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Time Matters: Rethinking the Role of Time in the Philosophical, Conceptual and Methodological Domains of International Business

The purpose of this editorial, and the special issue, is to initiate a dialogue about the role of time in international business (IB) scholarship. While time is inherent in IB phenomena, it has, to date, received limited attention in IB research and theorizing. When IB scholars do account for time, they generally adhere to assumptions representing time as linear and objective. We discuss the importance of time in IB's philosophical, conceptual, and methodological domains, defining each of these three interconnected domains, problematizing their dominant assumptions about time, and suggesting potential avenues for rethinking time in IB.

Keywords: Time, Temporality, Philosophical Assumptions, Conceptualization,

Methodology

1. Introduction

The study of international business (IB) involves consideration of emergent processes and activities across borders, and dynamic contingencies that affect internationalizing firms. While IB is embedded within a temporal landscape, there has been limited focus on time and temporality in IB research (Knight & Liesch, 2016; Nachum & Buckley, 2022; Welch, Nummela & Liesch, 2016; Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). With a few exceptions, IB research tends to focus on the antecedents and/or consequences of internationalization and on discrete events (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003), rather than the temporal unfolding of internationalization processes and their mechanisms (Jones & Coviello, 2005; for similar arguments, see Pettigrew, 2012; Van de Ven, 1992).

This is, perhaps, ironic, given the prominence of the process-oriented Uppsala model (e.g., Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) as a basis for understanding internationalization. Process research is inherently the study of events over time; however, concerns are raised periodically (e.g., Hurmerinta, Paavilainen-Mäntymäki & Hasset, 2016; Jones & Coviello, 2005) that much

IB research lacks an explicit focus on the temporal dimension. Much IB research focuses on explaining the achievements of specific internationalization-related goals, rather than the temporally-embedded processes of how these goals have been reached (Hurmerinta et al., 2016; Welch et al., 2016; Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). As a result, IB research often involves static accounts of phenomena, based on cross-sectional analyses (Welch, Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, Piekkari & Plakoyiannaki, 2022), and time is treated implicitly, rather than explicitly.

The “problem of time insensitivity” (Hoorani, Plakoyiannaki & Gibbert, 2023, p. 1) can be attributed to both the complexity of the notion of time and the dominance of methodological traditions that do not account for the dynamic unfolding of events. There are limited discussions on how time should be considered in IB theorizing. While few studies consider the temporal nature of IB phenomena (Hilmersson, Johanson, Lundberg & Papaioannou, 2017), even fewer adopt a paradigmatic approach to time in their research design (Pauwels & Matthyssens, 1999), *vis-à-vis* philosophical, conceptual, and methodological underpinnings. While the “appreciative system of the researcher is sensitive to time” (Pettigrew, 2012, p. 1305), assumptions of time in IB often remain opaque. For example, work based on stages-oriented models of internationalization often underplays the effluxion of time, generally relying on linear assumptions of temporality, without considering the circumvention of stages, stasis, and inertia (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki, 2003; Jones and Coviello, 2005; for exceptions, see, e.g., Vissak & Zhang, 2016).

While, increasingly, IB studies utilize more time-sensitive methodologies, such as historical studies, longitudinal approaches, and case studies, these developments remain slow, consistent with research conventions and traditions in the discipline (Plakoyiannaki, Wei, &

Prashantham, 2019; Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). Such approaches are often subject to criticism associated with the descriptive nature of narratives or the limitations of time-related data that are exposed to flaws associated with memory bias and hindsight-based conclusions (Plakoyiannaki, Paavilainen-Mäntymäki & Hoorani, 2023). Observational, visual, and multimodal IB research is scarce, despite the potential for representing, contextualizing, and theorizing temporal phenomena. There are concerns about the feasibility of contemporaneous research in this domain, and challenges associated with collecting and analyzing longitudinal and processual data, given time and financial constraints. For quantitative research, while there are well-established statistical approaches for modeling time-ordered data, effective estimation of time-series models (e.g., ARIMA) requires access to a long history of data (see, e.g., Rose, 1993). This is problematic in IB, as the assumption of consistent underlying mechanisms across long periods of time (e.g., a minimum of 100 years for annual data) is highly questionable. Therefore, there is a need to develop various, rigorous approaches to account for time without resorting to assumptions that relationships are consistent across discernibly different time periods.

This editorial – and the special issue – seeks to propose alternative ways to incorporate time into our research practices. We discuss and problematize three broad areas: 1) the *philosophical* domain: assumptions that we make about the nature, experience, and flow of time in IB; 2) the *conceptual* domain: the role of time in the conceptualization of IB phenomena; and 3) the *methodological* domain: tools for time-sensitive IB research (George & Jones, 2000). Together, these three domains expand our resources for treating time, for uncovering the dynamics instead of the similarities and differences or the antecedents and consequences of IB phenomena. The structure of this editorial is as follows. First, we discuss time (in)sensitivity in

IB research. This is followed by setting the scene for adopting a more time-sensitive approach, considering the philosophical, conceptual, and methodological domains. Next, we introduce the five articles featured in this special issue; these articles contribute to the three domains and demonstrate ways to enhance time-sensitive IB research. Finally, we conclude with key contributions and avenues for future research.

