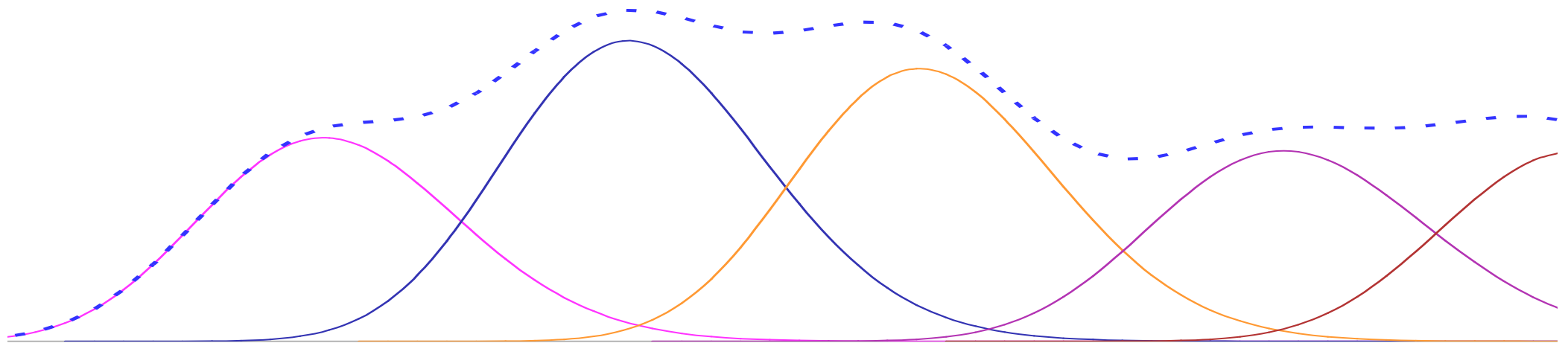


First Lüneburg Workshop on Environmental and Sustainability Communication:
The Role of the Media for Human-Environment Interaction and Sustainable
Development: Taking Stock and Moving Forward
June 22-23, 2006

New Perspectives on Environmental Issue Attention Cycles



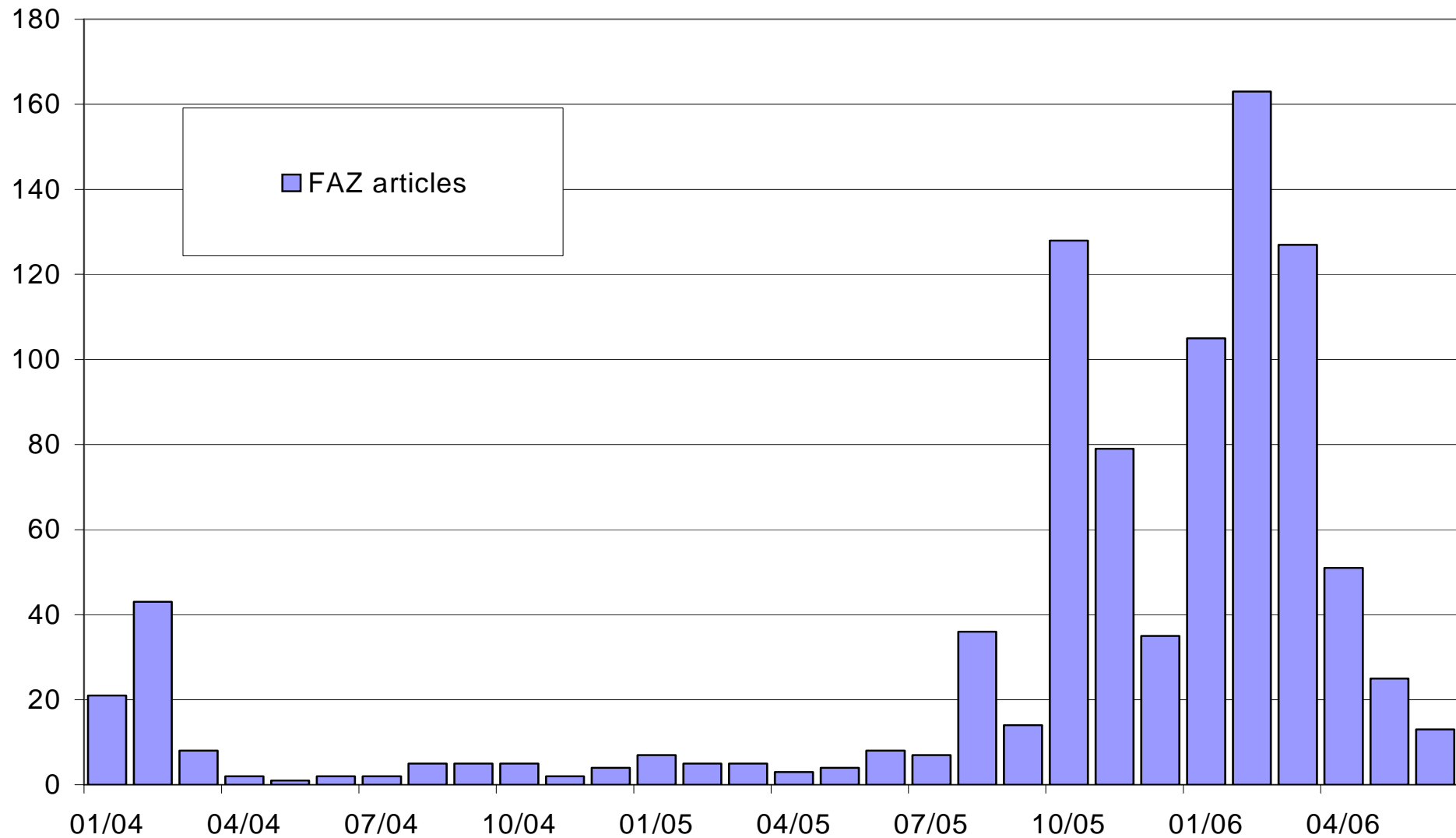
Jens Newig

Institute of Environmental Systems Research
University of Osnabrück, Germany



Institute of Environmental
Systems Research
University of Osnabrück

Bird Disease / H5N1



State of knowledge

- Patterns of coverage:
 - Public attention often appears in distinct cycles. These are more or less detached from “objective” real-world phenomena (Luhmann 1971, Downs 1972)
 - Differences in news media, countries, frames...
- Mechanisms:
 - Multiple relations between citizens, media, politics and special-interest groups exist. They all shape the “public agenda”
 - issue competition (Zhu 1992; Nisbet/Huge 2006)
 - external stimuli on public attention (Newig 2004, Nisbet/Huge 2006)
 - effect on political action (Newig 2004)
 - influence of actor groups, including journalists on public attention (Nisbet/Huge 2006)

