Stasis *and* change

Theorizing time, transformation and persistence
in public policy and governance

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1. Introduction: objectives and guiding questions

Stasis, it should be clear from the outset, does not refer to absence of interactions and, indeed, conflicts. Rather, it is the state of a polity in which contemporary issues may be solved and settled, within the structural features of that polity, which are thus reproduced in and through political processes. Stasis is the normal state of a polity. Juxtaposed to that notion, change will be understood here as *transformative* change, i.e. as a fundamental change in practices as well as their structural – i.e. discursive, material and institutional - contexts. Reviewing how theories of governance and policy making conceive of stasis, change and, especially, their relationship is the objective of this chapter.

The emergence of these theories, over the past thirty years, follows a long period in which the policy sciences predominantly (neo-pluralist agenda building theories being the main exception) yielded theories that, often implicitly, assume stasis. This shift in the nature of theorizing is no co-incidence, or may be better, it coincides with a range of novel types of problems demanding a prominent place on societal agendas: migration, integration and social cohesion; the transition to sustainable development; the transformation of welfare states. While earlier problems pertained to generating and (re-)distributing welfare, contemporary issues are of a different nature - to such an extent that practices that seek to deal with them hardly fit incumbent arrangements, yielding (pressures for) structural transformation (e.g. Dingeldey & Rothgang, 2009; Kunz *et al.*, 2011; Adger & Jordan, 2009). Simultaneously, *longue durée* trends also more directly impact incumbent institutional arrangements: trans-nationalization (Brenner, 2004; Hale & Held, 2012), the emergence of network society (Van Dijk, 1990; Castells, 2000) or the transition from a Keynesian economic order based on oil and mass production to a post-Fordist one, in which flexibility, information and networks are key words (Jessop, 1997; Perez, 2002, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2004).

These developments, as well as the responses they have invoked, have significantly altered the polity, which has become '"differentiated" (comprising manifold arrangements; cf. Rhodes, 1997; Pollitt, 2002) and an "institutional void" (which of this manifold arrangements 'apply' has become ambiguous and is essentially a matter of agency; cf Hajer, 2003). Thus, when analyzing public policy making and governance, the unit of analysis may be usefully seen as constituted by practices. The concept of practice may be used to capture social processes, avoiding both voluntarism and presuming any structural context as 'given'. Practices are routinized interactions to perform certain tasks, or in a wording closer to our field, to deal with a particular type of problems, drawing on their structural context and thus reproducing specific structural (discursive, material or institutional) features. As Reckwitz (2002) notes, this conceptualization is compatible with contemporary social theories from authors as different as Bourdieu, Giddens, Luhman and Latour.

From this perspective, stasis refers to a policy domain, constituted by a configuration of (interacting, in a structured way) practices that dynamically reproduces specific structural features. (Transformative) change means a break with that pattern of reproduction, involving changes in practices, as well as, dialectically, their dynamic relationships and their structural context. I will review theories from literature in these terms, so as to appreciate how they conceive of stasis and change, and to compare them. While not all authors explicitly use this terminology, those theories that are of interest here will at least share an engagement with routinized, structurally embedded interaction. Moreover, the policy sciences provide ample reason to understand 'practices' here in an relatively open-textured way, potentially including - in addition to public governance practices - also, for instance, practices of consumption, innovation, caring and investment. Implementation studies have taught that implementation essentially involves societal practices, and that policy formation and implementation must be considered as interwoven (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Elmore, 1985; Sabatier, 1986; Grin & Van de Graaf, 1996); the concept of governance has mainly absorbed these insights in its focus on "concerted action across institutional boundaries on behalf of public purpose" (O'Toole, 2000), essentially denying the distinction between governing and being governed (e.g. Kooiman, 2000; Ostrom, 1999; Hajer, 2003; Marinetto, 2002), the private-public distinction (Pollitt, 2002) and divides between traditional policy domains (Bardach, 1998). Also, institutional arrangements for governance are co-evolving with societal practices and their dominant problem perceptions (Hoppe 2002; 2011: 1-15; Grin, 2010: 232 ff; 2012). Thus I will include in my review theories that include smaller and wider range of practices, and show how they theorize them. I will discuss how they conceive of manifold structural contexts in a similarly open-textured way.

More accurately, then, in the remainder of this chapter stasis refers to a situation in which practices reproduce themselves and their structural context when 'processing' problems (Dunn, 2007; Hoppe, 2011). Change will refer to radical shifts in practices and associate structural transformation. Better understanding change is a crucial extension of the scope of theorizing. Understanding both stasis and change through the *same* concepts and insights is true theoretical progress. In reviewing recent theories, I will thus highlight

(i)   how they conceive of the dynamics of (which?) practices, of structural contexts (which – institutional, discursive and material) dimensions?) and of their relationships.

(ii)   to what extent, and how, they understand stasis *and* change *in the same terms*.

2.   Modes of situating public policy making and governance in time: a typology

It is crucial to understand stasis and change as embedded in time. Not just in the banal sense that it forms the independently ticking, universal backdrop against which stasis or change occur. Policy making and governance essentially are about making plans (i.e. conceived future interventions in practice), realizing and monitoring them. Plans reflect expectations, emerging between the past and the uncertain future, and thus involve judgement (Arendt, 1961), which may (in case of stasis) or may not (change) reproduce past practices and structures. Understanding stasis and change, in the same terms, therefore crucially involves grasping the variety of ways in which past, present and future may be related.

