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Collective Action Frames and Policy Windows: The Case of the Project to Export Liquefied Natural Gas from Bolivia to California

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How and why can a political mobilisation prevent what appears to be an economically rational and beneficial government investment? The present paper explores the ways in which both public policy and contentious politics theories can be potentially bridged to answer this question. It suggests ways in which concepts used by public policy theorists such as ‘policy windows’ (Kingdon, 1984) or ‘advocacy coalitions’ (Sabatier, 1999) may be useful to understand the emergence of political opportunities or the construction of collective action frames. The case study to be used is the project to export liquefied gas from Bolivia to California, which was promoted by the administration of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2002 and was cancelled after civil society groups not only mobilise to resist it, but to demand the resignation of the president.

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I. INTRODUCTION

How and why can a political mobilisation prevent what appears to be an economically rational and beneficial government investment? This work aims to answer this question by bridging social movement theories and public policy theories to give a more comprehensive account of the dynamic processes through which policy makers promote a project and social mobilisations emerge to resist it.

The case study to be used is the project to export liquefied natural gas (LNGP) from Bolivia to California, which was promoted by the administration of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada in 2003 and was cancelled after civil society groups not only mobilised to resist it, but demanded the resignation of the president.

A comprehensive link of both fields –public policy and social movement theories- is beyond the scope of this work. Therefore, the core analysis centres on how a policy window (Kingdon, 1984) emerges; how a collective action frame (Snow and Benford, 1992; Tarrow, 1992; 1998) is constructed; and how both concepts are related.

The approach is *theory linking*² and therefore, the relevant question is decomposed in three sub-sets: a) for the policy process, why did the government of Sanchez de Lozada decide to promote the LNGP, even in the context of widespread political and social opposition? b) Regarding the social mobilisations, how did the opposing groups gain support and mobilise successfully against the LNGP; and what were the key conditions for its success? c) And to bridge both fields, in what ways can a policy window trigger the construction of a collective action frame?

Methodological Note

This work constitutes a first attempt to articulate the case study and it has two shortcomings. In the first place, the analysis is not based on field interviews but in secondary sources such as journalistic articles and documents published on the internet. In this respect, the analysis and conclusions have a hypothetical character and shall be verified or falsified with extensive fieldwork and a more comprehensive documentation.

In the second place, the proposed theoretical framework has been used before to analyse other case studies and it is ‘transposed’ here to make sense of the Bolivian experience.³ For this reason, some theoretical concepts might have ‘taken over’ to replace reality. If this is the case, a more refined and accurate analysis shall also arise from the analysis of more empirical information.

² The use of different theories from different fields to make sense of a case study and/or answer a research question motivated by an empirical problem.

³ See Dominguez, C. (2004)

II. MULTIPLE STREAMS AND ADVOCACY COALITIONS

Why did the government of Sanchez de Lozada decide to promote the project to export liquefied natural gas even when there was widespread social and political opposition? What failures, if any, were committed during its implementation?

In contrast with a rational approach to public policy, the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) structures a system of interactions on the basis of four streams: *actors*, *problems*, *policies*, and *politics*. The main premise of the MSF is that an issue reaches the policy agenda when a problem, a policy solution, and someone willing to advance it –the *policy entrepreneur*– coincide in time and open a *policy window* (Kingdon, 1984).

The main objective of this section is to show that the promotion and official announcement of the liquefied natural gas project can be explained by the MSF. Section 2.1 characterises the actors participating in the policy process and complements the ideas of Kingdon (1984) with the notion of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1988). Section 2.2 describes the appearance of a policy window in 2003 and the alternatives faced by the government of Sanchez de Lozada. An exhaustive analysis of these elements is beyond the scope of this work and therefore, the core analysis is centred on the appearance of a policy window and its relations to the rest of the theory.

2.1 Actors and Advocacy Coalitions

According to the MSF actors influencing the policy process can be divided in two clusters. A *visible cluster* is composed for example, by the president, his cabinet, the media, state governors, and high level appointees. Then, a *hidden cluster* comprises actors such as civil servants of lower hierarchy, consultants, and academics. The first cluster is involved in the agenda setting, while the second is usually the one who generates the *agenda*.⁴

This characterisation is not free of criticisms (Zahariadis, 1999:81-85). Most importantly, it portrays monolithic actors using categories such as ‘pressure groups’, ‘the media’, or ‘the administration’. In this sense, although Kingdon (1984) recognises different levels of cohesion, it seems that he assumes each of these actors usually moves in the same direction. As the case study shows, this is not always the case.

For example, the loose governmental coalition that was shaped to win the elections in 2002 might have contributed to divisions regarding the LNGP.⁵ The leaders of the traditional political parties constituting such coalition agreed on the

⁴ The concept of ‘agenda’ refers to ‘...the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time...’(Kingdon, 1984:3). Then, ‘generating the agenda’ refers to the accumulation of knowledge and the formulation of policy solutions on the basis of this knowledge; while ‘setting the agenda’ refers to ‘...the transfer of items from a non-governmental agenda... to a governmental, “formal” agenda...’ (*ibid*:16)

⁵ As explained in Section 3.2 the governmental coalition was constituted in 2002 by three dominant parties with dissimilar political platforms to block the victory of the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) in a second voting round.

project or refrained from disqualifying it, but all of them had different ideas about the main goals and the ways it should be done.⁶

An additional category that emerges in the case study and that did not behave homogeneously is that of 'international actors', most importantly the governments of Chile and Peru. Both of them lobbied heavily in favour of their respective ports to export the natural gas and became clear rivals. The government of Chile even considered setting an economic zone so that new industries to be located near the port of Patillos would be ruled by Bolivian laws. By contrast, the government of Peru offered to compensate for additional costs of building a pipeline that was necessarily longer.

In the category of 'public interest groups' (Kingdon, 1984:48), most unions joined the mobilisations against the LNGP. However, some of the unions from the province of Tarija rejected the social movement and preferred to organise a forum to discuss the costs and benefits of different alternatives to exploit the natural gas (La Prensa, 19-09-03).

A complementary way to characterise participants in the policy process is according to advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1988, 1991; and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). This concept takes into account a dimension that Kingdon does not incorporate in his analysis: the divisions and confrontations of participants are based on knowledge and beliefs about a problem and its possible solutions.

