

Seminar 2 — A Policy Window in Building Decarbonisation

IR227 Politics of Change

July 2026

What you'll do in 90 minutes

[Bridge to seminar] *Reconstruct the most recent significant policy window for building decarbonisation in your assigned country. Apply MSF. Then ask: would foresight have caught it?*

- Six countries, three pairs, deliberately matched.
- Each group: 3–4 students, one country, one named window.
- One analytical phase, then drafting, exchange, then plenary.

Three methodological points up front

1. The streams are *categories the analyst constructs*. Not things the world hands you.
2. “Coupling happened” is not an explanation. Coupling claims name the moment, the streams, the entrepreneur.
3. The plenary will probe within-pair contrasts first, then the foresight reflection across cases.

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

Six countries, three pairs, six named windows

Pair	Country A	Country B
Industrial-federal	Germany (<i>Heizungsgesetz</i> 2023)	United States (IRA 2022 / 2025)
Centralised state	UK (Boiler Upgrade Scheme)	France (<i>MaPrimeRénov'</i>)
Smaller-state	Netherlands (gas phase-out)	Sweden (gradual outlier)

Within each pair: same archetype, divergent coupling outcome / entrepreneur / window structure. (Herweg et al. 2023)

Recap: the three streams

Problem stream Indicators, focusing events, feedback from existing programmes.

Policy stream The “primeval soup” of solutions; survives on technical feasibility, value acceptability, anticipation of constraints.

Political stream National mood, organised political forces, government changes.

Streams are independent. Coupling is the analytical hinge. (Herweg et al. 2023)

Recap: coupling, windows, entrepreneurs

Framework: Coupling

Policy change happens when streams are joined. Streams describe *conditions*; coupling describes *action*.

Predictable windows Elections, budget cycles, statutory review.

Unpredictable windows Crises, scandals, focusing events.

Entrepreneurs invest *their own* resources to couple. Most fail. (Herweg et al. 2023)

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

For your country and named window:

1. Reconstruct the three streams — problem, policy, political — in the months before the window. Identify the binding constraint.
2. Identify when the window opened and what signal marked it.
3. Name the entrepreneur (or note their absence) and the coupling that was attempted, plus any alternative couplings on the table.
4. Defend a verdict: was the window used, used-then-reversed, or missed?

Output: a sentence per stream, plus a sentence on the coupling moment, the entrepreneur, and the verdict — the material you'll need for Phase 2.

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

Case: The diagnostic memo

- One paragraph: the MSF retrospective. Streams, coupling, entrepreneur, outcome.
- Two-to-three sentences: the foresight reflection. *If the OECD strategic-foresight toolkit had been applied 12 months before this window, which modules would have flagged it? Which would have been blind?* (OECD 2025)

Be specific about the toolkit. Name a module of its five-module process (Explore Disruptions, Imagine Interactions, Create Scenarios). Name what it would have surfaced.

Phase 3 — exchange memos (5 min)

- Swap your written memo with your paired-case group (same pair, comparative country).
- Read their MSF retrospective and foresight reflection.
- Note one point of contrast to raise in the plenary: same pair — why does the coupling outcome differ?

Phase 4 — present (5 min per group, 30 min total)

Each group presents its own diagnostic. The other group adds the contrasting point — drawn from the memo they just read, not from memory.

Then: cross-cutting foresight reflection. What did foresight catch? What was it blind to?

Phase 4 — present (5 min per group, 30 min total)

Each group presents its own diagnostic. The other group adds the contrasting point — drawn from the memo they just read, not from memory.

Then: cross-cutting foresight reflection. What did foresight catch? What was it blind to?

- Industrial-federal: Germany vs. US — same archetype, divergent coupling vs. political-stream-reversal.
- Centralised state: UK vs. France — same institutional structure, divergent entrepreneurial coalitions.
- Smaller-state: Netherlands vs. Sweden — discrete coupling vs. gradual streams-convergence.

Three things to take away

1. MSF works as a diagnostic when it's disciplined: name the streams, the coupling, the entrepreneur, the outcome.
2. The political stream is the analytically hardest stream. Lecture 5 picks it up.
3. Foresight catches some signals reliably and is structurally blind to others. That's a useful empirical claim, not a failure of foresight.

Tomorrow: why some windows produce *stability* instead of change.

- Herweg, N., R. Zohlnhöfer, and N. Zahariadis (2023). **“The Multiple Streams Framework: Foundations, Refinements, and Empirical Applications”**. eng. In: *Theories of the Policy Process*. 5th ed. Routledge, pp. 29–64.
- OECD (2025). **Strategic Foresight Toolkit for Resilient Public Policy: A Comprehensive Foresight Methodology to Support Sustainable and Future-Ready Public Policy**. Paris: OECD Publishing.