

# The process of public policy: literature review, theoretical reflections and suggestions for future research

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## Abstract

The objective of this article is to broaden the understanding about the policy process from the systematization of its main constructs, presenting some theoretical reflections and a research agenda. The literature review is based on three international models: the Multiple Streams, The Advocacy Coalitions Framework, and The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, which have been increasingly applied in research in Brazil. They all consider the policy process the result of the interaction of many variables, such as institutions, actors, ideas and beliefs assuming that public policy would result from these interactions over time. The analysis undertaken showed that the models understand the policy process as marked by the dichotomy between “change” versus “stability”, and they focus on explaining change, although each model has a specific understanding of what is ‘change’. The actors’ ability to influence the political process is understood either as a direct consequence of the resources or as a consequence of individual’s capacity for action. The main contribution of this article is to establish theoretical reflections and notes for future research and collaborate with the current Brazilian agenda that aims at the construction of theoretical and methodological tools for the analysis of public policies.

**Keywords:** Policy process. Public policy analytical frameworks. Multiple Steams Model. Advocacy Coalition Framework. Punctuated Equilibrium Theory.

## *Processo das políticas públicas: revisão de literatura, reflexões teóricas e apontamentos para futuras pesquisas*

### Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é contribuir com o entendimento do processo das políticas públicas a partir da sistematização de seus principais construtos, apresentando reflexões teóricas e apontamentos para uma agenda de pesquisa. Optou-se pela revisão bibliográfica de 3 modelos teóricos conhecidos na literatura, múltiplos fluxos, coalizões de advocacia e equilíbrio pontuado, que vêm sendo cada vez mais aplicados nas pesquisas nacionais. Em comum, consideram que o processo das políticas públicas é resultado da interação de diversas variáveis, como instituições, atores, ideias e crenças, assumindo que a política pública seria resultado dessas interações ao longo do tempo. Buscou-se investigar como esses modelos teóricos compreendem os construtos mudança versus estabilidade e capacidade de influência dos atores. A análise empreendida demonstrou que os modelos veem o processo das políticas públicas marcado pela dicotomia “mudança” versus “estabilidade” e concentram-se em explicar a mudança, embora cada um tenha seu entendimento específico sobre ela. A capacidade de influência dos atores é entendida ora como consequência direta dos recursos institucionais, ora como consequência da capacidade de ação dos atores. A principal contribuição deste artigo consiste em reflexões teóricas e apontamentos para futuras pesquisas, colaborando com a agenda em curso no Brasil, que visa à construção de instrumentos teóricos e metodológicos para a análise de políticas públicas.

**Palavras-chave:** Processo de políticas públicas. Modelos de análise de políticas públicas. Múltiplos fluxos. Coalizões de advocacia. Equilíbrio pontuado.

## *Proceso de las Políticas Públicas: revisión de la literatura, reflexiones teóricas e indicaciones para investigaciones futuras*

### Resumen

El objetivo de este ensayo es contribuir a la comprensión del proceso de las políticas públicas a partir de la sistematización de sus principales constructos, presentando algunas reflexiones teóricas y apuntes para una agenda de investigación. Se optó por la revisión bibliográfica de tres modelos teóricos internacionales: flujos múltiples, coaliciones de defensa y equilibrio puntuado, que se están aplicando cada vez más en las investigaciones nacionales. Dichos modelos tienen en común el hecho de considerar que el proceso político es resultado de la interacción de diversas variables, tales como instituciones, actores, ideas y creencias, tomando como hipótesis que las políticas públicas resultarían de estas interacciones a través del tiempo. El análisis realizado mostró que los modelos comprenden el proceso de la política como caracterizado por la dicotomía entre cambio y estabilidad, y que se concentran en explicar el cambio, aunque cada uno tenga una comprensión específica sobre este. La capacidad de influencia de los actores es entendida como consecuencia directa de los recursos institucionales o como consecuencia de la capacidad de acción individual. La principal contribución del artículo es establecer reflexiones teóricas y apuntes para investigaciones futuras para colaborar con la agenda en curso en Brasil, que se propone la construcción de instrumentos teóricos y metodológicos para el análisis de políticas públicas.

**Palabras clave:** Proceso de las políticas públicas. Modelos de análisis de políticas. Flujos múltiples. Coaliciones de defensa. Equilíbrio puntuado.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Public policy, as a field of knowledge, originated in the 1950s in American political science (MELO, 1999). However, there is still no consensus among researchers on its concept. There are a variety of definitions for public policies, from the classic concepts offered by political science to the more recent ones. Lowi's (1964) argument *policy creates politics* has led to the understanding that public policy emerges from a process of disputes in different decision arenas. Recent definitions illustrate this political characteristic by considering public policy as more than a governmental decision, i.e., it may also be the result of decisions and actions of other actors, such as civil society and the market (HOWLETT, RAMESH and PERL, 2013; SCHABBACH, 2012). In addition, it may be influenced by ideologies, interests and needs of various actors, either formally (in the case of those who act directly in the institutionalized political arenas, such as the Executive, Legislative, or the Judiciary branches, and political parties) or informally (those who work in civil society) (SILVA and BASSI, 2012; SECCHI, 2014).

