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'Social Movements, Public Policy, and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America'

J. Carlos Dominguez[1]*

This work studies how different social mobilisation processes have influenced policy processes in Latin America (2000-2003) and vice versa. Studying these interrelations includes three issues of empirical and theoretical importance. First, it explores under what conditions an investment project or policy initiative that is strongly supported by a democratically elected government on the basis of economic and technical arguments may trigger the emergence of a social movement; and under what conditions a social movement may successfully preclude the implementation of such project or policy initiative. Second, this work explores if these social movements have actually compensated for the absence of channels of participation and representation that work to influence the institutional policy process. Third and final, it studies if the influence and impact of these social movements have contributed to improve the design and implementation of public policies in the medium term and to promote the democratic consolidation in the region. Although the work is based on evidence from many countries in the region, there are mainly two case studies presented with more detail: the 'Water War' in Cochabamba, Bolivia (2001-2002) and the conflict triggered by the project to build a new airport in Mexico City (2001-2002). The 'Gas War' of Bolivia (2003) is also explored with less detail.

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*Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford

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[1] Carlos Dominguez is associate student at the Department of International Development, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. This paper was presented in the Fourth Annual Conference of the Euro-Latin American Network on Governance for Development (REDGOB) organized in December 2006 at Nuffield College, Oxford.

I. INTRODUCTION

This work pursues three main objectives. First, it explores the interrelations between social movements and public policy in Latin America. For this purposes it leaves aside the study of social movements that contributed to democratic transitions in the region during the 1980s and focuses on social movements that have emerged with more frequency in the last ten years. These latter have emerged in the context of electorate democracies that have been recently reinstalled and as a response to projects and public policies promoted by governments that were elected legitimately in the ballots.

In other words, the object of study does not constitute, for example, the urban popular movements that supported the *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN) in Mexico in 1988, urban movements of Brazil or human rights movements that were so important for the democratisation processes of Argentina and Brazil during this same decade. By contrast, this paper is centred on social movements such as the one that was led by the *Frente Popular en Defensa de la Tierra* (FPDT), whose main goal was to oppose the construction of a new international airport in Mexico City (NIAMC) in year 2002; the *Coordinadora del Agua y de la Vida* (CAV), organised against the privatisation of water and sanitation in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia in year 2000 or the *Coordinadora del Gas* (CG), organised against a project to export gas from Bolivia to Mexico and the United States via Chile.

There are important differences regarding the economic, political, and social context in which each of these movements emerged and the public policies under study are varied and heterogeneous. However, these case studies can be studied together under the premise that there is a storyline with similar ingredients: 1) an infrastructure project or a public policy associated with the implementation or management of infrastructure projects that is promoted by a democratically elected government; 2) social groups that mobilise to oppose and reject such initiative; 3) a discourse that frames the project in the context of broader social and political demands; and finally, 4) the 'triumph' of contentious groups which accomplish the cancellation of the project and trigger social and political changes that surpass the project or public policy itself; often with important implications for the stability and governance of a democratic regime.

More concretely, the main question underpinning the work of this paper is: how and why a political mobilisation can successfully oppose a public policy or investment project that is strongly supported by a democratically elected government on the basis of economic and technical arguments? The answer to this question is relevant from both a practical and theoretical point of view. From a theoretical point of view there is a deficit in the literature that explores systematically the ways in which different social movement dynamics may impinge upon the outcomes of public policies and vice versa, the ways in which the implementation of certain public policies may trigger the emergence and evolvement of contentious groups that organise successfully against this sort of initiatives. In a few words, to make sense of these case studies it is necessary to build a conceptual framework that combines different social movement theories with different theories that have been produced in the area of public policy in the last twenty years.