The factors that determine the cohesion of an advocacy coalition are a significant degree of coordinated activity through time and the sharing of normative and causal beliefs. In this sense, the concept cannot be fully applied to the case study because the LNGP was only designed between 2001 and 2002. Therefore, the first requirement –coordinated activity through time– was not met. However, even when there were no *consolidated* advocacy coalitions it is still possible to talk about *emerging* advocacy coalitions (EACs) based on the second requirement –normative and causal beliefs.

A first advocacy coalition was constituted by the government of Gonzales Sanchez de Lozada –including the three traditional political parties–, foreign firms behind Pacific LNG, the entrepreneurial sector from Tarija, and other civil society groups from this region such as the regional worker's union. Its cohesion was a function of three *policy core beliefs*:⁷ a) the natural gas should be exploited and monetised in export markets; b) economically and technically, the best alternative was to export via the port of Patillos in Chile; c) in order to undertake such an ambitious project, the participation of foreign capital was crucial.

A second advocacy coalition was formed by non-traditional political parties such as the MAS (*Movimiento al Socialismo*), the *Movimiento Indígena Pachakutik*, and the Communist Party of Bolivia; the unions' movement and other civil society groups such as professional associations and Aymara intellectuals. The main core beliefs were: a) the law of hydrocarbons should be changed to limit the participation of foreign capital and increase the royalties perceived by the Bolivian state; and b) the natural gas should and could preferably be industrialised before exporting it.

⁶ This conclusion is based on the comparison between declarations of Bertero (2003), Reyes (2003) and Zamora (2003) with other stances by the Bolivian government.

⁷ This concept refers to beliefs about solutions to a specific problem that result from long processes of policy learning (Sabatier, 1999:122, 135)

2.2 Problems, Policies, and Politics: The Opening of a Policy Window

The generation of policy alternatives is usually incremental, because ideas do not come from nowhere (Richardson and Jordan, 1979). On the contrary, proposals evolve historically and adapt to broader circumstances and specific interests of actors participating in the policy game (Kingdon, 1984:79; based on Lindblom). However, the main thesis of the MSF is that this continuity is sometimes interrupted when a certain issue 'hits the policy agenda' (*idem*).

The historical changes in the natural gas policy can be explained by an incremental approach to public policy; but the sudden decision to turn the LNGP into the centrepiece of this policy is better explained by the MSF. According to this approach a sudden policy change is explained by three independent streams that when coinciding, open a *policy window* (Kingdon, 1984:87-88). The first stream explains how problems 'catch' the attention of decision makers, which can happen in at least four ways: a) available indicators show that a problem exists; b) specific studies are conducted; c) feedback on existing programs show a failure; or d) a contingency -such as a crisis or a disaster- draws attention to a particular problem (Kingdon, 1984:90-102).

In the case study, the main indicator was the amount of probed and likely reserves of natural gas.⁸ In the mid-1990s, the official data showed the existence of around 5.7 Tcf⁹ (YPFB, cited in La Prensa, 09-09-03). However, in 1996 a new law of hydrocarbons was approved to allow the participation of private and foreign capital in the hydrocarbons sector. Thereafter, a number of foreign firms invested in the exploitation of natural gas and undertook new studies to find new reserves. In just five years, probed and likely reserves increased from 5.7 to 54.9 Tcf (*idem*). The problem was how to exploit and monetise these resources to increase the income of the Bolivian state and balance the public finances (Zavaleta, 27-01-05)

But the existence of a problem or a condition is not enough to explain the decision of announcing the LNGP in 2003. After all, the discovery of new reserves was not a guarantee that it was feasible to exploit and monetise these resources. Following from this, the second stream shows how proposals to solve a given problem emerge through time. The actors in this stream are specialists in a given sector and usually belong to the hidden cluster. They are members of policy communities – researchers, consultants, and analysts of interest groups- that are engaged with the accumulation of knowledge about certain policy issues (Kingdon, 1984:117)

The presence of policy entrepreneurs is a crucial driver in the policy stream. These actors are usually the ones willing to advocate a policy alternative and 'sell it' in expectation of future returns. In the case study the main policy entrepreneurs were the oil companies that created the Pacific LNG Consortium¹⁰ in 2001. They designed the LNGP and their lobbying activities were crucial to push the project into the policy agenda.

⁸ The *probed reserves* are those that have been discovered and developed, but not exhausted; and the *likely reserves* are those that have been discovered but which volumes – except for the total ones- are not known with certainty.

⁹ Tcf stands for 'trillions of cubic feet'.

¹⁰ Pacific LNG is a consortium constituted by three oil companies: British Gas, PanAmerican Energy, and Repsol YPF.

In this sense, there are at least three important criteria for the emergence and survival of a proposal on the policy agenda (Kingdon, 1984:132-133). The first condition is its *technical feasibility*, which is closely related with the implementation phase. After all, an idea only survives in the long-term if it is physically possible.

For example, since natural gas is highly explosive, any project involving its extraction, transportation, liquefaction, or regasification depends on the safety levels that can be guaranteed and the risk levels that are considered acceptable. It is not surprising to find that projects are often suspended or cancelled because of safety concerns by nearby populations.¹¹

The criterion of technical feasibility is highly elusive and not sufficient – especially in the case of highly complex projects. However, there is a tendency to obviate other aspects when evaluating policy proposals (Vanderburg, 2000). This tendency is accentuated in the case of a project like a natural gas pipeline because the technical aspects should be considered first –given the safety concerns–, which does not make them more important.

The second condition for the survival of an idea is its *value acceptability* in the community of specialists (Kingdon, 1984:132). That is, a project might be acceptable or not, depending on prevailing normative values –such as equity, efficiency, the role of the state, or the environment.

For example, *fiscal discipline* has become a decisive normative value for the survival of ideas in the Bolivian governmental agenda; at least since the first structural adjustment program was implemented in 1985 under the government of Paz Estenssoro. Thereafter, public expenditure –especially for investment in infrastructure– has been cut down, and all major policy goals are now subordinated to attaining an acceptable governmental deficit.

The LNGP was not an exception. The project represented an investment of 6 billion dollars (La Prensa, 09-09-03), equivalent to nearly 75% of the Bolivian GDP.¹² Therefore, it was not possible to implement the project without a long-term increase in the fiscal deficit or without allowing the full participation of private firms, especially foreign ones.

In turn, the participation of private firms introduced *global competitiveness* as an additional normative value to be taken into account in the policy process. Consequently, in order to compete with other global projects the exploitation of natural gas should be done as fast and costless as possible. As explained later, this factor is crucial to understand why the Bolivian government ‘rushed’ to promote and announce the LNGP.

