The Responsive State: Actors, Policies and Temporalities of Emergency

Call for papers for a workshop, November 22, 2013, ENS Cachan
Organised by the ISP and funded by the Institute of Human and Social Sciences (ENS Cachan)

A temporal and policy-based approach to emergency

Has emergency taken over the world, both in the public and private spaces? If this were the case, then the strongest institutions, such as the justice or welfare systems, would see the domains reserved for emergency proceedings expand. Indeed, the multitude of financial and banking crises seem to cyclically set off a procession of summits to save the Euro, the European Union or even the Western economy. Likewise, the number of laws using emergency proceedings has exploded since the early 2000s. Also were this true then in the occupational sectors, where competition is increasing under pressure from the financialisation of economies and from its horizon of short-term profitability, emergency would become an alienating cult leading us to float in a culture of excellence — sometimes at the price of having a breakdown (Aubert N., 2003). In the private sphere, it would appear as a recurring leitmotif: "I don't have time, it's an emergency." As such, it could even be equated to a "tyranny" in the sense that emergency would have so deeply infiltrated all areas of life that getting out would seem, if not impossible, at least improbable (Finchelstein G., 2011). This prevailing catastrophism not only guides political essays, but also scientific work. At the conclusion of his book — which received a certain resonance in France —, Hartmut Rosa sees no end to the logic of acceleration specific to modernity (Rosa H., 2010). Confronted with an uncontrollable world, we would be restricted to hasty and shortsighted reactions, rather than actions anticipated through a panoramic view. Permanent emergency then would hamper the politicisation of existence by condemning it to superficial and short-term orientations with no alternatives: the "simulacrum of emergency" would be our main political horizon (Laïdi Z., 2000).

We invite contributions to follow this problematisation of emergency, in terms of temporalities, policies and politics. This reflection took root in the "Emergency Public Policy" workshop (ongoing since September 2011) based on the comparison of various fieldwork inquiries. Rather than approaching emergency through its normative dimension of "exception" (the figure of the state of emergency as the legal suspension of the law), the aim has been to confront its temporal dimension (paces, tempos, temporal horizons, durations) so as to assess its effects on policy. To introduce what may be considered a contribution to the general issue of public policy temporalities, we have been working with public policy inquiries focusing on "emergency". We have been comparing various fields: the real-time processing of criminal cases (Bastard B. and Mouhanna C., 2007), the accelerated resolution of divorce cases (Bastard B. *et alii*, 2012), the adoption and broadcast of videoconferencing in courts (Dumoulin L. and Licoppe C., 2010), the conduct of war and its various temporalities, the organisation of responses to public health crises (Gilbert C. and Henry E. eds., 2009), the emergence and institutionalisation of emergency aid in the medical field (Chave F. 2010, Nurock M., 2007) and assistance (Lipsky M. and Smith S., 2011; Gardella E., 2010; Cefaï D. and Gardella E., 2011).

We have come away from this workshop with the conviction that an empirical and theoretical project of inventory and clarification should be undertaken through expanding the variety of emergency policy situations. This comparative and empirical perspective initially allows us to step back vis-à-vis the proliferation of catastrophist essays on emergency. Can we therefore "map" emergency in so-called modern societies? Does it actually spread "more and more" into the various corners of public policy and, if so, how do we "measure" this increase of area occupied by emergency? Next, to avoid the traps of personifying "emergency" and the reification of an uncontrollable "system", it is necessary to reintroduce actors, localised interventions, situations and responsibilities into the analysis. We may then call attention to the variety of forms that emergency can take within the daily practices of public policy, how the latter turns emergency into an institutionalised norm (as in the case of the justice system, medicine or assistance) or how emergency arises unexpectedly or not. Finally, from these emergency policy fields, what contribution to the analysis of political temporalities can be induced?