From a practical point of view, in the next decades Latin America will face the challenge of meeting an ever increasing deficit of infrastructure whose materialisation will require intense and complicated negotiations between different public, private, and social actors. As an example –the one that is best known by the author-, in the case of Mexico a number of infrastructure projects have already been identified as a top priority to sustain and guarantee the economic development of the country. According to back of the envelop

calculations the necessary investment could reach USD 60 billions in a twenty years horizon (Elías Ayub, 2005). That is, in the following two decades it will be necessary to negotiate the implementation of projects whose investment requirements may be equivalent to twenty airports similar to the one that was supposed to be built in the outskirts of Mexico City in year 2002. And yet, the record to date is not very encouraging. In the last ten years, the country has witnessed the cancellation or indefinite postponement of almost twenty projects, from tourist developments and housing projects to dams and road expansions (Reforma, 08-09-03). If this data is extrapolated to the case of Latin America overall, we would be taking of a very conservative figure of USD 200 billions in a twenty years time frame. These projects should be considered in addition to structural reforms of a bigger magnitude that will require complex negotiations and changes in the methods and parameters that are used to assess the implementation of new projects and public policies.

Based on this analysis, the present work also explores some relations between this kind of social movements and the processes of democratic consolidation in the region. For this purpose it is necessary to raise two questions. First, to what extent have these social movements compensated for the unequal access to channels of political representation and participation in Latin America? And second, beyond the cancellation and/or postponement of infrastructure projects in the short term, what have been the medium and long-term effects of these social mobilisations on the processes of democratic consolidation and on the design and instrumentation of new public policies in general?

Third and finally, the paper closes with suggestions for a future research agenda. As argued in the last sections, this task should result in at least two products: 1) a more sophisticated conceptual framework that is based on a multidisciplinary approach and that extends our understanding of the interrelations between democracy, public policy, and social movements; and 2) a series of guidelines to improve the institutional processes for assessing and implementing infrastructure projects and the public policies associated with these latter.

The rest of this work is divided as follows. Section II presents a brief description of the two case studies on which this work is based. Section III suggests two conceptual frameworks that could be adapted to study the public policy process in Latin America, including the conditions under which a democratic government decides to promote certain infrastructure project, even when not all the social and political difficulties are tied up. In this regard, there are two key concepts: the opening of *windows of opportunity* and the attempts to establish and/or to consolidate *decision-making monopolies*. Based on this analysis, Section IV examines in more depth the role that dominant normative values play during the conception, design, and survival of a project on the policy agenda. Section V resorts to social movement theories –more specifically to the analysis of *collective action frames* projected by a social movement- to explain the conditions under which the opposition to an infrastructure project may be successful. Section VI analyses the issue of the 'autistic State' and explores the relations between the legitimacy of a social movement in the public sphere and the endorsement of public policies based on a limited number of normative values and assessment criteria. Finally, Section VII analyses the implications of both dynamics –public policies and social mobilisations- for the processes of democratic consolidation in the region and Section VIII presents some suggestions to be considered for a future research agenda.

II. GENERAL BACKGROUND: PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN MEXICO AND BOLIVIA

The project for a new airport in Mexico City was promoted by the administration of President Vicente Fox in the years of 2001 and 2002. This project had been on and off the governmental agenda for more than three decades and its implementation had been discarded and/or postponed by the five presidents previous to Vicente Fox. According to the official version, the site for the project was chosen on the basis of its technical-aeronautical advantages, cost-benefit analysis, minimisation of environmental impacts, and opportunities for socio-economic development. Moreover, the new airport was conceived as one of the most important projects of the new democratically elected government; a government that had been democratically elected after seventy years of hegemony by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI).

The main obstacle, however, was the necessity to expropriate 5,391 hectares of ejidos and displace 4,375 landowners who live in the municipalities of Atenco and Texcoco, in the outskirts of Mexico City. Nearly one year after the public announcement, the resettlement and expropriation negotiations failed and opposition to the project led to violent and non-violent mobilisations from several groups -peasants, NGOs, political parties, and even groups that were not directly affected. The project was cancelled in August of 2002 and to date there is no alternative project to solve the serious problems of traffic capacity that the International Airport of Mexico City faces.

