P253 / The Time and Temporality Triangle: Connecting Policy Analysis, Policy Process Theories, and Public Administration

Topic : Bureaucracy, Administration and Policy Process

Chair : Lihi Lahat (Sapir Academic College, Israel/ Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies, Department of Political Science,Concordia University, Montreal.)

Second Chair : GABRIELA LOTTA (Getulio Vargas Foundation)

Third Chair : Daniel Béland (McGill University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Time runs through every part of public policy, yet we rarely study it as an object in its own right. Policies take time to emerge, unfold, and change. They shape how citizens spend their time. Public employees deliver them, and their time is increasingly scarce. Many social science disciplines have theorized time, but public policy and public administration scholarship still approach it in fragmented ways. This panel brings three largely separate streams together into what we call the "Time and Temporality Triangle."

The first vertex is policy analysis and design, where time is a resource, experience, and an outcome. Building on time-use and well-being research (Goodin et al., 2010; Lahat & Sened, 2020; Lahat, 2026; Gregory, 2026), this stream asks questions such as: How do policies shape people's use of time? Which policies expand time discretion? How can policy design reduce time poverty across diverse populations?

The second vertex is policy process theory, which treats time and temporality as dimensions of change and critical aspects of policy (Howlett & Goetz, 2014). Historical institutionalism highlights path dependence, sequencing, and policy feedback (Pierson, 2004). It also highlights gradual change through layering, conversion, and drift (Hacker, 2004; Béland, 2007). Work on temporariness and citizenship shows that time itself can be a policy instrument that distributes rights and status to immigrants (Cohen, 2015). Other frameworks ask why policy windows open at particular moments and how timing shapes outcomes.

The third vertex is public administration, where time constrains governing. Pollitt (2008) showed that public management often neglects the past and reform's temporal horizons. Recent work calls for temporal dynamics and longitudinal designs in the field (Murdoch et al., 2023). At the street level, workloads, administrative burden, and accelerating demands shape how public employees allocate their time. In turn, this shapes how citizens experience the state, including the time costs citizens bear to access services.

The main question we want to explore in this panel is: How can perspectives on time from policy analysis, policy process theories, and public administration be connected to better explain how policies are made, delivered, and experienced?

Examples of questions to explore:

How does policy design distribute time burdens and time discretion?
In what ways is ‘time poverty’ a policy outcome?
How do the temporal dynamics of the policy process, such as sequencing, feedback, and drift, shape not only what policies do but also the temporal conditions in which administrators and citizens act?
How do administrative time constraints mediate between policy design and outcomes?
How does time help to understand the policy process and policy outcomes from a comparative perspective?
Can time in public sector organizations transmit or amplify time inequalities?

Integrating the three vertices yields concepts and research designs that single-stream approaches miss, such as longitudinal, time-use, and comparative designs. By connecting these streams, the panel aims to build an international community of scholars working on time at the policy and societal levels.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite theoretical, empirical, and normative papers that examine the role of time and temporality in public policy, public analysis, and public administration. Papers may speak to one vertex of the triangle, and we especially welcome papers that bridge two or more.

Relevant topics include, but are not limited to:

Time-related policy outcomes: time poverty, time discretion, care and work–life policies, and the unequal distribution of time across gender, class, migration status and other groups.
Time as a policy instrument: waiting periods, deadlines, eligibility durations, temporary status and the temporal dimensions of rights and citizenship.
Time and temporality in the policy process: policy windows, timing and sequencing, path dependence, policy feedback over time, and change.
Time in public administration: administrative burden and the time costs citizens face, how street-level bureaucrats and other public employees use and ration time, and temporal experiences across different public services.
Methods for studying time: longitudinal designs, time-use data, process tracing, and comparative-historical analysis.
Normative approaches: what a "time policy" could look like, and what governments owe citizens in terms of time.
We welcome single-country case studies, comparative studies and interdisciplinary work. We are particularly keen to receive papers from early-career scholars and from diverse regions, including the Global South.

Paper proposals will be assessed on the clarity of their theoretical framework and research question; the rigor of their methodology; and their contribution to connecting time-related insights across policy analysis, policy process theories, and public administration

The chairs intend to develop a special issue from selected panel papers for submission to a high-ranking journal. We would therefore be happy if authors are prepared to develop their contributions into full articles following the conference.

References:

Béland, D. (2007). Ideas and institutional change in social security: Conversion, layering, and policy drift. Social Science Quarterly, 88 (1, pp. 20–38.

Cohen, E. F. (2015). The political economy of immigrant time: Rights, citizenship, and temporariness in the post-1965 era. Polity, 47(3), 337–351.

Goodin, R.E. (2010). ‘Temporal Justice’, Journal of Social Policy, 39(1), 1–16.

Gregory, L. (2026). Time, Welfare and Society: challenging the rise of neo-liberal welfare provision. Edward Elgar

Hacker, J. S. (2004). Privatizing risk without privatizing the welfare state: The hidden politics of social policy retrenchment in the United States. American Political Science Review, 98(2), 243-260.

Howlett, M., & K. H. Goetz. (2014). Introduction: Time, Temporality, and Timescapes in Administration and Policy. International Review of Administrative Sciences, 80 (3), 477–492.

Lahat, L., & Sened, I. (2020). Time and well-being, an institutional, comparative perspective: Is it time to explore the idea of a time policy?. Journal of European Social Policy, 30(3), 275–292.

Lahat, L. (2026). Recognizing Time as a Policy Issue: A Research Agenda for Enhancing Societal Well-being. Policy Design and Practice, 9 (1), 70-81.

Murdoch, Z., MacCarthaigh, M., & Geys, B. (2023). It's about time! Temporal dynamics and longitudinal research designs in public administration. Public Administration Review, 83(6), 1727-1736.

Pierson, P. (2004). Politics in time: history, institutions, and social analysis.

Pollitt, C. (2008). Time, policy, management: Governing with the past. OUP Oxford.