Transformational Change through Public Policy

Abstract

This paper introduces the Special Issue "Transformational Change through Public Policy". After introducing the idea of transformational societal change, it asks how public policy scholarship can contribute to fostering it; the research questions we need to do so; what actors we need to study; who our audiences are; and how we need to expand our theories and methods. In our conclusion, we draw five lessons from the Special Issue articles. Transformational change (1) often results from many instances of policy changes over extended periods of time; (2) involves social movements that reconceptualise problems and possibilities; and (3) requires policy changes across sectors and levels of society, from local communities to national or global communities. As a field, Public Policy (4) will never offer detailed instructions to create transformational change in all circumstances, (5) but must involve scholars taking on different roles, from engaged scholarship to theory development that each provide unique contributions.

Introduction

The 2020s are turbulent times. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on society has been disastrous in terms of illness and death. It has also shone prolonged light on inequalities in our societies which are both entrenched and growing. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has revived the spectre of nuclear war. High fuel prices are causing cost-of-living crises not seen for many decades. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has brought violent policing practices to the fore, provoking powerful challenges to racist practices and institutions worldwide. Women's rights are under renewed attack from authoritarian and chauvinistic governments, and progress on LGBTQ+ people's rights has now stalled in many places and reversed in others. Indigenous communities across the world continue to be exploited, unrecognised and marginalised. All these intersecting challenges are set against the devasting backdrop of rapid climate change, for which the dreaded 1.5°C of warming is likely to be surpassed within a decade. Whilst policy responses to these issues have been more robust in some countries than others, symbolic action and agenda denial are widespread responses with policymakers showing few signs of paying these issues the sustained attention they need. In short, there is a notable lack of action on the most pressing challenges our societies face.

The impetus for this *Policy & Politics* 2022 Special Issue "Transformational Change through Public Policy" comes from a sense of unease about the lack of action of these and similar issues and the role of public policy studies in addressing them. The field of Public Policy emerged partly to address the worst maladies of society (Lasswell, 1956) and to describe, explain, and, perhaps, enable policy change to assuage them (Dawson and Robinson, 1963; Hofferbert, 1974). Despite this conviction, after more than a half century of scholarship we need to ask: what can Public Policy offer to understand and inform the kind of societal transformations needed both to weather these turbulent times and to realize a better future for all?

Using a diversity of approaches and ideas, the scholars in this Special Issue address this provocation head-on by exploring the field's intellectual possibilities for the study of transformational change. The aim of this collection is to stimulate wider, self-conscious reflection among policy scholars seeking to understand and change our world through their scholarship. Three of the articles explore the role of citizens in policy change: Jale Tosun, Daniel Béland and Yannis Papadopoulos' work on the impacts of the European Citizens' Initiatives (ECI); Rosana de Freitas Boullosa and Janaína Lopes Pereira Pere's article on community-activism in Brazil; and Meghan Joy and Ronald K. Vogel's article on transformative urban movements. Another set of articles shifts the focus to how we – as scholars – can contribute to transformational change through policy studies. Paul Cairney, Emily St. Denny, Sean Kippin, and Heather Mitchell explore lessons from policy theories to address inequities in health, education, and gender policy; and Leah Levac, Alana Cattapan, Tobin LeBlanc Haley, Laura Pin, Ethel Tungohan and Sarah Marie Wiebe illustrate how policy scholars can achieve transformational change through engaged scholarship. Finally, two articles seel to improve policy theory around transformational change. Daniel Nohrstedt offers innovative theoretical ideas linking disasters to transformational change, while Sebastian Sewerin, Michael Howlett, and Benjamin Cashore advance the relationship between policy feedback and paradigmatic policy change.

To clarify our arguments about the knowledge gained from this Special Issue, we begin with basic definitions of three key concepts. The first concept is *formal policy change*, which we define for simplicity's sake as any new or revised changes in law, regulations, decrees, court decisions, executive orders, and so on. Often these changes occur in legally authorized decision-making venues, such as legislatures, courts, and bureaucracies. Of course, the field is replete with descriptions of types of formal policy change (e.g., major to minor, punctuated to incremental) and associated politics (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018; Baumgartner et al., 2018; Lowi, 1964, 1972). Nohrstedt (2022) and Sewerin et al. (2022) represent two examples of articles dealing with formal changes in public policy.

The second concept is *informal policy change* or what some might call changes to the "rules-in-use" (Ostrom, 2005). These changes are often linked to shifts in the discretionary norms and regularized behaviors of street-level bureaucrats or the operational, on-the-ground community practices (Emilio Paolo et al., 2021; Lee and Park, 2020). They need not occur through a legally authorized decision-making venue. Rather, their legitimacy comes from the people engaged in the policy issue. Boullosa et al's (2022) work exemplifies informal policy changes at the community level. Importantly, both of these concepts refer to characteristics of a policy change in and of itself, sometimes referred to as a policy *output* (Koontz and Thomas, 2006).

