



Public Policy Evaluation in the Andalusian Government Agenda

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Abstract

This article examines the integration of public policy evaluation into the governmental agenda of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia from 2000 to 2024. This study is structured as a qualitative case analysis, employing a hybrid theoretical framework that integrates Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) with Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET). The research tracks the evolution of this technical instrument from a peripheral status to its increasing institutionalization within the political-administrative system of Andalusia. Utilizing documentary sources—including legislation, government programs, parliamentary initiatives, and political discourse—alongside academic contributions, interviews, media coverage, and specialized literature, the study identifies the principal actors, strategies, and contextual factors facilitating this transformation. The findings indicate that the incorporation of evaluation into the governmental agenda was not the outcome of a singular strategic decision but rather a cumulative and non-linear process. This process was influenced by policy entrepreneurs, windows of opportunity for administrative reform, shifts in political coalitions, and the emergence of an active epistemic community. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discussion on institutional change and underscores the analytical value of integrating theoretical models to explain agenda-setting dynamics in regional governance such as Andalusia.

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1. Introduction

Public Policy Evaluation (hereinafter PPE), when approached through a strategic and reflexive lens, plays a fundamental role in the modernization and transformation of public administration, fostering deeper democratic engagement and institutional legitimacy (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024). Its global expansion has been mirrored by burgeoning academic interest in deciphering the methodologies employed and their subsequent effects on public management. Furthermore, scholarly attention has focused on the political and institutional conditions that dictate how and why certain issues ascend the policy agenda—achieving the visibility and consensus necessary to become public priorities—as well as the underlying logic governing their adoption and consolidation across diverse contexts. In this regard, the literature suggests that the integration of evaluation into governmental agendas does not follow a uniform pattern¹ (Trías and Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024; Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024); rather, it is contingent upon specific dynamics, including political balances, administrative cultures, and the presence or absence of active epistemic communities.

This article focuses on the case of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, where evaluation has progressively assumed a prominent role within the governmental agenda over the 2000–2024 period. This trajectory gained particular momentum after 2015 with the design and implementation of a strategy to institutionalize PPE within the Regional Government of Andalusia (hereinafter JdA, for its Spanish initials *Junta de Andalucía*). Far from being a linear progression, this path has been characterized by distinct phases shaped by a myriad of internal and external factors. These include the necessity to adapt to interruptions and changes in the political, economic and social environment (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024), the strategic agency of key actors, and the exploitation of windows of opportunity arising from administrative reforms and specific political junctures.

The public policy analysis approach, rooted in political science and public administration, facilitates the study of public decisions—their motivations, processes, content, and impacts—serving both a scientific function (advancing knowledge) and a political function (optimizing decision-making) (Fontaine, 2015; Harguindéguy, 2020). By adopting a hybrid theoretical framework that synthesizes Kingdon's (1984, 1995) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) and Baumgartner and Jones's (1993) Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET), this study analyzes the incremental ascent of PPE on the Andalusian governmental agenda. It examines the dynamics of change to identify the mechanisms that have either facilitated or hindered the institutionalization of PPE as a core object of government action. This article draws upon doctoral research into public management innovation in Andalusia, integrating documentary analysis with qualitative interviews and a review of secondary sources.

The Andalusian case is particularly salient for several reasons. First, it serves as a revealing—and influential—case (Seawright and Gerring, 2008) with significant theoretical and practical implications; it provides a clear vantage point from which to observe a process of political-institutional change that remains under-documented within the Spanish

¹In recent years, the institutionalization of evaluation has gained significant momentum among public officials and decision-makers, as reflected by its rising prominence on the political agenda. This shift has catalyzed substantive regional initiatives that enhance transparency and provide a robust empirical foundation for policy design, establishing evaluation as a cornerstone of contemporary public management.

subnational context. As an Autonomous Community with extensive competencies in policy planning and management, Andalusia offers a privileged field for analyzing agenda-setting dynamics. Second, recent years have witnessed an intensification of the political-administrative discourse regarding the quality of strategic planning and the modernization of public management, within which evaluation is increasingly assuming a structural role.

Analyzing this trajectory elucidates how a traditionally peripheral technical instrument begins its consolidation within the institutional agenda. This provides a unique opportunity to study the conditions under which evaluation can act as a catalyst for policy transformation. Consequently, the Andalusian case contributes empirical depth and theoretical refinement to our understanding of agenda-setting mechanisms in decentralized contexts, offering insights applicable to comparative research and the design of promotional strategies in other regions.

The article is organized into five sections. First, it establishes the theoretical framework by integrating MSF and PET. Second, it details the methodology and the rationale for the case selection. The third section provides the empirical analysis, focusing on the entry of PPE into the agenda and addressing key questions: How did the agenda-setting process unfold? What mechanisms shaped the development of the case? Which internal and external determinants influenced decision-making, and who were the primary actors? This is followed by a discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical framework. Finally, the conclusions summarize the study's contributions and discuss implications for future research.

2. Theoretical framework and analytical structure

The literature on public policy analysis has produced diverse approaches to understanding how specific problems, proposals, or instruments are integrated into the governmental agenda while others remain marginalized. To analyze the institutionalization of PPE within the JdA, this study employs two of the most robust and widely recognized theoretical frameworks² in the field (Weible & Sabatier, 2017): 1) Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) (1984, 1995) and 2) Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) (1993). These frameworks offer a complementary lens, allowing for a multi-dimensional analysis of the Andalusian case from distinct yet intersecting perspectives.

Next, we briefly outline the key conceptual elements and how they can be applied to the analysis of the case under study.

²The theoretical-conceptual framework refers to the set of ideas, concepts, and approaches that provide the context and conceptual basis for a research study, though they do not necessarily offer exhaustive specific explanations.