What is meant by 'public' attention?

politics

Peters/Hogwood (1985)

media

Newig (2004)

citizens

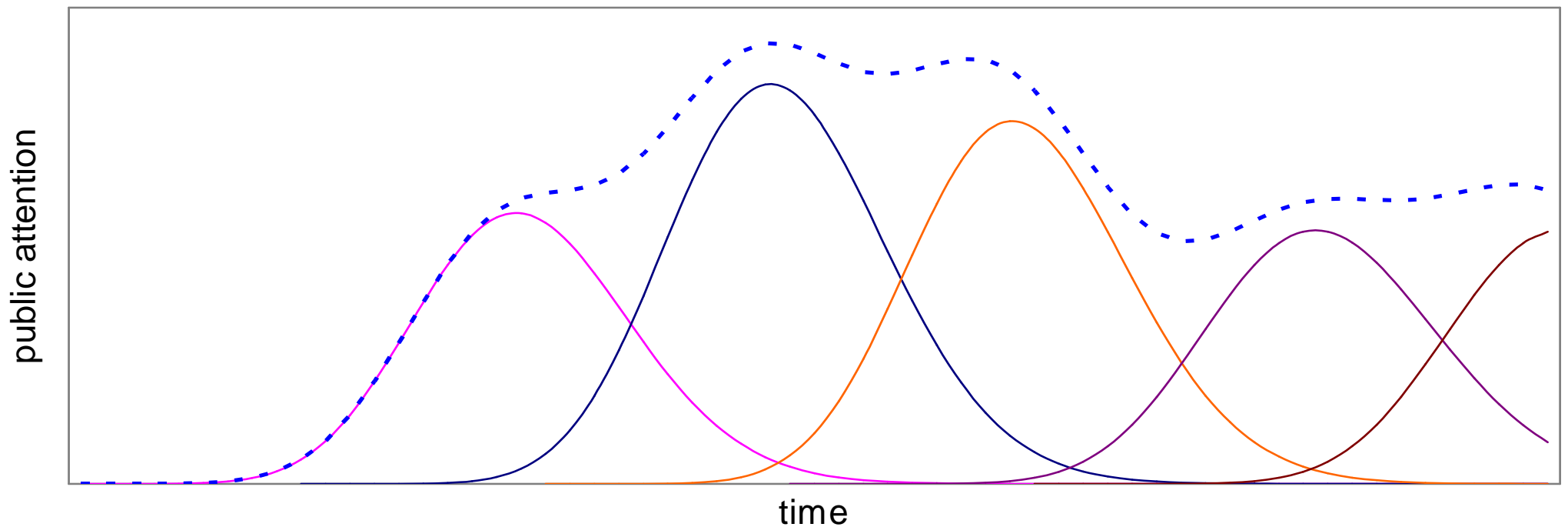
Henry/Gordon (2001)

interest
groups

'Attention' versus 'opinion' / 'attitude'

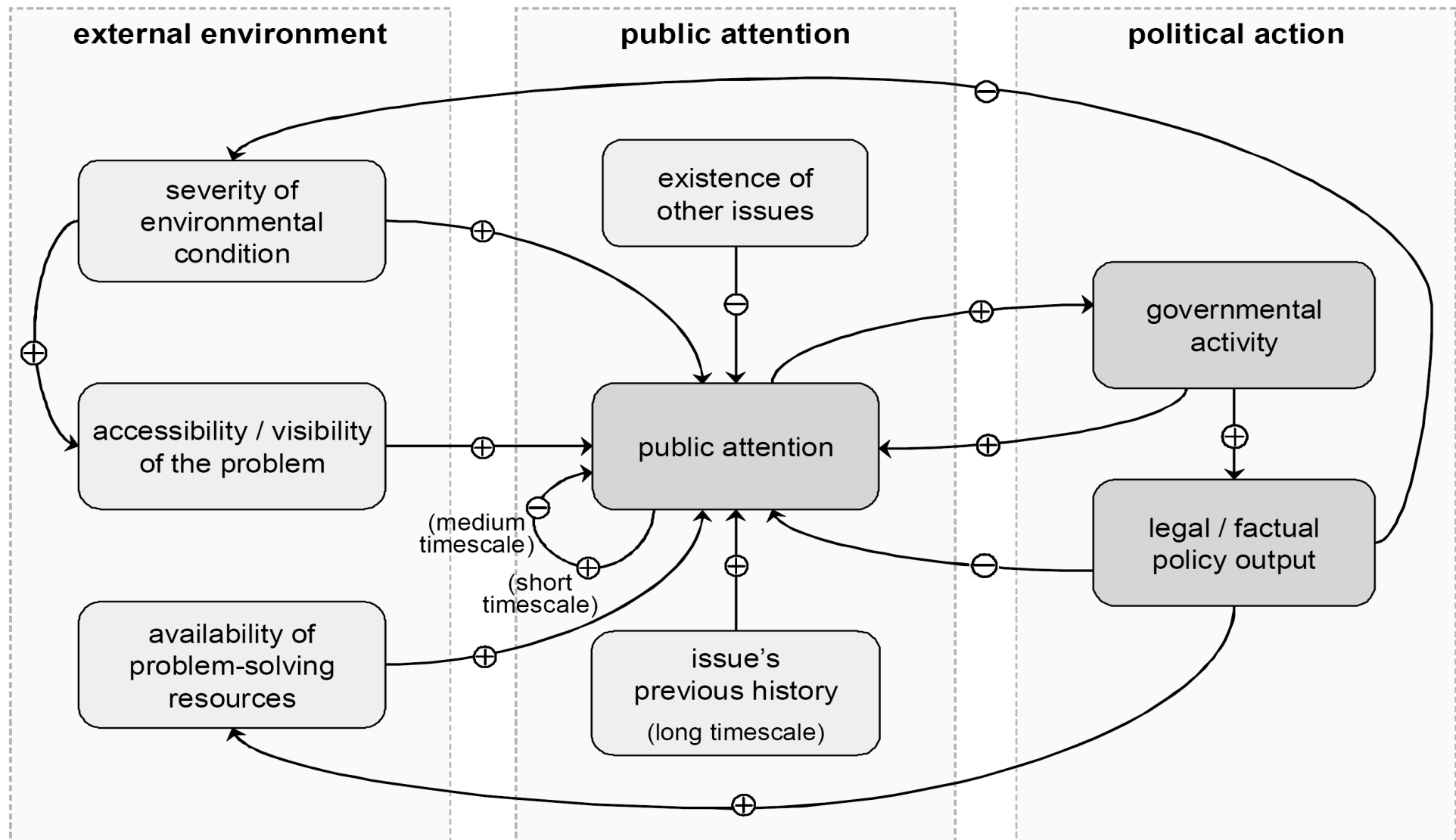
	attention	opinion / attitude
scarce resource	X	
predisposition		X
value judgement	X	X X X
temporal stability	X	X X X