Both formal and informal policy changes may lead to *transformational change,* the concept at the heart of this Special Issue. It refers to societal *outcomes* or impacts (broadly construed) which may be caused by policy change directly or indirectly. Nohrstedt (2022), who draws on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (IPCC, 2022), suggests that transformational change involves not only shifts in "goals or values." It also involves changes to the economic, social, and political fabric of society, including "power, politics, culture, identity and sense-making" and in the outcomes via "societal change" – that is, in the context of climate change, eradicating or at least lessening the worst current and impending threats. In terms of its temporal dimensions, while transformational change may be spurred by the passage of major, path-departing policies that force changes in societal outcomes, it may also result from incremental changes that accumulate over time to produce societal transformation (Kates et al., 2012; Westley et al., 2011; Geels and Schot, 2007; Walker et al. 2004), often across multiple sectors or domains (Garcia et al. 2019; Markard et al. 2012).[1]

Each of the articles in this Special Issue presents a somewhat different, often context-sensitive variation on the definition of transformational change, though all focus on the outcome of broader societal transformation as a result of formal or informal policy change. More importantly, as a community of scholars of policy and politics, we need a common vocabulary to enable communication and learning among us, even if tentative.

A note is in order with regard to the prescriptive status of transformational change. The policy perspective does not assume change is necessarily ethically, socially or politically desirable. We need to acknowledge this normative neutrality. As a field, we have moved away from naïve assumptions of classical pluralism, which suggests that incremental decision-making that balances organised interests is mark of a healthy democracy (Cobb and Elder 1972). Agenda denial of some policy actors and issues illustrates that the 'intelligence of democracy' is often

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[1] We recognize that, colloquially, both minor changes in public policy (outputs) and minor changes in society (outcomes) are often called "incremental." Similarly, we can have major, punctuated, and paradigmatic changes in public policy, as well as major transformative changes in society, though one does not necessarily lead to the other. Indeed, sometimes a major change in public policy has no impact on society while the accumulation of minor changes fosters transformation.

shored-up by systems of oppression that silence diverse voices and lock-in non-decision-making. The literature looking at the other side of the policy change coin – punctuations – similarly illuminates the darker side of change, where attention does not follow the evidence but rather is disproportionately allocated as images, frames and venues change. And so, policy change that is emancipatory for some populations can have deleterious consequences for others. This is something starkly seen in climate change mitigation strategies of the global North around land use which routinely transfer hazard to communities in the global South (Dunlop 2009).

Change is also temporally contingent. We must always look at policy change with one eye on the future, considering the broader socio-economic ramifications of policy choices whether incremental or major. This is what Wildavsky (1979) called the 'law of large solutions': the idea that large-scale responses to policy problems – for example, major investment in a particular climate change mitigation technology – carry far-reaching, unintended, and sometimes unwelcome consequences for society. These responses may privilege powerful groups and double down on sub-optimal ideas (for example, first-generation biofuels). Essentially, Wildavsky (1979) was interested in the interdependencies both between policies and also between policies and politics, as well as the ability of policy instruments to reshape the policy and political landscape in myriad and unexpected ways. We note this not to dampen the normative zeal involved in calling for transformational change. Rather we want to remind ourselves that, as policy scholars, we have the analytical means to expose these nuances and complexities to help create adaptive and inclusive policy designs.

This introductory article begins with a return to the literature on policy and politics to recap our history of dealing with policy change as a discipline and our consequent role in society. We then discuss themes of this special issue in the context of a specific (and grand) challenge – climate change – to demonstrate how the ideas presented in the articles can help us gain traction on transformational change. We conclude with an overview of the lessons from the Special Issue and some ideas for what comes next.

Transformational Change in the Public Policy Literature
In many ways, the study of public policy is the study of change. As policy scholars, we build and apply knowledge about both historical and ongoing policy processes, approached from multiple perspectives, to emphasize and explain different aspects of their complexity. For example, we study changes in behaviors, narratives, argumentation, and acts of persuasion in the public discourse to understand how they change minds or shift attention (Shanahan et al., 2018; Fischer and Forrester, 1993; Roe, 1994). We analyze changes in political engagement and advocacy in networks, coalitions, and epistemic communities to explain the creation and

prioritization of specific policy solutions (Haas, 1992; Mahoney, 2007; Weible et al., 2020; Hajer, 2005; Varone et al., 2017). We explore changes in policy actors' beliefs through learning to better understand how we can adapt to shifts in our environment (Dunlop, 2017; Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013). Critically, policy change is the fulcrum around which all of these important areas (and more) pivot.