2. International Business and Time (In)sensitivity

Several theoretical frameworks and concepts in IB capture time-sensitive phenomena. Vernon's (1966) product life cycle reflects the movement of a product through different operational modes, in different locations, following a timeline of its transition. Johanson and Vahlne (1977) adopt a processual perspective on internationalization by viewing it as sequential and path-dependent, where experiences and commitment decisions alternate and interact, and eventuate into the firm's internationalization process path. Buckley and Casson (1981) assess timing and foreign entry mode decisions, recognizing appropriate timings for switching between entry modes within stages of internationalization. The strategy literature on first movers, followers, and latecomers (e.g., Kerin, Varadarajan & Petersen, 1992; Lieberman & Montgomery, 1988) labels market-strategic moves, not only based on their content, but also on their temporal positioning relative to competitors. Literature on the speed of internationalization (e.g. Chetty, Johanson & Martín Martín, 2014; Garcia-Garcia, Garcia-Canal & Guillen, 2017; Monaghan & Tippmann, 2018; Sadeghi, Rose & Chetty, 2018; Vermeulen & Barkema, 2002) and rapidly-internationalizing firms (e.g., Knight & Cavusgil, 2004) pays attention to time and timing, albeit focusing particularly on the first foreign entry and the age of the generally-young firms taking this first step (Cavusgil & Knight, 2015).

Recently, studies on global value chains address the networked organization while posing questions about how and why value chain configurations change over time (Buckley et al., 2019). Process theorizing and contextualized explanations are not unfamiliar in IB research (Welch et al., 2016; Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014; Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011), although the spatio-temporal framing of IB phenomena has, to date, often been implicit or overlooked, perhaps because researchers have not had the tools at hand to address it (Jones & Khanna, 2006).

Time insensitivity is also noted as placing limits on our theorizing capacity in IB (Hoorani et al., 2023). Some other scholarly domains have developed time-sensitive emphases, facilitating methodological diversity along with awareness of different styles of theorizing (Cornelissen, Hollerer & Seidl, 2021), and advancing both theoretical and methodological capabilities (Nielsen et al., 2020). The call for attention to time in IB is not new; Eden (2009, p. 535) notes that “Much, perhaps most, IB research either ignores time or focuses solely on the comparative statics of predicting how a change ... affects strategy and performance at $t+1$ ”, while Jones and Coviello (2005, p. 287) argue that “Viewing entrepreneurial internationalisation behaviour through a temporal lens presents further opportunity to accommodate multiple theoretical explanations within the same, flexible conceptual models. Therefore, time becomes another important foundational element in our conceptualisation process”. With recent calls for methodological pluralism (Nielsen et al., 2020) and “dialogue so that IB can be transformed into a more time sensitive and dynamic discipline” (Hoorani et al., 2023, p. 10), the IB field, which has traditionally considered dynamism to be captured by comparative statics (Eden, 2009), may be changing.

We believe strongly that such change is important. Since the calls by Eden (2009) and Jones and Coviello (2005) for time-sensitive scholarship, Elsahn and Earl (2022) and Hoorani et al. (2023) have advocated for alternative ways of addressing time in IB research, particularly from a qualitative perspective. While sensitization to time in IB studies has been advocated for some time now, there is little evidence that IB researchers “delineate the dimension of time as critical to internationalisation research” (Jones & Coviello, 2005, p. 299) or explicitly incorporate time sensitivity. It is our view that the field remains subject to chronological fossilization (Poulis & Poulis, 2018). Our discussion below aims to address these issues and illustrate the central role of time in the study of IB phenomena. We consider the role of time in three interconnected domains – philosophical, conceptual, and methodological – and demonstrate the value and relevance of alternative conceptions of time to advance IB research.

3. Paving the Way for Time-sensitive IB Research: The Philosophical, Conceptual and Methodological Domains

To illuminate the role of time in IB, we build on Heath (1956), who introduced three central questions: (1) Is time an immutable part of the external world or a subjective notion?; (2) Do researchers consider time as inherent or exogenous to investigated concepts and constructs?; and (3) Is time treated as part of the research design, and thus integrated, measured, and captured in the research process? Viewed in this light, we suggest that the importance of time in IB scholarship can be considered in three domains: the *philosophical domain*, associated with researchers’ key assumptions about time (What are the underlying assumptions that researchers make about time in IB?); the *conceptual domain*, which pertains to the consideration of time in theorizing (How do we account for time with respect to concepts and theories in IB?); and the

methodological domain, which is related to the operational choices that accommodate a temporal understanding of investigated phenomena (How do we incorporate time in qualitative and quantitative IB methods?). We discuss these three domains, presenting dominant and alternative assumptions about time in IB, with the goal of contributing depth to the conversation on the role of temporality in our field; see Table 1 for more detail.

