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## Dynamics of policy change: Conceptualising policy change and stability in a transforming society

### Abstract

Policy change is at the heart of policy research. However, scholars mostly observe incremental rather than major or transformative change. As the hurdles for change are both high and diverse, policy research partly shifts from analysing major policy change to everyday politics. Following this analytical shift, this symposium addresses the dynamics of policy change. Its seven contributions examine the different qualities and modes of policy change identified in the (dis)continuities, path dependencies, and random or unexpected windows of opportunity. Adopting a processual analytical perspective, we reconsider different concepts of change and transformation. Starting from the explanatory power of overlapping policy process theories, we identify three analytical approaches (institutional, actor centred, politics of change) and summarise drivers and hurdles of policy change. Building on the contributions, we derive modes and qualities of policy change as a combination of these factors to facilitate exchange across theoretical perspectives and contribute to a better understanding of policy change and stability.

**Keywords:** Policy change, policy stability, transformation, policy process theories

### Zusammenfassung

*Dynamiken des Policy-Wandels. Konzeptionelle Überlegungen zu Politikwandel und -stabilität in der Transformationsgesellschaft*

Politikwandel liegt im Zentrum der Policy-Forschung. Dennoch wird meist schrittweiser statt umfassender Wandel beobachtet. Die hohen und vielfältigen Hürden für Politikwandel führten zu einem Perspektivenwechsel in Teilen der Policy-Forschung, der statt großer politischer Veränderungen nunmehr auf die Charakteristika alltäglicher Politikgestaltung blickt. Dieser analytischen Wendung folgend befasst sich der Themenschwerpunkt mit Dynamiken von Policy-Wandel. In den sieben Beiträgen werden die verschiedenen Qualitäten und Formen von Policy-Wandel untersucht, die sich in (Dis-)Kontinuitäten, Pfadabhängigkeiten und zufälligen oder unerwarteten Gelegenheitsfenstern zeigen. Mithilfe einer prozessualen Analyseperspektive überdenken wir Konzepte von Wandel und Transformation. Ausgehend vom Überschneidungsbereich in der Erklärungskraft verschiedener Policy-Prozess-Theorien identifizieren wir drei analytische Ansätze (institutionell, akteurzentriert, politics of change), um die Treiber und Hürden von Policy-Wandel zusammenzufassen. Aufbauend auf den Beiträgen leiten wir schließlich Modi und Qualitäten von Policy-Wandel als Kombination dieser Faktoren ab, um den Austausch zwischen theoretischen Perspektiven zu ermöglichen und zu einem besseren Verständnis von politischem Wandel und Stabilität beizutragen.

**Schlagwörter:** Politikwandel, Politikstabilität, Transformation, Policy-Prozess-Theorien

## 1 Public policy as the study of change

The dawn of the 2020s has seen an increased focus on economic, sustainable, and societal transformation. Starting with Green New Deal proposals in the US and the European Green Deal policy initiative, numerous post-COVID-19 recovery initiatives explicitly referenced transformation and transformative policy change. In Germany, both prior to and in the aftermath of the 2021 federal elections, parties were beating the drum for change, arguing for the need for political change for the post-Merkel era and presenting policy proposals that are intended to set new accents in various policy areas.<sup>1</sup> Their chorus was accompanied by many other political actors who tried to bring in their different points of view: social and economic interest groups and activists in social movements, the media, administration and municipalities as well as academia. But how can we classify such widely desired change processes from a political science perspective? And what is the relationship between policy stability and change in the context of social transformation?

When studying policy change and stability, it is worthwhile to take a public policy perspective because “public policy *is* the study of change” (Berglund, Dunlop, Koebele & Weible, 2022, p. 305; emphasis S.P. and M.S.; Lasswell, 1956). Hence, we see a multitude of special issues on policy change within public policy research. Some focus on specific forms of policy change, such as policy learning (Dunlop, 2017; Moyson, Scholten & Weible, 2017) or policy feedback (Béland & Schlager, 2019), while others advance the theoretical and methodological debate on policy change (Capano & Howlett, 2009; Rüb, 2014) or present a symposium of articles studying policy change from a distinct theoretical perspective, such as the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF, Weible & Schlager, 2016), Advocacy Coalition Framework (the ACF, Weible et al., 2011) or the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (the PET, Jones & Baumgartner, 2012). Lastly, also dms has featured two symposiums on change, one on the “governance of transformation” focussing on energy and climate policies (Benz & Czada, 2019, on the governance of sustainable development, see Russel & Kirsop-Taylor, 2022, p. 6) and one on the “development and change of policy areas” (Haunss, 2015).