As Pollitt (2008: 7-12) has remarked, while there is a vast literature on comparative public policy and governance has investigated the role of place (political system, policy domains etc.), most theorizing has paid remarkably little attention to how public policy and governance's are contextualized in time. This echoes Pierson's (2004) concerns on political science more generally. Pierson points out that this partly reflects rational choice theory's blind spots concerning "issues of macrostructure, the role of temporal ordering or sequence, and a whole range of social processes (…) over extended periods of time that cannot be reduced to 'moves' of 'actors'." (2004: 9; cp Marsh, 2010: 224 ff and Hancké, 2010: 242 ff) We may add that the more commonly mentioned (cf Hindmoor, 2006) limits of methodological individualism and stable preferences add to the problem of conceiving of stasis and change, respectively.

This, in a nutshell, is why, as noted above, so much literature has implicitly assumed stasis. Given this diagnosis, below I will review literature that has responded to these limits, i.e. work rooted in neo-institutionalism (including rational choice theories), in interpretivism, or in both; as well as the recently emerging complex systems approach. Yet, the chapter will not be organized by these approaches. Not only can they not fruitfully be considered disjoint. Also, from the perspective that "time matters and the past persists" (Pollitt, 2008: 121), a more interesting ordering framework seems to be that proposed by Howlett & Rayner (2006) on basis of recent literature on time in social processes from political science (in addition to Pierson and Pollitt, e.g. Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003) and, especially, sociology (e.g. Nowotny, 1992; Abbott, 2001; Whipp et al. 2001).

Howlet and Rayner (2006) contrast more recent perspectives with the 'stochastic-linear' model, in which outcomes are supposed to be relatively directly ('linear') caused by a set of underlying factors, which predispose (rather than determine – hence 'stochastic'). The underlying view of time is a-historical; history is simply "the assembly of 'moments' on a temporal continuum" (2006: 1) – "time has become no more than the difference between t_1 and t_2" (Pollitt, 2008: 7). They then develop an ordering framework for alternative approaches which consider policy outcomes as contingent, not only on individual actions, but also on more structural factors like historical timing or sequences of policy-relevant events. These approaches differ in how to conceive of nature and role of critical moments and of the workings of these sequences. Howlett & Rayner (2006: 9) organize them along two dimensions (figure 1): the nature of the origin of a sequence (contingent or embedded) and the directionality of the sequence (is it reversible over time?).

In the right 'irreversible' column, narrative positivist models work their way back from policy outcomes to reconstruct key moments and mechanisms of causation to explain the process from 'birth' to 'death'. Such 'developmental historicism' (Bevir, 2010) explains a given outcome - for instance the nature of a polity or the specific practices and structures of a policy domain - on basis of earlier circumstances. (Abbott, 1990) It hence provides little room for further change. As the seminal work by Pierson (2004) extensively argues, the latter is also true for path dependency theories (including many institutionalist theories), which describe how positive feedbacks make development stick to the paths taken at a specific critical (con-)juncture. Thus both types of irreversible theories discuss how a specific path of development sets in and then explains how this leads to stasis. Change is explained at best only for t=0, but by the nature of these approaches in different terms than the consequent stasis.

Direction of Sequence

	Reversible	Irreversible
Contingent/Random	*Stochastic and Narrative Postmodernist Models*	*Path Dependency*
Embedded/Cumulative	*Process Sequencing*	*Narrative Positivism*

Origins of Sequence

Fig. 1. Conceptions of historical change compared.

Rather than further introducing here the remaining two types, they will be successively discussed in one of the following three sections. I will elaborate each (but use the label' interpretive and discursive theories' for the top-left cell to avoid unfruitful confusions (see e.g. Schmidt's (2012) response to an undue classification by Bell), and then review some associate exemplary theories in terms of the questions outlined in section 1. While I have taken care to provide an overview of the field, the selection of theories unavoidably remains somewhat arbitrary. I present different fields of theory roughly in the order in which they have emerged, so as to better appreciate how they emerged as responses to each other's strengths and flaws. In reviewing theories, I will also draw on their empirical applications.

3. Process sequencing: punctuated equilibrium theories

Contrary to the path dependency perspective, process sequencing does not presuppose that a path, once taken on basis of choices made at a critical moment, unavoidably solidifies and becomes inescapable. Rather, the assumption is that along the road, there may be other moments where choices may be made, so that paths become reversible and novel paths may be taken. By making temporally ordered instances of problem solving the unit of analysis, it becomes methodologically possible to historically contextualize the process and show *how* time matters. Sociologist Haydu (1998), from whom these insights are cited, talks of "sequences of problem solving." By thus emphasizing that moments of choice are moments of problem solving, he wishes to emphasize that (i) events become connected, and thus sequences constructed, through solving particular problems; and (ii) thus through practices (my words – JG) involving a variety of actors, with differing, may be conflicting views. In addition, it may be possible to connect facts from different periods into larger sequences of problem solving, where periods are "demarcated on the basis of contrasting solutions for recurring problems." Thus he conceives of the distinction between stasis and change, in sociological processes like the evolution of US industrial relations, as a shift in the substance of problem solving.

