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Punctuated Equilibrium Model for Influencing Public Policies: Practical Implications for Public Health

Webinar | November 20, 2018

National Collaborating Centre
for Healthy Public Policy



Centre de collaboration nationale
sur les politiques publiques et la santé
National Collaborating Centre
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Our team for this webinar

Marianne Jacques: moderator



Mylène Maguire: logistics and technical support



Mathieu Masse-Jolicoeur: presenter



Jennifer Levy: presenter



To ask questions during the presentation

Please use the chatbox at any time.

Your questions will be raised during the Q&A period.



We are recording this webinar, including the chat, and we will be posting this on our website.



Declaration of real or potential conflicts of interest

Presenters:

Mathieu Masse-Jolicoeur

Jennifer Levy



Have no real or potential conflict of interest related to the material that is being presented today.



The National Collaborating Centres for Public Health




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National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCCHPP)

Our mandate

- Support public health actors in their efforts to promote healthy public policies

Our areas of expertise

- The effects of public policies on health
- Generating and using knowledge about policies
- Intersectoral actors and mechanisms
- Strategies to influence policy making



Mathieu Masse-Jolicoeur

Research officer at the Direction régionale de santé
publique
de Montréal du CIUSSS Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

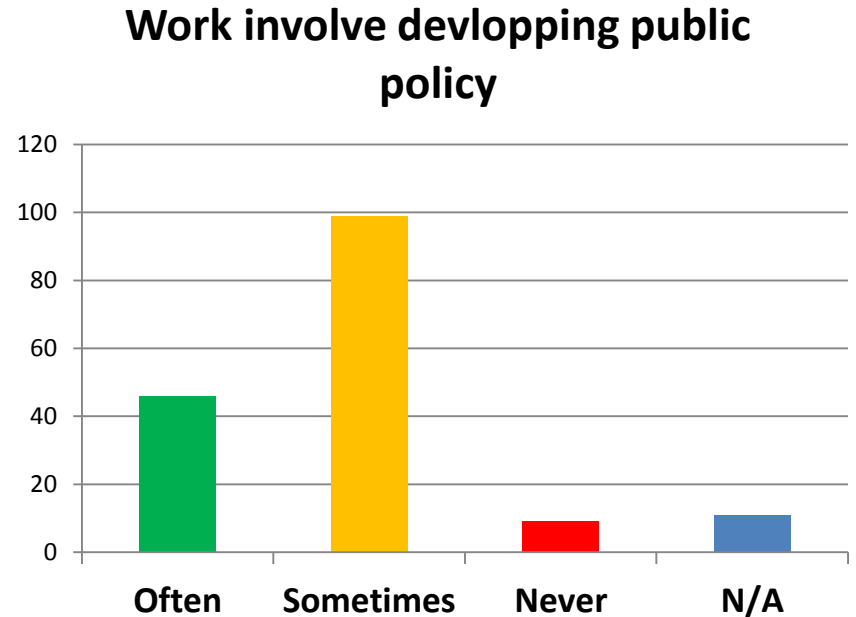
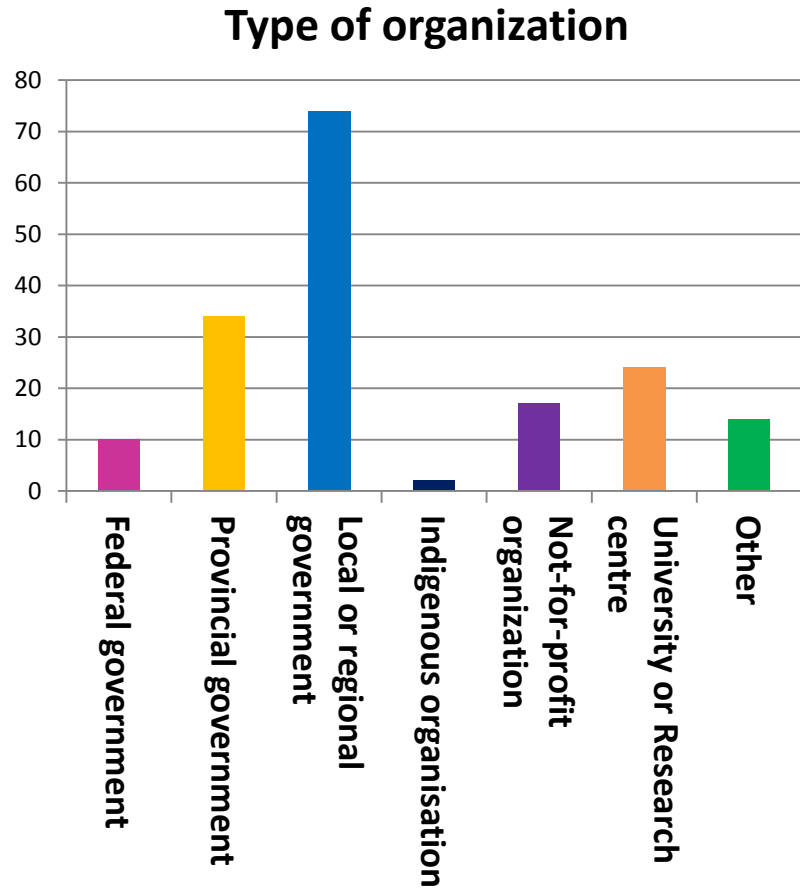