Policy scholars mostly observe incremental policy change. In turn, major or even transformative policy change are exemptions rather than the rule (Baumgartner, Jones & Mortensen, 2018; Cairney, 2019, p. 227; Hassel & Wegrich, 2022, pp. 68-71). In the German context, examples of policy change include the implementation of the Bologna Process as a transnational higher education reform at the turn of the millennium (Toens, 2009; Turner, 2019), the hurdled path of reforming the German Renewable Energy Sources Act (Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz, EEG) within the German energy transition (Stefes, 2014; Schmid, Sewerin & Schmidt, 2020), the introduction of the minimum wage in August 2014 (Voigt, 2019; Schmidt, 2015; Bandau & Dümig, 2015), and the lobby register adopted in March 2021 (Polk, 2021; Plümer & Schiffrers, im Erscheinen).<sup>2</sup> Although these reforms are not all ground-breaking in the sense of paradigmatic change, the debates with long phases of stability and subsequent, sometimes unexpected change patterns emphasise shifts in social perceptions of individual policies and policy fields. Further, they show how states respond to these changing perceptions by adopting new legislation and developing (new) policies step by step. Accordingly, we observe that incremental changes can add up to major and sometimes even transformative policy change (Streeck & Thelen, 2005; see also the main assump-

tions of PET in Beyer, Boushey & Breunig, 2015). Hence, Capano (2013) suggests that analysing policy change means studying everyday politics. We follow this approach by discovering small and incremental changes characterising daily policy-making which may eventually lead to major policy change.

This analytical shift from rare moments of major policy change to everyday politics is confronted with the supposed ‘truism’ of political science that policy changes are the results of large and ‘irregular’ exogenous shocks. Political observers and the media regularly expect that it is in the aftermath of crises, like the pandemic, natural disasters, and political turmoil, where large-scale shifts and changes take place. Current public policy research, however, shows that while broad opportunities for change may converge in key situations of crisis, they still do not always fully unfold their potential for change. This is because the hurdles are high: Even in situations of crisis, path dependencies and lock-ins must be overcome, with new perspectives offering more incentives than tried-and-true policy solutions which once provided stability.

Starting from this observation, this symposium puts policy change at its analytical core. Seven contributions with empirical case studies examine the different qualities and modes of policy change which can be identified in the (dis)continuities, path dependencies, and random or unexpected windows of opportunity. The articles address complex policy-making processes between various policy actors including decision-makers in government, parliament, and administration, as well as interest groups on a local, regional, national, and European level. Taken together, they answer the following questions:

- How do processes of policy change and stability take place in different policy fields and subsystems?
- What characterises the exchange and interactions of policy actors as well as the decision-making processes against the backdrop of a steady tension between the forces of the status quo and the dynamics of policy change?
- What role do specific working cultures of different policy fields, their level of contentious policy knowledge, topic-specific attention cycles, and individual perceptions of success and failure play in promoting policy change or defending the status quo?

Addressing these questions, this symposium is distinctive in three ways: First, we reconsider the study of policy change and transformation by putting the *processes* of policy change, i.e. the actions and interactions within institutional settings, at the centre. Second, in comparison to earlier special issues, we provide a platform for different conceptual approaches, thereby trying to overcome existing “theoretical silos” (Weible, 2018, p. 367) and let different theories ‘speak’ to each other within this volume. Third, in comparison to prior symposiums, our collection has a clear conceptual focus on policy change and covers a broader thematic range not only studying the evolution of policy fields but also the development of subsystems.

This introduction to our symposium proceeds as follows: Section 2 describes the multitude of definitions regarding policy change and outlines common conceptual challenges when studying policy change. Section 3 identifies three analytical approaches (institutional, actors centred, politics of change) and summarises the drivers and hurdles as explaining factors of policy change that are mentioned in the existing literature. Section 4 presents the articles of this symposium, illustrates their fit into the analytical

approaches and elaborates on the explaining factors of the contributions. Section 5 closes by deriving different modes and qualities of policy change from the case studies.

## 2 Policy change from a conceptual perspective: challenges and definitions

From a conceptual point of view the study of policy change faces major challenges (for an overview see Knill, Schulze & Tosun, 2010; Capano & Howlett, 2009). Among others, these include a “dependent variable” problem (the ‘what’), the challenge to determine the logic of direction (the ‘how’), the difficulty to identify causal mechanisms of policy change (the ‘why’) and the challenge to address the temporal dimension of change (the ‘when’; Capano, 2013; Capano, 2009). Lastly, there are difficulties regarding the operationalisation and measurement of policy change (Berglund, Dunlop, Koebele & Weible, 2022, p. 306). While some of the challenges need to be addressed by scholars studying policy change themselves, we can provide an overview of the most-used definitions of policy change and thereby contribute to clarify the ‘what’.