Punctuated equilibrium theory: an outline

This point has been taken further by political scientists Baumgartner & Jones (1993), who have learned from early agenda building theories (Schattschneider, 1960; Cobb & Elder, 1972) that at least as fundamental as the nature of solutions is the question what, and whose, problem is being solved or defines the debate and how precisely that - and how precisely that problem is defined. Marring, in the trail of Kingdon (1984), policy making theory with agenda setting, Baumgartner & Jones (1993: 1-24) propose that the dynamics of stability (or 'stasis' – True et al., 1999) and change is largely driven by the interaction between everyday policy making practices in stabilized policy domains (policy subsystems; policy networks; governance arrangements), and macro-political agenda setting where problems are articulated and (re-) defined. Relying on natural science insights on self-organized criticality (Bak et al., 1989), they note that positive feedback may make small changes have large effects: thus macro developments may transform policy domains. Positive feedback may result from macro-political intervention through e.g. the growth of governmental organizations, the policy diffusion of policy transfer (reviews in Grin & Loeber, 2007: 202-205; Stone, 2012) across systems or issue expansion through connecting a new issue to incumbent actors or other issues (Cobb & Elder, 1975). Such mechanisms may interrupt policy domains' stasis. The authors designate this alternation of stasis and change as 'punctuated equilibrium', a term proposed in evolutionary biology for similar processes in ecosystems. (Eldredge & Gould, 1972) They claim that this understanding adds to conventional theory an understanding how, also in the conservative American political system, fundamental change is possible.

While punctuations may result from a single, sudden crisis, the mechanism emphasized in the punctuated equilibrium model is that of the much more common "earth quake dynamics" (Baumgartner et al., 2009: 606-607). While tectonic plates are continuously pushing to each other because of earth core processes, for most of the time friction between them is the negative feedback mechanism[1] that keeps them in place. Yet, core processes will yield a multitude of tiny changes between which positive feedback may occur. Pressure, over a long time, builds up and spreads to many places with only very small shifts occurring, to then exceed a certain threshold, creating an apparently (!) sudden, major change. Thus friction explains that we see a so-called leptokurtic distribution of changes: both stasis and (radical) change, but hardly relatively small changes.

Baumgartner & Jones (1993: 25-38) further conceptualize positive feedback in policy making as the interaction between two mobilization processes. First, in order to justify a particular understanding of an issue, policy makers will attempt to create and maintain so-called policy images: simplified, symbolic public understandings of the problem that discursively structure the policy process. Images have an empirical and an emotive or evaluative (I will return to this problematic conflation of valuation and emotion) dimension. As different groups will appreciate images differently, a problem may be linked to different images in an essentially political process – referring to Stone (2003) and Majone (1989), the authors emphasize that problem conditions may be turned into problem definition in highly strategic ways.

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[1] In physics, until the propagating force exceeds a critical threshold, an object feeling that force generates friction with the same strength as the propagating force, but pointing into the reverse direction. Thus its velocity remains constant in magnitude and direction. This changes only when the threshold is exceed.

The second process involves choosing or creating, as well as maintaining, a policy venue: the institutional locus where "authoritative decisions are made" (this emphasis on formal institutions is another point to be further discussed). Throughout their book, Baumgartner & Jones emphasize that in a pluralist and multi-level political systems, picking or linking to the most appropriate venue (strategic "venue shopping") is a key political dimension of policy making as venues differ in their appreciation of particular policy image. These differences are the main driver behind the interaction between the searches for favourable images and *ditto* venues - and thus behind the positive feedback mechanisms that may create punctuated equilibrium dynamics.

Elsewhere (True et al., 1999: 102-104), the authors have noted that they thus are able to explain both stasis and change on basis of the assumption of bounded rationality. While rationality shaped by images and venues contributes to the negative feedback in times of stasis by dampening mobilizations against status quo, entrepreneurial actors may also draw on images and a multitude of venues to reinforce mobilization, generating positive feedback. They claim thus to explain, without needing to assume "rapid flip-flops in preferences" or "basic irrationality", change on basis of "collective shifts in attention." Rather, the general punctuation thesis explains stasis and change on basis of the information flowing into a policy subsystem and its inherent friction. Thus they are able to understand the influenced of macro-politics in much more general terms than the effect of elections (Jones & Baumgartner, 2012). One interesting corollary of that point has been proposed by Boushey (2012: 127), who has extended punctuated equilibrium theory by marring it with policy diffusion literature. On basis of 81 cases of policy innovation in the US, he finds that finds that gradual policy diffusion may be driven by incremental policy emulation, rapid state-to-state diffusion driven by policy imitation and mimicking, and nearly immediate policy diffusion driven by state-level responses to a common exogenous shock.

Analytical power, empirical basis and open questions

On balance, three fundamental strengths of punctuated equilibrium theory must be mentioned. First, it acknowledges the duality of structure ('The structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize' - Giddens, 1984: 25). Venues and images are institutionally and discursively structuring policy making practices; simultaneously, shaping and linking venues and images is an essential part of policy making.