Over the decades, the field of Public Policy has learned a lot about policy change. We know patterns of policy change show mostly incrementalism marked by the occasional punctuation, a finding across a variety of political systems (Baumgartner and Jones, 2010; Jones and Baumgartner, 2019). In large-n quantitative studies, we have established a list of factors preceding the adoption and diffusion of policy change, such as historical and geographical conditions, socio-economic conditions, citizen ideology, public opinion, and professional capacity (Hofferbert, 1974; Mallison, 2021a; 2021b). In small-n case studies, we are revealing factors and conditions that often precede policy change, including shocks or events, shifts in attention, learning, champions or entrepreneurs, and various forms of political associations (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018; Herweg et al., 2018; Fischer, 2014), as well as greater knowledge about how different institutional arrangements foster or restrict processes of change (Trondal, 2022; Huang and Wiebrecht, 2021; Ostrom 2005).

Despite these advances, the concept and theory of policy change remains elusive in meaning and measurement. While we have derived some of the factors preceding policy change, and we can usually find confirmations for some of them in instances of policy change, none of them are necessary or sufficient on their own. For example, Nohrstedt et al. (2021) found no relationship between a large sample of disasters – a commonly identified antecedent of change – and policy change in a worldwide sample. We also struggle to distinguish major and minor changes outside of large-n quantitative measures that rely on distinctions in counting the number of policies or standard deviation shifts from prior policies in areas such as budgets (Jones et al., 1998).

Perhaps even more elusive is our understanding of the outcomes, or impacts, of policy change on society. Policy change does not have its own telos – it has no 'correct' form or direction. Advocates for policy change often engage in political processes with the hope of spurring broader societal – potentially transformational – change. The ultimate goal of such advocates is not necessarily a new policy; rather, it is to create desired effects in society through the use of policy. However, policy change does not necessarily lead to societal change. When a policy change occurs, its effects – whether intended or unintended – may be obscured through challenges, mishaps, and politicized processes of funding and implementation (Hill and Hupe, 2014). Moreover, while we know policies impact society through various feedback mechanisms

(for example Mettler and Sorrelle, 2018; Michener, 2018), we are far from understanding the intricacies of these outcomes or being able to predict whether they will happen in the future, in part because of their highly complex underlying mechanisms. As a result, 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.

That said, policy scholars have laid the foundations for beginning this work. For instance, building on Lowi (1964, 1972), research has found strong evidence of how policies affect interest group emergence, citizen engagement, distributions of benefits and burdens, and future policies (Pierson, 1993; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Mettler, 2002; Mettler and SoRelle, 2018). Additionally, others have studied shifts in policy paradigms (Hall, 1993; Hogan and Howlett, 2015) and policy regimes (Jochim and May, 2010) that nod toward broader societal change. Some scholars (e.g., Burnham, 1970; Grossback et al, 2006) have also attempted to link transformational changes in society to generational shifts and mandated elections. However, all these efforts lack a focus on the enduring transformational element needed to address the globe's grand challenges, fall short in describing agency and mechanisms, and muddy distinctions between policy change and societal change.

Exemplary but rare analyses of transformational change as a result of policy change come from Baumgartner and Jones (2016) and Jones et al. (2019). They demonstrate, with decades of data, a "great broadening" in federal-level policies in the post-WWII United States (US), which peaked in the late 1970s. Through this unprecedented and sustained extension of federal government into new areas of social policy – health care, civil rights, the environment – citizens' lives changed in fundamental and enduring ways. But more than this, following Lowi's famous policies to politics logic, this great broadening of government's reach in society and economy worked to re-shape domestic politics through the rise of organised interests critical of this increased activity in the public sphere. Hacker and Pierson (2010) make similar arguments about the rolling back of the same pattern: through policy feedback and policy drift, the unraveling of federally-supported welfare programs came not in a single policy but in the impacts of multiple policy changes – including those that were incremental – which, taken together, had long-term, transformational outcomes (including those that were largely negative, such as greater economic inequality). This research reminds us transformational change often emerges not from a single 'big bang' policy but rather from changes in various policies through sustained efforts.

The challenge that we pose to the field of Public Policy with this Special Issue is whether it is up to the job of developing a coherent research program to build knowledge and enable necessary, positive transformational change to address the grand challenges of our time. Can

we ask the bigger questions about how things can change? Can we engage with actors and audiences inside and outside the halls of power that work for, or inhibit, transformational change? Can we expand our theoretical tools so they capture the magnitude of and explanations for change? And finally, what is our role as public policy scholars within the broader social sciences in doing this? Answering these questions falls beyond the scope of an introductory article and is more than a single special issue can handle. However, we can draw on the concepts from this Special Issue as a foundation for a research programme to address them into the future. To begin this effort, we explore how the lessons learned in this Special Issue's articles can be used to understand transformational change around one of our many key societal challenges: climate change.