'Issues' – finding the right analytical scale

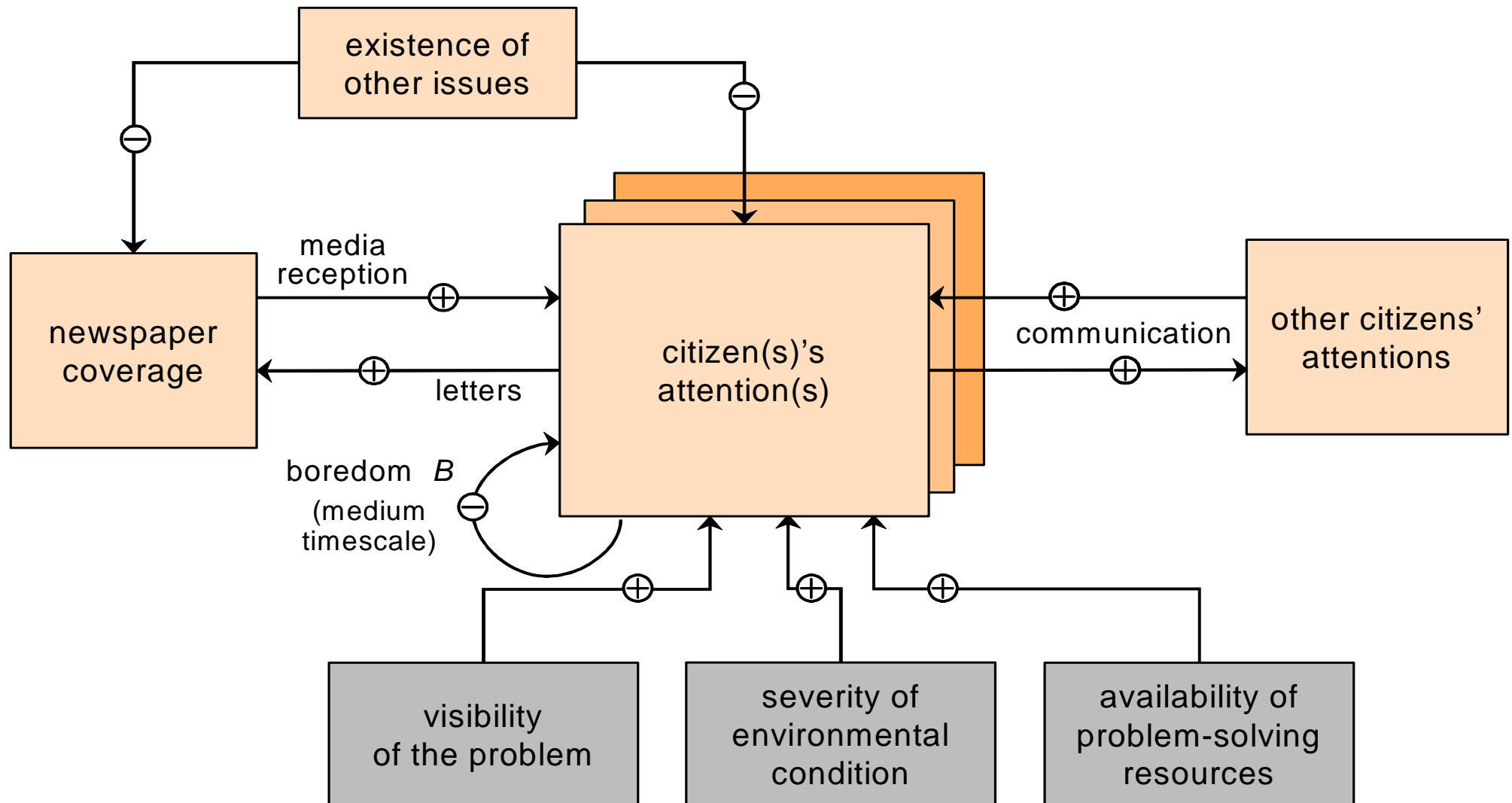


The dynamics of public attention towards a broad problem area (e.g. “the environment”) being composed as the sum of a multitude of single issue-attention cycles (e.g. forest damages, ozone hole, greenhouse effect etc.)

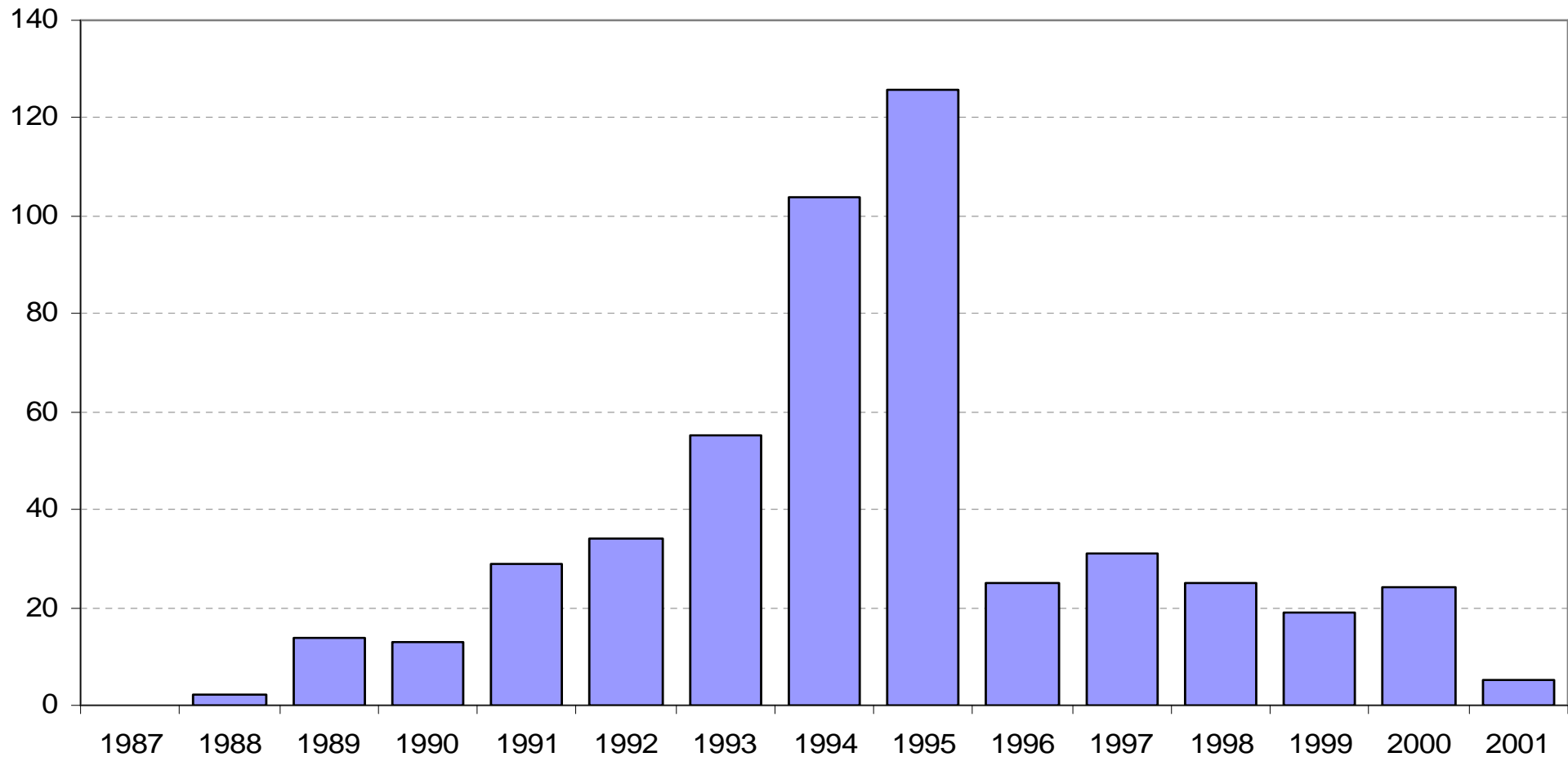
Key factors influencing public attention and political action