2.1. The Multiple Streams Framework (MSF): Windows of Opportunity and Policy Entrepreneurs

The MSF focuses on the origins of policy and the mechanisms through which issues ascend to the status of government priorities. While originally designed to explain agenda-setting, it has been extended to other phases of the policy cycle (Zahariadis, 2010). This framework elucidates how governments make decisions under conditions of ambiguity—defined as the coexistence of multiple, often conflicting, interpretations of complex situations (Herweg et al., 2018; Hoefer, 2022; Kingdon, 1984, 1995; Zahariadis, 2007, 2010).

At the core of this framework is the Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice (Cohen et al., 1972), which views the policy process as a highly dynamic system³ where participants, problems, and solutions circulate with no inherent linear connection (Sabatier, 2010). From this perspective, the entry of an issue onto the agenda depends on the convergence of different streams flowing within the system (problems, public policies, and politics) at a given time when opportune conditions arise (windows of opportunity). If these three streams couple within a window of opportunity, agenda entry or public policy change is highly likely to occur and may even extend to other related policy areas. This allows for the connection of interested actors (entrepreneurs) seeking to promote a specific issue (new or pre-existing) or policy (an alternative solution to potential or existing problems) so that it may be considered and adopted by public officials.

According to Kingdon, when these three streams align during a window of opportunity, a policy change becomes highly probable. This alignment is often facilitated by policy entrepreneurs—strategic actors willing to invest resources to promote specific solutions and "couple" the streams when the window opens.

In applying MSF to the Andalusian case, the analysis focuses on (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024, p.124): 1) Identifying the specific streams affecting the case (problems, proposals, and political context); 2) Analyzing each stream individually to understand its nature and impact; 3) Detecting the opening of a policy window; 4) Identifying the entrepreneurs involved and their strategic roles; and 5) Examining the coupling process between streams facilitated by these actors.

2.2. Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET): Stability and Dynamics of Change

For its part, PET contends that public policies typically remain relatively stable over long periods (equilibrium), sustained by two mechanisms: a dominant institutional configuration surrounding the policy that privileges a specific group of actors, and the control of the policy image, which prevents interference from actors outside that subsystem. From this perspective, policy images play a pivotal role; their control is essential for ensuring policy stability, while their transformation is necessary if the objective is to drive change.

³While MSF does not focus as explicitly on the policy subsystem as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) or PET, the dynamics within the subsystem remain central. Ultimately, policy entrepreneurs and the problem and policy streams are inherent elements of the subsystem, although the politics stream is frequently associated with macro-political shifts.

Thus, while accounting for stability, PET explains why agenda changes occur which rarely happen in a linear or continuous fashion, but instead tend to take place suddenly and within relatively short timeframes (abrupt changes). These shifts are driven by political, economic, and social factors that mobilize enthusiasm or trigger conflict expansion mechanisms beyond the subsystem by specific actors facing the need to address emerging problems or respond to citizen demands.

Applying PET to the object of study requires the ability to (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024, p.126): 1) Identify the prior state of equilibrium that has been disrupted and, where applicable, the elements contributing to its maintenance that is, which factors sustain its stability. Did a policy monopoly exist? If so, how did it manifest? 2) Identify the mechanisms that triggered the breakdown of that equilibrium (mobilization of enthusiasm or conflict expansion). In this sense, it is necessary to analyze how the equilibrium was affected to answer: what decisions altered the status quo? How and by whom were these decisions made? What is the balance of power within the subsystem? Which actors are involved, and how do they interact?

2.3. Proposed Analytical Framework: The Coupling and Rupture Model (MAR)

This research proposes an integrated analytical framework that transcends the individual application of the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) and Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET). While both theories offer valuable insights into policy formulation, their synthesis into a hybrid model—hereafter referred to as the Coupling and Rupture Model (Modelo de Acoplamiento y Ruptura, MAR)—enables a more comprehensive explanation of the dynamics of change surrounding the institutionalization of PPE in Andalusia. By integrating key concepts from both frameworks, the MAR provides a robust tool for achieving a contextualized understanding of complex phenomena that do not follow linear or predictable trajectories, thereby fostering deeper critical reflection.

The justification for this integration lies in the epistemological and methodological complementarity between MSF and PET in addressing the complexities of agenda-setting. On one hand, MSF is instrumental in identifying how and when windows of opportunity emerge, highlighting the role of policy entrepreneurs and the contingent convergence of the three streams (problems, solutions, and politics). However, it may overlook the persistence of "non-agenda" dynamics—such as deliberate exclusion, institutional bias, ideological dominance, or a lack of mobilization—that prevent certain issues from reaching the decision-making stage. On the other hand, PET provides the tools to understand why certain issues remain dormant for extended periods and how sudden bursts of institutional attention occur through mechanisms like enthusiasm mobilization or conflict expansion. Nevertheless, PET often struggles to account for gradual, incremental changes and fails to identify other nuanced causal mechanisms.

To explain the observed processes, two analytical alternatives are proposed. Following Kingdon (1984, 1995), change is viewed as a contingent process dependent not only on the promotion of ideas by entrepreneurs but also on the convergence of external factors and the relative power of actors within institutional spheres. Following Baumgartner and Jones (1993), entry onto the agenda is seen as largely dependent on mechanisms of enthusiasm mobilization or the strategic escalation of conflict by specific actors.

The MAR hybrid model is not intended as a mere theoretical summary. Instead, it offers an intermediate causal specification that explains how and under what conditions the contingent coupling of streams leads to durable shifts

in the political agenda or, conversely, to transitory effects that dissipate amid new power reconfigurations. In the Andalusian case, for instance, the model suggests that coupling dynamics (MSF) represent a necessary but insufficient condition for achieving a sustainable rupture of the pre-existing policy monopoly (PET).

To operationalize these two logics of change, the MAR framework identifies three mediating elements—actors, strategies, and contextual factors—as the key mechanisms that bridge the gap between political opportunity and structural institutional resistance.

