



Tutorials in Public Policy

Tutorial 3

Defining an epidemic: the body mass index in British and US obesity research 1960–2000

Isabel Fletcher

University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Abstract Between the 1970s and the mid-1990s the body mass index (BMI) became the standard means of assessing obesity both in populations and in individuals, replacing previously diverse and contested definitions of excess body weight. This article draws on theoretical approaches from the sociology of standards and science and technology studies to describe the development of this important new standard and the ways in which its adoption facilitated the development of obesity science, that is, knowledge about the causes, health effects and treatments of excess body weight. Using an analysis of policy and healthcare literatures, I argue that the adoption of the BMI, along with associated standard cut-off points defining overweight and obesity, was crucial in the framing of obesity as an epidemic. This is because, I suggest, these measures enabled, firstly, the creation

HEALTH & SCIENCE

If Obesity Is a Disease, Why Are So Many Obese People Healthy?

By Abigail C. Saguy | June 24, 2013

The decision of the American Medical Association (AMA) to classify obesity as a disease is great news for the pharmaceutical industry, as it is likely to increase pressure on the Food and Drug Administration to approve more weight-loss drugs and increase the odds that insurance companies will reimburse their cost. But it is deeply misleading.

Treating obesity as a disease implies that moving into the category of obesity, which for adults means moving from a body-mass index (BMI) of 29 to a BMI of 30, is equivalent to contracting a disease. But that is simply not the case.

(**MORE:** [Viewpoint: The New Food Police Are Out of Touch](#))

Yes, there are certain health risks associated with having an elevated BMI, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. More broadly, a higher BMI is



Getty Images

Labelling obesity
as a **medical** issue



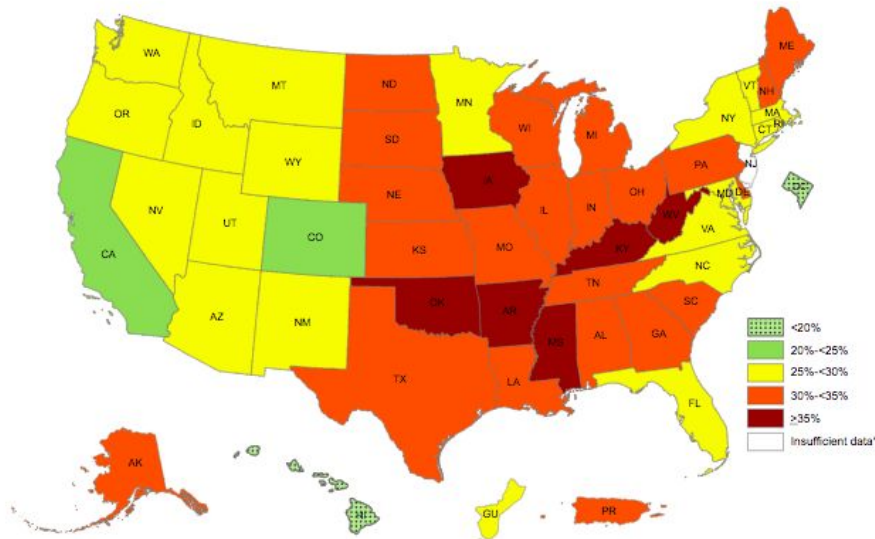
Raising the issue on the governmental agenda

Adult Obesity Prevalence Maps

COVID-19: Obesity May Increase Risk for Severe Illness; Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist

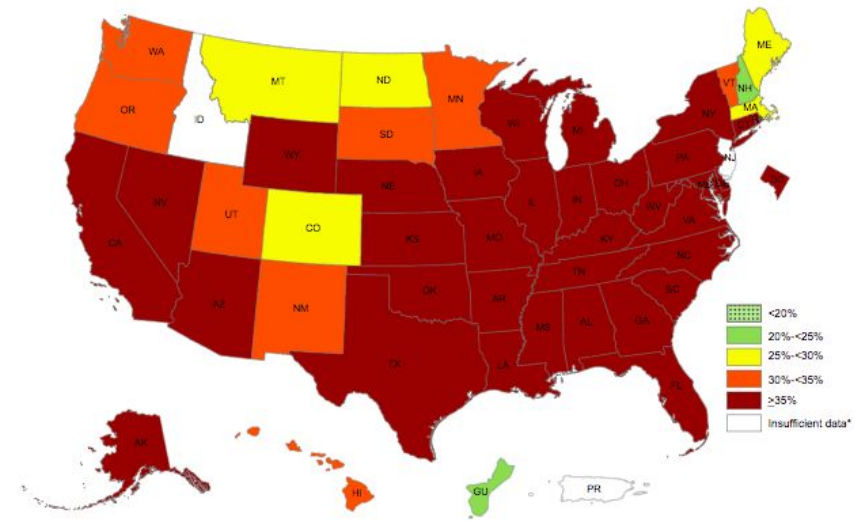
Non-Hispanic White Adults

Prevalence of Self-Reported Obesity Among Non-Hispanic White Adults by State and Territory, BRFSS, 2017-2019



Non-Hispanic Black Adults

Prevalence of Self-Reported Obesity Among Non-Hispanic Black Adults by State and Territory, BRFSS, 2017-2019



The Terror Within: Obesity in Post 9/11 U.S. Life

Charlotte Biltekoff

In the winter of 2001, just months after the September 11 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson urged all Americans to lose ten pounds “as a patriotic gesture.”¹ In the following years, the nation would engage in two wars, one against terror and another against what Surgeon General Richard Carmona would come to refer to as “the terror within;” obesity. Interconnections between the war on terror and the war against obesity have gone largely unnoticed by the public, the

Bush declares war on fat America

nic, but they are in fact related in a variety of reports on high rates of obesity in the U.S. military surfaced in the months immediately following the 9/11 attacks, journalists have referred to American dieters as engaging in a “fatwa against obesity,” weight loss advice is often infused with patriotic language and iconography, and the Surgeon General has warned, “unless we do something about [obesity], the magnitude of the dilemma will dwarf 9/11 or any other terrorist attempts.”² In 2003 an article in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* remarked on the fact that more than one war was underway: “The United States is fighting several wars at the same time. Not only are we fighting a war against terrorism around the world, but we are also fighting a war against obesity here at home.”³ These two wars are, however, not merely simultaneous. Understanding their relationship is essential to a broader accounting of post-9/11 life in the United States.