Insert Table 1 about here

3.1. Time, IB and the Philosophical Domain

Time serves as a “frame surrounding all thought” (Durkheim, 1961, p. 9), placing it at the epicenter of rich theoretical debates. The philosophical domain relates to the underpinning assumptions that researchers make about time in the research process (Plakoyiannaki & Saren, 2006). These assumptions produce different conceptions of time and can be categorized under three overarching dimensions: the nature, experience, and flow of time (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki, 2003; Mosakowski & Earley, 2000). The nature of time has long been a subject of debate, from the points of view of both philosophy and physics, in terms of ontological assumptions pertaining to whether time is absolute or relative, and connected to or disconnected from observed phenomena. The experience of time is associated either with a subjective arrangement and interpretation of events or with a publicly-accepted chronology, represented by clocks, calendars and diaries. The flow of time captures the movement of events, which can be orderly and linear or flux-like and simultaneous (Butler, 1995).

Scholarly research consistent with assumptions of an objective reality describes the nature of time as true, absolute, and monolithic. Viewed in this light, real time exists

independently of phenomena and space (Mosakowski & Earley, 2000). It is portrayed objectively as based on forward-moving clock time that adheres to a single interpretation and is free from contingent events (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence & Tushman, 2001). The flow of time is viewed as linear, consisting of separable units, and as “an irreversible sequence of unrepeatable and unique events” (Hurmerinta-Peltonmäki, 2003, p. 218). Time is assumed to unfold in steady and largely predictable ways. IB scholarship has been dominated by such real, objective, and linear assumptions of time, such that, e.g., internationalization is generally viewed in terms of discrete and disconnected events that unfold in an orderly manner (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). Time is generally measured with calendars and clocks that capture the duration, pace, or length of internationalization-related phenomena. Recent debates about the ontological status of IB (Delios, 2017), and the historical imprinting and contingencies of internationalization (Decker, 2022, in this special issue; Welch et al., 2022), pave the way for challenging the dominant assumptions of time as a basis for IB research. For instance, Amdam and Benito (2022, in this special issue) question the value of clock time in investigating FDI decisions, as it underplays the complexities and particularities of internationalization; they draw on conceptions of time that are prevalent in other fields, which we discuss below.

Mosakowski and Earley (2000, p. 797) consider the nature of time as “epiphenomenal”, namely contingent on the emergence or change of events, and relative to actors and contexts. For instance, the conception of strategic time, discussed by Butler (1995, p. 934), draws on time’s epiphenomenal nature through its dependence on the actions of players whose choices derive from “their predictions of the choices of other players” in the market. Departing from the objective experience of time, the social construction of time renders time significant only through human interpretation (Mosakowski & Earley, 2000). As such, time derives from

multiple meanings across different situations and cultures. It is also considered in terms of lived experience; emphasis is placed on individuals', groups', and organizations' experiences of time, rather than on a universal (e.g., calendar) meaning. An example of organization's experience of time is temporal structuring, where people draw from various, common temporal structures that they have enacted to organize ongoing practices, such as the notions of projects, office hours, vacation, etc. (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002). The flow of time allows for overlapping or repetitive events, irregularities, and disruptions. For instance, cyclical time consists of temporal paths that return to an earlier point in their history, in contrast to linear time (Butler, 1995). The conception of spasmodic time also challenges assumptions of linearity and points to the heterogeneity and uncertainty of events, in which the temporal order between past and future is disrupted (Butler, 1995).

What do we miss by considering only linear, objective clock time in IB? How can other philosophical assumptions of time enhance our understanding of IB phenomena? We propose that IB scholars can benefit from supplementing the traditional view of time with other, under-utilized assumptions of time. Embracing epiphenomenal time has implications for our understanding of firms' internationalization activities, as it allows IB scholars to move beyond the snapshot categorization of a firm as an entity at a particular point of time, in terms of specific milestones such as being a born global or an exporter (Reuber, Dimitratos & Kuivalainen, 2017). This offers room to reconceptualize the firm with respect to what has been achieved throughout time, by embracing unfolding events and processes. As such, assumptions about the consistent firm in stable contexts give way to the notion of the "temporary organization" – "a temporally bounded group of interdependent actors formed to complete a complex task" under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity" (Burke & Morley, 2016, p. 1237). Temporary organizations operate

in dynamic and unpredictable environments, functioning as temporally-bounded systems, whose actors change over time, as do the processes they undertake (Burke & Morley, 2016). Viewed in this light, internationalization activities are not fixed *ex ante*; neither do they have predefined phases, such as a beginning and an end. Rather, they are emerging. This enables IB scholars to identify multiple causal chains and interdependencies of events over time (see also Kriz, Rumyantseva, & Welch, 2023, in this special issue) and consider the time-dependent and process-based nature of IB phenomena (Poulis & Poulis, 2018; Welch et al., 2022).

Considering the subjective nature of time enables the study of individual influences and social processes in IB scholarship. Observing how managers of internationalizing firms perceive and construct time in a subjective manner allows IB researchers to examine the under-theorized link between individual (temporal) perceptions and firm-level choices (Middleton, Liesch & Steen, 2011). An understanding of internationalizing firms requires appreciation of the actions and decisions of managers and, therefore, awareness of the way in which time is experienced by actors within and outside the organization (e.g., industry players, competitors, network partners). This necessitates departing from assumptions of objective time and embracing multiple understandings of temporality, and hence of internationalization processes, to uncover the uniqueness and heterogeneity of IB phenomena, thus enriching our stock of knowledge (Niittymies, Pajunen & Lamberg, 2022, in this special issue).