The third condition for the survival of an idea in the policy agenda is related to *anticipating future constraints*; and most importantly *budget constraints* and *public acquiescence*. The budget constraints are intimately related with the normative value of fiscal discipline; the latter has to do with an overall economic goal and the former with the operational details of how such a goal is achieved year by year.

¹¹ For example, a report prepared by the Congressional Research Service of the United States shows that more than ten import terminals where the natural gas would be regasified were suspended or cancelled in the last years in the coasts of Mexico and the United States.

¹² Calculation based on data published by the World Bank (2003), http://www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/aag/bol_aag.pdf

The concept of public acquiescence refers to the fact that policy proposals need to be acceptable for the *general public*, defined by Kingdon (1984:138) as whatever the community of specialists have in mind when they take into account the potential reactions of the public to their proposals.

In the case study, even when the technical analyses favoured the project to export gas via Chile rather than via Peru, it was clear that the project would find public opposition on the basis of the limited royalties that the Bolivian State would get from the project. In this context, it seems that the strategy of the government was to create a false debate about the available alternatives and to delay the official announcement for one year.¹³ In the meantime, the discourse used for selling the project was changed to stress its side benefits. It was rephrased from ‘a scheme to exploit natural gas’ to ‘the last opportunity to foster the social and economic development of Bolivia’, and even to ‘the last opportunity to recover a sovereign exit to the sea’. The language of ‘inevitability’ was not only used by officials from the Bolivian government, but by representatives of Pacific LNG and officials from international institutions such as the IMF.

The coincidence between a problem and a feasible solution explains a great deal of how the policy agenda is formed. However, the explanation of the case study is incomplete without taking into account the broader socio-political context –the politics stream. In this sense, four important components should be considered: the *governmental willingness*, the emergence of *global opportunities*, the *national mood*; and the *distribution of political forces*.¹⁴

The election of Sanchez de Lozada in 2002 was a crucial factor affecting the governmental willingness to promote the LNGP. Being an entrepreneur linked to the mining sector, Sanchez de Lozada had traditionally favoured the active participation of foreign firms in the mining and hydrocarbons sectors. In fact, the controversial hydrocarbons law of 1996 was approved at the end of his first mandate as president of Bolivia and it was predictable that he would favour the LNGP.

At the same time, natural gas projects involve capital investments that are only possible when the market is secured through long-term contracts, of at least fifteen years. In the absence of such contracts, the monetisation of natural gas is not possible, no matter the amount of certified reserves and regardless feasible projects exist or not.

In this respect, an additional factor that drove the Bolivian government to promote the project in 2003 was the crisis of natural gas supply that the United States experienced one year earlier. When this crisis was accompanied by public declarations of key figures favouring the imports of natural gas¹⁵ and by changes in laws to ease the installation of import terminals, it became a concrete *global opportunity* to secure a market and monetise the Bolivian natural gas. From the point of view of those promoting the LNGP –i.e. the government of Sanchez de Lozada and Pacific LNG-, it was a valuable *policy window* that should be used swiftly before

¹³ Exactly one year passed between representatives of Pacific LNG suggesting publicly that the best alternative was the port of Patillos in Chile (March, 2002) and the government of Sanchez de Lozada making the official announcement (March, 2003).

¹⁴ Kingdon (1984) only mentions the last two, but in the context of an open economy the emergence of global opportunities caused by social, economic, and political events in other countries also contributes to the politics stream.

¹⁵ The most important was the declaration of Alan Greenspan during a congressional testimony in June of 2003, calling for ‘a major expansion of LNG terminal import capacity’ (Greenspan, 10-Jun-03, cited in Congressional Research Service, 2004)

other global competitors could secure favourable contracts to export natural gas to the United States.

However, the national mood and the distribution of political forces are also important variables that should be taken into account as part of the politics stream. In the case study, it was clear that none of these two variables were favourable to implement the LNGP in 2003 because: a) in his previous mandate, Sánchez de Lozada had promoted other failed experiments to capitalise the hydrocarbons sector; b) the governing coalition was formed overnight to win the 2002 elections and it was not strong enough;¹⁶ c) the political parties that had been excluded by such coalition enjoyed enough support to oppose any governmental initiative; and d) the repression of social mobilisations at the beginning of 2003¹⁷ and the unwillingness of the president to give any concessions, destroyed the little sympathy and legitimacy that the government had to promote any ambitious project.¹⁸

In this context, building the necessary consensus and support to implement the LNGP looked almost impossible. It meant a complicated process of bargaining with other advocacy coalitions (see 2.1) and the accommodation of forces with vested interests that would take time, even years. Ultimately, this would probably end up with a change of the hydrocarbons law to increase the amount of royalties earned by the Bolivian state, a compromise that foreign firms would not accept easily.

But policy windows do not remain open for long and therefore, decision makers face the dilemma between postponing a project to build the necessary consensus, losing the window of opportunity or proceeding with the project, even when not all the potential difficulties are tied up (Kingdon, 1984). The final decision is necessarily the result of an inexact calculation based on the cognitive experience of policy makers and on prevailing normative values.

In the case study, it seems that given the normative values in the policy stream –technical feasibility, fiscal discipline, and global competitiveness- the government of Sanchez de Lozada overvalued the prevailing market opportunities and the need to secure a contract to sell natural gas to the United States; and underestimated the national mood and the distribution of political forces, including the emergence of opposing advocacy coalitions. The premise was to make use of the policy window, even when not all the potential difficulties were tied up.

III. Collective Action and ‘Contentious Politics’

How did civil society groups in Bolivia gain support and mobilise against the project to export liquefied natural gas? What were the key conditions of their success?

According to social movement theorists (SMTs) a necessary pre-condition is the existence of a grievance because people don’t mobilise spontaneously or without a reason. As a first condition, the grievance should be framed in the broader social, economic, and historical context so that the group mobilisation makes sense even

¹⁶ See footnote 4 and Section 3.2 below.

¹⁷ As explained in Section III, it is important to consider that the mobilisations against the LNGP can’t be analysed as an isolated event. When Sánchez de Lozada became president, the country was facing a deep economic crisis and he was not able to get financial aid from international actors. The main events that contributed to this lack of support were the Argentinean economic crisis and the aftermath of September 11th.

¹⁸ These mobilisations emerged against a new tax on wages that was part of a fiscal adjustment plan promoted by the IMF. At the beginning of his mandate, Sanchez de Lozada enjoyed rates of approval of 46% but one year later such rates fell to 30% (Vegas, 2003).

when the probabilities of succeeding are limited. A second condition is the existence of mobilising structures that can substitute for the access to material and institutional resources.¹⁹ The third condition is the support from powerful allies, and the fourth and final condition is the opening of a political opportunity.