Lecturer, Université du Québec à Montréal, and École
nationale d'administration publique

Introduction

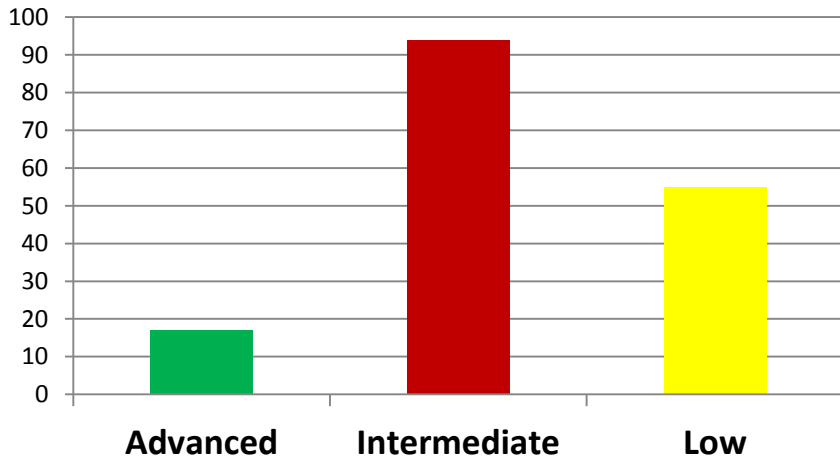
- Public policy unit of the Montreal DRSP (regional public health department)
 - Background information
 - Participation in the drafting of advisories and white papers
 - Strategic scanning
 - Influence support
 - Interventions involving strategic actors
 - Community of practice for health-related public policy

Attendees (Work and organizations)

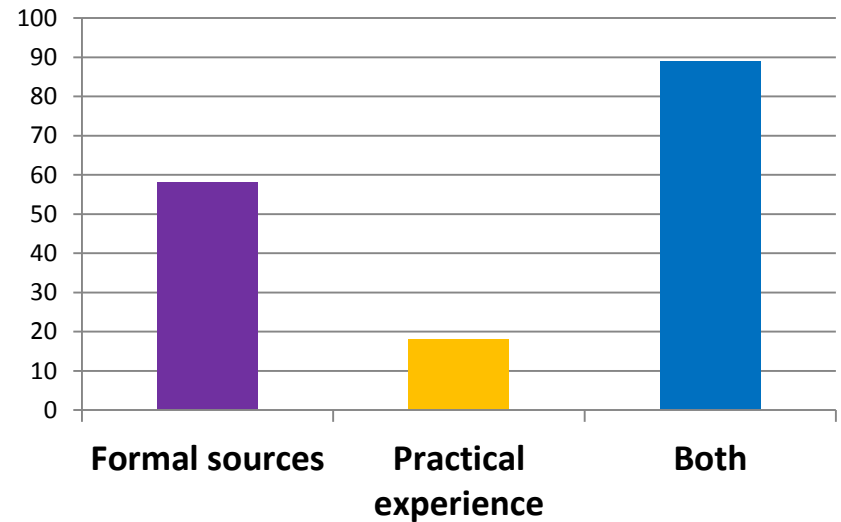


Attendees (Knowledge)