One of the most recognised definitions has been forwarded by Peter Hall (1993) distinguishing between first-order change (routine adjustment), second-order change (changing policy instruments) and third-order change (shift in goals and paradigms). Other scholars have followed this tradition of distinguishing between different variants of policy change. Paul A. Sabatier and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith (1993), for example, introduce the concepts of minor and major policy change: While minor policy change reflects alterations of the instrumental means to achieve policy goals (shift in secondary beliefs), major policy change happens when the goals constituting a subsystem change (shift in policy core or deep core beliefs). Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones (2009) refer to incremental and substantial policy change, whereby incremental policy change means small but regular changes to a policy (field) and substantial policy change refers to abrupt changes as a result of policy punctuations. In line with these two- or three-partitions, some taxonomies have been developed, e.g. based on the distinction between the tempo and directionality of change (Cashore & Howlett, 2007) or the tempo and scope of policy change (Rüb, 2014). Empirically, approaches e. g. by Christoph Knill and Jale Tosun (2015) help to measure policy change in terms of density (number of policies in one area, instruments) and intensity (policy expansion or dismantling, level of regulation, scope of measures).

The above-mentioned definitions seek to reduce complexity. Other researchers, however, have investigated different modes of policy change, once again adding complexity to the study of change. One of the most famous examples is the typology developed by Wolfgang Streek and Kathleen Thelen (2005, pp. 12, 19) covering four modes of incremental institutional change: layering, conversion, drift and displacement. By focussing on the characteristics of change agents with institutional, political and contextual resources, this framework increased conceptual complexity, stimulating both debate and application of policy change research (for an application and slight modification see Hacker, 2005 and Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). In a similar vein, Friedbert W. Rüb (2014) expands his first typology of policy change (see above) and analyses the intentions of the individual policy actors (policy change as reaction or action) as well as the actor constellations (bottom-up or top down). By adding these two fac-

tors to his typology, Rüb emphasizes the actor dimension of policy change and points out a processual perspective: Policy change is seen to unfold in the dynamic interactions between policy actors in an institutional setting. Studies on policy learning as a distinct pathway to policy change (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013; Heikkilä & Gerlak, 2013; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2018a; Plümer, 2021) and the recent dynamics of pandemic policy-making in the COVID-19 crisis (Capano, Howlett, Jarvis & Ramesh, 2022; Hogan, Howlett & Murphy, 2022; Ewert & Loer, 2022) show that focussing on the (interactive) processes can lead to a more nuanced picture of policy change.

A concept closely linked to policy change is the idea of transformational change. Although policy researchers already referred to the term ‘transformation’ at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g. Streeck & Thelen, 2005), the concept has not been used frequently in policy studies: “(...) the field of Public Policy is largely absent in empirical and theoretical arguments related to transformational change”, despite the recognition that policy change *may* spark transformational societal change (Berglund, Dunlop, Koebele & Weible, 2022, p. 306). Lately, however, we see a growing body of literature focusing on transformational change (see the articles of the special issue by Berglund, Dunlop, Koebele & Weible, 2022). Like the concept of policy change, transformational change is also defined in various ways. A common denominator, however, is to focus on broader societal change as a result of several policy changes over extended periods of time, support from social movements and cross-sectoral policy change (Berglund, Dunlop, Koebele & Weible, 2022, p. 315).

While we observe an increase of policy studies focusing on transformational change only recently, other research areas have a longer tradition investigating transformative change and can therefore help to expand our conceptual understanding. Evidence from the area of technology studies show that non-linear change is the distinguishing feature to separate transformation from ‘regular’ policy change. The literature review by Katharina Hölscher, Julia M. Wittmayer and Derk Looibach (2018) highlights that the terms ‘transformation’ and ‘transition’ both focus on large-scale, radical, and non-linear changes with different nuances in their conceptual and disciplinary backgrounds. While ‘transition’ refers to subsystems and the question of ‘how’ change occurs, ‘transformation’ relates to societal change with the question of ‘what’ patterns of change emerge. From this point of view, apparent radical change is a result of time spanning processes of searching and restructuring. Further, Ulrich Dolata (2011) differentiates between four variants of gradual transformation by combining an action dimension (passive/reactive versus initial/proactive) with an output dimension (reform-oriented versus radical): (1) “incremental” and (2) “architectural” change favour reform, (3) substitutive change leads to radical outcomes including disruption, and (4) “coexistence” refers to long-lasting stability that might lead to the first three variants in time.