The main goal of this section is to provide an explanation of the case study by analysing the presence of these conditions. An exhaustive analysis of these elements is beyond the scope of this work, and therefore the core analysis is centred on the collective action frame and its relation with the rest of the theory.²⁰

3.1) Grievances: A Pre-Condition for Mobilisation

In the case of Bolivia, the mobilisations against the LNGP cannot be analysed in isolation. They are part of a longer cycle of protest (Tarrow, 1994) that began in the 1990s, when the Bolivian population began to experience the social and economic consequences of structural adjustment programs (SAPs). The resistance against the LNGP is just another chapter in a long list of civil society mobilisations, including protests against the coca eradication scheme implemented in 1986, the ‘water war’ in 1999-2000, and the mobilisations against increasing taxes at the beginning of 2003.

In this context, the grievance at the end of 2003 was not the exploitation of natural gas *per se* or the use of a Chilean port to export the liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Mexico and the United States.²¹ The main grievance was a combination of two factors: a) the favourable conditions given to the Pacific LNG Consortium in contrast with the limited percentage of royalties that would accrue to the Bolivian state from the project; and b) the fact that the LNGP was yet *another* project promoted by a government with scarce legitimacy and without properly consulting the main stakeholders - the Bolivians themselves.

A detailed analysis of public standings, press releases, and interviews of the movement leaders supports this hypothesis. This shows that a) the exploitation of natural gas not only did not figure as a source of grievance *per se*, but it was openly recognised - even by the most radical groups that opposed the project- as the last opportunity to foster the social and economic development of Bolivia; and b) each time there was an attempt to reduce the conflict to the decision between a Chilean or a Peruvian port to export the natural gas, the response was always similar: ‘...as long as the hydrocarbons continue in the hands of the transnational firms, it is useless to discuss if it is going to be via Chile or Peru...’ (Morales, 2003)

¹⁹ This framework has often been used to explain collective action by ‘outsiders’ or non-institutional actors. However, it might also serve to explain mobilisations by insiders and stronger actors. An example is given by the mobilisations that emerged in the province of Santa Cruz in year 2005, which proclaimed an autonomous government and constituted a countermovement to the kind of mobilisations described in this paper.

²⁰ The rigorous analysis of all these elements requires extensive fieldwork since they are ‘non-discursive’.

²¹ The fact that the natural gas would be industrialised and exported in a Chilean port has often been mentioned as the main source of grievance. This claim is based on the symbolic importance that the War of the Pacific (1879) has for Bolivians -when Chile seized the Bolivian littoral and deprived this country from access to the sea-. Although this work does not deny that such historical specificity actually played a crucial role in articulating the movement against the LNGP, a preliminary analysis of discourses and public stances show that it is more often mentioned by government officials than by leaders of the social movement themselves. Compare for example, declarations of the foreign minister, Carlo Saavedra; and the president Sanchez de Lozada; with those of Evo Morales in La Prensa (09-09-03)

Therefore, the mobilisations against the LNGP stand out from the recent history of Bolivian contentious politics in one crucial aspect. The objects of grievance in other mobilisations had implied immediate –even overnight- changes in the material basis of the participants: the end of an alternative source of livelihood, a trade-off between spending money in water or other basic needs, and a reduction in the disposable income, respectively.

By contrast, the LNGP was a national project with deep consequences for the country's long-term pattern of economic growth and socioeconomic development, but with no *immediate* changes in the material basis of those who resisted it. Therefore, it was not that easy to define whether it was worth it or not to mobilise against the project.

In a first stage, between Sanchez de Lozada taking power in September 2002 and the project being formally announced in March 2003, the LNGP figured as just another grievance in the agenda of popular organisations. It was 'dissolved' or 'eclipsed' by the most diverse demands brought forward by teachers, peasants, policemen, and other groups.

In a second stage, the project was announced and the government launched an intense media campaign to convince the population about its benefits, including the convenience of exporting natural gas via Chile (La Prensa, 09-09-03). As a result, the LNGP ascended in the agenda of popular groups, but the concrete mobilisations against the project were still incipient and non-violent.

It was not until the military repressed a protest near the locality of Warisata and killed six Aymara people that the popular discontent won momentum and the mobilisations against the LNGP increased dramatically. Only then, an additional factor contributed to make the grievance more tangible and easier to identify: a repressive government that once again wanted to promote a project at any cost.

3.2) Collective Action Frames: Naming Enemies and Constituencies

But a grievance is not enough to trigger a social mobilisation. Individuals should frame it in broader economic, socio-political, and historical contexts; interpret the surrounding events and construct a guide to action (Tarrow, 1992:177). They need to build the pronouns 'we' –the challengers- and 'they' –the challenged- and make them visible through discursive devices that express and publicise the foundations of a social mobilisation. In a few words, it is necessary to build a collective action frame (CAF) with the symbolic power to turn grievances into worthwhile reasons to mobilise.

The main challenge is to frame claims so that a movement gains sufficient *critical mass* (Marwell and Oliver, 1993:1-4); it needs to be familiar²² enough to be understood by members of the movement, but sufficiently flexible²³ to adapt to changing circumstances and attract powerful allies. To achieve both objectives simultaneously, the available symbols and meanings should be reshaped and readapted (Snow and Benford, 1992:136; Tarrow, 1998:109).

²² The term 'familiar' refers to the capacity to make reference to circumstances or symbols that are well known by potential supporters of a movement.

²³ The term 'flexible' refers to the capacity to be adopted by potential supporters without implying fundamental contradictions between its content and supporters' beliefs.

In the case of the movement to resist against the LNGP, the CAF was based on three discursive references that were familiar and flexible enough to appeal for potential supporters and powerful allies. None of these references were new and did not appear spontaneously when the project was announced. The first element was historical-ideological, the second element was one of political culture, and the last one was ethno-nationalistic. The three of them intermingled in a discourse that named the government of Sanchez de Lozada and the transnational firms as ‘the enemy’ and ‘all those who have suffered from their repressive neoliberal policies’ as the potential constituency of the social movement.

The first source was the historical memory of ‘the fights that the Bolivian people have sustained against the unjust elite and the repressive government’ (Mamani, 02-10-03). In this respect, the peasant movement in Bolivia has been strong since the beginning of the 20th century. The need to organise and fight to consolidate their communal land and gain access to health and education programs contributed to the construction of a shared identity already in the 1920s (Cárdenas, 1988:516).