Second, and closely related, the theory explains both stasis and change in the same terms (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993: 235-251). Either is driven by the continuous dynamics of policy subsystems, responding to evolving problems through policy change, facing "forces [that] are the result of a complex interaction of institutions of society." (ibid, p. 237) Policy domains normally comprise structurally embedded practices, where negative feedback to policy change prevails. Punctuation occurs when positive feedback starts to dominate through the actions of policy entrepreneurs who mobilize the enthusiasm or the criticism of new actors, often those that were excluded from these practices. The existence of multiple venues offers channels for the rapid diffusion of new ideas and the shaping of policy domains through establishing novel linkages between venues. Macro-political interventions and crises in the overall political system may generate favourable conditions for such positive feedback. Wider societal, long term trends may induce such changes, both directly and through the changes they yield in a multitude of, interacting, policy domains.

The third key strength is that the theory has been extensively, thoroughly and multi-methodically tested in a variety of cases, including nuclear energy, budgeting, agricultural policies and urban issues. While the original book discussed cases in the US political system, with its typical federal division of power, meanwhile a wide range of empirical studies on cases elsewhere have been done, as well as a collection of insightful comparative work. One set of literature, methodologically drawing on inferential statistics enriched with contextualized analysis, has focused on testing two propositions at the core of punctuated equilibrium theory: that in a large set of cases the nature of change will be leptokurtically distributed (H1); and that kurtosis values will increase with the degree of institutionalization of practices (H2). Breunig (2006) finds that long term budgeting in Denmark, Germany and the UK reflects as much as a punctuated equilibrium and confirms H1 as the US case. The mechanisms generating positive feedback differ however: in the US, partisan differences in inclination to change the budget is a key driver, in the European countries it is distance in power and ideology between governing and opposition parties together with institutional features: in the UK and Germany, distance yields punctuation; in Denmark, often governed by minority governments seeking ad hoc policy support, distance tends to generate stasis. Leptokurtic distribution (H1) has also been found in Hong Kong, a democratizing polity shaped by a more authoritarian colonial and post-colonial past.. Punctuation is even stronger here because (i) "lack of democratic institutions commonly associated with friction actually lowers responsiveness and contributes to more volatile shifts" ; (ii) incremental policy change occurs less because learning is inhibited and (iii) the "lack of competition and confrontation in government processes represents an even more potent negative feedback mechanism than information costs in liberal democracies"(Lam & Chan, 2014: 22-23). Baumgartner et al. (2006), drawing on data for 30 policy processes in the US, Germany and Denmark find that both H1 and H2 find extensive support. Also, they observe that these countries exhibit more similarities than differences. This they tentatively explain by noting that, whatever the institutional context, bounded rationality will always characterize individual behavior and the functioning of organizations. They emphasize, however that more, and more in-depth, studies into the 'how' of punctuated equilibrium are highly needed. How do feedback processes work, and how may insight therein explain how eventually friction is overcome?

Baumgartner et al. (2009: 604) note that "[t]he relative importance of institutional differences compared to universalistic problems of cognitive limitations is an unanswered question". Based on a comparative analysis of earlier case studies in different institutional settings, they conclude that institutional frictions increases along the policy cycle, as the authors put it. But more fundamental is their observation on the underlying mechanisms: "Increasing institutional costs and the challenges of complexity produce increasingly punctuated series along the policy cycle regardless of the institutional specifics." (ibid, p. 615). This alerts us to the fact that also the degree of differentiation of the polity may matter. While the authors do pledge for future research into these issues, they emphasize the identification of institutional features that appear conditions making punctuation less or more likely. By contrast, Peter John (2006: 983), in a review, has argued that more (qualitative) work is needed to gain insight into the causal *processes* at work during policy change.

Significant work, along both lines, has already been undertaken. Comparative studies of major agrarian policy change in the EU and the US (Sheingate, 2000) as well as Sweden and New Zealand (Daugbjerg & Studsgaard, 2005) have explained policy shifts on basis of the twin processes of issue definition and

venue shaping. These occurred when positive feedback of agricultural subsidizing had yielded externalities (budget pressures, ecological damage) and resistance from other actors (in other policy domains, other polities (like the GATT/World Trade Organization) and other places (like the developing countries) regarding international trade repercussions. Yet, both studies find that the (strategic) agency involved and the way in which institutions shape the process needs better understanding. Most notably, Sheingate (2000: 367), arguing for more research into how actors promote policy innovations, notes that this is needed as a corrective to the "near-exclusive focus on institutional constraints so common in studies of retrenchment" and suggests research into, on the one hand, the possibility that some forms of feedback (like concentrated costs) by their nature promote more entrepreneurial agency; and, on the other hand, how differing institutional settings affect opportunities for issue definition and venue change. Lam & Chan (2014: 23) make the same two points on basis of four cases in Hong Kong, suggesting that future research should focus on the "very complex interactions between institutions and cognitive biases" in the "emergent multilevel process emerging from micro-level behaviors" that yield punctuation.