2.3.1. Actors

In both theoretical approaches, the role of actors is pivotal in explaining the processes of institutional change. Actors are the agents who leverage windows of opportunity (MSF) by promoting ideas, framing problems, and facilitating the coupling of streams. Simultaneously, they maintain equilibrium or drive ruptures (PET) by shifting the conflict into new policy venues or manipulating the policy image to dismantle existing monopolies. In this framework, the structure and distribution of power among these actors determine whether a successful coupling leads to a durable inclusion on the agenda or, conversely, remains a transient phenomenon subject to reversal once the previous balance of power is restored.

The MAR posits that institutional change is more likely to occur when policy entrepreneurs (MSF) successfully translate their persuasive capacity into a strategy for conflict expansion (PET). This involves mobilizing a broader coalition of both internal and external actors who amplify public and institutional attention toward a specific issue—in this case, PPE.

2.3.2. Strategies

Within the dynamics of agenda-setting, the strategies deployed by policy entrepreneurs and advocates play a critical role in catalyzing the prioritization of specific issues and solutions (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024). These strategies constitute deliberate actions aimed at navigating environmental contingencies and mitigating institutional inertia. Their efficacy is contingent not only upon the technical soundness of the proposals but also upon their strategic alignment with broader governmental objectives and their perceived political and operational feasibility.

In this regard, the MAR framework posits that successful strategies must be two-pronged: they must leverage coupling (MSF) to generate incipient momentum while simultaneously establishing institutional anchoring mechanisms (PET) to overcome structural friction and preclude policy reversal once the political window of opportunity closes.

2.3.3. Contextual Factors

Finally, it is imperative to delineate the role of both endogenous and exogenous factors in catalyzing the agenda for change. Within the MAR framework, the contextual environment acts as a modulator of the coupling mechanism's capacity to manifest as sustained institutional change. For instance, a policy window precipitated by an external shock or a change in administration may facilitate the entry of PPE onto the agenda; however, such a window may prove ephemeral if competing priorities emerge or if subsequent shocks reconfigure the political landscape.

Consequently, the integration of context into the MAR posits that while an exogenous factor (MSF) may trigger institutional attention, a permanent rupture (PET) occurs only if the institutional setting enables this external pressure to overcome structural friction and the inherent inertia of the prevailing policy monopoly.

2.3.4. Derivation of Theoretical Expectations

Building upon the conceptual framework, a set of theoretical expectations has been derived to guide the empirical analysis. Rather than strict hypotheses, these expectations represent plausible propositions rooted in the model's causal logic. They serve to facilitate the identification of key mechanisms and the interpretation of evidence within the Andalusian case. The following four theoretical propositions have been defined:

P1. Coupling of solutions. The presence of mature technical solutions within the policy stream, combined with policy entrepreneurs capable of linking these solutions to a visible problem and a favorable political climate, significantly increases the probability of PPE ascending the governmental agenda.

P2. Disruption through conflict expansion. In contexts where a policy monopoly controls the policy image, change tends to be incremental. However, the expansion of conflict or an exogenous shock that destabilizes that monopoly can trigger a decisive shift in institutional attention and a subsequent rupture in the status quo.

P3. Institutional anchoring. The sustainability of integrating PPE into the administration is contingent upon institutional anchoring. Strategies directed toward developing internal capacities and specialized technical units increase the likelihood of consolidation, mitigating the risks of policy reversal associated with changes in political coalitions.

P4. Discursive strategies as mediators. Discursive framing that aligns evaluation with core governmental priorities—such as efficiency, transparency, and spending efficiency—facilitates the convergence of the streams. Consequently, these strategies enhance the likelihood of opening windows of opportunity and consolidating long-term institutional change.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodological approach based on case study analysis, a design widely utilized in political science and public administration for the in-depth examination of complex phenomena within specific contexts. Methodologically, this is a single-case study with revealing-influential value (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). It facilitates a particularly clear observation of a process of institutional change, thereby contributing to the theoretical development regarding how technical instruments, such as PPE, are integrated into the governmental agenda.

The Autonomous Community of Andalusia was selected as the unit of analysis due to its significant analytical potential. It represents a case where structural and conjunctural dynamics converge, facilitating the transition of PPE from a marginal position to a tool of strategic importance. This selection criteria allows for analytical rather than statistical generalization (Coller, 2005; Gerring, 2004), insofar as the case helps identify patterns, trajectories, and explanatory mechanisms that may be tested in other subnational contexts.

The object of study is the process through which PPE has gradually gained centrality within the Andalusian political-administrative system. This phenomenon has been operationalized as the set of decisions, institutional dynamics,

discourses, and strategies that have fostered its inclusion on the governmental agenda, with particular focus on the key actors, strategies, and contextual factors that have facilitated this transition:

a) Actors and Positions. The actors who have played a significant role in driving and energizing the processes of change will be identified. The objective is to assess, based on the analyzed data, how these actors align with the expectations set forth by the MAR model, and to what extent their actions have influenced the dynamics of change. This approach allows for a more profound and nuanced understanding of the interaction among actors within the context of the change processes in the case under study.

b) Strategies. The strategies employed will be explored to understand their influence on agenda-setting (specifically through the mobilization of attention and positive feedback mechanisms that consolidate change) and, consequently, on decision-making within the sphere of public policy.

c) Contextual Factors. This provides a contextualized view of how evaluation gains prominence. We identify relevant events that demonstrate how various factors interact to redistribute political attention, open windows of opportunity, and mitigate resistance to change.

The research follows a flexible and abductive design, combining substantive theory with an iterative process of data collection and analysis. A robust empirical corpus was constructed using multiple techniques and both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources: Official documents (regulations, reports, annual reports and internal working papers), participant observation by the researcher, survey data from key informants, and interviews⁴ with representative institutional actors who have been central to the initiative or have played a significant role throughout these years. This is complemented by a systematic literature review as a secondary source. The use of diverse information sources fulfills the principle of triangulation (Yin, 1989), which ensures research quality, objectivity, and internal validity. This multi-method approach provides a level of evidence that facilitates transparently tracing the reasoning process leading to the study's conclusions.