Raising the issue on the **global agenda**



Health Topics ▾


Countries ▾

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Emergencies ▾

Data ▾

About Us ▾



Controlling the global
obesity epidemic

Credits

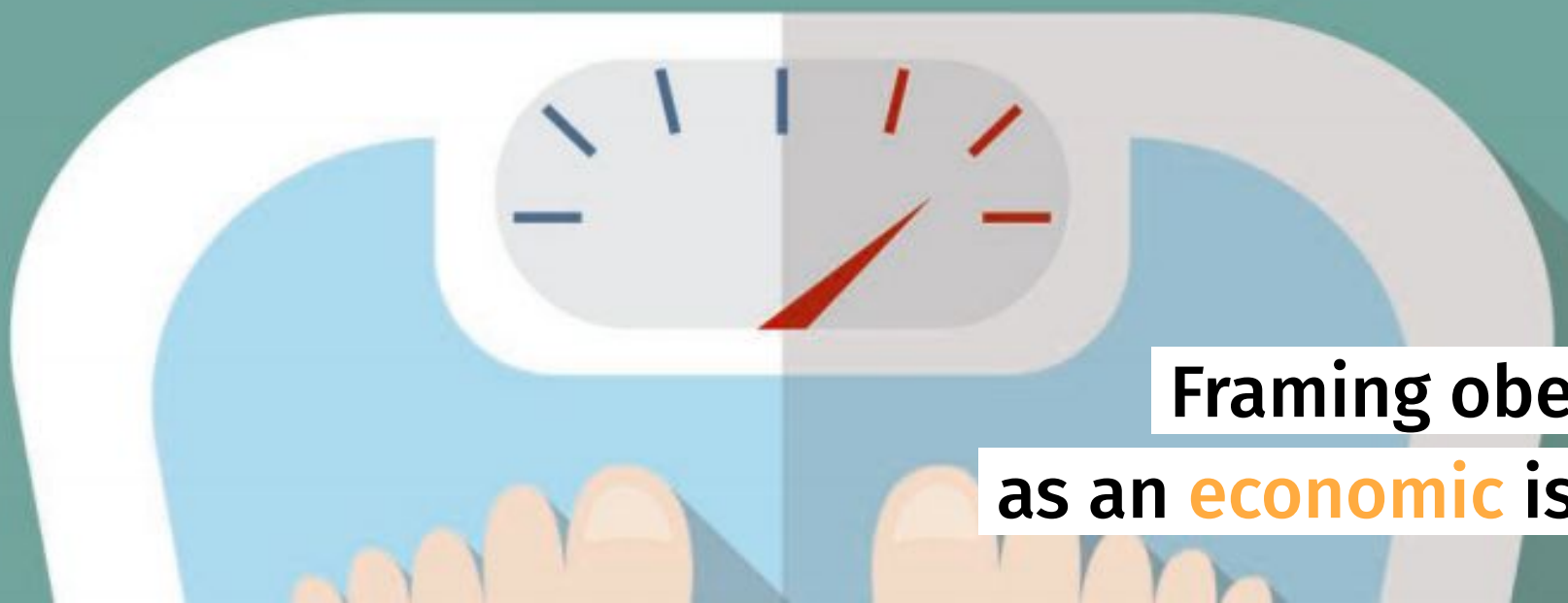




OECD Health Policy Studies

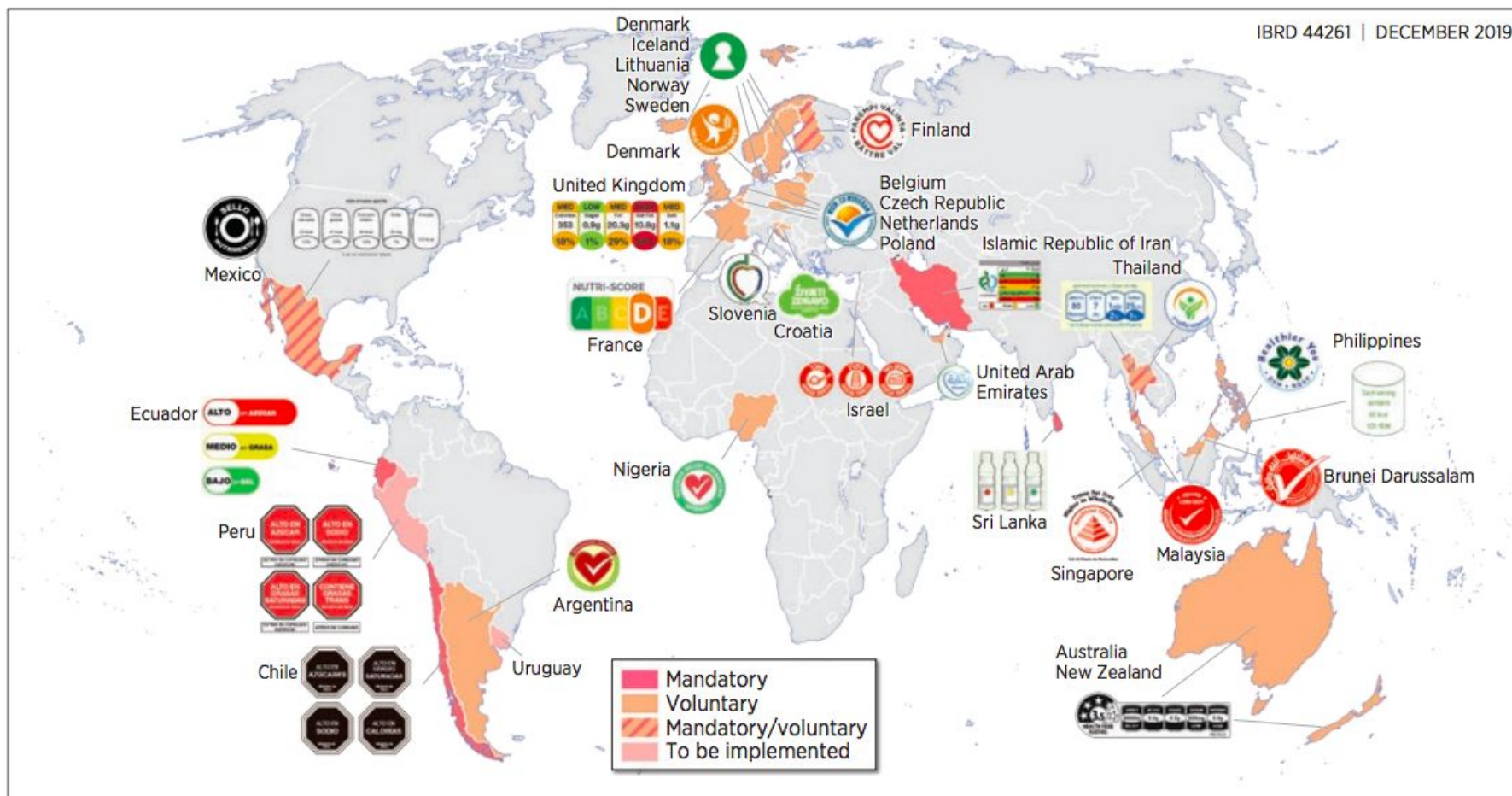
The Heavy Burden of Obesity

THE ECONOMICS OF PREVENTION



Framing obesity
as an **economic** issue

Map ES.3 Countries with Mandatory or Voluntary Front-of-Package Labels



Source: Global Food Research Program, University of North Carolina, 2019, <http://globalfoodresearchprogram.web.unc.edu/multi-country-initiative/resources/>.

