

Seminar 12 — Cases of Interacting Transformations

IR227 Politics of Change — TA slides

July 2026

What you'll do in 90 minutes

[Bridge to seminar] *Take your assigned case. Identify the operative cross-transition interactions. Apply the relevant frameworks (any from the course). Reach a verdict. Close with a normative reflection on what would constitute “good” governance for coordinating across the interacting transformations in your case.*

- Six cases, three pairs.
- Each group: 3–4 students, one case.
- Cross-transition diagnosis, framework application, verdict, normative reflection, plenary.

Three methodological points up front

1. Cross-transition interactions are specific. Pathway (Lawrence: common stress / domino effect / inter-systemic feedback), actors, sequence. (Lawrence et al. 2024)
2. Framework application can range across the course toolkit.
3. Normative reflection should be defensible. Specify institution, coalition, commitment design.

Six cases, three pairs

Pair archetype	Case A	Case B
Twin transition in practice	EU Green Deal + digital	India developmental state
Disinformation + democratic erosion	US 2020s information	Brazil 2020s information
Multi-transition governance experiments	Wales WBFGA	NZ Living Standards Framework

Within each pair: same archetype, different design responses, different coalition dynamics.

Recap: analytical lenses for interacting transformations

Several useful lenses, none privileged:

- Polycrisis (Lawrence et al.) — causal interconnection and mutual amplification. (Lawrence et al. 2024)
- Systems transitions / MLP (Geels, Kern, and Clark, extending Lecture 4).
- Twin / multi-transition policy coordination (Gao).
- Governing time (Hale): a climate-specific institutional agenda, extended to other transitions.
- Disinformation as cross-cutting threat (Farrell and Newman): the LIIO's self-undermining feedback.

Each illuminates different aspects. The course toolkit complements these lenses.

Recap: polycrisis as one lens

Framework: Lawrence et al.'s three causal pathways

1. Common stresses — a shared upstream stress synchronises crises across systems.
2. Domino effects — crisis in one system triggers crisis in another in temporal sequence.
3. Inter-systemic feedbacks — feedback loops between systems that escalate or dampen.

Useful for cascading-and-amplification dynamics; partial as a master frame. (Lawrence et al. 2024)

Recap: governing time

- Hale: climate is a paradigmatic *long problem*; institutional agenda includes independent assessment, trustees, citizen assemblies, multi-decade reserves, experimentalist strategies. (Hale 2024)
- *Extension across transitions*: the long-problem logic generalises (with different horizons) to demographic (multi-generation), AI (rapidly evolving), migration (sustained).
- Each transition demands governance frameworks longer than electoral / fiscal / career cycles.
- Commitment problems generalise from within-transition to cross-transition.

Recap: which course frameworks travel best

Travel well. Polycentric governance; drift-conversion-layering; conditions checklist; commitment problems; coalition-building.

Travel with extension. Path dependency; MSF; ACF.

Conditions-as-strategy generalises (Lecture 9). Build coordinative institutions.

Worked example: EU twin transition — common stresses + feedbacks

- **Foundation.** European Green Deal (2019); Digital Decade (2021); Twin-Transition strategy documents (2022–).
- **Funding.** NextGenerationEU >€800bn (2021–26); RRF requires 37% climate / 20% digital spending floors.
- **Lawrence pathway.** Common stress (decarbonisation requires digital infrastructure for smart grids, AI-optimised energy) + inter-systemic feedback (AI energy intensity strains decarbonisation; conflicting industrial policies for green vs digital sectors).
- **Coordination challenge.** Cross-DG bandwidth; governance-bandwidth pressure (Lawrence pathways extended). CBAM full operational 1 Jan 2026.
- **Frameworks.** Geels, Kern, and Clark MLP; Meckling coalition-building (green + digital industrial coalition); Brussels-effect diffusion of EU twin-transition framing. (Gao 2025; Geels et al. 2023)