Similarly, Pralle (2003) has shown that venue shopping appears also crucial in Canadian Forestry Politics, but proposes a much more refined theorizing of venue shopping practices which may be much less pre-conceived and much more experimental (in the Deweyan 'inquiry' sense of the word - JG) than thought; are chose through by policy learning and influenced not only shaped by substantive goals but also by organizational needs and identities. Such factors obviously shape overall patterns of stasis and change. In a later comparative study of US and Canadian pesticide policies, drawing on the above cited literature on time, she has added timing and sequencing (of events, actor mobilization and venue shifts) as factors that co-determine policy outcomes. (Pralle, 2006). For the Belgian Dutroux child abuse scandal critical case, Walgraven & Varone (2008) have found that agency - including that of political parties - matters in creating punctuation on basis of shifting images and changing venues. Boushey (2012: 142-143) argues that more attention is needed to the "process of problem definition leading to policy change, choosing instead to identify how the attributes of states or the complexity of the innovation relate to patterns of diffusion" so as to understand "how changes in policy images precipitate the diffusion of innovations." Reviewing these studies, without denying the importance of understanding institutional conditions, it seems plausible that most additional, deepening insight may be derived from the type of studies proposed by John (2006), elucidating the agency involved in "mutually reinforcing process of change and interaction between 'institutions, networks, socioeconomic process, choices, and ideas' (John, 2003: 488)." (Studlar & Cairney, 2014: 518)

4. Process sequencing: rational choice, sociological and historical institutionalist accounts for change

The a priori reason to discuss neo-institutionalist theories here could be that they typically seek to adding to classical institutionalism an understanding of both the ways in which institutions shape agency and their dynamics – their emergence and development. Also, they tend to include informal and societal institutions as much as formal, political ones. (Rothstein, 1996; Lowndes, 2010) In sum, such theories may be expected to yield insight on stasis and change in policy processes in contemporary, differentiated polities. In addition, with a conceptual apparatus closer to actual political processes, such

theories may prove of use in the type of cases studies on punctuation just pledged for, and help to further elaborate more abstract notions like friction and feedback.

The reason *not* to discuss neo-institutionalism here could be that especially early neo-institutionalist work, while contributing to understanding mechanisms at work in stasis, is less able to shed light on change. As Lieberman (2002) has argued, this is due to the central blind spots of neo-institutionalism: they tend to exogenize some factors (especially ideas) on which they critically hinge analytically, and to privilege structure above agency. Blyth (2003) has pointed to the same points, and argued that the key in moving beyond these limits is the recognition of diversity amongst agents so that "structures do not come with an instruction sheet": their operation is essentially mediated by interpretation-in-action. As for instance Stacey & Rittberger (2003) have outlined, ignoring agency and interpretation (and, they add, non-political institutions) may indeed yield flawed insights in e.g. the distribution of policy making power amongst EU actors. At first sight at least, it seems plausible that this pertains to all early neo-institutionalist traditions: rational choice institutionalism (which considers preferences as given), for historical institutionalism (with a rather limited account of agency) and for sociological institutionalism (which, by black-boxing agency and taking meanings and scripts for granted, tends to overemphasize the influence of institutions over agency). (Lieberman, 2002; Hope & Raudia, 2012)

Yet, Stacey & Rittberger add some crucial nuances on early neo-institutionalist work. In the distributional perspective within *rational choice institutionalism* (RCI). They mention authors like Tsebelis (1990) and Knight (1992, 1995) who, in contrast to functionalist RCI literature, pay attention to change, and the role of agency and ideas therein. In addition, we may of course also refer to Elinor Ostrom (1999; 2005), who has pointed out that properly designed institutional arrangements, that allow for communication and trust building, may be transformed by actors into settings that promote collective action for a common good. Also, she has explicitly added to institutional rules physical-material conditions and cultural and other attributes of communities as factors shaping the action arena; and she has emphasized that actors may have different expectations and adopt different "evaluative criteria" (2005: 66 ff) to assess differently shaped arena's and the outcomes they may yield. An action arena with its practices and the factors structuring it she calls holons, a term from complex adaptive systems literature where it denotes a relatively autonomous subsystem of a larger system. Change in a holon may result from changes in the factors structuring it, which on its turn may result from its outcomes (positive and negative feedback) or from the outcomes of other holons to which it is connected (one possibility, getting a lot of attention being holons into which it is nested). In a sense, thus her work may be seen as an extension of punctuated equilibrium – an extension in the sense that more attention is paid to especially the role of physical and material factors, and culture / ideas. Interestingly, her framework has been further elaborated with learning theories, opening up the role of processes of (changing) interpretations in these action arenas to understand change (e.g. Huntjens et al., 2010; 2011). Similarly, Hall & Taylor understand change through bringing together *sociological-historical institutionalism* with learning theories.[2]

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[2]   For a review of these theories see chapter 27 by @@, as well as earlier reviews by Bennett & Howlett (1992), Biegelbauer (2007) and Grin and Loeber (2007). The latter pays explicit attention to the relations between policy learning and structural change.