The analysis covers the period from 2000 to 2024, identifying the preconditions as well as the phases of momentum, partial incorporation, and the progressive consolidation of the evaluative approach. The objective is not to verify closed causal hypotheses but to identify recurring patterns, explanatory mechanisms, and sequences of change that elucidate the repositioning of PPE within the Andalusian institutional ecosystem. This approach aims to enhance the understanding of agenda-setting processes in decentralized contexts and the capacity of specific instruments to acquire strategic relevance over time.

4. Analysis results: the process of agenda-setting

The analysis of the Andalusian case is based on the application of the Coupling and Rupture Model (MAR), aiming to interpret the mechanisms that facilitated the entry of PPE into the JdA's governmental agenda. Building on this

⁴The study includes a total of 12 interviews conducted between January 2022 and April 2022. The majority of these were conducted within the regional administrative sphere (8), while 4 were conducted in academic and professional spheres.

framework, an analytical narrative divided into distinct stages reconstructs the sequence of events that led to the prioritization of evaluation. However, prior to analyzing the catalysts and milestones of this process, it is essential to identify the key actors and their respective spheres of influence.

4.1. Identification of Key Actors

The proposed taxonomy of actors is designed to provide a comprehensive and differentiated analysis of participation throughout the change process. Each category seeks to capture specific dynamics of influence and engagement in decision-making, enabling a precise assessment of their impact on the institutional trajectory.

To facilitate this analysis, actors are classified into three core categories (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024, p.128): 1) Public Officials: This group includes both elected representatives (political level) and career civil servants (operational level). Holding formal roles and responsibilities within the government, they are central figures in policy formulation and implementation; 2) Experts and Interest Groups (Insiders): Actors with direct access to the decision-making core. They influence political outcomes through their technical expertise, specialized knowledge, and capacity to advocate for substantive changes (Maloney et al., 1994); and 3) Citizens, Media, and other Organizations (Outsiders): Actors with limited access to the decision-making core but with the significant capacity to disseminate information, awareness-raising, and generate social pressure.

Recognizing the diversity of roles, interests, and levels of influence, the following table (Table 1) identifies and classifies the key actors within the established categories.

Table 1. Key actors in the PPE agenda-setting within the Regional Government of Andalusia

Category	Actors
Public officials	María Jesús Montero (Political level) José María Sánchez Bursón (Operational level) M. ^a Mar Herrera Menchén (Operational level) Group of Evaluation Collaborators (Operational level)
Experts and stakeholders (insiders)	Carlos Román—Spanish Evaluation Society Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) Citizens Party (Ciudadanos-Cs) People's Party (PP)
Citizens, the media, and other organizations (outsiders)	European Union (EU) Political Parties Mass Media

Source: Zúñiga-Guevara (2024)

4.2. Dynamics and drivers of agenda change

The integration of an issue into the governmental agenda necessitates a fundamental shift in problem perception and the successful capture of policy-makers' attention. In the case of Andalusia, the analysis identifies a sequence of catalysts that illustrate how evaluation progressively gained prominence.

To facilitate an understanding of the process by which PPE entered the governmental agenda, the analysis has been structured into distinct temporal periods. This decision accounts for the non-linearity of agenda-setting, as it occurs through a sequence of decisive and cumulative events that progressively modify the perception of the problem and successfully capture the attention of policymakers.

In the case under study, dynamics and milestones have been identified that mark turning points in the process, allowing for an observation of how evaluation gradually gained prominence within the Andalusian Administration. This chronological organization enables a more precise contextualization of the observed change dynamics, linking these shifts to the influence of actors, the strategies deployed, and the contextual factors inherent to each period.

The Pre-Agenda phase (1986–2000)

Although the period analyzed in this study spans the years 2000–2024, it is relevant to note that the context prior to the entry of evaluation into the governmental agenda in Andalusia mirrored the national landscape. There was no clear predisposition toward evaluation; its role during the 1986–2000 period was weak and had a limited scope within the daily activities of the Andalusian Administration (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024). During this stage, evaluation began to be taken into consideration as a consequence of mandatory requirements related to programs funded by European funds (AIRcF, 2021; Bustelo, 2020; Casado and Del Pino, 2021; FEDEA, 2021; Muñoz et al., 2013). There is no evidence of a prior political stream, with entrepreneurs struggling to introduce the issue of evaluation, nor of problems to which it could theoretically provide a solution. It was not something innate; rather, it was imposed by instances external (outsiders) to the Andalusian Administration, resulting in a clear influence of the European Union (hereinafter EU) on the initial drive for PPE.

Initially, therefore, the great ally of PPE was the execution of European funds. The EU required the evaluation of all fund-receiving programs to understand the impact of the investments made—a pressure that, from the perspective of the Junta de Andalucía, can be interpreted as part of the problem stream in the sense of an external requirement. Regarding the policy stream, it would be relevant if the EU had also imposed specific evaluation approaches or models. However, European authorities limited themselves to setting out measures and guidelines⁵ to promote the evaluation and supervision of European funds, without establishing a single uniform model for all member states. Instead, each country was encouraged to develop its own evaluation methodologies and approaches, better suited to their national contexts and specific needs, to ensure efficient use in line with established objectives. During this period, PPE had a

⁵For instance, in the 1980s, the EU adopted Regulation (EEC) No. 4253/88, which established the principles and rules for the implementation of the Structural Funds. This regulation mandated that Member States establish monitoring and evaluation systems for programs receiving European financing.

fragmented, marginal, and poorly structured presence in the politico-institutional ecosystem of Andalusia, conceived more as a tool for internal control or budgetary justification than as a strategic instrument for improvement and accountability, remaining disconnected from decision-making processes.

Period 2000–2014

Within the academic sphere, prominent experts and interest groups in public management and political science began to shift the debate into the political arena. Leveraging their status and proximity to political leadership, these actors emphasized the need for rationalizing public decisions, evaluation, and accountability to influence decision-making processes.