Level of Knowledge

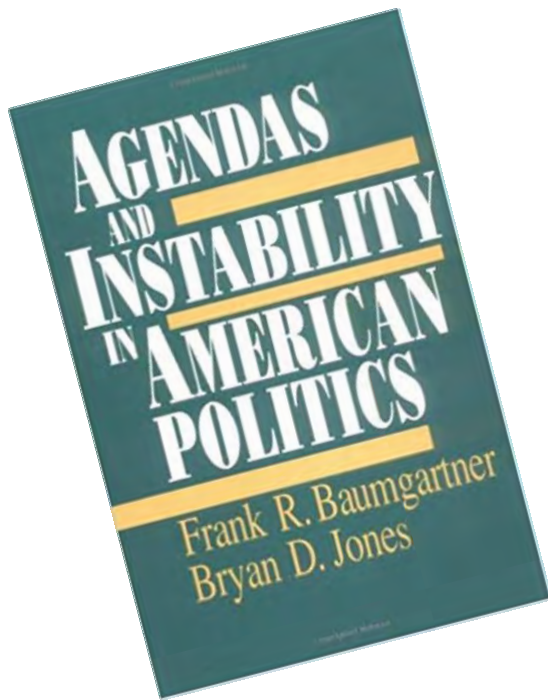


Knowledge stems from...



Agendas and Instability in American politics

Baumgartner and Jones (1993)



- The authors analyze five major subsystems over a long period of time (90 years):
 - The Tobacco Industry
 - Auto safety
 - Nuclear energy
 - Pesticides and agriculture
 - Municipal urban planning

POLITICAL SUBSYSTEMS

- Power has a tendency to be distributed among specialized subsystems
 - Each subsystem draws together a small number of concerned actors
 - These subsystems are highly autonomous and largely unconstrained by public opinion and democratic forces
 - Decisions made by subsystems are often considered more technical or routine

Question 1:

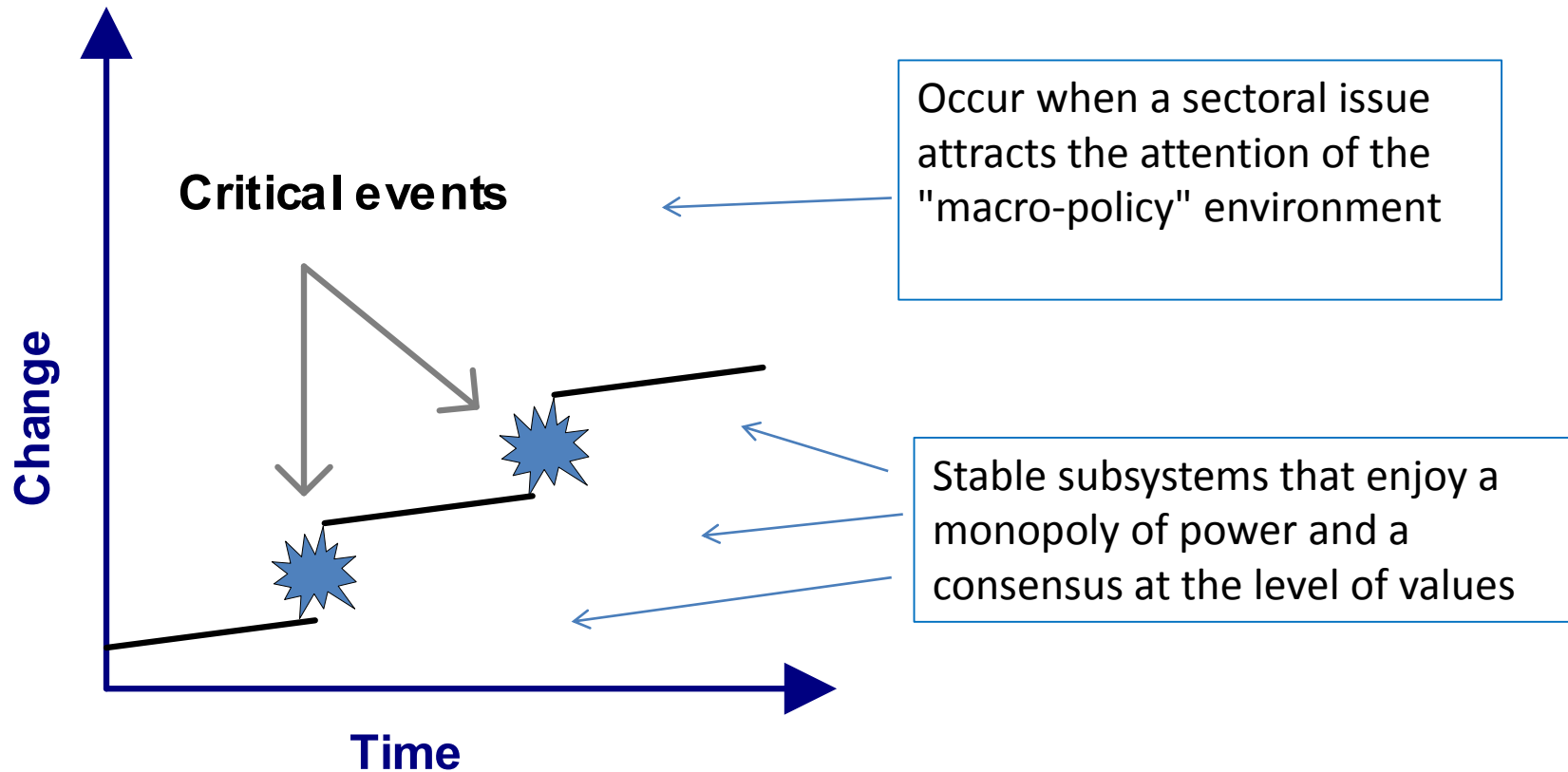
- In your opinion, how many of the 5 subsystems studied by Baumgartner and Jones remain stable?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - I don't know