From this line of debate, we reconsider the study of policy change and transformation by putting the *processes of policy change* at the centre of the symposium. This means that we analyse the actions and interactions of policy actors within an institutional setting and also consider the substantial policy output. In this way, we (a) investigate different explanatory factors as drivers and hurdles for policy change and (b) identify different modes and qualities of policy change, illustrating the dynamics of linear and non-linear change (transformation). In this way, we contribute to a more nuanced picture of policy change.

### 3 Three perspectives on the drivers and hurdles for policy change

Next to a variety of definitions of policy change, scholars also apply different theoretical approaches to understand and explain policy change. Policy change is usually studied using policy process theories, such as the ACF and PET which explicitly use the word ‘policy change’, or the MSF and the relatively young Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) implicitly referring to policy change (for an overview see Weible & Sabatier, 2018 and Weible & Workman, 2022). Still others engage in concept formation regarding policy diffusion (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996) or policy learning (Bennett & Howlett, 1992).

Besides having different scopes and assumptions (Cairney & Heikkilä, 2018, p. 306), each theory helps to capture the complex reality of how and why policies may change and others do not. To investigate the nature of observed policy change or stability, policy process theories provide different explanatory factors which – depending on the context of the analyses – work as drivers and hurdles of policy change, and may display causal mechanisms (van der Heijden, Kuhlmann, Linquist & Wellstead, 2021). Analytically, these factors can be divided into three overarching perspectives: institutional factors, actor centred factors and factors related to the politics of change.

- (1) From an institutional perspective, explanatory factors cover the broader political context of a concrete policy, including the structural specifics of policy-making in general, such as elections that may lead to changes in (the composition of) government (MSF, ACF), changes in socioeconomic conditions (ACF), an increased problem perception and pressure to react to a broader public mood (MSF, new institutionalisms), heightened attention for a policy problem (PET), changed policy venues (PET), and institutional friction in policy making (PET). Further, the perspective highlights decision-making processes in institutional settings and therefore connects to different institutionalist theories (rational choice, historical, sociological, and discursive institutionalism; see Schmidt, 2010).
- (2) The actor centred perspective helps to explain how policy actors build majorities for policy change or the defence of the status quo. Theoretical factors include advocacy coalitions and policy communities (ACF, PET), mobilization by interest group campaigns and social movements (MSF), changes in the public opinion or the national mood (MSF, ACF), actor resources (ACF), actor narratives (NPF), and policy images (PET). Actor centred pathways to policy change include policy-oriented learning (ACF), other forms of policy learning (see the development of a theory of policy learning, Dunlop & Radaelli, 2018b), and negotiated agreements (ACF). Studying policy change from an actor centred perspective explicitly focuses on the involved actors and their policy communities.
- (3) The perspective of politics of policy change relates to the question of how political actors make use of possible pathways in practice that may lead to policy change. Focusing on strategic considerations, actors act either proactively or reactively in crucial situations. Theoretical factors include focusing events and windows opportunity (MSF, PET), as well as the skilful and clever use of public opinion, expertise, scandals, and policy failures via framing and narratives (NPF, see also discursive institutionalism), and via policy images (PET). Lastly, coalitions may use their

resources (ACF) to influence policy decisions. The analytical translation from *potential* possibilities of change (the ‘what’ including the explaining factors) to concrete action for change and transformation (the ‘how’) underlines recent findings about the complex link between external shocks and change (ACF).

Crises and crisis-like events were widely recognized as drivers of change processes. However, Ian Bremmer (2022), for example, shows that the institutional response to possible solutions to world-changing crises is inadequate. Daniel Nohrstedt, Maurizio Mazzoleni, Charles F. Parker and Guiliano Di Baldassarre (2021) found no relationship between a large sample of disasters – a commonly identified antecedent of change – and policy change in a worldwide sample. Xavier Fernández-i-Marín, Steffen Hurka, Christoph Knill and Yves Steinebach (2022) show that economic crises influence crisis-remote policy subsystems by evoking incrementalist patterns of policy change with radical changes still only occurring after infrequent punctuations (PET). Bremmer (2022) trenchantly coined the term of “goldilocks crisis” which fosters decisive change by being not too large to overwhelm any political action but large enough to initiate structural and institutional change.

Focusing on the factors explaining policy change or the maintenance of the status quo has two important implications: First, they vary in effect and are subject to context-sensitive analyses. Second, the different analytical perspectives related to the explanatory factors are highly interrelated. Nonetheless, these three perspectives serve as basic ways of how to approach the study of policy change. The next section thus outlines how the articles of this symposium fit into the three perspectives and speak to different drivers and hurdles of policy change.