In this context, Professor Carlos Román del Río emerged as the first policy entrepreneur identified in this case study. Leading a movement from academia—as president of the Spanish Evaluation Society (SEE) at the time—he held a strategic position that he utilized to influence the political level. During these years (2003–2004), a long-term project was being developed that would define the future of public policy in Andalusia.

Consistent with Multiple Streams (MS) theory, this actor was able to influence public policy by seizing a window of opportunity within the politics stream—independent of the dynamics occurring within the subsystem of actors interested in evaluation. This led to a decisive step in setting the PPE agenda through Article 138 of the Reform of the Statute of Autonomy of Andalusia (Organic Law 2/2007), which mandated the establishment of a PPE system. This event can be considered the genesis of PPE's entry into the Andalusian governmental agenda. However, although this policy entrepreneur was outside the decision-making subsystem and sought a substantial image change for PPE, he did not expand the conflict beyond the subsystem nor generate significant short-term shifts to break the existing policy monopoly, as theorized by PET. Consequently, the actual weight of evaluation within the JdA remained largely unchanged.

Months after the approval of the Statute, the 2008 economic crisis erupted, impacting the context at all levels and triggering a debate on the effectiveness of public policies and the need to "do more with less." Public officials increasingly felt the pressure to be accountable to citizens (problem stream). This requirement, as previously noted, had been imposed by the EU, and many neighboring countries had already been practicing PPE for decades as a key element for modernizing public administration models. Furthermore, a certain body of doctrine on PPE already existed at the national level, encouraging progress in evaluation (policy stream), acting more as a response to the environment than as an act of conviction. As expected in MS, by 2014, there was a favorable context in both the problem and macropolitics (politics stream) streams; however, this disposition did not yet translate into an organizational architecture or systematic practice, leaving evaluation relegated to a desirable but non-mandatory function.

While outsiders began to tentatively discuss evaluation, the issue remained secondary and lacked political prominence. Nevertheless, two events in the politics stream eventually placed evaluation in a preferential position: first, the approval of Law 1/2014, of June 24, on Public Transparency in Andalusia, which aimed to advance the design of an Andalusian PPE System to comply with Article 138 of the Statute; and second, the governmental pact between the PSOE-A and Ciudadanos (Cs) in June 2015, which included a specific agreement to promote PPE. For over a decade, evaluation was not perceived as a lever for innovation and public action improvement, but rather as an interest that was easily displaced by more visible or urgent priorities.

Period 2014–2018

In the preceding period, a favorable political framework with a sufficient regulatory foundation had been established, yet decisive political leadership was required to drive evaluation forward. This challenge was embraced by María Jesús Montero, then Regional Minister of Finance and Public Administration. Holding a strategic position within the executive branch, she championed the benefits of PPE in light of the evolving administrative reality in Andalusia. In accordance with the MSF, the policy community (political actors, civil servants, academics, and experts) began to align their discourses, effectively opening a window of opportunity. With executive commitment and clear political leadership established, the critical factor became the development of viable solutions specifically, the definition of a strategy to institutionalize PPE within the JdA.

In line with the MS framework, the choice of strategy can be interpreted as a decision independent of both the macropolitical stream—as it was not conditioned by external political pressures or predefined agendas—and the specific definition of the problem. The implementation of PPE was approached as a technical matter that could have been framed from any other perspective. According to key informants, the chosen strategy is logical and consistent within the context of the JdA. However, given the absence of a counterfactual, it is impossible to verify whether this was, in fact, the best or the only viable option.

Four key decisions in defining the PPE strategy:

1st Decision. Institutional Restructuring and the Role of the Policy Entrepreneur. The Regional Minister restructured her department and entrusted the Andalusian Institute of Public Administration (IAAP) with the promotion of PPE. A pivotal move was the appointment of José María Sánchez Bursón as Director of the IAAP. Sánchez Bursón emerged as a crucial policy entrepreneur; from his operational position, he influenced the definition of the PPE model and identified the individuals responsible for the strategy. As noted by interviewees, he was in the right place at the right time to lead a policy that had previously lacked a champion within the JdA.

2nd Decision. Defining the Evaluation Model (representing an alternative within the policy stream). The Director of the IAAP advocated for replicating the European model, grounded in objectivity and scientific rigor—the core idea he sought to introduce onto the agenda—while prioritizing ex-ante evaluation, as he considered it a model capable of yielding significant results in the medium-to-long term.

3rd Decision. Prioritizing Culture over Legislation. Although there were legislative commitments from the PSOE-A to pass a PPE law (a potential window in the politics stream), the Director of the IAAP recommended a sequential approach against starting with the law, justifying his position on the grounds that, to solidify the institutionalization of evaluation, there had to be prior knowledge, "learning by doing" experience, and a certain evaluative culture within the Administration—circumstances that were not present at the institutional level at that time. Knowledge, intelligence, and a step-by-step progression had to be prioritized before creating the structures and regulations to drive PPE.

Following these initial decisions, there was a complete understanding between the Minister and the Director of the IAAP. The latter was granted a degree of autonomy—he was "allowed to work"—under the constant supervision of the Minister, who faced the difficult mission of driving PPE from scratch, given the scarcity of resources and specialized personnel. The IAAP started from zero. As Sánchez Bursón notes: "I arrived at the IAAP and asked, 'Who here knows

how to evaluate?... and then someone said, ‘Well, look, there is a person at the IAAP with a PhD in evaluation who could take charge of the matter’” (Sánchez Bursón, personal communication, April 1, 2022). At that moment, the decision was made to appoint an internal staff member, Mar Herrera, to lead the initiative. Together with four other people—two from the General Directorate of Planning and Evaluation and two from the IAAP—they formed an internal committee to draft the strategic document that launched the project with the following purposes: to study PPE at national and international levels; to analyze the reality of evaluation within the JdA (opportunities and weaknesses); and to develop a baseline document to guide public action.