The punctuated equilibrium theory



Aims to reconcile long periods of equilibrium and sudden punctuations in an integrated model

Incrementalism: in systems that are in equilibrium, changes take the form of small advances and marginal changes to allocations



Conflict expansion

- Process which may explain the destruction of these subsystems
 - As the circle of participants grows, the risk that the associated subsystem will collapse also increases
 - Media attention represents a risk for a subsystem in equilibrium

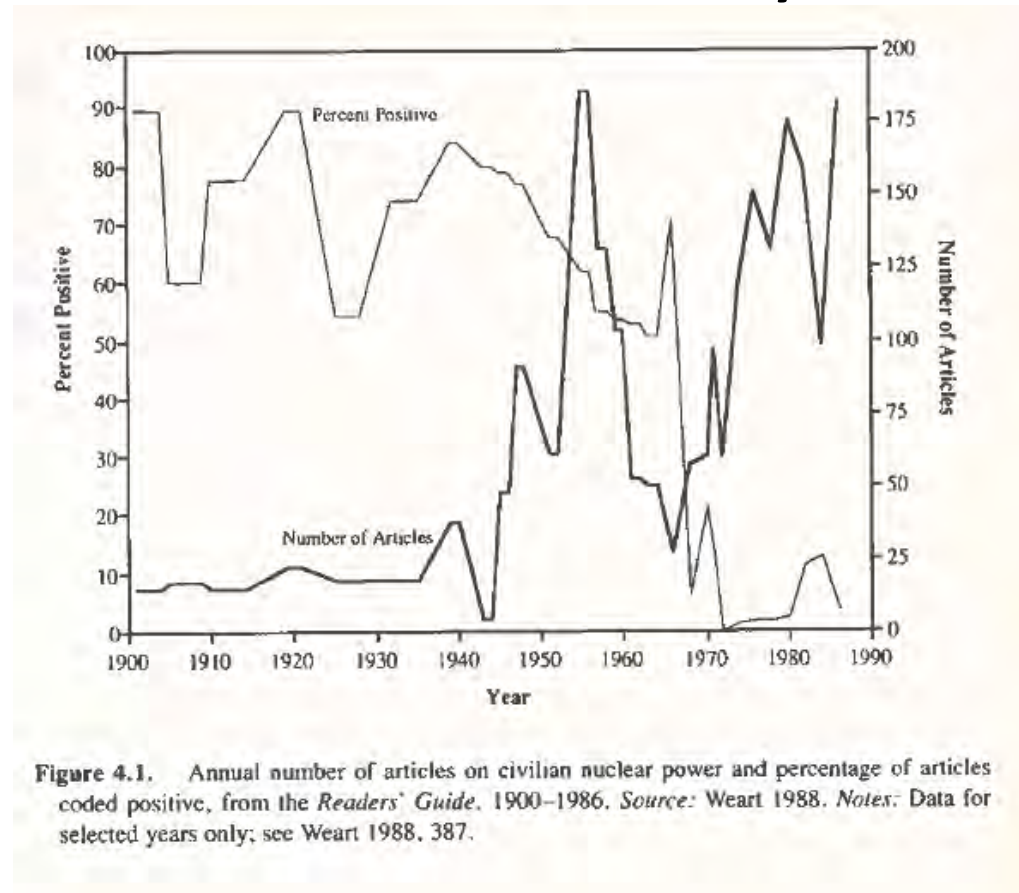
The importance of tracking media coverage