Public attention - causal loops in detail

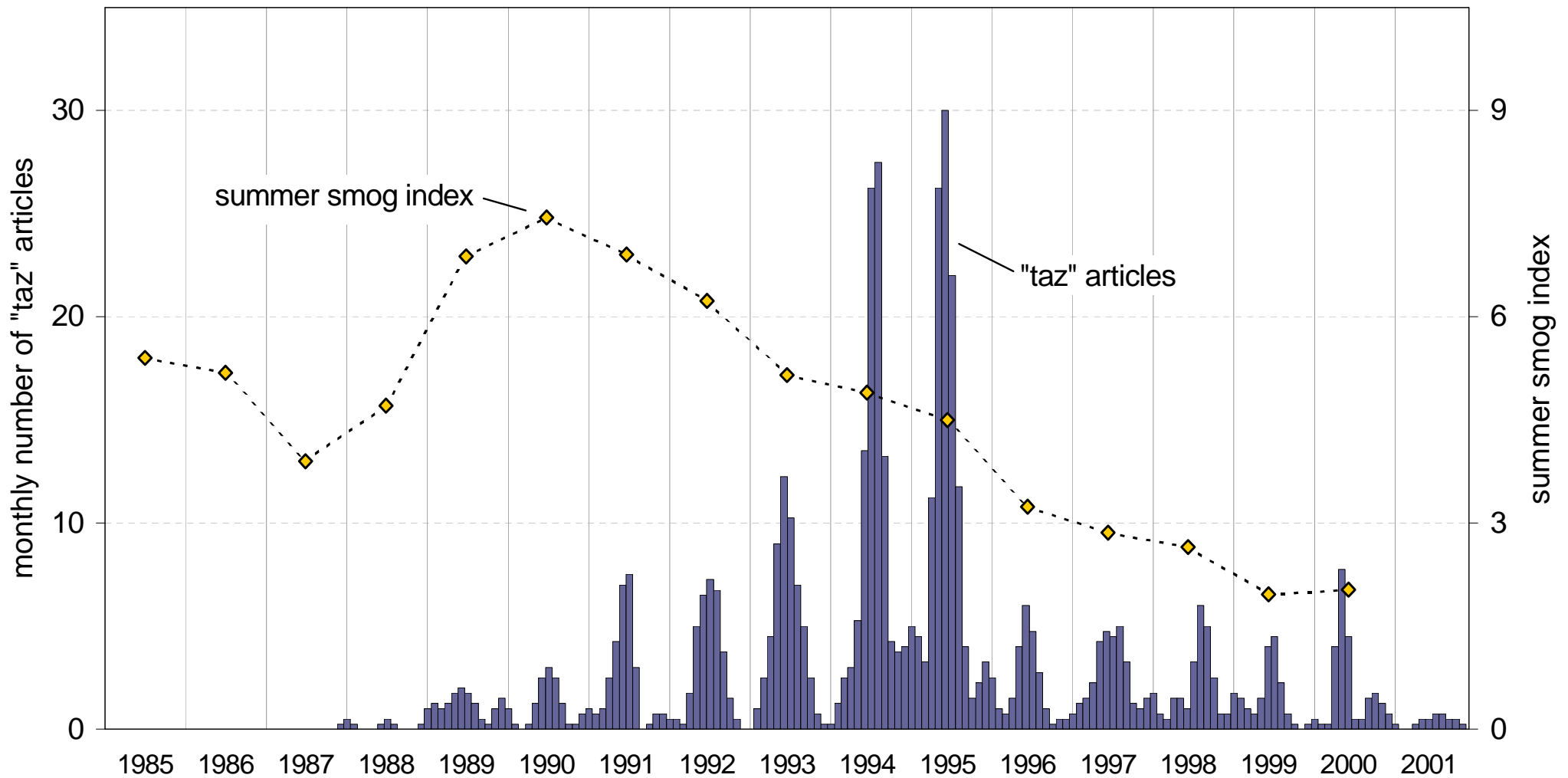


Issue-attention cycle of *summer smog / low-level ozone*

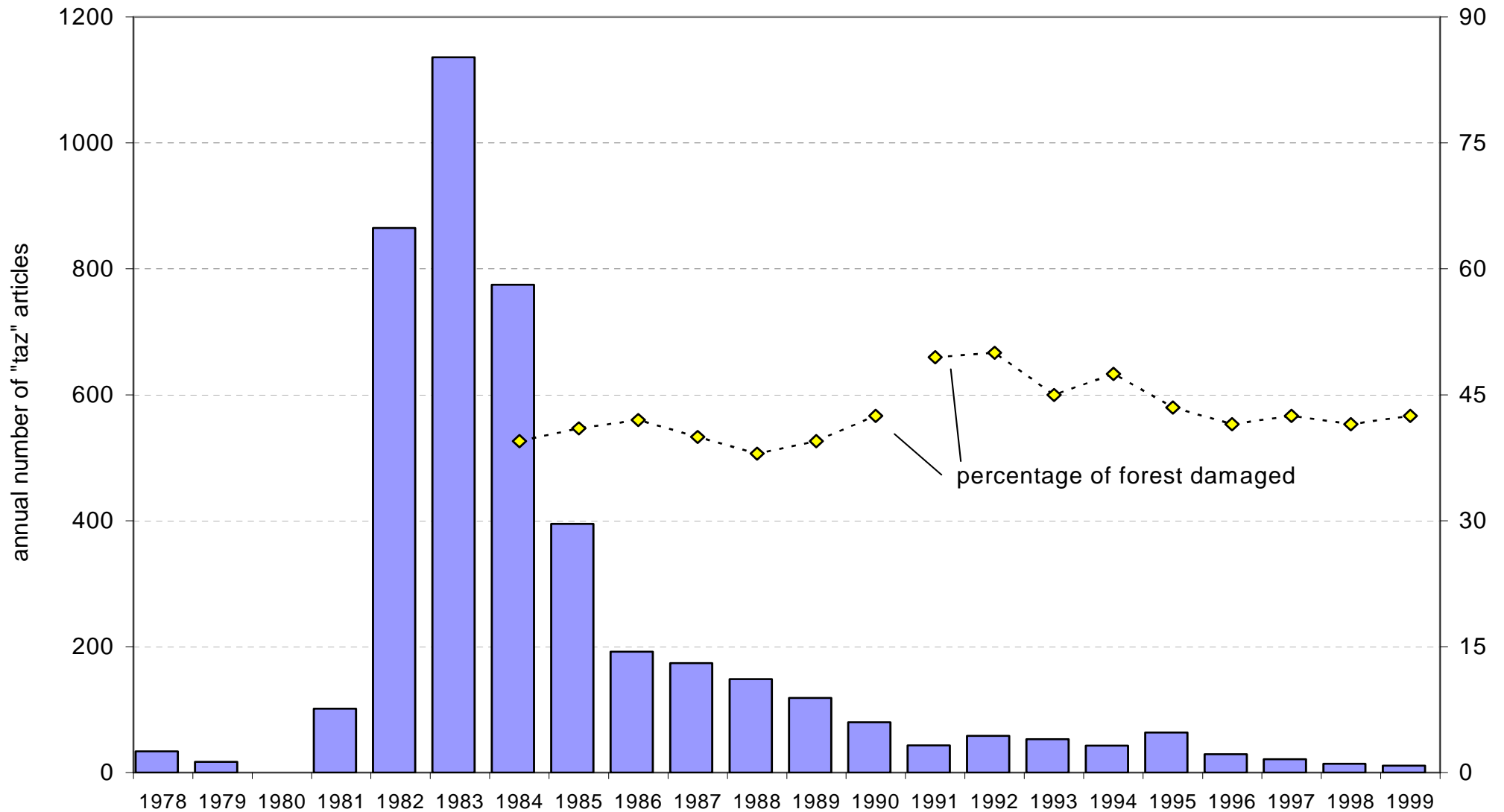


The intensity of public attention towards the issue of