Note: This map was created based on the dataset available as of March 2019.

Measure of **issue magnitude**

(‘how big of a problem’)

WASHINGTON, February 6, 2020 — Long believed to be a problem exclusive to high-income countries, evidence shows that over 70 percent of the world's 2 billion overweight and obese individuals live in low- or middle-income countries. Faced with increasing disability, mortality, health care costs, and lower productivity, obesity is **a growing concern for all countries** regardless of income level, says a new World Bank report launched here today.

Description of **issue severity**

(‘what kind of a problem’)

International Journal of Obesity (2016) **40**, 883–886; doi:10.1038/ijo.2016.17; published online 15 March 2016

Misclassification of cardiometabolic health when using body mass index categories in NHANES 2005–2012

A J Tomiyama¹, J M Hunger², J Nguyen-Cuu¹ and C Wells³

Abstract

[▲ Top](#)

The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has proposed rules allowing employers to penalize employees up to 30% of health insurance costs if they fail to meet 'health' criteria, such as reaching a specified body mass index (BMI). Our objective was to examine cardiometabolic health misclassifications given standard BMI categories.

Potential effects on **policy-making**

Last week's and this week's readings

- The (social) construction of (policy) **problems**

Saguy, Gruys and Gong (2010)

Framing · Media · Elites · Experts · Culture · Globalization

- **Agenda**-setting and policy windows

Copeland and James (2014)

Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) · Institutionalism

Policy entrepreneurship · Focusing events

A D U L T S
I N T H E R O O M

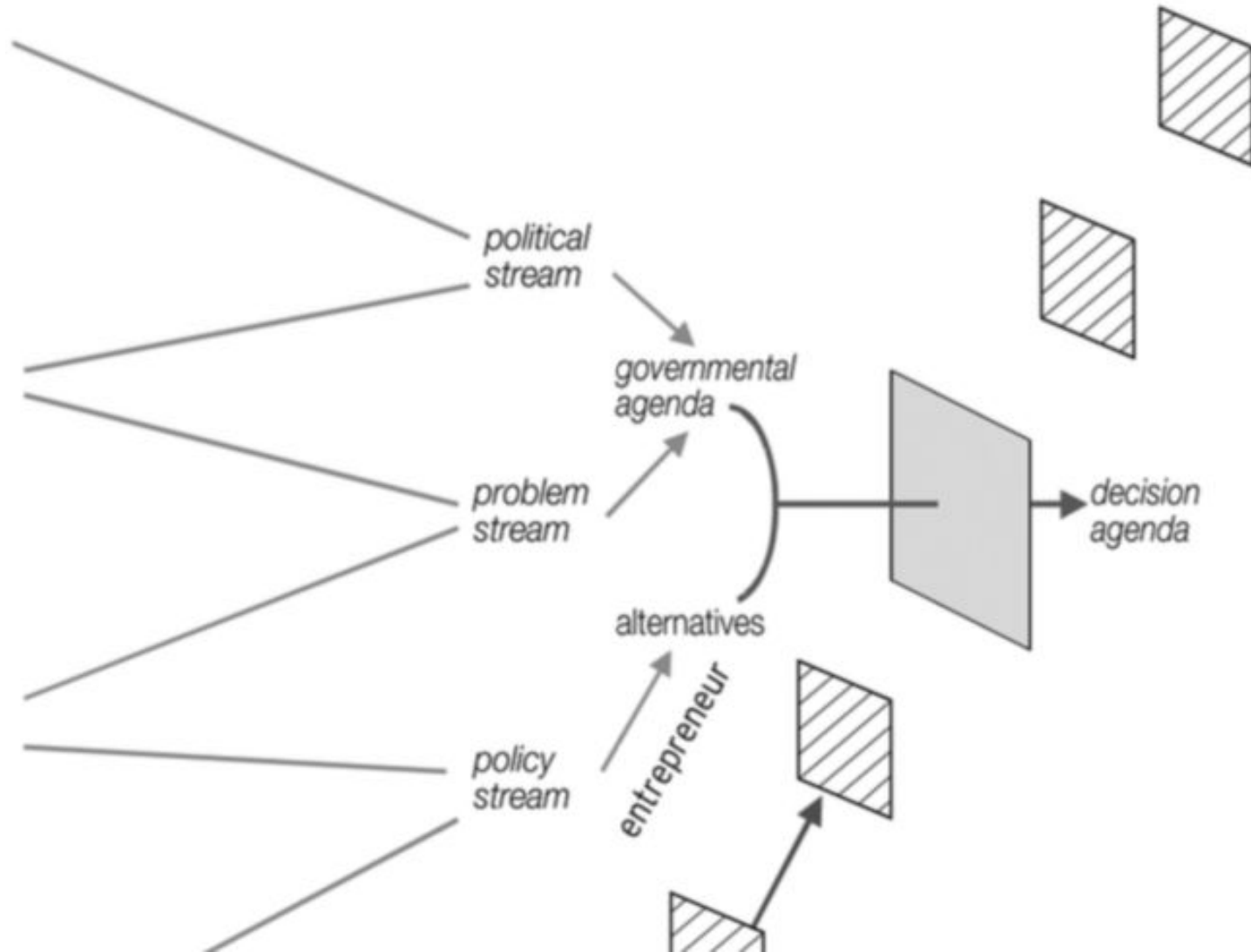
A COSTA-GAVRAS FILM

Barroso/Van Rompuy urge more discipline, convergence in euro zone

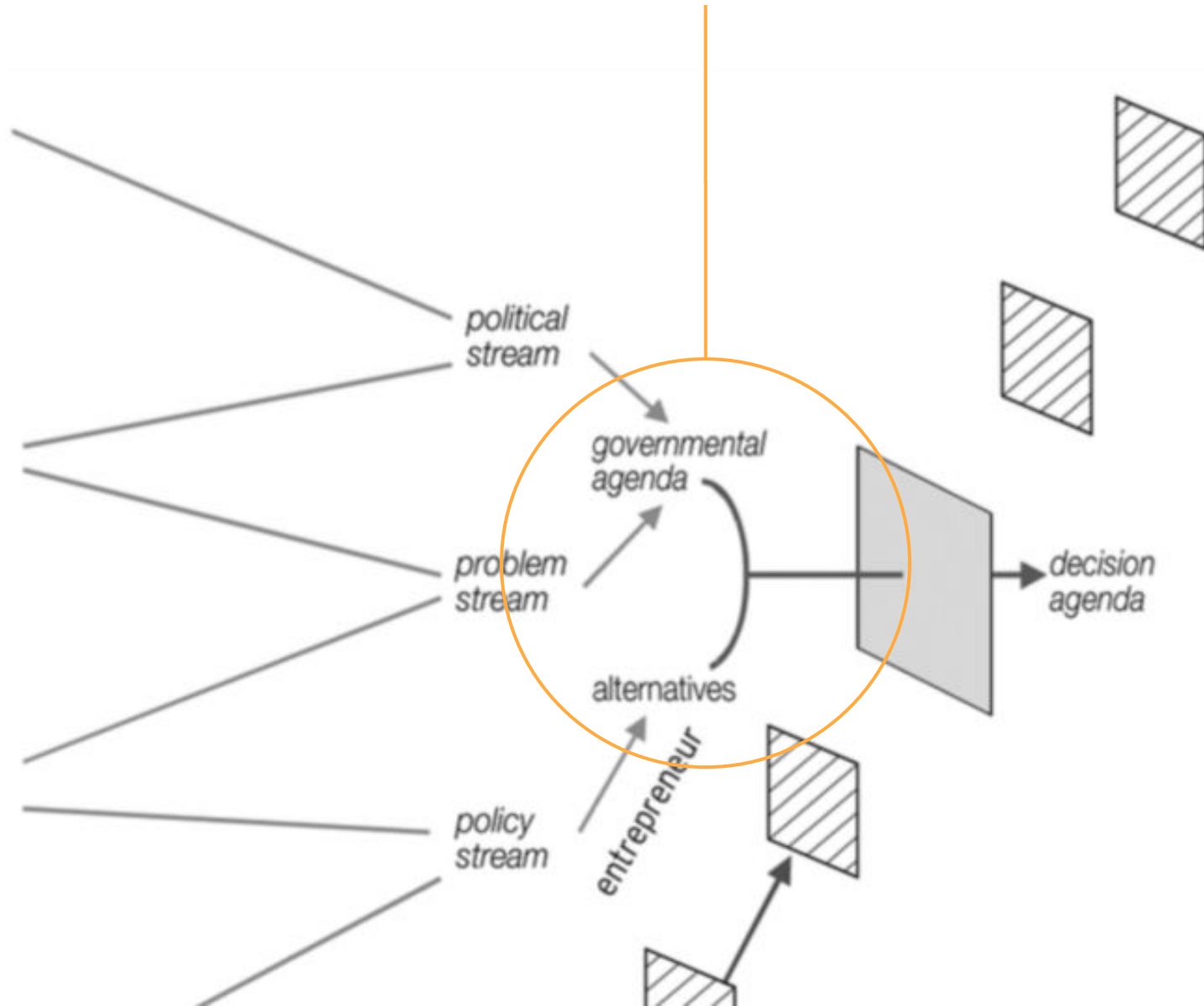


SOMMET EUROZON
BRUXELLES, 23

Streams, windows and entrepreneurs (Kingdon)



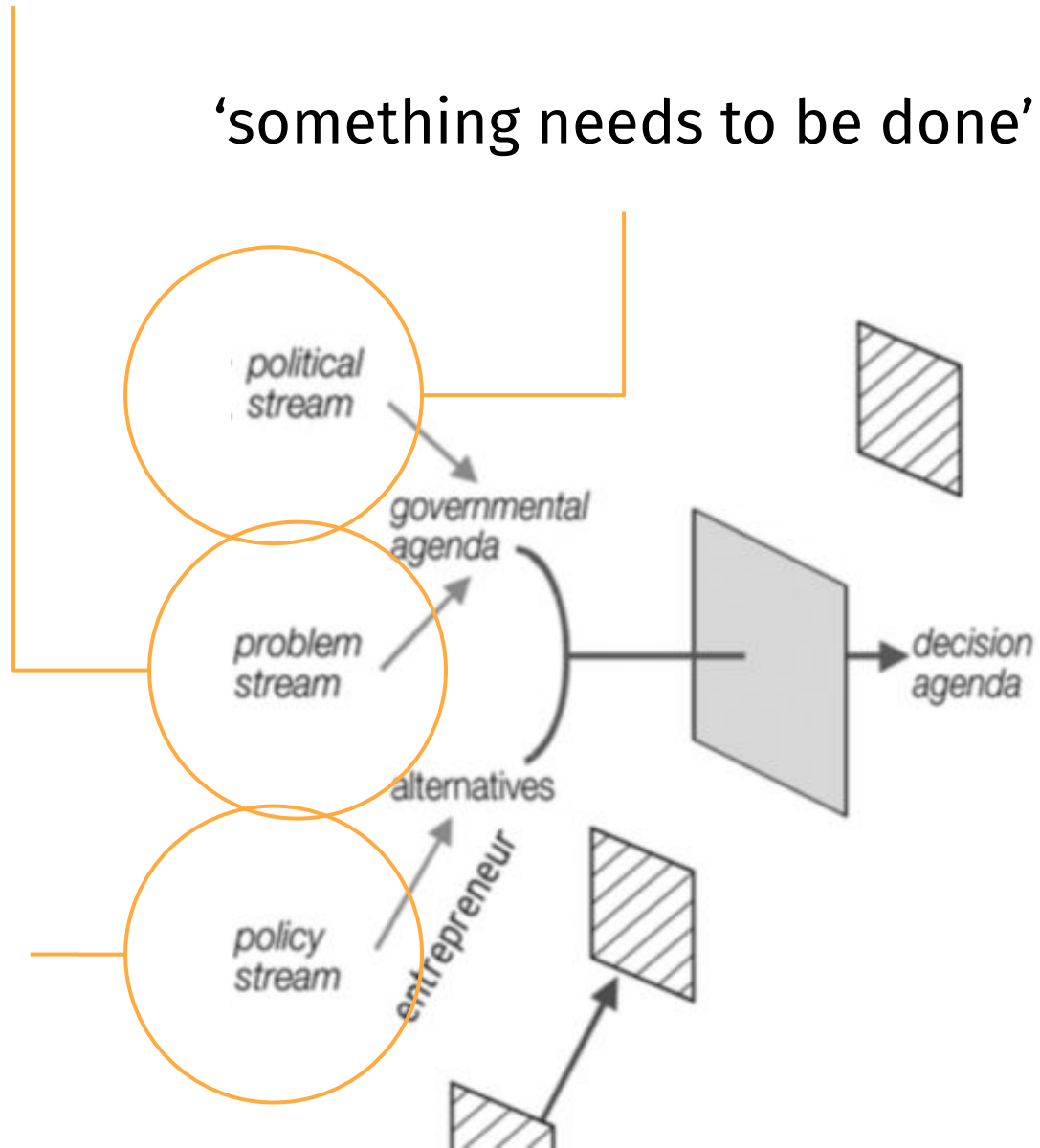
stream coupling (failed for 'Lisbon II')