Seeing this Special Issue through the Lens of Transforming Climate Governance
Climate change poses an unprecedented challenge to the typical incrementalism of public policymaking. We are running out of time to make enough minor policy changes to lead to transformative societal change before climate catastrophe. Indeed, the IPCC (2022) have clearly stated that incrementalism is now insufficient in mitigating climate change. Rapid, major change – and subsequent societal transformation – is needed in order to avert civilisational collapse. At the same time, such rare policy punctuations remain politically and socially unpopular in many countries. In this context, increasing numbers of scholars across the social sciences, including those in Public Policy (e.g. Massey and Huitema, 2016), are turning their attention to climate change and what to do about it given these social and environmental constraints.

We believe the field of Public Policy has something unique to offer these pursuits toward what are likely to be more rapid, disruptive shifts in policy that may ultimately provoke transformational change (Kates et al., 2012). Here, we set out five questions to guide a discussion of the articles in this Special Issue and how their findings bear on addressing the challenge of climate change.

(1) What is it about the field of Public Policy that can be useful in achieving societal transformations, such as those necessary to avert climate catastrophe?

Answering this question requires some soul searching and consideration of the nature of policy scholarship as an endeavour and where it fits in the broader social sciences. We, in part, are a field of practical lessons (Lasswell, 1956). That is, while many other disciplines, such as Ecological Economics (Martinez-Alier and Muradian, 2015) or Sustainability Transitions (Rogge and Reichardt, 2016) focus on what kind of changes would be needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, policy scholarship can tell us how we get there from where we are now. We are

well placed to ask what various policy actors can do to make transformational change more likely, and in the context of rapidly advancing climate change and (un)sustainability, how to speed up such change (Durrant et al. 2018).

Such practical lessons are one of the driving forces of our discipline (Weible and Cairney, 2018). If we think deeper about this claim, it concerns how policy scholarship engages with structure and agency. The major ontological focus of the field of Public Policy concerns agency; when policy scholars look at the world they see policy actors, ideas, and fine-grained problems. For example, policy entrepreneurs carry the burden of a policy idea to fruition (Capano and Galanti, 2021; Cairney, 2018; Herwig et al., 2018), and advocacy coalitions remain adamant over time in translating their beliefs into policy (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018). Social science disciplines like the traditional study of Politics, Sociology, and Economics identify structural obstacles to change whilst also exploring individual and collective agency in overcoming them (Porter et al. 2015). In contrast, the field of Public Policy takes a granular view; getting into the nitty gritty of how, when, and under what conditions policy actors as individuals and collectives enable or prevent change in policy and consequent societal outcomes (e.g., Hamilton and Lubell, 2019; Selin and VanDeveer, 2017; Boin and 't Hart, 2003).

This Special Issue highlights such agency in the context of structure. Take for example Boullosa et al. (2022) who identify lessons contributing to the Brazilian community of Paraisópolis' successful community-based governance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, including proximity coordination, collective learning, and affectionate rationality. Levac et al. (2022) provide similar insights in their tips for engaged scholarship in improving policy processes, especially in disrupting existing community power distributions. Their recommendations are not only about what makes a community successful but they offer deeper insights on what makes a policy scholar successful in engaging with communities, including collaborations in understanding problems and finding solutions. These two studies exemplify what it means to learn about a community, the individual agency embedded therein, and our relationship to them. They demonstrate that *how* we conduct our scholarship matters. Engagement is not an event but a way of being which guides how we do research at all stages (Stewart 2022).

   (2) What questions do we need to ask in order to explore opportunities for transformational change around climate and other grand challenges?

To answer this question, it is worth looking at what kind of transformations are advanced by colleagues from across the social sciences on climate change as an example. Despite three decades of international climate talks and 35 years since the Bruntland Report set out a Sustainable Development framework, greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase. We are,

in other words, far from achieving the "green growth" that dominates current policy rhetoric in the global North. Achieving green growth requires more than piecemeal sector-based policy initiatives, innovation and increased regulatory oversight. Disruptive structural measures are needed that decouple global GDP growth from greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, since the two have gone hand-in-hand over the last centuries (Hickel and Kallis, 2020), it would undoubtedly require a major transformation of our economies and energy systems to achieve absolute decoupling. Some believe there is room for optimism, pointing to the relative decoupling achieved in many wealthier countries that have reduced emissions whilst maintaining moderate growth (Newman, 2017). Critics are less persuaded, noting the geographical division of labour in world trade whereby emissions are naturally higher in the countries where the products we consume are produced, as well as the fact that neither aviation nor shipping are included in any country's official emissions accounting (Wiedenhofer et al., 2020).