summer smog (low-level ozone) measured by the annual number of related articles in the German newspaper "die tageszeitung"

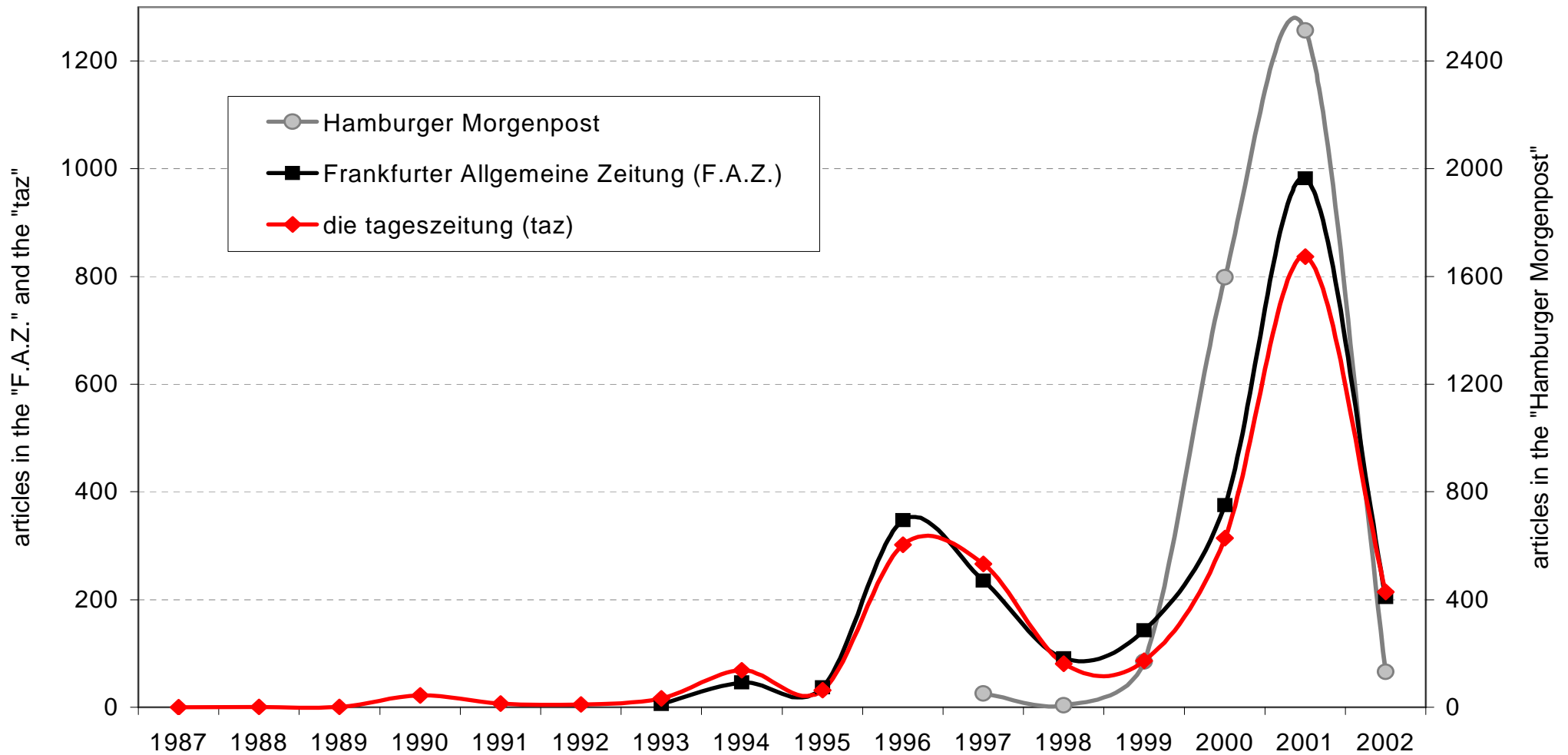
“High-resolution” issue-attention cycle of *summer smog / low-level ozone*