The role of Mar Herrera (operational level) is significant due to her position as the head of the PPE Area at the IAAP, although she is not categorized as a policy entrepreneur per se. While she is responsible for all matters concerning PPE within the IAAP and played a prominent role in certain decision-making processes, she possessed neither the institutional standing nor the influential capacity of the IAAP Director, despite having his full backing. Her role was, and remains, the coordination and leadership of the area's technical activities to advance the PPE strategy.

For months, they analyzed and studied: the conceptual definitions of PPE; the work and materials of the AEVAL at the time; the experiences of other Autonomous Communities (mainly Catalonia, La Rioja, and Navarre); how it was being implemented in other countries (Canada, France, etc.); how it could be adapted to the Andalusian reality; and the approaches taught in various evaluation master's programs (M. Herrera, personal communication, February 7, 2022). As a result of this process of joint discussion and reflection by the working group, a strategic plan was established to promote evaluation within the JdA. In that foundational document titled “Evaluación de Políticas Públicas. Junta de Andalucía 2016” (IAAP, 2016), approved by then-Minister María Jesús Montero, explicit reference was already made within the objectives to: 1) Promote a culture of evaluation within the organization; 2) Articulate the means to implement an evaluation system; and 3) Evaluate public policies: first steps.

In early 2016, following several meetings, the proposal was presented to the aforementioned minister, and the Public Policy Evaluation Unit was established—in a functional capacity—within the IAAP. This new unit (coordinated by Mar Herrera Menchén) assumed responsibility for promoting reflection, training, and momentum in the areas of planning and PPE, with a roadmap based on the three previously defined strategic objectives.

4th Decision. Leveraging internal human capital (The GPE). This was a conscious decision driven by a reality principle; there were no available means, resources, budget, or even a minimal structure to begin promoting PPE. The underlying argument was: why not ask the system itself to collaborate with the IAAP in developing the initiative?

From the project's inception, it was clear that the participation of the JdA's internal staff was an essential element for driving the institutionalization of PPE. The decision adopted by the IAAP Directorate and the competent Ministry led to an open call for all administrative personnel, grounded in several principles (Zúñiga-Guevara, 2022, 2024): the need for commitment and complicity from those already within the organization; the certainty that human capital with relevant PPE competencies and experience existed; the lack of dedicated resources to create a specialized technical team; and the conviction that cultural change must be driven by those already sensitive to evaluation.

In February 2016, a mass call was launched, targeting more than 10,200 technical staff members across the JdA, without restrictions on location or function. More than 400 individuals expressed interest in the project, allowing for the

selection—based on criteria of competency, experience, specific training, and organizational and territorial diversity—of an initial group of 40 members.

This group, named the Group of Evaluation Collaborators (GPE), has established itself as one of the primary agents of change in the institutionalization of PPE in Andalusia. Their role has been crucial in generating organizational learning, building internal capacity, and actively promoting an evaluative culture within their respective directorates. Thanks to their commitment and expert knowledge, the GPE has contributed to strengthening the credibility of evaluation processes both within and outside the Administration, acting as a facilitator for the cultural change necessary for the project's sustainability. Faced with a moment of conscious attention to evaluation, various strategies were developed to promote debate, attempt to break the policy monopoly, and favor more significant shifts in public policy, in line with PET postulates.

The strategic decision to bet on internal talent—also motivated by the lack of economic means and specific resources—has been positively assessed by the interviewed actors and is confirmed as a success in light of the milestones achieved. Leveraging the organization's existing knowledge and experience not only bypassed initial limitations but also provided solidity and a sense of belonging to the PPE promotion strategy in Andalusia.

Ultimately, the institutional design of the PPE promotion strategy is defined by two elements: the PPE Area, functionally established within the IAAP with a clear mission; and the decision to rely on the Administration's own personnel. In the words of Sánchez Bursón, this decision was "highly successful" (*muy acertada*), as it integrated what he calls "the intelligence of the Administration"—that is, sharing the generation of innovation and knowledge within the Administration to serve the improvement of public policy. This organizational model, based on the valorization of internal expert knowledge, has fostered the consolidation of an engaged professional community, generating horizontal collaboration networks and facilitating institutional learning processes. Unlike technocratic or excessively outsourced models, the Andalusian strategy positions human capital and organizational culture as levers of institutionalization, consistent with approaches that emphasize organizational learning as the foundation for change in public administrations.

From this point forward, the first steps were taken to promote the aforementioned PPE strategy, including work on a Decree that was reviewed by the legislative authorities of the Ministry of Finance and Public Administration. However, a shift in the political arena—changes in key influential figures—in mid-2018 posed a setback for the institutionalization of evaluative practice within the JdA. Despite the work accomplished, a successful coupling between evaluation (the problem) and the expected progress toward institutionalization within the JdA (the solution) was not achieved.

Period 2018–2024

The issue of PPE stagnated and was once again relegated to the background, failing to represent a priority for the new PP-Cs coalition government, despite repeated references to the Andalusian Government's commitment to present a Public Policy Evaluation Law before Parliament. In the case of the Cs Parliamentary Group, which secured a position of power due to its essential support for governing, it included and once again championed the promotion of a PPE law within the government agreements (policy stream). The Ministry of Tourism, Regeneration, Justice, and Administration attempted to promote the PPE law as one of the legislature's flagship projects; however, this met with

little success due to the divergent interests and perspectives within the governing coalition, which generated tensions and conflicts within the subsystem. This circumstance triggered a process of conflict expansion outside the subsystem, driven by the Cs Parliamentary Group in an attempt to influence a political and social context that had hitherto shown no interest in evaluation, while simultaneously grappling with the administrative inertias within the subsystem that hindered and obstructed change.