- Media attention:
 - Have many articles on the policy been published?
 - Has there been a change in the number of articles observed?
- Media tone:
 - Do media reports support or oppose the existing policy?
 - Has there been an observable change in the media coverage?

Question 2:

In your opinion, what most threatens a stable subsystem?

- Media attention
- Media tone
- Both
- I don't know



THE PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM MODEL

- The punctuated equilibrium model builds on the interaction between two key concepts:

- Policy images



- Policy venues



POLICY IMAGES

- Definition: The way a public policy is discussed in public and in the media
 - Other authors refer instead to the *framing* of a public policy
 - A public policy's image is based on facts, or rather on a set of facts, interpreted through a prism of beliefs and values
 - Facts can be distorted
 - Public policies are compatible with several images
 - There is a tendency to simplify and to choose a single image

A positive policy image

- A stable subsystem (in equilibrium) focuses on positive facts and ignores negative facts
 - A positive image protects a subsystem
 - The public loses interest in a positive image
- Consequence: subsystems devote a great deal of effort to strengthening their positive image
- Warning: the accumulation of unresolved negative facts can put a subsystem at risk of punctuation

A negative policy image

- A new fact that is judged more negatively and tarnishes a policy's image can surface because of a change in the environment
 - Critical event
 - Action of a strategic actor (and, most of the time, a combination of the two)
- Powerful and autonomous subsystems can lose control of the policy image that protects them

Analyzing the policy's image

- For an actor wishing to influence public policy, it may be relevant to be knowledgeable about the policy's image
 - What is the policy's overall image?
 - What facts play a role in generating this image?
 - How are these facts interpreted? (values and beliefs)
 - Do other groups present an alternative image of the policy?

Question 3:

Can a public policy's image change depending on the stakes concerned with an issue?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- The example of tobacco:
 - Agriculture: Employment
 - Health: Diseases, cost
 - Insurance: Income (premiums)
 - International business: Exports
 - Tourism: Events sponsorships
 - Etc.

POLICY VENUES

- Definition: "the institutional locations where authoritative decisions are made"
- Our societies offer a multitude of policy venues
 - Policy venues associated with a debate can change, or even multiply, over time
 - Some of these policy venues have decision-making abilities, or they can act as public forums and agents of change for a policy image