Finally, as the reviews by Lieberman, Blyth and Stacey & Rittberger show, *historical institutionalism* has its real, and significant, merits in explaining stasis. They do so first and foremost on basis of friction from positive feedback ('increasing returns', as Pierson, 2004 captures it with a concept from path dependence theory; or 'policy feedbacks' - Skocpol, 2008), uncertainty about pay-offs of alternative practices and institutional arrangements; and incumbent institutional arrangements and preference constellations. (Stacey & Rittberger, 2003: 867-868; Lindner, 2003) These matters have been well elaborated on basis of extremely thorough empirical work (e.g. Thelen, 2004; Streeck &Thelen, 2005; and see the review in Skocpol, 2008). This literature has also claimed that, if novel institutions arise, they are an add-on to, or transformations of, incumbent institutions, as for instance discussed by Genschel (1997) in a study of international arrangements in telecommunications and the German health care system, and a comparative, longitudinal study on skill formation and vocational training in Thelen (2004). Many of these authors therefore juxtapose their analysis to the notion of punctuation, claiming that change is a much more gradual process (e.g. Lieberman, 2002: 703; Streeck and Thelen, 2005: 1-39). Partly, this reflects a lack of appreciation of the idea (admittedly not well elaborated in empirical punctuated equilibrium studies, as we have seen) that punctuation is partly caused by gradual build-up of negative feedback.

In order to understand change, historical-institutionalist theory *per se* needs be complemented with some conceptualization of agency. Similarly, Kathleen Thelen (1999) extensively reviews both traditions so as to argue that they should be synthesized rather than juxtaposed. Most crucially, she has pointed out that the strong emphasis on self-reinforcing feedbacks implicitly and unjustifiably assumes that these mechanisms may actually change when key actors re-evaluate their decisions in the light of changing contexts – more specifically, and referring to historical-institutionalist work by Skocpol (1992) and Hall, she mentions as contexts other policy domains or what Baumgartner & Jones call macro-politics (1999: 396); in later work, she has added social-economic contexts (Thelen, 2004: 31). In understanding these mechanisms, she joins sides with Knight (1999: 20; cited in Thelen, 2004: 32; cp. Lindner, 2003: 917 ff - JG) in portraying institutional development as a contest to shape institutions that make favourable outcomes likely. Thus, power distribution and coalition formation become key concepts in her empirically-grounded account (see also Thelen, 2012). To this depiction, Stacey & Rittberger (2003: 872 ff) have added the need to maintain bounded rationality and limited information as basic assumptions. Thus change may occur not only when its promised returns outweigh transformation costs, but also when this situation is announcing itself or when powerful actors feel that negotiating is the better option in the face of obstruction.

Fritz Scharpf's 'actor-centered institutionalism' also emphasizes that change is induced by external developments. He places agents centre-stage: it is through their work that either stasis or change result. Crucially, he rejects the assumption (made by most of the above authors) that institutions directly shape actor preferences; rather, they reflect actors' material interests and cognitive/normative orientations (1997: 19-22), which may be shaped by the norms embedded in institutions (2000: 769 ff).

In sum, these early neo-institutionalist theories have gone at great length to explain change – as solid empirical work shows, better than some have claimed. They have done so by, somehow, integrating an agency perspective and the role of ideas, generally as an add-on to ration al choice and institutional

inisghts (Bélan, 2009), emphasizing that agents may choose to reproduce or transform incumbent institutions. Also they consider how external dynamics condition these choices. Relatedly, in all strands, the role of ideas and learning has been increasingly recognized by a variety of open-minded neo-institutionalists and this synthesis has indeed led to important results by and in the trail of such authors as Elinor Ostrom and Peter Hall. It is difficult to disagree, however, with Lieberman's (2002) contention that these approaches often discuss ideas as explaining stasis around a particular policy paradigm; with his and Schmidt's (2010: 7) claims that this synthesis goes at the cost of the claimed parsimony of rational choice theories; and with Schmidt's (2012: 709) claim that this work has done a lot to endogenize change into accounts that acknowledge that institutions, but do not *explain* change.

5. Interpretive and discursive theories

It is precisely to remedy that flaw that Vivien Schmidt (2008, 2010, 2014) has sought to take up some of the more helpful notions from the literatures just discussed, and bring them together with insights from 'argumentative' turn in the policy sciences (Fischer & Forester, 1993; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Fischer & Gottweiss, 2012) into what she calls 'discursive institutionalism'. Her original point of departure (Schmidt, 2008) was to include ideas – understood in an institutional and a communicative (action, meaning) context - in a way that would yield a more dynamic explanation of change. Acknowledging that literature sees ideas in various ways - instrumental, strategic and structuring – she proposes to take all of these 'levels' into account. Thus, she distinguishes between ideas on policy solutions; ideas on policy problems and the 'programmatic beliefs' (Berman, 1998) 'policy cores' (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) or 'policy theories' (Hoogerwerf, 1990) mediating between world views and such problem definitions; and the public philosophies that underlie and shape the other two levels, and which may be the object of critical scrutiny in the trail of Foucault, Gramsci and others.

Discourses constituting particular practices and often dominating a particular domain generally comprise elements from all these levels (Fischer, 1993; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003) - as do the 'policy belief systems' (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) and 'interpretive frames' (Grin & Van de Graaf, 1996) or 'background ideational abilities' (Schmidt, 2008: 315) that represent the way in which actors engaged in particular practices have internalized these discourses and their institutional contexts. Following the Habermassian insight that discourse includes both *what* an actor says *and* to whom, why and where in the public sphere, Schmidt (2008: 310) distinguishes between "the policy sphere, in which policy actors engage one another in a 'coordinative' discourse about policy construction" and the "political sphere, in which political actors engage the public in a 'communicative' discourse about the necessity and appropriateness of such policies."