Intriguing alternatives also exist regarding how time flows, as actors do not necessarily experience time unfolding sequentially and continuously from one moment to the next. In challenging assumptions of linearity, Lippmann and Aldrich (2016) propose that, in the earliest stages of a venture's lifecycle, managers may orient their actions to the distant future in attempts to envisage and envision international expansion. At other points, managers may focus on the

present, potentially losing sight of the lessons of the past or neglecting to prepare for the future. Non-linear assumptions of time also offer the potential to shed light on feedback loops, the acceleration and deceleration of IB processes, and withdrawal from – and re-entry into – international markets. Relaxing the assumption of linearity also allows for the study of repetitive internationalization patterns across firms and industries, and disruptions to pathways due to uncertain and unexpected events (Schembri, Fletcher & Buck, 2023, in this special issue).

3.2. Time and the Conceptual Domain

The conceptual domain pertains to how time is addressed, in terms of theoretical framing. Zaheer, Albert, and Zaheer (1999) suggest that time is inherent in any act of conceptualization, enhancing theories' applicability and explanatory power. The theoretical consideration of time in IB is critical, given that most of the field's concepts and investigated phenomena – at various levels of analysis – have time as a key component. Cross-border activities do not take place in a temporal vacuum; thus, it is not surprising that most of the theorizing that underpins IB research includes an implicit consideration of time-based ordering. Considering issues of foreign market selection and entry, fundamental theoretical frameworks such as the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), internalization (Buckley & Casson, 1976; 1981; Rugman, 1981), and Dunning's (1980) eclectic paradigm are all based on sequential decision-making that accounts for the firm's past and present resources, capabilities, and experiences. Psychic distance (Beckerman, 1956), which is a key aspect of the Uppsala model, is defined as a current perception regarding the difficulty of doing business in a particular location, based on the decision-maker's past experience.

Similarly, the resource-based view of the firm (e.g., Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984) and dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) deal with the effective linking of an

organization's past, present, and future, as do notions of strategic agility and organizational (or individual) ambidexterity. Moreover, international market entry decisions are inherently conditional on, among other considerations, the firm's present situation and what it has done in the past. Other considerations often include the past actions of competitors; competitive interactions (e.g., Rose & Ito, 2008) involve firms following each other into foreign markets (or avoiding key rivals), which is a process that unfolds over time. In international entrepreneurship, a widely-studied phenomenon is that of firms that enter foreign markets "soon" after establishment, e.g., international new ventures (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994); the very definition of such firms involves time. At a micro level, expatriation is necessarily a temporal process, involving the individual's adjustment to both expatriation and post-assignment repatriation, and the flow-on career effects, all of which unfold over time.

While obviously central to the study of IB, it is fair to question whether current conceptualizations really account for temporal issues in sufficient depth. The argument can be made that the focus tends to be more on the measurement of time than on time as a process. Consideration is seldom given to time as something that is socially constructed, apart from some limited incorporation – generally as a control variable, rather than a focal point – of, e.g., short- vs. long-term orientation (e.g., Hofstede, 2001). Although it is well-established that perceptions of time can differ across cultures (e.g., Hall, 1959), we tend to not theorize about this, even in the context of organizations that operate in a variety of cultural and institutional environments.

Conceptualizing without deep consideration of time limits our ability to really account for its clearly substantial impact on our understanding of IB phenomena. We lack a commonly-established rhetoric and vocabulary pertaining to time in the field, and rarely draw on process-oriented and historical approaches, or perspectives concerned with the evolution and change of

phenomena, to frame and define our key concepts. How we conceptualize phenomena shapes how we study them. For instance, in the context of family-firm internationalization, time is present not only in the internationalization process (Debellis, Rondi, Plakoyiannaki & De Massis, 2021), but also in the concepts of “family” and “firm” as “a current pattern of groupings of related individuals that has grown out of an ongoing process of evolution and transformation” (Abbott, 2016, p. 229). Similarly, a complex systems perspective conceptualizes networks as evolving and adaptive systems of interacting actors in the dimension of time, and in the context of temporally-fluid internationalization as constant processes of “being” and “becoming” (Chandra & Wilkinson, 2017, p. 696).

Full consideration of time entails its incorporation into our focal concepts as well the context of our study. This involves considerably more depth than simply noting the year in which an event of interest appears to have occurred, which is likely to be the observable result of a much longer process of decision-making (and, as Kriz, Romyantseva, & Welch, 2023, in this special issue, note, potentially an inaccurate representation of reality). IB research can benefit from extension of our theorizing to consider the sequencing in which events occur, their pace, and how long change takes to become embedded (Ancona et al., 2001). For example, our models of international expansion tend to focus on the firm’s initial entry into a foreign market. However, unless the firm engages in a one-time-only foray into a single international setting, each entry is part of a time-based sequence of engagement, which we rarely conceptualize or discuss.

