# 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 a 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 time-frames, 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, deadlined, 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 form 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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Klaus GOETZ has been chair of German and European Politics and Government, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, University of Potsdam, since 2006 and Dean, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, University of Potsdam, since 2009. He has held previous positions as Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader in Government, Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 1992-2006; Research Officer, Centre for European Studies, Nuffield College, Oxford, 1991-1992; and Research Fellow, Post-Graduate School of Public Administration, German University of Administrative Sciences, Speyer, 1989-1991. He has worked on the politics of time as part of several research grants including The Politics of Time: The Temporality of Enlargement and Europeanisation German Research Foundation (DFG), 2007-2011, sole applicant; Executive Governance and Law-making in Central and Eastern Europe. Better Government Programme, Ernst & Young (Poland), 2007-2009, co-applicant with R. Zubek, LSE (now Oxford); and The EU Timescape EU-CONSENT, 2006-2009, team leader with J.-H. Meyer-Sahling, University of Nottingham. His recent and forthcoming publications include: Time and Political Power in the EU, monograph under contract with Oxford University Press, 2012; ed. with R. Zubek, Performing to Type? Institutional Performance in the New EU Member States, special issue of Journal of Public Policy, 30 (1), 2010; ed. with J.-H. Meyer-Sahling, The EU Timescape, special issue of Journal of European Public Policy, 16 (2), 2009; ed . with P. Mair and G. Smith, European Politics: Pasts, Presents, Futures, London: Routledge, 2009 (first published as a special double issue of West European Politics, 31 (1/2) 2008); and with V. Dimitrov and H. Wollmann, Governing after Communism: Institutions and Policymaking, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. He is co-editor of the journal *West European Politics.*

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