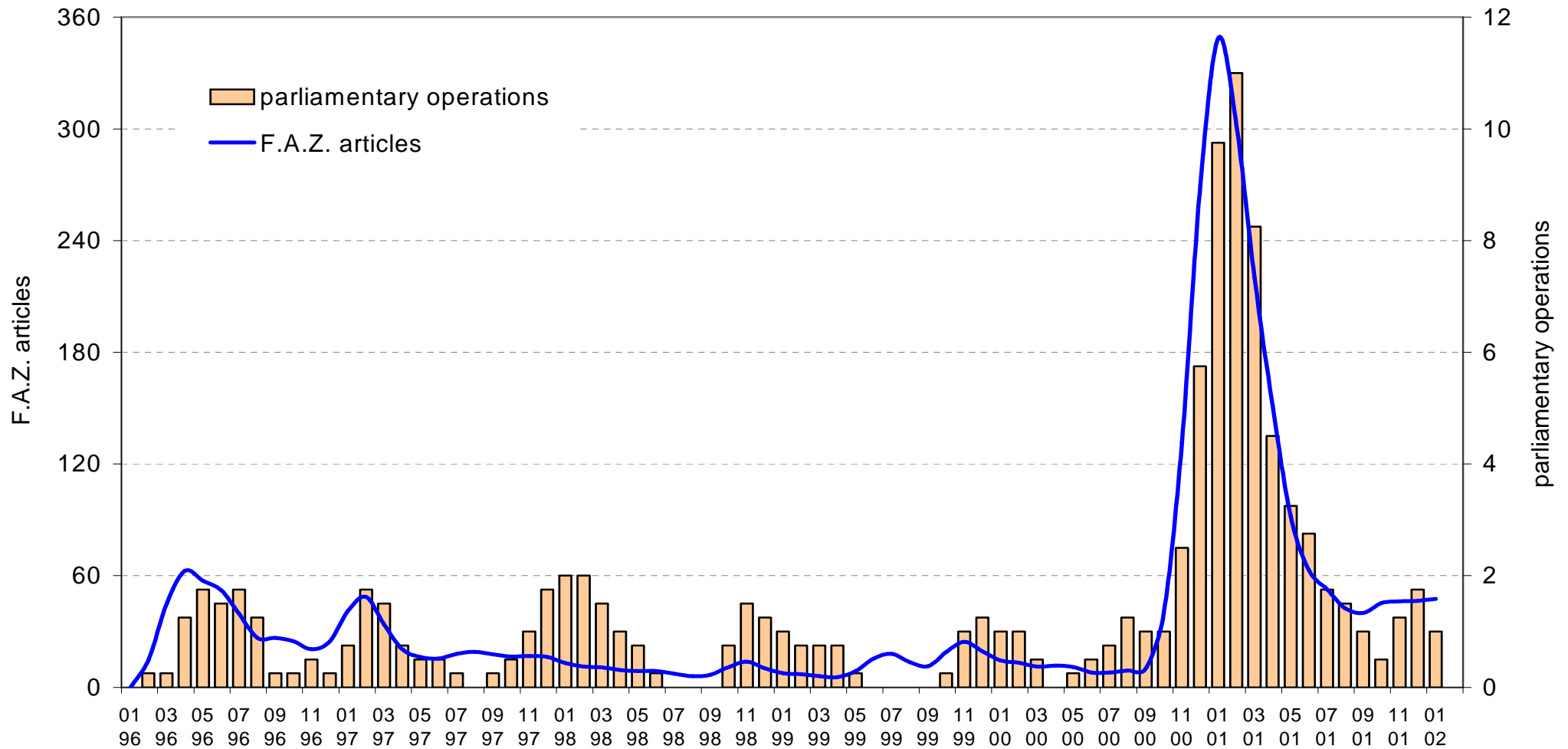
Issue-attention cycle of “Waldsterben”