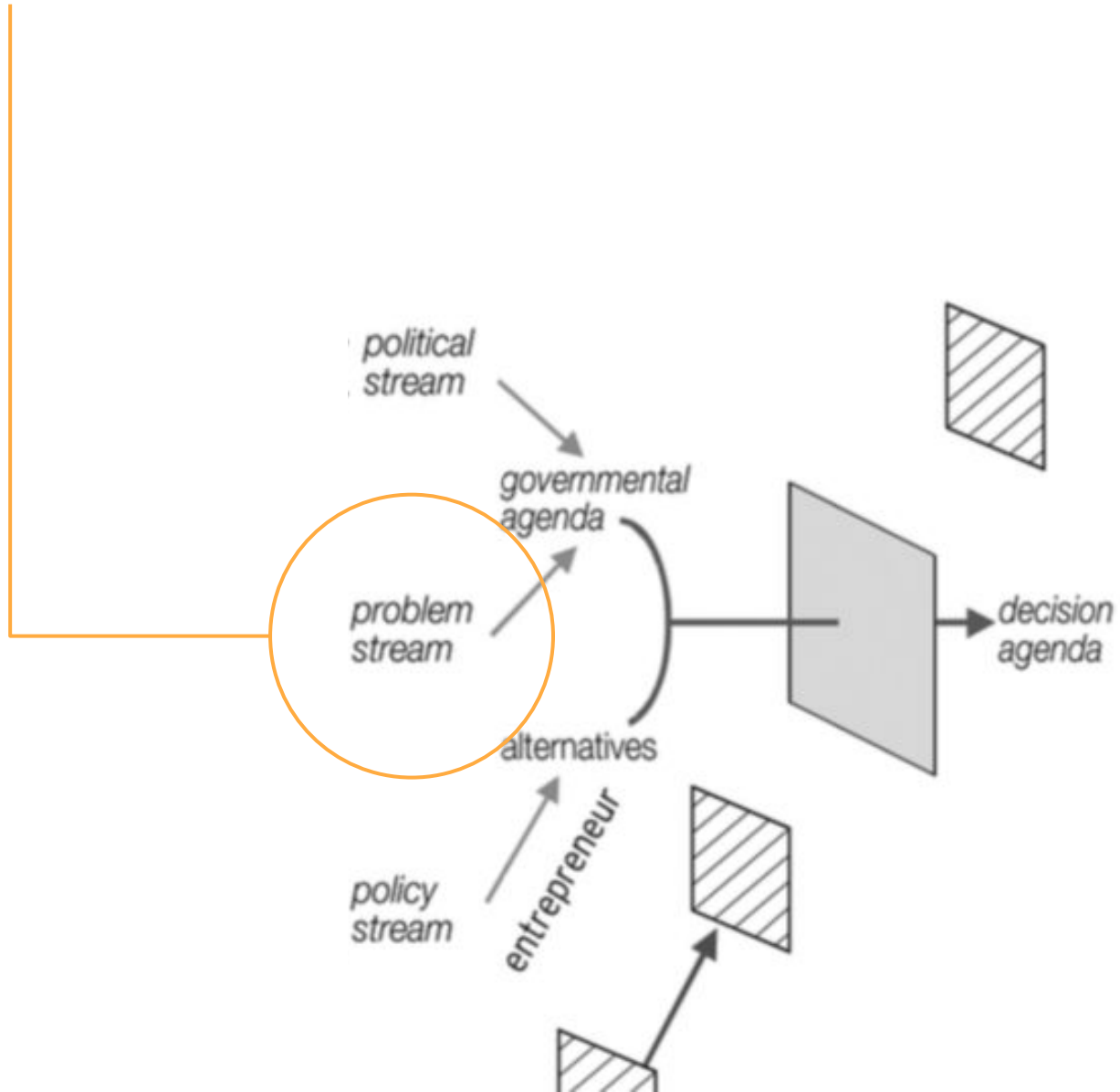
'problems require solutions'

'something needs to be done'

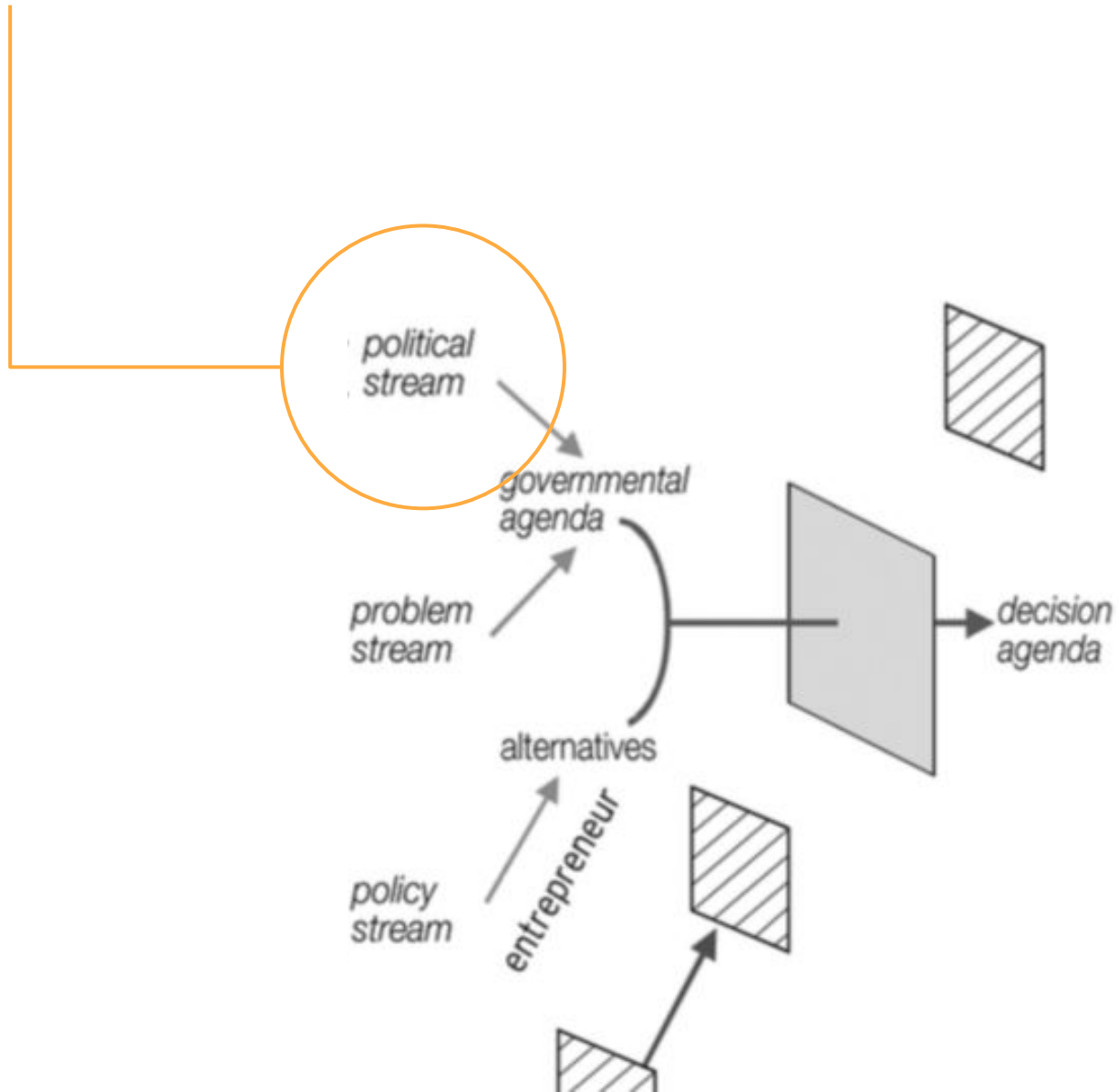
'solutions fit problems'