Pascale Laborier and Danny Trom distinguished two positions available to a social science researcher in his/her relation to the past (Laborier P. and Trom D., 2003, p. 12), which could be extended to his/her relation to time in general. In the first, "the sociologist holds a disengaged position." Policies are studied in a temporal context by taking "time" (and its various scales) as a category of analysis exogenous to the action (Pierson P., 2011). We propose to approach time by borrowing the second perspective distinguished by Laborier and Trom: reintroducing temporalities into the action *in the making*. Simply put, we do not address the action in time, but time in the action. We suggest taking the analysis of *temporalities as categories of action* as the starting point: accelerate, stall or slow down; anticipate or improvise; rely on past situations, make a clean sweep or move towards a desirable future; set quantified durations or commit to indefinite ones; etc. The investigation is primarily of the experiences and uses of temporalities in public policy, and in this regard the fields of emergency seem particularly favourable. Therefore, it is a question of understanding how temporal horizons of more or less short terms, how more or less rapid tempos and how more or less limited paces emerge, are consolidated, are subject to controversy, are transformed and, why not, disappear. As part of this workshop organised around this goal of clarifying and elucidating political temporalities, we invite submissions based on first-hand data from emergency policy fields.

Two framing proposals

We propose two ways to problematise emergency public policy that submissions could discuss head-on.

First proposal: rather than speaking uniformly about "emergency" in the singular, it would be better to address it through the *variety* of manifestations. Without being exclusive, we propose three types:
- **emergency interventions institutionalised in continuously operating measures**, such as medical, judicial and social emergency services;
- **emergency interventions as regulatory measures for recurring disasters**, surveillance systems, preparedness measures as well as ways to improvise in the event of unanticipated dangers. These analyses concern as much sanitary crises or natural disasters as "security" crises or situations of war;
- **emergencies of everyday occupational life**, including stress at work, feeling overwhelmed in everyday life or difficulties related to multi-activity at work (Bidet A., 2011).

Second proposal: emergency as a specific public policy is often stretched over several mixed temporal dimensions, yet it is nevertheless possible to distinguish: a very short deadline to react to a situation seen as problematic; a fast tempo of execution; and a short-term temporal horizon, which almost immediately leads to an assessment of the action's effectiveness. But there are so-called emergency interventions — like social emergencies — whose temporal horizons are not short-term but unknown, and which are carried out at a very slow rate. In contrast, one temporal dimension seems common to various emergency policies: **high responsiveness through prioritisation**. We hypothesise that acting in emergency is to follow a rule of responsiveness and to feel compelled to react to a problem as quickly as possible. While this rule may be diffused throughout the social body, we treat it here in its more or less institutionalised forms in the many domains where public policy is exercised. How are other temporal dimensions of policy connected to this norm of responsiveness? Are there any "negative cases" in which an emergency is instead met with an imperative of deferral, delay or stalling?
It is in this sense that we question emergency policies not only from the classic figure of the state of emergency, but through that of the "responsive state". Of course, our understanding of "state" is rooted in the French sociology of public policy: the state acts through a multiplicity of actors that constitute public policy.

Paths for studying the "responsive state"

While today emergency may seem naturalised, "responsiveness" is far from being an invariant of public intervention or a hegemonic mode of domination. Unsurprisingly, it is variously distributed, depending on social resources and the situation (Martuccelli D., 2004). In line with this effort to denaturalise emergency public policy, we would like to analyse the figure of the "responsive state" according to three additional inquiry perspectives:

- The responsive state within interventions
Who defines emergency? The various actors involved do not necessarily share the same definition of the situation: what seems to present an "urgent need" for some, presents for others a routinised problem that can be postponed or delayed. Emergency is described through first describing how a situation's definition in terms of emergency, at the level of everyday practices, imposes itself as legitimate and shared.
What do the actors do next when they are trying to resolve an emergency situation *as quickly as possible*? The emergency may arise as an unexpected event, requiring improvisation (Mendonça D., Webb G. and Butts C., 2010). But the emergency may also be outlined in anticipatory and preparedness measures: instruments of surveillance and alert or grids for detecting lurking threats and dangers. How do the tensions between anticipation and responsiveness materialise once the actors are faced with emergency situations?