## 4 Articles of this symposium

This symposium covers seven contributions – six research articles and one essay (Karl-Rudolf Korte) – highlighting different facets of policy change and stability. Further, it contains two book reviews: The first review by Karin Ingold discusses *Learning in Public Policy. Analysis, Modes and Outcomes* edited by Claire Dunlop, Claudio Radaelli and Philipp Trein (2018) which is so far one of the few books studying policy learning as a specific pathway to policy change. The second review by Nadin Fromm discusses Paul Cairney’s *The Politics of Policy Analysis* (2021), a compendium on how to do policy analysis including some thoughts on policy change.

The seven contributions of the special issue can be assigned to the three different analytical approaches towards policy change and stability outlined above. According to this logic, the articles by Christoph Knill, Yves Steinebach and Bastian Buitkamp, Anne Goldmann, as well as Simon Fink, Eva Ruffing, Hermann Anton Lüken genannt Kläßen and Luisa Maschlanka highlight an institutional perspective on policy change. Daniel Rasch as well as Detlef Sack and Sebastian Fuchs take an actor centred perspective while Nicolas Jäger, Julie P. King and Bernd Siebenhüner, as well as Karl-Rudolf Korte analyse policy change through a politics of change perspective. Further, the articles refer to different explanatory factors of policy change closely associated with the analytical approaches. In this way, they clarify the factors already mentioned in the existing literature by adding context-specific information (see section 3). *Table 1* groups

the articles according to their analytical approaches and points to the underlying explanatory factors of policy change in each case study.

*Table 1: Articles of this special issue on policy change and stability*

No.	Authors	Analytical foci and link to existing literature on policy change/stability	Explaining factors of policy change/stability
<i>Institutional perspective</i>			
1	Knill, Steinebach & Buitkamp	Policy change across different subsystems: Change between subsystems as new research agenda	Problem pressure, attention, actor constellations
2	Goldmann	Policy change and stability as the development of policy fields and the emergence of new subfields: Nascent subsystems and their evolution	Attention, policy images
3	Fink, Ruffing, Lüken genannt Klaßen & Maschlanka	Policy change and stability from a multi-level perspective: Europeanisation	Institutional friction, power balance, window of opportunity
<i>Actor centred perspective</i>			
4	Rasch	Policy change and stability through changed consultation networks: Actors and advisory systems shape policy outcome vice versa	Internal dynamics of policy networks, short-term advocacy coalitions, external and internal developments in the policy field
5	Sack & Fuchs	Policy change and stability influenced by state-interest group relations: Actors and advisory systems shape policy outcome vice versa	Internal dynamics of policy networks, policy communities, convergence of problem perception and actor preferences, political exchange
<i>Politics of change perspective</i>			
6	Jäger, King & Siebenhüner	Policy change and stability through a lock-in perspective: Formal and informal aspects of policy change	Framing and knowledge via policy image
7	Korte	Policy change as transformative change: Transformational governance, the politics of transformation	External shocks with windows of opportunity, new governing coalition, policy image

*Source:* Own illustration.

Taking an *institutional perspective* as first analytical approach, the article by Knill, Steinebach and Buitkamp analyses policy change across different subsystems. For this purpose, the authors use the concept of policy proximity which posits that different policy issues share common features that make them more or less likely to change together. In this way, the study contributes to overcoming the prevalent ‘subsystem bias’ in the existing literature on policy change. The authors conclude that policy issues substantially differ in their level of connectivity and identify the closest ‘neighbours’ for each subsystem.

Regarding the different drivers and hurdles of policy change, the article addresses two main factors: First, increased problem pressure and heightened attention for a policy problem with cross-sectional importance may lead to policy changes across subsystems. Second – also hinting at the actor centred perspective of policy change –, the characteristics of policy actors being part of advocacy coalitions or policy communities may affect subsystem proximity. Examples are party-political coalitions that often span



different subsystems and policy brokers engaging in advocacy across policy fields with similar professional norms.

Going beyond the traditional subsystem logic is also the starting point of Goldmann's article on the development of digital policy as a cross-sectoral policy field in Germany. Taking the example of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the author asks how the rapidly developing technology acts as a driver for the emergence of a new subfield within digital policy. Her results show a quick rise of the topic of AI on all political levels in the last years, a dominant policy image focussing on the economic promotion of AI technologies in German federal states, that AI politics is framed as an executive responsibility and that policy coordination mainly takes place regionally and locally.

In terms of explanatory factors, Goldmann illustrates heightened attention due to the new technology of AI. This, in turn, translates into a perceived need of policy makers to develop AI policy as a subfield of digital policy and adds an actor centred perspective. The emergence of a new policy field calls for coordination between governmental actors both at the federal and at the state levels. Further, policy actors use policy images as an instrument to frame the new policy as a part of regional economic policy potentially enhancing the states' resources.