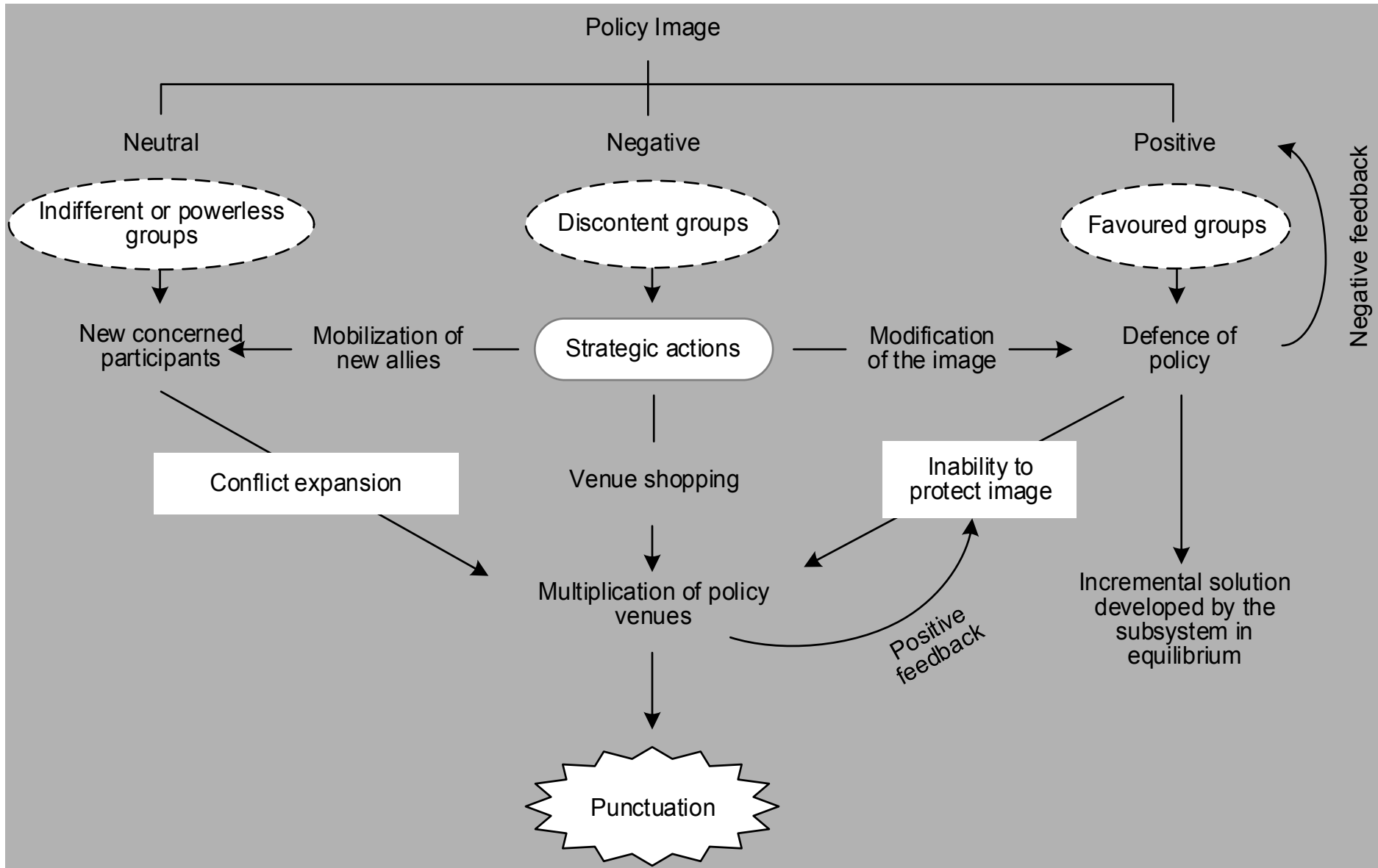
Question 4:

- Find the intruder: which of the following institutions is not a policy venue?
 - Court
 - Parliament
 - Parliamentary Committee
 - Municipal council
 - School board council of commissioners
 - Governing board of a public agency
 - None of the above
 - I don't know

Venue shopping

- For disgruntled groups dissatisfied with a subsystem, it is possible to interest a new policy venue
- When venue shopping, it is essential to:
 - Understand their context and decision-making rules
 - Determine which policy images these policy venues would prefer to be associated with
 - Ensure that these policy venues have the will and the leverage to expand their field of expertise

How can this model guide public health actors?



Strengthening the policy system (policy defence)

- Subsystems thrive when images are positive, attention is limited and policy venues are favourable
 - When a policy image is predominantly positive:
 - Specialists can call for autonomy and resources to continue their work
 - Despite the accumulation of negative evidence, governments retain public policies that favour certain actors
 - The involvement of new policy venues is not encouraged
 - While a policy venue remains unchallenged and retains its monopoly in an area of activity, an image change is unlikely

Punctuation, or how a system can be destroyed

- Subsystems can be destroyed when events or strategic actions weaken a policy's image and strengthen an alternative image
 - External shocks (crises, scandals or natural disasters) can also highlight the inadequacies of a subsystem
 - If the image is overburdened with ethical, social or political issues, new participants may want to get involved
 - Pressure groups, activists, legislative committees, the media, etc.
 - If a policy's image changes, new policy venues and new actors may want to become involved
 - Risks changing the policy's image

Resources

- **The resources needed to control a subsystem are not the same as those required to contest one**
- **To keep a system in equilibrium:**
 - Financial resources
 - Political support
- **To change a subsystem:**
 - Scientific knowledge
 - The qualifications of actors engaged in influence activities (knowledge, perseverance)
 - Support from new actors

Questions ?