In the 1970s and 1980s, public policy began to be presented as a science in the United States, from the development of models of analysis that characterized public policies in sequential steps (or stages). Typically, such models considered public policy to include the phases of agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation (SECCHI, 2014). These models, however, have been criticized because they fail to understand causal relationships, they are not precise when it comes to being descriptive, and they undervalue the role of analysis and of learning for public policy (SABATIER, 2007). From the 1980s onwards, scholars sought to understand public policy by investigating 6 key elements (actors, institutions, networks/subsystems, ideas/beliefs, contextual factors and events) that interact in what is known as policy process (JOHN, 2003; CAIRNEY and HEIKKILA, 2014).

The concept of policy process brings the idea that public policies are shaped at all stages by different types of actors and institutions, actors can establish relationships (whether formalized networks or not) according to their beliefs/interests in the defense of an idea, their actions being affected by the context in which they operate and influenced by external events. Thus, analyzing the policy process means understanding how these 6 factors interact and influence the trajectory of public policies throughout their phases or stages. Thus, Weible and Carter (2017, p. 27) argue that studying the policy process means analyzing "interactions that occur over time between public policies and actors, events, contexts, and outcomes."

A range of theoretical models have been developed in order to explain the various aspects of the policy process (WEIBLE and CARTER, 2017). The most important are those well-known in the international literature (PETRIDOU, 2014; WEIBLE and CARTER, 2017) and that have been applied to the Brazilian reality more frequently (BRASIL and CAPELLA, 2016; CAPELLA, SOARES and BRASIL, 2014): the multiple streams model proposed by John Kingdon in 1984; the advocacy coalitions framework, by Paul Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (presented in 1993 and revised and improved by the same authors in 1999); and finally the punctuated equilibrium model, by Baumgartner and Brian Jones (1993). The three models consider the public policy process as complex, unstable, and subject to power relations among diverse actors. In addition, they include important variables such as ideas, the media and public opinion, considering them important influences in the consolidation of a policy. Perhaps because of their reach and potential to adapt allowing the analysis of different types of public policy, these models became attractive tools to study the process of construction of different policies and in different realities.

Although they are similar in many ways, each model has several different analytical goals. Kingdon's model focuses on how a particular theme ascends to the governmental agenda. The model by Sabatier and Smith seeks to understand how arrangements are formed between actors (coalitions) in decision-making processes and how they change over time. As for the punctuated equilibrium model by Baumgartner and Jones, it attempts to explain the moments of abrupt change in which most public policies go through. According to Cairney and Heikkila (2014), such models were developed in parallel and independently. The researchers who created the models did not present an initial concern regarding a common language or the comparability among the tools. However, these characteristics do not make the comparison unfeasible; on the contrary, they reinforce the importance of a systematic review (CAIRNEY and HEIKKILA, 2014).

Therefore, the aim of this article is to systematize the constructs (change versus stability and the influence capability presented by the actors)<sup>1</sup> that are present in different ways in the aforementioned theoretical models. The study consists of a literature review of the three models, in order to identify: 1) how each model understands the policy process change and stability and what the explanatory objectives in these dimensions are; 2) the understanding of the factors that make up the actors' capability for influence.

The choice of the constructs 'change/stability' and 'actors' capability to influence' is justified by the fact that one of the great themes of scholars in studying the policy process, according to Weible and Carter (2017), is the investigation of the engagement and influence of certain actors and political groups, since it is understood that the actors compete to influence public policy directly or indirectly, "aiming to influence the results of decision-making; changing the rules that provide government with structure, often through the creation, modification and elimination of decision-making sites; or by electing people to take over official positions" (WEIBLE and CARTER, 2017, p. 28). Another great research theme pointed out by these authors is the change in the process, promoted in the work by Baumgartner and Jones (1993). From its publication to the present day, a considerable number of studies have been concerned with understanding the patterns of policy change in space and time (WEIBLE and CARTER, 2017). Therefore, these two dimensions (capability to influence and change/stability), presented in different ways in each model, can constitute units of comparison between them.

When thinking about the policy process as something constituted by actors, institutions, networks/subsystems, ideas/beliefs, contextual factors and events, one can understand actors' capability to influence and change/stability as products of the interaction between such elements. It is worth highlighting each model emphasizes some elements to the detriment of others in their explanations about each of these dimensions of analysis.