Stasis and change are theorized by considering institutions as "simultaneously constraining structures and enabling constructs of meaning, which are internal to 'sentient' (thinking and speaking) agents whose 'background ideational abilities' explain how they create and maintain institutions at the same time that their 'foreground discursive abilities' enable them to communicate critically about those institutions, to change (or maintain) them." A key issue is how "ideas in discursive interactions enable actors to overcome constraints which explanations in terms of interests, path dependence, and/or culture present as overwhelming impediments to action. " (Schmidt, 2010: 4)

This conceptual framework has already spurred a variety of empirical studies. Schmidt (2013), in an analysis of EU policy making around the Eurozone crisis, has found that discourse indeed differs between in coordinative EU councils and summit meetings, and the communicative spheres; but also that it differs between different communicative spheres, such as 'the market' or 'the people' (opinion leaders, media, citizens). Communicative actions go back and forth, and 'up' and 'down' between these diverse 'argumentative practices' as policy actors construct and seek to legitimate policies. Thus novel ideas emerge, most frequently at the policy and programmatic levels. Through bricolage they may layered upon each other as well as incumbent ideas. Thus, while the result –when looked upon from some distance in time - may be revolutionary, a closer look at the moment itself would reveal more evolutionary processes. Whereas Schmidt juxtaposes her findings with earlier literatures on paradigms, deep seated discourses and so on, a closer look into these literatures (Grin & Loeber, 2007: 206-209) reveals that these studies confirm her conclusion. Bakir's (2009) study of banking reform in Turkey yields similar results, and underscores the contribution that policy entrepreneurs may make to communicative interactions.

Other studies have both confirmed the analytical potential of discursive institutionalism, and explored the politics involved. Applying the theory to a case of conflict management, Raitio (2013) finds the importance of an institutional basis for trustful interaction. Fairbrass (2011), in a study of the EU's policy making on corporate social responsibility, has shown how power differentials affect the mechanisms through which ideas flow between spheres. She finds that the European Commission, making itself publicly vulnerable by flouting principles laid down in its Green Paper on Governance, adapted coordinative discourse significantly in response to communicative discourse, both because it considered it politically expedient to accommodate the interests of business and big governments, and because it realized it would need these actors for implementation. This finding may be seen as underlining the analytical importance of Schmidt's (2008: 307) reference to Foucauldian and Grasmcian notions on dominant or hegemonic philosophies that shape dominant programmatic beliefs.

That is, indeed, a point which Panizza and Miorelli (2013) claim to deserve more emphasis in discursive institutionalist theorizing. From the perspective of post-structuralist discourse theory, they stipulate that "discourses involve political struggles to inscribe and partially fix the meaning of a term within a certain discursive chain to the exclusion of others" and that "there is always a relative structuration of the social resulting from discursive operations that limit contingency by institutionalising the power relations of a particular social order. (Torfing, 1999: 153)." Arts & Buizer (2009) acknowledge these two points more operationally through the policy arrangements approach (PAA) (Art & Van Tatenhove, 2004). Policy arrangements describe the way in which a policy domain in terms of discourses, actors, resources and rules, which may be temporarily mutually coherent (stasis). While PAA claims that analysis may start at either dimension, Arts & Buizer (2009: 344) choose to follow discursive institutionalism in first undertaking a discursive analysis from the perspective of stasis and change, as a basis for subsequently analyzing the dynamics in the other dimensions, including the power dynamics involved. They find that in global forestry governance the sustainable development, biodiversity and governance discourses 'materialized' in the form of new partnerships, certification programs, voluntary instruments and an empowerment of non-state actors (…), [opening] the door to coalitions, which succeeded in combining economic interests with ecological aims." While they thus, more than Panizza and Miorelli, offer a

conceptual apparatus to grasp the dynamic relations between institutions, discourses, actor configurations and power, they are less able to conceive of the work involved in achieving change. The latter authors use the post-structuralist notion of discursive articulation, i.e. relating claims to heterogeneous elements, to understand how during the 2002 presidential electoral campaign in Brazil and in Argentina's poverty reduction policies in the 1990s, publics could be persuaded to accept change. They argue that this more relational understanding of 'foregrounding' has more explanatory power than Schmidt's individually rooted notion of abilities.