We suggest that theoretical development in IB will be enhanced by treating time deeply and explicitly, to account for its complex impact on the wide range of phenomena considered in this broad field. This will allow us to move on from the static – snapshots in single or multiple

points in time – to capturing the dynamic processes that provide better representations of the reality of IB phenomena. Questions of what is happening are interesting, but developing an understanding of how things develop between observable states provides considerably deeper understanding. Such conceptual and theoretical development can be facilitated by more effective interaction among IB researchers with different ontological perspectives (as discussed regarding the philosophical domain) and engagement with methodological approaches that account for time.

3.3. Time and the Methodological Domain

The methodological domain addresses the operational choices that researchers make pertaining to their research design; the focus is on approaches to – and methods of – the collection and analysis of data, with the aim of incorporating temporal perspectives into the investigation (George & Jones, 2000). According to Menard (1991), the temporal dimension constitutes the duration of the field research, the time orientation of the research process, and the rate and timing of the data collection. Typically, methods acknowledging time assess non-linearity, unpredictability, longer-term observation, change, cycles, and events (Hurmerinta et al., 2016). Such a consideration of time is inherent in process-oriented and historical research. So far, such approaches are underutilized in IB (Plakoyiannaki et al., 2019), relative to work that is variance-oriented and cross-sectional, focusing on the antecedents and consequences of events (Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). Variance-oriented research often captures phenomena “during a slice of ongoing time” and, when studying processes, sets well-defined beginnings and ends (Eisenhardt, 2021, p. 154). As IB research has not yet taken full advantage of existing and emerging temporal approaches, its reporting of methods and research designs has not generally been explicit regarding how time is present and meaningful.

In IB, time is frequently treated as part of context, as a backdrop but lacking a decisive role (Michailova, 2011; Teagarden, Von Glinow & Mellahi, 2018). Welch et al. (2022) note that IB research traditionally decontextualizes phenomena, eliminating time. Especially in volatile contexts, which are often considered in IB, temporal methods and theorizing offer the opportunity for much deeper insights (Kunisch, Blagoev & Bartunek, 2021; Van de Ven & Sminia, 2012). Recognizing context and time in research is paradigmatic, simultaneously strengthening and revitalizing theorizing (Hurmerinta et al., 2016; Rowlinson, Hassard & Decker, 2014), and potentially increasing practical relevance (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010).

Many scholars have suggested historical approaches to bring time into IB research (Burgelman, 2011; Decker, 2022, in this special issue; Jones & Khanna, 2006; Niittymies et al. 2022, in this special issue; Suddaby & Foster, 2017; Welch et al., 2022). Historical studies may include diverse approaches, including case studies, narratives, longitudinal and process research, time-series analysis, eventful temporality, and causal and contextual explanation as ways of conducting temporally-driven IB research. Time can be incorporated in research design with the help of contemporaneous, retrospective, and future-oriented approaches, to enhance and complement our understanding of, and theorizing about, IB phenomena (Hassett & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013). In qualitative research, timing and context are central when using time-sensitive approaches (Zaheer et al., 1999; Mitchell & James, 2001). To do justice to temporal methods, they should be employed when studying phenomena within (real-time), or by acknowledging (retrospective), their natural, temporal, and spatial contexts (George & Jones, 2000; Perchard & MacKenzie, 2021). In this way, researchers can more explicitly assess the role of timing in their data collection and analysis, to account for the underlying dynamics within the adopted research approach (Hassett & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013). Time is often neglected in

the analysis of qualitative data, which focuses on coding, classifying, ordering and categorization and on identifying similarities and differences (Eden, 2009; Langley Smallman, Tsoukas & Van de Ven, 2013; Reuber, 2016), instead of searching for contextual relationships, narratives, event histories, dynamics, mechanisms, and chronologies (Paavilainen-Mäntymäki & Welch, 2013).

In quantitative research, longitudinal approaches are well-established in the fields of statistics and econometrics (e.g., Kondratieff, 1925; Box & Jenkins, 1976). In addition, methods for time-series data analysis are continually being enhanced. With the increasing availability of long-term data via the digitalization of archives, and the development of data mining tools, effective estimation of time-series models may become more feasible in IB research. Nevertheless, over longer time periods, such as decades and centuries, the underlying assumptions of a consistent process generating the data is not likely to be viable.

Reporting temporal research can be challenging, as it entails accommodating description of large datasets, long processes, or complex dynamics within the confines of one article (Hassett & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013; Hurmerinta et al., 2016). Schotter, Buchel and Vashchilko (2018) discuss interactive visualization as an enhanced tool, where an article depicting contextualized, complex phenomena is complemented with links to additional information. Cloutier and Langley (2020) and Hurmerinta-Peltomäki (2003) suggest different depiction styles for various types of process theorizing, while Cloutier and Ravasi (2021) present data tables that compress data to support the reporting of temporal phenomena (with the caveat that tables may offer a static and categorized depiction). Recent examples of IB studies compressing large sets of data into deep historical accounts, process illustrations, and chronological tables include Amdam and Benito and Niittymies et al. (2022, in this special issue) and Leppäaho, Mainela, and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki (2023).