Worked example: US 2020s information — LIIO self-undermining feedback

- **Structural condition.** Section 230 (CDA 1996) unchanged; AI-amplified content transforms what the rule governs. Drift (Lecture 8).
- **LIIO feedback.** Farrell and Newman: open-information norms become *vectors of attack* from illiberal actors and contesting forces. (Farrell and Newman 2021)
- **Recent Supreme Court.** Moody v. NetChoice / NetChoice v. Paxton (1 July 2024) — first-amendment-protected content moderation; Murthy v. Missouri (26 June 2024) — government-platform-coordination limits.
- **Cross-transition implication.** Disinformation as cross-cutting threat: climate coalition fragility; AI-policy partisan polarisation; migration-policy polarisation; democratic-deliberation infrastructure stressed.
- **Verdict.** Democratic-deliberation infrastructure under sustained stress; transition coalitions fragile.

Worked example: Wales WBFGA — statutory cross-sector duty

- **Foundation.** Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Seven Well-being Goals (prosperous / resilient / healthier / more equal / cohesive / vibrant / globally responsible).
- **Five Ways of Working.** Long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, involvement.
- **Institution.** Future Generations Commissioner (Derek Walker, 1 March 2023–); statutory recommendations; reporting; advocacy. Public Service Boards in 19 local-authority areas.
- **Hale frame.** Statutory cross-sector duty addresses temporal-commitment problem; institutional design for the long problem. (Hale 2024)
- **Diffusion.** Model studied: Scotland FGC in development; NZ considered analogous (chose budget-process route).
- **Verdict.** Most-developed worked case of statutory cross-transition coordination;

Phase 1 — cross-transition diagnosis (25 min)

Identify the operative cross-transition interactions:

1. Which Lawrence pathway (common stress / domino effect / inter-systemic feedback)?
2. Which actors?
3. Which sequence?
4. What evidence?

Phase 2 — framework application + verdict (15 min)

1. Apply relevant frameworks (any from course).
2. Reach a verdict on governance trajectory.
3. Walk from frameworks to verdict.

Phase 3 — drafting + normative reflection (15 min)

Case: The diagnostic memo

- One paragraph: diagnosis-and-verdict memo.
- Two-to-three sentences: normative reflection on what would constitute “good” governance for coordinating across the interacting transformations in the case.

Be specific. Specify institution, coalition, commitment design.

Phase 4 — plenary (25 min)

Within each pair:

- Twin transition: EU vs. India. Different starting conditions, different cross-transition logic.
- Disinformation: US vs. Brazil. Different democratic-institutions baselines.
- Governance experiments: Wales vs. NZ. Different institutional designs for cross-transition coordination.

Then: course-toolkit summary discussion.

Three things to take away

1. Governing multiple interacting transformations is structurally novel. Worked cases are limited; institutional-design space is largely unexplored.
2. The course's analytical apparatus generalises. Frameworks extend from single-transition to multi-transition cases.
3. Conditions can be built. The strategic-design challenge is which coordinative institutions to invest in.

The analytical apparatus the course has built is general; it carries beyond the cases examined here. Good luck.

- Farrell, H. and A. L. Newman (2021). **“The Janus Face of the Liberal International Information Order: When Global Institutions Are Self-Undermining”**. In: *International Organization* 75.2, pp. 333–358.
- Gao, X. (2025). **“The EU’s twin transitions towards sustainability and digital leadership: a coherent or fragmented policy field?”** In: *Regional Studies* 59.1, p. 2360053.
- Geels, F. W., F. Kern, and W. C. Clark (2023). **“System transitions research and sustainable development: Challenges, progress, and prospects”**. In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120.47, e2206230120.

- Hale, T. (2024). **“Governing Time”**. In: *Long Problems: Climate Change and the Challenge of Governing Across Time*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 166–182.
- Lawrence, M., T. Homer-Dixon, S. Janzwood, J. Rockström, O. Renn, and J. F. Donges (2024). **“Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement”**. In: *Global Sustainability* 7, e6.