Such identity, based on the idea of a common historical fight was later reinforced during the War with Paraguay at the beginning of the 1930s and during two decades of fights that culminated in 1952 when the peasant movement defeated the army and achieved the nationalization of the mining sector, as well as agrarian, educative, and voting reforms (Mamani, 02-10-03).

In the last decades the elderly have orally transmitted the historical memory of these conflicts with the accompanying sentiment of pride. This latter is particularly important in the communities of Sorata and Warisata where people participated actively in the war against Paraguay -and where the first protests were repressed by the military in 2003. The people in these communities even keep the guns used in 1952 as a symbol of the ‘...historical legitimacy to become the guides of the country’s destiny...’ (Mamani, 02-10-03).

In the last fifteen years ‘the fight against neoliberal policies promoted by the State and their pervasive effects’ has become the last chapter of this historical-ideological²⁴ quest. Many social mobilisations since the mid 1980s have been against projects identified either as neoliberal –like the privatisation of water services- or as by-products of neoliberal policies –like the scheme to eradicate coca harvests.

Therefore, the LNGP did not trigger the creation of a completely new identity but made once again visible that many social groups were structurally and ideologically placed in opposition to the recent policies promoted by the State. In this context, it was framed as part of the grievances suffered by various groups, including those protesting against the coca eradication scheme or those who protested against the privatisation of water three years earlier.

The repression in Warisata worked as a further catalyser to activate and reshape an identity that was already shared by many groups. It deprived the government of Sanchez de Lozada of any legitimacy left and provided social organisations with the legitimacy necessary to oppose the project nationwide. The pronoun ‘we’ did not stand for those who have suffered the repression because of the LNGP, but for those in Bolivia who have suffered any sort of repression by the government promoting neoliberal policies.

²⁴ Here the term ‘ideological’ refers to the underlying assumption –which might be right or not- of certain distribution of power between different actors.

The second element was a well consolidated political culture based on ‘the fight to recover and open new democratic spaces’. In this sense, the peasant movement has been crucial for the democratisation processes of the last two decades. By the mid 1990s popular organisations not only engaged in protesting activities, but had become active players in the arena of formal politics. The first indigenous political parties were created short after the law of decentralisation was approved in 1995, but were grounded in popular organisations that had been consolidated since the 1970s (Van Cott, 2003:755).

In 2000, the successful protests against a scheme to privatise water services in the locality of Cochabamba increased the visibility of Evo Morales and Felipe Quispe, two important leaders of the resistance against the LNGP. This victory and the increasing disillusionment with the performance of traditional political parties contributed to the strength of indigenous political parties which received 27% of the votes in the presidential elections of 2002 (Van Cott, 752; 770).

However, under the Bolivian electoral laws if no candidate wins with an absolute majority in the first round, the president should be elected by the Congress in a second round. In 2002, the two candidates that competed in the second round were Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada from the MNR and Evo Morales from the MAS. Then, given the threat that a candidate from a non-traditional political party could be elected, the three traditional political parties -MNR, MIR, and ADN- made a coalition to block the victory of Evo Morales and allow the election of Sanchez de Lozada (Van Cott, 2003).

As a result, the political coalition that reached the executive power in 2002 was weak and unstable,²⁵ while the collective identity of the popular movement was galvanised as ‘we’, the ones from whom democracy has been stolen and who challenge ‘them’, the ones who have stolen democracy (Morales et al., 2003).

Third and final, the CAF borrowed from and intermingled with an ethno-nationalistic discourse that had long been used by indigenous groups, particularly the Aymaras. This discourse advocates for the restitution of original forms of political and socioeconomic organisation that were characteristic of the Aymara people before the Spanish conquest.

These references might have worked as powerful devices to win constituencies for two main reasons. First, 61% of the population in Bolivia is indigenous and second, the recent socioeconomic crises affecting the majority of the Bolivian population may have accentuated the feeling that there is a need to redesign and rebuild the whole social and political system.

3.3) Mobilising Structures and Powerful Allies

The collective action frame and the new constructed identities are crucial for understanding a social movement. However, ‘...identification does not equal association or organisation...’ (Schaffer, 1985: 51) and therefore, the analysis of other elements proposed by SMTs becomes even more important.

²⁵ In a contra factual scenario, this does not mean that the coalition around the MAS would have been stronger or more legitimate. In any case, the problem is the polarisation of Bolivian politics between those supporting traditional parties and those supporting popular-based parties (Zavaleta, 27-01-05).

The CAF is not a mere rhetorical device, unrelated with the material conditions of a movement's constituency. Since it is based on concrete political, social, and historical contexts, it hints to the existence of *mobilising structures*²⁶ and the presence of potential *powerful allies* that are determinant for the scope and scale of a social movement.

Beyond its emotional and evocative functions the memory of previous historical fights activated three mobilising structures that have survived over the years and that are still active and working (Mamani, 02-10-03). These are: a) organisational models used traditionally by indigenous groups, b) probed and well-learned repertoires of contention (Tilly, 1978), and c) traditional indigenous-peasant leadership.

Firstly, contemporary organisational models such as the peasant unions have not totally supplanted traditional ones based on the *ayllus*. They have complemented them and in many cases, the original models have only changed name (Cardenas, 1988:516; Carter, 1988:456-486). Even when the principles of economic individualism have disrupted the *ayllu*, the communal sense and organisational experience are still present in many activities, from the organisation of festivities to the building of roads (Carter, 1988:474).

Secondly, the coalition between peasants and workers to strike and paralyse the country was not new in the repertoires of contention used by mobilising groups in Bolivia. Such a measure was already used successfully in 1979 to put pressure on the government (Cardenas, 1988:527) and it has been used repeatedly thereafter. The same can be said of marches to the main cities of Bolivia, blocking of roads, or hunger strikes by the movement leaders.

Third and finally, a network of traditional leaders or *mallkus*²⁷ that had been reshaped and consolidated since the beginning of the 20th Century was crucial to provide the movement with enough *critical mass* (Marwell and Oliver, 1993:1-4). In this sense, the figure of the *mallku* is nowadays transposed with the union's leadership and has an enormous mobilising capacity that in many cases –like the example of Felipe Quispe as executive secretary of the CSUTB-²⁸ reaches nationwide scales (Mamani, 2003).

