Time, Temporality and Timescapes in Politics and Policy

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Abstract

This workshop aims to examine political time, temporality and timescapes in the study of politics and public policy. Whilst references to temporal categories, such as timing, sequence, speed, duration, time budgets, time limits or time horizons, are ubiquitous both in comparative politics and comparative public policy, there are very few systematic treatments of time in political science. The workshop seeks to advance the debate (i) by exploring different facets of time and how they affect politics, government and public policy; (ii) by paying attention to time as an institution, a resource and a contextual variable; (iii) by discussing both the temporal features of politics and government (such as, e.g., election timing and term limits) and public policy-making (such as policy cycles or policy horizons); (iv) by exploring time in both diachronic-historical and synchronic analyses; and (v) by debating the status of time in different theoretical traditions in political and policy analysis.

Outline of the topic and its relation to existing research

Political Time, Temporality and Timescapes

Time has always been an issue for studies of politics and public policy and considerations of temporality permeate the field (Elchardus 1988; Nowotny 1992). However, over the past half century, many studies have tended to focus on the synchronic rather than diachronic elements of political life and few have sought to grapple with temporality in as sophisticated a way as they have with spatial issues. While the methods and epistemological issues associated with spatial analyses – such cross-national or cross-sectoral comparisons (Thelen, 2000; Stone 1999) - are well laid out and thoroughly
explored, the impact of time is much less well established. For example, only few journals – *Time & Society* or the *Journal of Policy History* – specifically address the subject and much behavioural research continues to be undertaken in a largely ahistorical or a atemporal way.

This situation is beginning to change as the impact of time at all levels of politics, government and policy-making – micro, meso and macro – has begun to receive more detailed treatment. Pierson’s *Politics in Time* (2004) stands out as a landmark work applying sociological insights to political phenomena. Utilizing the terminology developed in sociology to explain the impact of time on social processes helps to organize political inquiry into the subject and its effects. *Time, temporality and timescape* are key concepts that can be used to guide political investigations and analyses (Bree, Feddag and Pratt 2010).

Of the three key concepts, the term most familiar to political scientists will be *political time*, which has been the central focus of work such as Skowronek’s (1993, 2008) on the American presidency. It generally refers to the specific historical-temporal location in which a phenomenon, such as a presidency or a public policy, exists and highlights the significance of effects such as policy legacies, sequencing and trajectories on current political actors. As Goetz and Mayer-Sahling (2009) point out, however, this characteristic of existing and operating within a specific temporal location may be better understood as constituting *temporality* or historical time. *Political time*, then, can be reserved to refer to the very diverse range of rules, norms, conventions and understandings that serve as a resource and constraint for political institutions and actors regardless of their spatio-temporal location and affect many aspects of political and policy-making behavior, such as the timing of decision-making and the processes of attempting to make public policies.

The idea of a *timescape*, developed by the sociologist Barbara Adam (1998) and defined as “a cluster of temporal features” (Adam 2004: 143), is a broader term encompassing both historical and political time; that is, both the context of political action as well as its
processes. The key elements of a complete timescape, in Adams view, include timeframes, temporality, timing, tempo, duration, sequence and temporal modalities (past, present, future) (Adam 2008).

Analyzing Time as an Institution and a Resource

Time can be understood both as an institution and as a resource. Time as an institution is understood as “a system of rules that structure the courses of actions that a set of actors may chose”, and these rules may be formal or consist of “social norms that actors will generally respect and whose violation will be sanctioned by loss of reputation, social disapproval, withdrawal of cooperation and rewards, or even ostracism” (Scharpf 1997: 38). Accusations of “bad timing”, “undue haste” or “playing for time” often result from perceived violations of such social norms. Importantly, institutions so understood “define repertoires of more or less acceptable courses of action that will leave considerable scope for the strategic and tactical choices of purposeful actors” (ibid.: 42). It is when making these choices that time can also be an important resource. As Schmitter and Santiso (1998: 71) have noted, decision-makers “learn how to manipulate time, that is, to turn it from an inexorably limited, linear and perishable constraint into something that could be scheduled, anticipated, delayed, accelerated, deadlines, circumvented, prolonged, deferred, compressed, parcelled out, standardized, diversified, staged, staggered, and even wasted – but never ignored”. This perspective revolves around the scarcity of time and opportunities for time tactics, such as intentional delay, as discussed by Pollitt (2008). The importance of such time tactics in public policy-making should be readily apparent; in fact, it has been suggested that “the primary concern of decision makers – policy makers, business executives, or top civil servants – is to manage time effectively rather than to manage tasks” (Zahariadis 2007: 68).