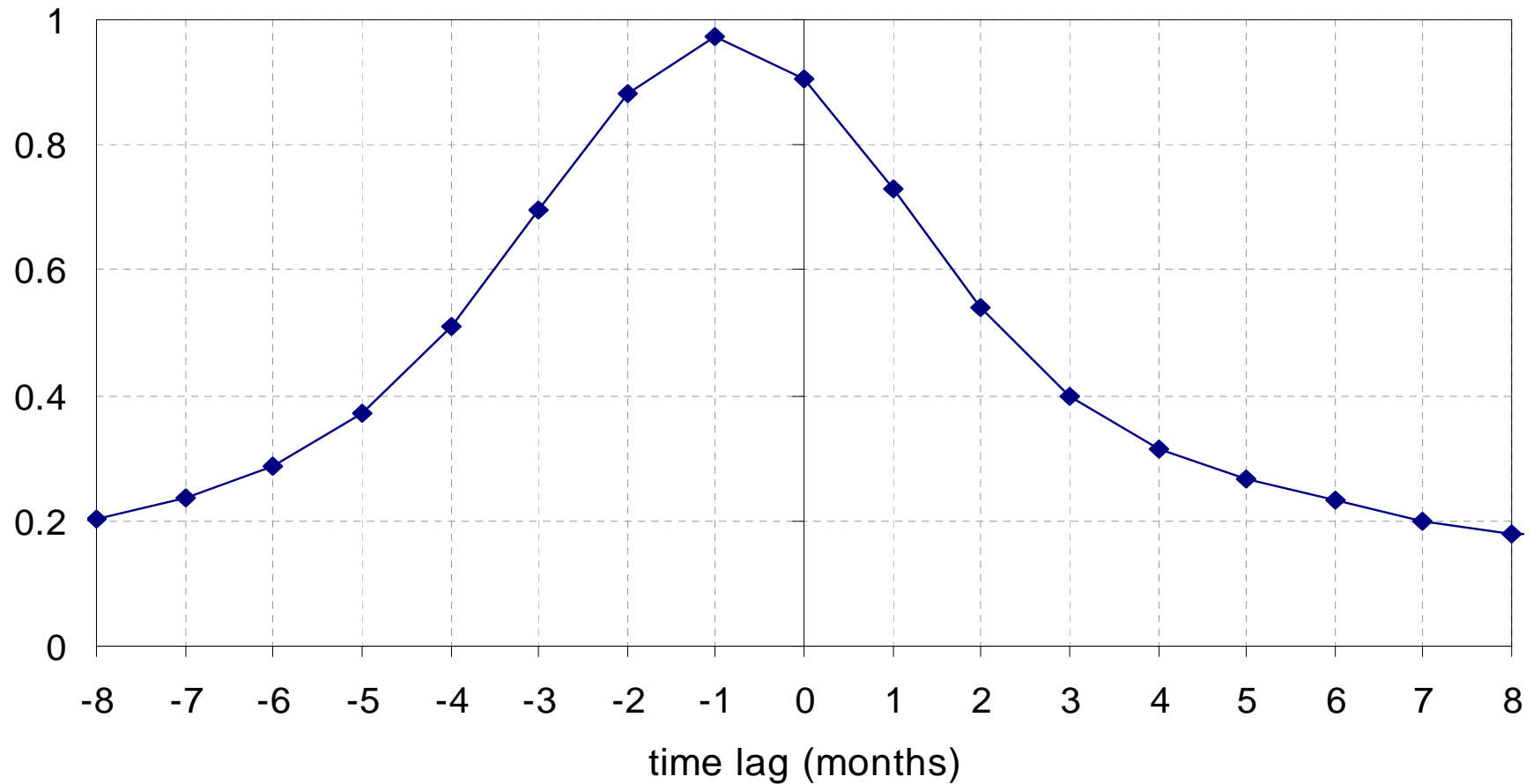
Issue-attention cycle of *BSE*



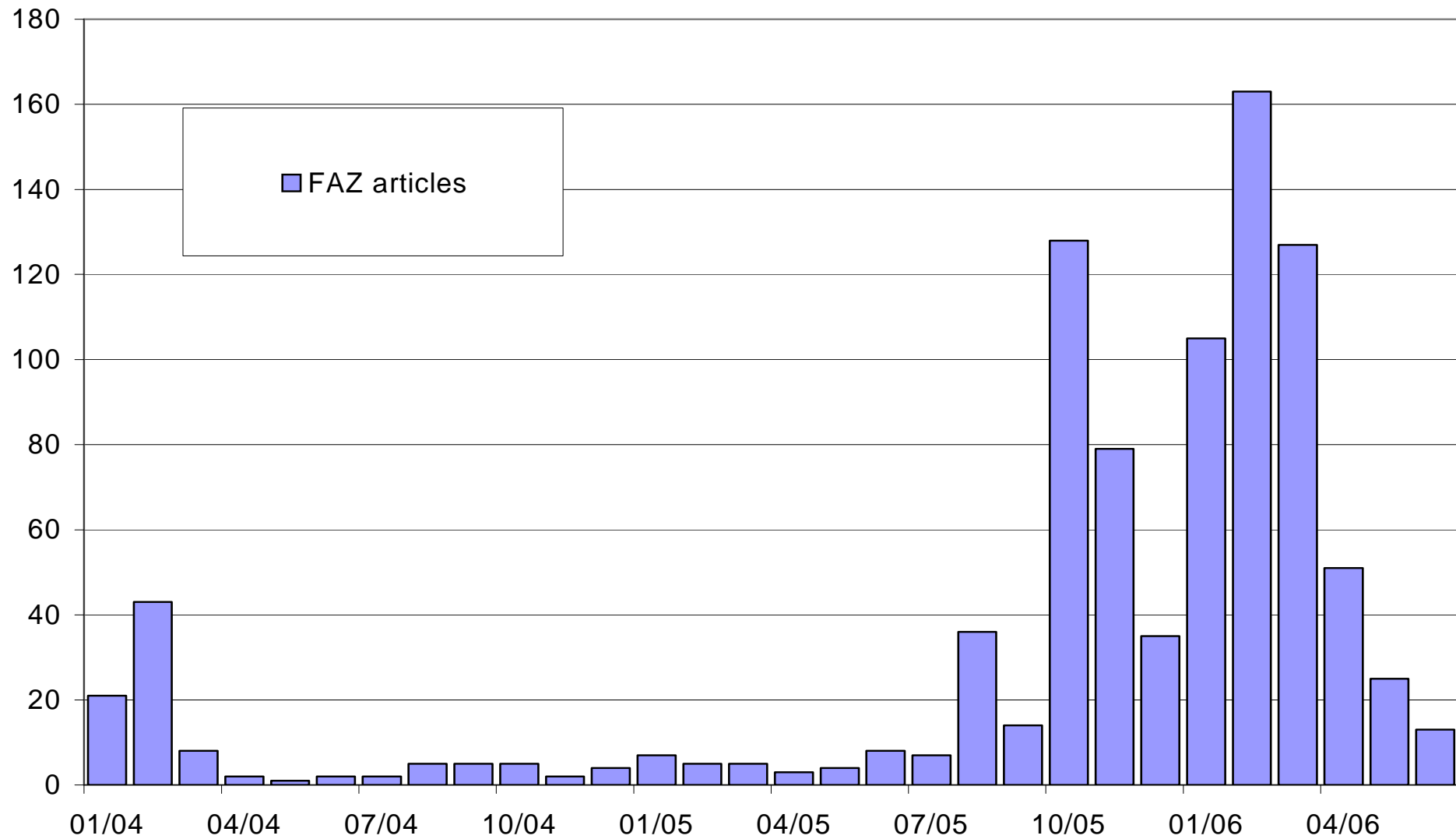
BSE - media coverage and parliamentary operations