The third article with an institutional approach looks at possible policy change through the lens of Europeanisation research. Taking the example of the third energy market package in Germany, Fink, Ruffing, Lüken genannt Klaben and Maschlanka focus on the implementation of European energy market directives in national law. The analysis reveals that only by looking at the implementation phase following the transposition of European law into national law, the 'true' amount of policy change becomes visible. In the case of the third energy market package, the institutional design of the implementation phase had a significant impact on the position of different actors involved. This, in turn, is reflected in the final policy output after the implementation phase.

The article points at institutional friction as a key explanatory factor. In the case study, the transposition of European law into national law acts as a hurdle to policy-making as it creates unequal power between actors with information asymmetries and the existence of central veto players. This also highlights a politics of change perspective because some policy actors actively use the implementation phase as a window of opportunity to make claims.

An *actor centred perspective* as second analytical approach is taken in the article by Rasch. The study asks if the transformation of German environmental policy can be observed in the corresponding consultation networks of the Federal Ministry for the Environment. Results are two-fold: First, the study finds that environmental consultation networks have been subject to substantial dynamics in a seven-year period between 2014 and 2020 regarding for instance their size, their diversity and the dominance of certain networks. Second, the changing consultation networks are connected to policy variations and changes in German environmental policy.

Regarding the drivers and hurdles of policy change, the article identifies several external and internal factors regarding the transformation of German environmental policy: On the external dimension, Rasch mentions European and international regulations and natural disasters; on the internal dimension, he refers to short-term advocacy coalitions, the development of new parties (the Green Party) and new governing coalitions. Further, the article elaborates on ministerial consultation networks as part of a

larger policy network seeking influence and either pushing for change or trying to keep the status quo. The article therefore contributes to the study of policy networks whose membership is fluid, becomes more diverse, and varies from policy to policy in this case.

Connecting the study of networks to the investigation of policy change and stability is also of major concern to the article by Sack and Fuchs. The contribution analyses the underlying mechanism of reproduction and change of state-interest group relations (SIGR). In this way, the authors do not only highlight the implications for the policy output in terms of policy stability and variation but also point to the output's consequences for future SIGR regarding their stability or adaptation. The study shows that the mechanism consists of three immanent restrictions (divergent problem perception, experiences of defeat and membership decline) and two exogenous contingencies (limits of governance capabilities and exogenous political mobilisation).

Related to the article by Rasch, this contribution also addresses policy communities as an explanatory factor of policy change and stability. It provides insights into the nature of policy communities with a special focus on state-interest relations. The analysis shows that the perception of a policy problem, the interaction of the policy actors as well as their unilateral action have an impact on the stability and reproduction of the relation. In turn, it affects the policy output and its tendency towards change or stability.

The third analytical approach covering the *politics of policy change* is chosen by Jäger, King and Siebenhüner. The authors focus on climate change adaptation in the German states of Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia to analyse the dynamics of policy stability and change. Using a lock-in theoretical perspective, they show how different combinations of factors – technologies and infrastructure, institutions, actors and agency, knowledge and cognitive frames – can act as constraints in the policy-making process. Empirical results illustrate that lock-ins are more distinct in mature policy fields (coastal erosion in Schleswig-Holstein) and less entangled in nascent fields (water scarcity in Thuringia). In turn, the authors argue that framing and knowledge are leverage points to break the self-reinforcing mechanisms of lock-ins.

In terms of explanatory factors, the article highlights framing and knowledge via policy images. While a homogenous knowledge base by a stable set of central actors puts policy alternatives out of active consideration, an absence of established coalitions allows for new knowledge and a broader frame for potential change.