The relevance of this article is to systematize these major themes of study in order to better understand the policy process, especially the products of the interaction among its key elements, in order to contribute to present theoretical reflections and suggestions for a future research agenda, in order to think about other theoretical tools and/or new approaches for analysis, especially in a moment of "mobilizing the research community not only in the direction of public policy research, but also with the development of theoretical and methodological approaches" (BRASIL and CAPELLA, 2016, p. 86).

The next sections will describe each of the theoretical models analyzed.

## ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK

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This model was developed to provide an alternative to models of public policy analysis that used the notion of stages. According to its authors, models that use stages lack conceptual robustness for the construction of empirically testable causal hypotheses (WEIBLE, SABATIER and MCQUEEN, 2009). The advocacy coalitions framework, emphasizing the role of values and ideas embodied in the beliefs of defense coalitions, seeks to build an overview of the functioning of the public policy subsystem.

The policy process is characterized by an open system, subject to change with the environment and whose primary unit of analysis is the subsystem of public policies, formed by a diversity of actors actively concerned and involved with a political problem or issue (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999).

Externally to the subsystem of public policies there are stable factors that are quite difficult to change, which constrain the actors' actions within the subsystem. These factors are: the basic attributes of the field of the problem, the distribution of natural resources, sociocultural values and social structure, and the structure of basic rules of the political system (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999).

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<sup>1</sup>In this article, the capability to influence is understood in a similar way as the notion of power by Morris (2002, p. 288), i.e., as the "capacity to do things". Also, it is in agreement with the definition by Parsons (1963), who understands power as an ability or a potential. It is worth pointing out that this understanding leads to an idea of intersubjective power, implying interaction, interdependence between subjects, either the more or the less powerful. Finally, the actor's capability to influence is observed as their capability to cause or prevent acts and interactions in order to reach a specific goal in the policy process.

The actors in these subsystems, are led by the beliefs shared on a specific area, in an attempt to influence decisions about a policy. The coalitions tend to have different interests, either complementary or otherwise, and present a high degree of coordination of their activities, in order to push forward their proposals for intervention in a given public policy (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999). Decisions on a public policy result from the conflict between coalitions that contribute to the development of constraints and/or incentives for the adoption or change in a particular public policy (SABATIER, 1999).

The model seeks to explain the moments of change, establishing hypotheses about the necessary conditions for this change to occur. According to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), the change can occur due to factors internal and external to the subsystem. The external factors are: 1) relatively stable parameters; 2) coalition opportunity structures; and 3) major external shocks.

Stable parameters are the basic attributes of the problem, recommended by the author to conduct the analysis. They are attributes such as the distribution of natural resources, sociocultural values, and social and constitutional structure, which present little change over a period of 10 years. Coalition opportunity structures are the specific features of the political system that provide greater or lesser opportunity for coalitions to act, depending on their rules. Opportunity structures are influenced by the relatively stable parameters of the system. Finally, major external shocks refer to changes in socioeconomic conditions, in the political regime, impact of decisions made in other subsystems and events of force majeure, such as disasters.

As for the internal factors responsible for changes in the process of formulation and implementation of public policies, they are: 1) internal shocks; 2) negotiated agreements; and 3) the political learning built by the interaction of actors in the subsystem over time (SABATIER and WEIBLE, 2007).

Internal shocks are understood as major events impacting the beliefs of the dominant coalition, and can therefore cause a change of understanding about a problem and the way it is conducted. Negotiated agreements are indicated as a path to change when there is impasse, but there are no internal or external shocks to the subsystem. Finally, the political learning process is a consequence of the negotiation process between members of several coalitions, who seek to better understand reality to improve their political objectives (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999). The political learning process favors the accumulation of knowledge about characteristics of a problem and factors that affect it, promoting the assessment of the alternatives adopted and impacting the adoption of changes in specific public policies.

## THE MULTIPLE STREAMS MODEL

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Like the advocacy coalition framework presented above, this model emerged with the aim of providing a more comprehensive explanation of the process of public policy formulation. The emphasis of this model is on government agenda-setting, highlighting the role of the policy entrepreneur, and rejecting the rational and linear representations of the models using sequence or stages (WEIBLE and CARTER, 2017). According to Kingdon (2010), the agenda-setting process is highly competitive, with the participation of different actors, and the changes in the agenda occurring when three streams converge (each with their own dynamics and moving in a relatively independent way): the politics stream, policy stream, and problem stream.

In order to understand the mechanism underlying changes in the agenda, it is necessary to first understand the problem stream. The author points out the importance of understanding the difference between 'problem' and 'conditions'. A condition is a perceived social situation that does not necessarily trigger action in return. A condition becomes a problem when policy formulators believe they should act on it (KINGDON, 2010).

As for the policy stream, it "occurs without necessarily being related to the perception of the problem" (CALMON and MARCHESINI, 2007, p. 8). The alternatives are generated in policy communities and those that are technically feasible and cost-effective are disseminated not throughout the policy communities but also to the general public, progressively building acceptance of the idea (KINGDON, 2010).