Identifying and Explaining Patterns of Change over Time

To explain change is one of the most fascinating challenges for any scientific enterprise. To explain social, political and policy changes, the social sciences (sociology, economics,
political science, organization theory, public policy, public administration and management, and others) have borrowed theories, concepts and metaphors from other disciplines, especially from biology, psychology, system theory or palaeontology (see Gersick 1991; Eldridge and Gould 1972). In the political and policy sciences, the most common models of policy change are currently linear-teleological “path dependent” ones (Pierson 2000; Mahoney 2000; Liebowitz and Margolis 1995; Abbott 1992; Roe 1994; Buthe 2002; Ospina and Dodge 2005; Czarniawska 2004); linear stepped evolutionary “punctuated equilibrium” or ‘threshold” models (Wood and Doan 2003; True 2000; Baumgartner and Jones 2002; True, Jones and Baumgartner, 1999); and linear – (moderately) dialectic models such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier 1993).

These models contain assumptions and presuppositions that influence methodological choices and bias investigations of policy dynamics in specific ways. Focusing on the three types of neo-institutionalism common in contemporary political science, for example (Hall and Taylor 1996), it can be shown that historical-institutionalist approaches create a strong polarization between incremental path-dependent models and revolutionary punctuated equilibrium ones. Rational-institutionalist approaches, on the other hand, are usually incrementalist and deterministic, while sociological-institutionalism, by privileging the logic of appropriateness, is path-dependent and structurally incrementalist and favours narrative methods of analysis.

The Aims of the Workshop

The components of a timescape enumerated by Adam (2008) open up a very wide agenda for empirical research. Factors such as terms, time budgets, time horizons and their effects; questions concerning timing, tempo, sequence and duration of decision-making processes and their effects; and the temporal properties of policies and their effects are all key concerns for temporally-informed analyses. A focus on the implications of time for the distribution of power, system performance and legitimacy will help to ensure, for
example, that research on the EU timescape can contribute to key debates in the analysis of the evolution and operation of the EU or any other political system.

This workshop will address conceptual, methodological and epistemological issues related to time, politics, government and public policy, and will critically examine the literature in the field whilst so doing so. Key questions to be examined in the workshop include:

- What are the central time-centred questions to be asked in the analysis of politics, government and public policy? What is the current state of the art when it comes to answering these questions and where are major advances to be made?
- What are the chief obstacles – empirical, conceptual, theoretical and methodological - to time-centred analyses? How might they be addressed?
- What are the different levels of abstraction at which political time, temporality and timescapes can be conceptualized and analyzed? What are the theoretical and methodological implications of choosing a specific level of abstraction?
- What are the empirical linkages between the temporal features of politics (such as electoral terms); government (such as turnover in office); and public policy (such as the intertemporal distribution of policy costs and benefits)? How closely coupled are they?
- How may different theoretical lenses help to shed light on time as an institution, a resource and a context?
- How much “time” is essential in influencing the features of change processes and of their outcomes?
- Is it possible to theorize and design a single, general, comprehensive model of time in the public sphere? If so, what intrinsic characteristics should such a model have? If not, what alternate possible approaches can be adopted in trying to explain change over time and how do they differ from each other?
Participants and Types of Papers