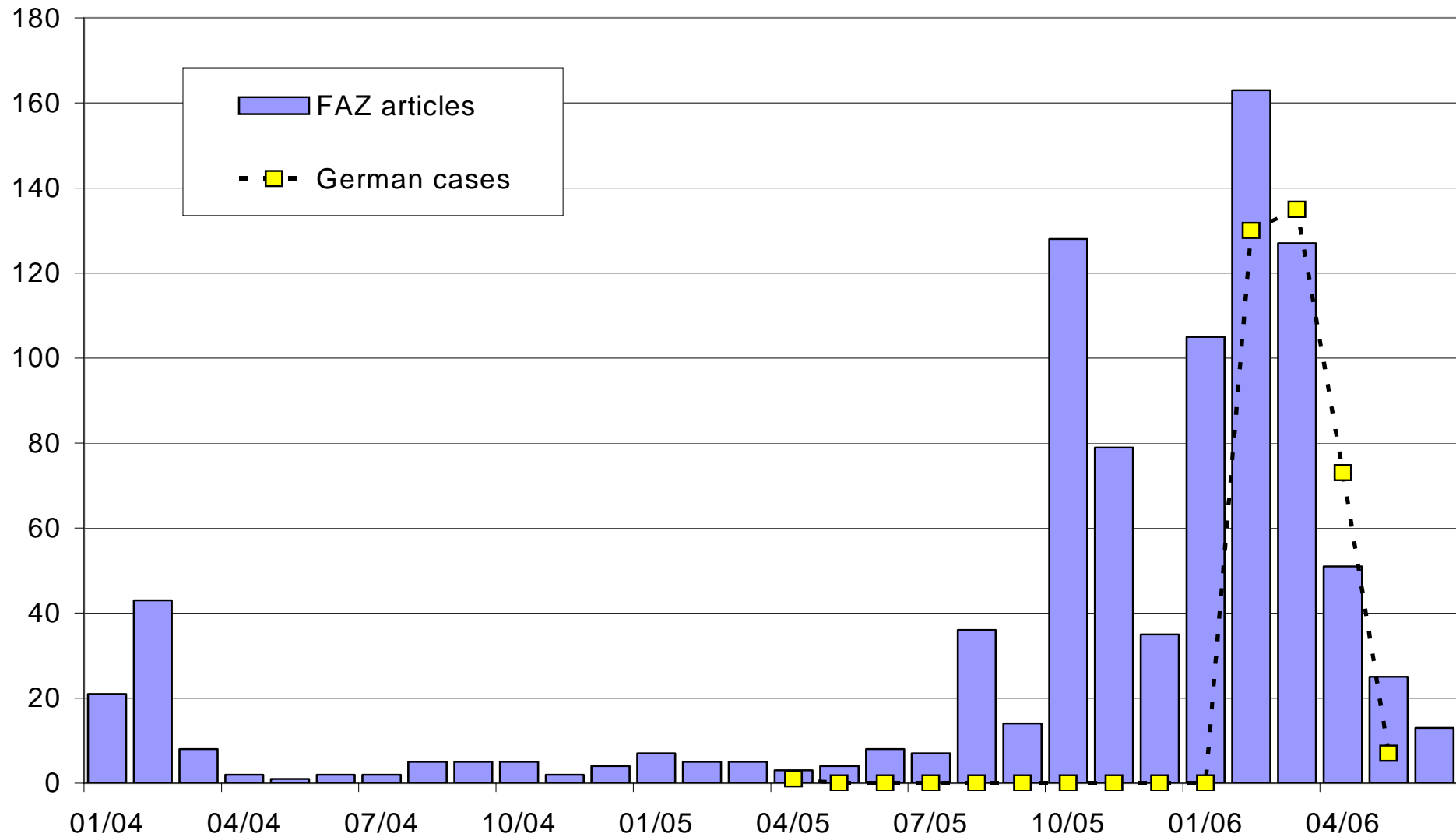
BSE - cross correlation function between press coverage and parliamentary operations



Bird Disease / H5N1

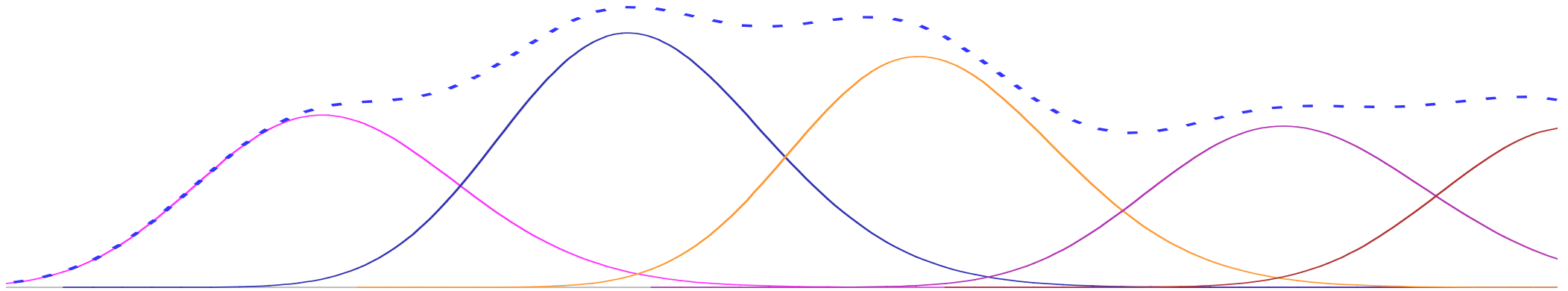


Bird Disease / H5N1 and German cases



Challenges

- Terminology:
 - What constitutes the ‘public agenda’ / ‘public sphere’: politics, the media, citizens, interest-groups? Their communication?
- Mechanisms:
 - Selection principles of news media - especially when to *stop* coverage (conduct interviews)
 - Influence of citizens (letters to editors, buying behaviour), of interest-groups (lobbying, expertise), of science, of politicians on media agenda?
 - problem exhaustion
- Typology of attention dynamics
- Methodology:
 - how to measure public attention / media attention, e.g. comparison of local with national news media
- Empirical results
 - integration of case study findings



Thanks for listening!

References

- Downs, A.** 1972. 'Up and down with ecology - the "issue-attention cycle".' *The Public Interest*: 38-50.
- Henry, G.T., C.S. Gordon.** 2001. 'Tracking issue attention. Specifying the dynamics of the public agenda.' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65: 157-77.
- Luhmann, N.** 1971. *Öffentliche Meinung*. In *Politische Planung*, ed. N. Luhmann. Opladen: 9-34.
- Newig, J.** 2004. 'Public Attention, Political Action: The Example of Environmental Regulation.' *Rationality and Society* 16 (2): 149-90.
- Newig, J., J. Hesselmann.** 2004. Modelling the Dynamics of Public Attention towards Environmental Issues. In: *Complexity and Integrated Resources Management*. International Environmental Modelling and Software Society, International Congress, eds. C. Pahl-Wostl, S. Schmidt and T. Jakeman.
- Nisbet, M.C., M. Huge.** 2006. 'Attention Cycles and Frames in the Plant Biotechnology Debate. Managing Power and Participation through the Press/Policy Connection.' *Press/Politics* 11 (2): 3-40.
- Peters, B.G., B.W. Hogwood.** 1985. 'In Search of the Issue-Attention Cycle.' *The Journal of Politics* 47: 238-53.
- Zhu, J.-H.** 1992. 'Issue competition and attention distraction: A zero-sum theory of agenda-setting.' *Journalism Quarterly* 69 (4): 825-36.

'Diana'