- Why has public responsiveness been institutionalised?
How and why has the need to react quickly become institutionalised in some cases and not in others? How is a problem publicly categorised and configured as "urgent"? At what level of public policy are responsiveness measures sustainably organised? Several paths can be undertaken.
Two "models" seem used to justify the responsiveness of public policy: management (especially New Public Management) and medical emergencies. What place should they be given within all the causes explaining the responsive state? How is public management used as a justification for imposing permanent administrative responsiveness? Where does the "model" of medical emergency fit in: how is it used as a metaphor or style of policy to transfer to other sectors?
More generally, can we globally identify the incentives shared by various emergency policies, or is there a singular motive each time? Who are the "responsiveness inciters", the "emergency entrepreneurs" and the "owners" of this definition of the problem perceived as public?

- The consequences of the responsive state at different levels of public policy
At the level of daily public policy, what changes in vocational practices do the actors perceive? Do they experience their mission as an exciting rush of adrenaline, as an incentive to quantitative productivity or as emptying their job of meaning? And how do they react to this experience of responsiveness? How and why do they try — when this is the case — to resist, to confine or to circumvent orders and pressures to responsiveness?
At organisational levels, one consequence often observed when responsiveness is institutionalised is that the emergency service sees an increase in demand: hence professionals feel besieged, caught between the need to meet all "urgent" demands and to hold on to their resources to respond to the more serious "emergencies" likely to occur. At the centre of everyday life, a tension emerges in prioritising between the problems to address immediately and the problems, virtually more serious, yet to come. The management of spaces in medical, psychiatric or social emergency services is one case where this temporal tension surrounding prioritisation is clearly observable. But can it be observed in other fields where responsiveness is entrenched in the norm of public policy?
The temporalities of emergency are not only the sources of local justice system ordeals. They are also a means of support to power relations. Who imposes on whom his/her schedule, his/her priorities and more broadly his/her relationship to time (Bessin M., 1999)? What balances of power are visible through imposed paces, tempos and temporal horizons (Michon P., 2005; Gardella E., 2010)? What time-based policies, what "chronopolitic(s)" (Rosa H., 2010; Inerarrity D., 2008) does the responsive state produce?

By repoliticising the temporalities within emergency without making it an output of a fast and uncontrollable machine, we are looking for the critical reflexivity of actors in their relationship to time. Can we observe, at various levels of public policy, responses that explicitly call into question the urgent or responsive dimension of public policy? Often justified by a state of "necessity" that cannot afford any delay, is such a definition nonetheless subject to practices and tactics of "stalling" or even "braking", which have long been observed in the business world where responsiveness is synonymous with profit and productivity? Can we identify "temporal ecologies" (Grossin W., 1996) in which the issue of the temporalities of emergency has been in dispute? From this last path, to what extent can we set up a "pragmatic temporal" perspective in which emergencies, responsiveness and, beyond that, temporalities are not solely imposed as internalised and binding structures, but also as ordeals lived by individuals, encouraging critiques and alternative temporal perspectives?

Format and schedule for papers

Paper proposals addressing these broad research questions and paths must be based on empirical investigations. No longer than 6,000 characters, they should indicate the field(s) studied, the method used and the hypotheses or results that will be presented in explicit relation to this call for papers. The closing date for submissions is June 10, 2013.
Notification will be given on July 15, 2013.
Accepted proposals are to be developed into a paper (20,000–30,000 characters) and submitted before November 1, 2013, in order to enrich the discussion initiated by the discussant(s).
The workshop will be held on Friday, November 22, 2013 at ENS Cachan. The publication of papers in a journal or a collective edition is intended.

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