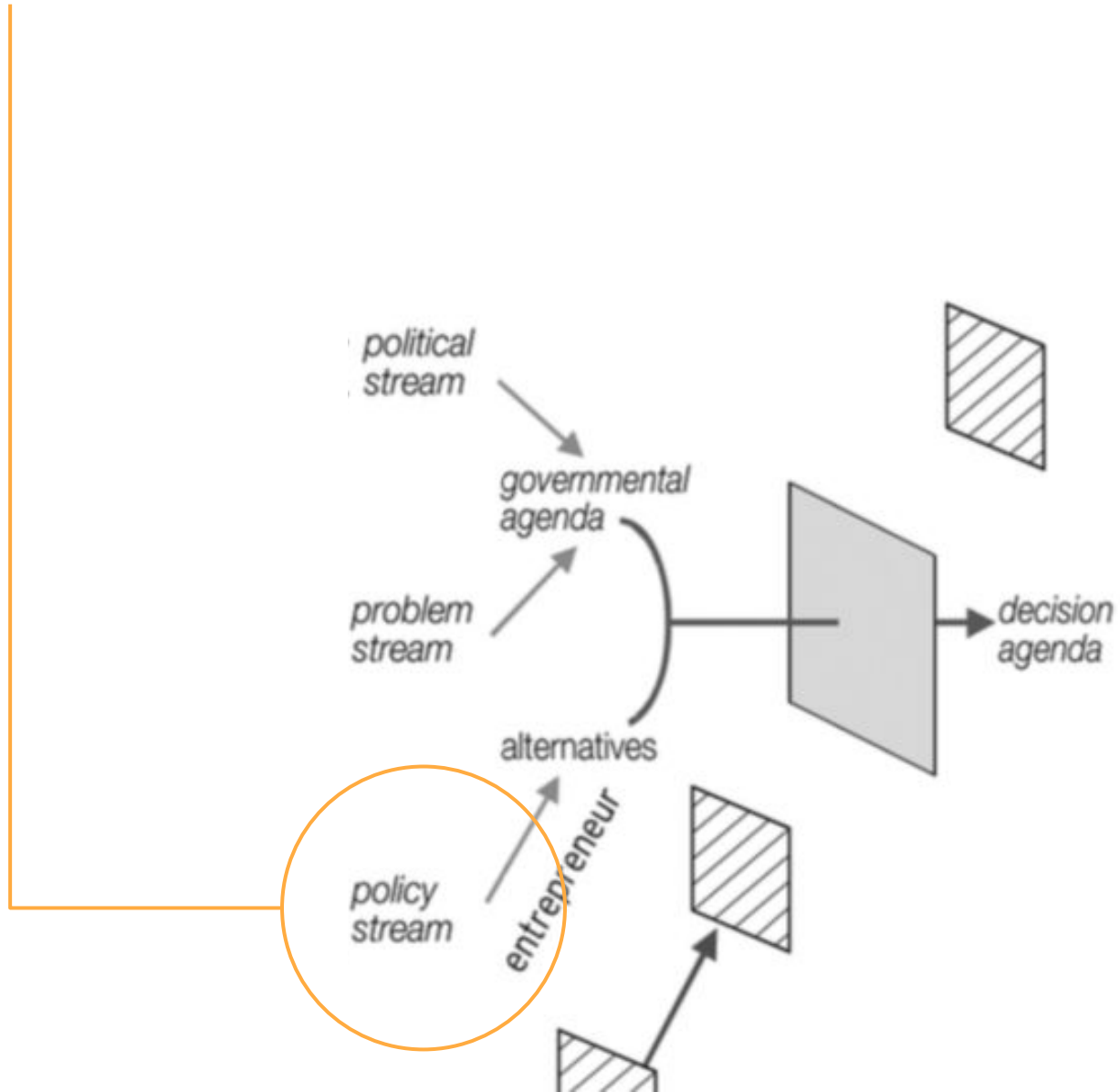
focusing event (Greek sovereign debt crisis)



timing (Barroso/von Rompuy alliance)



entrepreneurship (Rehn/ECFIN takeover)



Propositions

Findings

-
- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | The delay to agreeing a new economic reform agenda reflected the inability of policy entrepreneurs to couple the three streams. | Yes. Progress in reviewing Lisbon was hampered by confusion over goals and institutional obstacles, preventing the Commission from coupling the streams. |
| 2 | Europe 2020 is a product of a policy window in the:
a. Problem stream in which 'problems require solutions'; or
b. Politics stream in which 'solutions chase problems'. | Two windows opened simultaneously: in the problem stream signalled by a focusing event (the Greek crisis); and in the politics stream signalled by shifting institutional dynamics (in the Council and Commission). |
| 3 | Within the Commission:
a. Policy entrepreneurs can (re-) shape the policy agenda in response to heightened institutional ambiguity and policy spillover.

b. Policy commissioners can exploit new policy windows to overcome perceptions of policy failure and renew existing policy solutions. | No. DG ECFIN exploited the new policy window to seize control of the reform agenda, enabling them to reduce institutional ambiguity and reverse policy spillover (policy spillback).