In a similar fashion, the privatisation of water and sanitation services (WSS) in Cochabamba, Bolivia was promoted by the government of Hugo Banzer and backed by international financial institutions in the year 2000. Such scheme was implemented through a concession awarded to *Aguas del Tunari* (AdT) -a private consortium backed by Bechtel International. The respective contract was tied to the implementation of a 'multiple development project' called the MISICUNI-Multiple Project (MMP), which included the construction of a dam to increase the supply of drinkable water in urban areas of Cochabamba and water for irrigation in surrounding rural areas. For many decades the MMP had been conceived as one of the main projects to foster the development in the whole department of Cochabamba.

However, the main obstacles were the need to increase water fees to make the MMP feasible and to change existing regulations to allow the privatisation of WSS in the country. In both cases, these measures led to social and political tensions that derived in street protests from different urban and rural actors claiming that the government colluded with private actors to exploit water resources without benefiting the most disadvantaged and without respecting traditional uses and customs in rural areas. Under heavy political and social pressures, the concession of WSS to AdT was revoked in May 2000 and the MMP was indefinitely postponed.

III. PUBLIC POLICY: WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY AND DECISION-MAKING MONOPOLIES

There are two questions that arise from the two case studies that were described in the last section. First, why did government actors promote projects and public policies, even though not all the possible social and political difficulties were tied up? And second, what were the main official arguments, claims, and legitimacy discourses employed by the respective institutional actors in charge of promoting such projects and public policies?

A rational approach to public policy is too simplistic to answer these questions. It is inadequate a conception of such process as a lineal and systematic process through which a) a problem emerges, b) is comprehensively analysed to determine available solutions, and c) the best one is chosen according to strictly economic and technical parameters (Chart 1). In contrast, a detailed analysis of the stories behind the project for a new airport in Mexico City, the 'Water War' in Cochabamba, Bolivia, or the 'Gas War' in this same country show that sudden policy changes such as the decision to go ahead with an infrastructure project that has been delayed for many decades and/or that faces overt social and political opposition are best explained by using other theoretical concepts. Two examples are the concept of *windows of opportunity* proposed by John Kingdon (1984) and the concept of *punctuated-equilibrium* proposed by Baumgartner and Jones (1993).

Kingdon (1984) proposes a system of interactions on the basis of four streams: actors, problems, policies, and politics. Although these streams may sometimes be interconnected they usually evolve independently from each other. The main premise is that an issue reaches the policy agenda –for example, the construction of a new airport- when a problem, a policy solution, and someone willing to advance it –a policy entrepreneur- coincide in time and open a policy window (Chart 1). In other words, the convergence between these four streams opens a window of opportunity in one or many policy areas. The forecasting capacity of this model is very limited. However, in contrast with a model of lineal decisions, the analytical categories proposed by this conceptual frame are more capable of explaining –even if in hindsight- the existence not only of problems looking for solutions but of solutions looking for problems.
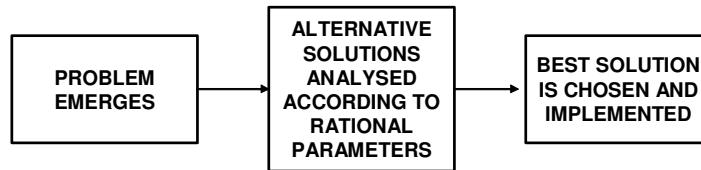
Baumgartner and Jones (1993) propose a division of actors involved in the design and implementation of public policies according to two main groups: policy subsystems and macro-political institutions such as the Congress or the Presidency.[2] The first group is composed by academics, technical experts, consultants, and other professionals in charge of the design and technical assessment of public policies. They are usually actors that remain hidden, away from the limelight and the public scene. The second group are often more visible, they have more political power, and enjoy greater decision-making attributions regarding the content and timing of the policy agenda. According to Baumgartner and Jones, these latter can only process a limited number of issues at a time and therefore there are many issues that remain within 'policy communities' and out of the political spotlight. In the long term, these small communities tend to build and protect decision-making monopolies within certain policy area(s).