Finally, the political stream includes elements such as public opinion, pressure groups, election results, partisan or ideological distribution in Congress, and changes in administration (KINGDON, 2010). In this stream, 03 elements influence the governmental agenda: the national mood, the organized political forces and the changes within the government itself. National mood “creates a kind of ‘fertile soil’ for some ideas to germinate” (CAPELLA, 2007, p. 29). Thus, favorable mood can encourage the promotion of some issues and, at the same time, discourage others (CAPELLA, 2007).

The 03 streams have their own dynamics and present relative independence. Sometimes they converge and generate opportunities of change in the agenda, which Kingdon calls windows of opportunity. These are transitory moments, i.e., ‘windows’ that can open and shut in different times (KINGDON, 2010).

However, for the 03 streams to occur, the figure of the policy entrepreneur is crucial, because the union between the streams depends very much on this player. Policy entrepreneurs act “uniting solutions and problems; proposals and political moments; problems and political events” (CAPELLA, 2007, p. 31). They are usually experts in a particular issue and are able to communicate ideas from other individuals or groups. In addition, policy entrepreneurs may enjoy a position of authority within the decision-making process, which provides receptivity to their ideas (CAPELLA, 2007). The great skill of this player is to understand the timing and to act. They invest their resources in the defense of proposals, in order to obtain future benefits. Thus, the entrepreneur plays a central role in political change (KINGDON, 2010; CAPELLA, 2016).

In addition to the dynamics of the political stream, the actors involved in the process are also decisive for the changes in the agenda. Kingdon (2010) establishes differences between the influential actors in the governmental agenda-setting and those who influence only in the definition of alternatives. Government actors (the “administration”, civil servants, deputies and senators and their advisors) have more resources to interfere in the formulation of public policies, resources such as “legal authority, publicity, longevity and a mix of political and technical information” (KINGDON, 2010, p. 43). The non-governmental actors (interest groups, academics, researchers and consultants, public opinion, political parties), on the other hand, are more influential in generating alternatives.

The “administration” mentioned above in the group of government actors, includes the president, their advisers and the other positions whose appointment falls exclusively to the president. The president is the most important actor in the political stream, playing a dominant role. This is because they have institutional and organizational resources, as well as the public attention and control over agenda-setting. According to Kingdon (2010, p. 23), “no other single actor in the political system has quite the capability of the President to set agendas in given policy areas for all who deal with those policies”.

## THE PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM MODEL

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This model developed by Baumgartner and Jones in 1993, is inspired by elements from biology to explain the occurrence of long periods of stability, occasionally interrupted by abrupt changes that mark the history of most public policies (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993).

This model assumes that individuals operate with limited rationality. Therefore, in order to deal with the multiplicity of political issues, governments delegate authority to government agents (bureaucrats specialized in a policy area) who, along with subgroups of legislators and groups of interest, discuss several issues in parallel. Baumgartner and Jones call this group of actors a ‘subsystem’, and this group is responsible for building an image of the policy, producing a strong idea that connects values and can be communicated in a simple way and with emotional appeal. Such an image helps to legitimize a monopoly both on the understanding of a particular policy and on institutional arrangements to deal with it.

A shared image and the monopoly on a policy help maintain the status quo and the subsystem acts in a negative feedback process, which reinforces this status quo, allowing only incremental changes (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2010).



When an issue emerges in the macro-political environment, where issues are dealt with separately and one at a time, negative feedback processes occur, with significant changes that break with the status quo. Thus, government decisions are made at two levels: the level of government agents (which are located in the so-called political subsystems), and the level of government leaders (who form the so-called macro-systems) (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2010).

The explanation for periods of stability and/or change is related to the agents dealing with that issue, i.e., whether it is being treated in the subsystem (by government agents) or in the macro-system (by government leaders). The model assumes that many competing policy issues survive simultaneously, waiting for the right moment to expand (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2010).

Subsystems are characterized by stability and proposed changes are discouraged by negative feedback, with little gain from political actors in relation to investments, resulting in balance and incremental change. Unlike the subsystems, the political macro-systems are characterized by intense and rapid changes, diverse understandings on the same policy (different policy images) and positive feedback; according to Baumgartner and Jones (2010, p. 137): “macro politics is the politics of punctuation - the politics of large-scale change, competing policy images, political manipulation and positive feedback”.