Both in the preceding period and from 2022 onwards, the role of various political parties exerted a significant influence through the signing of governing pacts that included PPE among their commitments. This dynamic is most clearly interpreted through the lens of PET, which describes processes of change characterized by long periods of stability—under the dominance of a group of actors controlling both the discourse and the institutional structure—interrupted by specific moments of substantive transformation. In the Andalusian case, the PSOE-A (as the governing party) acted as a force for stability, maintaining the institutional framework and predominant practices through incremental reforms, even after the formalization of PPE on the governmental agenda. In contrast, Ciudadanos (Cs), as an outsider political party, acted as an agent of change, driving the inclusion of PPE as part of its political agenda within a context marked by growing social demand for transparency and efficiency in public administration. Although PPE had previously remained in the background, it began to position itself strategically within the political debate and gain greater relevance among other actors, including the academic community, experts, and social organizations committed to the improvement of public policies. The outcome was the inclusion of PPE in the 2015 governing pact between the PSOE-A and Cs.

The incorporation of PPE into governing agreements reflects shifts in power dynamics and the configuration of political coalitions. The tensions generated between different governing partners—as seen during the coalition periods between the PSOE-A and Cs (2015–2018) and the PP-A and Cs (2018–2022)—evidence the conflicts stemming from divergent interests. These disagreements have contributed to broadening the debate beyond the technical-administrative sphere; however, they have not managed to consolidate as an issue of high political salience. Despite attempts to promote an evaluation law through parliamentary alliances and external mobilization—including the use of media⁶ outlets by outsiders to capture public attention—PPE has not achieved a high level of institutionalization (Trías & Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024; Zúñiga-Guevara, 2024) due to differing political stances and strategies.

Following the 2022 regional elections, in which the PP secured an absolute majority in the Parliament of Andalusia for the first time, a reconfiguration of priorities within the governmental agenda took place. This new political conjuncture introduced significant shifts in the orientation of administrative reforms, displacing attention toward the promotion and passage of a new Law on the Civil Service of Andalusia (Law 5/2023, of June 7). This legislation has since come to occupy a priority position within both political discourse and legislative action.

As a result of this shift, the issue of PPE—which had gained momentum in previous stages through technical drivers and programmatic commitments within governing coalitions—was once again sidelined. This does not imply that PPE

⁶The analysis conducted reveals that evaluation has maintained, and continues to hold, a residual presence in mainstream media, which has hindered its visibility as a public problem. This scarce media coverage, combined with the technical complexity of the concept, has further contributed to a lack of public perception of evaluation as either a citizen right or a fundamental demand toward public institutions

has disappeared entirely, but rather that its presence has weakened in favor of other objectives deemed strategic by the new executive. This confirms one of the core assumptions of both the MS and PET frameworks: political attention is a finite resource, and therefore, the inclusion and persistence of an issue on the agenda depend on its ability to compete with other emerging matters. In this case, the consolidation of PPE as a governmental priority is constrained by the opening of a new window of opportunity focused on different reforms, highlighting the fragility of institutional progress when it is not fully anchored in structural commitments or backed by sustained external pressures. Nonetheless, despite this displacement of attention, the capacities built within the IAAP's PPE Area and the consolidation of the GPE are enabling the PPE promotion strategy to remain active, which will facilitate a future reactivation of the evaluative agenda.

5. Discussion

The results of the analysis demonstrate that the entry of PPE into the governmental agenda of the JdA does not follow a linear or exclusively technical logic. On the contrary, it is a contingent and dynamic process conditioned by both structural and strategic factors, in which the actors—along with their positions and capacities—the political context, and regulatory frameworks have played a central role. From this perspective, the study confirms the utility of employing a theoretical approach that combines the MSF and PET within the MAR. This integrated approach allows for a deeper understanding of the various phases, tensions, and turning points that have characterized this process, in alignment with the theoretical propositions outlined in Section 2.3.4.

The MSF provides a robust interpretation for understanding the fulfillment of proposition P₁ (Coupling of solutions): specific conditions—the redefinition of the problem, the availability of viable solutions, and the existence of a favorable political context—align temporally to generate a window of opportunity for change. In the Andalusian case, this convergence is particularly observable from 2015 onwards, when the political drive led by the Ministry of Finance and Public Administration, the institutional reconfiguration within the IAAP, and the programmatic interests of Ciudadanos (Cs) enabled the articulation of an explicit strategy to promote PPE. The role of policy entrepreneurs, especially visible in the trajectory of Sánchez Bursón, reinforces the idea that individual leadership—when combined with organizational capacity and technical expertise—can activate processes of institutional innovation in initially unreceptive contexts. In this case study, the favorable alignment of key actors within the Andalusian executive (politics stream) and the presence of public policy entrepreneurs within the Administration facilitated the opening of a window of opportunity by enabling the coupling of the three streams (problem, politics, and policy).

However, the persistence of an organizational culture focused on compliance rather than learning, the weight of administrative inertia, and the absence of a legally binding regulatory framework have caused progress to remain fragmented and dependent on short-term leadership. The dynamics of political coalitions—particularly the alliances between the PSOE-A and Cs, and subsequently between the PP-A and Cs—reflect how conflict and disputes among actors with divergent interests can generate discursive expansions without necessarily translating into profound institutional changes. This pattern verifies proposition P₂ (Rupture through conflict expansion), wherein PPE failed to fully break the existing political-institutional policy monopoly, forcing outsider actors (Cs) to seek an expansion of the conflict to sustain political attention.

In short, the analysis demonstrates how the promotion of PPE has been made possible through a logic of progressive institutionalization, rooted more in organizational learning than in regulatory imposition. The strategy adopted—centered on internal capacity building, the development of an engaged professional community, and the utilization of existing expert knowledge within the Administration—confirms proposition P₃ (Institutional anchoring) and proposition P₄ (Discursive strategies). The analysis of the anchoring strategies implemented by the IAAP (namely the creation of a technical unit and the GPE) reveals an approach consistent with the principles of sustainability and institutional ownership, shielding progress against the reversibility often associated with shifts in the politics stream.