Yes. By re-framing its proposals as the EU's exit strategy from the crisis, DG ECFIN was able to couple an existing policy solution around a new policy problem by the political deadline. |



10' break



Reminder: **presentation proposal** due next week

link.infini.fr/ppol-2022

Relevant document:



PPOL-2022-presentation-proposal

- **Read the instructions** on page 2

Ask any questions right now, **in class**

- **Download** a copy of the document (File → Download)

... in an editable format (e.g. DOCX, RTF)

- **Fill it in as a group** and upload it to



Student proposals

The deadline is **Tuesday 18 October at noon**

Workshop roadmap for today

link.infini.fr/ppol-2022

- Find **4–5 academic references** on your topic
→ **Settle on your policy topic first, so today**
- Note their **full bibliographic reference** in your proposal
Use **Harvard-style referencing** (see e.g. today's reading)
- **Summarize their contents** in a few lines
→ Research Question, Theory, Data/Methods, Findings

Practicals of 'lit reviewing'

- Use *both* of your **working languages**

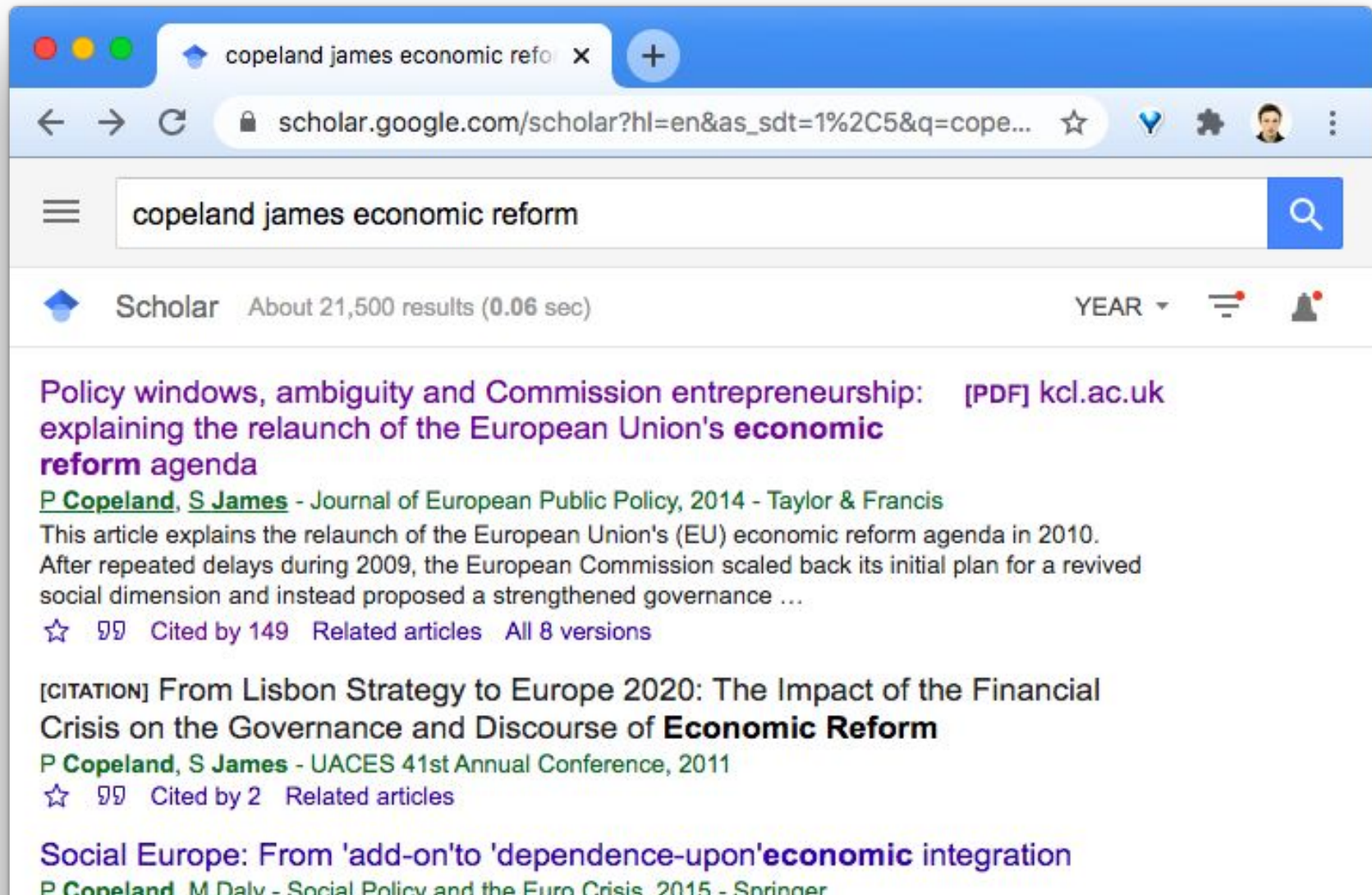
→ Use **Google Scholar** as well as Cairn, Persée and OpenEdition for French-language references

- Look for both **general and specific** references

e.g. German political system / Agriculture and food safety in Germany / GMO policy in Germany

→ Use books like the **New European Union** series or the *Politiques publiques* books cited in the last workshop

Use **Google Scholar** to find articles



The screenshot shows a web browser window with a single tab titled 'copeland james economic reform'. The address bar shows the URL 'scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=1%2C5&q=cope...'. The search bar contains the text 'copeland james economic reform'. Below the search bar, the results show 'Scholar About 21,500 results (0.06 sec)'. The first result is 'Policy windows, ambiguity and Commission entrepreneurship: explaining the relaunch of the European Union's economic reform agenda' by P Copeland and S James, published in the Journal of European Public Policy in 2014. The second result is '[CITATION] From Lisbon Strategy to Europe 2020: The Impact of the Financial Crisis on the Governance and Discourse of Economic Reform' by P Copeland and S James, presented at the UACES 41st Annual Conference in 2011. The third result is 'Social Europe: From 'add-on' to 'dependence-upon' economic integration' by P Copeland and M Daly, published in Social Policy and the Euro Crisis in 2015.

copeland james economic reform

Scholar About 21,500 results (0.06 sec) YEAR

Policy windows, ambiguity and Commission entrepreneurship: explaining the relaunch of the European Union's economic reform agenda [PDF] kcl.ac.uk
P Copeland, S James - Journal of European Public Policy, 2014 - Taylor & Francis
This article explains the relaunch of the European Union's (EU) economic reform agenda in 2010. After repeated delays during 2009, the European Commission scaled back its initial plan for a revived social dimension and instead proposed a strengthened governance ...
☆ Cited by 149 Related articles All 8 versions

[CITATION] From Lisbon Strategy to Europe 2020: The Impact of the Financial Crisis on the Governance and Discourse of **Economic Reform**
P Copeland, S James - UACES 41st Annual Conference, 2011
☆ Cited by 2 Related articles

Social Europe: From 'add-on' to 'dependence-upon' economic integration
P Copeland, M Daly - Social Policy and the Euro Crisis, 2015 - Springer

Take a look at **citing articles**

Copeland: Policy windows, amb... x

scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=1479197681075528630...