On the other hand, the historical consolidation of these mobilising structures contributed to the protagonist role that popular organisations had in the democratisation processes since the 1970s. Progressively, many of these civil society groups used their organisational experience, repertoires of contention and traditional leadership to participate and push reforms in the arena of formal politics.

Then, the law of decentralisation of 1994 and the law of popular participation of 1995 –a symbolical victory for the Aymara movement-constituted a turning point in the relation between popular organisations and political parties. By creating 311 new municipalities in rural areas and by recognising the personality of indigenous communities and peasant unions, these laws provided grass roots groups with the

²⁶ For the purposes of this work, I will define 'mobilising structures' as the devices that individuals use to get together, transfer information about values, ideas, and projects; and turn individual demands into group claims (Castells, 1983; Tarrow, 1992, 1998; Zald, 1992).

²⁷ The closest translation to the Aymara term of *mallku* is that of 'authority', whose legitimacy is in turn based on its generosity and capacity to redistribute. See Platt (1988:408)

²⁸ CSUTB stands for 'Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores de Bolivia' (Bolivian Confederation of Workers Unions).

power to create their own political parties and participate in election processes (Klein, 2003:261-262).

Therefore, the reference to the fight for new democratic spaces was more than a rhetorical allusion. It legitimated the support of powerful allies in the institutional arena, most importantly of indigenous political parties like the *Movimiento al Socialismo* and the *Movimiento Indígena Pachakutik* –led by Evo Morales and Felipe Quispe respectively.

Both political organisations contributed with an institutional platform to oppose the government’s initiatives –including the LNGP-, an additional forum to gain constituencies, networking capacity in the national level, material resources and political legitimacy to reject the project.

Finally, the migration of Aymara people to the cities has contributed to the penetration of their culture and the manifestation of their identity in new social spheres.²⁹ There are a number of bilingual Aymaras that are teachers or professionals in various sectors and therefore, ‘being Aymara’ does not mean ‘to be a peasant’ anymore (Albó, 1988:31).

In this sense, the reference to an ethno-nationalistic discourse provided the movement with powerful allies and additional mobilising capacity in different localities of Bolivia and in some cases, outside the country. Even with little or no formal coordination, service and commercial units were closed in solidarity with the movement; university campuses provided with physical spaces to coordinate and discuss mobilising activities; and Aymara intellectuals expressed their support in Ecuador, Peru, and other neighbouring countries.

Overall, the existence of functional mobilising structures and the presence of potential powerful allies turned the constructed ‘we’, the ones who have fought historically, the ones who have contributed to the democratisation of the country, and in some cases, the ones who identify with or support the Aymara nation, into ‘we’, the ones who *can* actually mobilise against the government.

Then, with the capacity to combine contentious politics and institutional resources the movement expanded nationally. By mid October 2003, the LNGP was not possible without further repression and without confrontations between the military and mobilising groups. Isolated by members of his cabinet and with little legitimacy left, Sanchez de Lozada had no alternative but to cancel the project and present his resignation.

3.4) Political Opportunities

Finally, social movement theorists have pointed to the existence of a political opportunity as an important condition for contentious collective action (Jenkins, 1984; Tarrow, 1992). Defined as a re-alignment of political forces in such a way that new and old actors have the opportunity to become visible, a political opportunity represents a chance for political opponents to block governmental initiatives; and a chance for social groups that have been systematically excluded by public policies to get the attention of authorities.

²⁹ In this sense, Albó (1988:262) has documented that even Aymaras living in urban areas continue different traditions such as the celebration of *Pachamama*, the goddess of agriculture according to the original Aymara cosmology.

Firstly, the government of Sanchez de Lozada was a last-minute coalition conformed by three different parties with dissimilar ideologies and political platforms with the objective of winning the elections in 2002 (Van Cott, 2003:760). The weaknesses and divisions of such coalition were already evident at the beginning of 2003 when the government repressed –unsuccessfully– a number of social mobilisations against a scheme to implement a new tax on salaries.

In this context, the LNGP was a complex and ambitious project that required a minimum level of consensus. However, none of the three traditional parties agreed completely on a policy for the exploitation of natural gas and all of them expressed differences about the project's details (see 2.1).

The military, a crucial actor for containing the social mobilisations was also divided. On one hand, the high ranks agreed that the LNGP was the last opportunity to negotiate a sovereign port with Chile; but on the other, the lower ranks favoured the opposition against it (La Prensa, 09-09-03).

A loose governmental coalition and divisions within the military³⁰ represented a political opportunity for those excluded in the elections of 2002. It was a chance to block the initiative of a government that was vulnerable and do not have enough legitimacy; and depending on the responses to the social mobilisations, an opportunity for contributing to its collapse. Therefore, it was not surprising that Sanchez de Lozada found himself isolated after everything had gone wrong with the announcement and implementation of the project.

Secondly, discourses and public stances by groups that mobilised during September and October of 2003 show a mix of demands that go beyond the LNGP. This was not only a consequence of a collective action frame that was flexible and familiar enough to attract constituencies (see 2.2), but of the opening of a concrete political opportunity.

The LNGP was such an important project that any opposition to it would certainly catch the attention of the government.³¹ But being the main issue at stake, the LNGP worked as an 'attraction field' and opened a space in the public arena for other groups to show up and place their demands.

Even with little or no coordination, social mobilisations increased in different provinces of Bolivia and took the city of La Paz by the beginning of October. The demands and claims ranged from agricultural programs to rejecting the FTAA (Free Trade of Agreement of the Americas) and demanding the freedom of political prisoners.

In summary, the project became not only a source of grievance, but a potential political opportunity for two kinds of actors: a) those that had been unsuccessful in placing their particular demands before the government; and b) those that were excluded by the political system in the elections of 2002.

³⁰ See La Prensa (09-09-03)

³¹ Although, as explained later this does not mean that the normative values ruling the policy process would easily be changed or that the government would grant concessions to any opposing actor.

IV. Policy Windows and Collective Action Frames

In what ways is the policy process of the liquefied natural gas related to the mobilisations that emerged to reject it? In what ways can a policy window trigger the construction of a collective action frame?

Public policy is related with the emergence of contentious collective action in two ways. Firstly, if the social implications of a project are disregarded, the very process of public policy becomes a source of grievance for those stakeholders that are not consulted. And under certain conditions -analysed in section III- a grievance can be framed to shape a suitable collective action frame (CAF).

In turn, the CAF is not merely a discursive tool. It is the expression of social and historical realities and therefore, is intimately related to pre-existing mobilising structures. Thus, if the policy process minimises the social and historical variables, it is likely to underestimate the potential resistance to a project.