However, this approach also presents limitations; the absence of a clear social demand and the low public visibility of evaluation—due to discursive strategies that were insufficiently media-oriented—have hindered a more ambitious expansion of the evaluative agenda. Consequently, the results not only confirm the relevance of the theories employed but also highlight the need to interpret them from a situated perspective that recognizes the specificities of subnational contexts, the role of administrative cultures, and the influence of political and discursive frameworks on the trajectory of reforms.

The Andalusian experience, with its advances and setbacks, shows that PPE can become a lever for institutional change if it successfully connects with strategic interests, articulates favorable coalitions, and anchors itself within stable organizational structures (Proposition P₃). Yet, it also serves as a reminder that its consolidation requires time, sustained political will, and effective mechanisms to link knowledge, decision-making, and action. This suggests that PPE promotion processes may adopt diverse trajectories depending on the politico-administrative context, internal capacities, and the critical window that triggers change. The transition of PPE from a marginal position to a progressive centrality in the Andalusian government's actions was not the result of a sudden decision, but rather the outcome of a cumulative process of strategies, convergences, and windows of opportunity that facilitated its effective entry into the governmental agenda. In this regard, for future research, it would be pertinent to conduct comparative analyses of other regions to identify differential patterns and factors in the processes of evaluation institutionalization.

6. Conclusions

This article has analyzed the process by which PPE entered the Andalusian governmental agenda, demonstrating that its incorporation does not follow a merely technical or regulatory logic. Instead, it has been a process conditioned by multiple political, institutional, and strategic factors, combining dynamics of continuity and change over time.

Initially (the 2000–2015 period), evaluation occupied a marginal position on both the administrative and political agendas. Although regulations were passed that included references to evaluation—such as Organic Law 02/2007 and Law 01/2014—and evaluative practices were developed in sectoral areas (education, healthcare, social services, and employment), it did not achieve structural recognition as a public policy. Its presence responded less to internal conviction than to dynamics of adaptation to European requirements and administrative modernization trends aimed at improving service quality.

From 2015 onwards, a shift in trend occurred. Evaluation began to acquire greater visibility and centrality in both the technical and political-parliamentary arenas. A specific strategy to promote PPE was launched, the need for a regional

law on the matter was proposed, and attention increased toward evaluation as a fundamental tool for improving decision-making and public accountability.

From a theoretical standpoint, the process of PPE's entry into the agenda of the JdA can be explained by combining the contributions of the MSF (Kingdon, 1984, 1995) and PET (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993) through the MAR. This integrated approach reflects the complexity inherent in public policy change processes and confirms the utility of synthesizing different analytical perspectives to capture the dynamics of institutional transformation.

The 2014–2018 period aligns most clearly with the logic of Coupling (MS) and confirms proposition P₁ (Coupling of solutions). During these years, a window of opportunity opened in which the problem stream (need for transparency and accountability), the policy stream (available technical solutions), and the politics stream (political context and governing pacts) aligned favorably. This alignment allowed strategic actors—the policy entrepreneurs—to develop and drive the strategy for the institutionalization of evaluation. Furthermore, proposition P₄ (Discursive strategies) is validated by the observation that the favorable political context was reinforced by the discursive linking of PPE with governmental priorities such as efficiency and democratic quality.

In contrast, the 2019–2024 period corresponds more closely to the postulates of Rupture (PET) and proposition P₂ (Rupture through conflict expansion). From 2018 onwards, changes in government altered the previous equilibrium, causing evaluation to lose priority on the governmental agenda. In this context, various actors—such as the Ciudadanos (Cs) parliamentary group, the IAAP's PPE Area, and the GPE—activated conflict expansion strategies (P₂) beyond the administrative subsystem, attempting to maintain pressure on the political system to prevent a complete reversal of the progress achieved.

The Andalusian case demonstrates that the entry of evaluation into the governmental agenda has been a discontinuous process, dependent on both structural conditions and the strategies of the actors involved. Despite setbacks in political priority, the progress achieved validates proposition P₃ (Institutional anchoring): the building of internal capacities (IAAP, GPE) and the generation of strategic alliances have minimized the vulnerability of these changes to the reversibility associated with political volatility.

In conclusion, the analysis confirms that the entry of PPE into the agenda cannot be understood as an inevitable outcome or as the exclusive product of regulatory reforms. Instead, it is a political and institutional process that requires leadership, strategy, the alignment of interests, and a long-term vision. The Andalusian experience thus provides a relevant case study for the analysis of public policy change in subnational contexts and serves as a useful reference for other regions aspiring to consolidate evaluative systems oriented toward the improvement of public action.

Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

Notwithstanding the utility and analytical rigor that the MAR provides for understanding the causal dynamics and trajectory of PPE in Andalusia, the present study faces limitations inherent to its design. These constraints, in turn, open significant avenues for future research.

One of the primary limitations lies in the use of a qualitative single-case study methodology. While the Andalusian case serves as a 'revelatory case' that allows for the clear identification of the causal mechanisms described in the model's

propositions (Coupling, Rupture, Anchoring, and Discursive strategies), the patterns identified are not generalizable to other contexts without additional comparative testing. This limitation paves the way for future lines of research. In particular, it would be of great interest to develop comparative studies between Spanish Autonomous Communities or other subnational levels to assess whether the mechanisms identified in the MAR are replicated or vary according to specific institutional and political configurations. Such an approach would allow for a refinement of the model's scope, the identification of potential biases, and an evaluation of its applicability across different levels of government. Furthermore, the application of mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) would be appropriate to enhance the study's empirical robustness.

Another potential line of research involves analyzing the interaction between evaluation and other public innovation policies. This would explore how PPE articulates with broader administrative reforms, particularly within the framework of European Union requirements and the new funding cycles linked to European funds.

Finally, the possibility remains to develop methodologies for measuring institutional friction, analyzing whether institutions create resistance in the translation of political agenda inputs into public policy outputs. This would involve examining whether rupture is more easily achieved at the level of attention than at the level of concrete results.

These research avenues aim to strengthen the MAR, transforming it from an analytical tool for a specific case into a generalizable theoretical framework for the study of non-linear institutional change in public administration.

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