It must be noted that the full appreciation of time in research comes with complications. Limitations related to temporal approaches concern the duration of the research process and the extent of available data. Narratives of the past may be biased by memory and tautological hindsight reasoning (Hassett & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013), resource constraints may affect the feasibility of contemporaneous research, and archival data access may be limited (Decker, 2022, in this special issue). However, at issue may not be the adoption of new, pluralistic methods, but that of embracing the temporality of the phenomenon and teasing out new findings and perspectives to enhance our understanding. Exploring new methods can also give rise to theoretical novelty, uniqueness, and discovery (Decker, 2022, in this special issue; Nielsen et al., 2020). There are some IB studies that embed their topics in time and embrace temporality in their analysis (Aguzzoli, Lengler, Sousa and Benito, 2021; Da Silva Lopes, Casson & Jones, 2019; Middleton, Liesch & Steen, 2011; Pauwels & Matthyssens, 1999), and we hope that the articles featured in this special issue provide further inspiration for engagement with time to shed light on IB phenomena.

4. Articles Featured in this Special Issue

The call for this special issue invited papers that make an important contribution in terms of the three key domains and the relevance of time for studying and theorizing about IB phenomena. Our wide-ranging call yielded 31 submissions. Of the five accepted articles, three focus on historical research methods and two illustrate how adopting different perspectives on time – e.g. a pluralist approach to time itself – can yield interesting results and contribute to stronger IB theorizing. The papers of this special issue focus on different perspectives on firms' internationalization processes and on temporal events, and their unfolding, in the context in which they occur. Each of the articles adds to the heretofore-limited temporal focus in IB

research, advocating for more pluralistic approaches to combining chronological and historical time perspectives, along with subjective and objective conceptions of time. We believe that taking such critical attitudes toward time will enrich theorizing in our field.

The first article, “Temporality and the first foreign direct investment”, by Rolv Petter Amdam and Gabriel Benito, relates to the *philosophical domain* and explores how different conceptions of time affect our insights into organizations’ major internationalization decisions. It investigates the timing of an organization’s first FDI, drawing on different notions of temporality from management and history. The paper focuses on combining chronological and historical time by studying the decision made by the Harvard Business School, in 1971, to undertake its inaugural FDI by establishing a new, wholly-owned unit in Vevey, Switzerland. Amdam and Benito note that, while chronological time is viewed as linear and objective, the historical conception of time is subjective and socially-constructed. This major internationalization decision is investigated in terms of various conceptions of time – clock, event, stages, and cyclical – enabling the discovery of nuances pertaining to chronology and interlinkages among events and the temporal forces typically associated with FDI. According to Amdam and Benito, incorporating an historical conception of time in internationalization enhances our understanding of the temporal ordering of complex factors that underpin events such as the timing of the first FDI.

In “Temporality and firm de-internationalization: Three historical approaches”, Aleksi Niittymies, Kalle Pajunen, and Juha-Antti Lamberg consider the *philosophical* and *methodological domains*. This article compares three historical approaches, each distinct with respect to ontology and epistemology, and considers how they can provide a better understanding of temporalities in the context of firm de-internationalization. The authors develop a three-

category taxonomy that organizes historical approaches based on philosophical orientations and assumptions of temporality: comparative historical analysis, interpretive history, and poststructuralist history. The paper focuses on United Paper Mills (UPM), one of the largest global pulp and paper industry companies. Niittymies et al. use these historical approaches to explain the process of UPM's exit from the Italian market, only a few years after it had undertaken a rapid and well-publicized market entry, via acquisitions and greenfield investments, during the late 1950s into the early 1960s. This study demonstrates that historical approaches enrich the methodological opportunities available to IB research, given that internationalization consists of a series of time-embedded entries and withdrawals. It also clarifies that, while adopting different philosophical and conceptual approaches to time, IB scholars can address different research questions in relation to a phenomenon, the different approaches and concepts should be mixed cautiously.

The third article, "Introducing the eventful temporality of historical research into international business", considers the *philosophical* and *conceptual domains*. Stephanie Decker argues that the study of internationalization requires "non-linear understandings of time" and "contingent interaction of events and processes" (p. 10). Drawing on business history and introducing eventful temporality, Decker posits that historical research offers an alternative understanding of time, beyond existing conventions such as qualitative longitudinal approaches used in IB, and contributes to greater methodological pluralism in the field. Decker notes that eventful temporality is both contextualized and interpretive, and elaborates on this historical research design's temporal assumptions, including the status of events in the analysis, the roles of context and time, and distinctive data collection and analytical techniques that have the potential to expand the relevance of qualitative IB research. On the basis that methodological

diversity is essential to the development and advancement of theory, eventful temporality can contribute to both the methodological and theoretical repertoire in IB.

