

Seminar 1 — Regional Transition Diagnostic

IR227 Politics of Change

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Some introductions...

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I study:

- How do people come to think what they think about politics? what makes it change?
- The role of institutions in shaping citizens attitudes.
- And, as AI becomes more prevalent, how political decision-making changes
- Find out more at www.elenapro.eu

2 minutes: introduce yourself to the rest of the table

What you'll do in 90 minutes

[Bridge to seminar] *You are advising a regional development agency. Write a one-page diagnostic — is this region locked in, or near an opening, and what does that imply for action?*

- Six regions, two per archetype, deliberately paired.
- Each group: 3–4 students, one region.
- Three analytical phases, then drafting, then plenary.

Three methodological points up front

1. The diagnostic is an *analytical claim about why* — not a description.
2. “Lock-in” is not an opaque label. Name a mechanism.
3. The plenary will probe within-pair contrasts. Be ready to defend why your verdict differs from the paired region’s.

No “right” answers. Good and bad uses of the vocabulary.

Six regions, three archetypes

Archetype	Region A	Region B
Industrial decline	The Ruhr (Germany)	North East England (UK)
Rural depopulation & ageing	Hokkaido (Japan)	Calabria (Italy)
Resource-dependent	Alberta (Canada)	Pilbara (W. Australia)

Within each pair: same archetype, different outcome / driver / politics. The diagnostic should be sensitive to which. (OECD 2019)

Recap: the four lock-in mechanisms

Set-up costs Heavy fixed investment raises the bar for alternatives.

Learning effects Practitioners get better at the existing system; gap with alternatives widens.

Coordination effects Value of choosing X rises with the number of others who chose X.

Adaptive expectations Anticipating that X continues, people invest accordingly — making X more likely to continue.

For each region: which is dominant? Which is conspicuously absent? (Pierson 2000)

Recap: self-reinforcing vs. reactive sequences

Self-reinforcing Each step entrenches the path. Positive feedback. Lock-in proper.

Reactive Each event responds to the previous one. Logic of reaction, not reinforcement. Different politics, different opening.

Which kind of sequence is your region on? (Mahoney 2000)

Recap: a working juncture test (after Capoccia–Kelemen)

Framework: Critical juncture — a working three-condition test

A short window in which:

1. structural constraints loosen (contingency rises);
2. alternative outcomes were plausible (counterfactual range non-trivial);
3. the choice has durable downstream consequence.

(1) and (2) are Capoccia & Kelemen's; (3) is the lecture's operational extension. (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007)

Recap: permissive vs. productive conditions

Permissive conditions Loosen the constraints. Mark the window's beginning and end.
Necessary, not sufficient.

Productive conditions Operate *within* the window. Determine which alternative is selected.

Two clean implications:

- A window can open without being used.
- Two cases with the same productive conditions can diverge if the permissive condition's duration differs. (Soifer 2012)

Phase 1 — read and analyse (25 min, no laptops)

1. Read your case.
2. Identify the dominant lock-in mechanism for your region. *And the conspicuously absent one.*
3. Classify the historical sequence: self-reinforcing or reactive?
4. Identify one or two candidate critical-juncture moments and apply the Capoccia–Kelemen test to each. Verdict: critical juncture, dramatic event, or too soon to tell?
5. Use the permissive/productive distinction: (Soifer 2012) which conditions were permissive, which were productive, and did the productive condition arrive?

Output: a short summary — two or three sentences you can defend and will report to the class — naming the mechanism, the sequence, and your juncture verdict.

Phase 2 — draft your briefing (15 min, Claude allowed)

Case: Transition diagnostic

A one-paragraph diagnostic for the regional development agency.

- Verdict: locked-in / near an opening / ambiguous.
- Evidence: the mechanism + the sequence + the juncture analysis.
- Implication for action: what should the agency be doing differently as a consequence of your diagnosis?

No “mush.” Commit to a verdict. The agency needs a recommendation.

Phase 3 — exchange briefings (5 min)

- Swap your written briefing with your comparative-case group (same archetype, paired region).
- Read their verdict, evidence, and implication for action.
- Note one point of contrast to raise in the plenary: same archetype — why does the verdict differ?

Phase 4 — present (5 min per group)

Each group presents its own diagnostic, then names the contrast with its comparative case.

- Industrial: Ruhr vs. North East England — same archetype, divergent outcome.
Why?
- Rural-demographic: Hokkaido vs. Calabria — same archetype, divergent driver.
Why?
- Resource-dependent: Alberta vs. Pilbara — same archetype, divergent politics.
Why?

Three things to take away

1. This diagnostic move is the analytical move the course will keep asking for.
2. Within-archetype variation is the puzzle that motivates the rest of the course.
3. “Transition” is a governance achievement (or failure), not a property of the region.

See you tomorrow. (Herweg et al. 2023)

- Capoccia, G. and R. D. Kelemen (2007). **“The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism”**. eng. In: *World politics* 59.3, pp. 341–369.
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