Based on the understanding of time as an institution, a resource and a context for political decision-making, the workshop encourages participation from a wide variety of disciplinary fields and sub-fields in clarifying, developing, operationalizing and applying the key concepts and prevailing models of political time, temporality and timescapes. In particular, it will encourage interactions between scholars working on decision-making analysis, which highlights the linkages between temporal discretion, time tactics and the capacity for substantive goal attainment (Pollitt 2008); and historical accounts of time, organisations and policies. The workshop will be of interest to both graduate students developing new research programs and established scholars working in a variety of areas where questions of time have arisen. We wish to invite researchers from North American, Asia, Australia, Europe and other locations and strongly encourage the participation of scholars belonging to different theoretical and methodological schools of thought (historical institutionalist, rational-choice, post-positivist policy analysis, constructivism, etc.) in order to bring together the widest possible set of investigations and research results into the workshop subjects.

This workshop will allow students of political and policy time at all levels to work with each other in pursuit of a better understanding of time and a sophisticated appreciation of the methodological issues it raises for political scientists and policy scholars. The workshop aims to contribute to the establishment of some order in this field and towards empirical and conceptual research into time, temporality and timescapes. We particularly welcome theoretical and methodological papers capable of providing an innovative contribution towards such questions. We expect empirical papers to be theoretically informed.

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Biographical Notes


Michael HOWLETT is Burnaby Mountain Chair in the Department of Political Science at Simon Fraser University. He specializes in public policy analysis, political economy, and resource and environmental policy. Professor Howlett taught at Queen’s University (1986-1988) and the University of Victoria (1988-1989) before coming to SFU and was Visiting Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore (2009-2010). His recent books include Canadian Public Policy (2011); Designing Public Policy (2011); The Public Policy Primer (2010); Integrated Policymaking for Sustainable Development (2009); Studying Public Policy (2009); British Columbia Politics and Government (2009); European and
Monetary policy changes normally take a certain amount of time to have an effect on the economy. The time lag could span anywhere from nine months up to two years. Fiscal policy and its effects on output have a shorter time lag. When monetary policy attempts to stimulate the economy by lowering interest rates, it may take up to 18 months for evidence of any improvement in economic conditions to show up. Additionally, if the government changes its fiscal policy and chooses to increase spending, for example, the fiscal stimulus may still take several months to have any effect on the economy. This workshop aims to examine political time, temporality and timescapes in the study of politics and public policy. Whilst references to temporal categories, such as timing, sequence, speed, duration, time budgets, time limits or time horizons, are ubiquitous both in comparative politics and comparative public policy, there are very few systematic treatments of time in political science. Pierson's Politics in Time (2004) stands out as a landmark work applying sociological insights to political phenomena. Utilizing the terminology developed in sociology to explain the impact of time on social processes helps to organize political inquiry into the subject and its effects. Russian Politics & Diplomacy, Russian Politics & Diplomacy Into section â†’. FOREIGN POLICY. The European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, earlier announced that the strategy would be based on three principles: pushing back, constraining, and engaging with Moscow at the same time. "Can you imagine a person who offers you relations based on the principles: push back, constrain and engage? In the disaster timescape, there appear to be overlapping trajectories of environmental, social, political and economic processes. Although the relationship between public policies and disaster risk is apparent, its nature is not so evident. The dominant model, the disaster management cycle, is based on the principle of response and return to normalcy. In addition, it is accepted that policies are based on constant legal development and that risk governance is responsive to successive disasters. The temporal pattern of large nature-triggered and technological disaster events in Japan since the end of WWII has been researched by measuring the duration of events and discontinuities between them as well as the development of Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis â€” Paul Pierson Introduction A prefatory Remark from North: For an economic historian, time has always been something that is fundamentally disturbing, because there is no time in neoclassical theory. The neoclassical model is a model of an instant of time, and it does not therefore take into account what time doesâ€¦ I will be blunt: Without a deep understanding of time, you will be lousy political scientists, because time is the dimension in which ideas and institutions and beliefs evolve. (1) We can begin with an analogy.