## **ACTORS' CAPABILITY TO INFLUENCE ON THE POLICY PROCESS**

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The influence of the actors on the public policy process is different for each of the models. In the advocacy coalitions framework, processes of forming a policy are influenced by the sharing of beliefs among different actors within a coalition, as well as by the relationships established between the coalitions. The policy process is characterized at the same time by conflict (between the coalitions) and consensus (inter-coalitions). Public policy decisions are the result of the conflict established, which represent a constraint and/or an incentive for adopting a policy alternative (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999). It is assumed that the action of the actors organized in competing coalitions influences the result of the policy, that is, the alternative adopted. Actors act according to shared beliefs on a particular issue, in an attempt to influence policy decisions, such as the definition of institutional rules, allocation of resources, and nominations for public offices and functions (SABATIER and SMITH, 1999). From the interactions between the actors, the framework assumes that a movement of political learning can occur between the actors, which can change their positions; in addition, external shocks can change the resources available in the subsystem and, consequently, change coalition arrangements. This means that coalitions and their ability to influence the policy process change over time.

Contrary to the perspective of the advocacy coalitions framework - which is more open to considering the actors' capability to act, the multiple streams model emphasizes the actors' resources and their position in the political-institutional environment as an element to explain the differences in the actors' capability to influence the policy process. In the model, there is a clear difference between the actors who are influential in setting the government's agenda and those who influence only in the definition of alternatives. The first group is composed of “visible” actors, who receive attention from the press and the public, usually the politicians of the Executive and the Legislative branches. In the second group are the “invisible” actors, who are more important for generating alternatives. This group contains the experts in certain areas, those that work in epistemic communities, the academics and bureaucrats (KINGDON, 2010).

In this case, in assuming that government actors have more resources to influence the governmental agenda-setting than the non-governmental players, the model considers that the actors' capability to influence is determined by the very characteristics that form the institutional environment in which they are found. This means that a greater or lesser capacity to influence depends on the position occupied in the institutional political environment. An example of this is the figure of the president, considered the most important actor in the political stream. The president has the public attention and counts on the institutional and organizational resources, having a dominant role in terms of agenda-setting. However, not even the president alone can determine the outcome of a policy, because despite having the most important resources, they have no control over the alternatives that may come up in the process (KINGDON, 2010).

Thus, the position of the actors in the institutional environment establishes the conditions in terms of a greater or lesser capability to influence, since not all actors have access to the same resources, which are important elements for the actors to be able to include their demands on the agenda. However, the model also considers the aspect of individual action when referring to the figure of the policy entrepreneur, who is responsible for the connection among the 03 streams and, consequently, for the rise of a certain issue to the agenda.

Although the ability to represent ideas and build consensus is a characteristic of an act from an individual player, Kingdon (2010, p. 180) reinforces the importance of the institutional component by stating that such ability can be explained, in addition to other factors, by a position of authority within the decision-making unit, "such as the President or the Chairperson of a Congressional Committee", position that increases receptivity to the entrepreneur's ideas.

Thus, an actor's influence is understood as a consequence of their positioning in the institutional environment, which causes them to have more resources to influence the process. However, in asserting that the president alone is not able to determine the agenda, although they are the closest to having the capability to do this<sup>2</sup>, the model assumes that the resources resulting from the position or role in the institution are not enough to explain the agenda-setting process. This is precisely the great contribution of this model's narrative, that is, the change of the agenda will only occur at a specific moment; even if actors with great capability to influence want it, it will only come at the right moment, when the 03 streams come together, during the so-called "windows of opportunity".

The punctuated equilibrium model closely resembles the multiple streams model in understanding the actors' behavior and their ability to influence the policy process. Like in the model by Kingdon, that presents a separation of actors into "visible" and "invisible", according to the position occupied in the system and the resources possessed, the punctuated equilibrium model also assumes a division. In this model, the political system is divided into 2 subsystems, which operate in serial (abrupt) and parallel (incremental) ways.

The first is the macro-system (which corresponds to formal aspects such as the role of the president, ministers, the Congress, etc.). The macro-system is formed by decision-makers, that is, those who can influence the policy and cause abrupt changes. The other subsystem consists of the specialists, who are only able to influence politics indirectly, in parallel, managing to produce incremental changes (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993). Parallel processing in the subsystem stimulates smaller political changes, since this system operates "out of the political spotlight" (TRUE, JONES and BAUGMARTNER 2007, page 158). When an issue is selected by the macro-system major changes in a policy tend to occur, generating, as a consequence, changes in the subsystems themselves. The creation of an image is considered a strategic component in the mobilization of the attention of the macro-system around an issue and, therefore, the dispute to create consensus around a policy image is considered by the authors as a crucial element in the political struggle.

Thus, actors who are institutionally endowed with resources that enable decision making are those who can change the course of a policy abruptly. The specialists, who do not have the same resources, have a marginal influence. As in the multiple streams model, in the punctuated equilibrium model the capability to influence depends on the types of resources that each actor possesses, which are derived from their position in the political-institutional environment.

Thus, in the advocacy coalitions framework, the capability to influence is understood as a consequence of the actions of the players organized in coalitions, who fight for common goals in the policy process. It is from this fight that emerges the political instruments and/or understandings about a problem, which will shape the public policy in its stages.