Punctuated Equilibrium Model for Influencing Public Policies: Perspectives from Local Public Health

Jennifer Levy
Policy Development Officer
Healthy Public Policy, Toronto Public Health
November 20, 2018

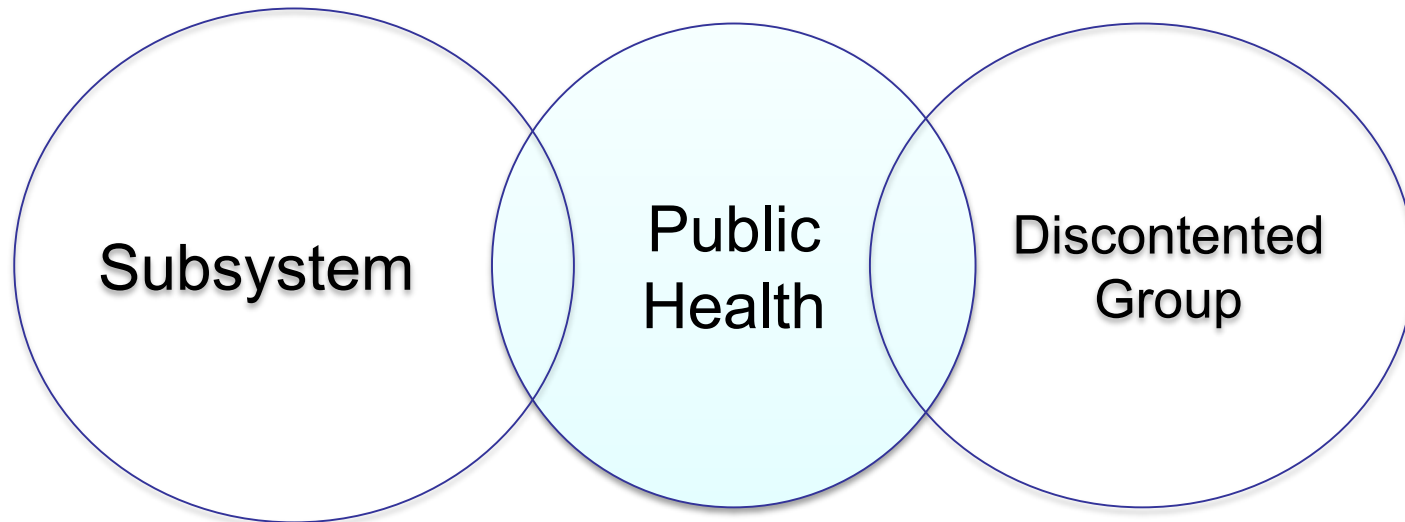


Reflections on the Punctuated Equilibrium Model

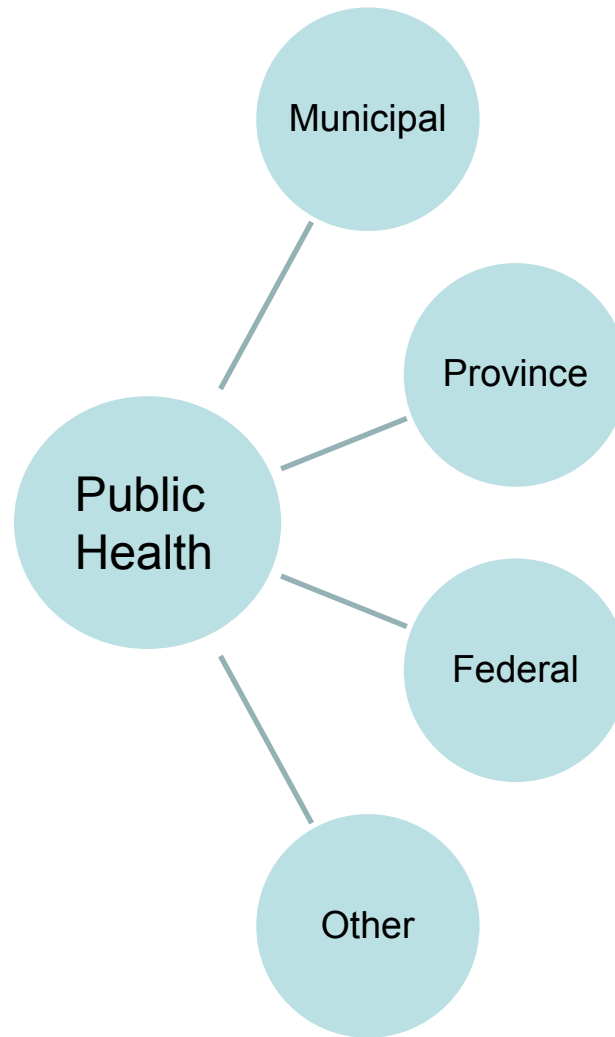
- Insights that the model offers
- Questions about / challenges to model