Secondly, if a policy window is an opportunity to implement a project, it may also turn into a political opportunity for some groups to mobilise and get the attention of policy makers, as explained in Section III and extended below.

As already mentioned, more fieldwork is required for a more conclusive analysis and therefore, the main aims of this section are to use notions of contentious politics and public policy to make sense of the case study; and to pose questions for future research.

4.1 The Policy Process as a Source of Grievance

The policy process becomes a source of grievance at two levels. At the level of *practice*, policy makers operate according to a compartmentalised conception of reality, a practical way to breakdown problems into labels such as ‘the technical’, ‘the economic’, or ‘the social’. This compartmentalisation obeys to normative values that prevail in the policy stream, assign different weights to different problems, and dictate which variables justify more attention.

At the level of *discourse*,³² policy makers need to justify why certain variables do not deserve an exhaustive analysis. Assumptions about problems, agents, and their relations reduce implications of public policy to scales that are intellectually manageable (Dryzek, 1997:80-81).

Both levels –practice and discourse- shape the cognitive experience of policy makers and their particular way of apprehending reality (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999:131; Vanderburg, 2000:67). In their minds, the world looks like a ‘chessboard’ that can be rationally and deliberately modified. Therefore, the ‘peasant’ or the ‘indigenous leader’ is just another piece that can be neutralised or not taken into account.

In the case study, the government of Sanchez de Lozada promoted a project that met the normative values of technical feasibility, fiscal discipline, and global competitiveness. However, the social, political, and historical specificities that could hinder its implementation were badly taken into account. Instead of opening the

³² ‘Discourse’ is defined as a ‘...shared way of apprehending the world that is embedded in language and enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts...’ (Dryzek, 1997:8)

policy process to allow the main stakeholders –the Bolivians themselves- to appropriate the project and modify it -i.e., changing the hydrocarbons law to increase the royalties received by the Bolivian state-, the government ‘closed’ the process and created a false debate about the most suitable port to export the LNG.

At the level of discourse, the omission was legitimated in two manners. Firstly, the LNGP was considered as ‘the last opportunity that Bolivia has to foster its development’. And secondly, even when there were signs of resistance against it, the opposing groups were conceived as ‘peasants’ or even ‘criminals’, with no legitimacy to negotiate with the government.

Three issues emerge from this analysis: a) whether the cognitive experience of policy makers can be re-shaped; b) whether prevailing normative values are modifiable to take into account relevant variables; and c) whether such adjustment is possible through institutional channels of representation and avoiding confrontation with mobilising groups.

A definite answer cannot be provided without extensive fieldwork, especially on the nature of the policy process around the LNGP. However, at least in theory shortcomings in the policy process play an important role in oversimplifying reality. Therefore, if these deficiencies are overcome certain problems may become visible, even if this implies an adjustment of normative values in the policy stream (Kingdon, 1984; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999:138). For example, with enough information about an issue that has been minimised during the policy process, a public policy might be taken off the governmental agenda and a policy window closes –if it ever appeared- (Kingdon, 1984:169).

Unfortunately, the cancellation of the LNGP can only illustrate how normative values were modified too late after confrontations with contentious groups escalated. Firstly, a policy window appeared in 2003 and the main task was to implement a project that met the requirements of technical feasibility, fiscal discipline, and global competitiveness. In turn, these normative values dictated the hierarchy and relative importance of problems that should be tackled. It seems that the social and political dimensions of the project were relegated.

Secondly, even when the LNGP did not imply an immediate change in the material basis of those who mobilised to resist it, it was implemented in the context of a delicate distribution of political forces and of general disapproval given the prevailing economic situation and recent repressions of other mobilising groups. The margin of error was narrow and therefore, any unexpected event, any step out of the line could make the LNGP impossible.

The drop that ‘spilled over’ came in September 2003, when a group of Aymara people from the community of Warisata blocked roads to demand a rural development plan and protest against the LNGP and the Free Trade of Agreement of the Americas (BBC, 18/10/03). A number of tourists, including some American citizens were trapped by the demonstrations and the American embassy put pressure on the Bolivian government to break the blockades and realise them (La Prensa, 21-09-03).

The government’s response was to launch a military operation led by the minister of defence himself. The confrontation with the protesting groups ended with several people dead, including a five-year-old child (La Prensa, 04-10-03). It was after this repressive action that the MAS and other social and political organisations joined the protests nationwide. There was now a more tangible grievance.

Thirdly, the government of Sanchez de Lozada showed ambiguous responses to the month-long protests that took place around the country between the end of September and mid-October of 2003. The attempts to solve the conflict via dialogue were followed by confrontations resulting in the death of more than thirty people.

Three factors might explain this ambiguous response: a) the underestimation of the social movement; b) the resistance to reconsider the normative values that ruled the policy process and therefore, to cancel a project that was feasible and convenient from the technical and economic point of view, but socially and politically unfeasible; and c) the pressure from international actors such as the International Monetary Fund.

In the meantime, the collective action frame that was crafted to justify the social movement activated existing mobilising structures and appealed to powerful allies, as explained in Section 3.3. By the time the government began to open the policy process, the movement had already radicalised and protesting groups taken the city of La Paz.³³

Fourth and finally, it seems that confrontations between the 11th and the 13th of October triggered the final reconsideration of the project. Now, the social and political factors weighted more than the economic and technical. The normative values ruling the policy process had been adjusted. As a result, members of the cabinet withdrew their support to President Sanchez de Lozada, the project was cancelled, the president was expelled, and the vice-president took over and offered to organise a referendum to decide the best alternative to exploit the natural gas. The policy window was finally closed.

4.2 Policy Windows as Political Opportunities

Policy makers and supporters of social mobilisations move according to their own cognitive experiences and ‘rules of the game’. Therefore, what is perceived by decision makers as a valuable policy window (Kingdon, 1984) might at the same time be a political opportunity for group supporters (Tarrow, 1998).

Moreover, a policy window that is badly managed may become the point of departure to construct a collective action frame that justifies the opposition against a project or a public policy. The distinction between the project *per se* and its respective policy process is not trivial: the fact that a mobilisation is triggered by a non inclusive –and sometimes repressive- process does not mean that it opposes the essence of a project –e.g. exploiting the natural gas.