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[2] Kingdon (1984:68) proposes a similar division of actors, but he classifies them according to the 'non-visible cluster' (those engaged in generating the policy agenda) and the 'visible cluster' (those engaged in the agenda-setting).
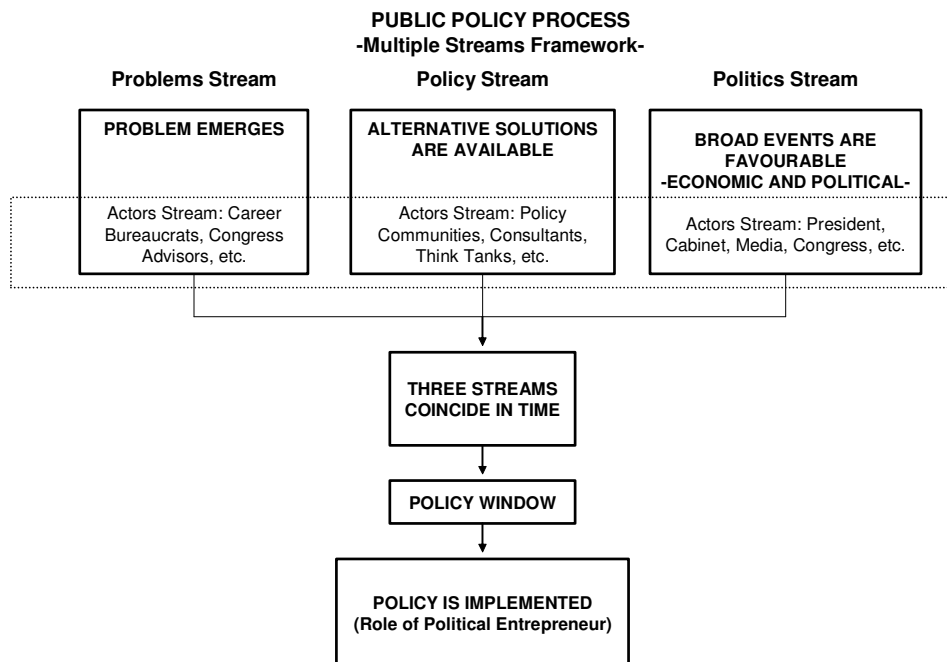
CHART 1
PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS

Chart 3.1
Public Policy Process

a) Rational Approach

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┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│          │      │ ALTERNATIVE  │      │              │
│          │      │  SOLUTIONS   │      │ BEST SOLUTION│
│ PROBLEM  │─────▶│  ANALYSED    │─────▶│ IS CHOSEN AND│
│ EMERGES  │      │ ACCORDING TO │      │ IMPLEMENTED  │
│          │      │   RATIONAL   │      │              │
│          │      │  PARAMETERS  │      │              │
└──────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
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b) Multiple Streams Approach

PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS
-Multiple Streams Framework-

Problems Stream	Policy Stream	Politics Stream
PROBLEM EMERGES	**ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS ARE AVAILABLE**	**BROAD EVENTS ARE FAVOURABLE -ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL-**
Actors Stream: Career Bureaucrats, Congress Advisors, etc.	Actors Stream: Policy Communities, Consultants, Think Tanks, etc.	Actors Stream: President, Cabinet, Media, Congress, etc.

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          ┌──────────────────┐
          │  THREE STREAMS   │
          │ COINCIDE IN TIME │
          └──────────────────┘
                   │
                   ▼
          ┌──────────────────┐
          │  POLICY WINDOW   │
          └──────────────────┘
                   │
                   ▼
          ┌──────────────────────────┐
          │  POLICY IS IMPLEMENTED   │
          │ (Role of Political       │
          │      Entrepreneur)       │
          └──────────────────────────┘
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Source: Domínguez (2004:38), based on John (1998), Kingdon (1984), and Sabatier (1999).