Whilst many are skeptical about absolute decoupling even being hypothetically possible, and certainly highly unlikely under the timeframes set out in international climate talks (Antal and Van Den Bergh, 2016; Hickel and Kallis, 2020), others point out that even getting close to green growth would require what Peter Hall termed a paradigm change (Buch-Hansen and Carstensen, 2021). As Buch-Hansen and Carstensen point out, the antithesis to green growth is the idea of 'degrowth'. This academic concept has started to manifest itself in policy debates around a 'Green New Deal' (Aronoff et al., 2019; Pettifor, 2019) where the core argument is that climate change adaptation requires shifts in our economies as seismic as those seen in North American and European welfare states after the Great Depression and WWII. Degrowth's realisation demands nothing less than fourth-order paradigmatic change exemplified by: 'a different systemic logic and thus [involving] much deeper institutional and ideational change' (p. 312).

Moving beyond the economic, transformative climate policy requires radical changes in our democratic institutions. Graham Smith (2021) argues that policy myopia is built into representative democracy. This short-sightedness is a fundamental stumbling block for action on climate change. Short-term electoral cycles are ill-fitted to address the long-term challenge of climate change, and clientelism towards an older electorate means that younger generations' interests are ignored. Moreover, the lobbying system gives disproportionate power to entrenched interests, not least to the fossil fuel industry. Smith's critique builds on a long-developing trend amongst scholars studying democracy towards a preference for deliberative and participatory forms (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Ercan et al 2019; Richards 2018). Many in the climate sphere promote citizen assemblies as a better way to bring about action on climate change. These assemblies would be picked by sortition and deliberate over how to reach emission targets under the advice of experts (Bryant and Willis, 2019). The promise is

that such deliberation can be insulated from the entrenched interests that otherwise distort and counteract climate policy, and that random citizens are a lot better at agreeing on policy than politicians driven by adversarial party-political relations and strong ideological beliefs. Yet, the results from climate assemblies in both the UK and France have been disappointing. Unsurprisingly, parliaments have not been willing to cede any real power to the assemblies, thereby turning them more into consultation processes. Turning our political systems into true deliberative democracies would entail a much deeper transformation than much of the literature concedes.

This Special Issue speaks to some of these fundamental challenges. Tosun et al. (2022) explore the impact of direct democracy in citizen initiatives with an emphasis on a shift in perspective of citizens as opportunities for societal change rather than as veto points. This shift is often overlooked in policy process research. Yet, it is essential to reach holistic, transformative societal change. Other examples point to crisis or disasters as a possible driver for major change. Nohrstedt's (2022) four simplified scenarios amplify some of the challenges ahead. For instance, even when policies are made in response to disasters, we must assess whether they are part of a series of incremental policies that can lead to broader societal change over extended periods of time. In such cases, we need to avoid the "tyranny of the urgent" – short-term, symbolic responses with no real impacts. Similar to one of the scenarios in Nohrstedt (2022), we should also not under-emphasize the impacts of incremental policy change on transformative societal impacts, which resonates with policy drift as one explanation for the US's historic inequities (Pierson and Hacker, 2010). In this vein, Cairney et al. (2022) claim that our field's strength is not in telling a policy actor what they should do in a given context through "toolboxes" or "playbooks". The world is far too complex for such generalized recommendations. Instead, policy studies can offer knowledge and ways of thinking about social and political processes that can help us understand and react to our world to foster transformational change.

(3) *What actors and whose agency do we need to study to bring about transformational change around climate and other salient but neglected issues?*

Our answer to this question is for the field to incorporate the agency and perspectives of less institutionalised actors into our scholarship. A sizeable portion of policy studies focuses on professional and often elite policy actors, wherein members of the general public or citizens fall in the background, often as one of the many factors affecting policy processes (e.g., see Weible and Sabatier, 2018). Fewer studies identify the public (or often social movements) as general constraints on policy choices or forces shaping tidal waves of policymaking (e.g., Hofferbert, 1974; Jones et al., 2019). While the general public and social movements remain noticeably

absent from theories and many publications, we know they influence policy processes more than the field generally acknowledges and interact with formal policy actors in underexplored ways (exceptions include Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Mettler and Sorrelle, 2018). Additionally, history tells us that transformational changes (whether positive or negative) tend to have widespread social movement organising as a contributing factor.

Engaged citizens and social movements certainly parallel some of the arguments related to political mobilization and associations in policy process research. Examples include the power of policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon 1984; Herweg et al., 2018), the role of movements in target population stigmatization and emancipation (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 2004), and advocacy coalitions (Weible and Ingold, 2018; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018).[2] Yet, policy scholarship rarely places these actors front and centre in its analysis. Given the challenges facing our world, we believe it is time for policy studies to better incorporate social movements, mostly abandoned from its scope in the early 20th Century (and adopted by Sociology), in theories of interest groups, pluralism, and corporatism (Garson, 1978).