However, the task of finding the real aims behind the discourses and public stances of a mobilising group is not an easy one. The CAF has an accentuating and strategic character because it serves to publicise and make visible grievances, demands, constituencies, and constructed identities (3.2). Distorting and overstating is part of its strategic nature to challenge authorities and achieve a solution for a given grievance. Moreover, since the CAF functions as an umbrella for different groups it is likely to find differing goals between different supporters and powerful allies of a social movement.

³³ On the 5th of October, vice-president Carlos Mesa offered to increase the royalties perceived by the Bolivian State from the LNGP and on the 15th of October the president offered to organise a general consultation with the Bolivian people about the LNGP. However, thousands of people had already taken the streets of La Paz and by the 6th of October, the city was controlled by the social movement.

What were the main goals behind the opposition against the LNGP? A preliminary analysis of the case study shows at least three non-mutually-exclusive possibilities: a) it was a struggle for redistribution and the main goal was to change the project and increase the royalties accrued to the Bolivian state; b) it was a struggle for political power and the main goal was to hamper a project that was promoted by a government constituted by political opponents; and c) it was a struggle for recognition and the main goal was not to cancel the project but to increase the visibility of marginalised and disfavoured groups.

In the first case –a redistribution struggle-, one may ask if it was actually feasible to modify the project to increase the royalties received by the Bolivian state or to industrialise the natural gas before exporting it. In other words, it is necessary to enquire whether the language of inevitability and the discourse portraying the LNGP as the last chance to foster the economic development of Bolivia (see Section 2.3) was applicable or a distortion of reality.

If none of the policy alternatives proposed by other advocacy coalitions were actually possible and therefore the LNGP constituted the dramatic ‘last opportunity’ for Bolivia, then the success of the social movement can only be relative because the main goal –redistribution through exploitation and monetisation of natural gas- was not achieved. In other words, to stop a repressive and non-inclusive government may be considered as a success; but to miss a window of opportunity is not an achievement if the opposition was not against the monetisation of natural gas *per se*.³⁴

The problem when a public policy is hampered via contentious politics is the unequal levels of accountability between policy makers and leaders of social mobilisations. While policy makers are accountable for the pervasive effects of public policies or for the lost benefits if these are cancelled; social leaders³⁵ are only accountable for preventing the first ones.

With adequate channels of representation, contentious actors could appropriate public policies, influence the policy process, and change the respective normative values. They could even stop projects, but they would at least become accountable for the last consequences –e.g. missing a policy window.

In the second case –political struggle-, the movement may be considered successful because it not only forced the cancellation of the project, but also the resignation of Sanchez de Lozada and a rearrangement of political forces. However, the problem when an excluded political group opposes a project promoted by a government with scarce legitimacy remains the same as in the case of a redistribution struggle. Social movement leaders are only accountable for the political victory, but not for the lost economic benefits.

In the third and final case –recognition struggle-, it may be argued that the cancellation of the LNGP has a symbolic importance and that it was actually a victory for the social movement. However, such symbolic importance might actually decrease or be negotiable if adequate channels of representation allow for the recognition and accommodation of different stakeholders.

Whatever the case, the implications are the same. On the one hand, social and political difficulties arise when policy makers have no adequate feedback to adjust normative values, reconsider a policy window, or design policies that take into account potential discontent in the social and political arenas. On the other,

³⁴ Rather than the opposition against the particular project promoted by Pacific LNG and/or its respective policy process.

³⁵ Although all supporters should in theory be accountable, the leaders play a crucial role in articulating the collective action frame of a social movement.

contentious politics emerge when people lack institutional resources to express their concerns and participate in the process of policy making. The main enquiry for future research is to find if both difficulties can be resolved through adequate channels of representation and how these should be designed.

V. Conclusions

Section II showed that the case study fits the basic assumptions of the multiple streams framework: the existence of four streams –actors, problems, policies, and politics- that when coinciding, open a policy window. It also shows that the first stream – actors- can be complemented with the notion of advocacy coalitions, as theorised by Sabatier (1999).

On the basis of these theories it seems that the coincidence between the discovery of new reserves of natural gas, the existence of a feasible project proposed by Pacific LNG, and the energy crisis in the United States opened a window of opportunity for the Bolivian government.

Considering the lack of consensus in the politics stream and the emergence of opposing advocacy coalitions, the government of Sanchez de Lozada faced the dilemma between postponing the project to build the necessary consensus, losing the window of opportunity or proceeding with the project, even when not all the potential difficulties were tied up. At the end, it seems that an inexact calculation led the government of Sanchez de Lozada to overvalue the market opportunities and undervalue the social and political opposition.

But this is just a partial account of the case study. Even potential political and social opposition is not a guarantee that such opposition is going to mobilise effectively and successfully. Moreover, it does not explain why it was the LNGP and not another government initiative that forced Sanchez de Lozada to resign in 2003. Therefore, to fully understand the case study, it is necessary to analyse the other side of the equation: the emergence of mobilisations against the project.

In this respect, Section III shows that the success of the social mobilisations against the LNGP depended on four conditions. In the first place, there were three sources of grievance: a) the favourable conditions given to the Pacific LNG Consortium; b) the fact that the LNGP was yet *another* project promoted by a government with scarce legitimacy and without properly consulting the main stakeholders; and c) the repressive actions of a government that once again wanted to promote a project at any cost.

Then, the movement crafted a collective action frame that was familiar and flexible enough to gain sufficient critical mass. Three elements are identifiable in this discursive device: the first one was historical-ideological, the second element was one of political culture, and the last one was ethno-nationalistic.

In turn, these discursive elements activated existing mobilising structures. Most important to mention are: a) organisational models used traditionally by indigenous groups, b) probed and well-learned repertoires of contention; and c) traditional indigenous-peasant leadership. At the same time, the same discursive elements attracted the support of two kinds of powerful allies: indigenous political parties and Aymara groups living in urban areas and outside Bolivia.

Fourth and final, in the context of a loose governmental coalition and divisions within the military the project opened a political opportunity for those excluded in the elections of 2002. At the same time, the LNGP worked as an ‘attraction field’ and

opened space for groups that had been unsuccessful in placing their particular demands before the government.

By bringing together both analyses –public policy and contentious politics– this work has attempted to show a) that the policy process becomes a source of grievance when policy makers –through *practice* and *discourse*– minimise the social, political, and historical implications of a project; b) that the potential resistance to a project is likely to be underestimated if the policy process minimises these variables; c) that under certain circumstances, a policy window is also a political opportunity for mobilising groups; and d) that deficiencies in the policy process might be overcome if adequate channels of representation are designed. Future research should focus on this latter issue.

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