Scholar About 149 results (0.02 sec) YEAR

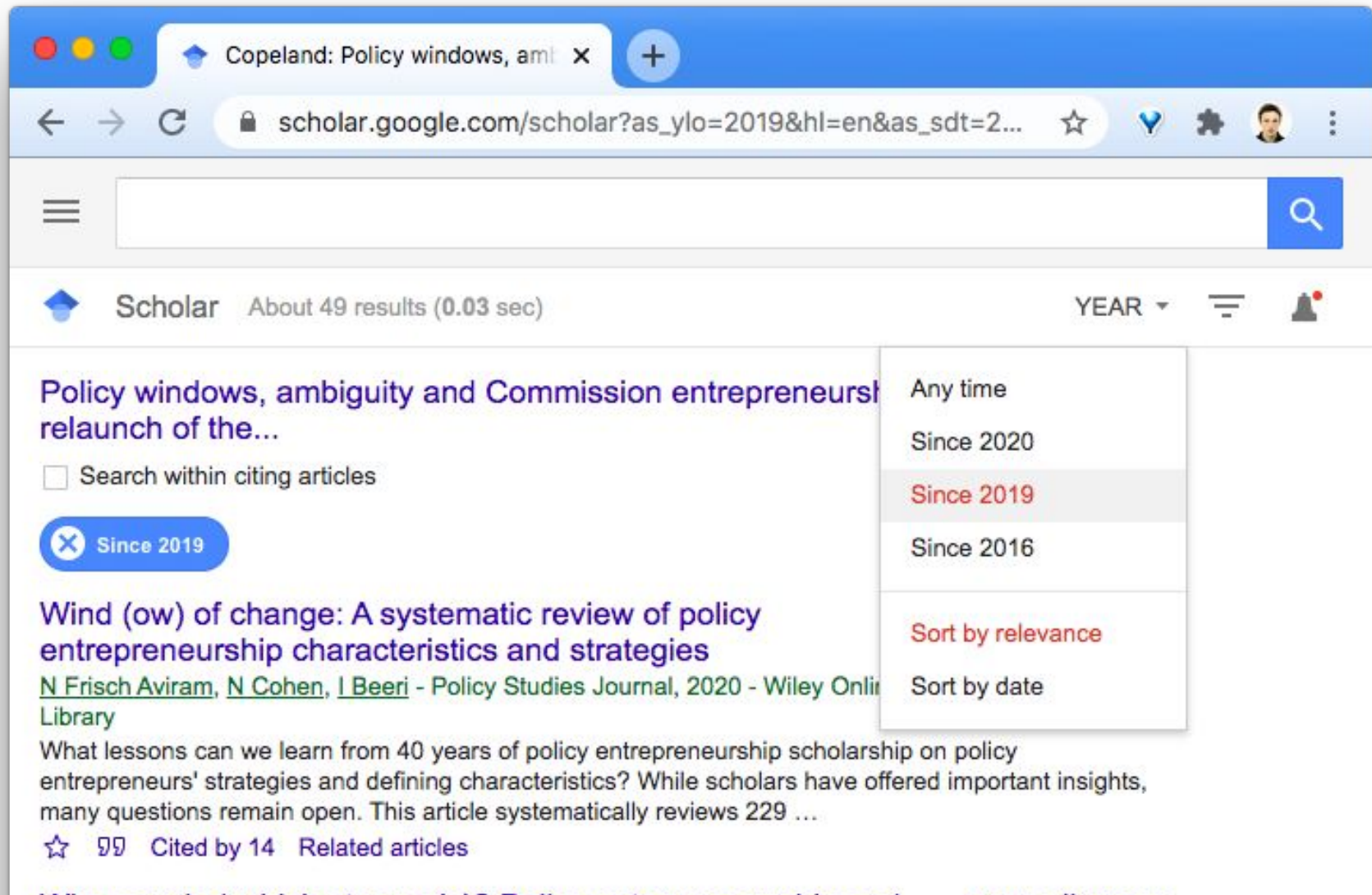
Search within citing articles

[CITATION] Innovation and diffusion models in policy research [PDF] edwardwimberley....
FS Berry, WD Berry - Theories of the policy process, 1999
☆ Cited by 1515 Related articles All 8 versions

[BOOK] The european commission
N Nugent, M Rhinard - 2015 - books.google.com
A fully revised and expanded new edition of the authoritative text on the European Commission. This major text based on extensive original research introduces and assesses the key factors involved in the Commission's evolution, organization, character, functioning ...
☆ Cited by 551 Related articles All 5 versions

The unexpected winner of the crisis: The European [PDF] muni.cz

Use filters to find recent publications



The screenshot shows a web browser window with a single tab titled "Copeland: Policy windows, am...". The address bar shows the URL "scholar.google.com/scholar?as_ylo=2019&hl=en&as_sdt=2...". The search bar is empty. Below the search bar, the text "Scholar About 49 results (0.03 sec)" is displayed. A dropdown menu is open, showing filter options: "Any time", "Since 2020", "Since 2019" (highlighted), "Since 2016", "Sort by relevance" (highlighted), and "Sort by date".

Policy windows, ambiguity and Commission entrepreneurs' relaunch of the...

Search within citing articles

Since 2019

Wind (ow) of change: A systematic review of policy entrepreneurship characteristics and strategies

[N Frisch Aviram](#), [N Cohen](#), [I Beerl](#) - *Policy Studies Journal*, 2020 - Wiley Online Library

What lessons can we learn from 40 years of policy entrepreneurship scholarship on policy entrepreneurs' strategies and defining characteristics? While scholars have offered important insights, many questions remain open. This article systematically reviews 229 ...

☆ [Cited by 14](#) [Related articles](#)

West European Politics,
Vol. 31, Nos. 1–2, 82–107, January–March 2008



Check **publication dates**

The European Welfare State: Golden Achievements, Silver Prospects

MAURIZIO FERRERA

Look for **'review' texts**

For the welfare state the last 30 years have witnessed a turbulent transition from the 'Golden Age' of expansion to a 'Silver Age' of permanent austerity. This shift has been the result of external pressures and of internal transformations of domestic economies and social structures. Permanent austerity has entailed incisive institutional adaptations and has been accompanied by a 'new politics', centred on a plurality of 'blame avoidance' strategies on the side of parties and governments. The article summarises and discusses the main factual developments since the mid-1970s but it also surveys the main strands of academic debates on both the expansion and the crisis phases. The author argues that comparative welfare state research has been one of the liveliest fields

Identify the relevant journals

- **General** public policy journals

e.g. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*

e.g. *Gouvernement et action publique* (in French)

- **Topic-specific** policy journals

e.g. *Development and Change*

e.g. *Journal of European Public Policy*

[this list might help]

What you need for **next week**

- A stable, well-defined **policy topic**

If your literature review is inconclusive, then you will need to refine (**specify**), or perhaps change, your topic

- At least 4–5 relevant **academic references**

Finish this as group homework if you are not done at the end of today's workshop (**plan some work sessions**)

- **Reading notes** on the references' contents

Distribute the references among your group, read them in full or selectively, take notes and share/discuss them



See you next week