It is perhaps telling that three of our contributors to this Special Issue have indeed chosen to focus on various types of grassroots actors in analysing transformational change (Boullosa and Peres, 2022; Joy and Vogel, 2022; Levac et al., 2022). These contributions highlight how communities of engaged citizens can make their own (informal) public policies (Boullosa et al., 2022), social (urban) movements can be a force for change (Joy and Vogel, 2022), and people can (in collaboration with policy scholars) solve community problems (Levac et al., 2022). To put it differently, it is not that policy studies focuses on the wrong things, but rather that its ability to understand and foster changes in policy and society would be enhanced with a broader lens.

In terms of the public and social movements shaping outcomes, the climate change movement has long had a strong prefigurative component – that is, actors who seek an 'attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present' (Yates, 2015, p. 1). We can think about 'intentional communities' that seek sustainable communal lifestyles outside of mainstream society (Clarence-Smith and Monticelli, 2022), such as neighborhoods that come together to produce food or energy in sustainable ways (Schlosberg, 2019). What such actors have in common is that they make outcomes happen at a local level without waiting for the

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[2] Yet, these phenomena are fundamentally different. See Weible and Ingold (2018) for comparisons of advocacy coalitions and social movements.
We also must not jettison existing and ongoing research on policy actors, especially members of the general public. Research finds complicated and difficult to measure relationships between the public and policy changes (Branham et al., 2017; Wlezien, 2017; Moon and Cho, 2022), coupled with the fact that the public's preferences are often revealed through mechanisms linked to identities and associations (Disch, 2021). Hence, we argue that the public (and how they influence public policy as found in social movements) is relatively neglected in the field.

state to do so. Similarly, social movements have had a greater influence on policymaking than given credit for in most cases. If we were to ask, for example, why recent oil and gas development technologies (i.e., "fracking") have not been incorporated into the UK's energy development practices, a decisive factor has been the direct action carried out at proposed fracking sites by a combination of seasoned activists and local residents-turned-activists (Brock, 2020). The question then becomes how the public and social movements interact with the more institutionalized policy actors and to what extent our scholarship incorporates, distinguishes, and recognizes them in our empirical and theoretical arguments.

Another reason we should pay more attention to social movements in public policy scholarship is that grassroots organising and social movements have contributed to transformational changes historically (Jones et al., 2019). The creation of the welfare states in Europe and North America are cases in point. Keynesian economists are often guilty of telling this story in terms of ingenuity in economic and monetary thinking and strong and bold leadership (e.g., Pettifor, 2019). However, this does a disservice to the actors that helped bring about such transformational change. Equally important to the story was the growth and commitment of labour movements with which powerful actors had to strike compromises. This suggests that a transformational change around climate, such as a Green New Deal, would require strong institutions based in communities and workplaces that have been built from below rather than set up from above (Aronoff et al., 2019).

Thus, while policy scholars observe radical shifts in public attention and policy activity linked to social movements, the emphasis tends to be on the broad time scales necessary to justify such claims rather than on the mechanisms driving the change (e.g., Baumgartner and Jones, 2016; Jones et al., 2019). Boullosa et al. (2022), Joy and Vogel (2022), and Levac et al. (2022) all show how policy scholars can draw lessons from specific cases of citizen engagement and social movements to think more deeply about the drivers of transformational change.

(4) *Who do we need to speak to?*

This question is, of course, closely connected to the previous one. It concerns reflecting on what kind of research we carry out that would support broader publics and under-represented policy actors in creating transformational change. We will also want to speak to actors more integrated into the institutionalized policy process but who nonetheless have a transformational policy agenda. Not least, we will want to enable transformational projects and actors inside and outside of formal institutions to collaborate and make the best use of each other's abilities and actions.

In the context of climate change, various non-state actors such as environmental NGOs and private companies, as well as sub-state actors such as cities and other sub-national governments, have become increasingly integrated into climate policy efforts (Nasiritousi et al. 2016). Despite historical marginalisation in formal policymaking arenas, these actors have been given more formalised recognition, if not explicit roles, in global climate policymaking in the post-Paris era (Kuyper et al., 2018; Hale, 2018). Other relatively informal efforts calling for climate transformation include fossil fuel divestment campaigns (Ayling and Gunningham, 2015) and social movements led by youth climate activists (O'Brien et al., 2018), among others. Considering the types of research that would benefit these actors in their informal or formalising roles, especially in their interactions with one another and with decision makers, can bolster their collective efforts toward transformational change.