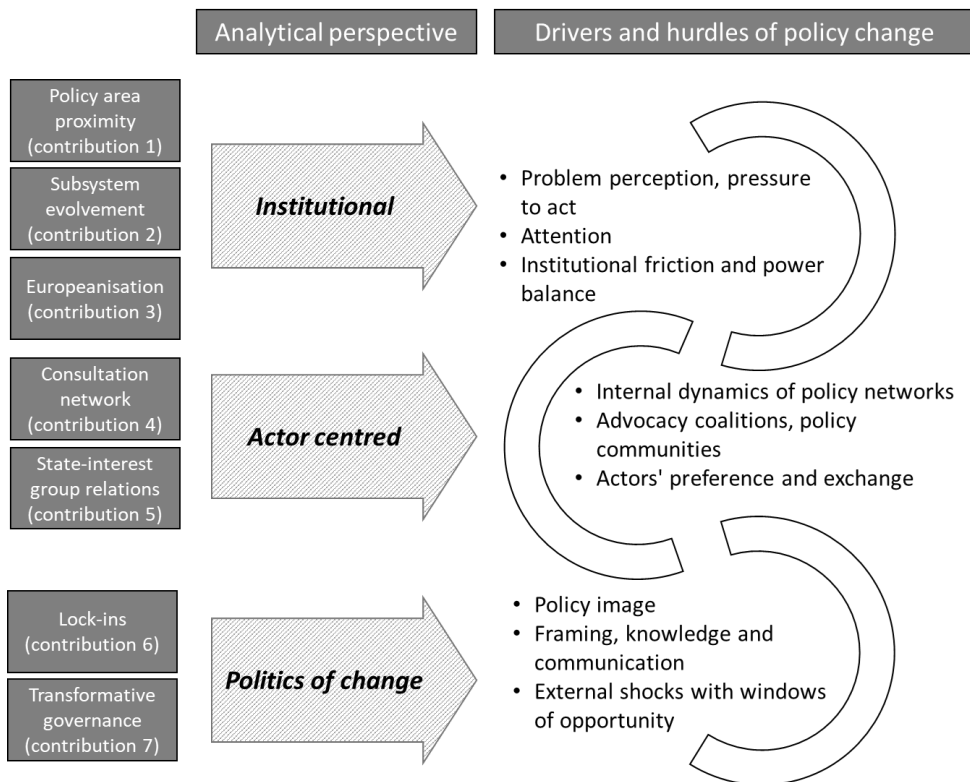
In his essay, which is also part of the politics of change perspective, Korte introduces the concept of transformative governance. Building on the ideational context of transformation, the author draws on seemingly permanent crises that face the German 'traffic light' coalition, a government coalition named after the traditional party colours of social democrats, liberals and greens, which is in office since December 2021. As a concept, transformative governance points to a specific form of political management in times of crises and imminent transformations. It employs four distinct but interconnected modes: adaptation, guidance, prioritisation, and exchange. These modes and a combination thereof are identified in different situations in German executive politics, reaching from incrementalism to disruptive transformation. The concept underlines the relevance of resilience for governmental crisis response and the time-tested power of the Chancellor's address in parliament to declare the turning point in German foreign and security policy ("*Zeitenwende*") after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The essay suggests that successful transformation needs both unconditional public services secur-

ing livelihood and the courage of government to embrace change and to impose necessary short-term burdens on its citizens.

Lastly, this essay also gives some hints on the explanatory factors of policy change and transformation. It points to the skilful handling of external shocks, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic in a communicative way. Accordingly, the newly elected German ‘traffic light’ coalition skilfully communicates a policy image that proactively engages with the external shock of a European war.

*Figure 1* again provides an overview of the contributions, their analytical perspectives (institutional, actor centred, politics of change) and their corresponding explanatory factors as drivers and hurdles of policy change. It complements *Table 1* in highlighting the overlap and the interdependence between both the analytical approaches and the explanatory factors. By virtue of this overlap, we find a set of connected factors that go well beyond the individual case studies and underline the usefulness of a processual perspective on the dynamics of policy change.

*Figure 1:* Three analytical perspectives, common set of explanatory factors of change



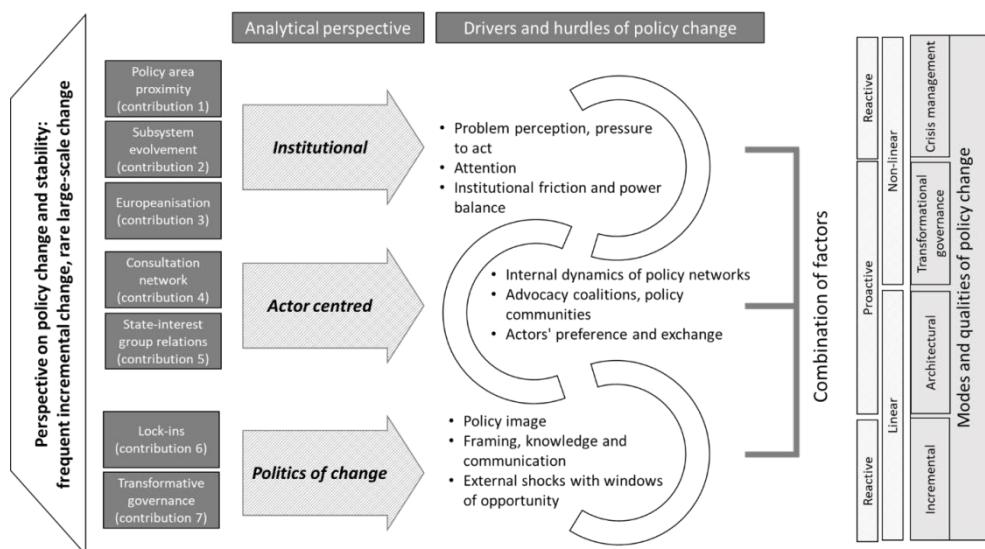
Source: Own illustration.

