the EU agenda or not?
- Which factors do you think are most influential in pushing an issue onto the agenda?
- Which factors do you think are rather less influential in pushing an issue onto the agenda?
- How does your organization influence the EU agenda?
- Do you think your organization has a great influence on the agenda? If yes, why?

Questions on disability policy

- Why do you think did/does the EU tackle disability policy?
- What is the general importance of disability policy?
- Why is it important that the EU tackles such an issue?
- In which way did your organization promote the issue of disability policy?
- In which way did your organization try to push the issue of disability policy onto the EU agenda?

Questions on expertise

- How often is your organization consulted by EU institutions/bodies? How often do EU bodies ask for your advice?
- In which ways do you offer expertise to the EU? How often do you offer advice voluntarily?
- In what way(s) is your organization involved in providing advice/expertise to the EU?
- How much do you think is your expertise of value within the complex multi-level EU structure?
- Were you involved in the Commission's public consultation? If yes, how?
- Do you think expertise (e.g. of interest groups) is an important tool at the EU level? If yes, what for and why?

Questions on support

- Do you frequently contact other organizations/groups?
- Do you often work together with other organizations/groups?
- Do you consider it important to find allies for pushing issues onto the agenda?
- Do you think a larger group can achieve more than a smaller one at the EU level?
- Do you think support is an important tool at the EU level? If yes, what for and why?

Questions on institutional rules

- Are there any rules determining which issues are to be discussed in the EU and which not?
- Do you think the treaties are important in determining the kind of issue (or issue area) to be discussed in the EU?
- How important is it to know the legal base for an issue or issue area?
- Are you aware of the treaty provisions for your issue area?
- Do you use treaty provisions in order to support your arguments?
- Do you think rules are important at the EU level? If yes, what for and why?

Questions on legitimacy

- What issues can or should the EU tackle?
- When do you think is the EU the appropriate venue to discuss an issue?
- What makes the EU the appropriate venue for discussing integration policy?
- Do you use arguments of legitimacy when promoting your claims?
- Do you think legitimacy is important at the EU level? If yes, what for and why?

III. The Broader Picture: Agenda-setting Success in Retrospect

The introduction of this thesis claimed that “a better understanding of agenda-setting can aid one’s general perception of the way policies and decisions are made in the Union, as these processes – albeit different in nature – are closely connected” (section 1.1., p. 7). Of course academics always need to be careful when evaluating their findings. Some fellow researchers may claim that the findings of this thesis are rather minor, as agenda-setting success per se does not say much about EU integration or EU governance. However, the researcher has a different opinion. This section will explain how the results of this thesis may be integrated into the broader picture and what they may predict for future EU processes. As it does not directly fall under the focus of this study, it is provided as an addition to the overall study in the annex.

Agenda-setting as a process proves to be very complex. It appears quite difficult to get an issue onto the agenda, as it requires much effort and an early involvement by entrepreneurs. It is still a very important endeavour, though. What is even more important is that the issue stays on the agenda. After all, an issue does not only need to enter the agenda, it also needs to succeed in staying there and being decided about (i.e. becoming the subject of decision-making).

With regard to disability policy this was in fact the case. The result of agenda-setting success here was the Commission’s “European Disability Strategy 2010-2020”, officially adopted in November 2010 under reference number 2010/EMPL/027. Hence, one may assume that once an issue enters the agenda it is not easy to remote it again from there or to ignore it. Agenda-setting success in the case of disability policy triggered some follow-up processes: a public consultation of the Commission directed at both interest groups and ordinary EU citizens; decision-making; and ultimately policy-making. Such developments may hold for other cases as well.

Furthermore, the EU agenda may help to predict how the Union will develop. To be more precise, that an issue like disability policy entered the Commission’s agenda says something about EU integration. Some years ago it would not have been possible for the EU to deal with a highly social issue. The Union started out of economic cooperation; it then took over political aspects; and lately it started dealing with social or societal issues as well. Hence, one may claim that the EU will increasingly deal with social issues in the future.

Why does this seem appropriate? For one thing, the EU has no other option as to do so. We saw similar developments when cooperation expanded from economic to political cooperation. This process is often referred to as “spillover effect” within the literature. After experiencing political spillovers (or functional spillovers; see e.g. Stephenson, 2012) there may very well be social spillovers in order. For another thing, to foster European integration these social spillovers may even be needed – as a way of making the EU appear more ‘real’, more ‘human’, and as connecting it closer with its citizens.

Hence, at the end of this thesis we can actually go back to its beginning, to where we started with: discussions of European integration and governance. If an issue enters the agenda, the EU will somehow govern it and thus grow closer in this field (or not, respectively). All in all, this section may be regarded as an attempt to generalize the findings made for the case of disability policy to its broader category of social policy.

IV. On the Edge of Science

When conducting interviews for scientific purposes there sometimes remain statements which do not prove to be valuable for the scientific work one engages in, but which are really interesting and inspiring in a general context. I encountered some of these when conducting the interviews for this thesis and decided to mention them here. Most of them regard the work in Brussels or generally EU values. The following section will therefore provide a non-scientific excursus.

The EU does not build up debts. It only spends the money it has at its disposal. This is unique, as all other Systems (nation-states, regions, municipalities etc.) do build up debts.

– Dr I. Wolf, personal communication, July 3, 2014 –

Europe will not work with cherry-picking politics. If people want Europe, if they want open borders and free movement, then people need to accept success stories just like they need to accept setbacks, which are both part of Europe.

– J. Neumann, personal communication, July 3, 2014 –

If the European project is to have any chance of succeeding in the long run, if people are to conceive Europe as their very own Europe, then Europe itself not only needs to face and tackle social questions but it also needs to create a general social framework for the future. It is about time that the European Economic Community develops also into a European social community.

– J. Neumann, personal communication, July 3, 2014 –

Being part of the EU has a value as such, and this value is more than just trade and prosperity. That value is the right to speak and think independently.

– M. Töns, personal communication, July 3, 2014 –

If we want to defend and develop the democratic character of the EU, we have to make sure that fundamental rights are protected.

– M. Töns, personal communication, July 3, 2014 –

In terms of issue importance, the interests of ordinary citizens are just as important as those of industry.

– S. Engstfeld, personal communication, July 4, 2014 –

Whether we like it or not, over 75% of the legislation that is approved at national, adopted at national or regional level, is or is inspired or is a transposition of European guidelines, regulations, directives and so on. So if you want to have an impact on the broader picture, on where the frameworks are designed, then you have to have a voice here in Brussels.

– L. Zelderloo, personal communication, June 27, 2014 –

There is a direct link between the quality of a service developed at national level and many European regulations, guidelines, communications and so on. If we want to act in a professional way then we have to be represented here in Brussels.

– L. Zelderloo, personal communication, June 27, 2014) –

If we want to build a more inclusive society then we have to re-specialize providers, have to work together with organizations of persons with disabilities of course, but also with authorities at all levels, also with the business world, also with the health sector, with the educational sector. So my drive for the coming years is to make sure that we reach out and that we work together with other actors in society; because today's society is complex and if we want to change something we have to work together, otherwise it will not work.

– L. Zelderloo, personal communication, June 27, 2014 –

I don't think the competences will change. However, the EU also has shared competences with the member states. With the competences the EU already has it would be enough to guide national policies in the field of disability policy. The EU should be more active in those fields with shared competences.

– D. Vivanti Pagetti, personal communication, June 11, 2014 –