Expanding our audiences also means reconsidering what kind of research questions we ask. Our field excels in exploring how policy actors with access to institutional politics can achieve policy change. International relations, sociology, and anthropology scholarship points the way for policy scholars on researching how actors without such access can produce change. James Scott's (1985) classic *Weapons of the Weak* and Erica Chenoweth's recent research on anti-regime struggles globally (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011) are examples of that rare thing – academic texts whose messages have transferred to the world of activism. For example, both the Sunrise Movement in the US and Extinction Rebellion drawing explicitly on some of Chenoweth's findings in the fight against climate change. That said, the value of the civil resistance literature for such social movements in liberal democracies is highly questionable (Berglund and Schmidt, 2020). David Bailey's dataset of protest movements across several liberal democracies is possibly more directly relevant. It shows that militant or disruptive protest is sometimes successful while non-disruptive protests rarely are (Bailey, 2014; Bailey et al., 2021).

Recent scholarship that considers co-production and collaborative governance approaches (Torfing et al. 2021; van Gestel and Grotenberg, 2021) also provides important insight into this topic while pointing out critical challenges associated with translating policy change into societal change. The point is that questions of what works under what circumstances are of great interest to those seeking transformational change, and public policy scholarship should have much to offer here. Again, we return to Levac et al.'s (2022) work on engaged scholarship as exemplar in speaking to people beyond the usual suspects.

Inclusion in our scholarship is central to informing and catalysing transformational change. We have focused on reaching out to, and working with, ignored publics and marginalised communities. But inclusion means we should also not forgo our traditional audiences, including

students, other scholars, and institutionalized policy actors. They remain an essential audience, however effective and ineffective we have been in reaching them. Let us not forget the fears stoked by the "policy sciences of tyranny" of the last quarter of the 20th Century (Dryzek and Torgerson, 1993; deLeon, 1997). The general notion was that policy analysis excluded the voices of the public and therefore supported a technocratic state. Certainly, policy analysis has been incorporated in some forms of rulemaking and decision-making and is influential in shaping the climate of policy if not policy itself (Dunlop 2018, 2019; John 2013). But, the policy sciences of tyranny nightmare never materialized as feared and the arguments have been more about the limits of the policy sciences than their successes (Jenkins-Smith, 1990). Instead, politics (i.e., the quest for power and influence) continues to trump policymaking as much as it trumps the public: the powerful continue to selectively use scientific and technical advice or discard it to legitimize their claims and delegitimize others (Durnová, 2019).

While the blatant overuse of policy scholarship by policy actors has never happened (and why should it? [Lindblom and Cohen, 1979]) we also know that when it does occur, knowledge utilization in policy-making may not always be positive. Recall evaluation scholars Weiss and Bucuvalas' (1980) famous warning of 'policy endarkenment': we should never assume knowledge is up-to-date and should be mindful of the impacts of cognitive biases, problems of analogous reasoning and dangers of researchers becoming 'guns for hire'. The literature linking policy learning and failure points to the regularity of these tensions rather than any extreme tyrannies of technocracy or misuse. In relation to climate change, a central problem, of course, is one of non-use of scholarship. Deafening policy silences in the face of an unprecedented global scientific consensus has led some climate researchers to call for a moratorium in research and its communication until nations take meaningful transformative action (Glavovic et al. 2021). Exercising the right not only to 'voice' but also to 'exit' policy settings we judge to be dysfunctional and dangerous is one of the less discussed but important ethical duties of engaged scholarship.

Of course, this does not mean we should not keep trying to provide insight to policy actors but it does mean we should be self-conscious in our choices. As policy scholars, we should stop overlooking the less institutionalized actors as an audience and keep working with established policy actors as best we can. We should also keep our eyes turned inward; our lasting influence on the world is probably most likely to happen through teaching by making concepts and methods relevant to students.

(5) *How do we need to expand our methodological and theoretical approaches to advance knowledge and promote action on transformational change in climate and other areas?*

Transformational scholarship needs the combination and collaboration of mainstream and critical scholarship that we called for in our previous Special Issue (Berglund et al., 2022). Similarly, this Special Issue draws on a diversity of scholarship, from interpretive approaches in Boullosa et al. (2022) to more positivist scholarship in the case of Nohrstedt (2022). If the goal is to advance knowledge and promote action, we need to maintain the "all-hands-on-deck" mentality promoted by *Policy & Politics*. The ability to draw practical lessons whilst understanding these in relation to strong methods and theories is Public Policy's contribution. However, this means we need to keep challenging our methods and theories and the practice of our science.

Regarding the climate change issue, it is telling that the aforementioned exploration of possibilities for degrowth (Buch-Hansen and Carstensen, 2021) sought to grasp transformational change through Peter Hall's (1993) concept of policy paradigms. This is also where Sewerin et al. (2022) turn theoretically in this Special Issue. They shift our focus on the drivers of policy change away from the typical set of factors (e.g., exogenous shocks) towards previous public policies with rippling effects leading to paradigmatic policy change (and possibly societal transformations).