The stability of these monopolies depends on the creation of barriers, including the projection of a positive image in the public sphere (Hunt, 2002:74), to block the intromission of other actors (Hunt, 2002:74). Such image is usually based on a concrete and narrow definition of problems which limits the number of conflict dimensions and thwarts the problematisation of public policies. It is often possible to find that such dominant policy image is based on a one-dimensional definition of problems, even when these are in reality multidimensional (Baumgartner and Jones, 2002: 21). In this way, actors with access to these monopolies are able to guarantee that their decision-making power is not questioned by external actors and more importantly, that issues related with their area of expertise are not moved up to the agenda of macro-political institutions. The concept of a *punctuated-equilibrium* is used to describe changes in the policy agenda, consequence of positive images that collapse and that in other circumstances would help the shielding, isolation, and survival of decision-making monopolies.[3]

Both conceptual frameworks, the *multiple streams framework* (MSF) and the *punctuated-equilibrium theory* (PET)*,* were conceived to explain policy processes in the United States, a country with a longer liberal-democratic tradition compared to the Latin American cases and whose policy systems are generally more decentralised and open, conducive to the innovation and competition between different policy alternatives. However, with the proper adjustments and considerations both conceptual frameworks may be combined to provide with the heuristic tools and analytical categories that are useful for studying 'recurrent causal mechanisms' (Tilly, 2002:2) behind the policy agendas of Latin American countries.

Moreover, as explained throughout this work both models open the door for considering the role that social movements and contentious groups may have in the policy process. For example, they can introduce new dimensions of conflict or make them more salient, preventing then the consolidation of new policy monopolies and/or prompting institutional actors to reconsider whether or not there is actually a window of opportunity. At the same time, the study of the policy process through a holistic approach –i.e. considering together the role of actors, institutions, ideas, and socioeconomic scenarios-, in combination with social movement theories facilitates the identification of problems and challenges associated with the consolidation of third wave democracies in Latin America. As argued at the end of this work, the most evident challenge is the lack of policy instruments that contribute to democratising the public space in a practical and functional manner.

In the case of Mexico, the possibility that the capacity of the International Airport of Mexico City (IAMC) would be exceeded in the near future appeared intermittently on the presidential agenda between 1976 and 2000. What is more, this problem often coincided with the availability of policy solutions that had evolved according to the dynamics inherent to the policy stream –i.e. according to specialised studies, existing technical limitations, and prevailing normative values. Unfortunately, the existence of a

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[3] The classic example documented by these authors is that of nuclear power for civilian uses in the United States (Baumgartner y Jones, 1991). Between 1944 and the late 1960s the use of nuclear power for civilian purposes was accompanied by a policy discourse emphasising the benefits of this technology in terms of efficiency and technical progress. During this period the regulation and monitoring of nuclear energy was in the hands of one single governmental agency –the *Atomic Energy Commission* (AEC), which enjoyed a close monopoly that prevented other government and non-government actors from scrutinising its activities. Nevertheless, this changed drastically since the late 1960s when other actors successfully introduced new conflict dimensions, replacing a positive image based on the ideas of 'progress and efficiency' by a negative image based on the ideas of 'risk and danger'.

problem and the availability of feasible solutions are not always sufficient conditions for a project to get the final push and to move up in the priorities of the executive power. At the end of the day, five presidents previous to Vicente Fox (2000-2006) decided to postpone indefinitely the construction of a new airport. In this respect, the crucial difference was the victory of an opposition party in the presidential elections of the year 2000 after seventy one years of uninterrupted PRI's ruling. Such political transition was very important, not because the problems and restrictions of the policy process changed but because the Fox administration enjoyed the legitimacy and political solvency necessary to promote an infrastructure project of such magnitude. In these circumstances, the NIAMC could potentially be the main and most important infrastructure project of the presidential six-year term. In a few words, year 2000 witnessed the opening of a window of opportunity as defined by the MSF: the airport capacity problems were imminent, there was a feasible solution that had been studied for many years, the political setting seemed conducive, and there was a set of actor willing to promote the project for the sake of their own political legitimacy.