The fourth article in our special issue addresses the *conceptual domain* that is linked to the incorporation of time in IB theories and concepts. “To go or not to go? Opportunities as triggers of commitment to internationalisation”, by Joe Schembri, Margaret Fletcher, and Trevor Buck, focuses on both horizontal and vertical dimensions of time in the cycle of internationalization. This study illustrates how firms develop international opportunities over time, with the nature, sequence and intensity of such opportunities’ explaining their internationalization. The longitudinal research design, coupled with an abductive approach, allows the authors to trace the evolutionary process of opportunity development, identifying how and when regular, ongoing opportunities are punctuated by major events and opportunities that break the path and change the trajectory of the firm’s internationalization. Three strategic phases are identified in the internationalization development cycle: 1) defining the opportunity space, 2) growing and learning, and 3) becoming an international enterprise through new growth and structuring. This study extends internationalization process theory by proposing that the development of a path-breaking opportunity is a key trigger of the knowledge-commitment cycle. The authors make an important contribution by demonstrating how a pluralist conceptualization of time and a longitudinal abductive approach can reveal a richer understanding of internationalization.

Finally, the fifth article, “When does the internationalization process begin? Problematizing temporal boundaries in international business”, by Alexandra Kriz, Maria Rumyantseva, and Catherine Welch, contributes to the *conceptual* and *methodological domains*. This paper raises an important point about decisions pertaining to the timespan used to define a

research phenomenon. The authors discuss the concept of periodization and introduce reperiodization as a research strategy for problematizing and reconsidering “conventional” timespans. The reperiodization strategy is applied in a study of eight firms that were spinoffs from a common parent. The case histories reveal that the actual start of internationalization ranged from one to more than 20 years prior to the firms’ official separations from the parent firm. The attendant reperiodization uncovers a more extended internationalization process than is commonly included in IB studies, and demonstrates how incorporating incubated internationalization into the timespan enhances our understanding of each firm’s internationalization trajectory. This article shows how reperiodization can produce novel theoretical insights by challenging the temporal assumptions of existing theories and by offering alternative understandings of IB phenomena.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this editorial and special issue is to stimulate thinking on the role of time in IB scholarship. We discuss and problematize the role of time in three domains of IB research: philosophical, conceptual, and methodological. The articles featured in this special issue each contributes to at least one of these three domains.

We advance several contributions, based on the assumption that explicitly considering time is important for understanding and explaining IB phenomena. We acknowledge temporal complexity and advocate for a holistic consideration of time across the three domains, and offer options for incorporating temporal considerations to IB theorizing and research. Drawing on philosophy and the social sciences, we speculate about why time remains underconsidered in this field, despite its importance for advancing our understanding. We propose that IB research

would benefit from the purposeful and systematic consideration of temporality in theorizing, in real-time, retrospectively, or with a future orientation. Disregarding time risks the loss of practical relevance, disconnection with real-life events and experiences, and a reduction of explanatory power, all the result of incomplete contextualization. We argue for bringing time to the fore in IB research, rather than treating it as ancillary to the phenomenon being investigated and considered in the background, and advocate for time pluralism to allow for better characterization of the diverse IB landscape and nature.

We also contribute to the discussion on the importance of context (Delios, 2017; Teagarden et al., 2018; Welch et al., 2022) in IB theorizing. As an eclectic field, IB encompasses research topics that require contextualized treatment involving both time and intertwined levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro). While time is often treated as a dimension of context (Michailova, 2011; Teagarden et al., 2018), it has seldom been central to IB theorizing (Hoorani et al., 2023), despite its potential for offering deeper understanding and more contextualized explanations for IB phenomena (Welch et al., 2011). Incorporating temporality allows researchers to capture interactions and contingencies among actors, events, and processes at different levels, along with period effects that exert similar pressures on a variety of organizations at a particular time. Doing so should improve the understanding of internationalization processes, including entering, exiting, reentering, and operating in foreign markets and making strategic decisions that have been often assumed to unfold in steady and predictable ways or else in a temporal void (Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). This requires embracing temporal fluidity, and reassessing temporal boundaries to reflect the diversity of time-related experiences of individuals and organizations. We encourage scholars to formulate novel research questions that explore the dynamics of evolution, disruption, and change in IB.

Accomplishing this agenda will require challenging existing assumptions of time and the use of different methodological approaches, including deep historical accounts (e.g., Jones & Khanna, 2006) and novel tools such as interactive visualization (Schotter et al., 2018). Looking backward and looking forward by bringing both business history perspectives and futures research approaches into the toolkit can help IB scholars to develop stronger theoretical contributions.

Accounting for time allows for phenomenon-driven research that captures and explains the ever-present dynamic realities of globalization. Firms face challenges from diverse sources, including fluctuating societal conditions, climate change, migration, trade wars, political volatility, technological disruptions, and the depletion of natural resources (e.g., Hassett & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013). New technologies and digitalization facilitate global reach, but also entail temporal shifts and time constraints (Ahsan & Musteen, 2021). Stallkamp, Hunt and Schotter (2022) found that, while digitalization can speed up internationalization and scaling, resource orchestration and supply chain constraints, among others, can delay the process; this helps to explain the heterogeneity in digital firms' internationalization timing. The drifting landscape challenges the relevance and applicability of traditional theoretical frameworks, and invites research approaches that accommodate dynamic realities, time-sensitive theorizing (Kunisch et al., 2021), and phenomenon-driven research to investigate dynamic problems (Doh, 2015).