On the other hand, the multiple streams and the punctuated equilibrium models emphasize collective action and conflict among actors, be it around ideas, values or beliefs. The models favor the explanation of the different levels of actors' influence in the political process as a consequence of the resources they have, which, in turn, depend on the position occupied in the political-institutional environment.

<sup>2</sup>Because presidents have institutional resources (especially the power of veto, the power of nominating people to be in key positions in the decision-making process), organizational resources (coordination of the administrative machine) and the public attention (people are alert to the president's speaking and attitudes), as well as the personal involvement, the president is considered the strongest actor in agenda-setting. See Kingdon (2010, p. 25-26).

## CHANGE AND STABILITY IN PUBLIC POLICY

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The advocacy coalitions framework understands change in a broad way, from changing the dynamics of the policy subsystem where decisions occur, to changes in policy content, the former being induced by external factors and the latter induced by factors internal to the subsystem. For example, a change in the coalition's understanding of a problem (which occurs internally in the subsystem) can lead to changes in the content of the policy. On the other hand, changes in coalition opportunity structures (such as greater openness of the political system) impact the behavior of coalitions, altering the degree of consensus needed to obtain a decision, which in turn can change the dynamics of the decision-making process.

The framework is particularly concerned with explaining change, seeking to theorize about its determinant factors (inputs from external environment, internal shocks, negotiated agreements and political learning), and establishing hypotheses (SABATIER and WEIBLE, 2007; WEIBLE, SABATIER and MCQUEEN, 2009).

The concept of political learning, which has been defined by the authors as "relatively enduring alternations of thought or behavioral intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives" (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999, p. 123) shows the concern that actors themselves can change their perceptions through interaction with others. Events external to a particular subsystem present incentives to change. Examples include changes in social, economic and political conditions; decisions on other public policies; and impacts of other policy subsystems. Internal shocks are understood as major disturbances, similar to Kingdon's focusing events<sup>3</sup>, which impact the beliefs of the dominant coalition, and can therefore cause a change in the understanding of a problem and in the way it is conducted. Negotiated agreements are also indicated as a path to change, when there are no internal or external shocks to the subsystem, but when there are situations of impasse (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999).

It should be noted that none of the hypotheses traced by the framework is concerned with explaining stability. However, they consider that when neither of the hypothesis of change occurs, there are slow and complex decision processes, permeated by the conflicts of political beliefs of the actors (SABATIER and JENKINS-SMITH, 1999).

Unlike the advocacy coalitions framework, which comprehend the change related to the subsystem's dynamics and the changes in terms of policy content, the multiple streams model is concerned with a specific type of change, i.e., the inclusion of new themes or even the abandonment of themes previously considered as strategic. In this case, the unit of analysis is not a system or subsystem, but "streams" that occur in a parallel and independent way: problems stream, politics stream and policy stream.

The 03 streams have their own dynamics and present relative independence. Sometimes they converge and generate opportunities of change in the agenda, which Kingdon calls windows of opportunity. These are transitory moments, i.e., 'windows' that can open and shut at different times (KINGDON, 2010). It is at this moment that a condition gets the policy-makers attention and there are changes in the politics stream, which allow for changes in the agenda. Policy-makers start to look for alternatives to the problems, which have already been developed in parallel in the policy streams. In this way, Kingdon points out that windows of opportunity occur mainly in relation to problems and politics streams (CAPELLA, 2007).

Kingdon did not explain the stability of the agenda-setting process, although he assumed that the fragmentation of policy communities would influence the stability of the agenda. This lack of examination towards the moments of stability was criticized by Baumgartner and Jones (1993). In their model, the authors sought to precisely differentiate these moments, stating that substantive changes would occur in times of rupture and incremental changes in moments of stability.

The punctuated equilibrium model was developed in order to respond to the fact that "policy processes are often driven by a logic of stability and incrementalism, but occasionally they also produce large-scale departures from the past" (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1999, p. 97). Therefore, the understanding of how these changes occur on a large scale is the primary goal of the analysis. The punctuated equilibrium model resembles the multiple streams, in terms of understanding the functioning of the policy process. Instead of streams, the first refers to the "processing" of problems on 02 levels, at the level of government leaders (macro) and at the level of government agents (micro). Small changes, considered incremental, would be the result of decisions made in the microsystem or political-institutional subsystems, in which different issues are processed in parallel.

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<sup>3</sup>They are not necessarily events, but images associated to a policy, such as crisis, disasters, or other symbols that bring the government attention to specific conditions, in order to transform them in problems to be included in the agenda (KINGDON, 2010; CAPELLA, 2007).



On the other hand, radical changes would be the result of decisions made in the political-institutional macro system, where issues are dealt with in series (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993).