Reflections on the Punctuated Equilibrium Model

Where are public health actors located?



Reflections on the Punctuated Equilibrium Model – Policy Venues




Reflections on the Punctuated Equilibrium Model – Policy Image



I'D LIKE TO KNOW
WHEN I'M
INDULGING, AND
WHEN I'M JUST
HAVING
DINNER.




IF THE SALAD
HAS MORE
CALORIES THAN
THE HAMBURGER,
I WANT TO
KNOW.



IF 54% OF
RESTAURANT MEALS
EXCEED MY DAILY
SODIUM LIMIT, I'D
LIKE TO KNOW
WHICH ONES.



IF I'M ABOUT TO
EAT 3 DAYS WORTH
OF SODIUM,
I THINK I HAVE
A RIGHT
TO KNOW.



Reflections on the Punctuated Equilibrium Model – Policy Image

News · Cannabis

Toronto Community Housing plans to go smoke free — including pot

By **EMILY MATHIEU** Affordable Housing Reporter
Fri., July 27, 2018

Council supports harm-reduction strategy for drugs

By **PAUL MOLONEY** Urban Affairs Reporter

Fri., Aug. 27, 2010



Toronto has become the first city in the world to endorse the [Vienna Declaration](#), which advocates **harm reduction over the law enforcement-driven war on drugs.**

Reflections on the Punctuated Equilibrium Model

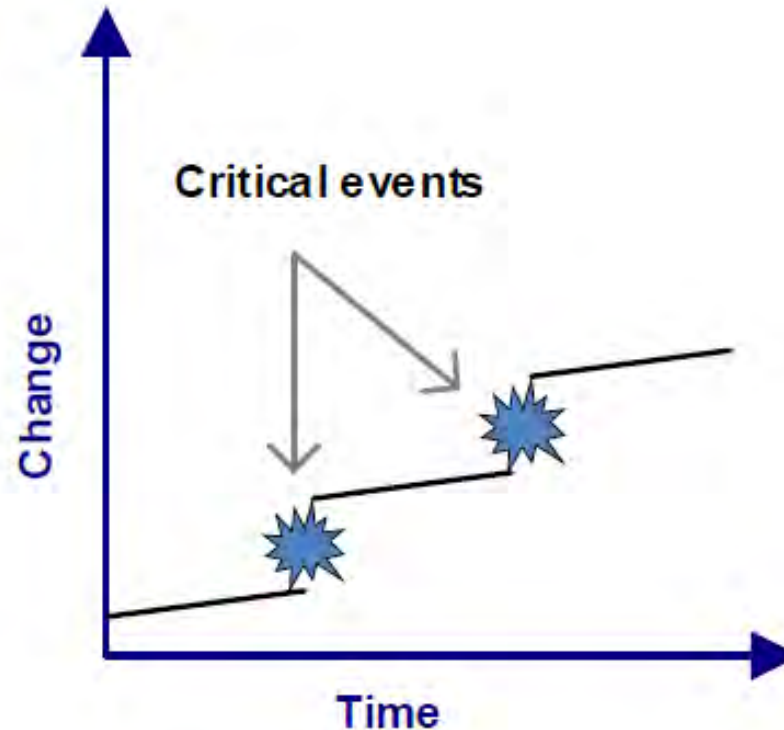


Figure 1: Graphic representation of punctuated equilibrium

Reflections on the Punctuated Equilibrium Model

Questions?

Wrap up

- Concluding remarks
- Webinar evaluation and material
- Continuing Education Credits

Thank you !



You're interested in this topic?

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Production of this webinar has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada through funding for the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP). The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.



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