## 5 Towards modes and qualities of policy change

The articles of this symposium contribute to a *processual understanding of policy change* by focusing on the actions and interactions of policy actors within an institutional setting that lead to a certain policy output. Within this processual understanding, they take three different analytical approaches: an institutional perspective, an actor centred perspective as well as a politics of change perspective. Accordingly, they focus on the political and institutional context of change, on the role of political actors in pushing for or preventing policy change, or on political actors' strategic considerations to translate possibilities of change into visible change and transformation. Further, the articles highlight several explanatory factors and a combination thereof as drivers and hurdles of policy change. Based on this combination of explanatory factors in the contributions and in the referenced literature (see sections 2 and 3), we identify different modes and qualities of policy change. In this way, we illustrate the dynamics of linear and non-linear change (transformation).

Our typology differentiates reactive versus proactive policy-making in an action dimension and linear change versus non-linear change in an outcome dimension. The resulting modes of policy change are *incremental change*, *architectural change*<sup>3</sup>, *transformational governance*, and *crisis management*. Figure 2 summarises the findings of this symposium and illustrates the analytical perspectives, the different drivers and hurdles of policy change, as well as the modes and qualities of policy change.

Figure 2: Modes and qualities of policy change, derived from literature and contributions



Source: Own illustration.

Each of the four modes of policy change has distinct characteristics:

1. In *incremental change (reactive, linear)*, actors react to policy problems or specific situations. In its outcome, change is small and linear, following closely ongoing developments in a linear path. As incrementalism is the de-facto routine decision-making style, we find broad evidence in all contributions. As an example, we see spillovers of change from one policy subsystem to other proximate neighbours (Knill, Steinebach & Buitkamp), institutional frictions in the Europeanisation of implementing public policy (Fink, Ruffing, Lücken genannt Klaben & Maschlanka) and continuous changes in ministerial consultation networks (Rasch).
2. In *architectural change (proactive, linear)*, actors take a proactive role in policy-making e. g. by following a coherent strategic vision. Its outcome is linear change. Closely connected to incrementalism, this mode can be observed in several cases or situations in the articles of this symposium. For instance, Sack and Fuchs show that policy actors strategically pushed for policy change in the legislation on human rights due diligence in transnational supply chains. Further, we see initial approaches to potentially break existing lock-ins via strategic framing and knowledge in the case of water scarcity (Jäger, King & Siebenhüner) and in an emerging policy field following heightened attention that is actively used by political actors to frame a new policy subfield (Goldmann).
3. In *transformational governance (proactive, non-linear)*, key policy actors anticipate imminent turning points proactively to foster non-linear outcomes and large-scale change. Its characteristics include shifts in policy goals and values (Nohrstedt, 2022, see section 2), as well as communicative interaction as relevant accompanying measures. An example for transformational governance can be seen in the German Chancellor's address in parliament initiating the "*Zeitenwende*" where a key political actor used the parliamentary venue to take leadership in introducing decisive shifts (Korte).
4. In *crisis management (reactive, non-linear)*, policy-making is reactive in the face of external shocks and high levels of uncertainty. Its outcome nevertheless follows a non-linear path of radical change. We find examples for this mode in pandemic politics (Korte) and crisis corporatism during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sack & Fuchs).

The synthesising typology based on different drivers and hurdles of policy change allows to overcome existing "theoretical silos" (Weible, 2018, p. 367) within policy analysis. While acknowledging the explanatory power of each policy process theory and its explanatory factors, this systematic derivation focuses on the *combination* of different factors of stability and change that we find in the overlap of these theories. It therefore facilitates scholarly exchange *across* different theoretical perspectives and contributes to a better understanding of policy change and stability as central topics of public policy research.

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## Notes

- 1 The CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens, FDP, Left Party, AfD and the minority party SSW actively use the term ‘transformation’. The FDP merely mentions digital transformation, while the AfD is the only party to position itself against transformation (Schiffers, von Schuckmann & Plümer, im Erscheinen).
- 2 For some examples of policy changes during the last legislative term in Germany (2017-2021), see Blum (2022).
- 3 See Dolata (2011) and section 2.

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