Other studies have sought to explore how discursive institutionalism may explain stasis. Hope & Raudla (2012) show how in a simple polity like Estonia, the number of policy makers may be so limited that there are hardly carriers of new ideas. As simultaneously communicative discourse was very effective in publicly legitimating strict fiscal policies, positive feedback loops were in place which led to stasis. In the much more compound US polity, change is of course unlikely; but discursive institutionalism can help "go beyond this truism and turn it on its head: not only is change difficult, but stasis is easy." Stasis is promoted through discursive activity: a complex coordinative discourse had to transgress many institutional borders , and the communicative discourse "communicative discourse lacked focus and ensured policy stasis through a discursively induced policy paralysis." (p. 415) While here the interaction between the institutional structure of the macro-polity and discourse explain stasis, Palmer (2010) demonstrates that it may also be the historically evolved, self-reinforcing interdependence between the institutional arrangement of and the dominant discourse prevailing in a specific policy domain that explains stasis. Institutionally privileged actors, who could draw on the rational-technical nature of the science-policy nexus in the UK, were able to set the debate on biofuels in the UK, whilst critics had to work hard to legitimate their positions, doing a lot of 'boundary work' between science and politics. Acknowledging that change is a slow process, Palmer stipulates that an analysis over a longer period, informed by insights and concepts from discourse analysis and STS, might show how the work shown may eventually produce change.

6. Beyond process sequencing? Complex systems based theories

Here I intend to add a brief section on complex systems based theories, especially Kooiman, Room, Innes & Booher, Geyher & Rihani, Cairney. The argument will run roughly as follows:
Such theories extend punctuated equilibrium theory by a better account of the complex, interdependent systems implied in work from studies in punctuated equilibrium and some neo-instutionalist work that emphasizes the nestedness and connectedness of policy subsystems, most notably that of Ostrom.
This may help to better understand typically contemporary phenomena like the interaction between societal and political practices and institutions; and the interaction / integration between hitherto separate policy/societal domains.
Also the idea of multiple, non-linear interactions implies a less linear understanding of change. Such theorizing may eventually take us beyond mere sequencing, and help us understand change in both synchronic and diachronic terms.
Yet, the authors listed above are still amongst the few who have truly translated CAS theory from biology and physics towards social reality; further conceptual work is needed and empirical work is scarce. In

order to make such elaboration usefully operational, both in research and in practice, it is crucial to build on discursive institutionalism and related approaches.

7. Conclusions

Clearly, over the past twenty five years, a variety of literatures has sought to better understand, in the same terms, stasis and change. Interestingly, all these bodies of work share some basic insights:

- stasis and change both result from interactions of practices with each other and with their discursive, institutional and (as some authors mention) material contexts;
- these practices are distributed over the realms of the specific policy subsystem(s) involved, diverse macro-political spheres (including parliament, media, public debate) as well as society at large;
- change does rarely occur due to a single event but, even when it occurs relatively suddenly, is partly due to longer period in which interactions between heterogeneous elements gradually undermine the conditions for stasis and prepare change;

The strong point in punctuated equilibrium and, even more, complexity theories is that they allow an understanding of the multiple, non-linear, sometimes circular interactions between heterogeneous elements; but they need better qualitative elaborations, conceived in more day to day terms. Conversely, institutionalist theories are stronger on the latter but may benefit from a less Newtonian understanding of the interactions involved. Time seems ripe to conceptually and empirically explore their integration.

Within all bodies of literature, agreement has been emerging that understanding these interactions better requires more insight in the agency (of both key actors and of policy entrepreneurs / brokers - cf. Mintrom & Norman, 2009). It should be stipulated that the pledge is *not* that agency needs be better understood in order to understand change – rather, agency must be better understood to understand both stasis and change as well as well as how one may flow into the other, in ways implied in the previous points. At the core of that agency is the work of linking (changing) practices, (changing) discourses and (changing) institutional features. Especially punctuated equilibrium theory and discursive institutionalism point to the importance of the work done by politicians, who from the macro-political a rena may change the agenda, prevailing ideas and institutional features in policy subsystems, simultaneously shaping these elements as they seem fit in view of their dealings with a variety of spheres in (potentially contentious and conflictual) processes of persuasion, legitimization, and accountability.

Equally important in the various literatures are policy workers, linking their practices to societal practices, to other policy practices and to changing discursive and institutional structures – as "facilitators of long-term social processes that are beyond their control" (Colebatch, 2011: 38). Importantly, entrepreneurial policy workers too may disrupt policy agendas and achieve transformational change (Loeber, 2007; Avelino, 2009; Sterrenberg, 2011). Especially the developing literature offering a relational perspective on policy work that may help to understand the work of

interlinking and its politics (e.g. Jessop, 1997; Healey, 2006; Smith, 2007; Hajer, 2009; Stone, 2012; Hoffman, 2012); literature, especially from transition studies (Voß et al., 2009; Shove & Walker, 2010; Grin, 2012) and urban studies (Kazepov et al., 2005; Hodson, 2008; Bulke) on connecting policy and societal dynamics and the powering involved in these processes; and literature on design and planning, that takes into account complexity (Morçöl, 2002, Dennard et al, 2008, Room, 2011) and reflexivity, to better understand what transformative work through what Schmidt has called foregrounding (Hillier & Healey, 2008; Voß et al., 2009; Lissandrello & Grin, 2011).

Integrating this policy studies literature into the literatures reviewed in the preceding sections would help to enrich the explanatory power of the theories reviewed in this chapter – not in the sense of a quest for universally valid causal relations, as some of the literature discussed is waging, but in the sense of developing a 'dual vision' (Grin, 2010) on these processes of stasis and change, alternating between a meta-perspective and an actor perspective. Such theory could enlighten policy scholars and practitioners alike.

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