In relation to change and stability, the model assumes that when an issue is captured by a microsystem, there is a period of equilibrium or near equilibrium; on the other hand, when an issue enters the macro-political agenda, there are periods of imbalance, a period in which the public policy agenda can change very rapidly, contrary to the established consensus around the ideas (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993). The main characteristic of the subsystems is their stability, i.e., actors at this level tend to make only incremental decisions, since there is little cost-benefit for political actors, with slow, gradual and incremental changes prevailing. On the contrary, macro-systems are characterized by intense and rapid changes (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993).

There is then an association between the process dynamics (its change or stability) and decision making by different actors (in the subsystem or macro-system). In other words, the differences in the resources possessed by the actors explain not only the different intensities that can influence the process, but also the magnitude of the reflexes that such decisions can cause.

It is possible to observe that the O3 models are concerned with explaining the change (be it changing the agenda, changing the dynamics of the subsystem and the content of the policy, as well as abrupt change), seeking to theorize on the factors involved in their explanation. Comparing these three models, it is observed that the advocacy coalitions framework is concerned with explaining the factors that induce change, since these can alter the negotiation dynamics of the coalitions and the content of the policy. In this case, the object of analysis is the decision-making process, seeking to understand how the coalition's actions shape public policy. The focus is not on why changes occur, but how public policy is a product of these interactions. The other O2 models, which have a processual view (unlike the systemic view of the advocacy coalitions framework), see change as the object of analysis itself, as in the case of the punctuated equilibrium model, where the aim is to investigate why occasional long periods of stability are interrupted by abrupt changes. In the case of the multiple streams model the central question is: Why do issues rise in the agenda and change the status quo?

Box 1 summarizes what was presented in this section.

**Box 1**

**Actors' capability to influence and change/stability of policy process in the traditional models**

Theoretical models	Object of analysis	Actors' capability to influence in the policy process	Change vs. Stability
Advocacy coalitions framework	– Acts of coalitions of players that shape the stages of policy formulation and implementation	– Related to the players' capability of action (building coalitions). – The capability to influence can be limited by factors external to the subsystem.	– Seeks to identify the determinant factors (inputs from external environment to the subsystem, internal shocks, negotiated agreements and political learning) and establishes hypotheses.
Punctuated equilibrium model	– Moments of abrupt change interrupting long periods of stability	– Related to resources owned, which depends on the position occupied in the political-institutional system.	– Establishes that abrupt changes in policies are caused when an issue is decided by governmental leaders, who possess more efficient resources. – Subsystems make incremental decisions, generating stability in the system
Multiple streams model	– Agenda-setting process. Introduction of new issues in the governmental agenda.	– Related to resources owned, which depends on the position occupied in the political-institutional system. – Limited capability to influence, due to the need to find convergence in the O3 streams.	– Change in the governmental agenda (ascension of an issue) occurs when there is a union of the O3 streams, which evolve in parallel and independently.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As pointed out in this section, each model presents a specific object of analysis and each one has its interpretation about change and stability and about the actors' capability to influence. It was observed that the 3 models are concerned a priori in understanding the change, although each has its own understanding of it. The capability to influence, in turn, is understood as a consequence of actors acting through the formation of coalitions, in the model of advocacy coalitions, and in other models is understood as a consequence of the resources possessed, related to the position occupied in the political-institutional system.

In short, it is possible to observe that the 03 models intend to explain a priori the moments of change, and understand change and stability as dimensions that can be identified individually and separately. For example, stability occurs in the punctuated equilibrium model, when an issue is treated in the subsystem, generating only incremental adjustments. In the advocacy coalitions framework, when none of the change inducing hypotheses occurs, there is a period of stability. Finally, in the multiple streams model, stability and maintenance of the status quo occur when there are no windows of opportunity available and when the entrepreneur did not manage to unite the three streams. Thus, stability is understood as a moment in which the conditions for change do not occur, allowing the researcher to "separate" the 2 moments when analyzing the process. Capability to influence, in turn, is understood as depending on the actors' collective action (in the advocacy coalitions framework), or as a consequence of the actors' positioning in the political-institutional environment (in the punctuated equilibrium and multiple streams models). From the synthesis of these constructs, the next section presents reflections and suggestions that may contribute to the theoretical advance in the field.

## **THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR A RESEARCH AGENDA**

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A first reflection from the analysis carried out above is the need to advance theoretically on analyzing change and stability, understanding them not as separate categories but analyzing how they occur in an interconnected way.

Wiering, Liefferink, and Crabbé (2017), in an article published in the special edition of the Journal of Flood Risk Management, analyze the dynamics of the political system of flood risk management, identifying key directions and trends, assuming that stability and change can reinforce or neutralize each other. The authors combined insights from the 3 models reviewed in this article, used discourse analysis and the policy arrangements approach, and argued that each of the theories neglects or underestimates the forces of stability and change, advocating for an alternative approach.

