

Policies for time studies: A call for a global political-scientific agenda

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Considering the global crisis that the development model, based on hegemonic temporality, is going through and the daily social uncertainty it produces, this contribution intends to declare the need for an imminent widespread call for the design and application of public policies about time studies throughout the world.

The current hegemonic temporality, which reproduces a univocal idea about the linearity of time and considers the past as an accumulation of events and the future as a projection of the present, is the main logical scheme of the dominant model of development (political, economic, and cultural).

The indistinct use of time and temporality in the knowledge produced by official education inside this model contributes to the naturalization of an equal meaning for both, therefore, naturalizing the hegemonic temporality as the *only* possible way of thinking the time phenomenon. The distinction is vital for not reproducing this common misunderstanding. As I have written previously in this journal, “I define temporality as the apprehension of becoming, which every human being accomplishes through his cognitive system in a cultural context, and time as the phenomenon of becoming in itself, which the human being is capable to apprehend as temporality” (Iparraguirre 2016: 616).

Thereby, this call to attention goes out to both academics and politicians, to any decision-making group connected with “time problematics,” arguing that there needs to be at least two clear core topics: time policies and temporality policies.

Regarding time policies, there are well known “space agencies” all over the world (NASA, ESA, CNSA, and CERN) that deal with “space policies,” “space studies,” and “space problematics,” such as spaceships, satellites, radars, and GPS, among others; however, there are no “time agencies.” There is also an Intergovernmental Organization “space office” (UNOOSA) and an International Space Station (ISS). Why are there so many “space agencies” and no “time agencies”? A preliminary epistemological answer points to the spatialization of time in the current dominant temporality: we learn to think about time in terms of space categories (distance, measurement, quantity, and scalar) and “time

problems” are overlapped by “space problems,” reducing the first into the second. This spatialization of time reduces any notion of time to mere interpretations of space, that is, to spatialities. Even the notion of space-time proposed in the general relativity theory naturalizes the idea of supposing that the past and the future, as temporal dimensions, can be associated with directions on an axis, that is, that these dimensions can become *physical places*.

The physics of time, cosmology, neuroscience, and chronobiology are fields of knowledge that have much to contribute to the discussion on how to design policies around the phenomenological study of time and encourage investments in laboratories and research centers dedicated to broadening the horizons of what we now know about time as the “texture” of the reality in which everything happens and passes.

Regarding temporality policies, the great changes that societies are experiencing today, such as the acceleration of the rhythms of life, the globalized economy, media saturation, and the loss of local identities, among others, respond to political and scientific ignorance regarding social dynamics in relation to their temporalities or *timescapes* in Adam’s (2021) conceptualization. Politicians and decision makers reproduce ideas from the past because they do not know their own citizens’ way of thinking about time. In this direction, the *Barcelona Declaration on Time Policies* is a recent European initiative that state 10 propositions to declare that time is a political issue and that can be conceptualized as a right for all citizens.¹

Societies demand to rethink “agenda problems” taking the future into account and abandoning agendas that are asymmetrically centered in the past. Many of the so-called cultural problems are directly intertwined with the way that societies think about time and manage their rhythms of life, being it economic, productive, political, ritual, or religious. Social organization strategies such as planning, creating agendas, or generating development models all depend on the way in which relationships between experience (past), decisions (present), and visions (future) are conceived. Faced with the recurrent search for models focused on the past, it is necessary to establish anticipatory policies that integrate the valuation of the future in decision-making. Past-centered agendas prevent us from incorporating the power of the future to transform the way we intervene in our becoming.

The international hour, time zones, the Gregorian calendar, and the time-reckoning of minutes-hours-days-months-years are all expressions of international policies on time that require ongoing agreements between nations and between continents. These clearly express a linear temporality centered on the measurement of time in standard schedules, that is, naturalizing that becoming can be reduced only to a measure of its passing.

Anthropology of time, rhythmanalysis, chronopolitics, time geography, and anticipation studies, among others, are research fields growing in this direction of

opening the field of studying temporalities toward the design of methods and policy. The UNESCO chair in Anticipatory Systems and UNESCO Chairs in Futures Studies and Futures Literacy are concrete initiatives responding to the need for temporality policies regarding the relevance to think, teach, and design with a focus in the future.

Following the words of Barbara Adam in the first volume of this journal, “the idea of global thinking [...] needs to encompass our knowledge, our epistemology, and our ontology” (Adam 1992, 6). Imagining a global agenda for time studies requires coordination of diverse temporalities and, in turn, a frame of reference for its legal and ethical aspects, its scope, and its limitations, in short, its intercultural legal horizons on an international scale.

The legitimacy of time studies requires a new step to become formal and daily: a comprehensive and detailed legislative framework that promotes rapprochement with those who do not know the importance of studying time and temporality and its impact on daily life.

Issues related to time and temporality require interdisciplinary and intercultural research. Their complexity merits listening to different voices and integrating different imaginaries in order to achieve an intercultural epistemology of time. Aware of the energetic, ecological, demographic, and economic challenges that societies have today, this call to attention proposes that policies about time studies should be a priority for scientific committees, international societies, intergovernmental organizations, and national states, so as to obtain a global scientific and political agenda on the study of time.

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Notes

1. <https://www.timeuse.barcelona/barcelona-declaration-on-time-policies>

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Author Biography

Gonzalo Iparraguirre is an anthropologist whose work focuses on comprehending and translating temporalities, development imaginaries, and their political interventions. He has published widely in these areas and is the author of the Anthropology of Time online course (www.academia.edu/learn/GonzaloIparraguirre).