

# Degrees of sectorial coupling: Towards an approach to analyze the co-evolution of policy sectors

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## Abstract

*Horizontal relations of policy sectors are a major research problem in political science and public administration. Building on recent contributions to the literature of horizontal government and governance, such as boundary-spanning policy regimes and functional regulatory spaces, this paper adds a temporal dimension to our understanding of the relation between policy sectors. I propose a theoretical framework for the analysis of the co-evolution of policy sectors, which takes into consideration dynamics between policy sectors and their development over time. In the framework, I define different degrees of sectorial coupling, which distinguish distinctiveness and responsiveness between actors and institutions concerning different policy sectors. My main argument is that, in the course of time, policy sectors develop a connecting paradigm, because there is a learning and adaptation process. However, this process varies between countries, due to domestic political factors, such as political activism of interest groups, federalism, type of government, but also path dependence. Sectorial coupling at the time of emergence of policy sectors is an important element for the relation of the two sectors at later points in time. In order to demonstrate the applicability of the model to empirical research, I am analyzing the co-evolution of the health care and public health, in Australia, Germany, Switzerland and the US. Therewith, the paper contributes to our understanding of the relations between time and space in comparative analysis of policy sectors, as well as the relation of public health and health care in different countries.*