We believe that this special issue initiates a promising dialogue at the interface of time and IB, and paves the way for future research directions that push towards a systematic and deeper understanding of this interface. Drawing on the philosophical domain, we encourage IB scholars to challenge the dominant linear assumption and consider epiphenomenal assumptions of time in the study of internationalization processes. Such an effort should help IB scholars to reassess the

temporal boundaries of internationalization processes; to explain both growth trajectories and regressive cycles of internationalization characterized by disruptions and setbacks, and to investigate re-entry into foreign markets. Future research might also focus on managers' experiential or subjective perceptions of time and how these are manifested in their internationalization-related actions. As the articles in this special issue demonstrate, adopting different philosophical, conceptual and methodological approaches offer the potential to enhance our understanding (cf. Niittymies et al., 2022, in this special issue).

Regarding the conceptual domain, future research might investigate the role of time in IB theories, focusing on how internationalization evolves. This invites a paradigmatic shift from variance-oriented to process-oriented theorizing and explanation, and rethinking the theoretical origins of IB from a process perspective (Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013). Such research can contribute to more process-oriented perspectives on foundational IB frameworks such as the Uppsala model and innovation-related internationalization by embracing time complexity (see Hoorani et al. (2023) for styles of temporal theorizing) and equifinality (Welch et al., 2022). Focusing on the role of time in the conceptual domain can also enable IB scholars to assess the relevance and applicability of IB theories and distinguish between static and dynamic theoretical frameworks by considering their temporal contexts. We suggest that exploring the role of time in the conceptual domain is a pressing research priority for dealing with what some regard as theoretical stagnation, conceptual rigidity, and chronological fossilization in IB research (Poulis & Poulis, 2018).

Future work can also contribute to methodological pluralism in IB. For instance, in this special issue, Amdam and Benito and Niittymies et al. highlight the value of a comparative approach, demonstrating how different methodological practices enable scholars to address

different research questions by accounting for time. Similarly, Decker outlines the value of historical methods for understanding IB phenomena. As IB researchers, we should aim to delve more deeply into methodological issues and consider how we can incorporate time into the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Cross-fertilization with other fields such as business history, organization studies, and other social sciences can further enrich our understanding of how to incorporate temporally-sensitive practices and methods. The call to account for time in research design is addressed to both qualitative and quantitative scholars, who can benefit by acknowledging time complexity and identify ways to better incorporate this complexity in their respective research designs.

Overall, the goal of this special issue is to encourage IB researchers to engage in dialogue that yields research that is more time-sensitive and appreciative of IB's inherent dynamism. This will help us to appreciate the emergence, disruption, and change that characterize IB phenomena, including the complex and non-linear processes of pre-internationalization, market entry and extension, de-internationalization and re-internationalization, and collective and individual actors' cognitions and interactions pertaining to decision-making in rapidly-changing markets and organizational contexts. Many IB phenomena become meaningful *only* when they are contextually situated and temporally embedded. Paraphrasing Pettigrew (1990), we hope that this editorial and special issue create an appetite for giving time to time as a means for catching and better explaining IB realities in flight and over time.

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Table 1: Time and the Three Domains

Domains	Focus of the Domain	Dominant Assumptions of Time in IB	Alternatives	Directions for Future Research
Philosophical	The nature, experience, and flow of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time viewed as linear, objective and measurable • Time existing independently of individuals and phenomena 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time contingent on the emergence and change of phenomena • Time socially constructed by actors • The flow of time not following a linear trajectory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we define time in IB research? • How do different philosophical traditions define the study of time in IB scholarship? • How do different conceptions of time (e.g., subjective, organic, cyclical) advance knowledge of IB phenomena?
Conceptual	Time in IB theories and concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time ignored or taken for granted (as being objective) in IB theories and concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time featuring at various levels of analysis in IB theories • Moving from states to processes • Contextualizing IB theories • Developing a vocabulary for accounting for time in IB theorizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of time in IB theorizing? • How can time-related concepts be defined in IB research? • How do we define and distinguish between dynamic and static theories in IB? • How can process and variance-oriented IB scholarship complement one another in providing stronger theoretical bases?
Methodological	Time in the research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time treated as a variable or boundary condition in variance-oriented research • Time treated as part of context, as backdrop • Time largely ignored in key methodological decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time considered in the duration of field work, the rate and timing of the data collection • Real-time, retrospective, prospective orientations of fieldwork • Time-sensitive methods (e.g. longitudinal and process research, time series analysis, history research, eventful temporality, causal and contextual explanation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we incorporate time into the assembly of qualitative and quantitative data in IB research? • How can we analyze longitudinal or process data qualitatively and quantitatively? • How can we incorporate practices and methods from business history research into IB? • How can we make strong theoretical contributions using temporal, processual and longitudinal research?

Source: The authors