They conclude that the evolution of flood risk management policies in a given country is a result of the specific interaction of forces of stability and change. Based on comparative analysis in 04 countries, Wiering, Liefferink, and Crabbé (2017) identified 05 typical clusters of stability and change forces that can help explain the dynamics of national institutional policies and arrangements on flood risk management. In this case, the focus of analysis is the dynamics of these policies, aiming to understand their evolution.

This focus of analysis becomes relevant mainly when the study takes into consideration the complexity of the institutional environments in which public policies are formulated today and the rapid changes of the political system influenced by the processes of globalization (ANDERIES and JANSSEN, 2013). According to Hill and Varone (2016), there is a tendency in the literature to focus on abrupt changes, but "there are, even in the most stable administrative systems, processes of change occurring all the while" (HILL and VARONE, 2016, p. 165).

In this sense, a suggestion for future research is to guide the analysis of the process to understand its dynamics as a whole, without seeking to theorize about moments of abrupt or incremental changes or to investigate the factors inducing change, as already done by the theories addressed. A research question to advance in this direction is:

- How do the dynamics of the process (permeated by inter-related forces of change and stability) shape the content of the policy?

Another reflection is the possibility to broaden the understanding of actors' influential capabilities, based on the combination of the elements (already identified in the analyzed theories): the actor's capability to establish relationships in order to reach their objectives in the process (coalitions and/or networks); and the resources they possess.

As seen in the revised theories, actors' resources (related to their position in the institutional political environment) and their capability to articulate and establish relationships to defend their interests, ideas and/or beliefs, seem to be equally important dimensions of the actors' influential capabilities.

A suggestion for future research is to investigate how these two dimensions together (resources possessed and ability to establish relationships) contribute to the increasing influence of actors and how they affect the dynamics of the policy process and content. The novelty proposed consists of combining the two dimensions in the analysis and investigating the relationship between influential capacity and policy dynamics/content.

Elgin and Weible (2013) analyzed the case of Colorado's climate and energy policy, combining the advocacy coalitions framework and the policy analytical capacity model to assess the individual and organizational resources of the actors forming the coalition. The combination of the O2 models is justified by the fact that the advocacy coalitions framework, in its first version, did not theorize on resources and how these resources are used by actors individually and by the advocacy coalitions. An approximation in this sense is found in Weible (2007), who identified 05 types of resources used by the actors: financial resources, formal legal authority, mobilizable groups, access to technical and scientific information, and influence on public opinion. Meanwhile, Weible, Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith et al. (2011) recognize that this is still one of the little developed aspects of the model.

The aim of Elgin and Weible (2013) is to combine individual and organizational capabilities with the analysis of conflict in the decision making process, which was possible through the analytical structure of the advocacy coalitions framework. However, the authors do not directly relate the resources possessed to the individual or organizational capability to influence – considering that the organization influence is understood within the scope of the coalitions. The argument is that this may be a possibility to advance in theorizing, by seeking to understand the connection between resources and relationship via coalitions around the capability to influence presented by individual and organizational actors.

The reflections presented here are initial notes that can form a broader and shared research agenda among the authors of the field of public policy analysis. The assumption is that shifting the focus of the analysis of the public policy process from the specific periods (of change or stability) to the dynamics of the process, as well as broadening the understanding around key concepts such as capability to influence, will contribute to improve the capacity to explain the results and development of public policies.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The aim of this article was to broaden the understanding about the policy process from the systematization of its main constructs, presenting theoretical reflections and suggestions for a research agenda. It is possible to observe that the O3 models aim to explain the change a priori, and they consider that stability emerges when the necessary conditions for change are not present. As for the capability to influence, it is understood either as in relation to individual factors, or as a consequence of the positioning of the actors in the political-institutional environment.

From the synthesis and analysis of the constructs in each model, some theoretical reflections were proposed in order to suggest a research agenda: 1) the possibility of analyzing the dynamics of the political process, including change and stability as interrelated instances; and 2) analysis of the actors' capability to influence, in terms of resources owned and relationships established (coalitions and/or networks). The ultimate contribution of such suggestions is to promote an understanding on how the dynamics and the capability to influence shape the content of politics.

The theoretical reflections presented here can be operationalized in empirical works from the combination of the propositions of more than one model, in order to analyze the dynamics and the capability to influence from other viewpoints suggested. In addition, the systematization and reflections undertaken may contribute to structuring a future model for public policies analysis.

Therefore, it is important that the researchers identify a research object in which these analyses are relevant. For example, in the case of comparative studies, the understanding of process dynamics for an extended period of time seems relevant. The analysis of the capability to influence in this suggested perspective seems to be useful for decision-making processes in which there is a large number of different actors and for issues in which diverse interests collide, such as environmental policies. The next step is to carry out empirical studies, in order to verify the extent to which these new dimensions of analysis can contribute to broadening the understanding of the results and the evolution of public policies.

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