Whilst we are supportive of Sewerin et al.'s attempts to understand transformational change through paradigm change, the tendency to rely on what we already know says something about the limits of the standard Public Policy theoretical toolkit. Hall's iconic study explained the shift in macroeconomic policy in the UK from 1970 to 1989. This paradigmatic shift was of course part of the broader neoliberal revolution that others have traced to specific ideas and agents starting with the Mont Pelerin Society (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2015). Incidentally, transformations wrought by this ideological apparatus are the main adversaries when popular climate-focused economist Kate Raworth (2017) sets out her suggested transformation (Doughnut Economics) of Economics as a discipline. That historical context has theoretical consequences. Since the neoliberal revolution has been an elite-driven process, we would not expect theories built on it to have very much to say about bottom-up agency. This can be contrasted to theories and scholarship that builds on the creation of the welfare states mentioned above. In short, Peter Hall's paradigm shifts is a good starting point but not an endpoint for thinking about transformational change through public policy.

Nohrstedt (2022) also pushes the field to think differently about policy change and specifically its temporal and spatial dimensions. He reminds us of the different paths forward and the effects of time on adopting public policies and their outcomes, which also points to another limitation of the field. Our theories tend to focus on dependent variables (i.e. the production of a single policy) that segment our view of a broader policy process. Despite Lindlbom's (1968)

wisdom that the policy process is ongoing without beginning or end, much of our scholarship maintains a focus on explaining policy change without much effort in studying their impacts or gauging whether those impacts succeed or fail at producing societal change (e.g., Dorrell and Jansa, 2022). The path forward is to keep advancing our theories and methods as policy specialists while embracing collaboration. For *Policy & Politics,* this means building bridges among our scholarships in creating a world that is as comprehensive, representative, and relevant as possible. While our intention is not to set out what broader methodological and theoretical approaches ought to look like, it should certainly draw on the diversity of scholars from our public policy meta-communities (Berglund et al. 2021) and, importantly, venture to other fields. Specifically, we encourage policy scholars to draw more on the broader cannon of social theorists that scholars from across the social sciences and humanities who have seriously grappled with transformational change do, from Antonio Gramsci to bell hooks and beyond.

Conclusion

What can the field of Public Policy offer to understand and inform policy change that leads to the kind of positive societal transformations needed not simply to weather our turbulent times but to realize a better future for all? This Special Issue responds to this question with seven articles that each contribute to understanding the role of public policy in transformational change differently. In this introduction, we highlight some of the contributions from these articles through an analysis of transformative change around the issue of climate change. We end this paper with a set of summary points for realizing transformational change through public policy and an agenda for establishing a research program on this theme:

1. If transformational change can be achieved through public policy, it often does not result from a single instance of policy change but many instances of policy changes that interact in ongoing processes of feedbacks over extended periods of time (Nohrstedt, 2022; Serwerin et al., 2022).
2. Achieving transformational change through public policies necessitates sufficient force, often through social movements that reconceptualize problems and possibilities (Joy and Vogel, 2022; see also Jones et al., 2019).
3. Transformational change often requires policy changes across sectors and levels of society, from local communities (Boullosa et al., 2022; Levac et al., 2022; Joy and Vogel, 2022) to national or global communities (Nohrstedt, 2022; Tosun et al., 2022; Sebastian et al., 2022).
4. Drawing insights from the field of Public Policy will never offer detailed instructions (e.g., a toolkit or playbook) to create transformational change in all circumstances; instead, it can provide ways to think about the challenges we face and strategies for overcoming them (Cairney et al., 2022).
5. Studying transformational change from the lens of public policy necessarily involves scholars taking on different roles, from engaged scholarship (Levac et al., 2022) to

theory development (Nohrstedt, 2022; Sewerin et al., 2022; Cairney et al., 2022), that each provide unique contributions.

Finally, we end with a call. Knowledge and action related to transformational change through public policy cannot happen without the concerted effort of a group of scholars working together and sharing their ideas. What is needed is a research program (Laudan, 1976). While much of the extant policy studies literature centers on the drivers and characteristics of policy change, scholars should further explore the outcomes of these changes to assess how they impact, or fail to impact, society in a transformative way. This requires the development and use of creative, interdisciplinary, and often collaborative approaches to better understand the collective societal impacts of policy change. Thus, while "policy change" is already on many policy scholars' minds and at the core of many of our theories, how we define, characterize, and measure the impacts of policy changes on society must be brought to the fore of our scholarship, particularly in the turbulent times we currently face.

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