As Kingdon (1984) points out, the problem is that windows of opportunity do not remain open for long and policy makers should move swiftly if they want to take advantage. However, in the context of a policy process that is imperfect and problematic, with new participation spaces opened up by the processes of democratisation, and with a new distribution of political power it is almost impossible to reach unanimous consensus in the short term. The combination of these two factors – the likelihood that the window of opportunity closes and difficulty to reach a consensus- implies a dilemma for policy makers: 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. The case studies seem to confirm that the second case has been most common in Latin America. In the context of a window of opportunity, those who promote projects and public policies in democratic regimes are often forced to go ahead even when unexpected - and often undesirable- outcomes are likely to appear.

For example, in the Mexican case the idea that the first opposition government enjoyed unconditional support distorted the government's decisions regarding the NIAMC. In a few words, the Fox administration believed that the discourse of democracy was enough to sort out all the obstacles, including the displacement of population, the financial limitations to compensate the affected communities, and the presence of important institutional actors who were manifestly against the project; [4] all these on top of the unforeseen –and unforeseeable- difficulties because the policy process is inherently imperfect. But it is precisely the democratic transition that made the negotiation with other political forces at all levels so important for the successful implementation of such a complex and controversial project.

The Pacific-LNG project, promoted by the Bolivian government in year 2003 to export natural gas to Mexico and the Untied States via Chile represents a similar example. In this case, the election of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (GSL) as president of Bolivia together with other events in the policy and the politics streams brought about the opening of a window of opportunity that -at least from the point of view of GSL's government- could not be missed out.

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[4] A detailed analysis of the institutional actors show the existence of two advocacy coalitions: those in favour of locating the airport in Texcoco, constituted by public servants of the ministry of transport and communications, the Government of the State of Mexico, and the municipal government of Atenco, between other actors; and those in favour of locating the airport in an alternative site –Tizayuca-, constituted by the Government of the State of Hidalgo and the Government of the Federal District, between other actors.

Already between 1993 and 1997 GSL had been a strong promoter of private sector participation in different economic sectors of Bolivia, including strategic sectors such as hydrocarbons and mining. In fact, a controversial law that granted foreign companies the property rights of natural gas once extracted from the underground was approved during his first mandate in 1996   (*Ley de Hidrocarburos*, 1996). With this background, it was expected that the election of GSL would be accompanied with a greater governmental willingness to promote a project to commercialise the natural gas reserves that had been probed and certified in the late 1990s (Domínguez, 2005: 7).

The second mandate of GSL also coincided with other events that signalled the opening of a window of opportunity in year 2003. One of the most important 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 gas[5] 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 internationally. Such opportunity was not trivial considering that 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 whatever feasible projects exist or not. In this way, 2002 seemed to offer a valuable opportunity that should be used swiftly before other global competitors could secure favourable contracts to export natural gas to the United States (*ibid.* 8).

But again, in the context of a policy process that is problematic and imperfect and with a new distribution of political power, windows of opportunity that are used without the necessary consensus may become very costly. For many reasons, such consensus was particularly difficult in the Bolivian case: 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;[6] c) the political parties that had been excluded by this coalition enjoyed enough support to oppose any governmental initiative; and d) the repression of social mobilisations at the beginning of 2003 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.[7]

Building a consensus appeared to be almost impossible or in any case it implied a complicated process of bargaining with other political forces and to accommodate disparate vested interests. The process would take long, even years, as demonstrated by the sequel of reforms and negotiations that have continued for almost four years after the ousting of GSL and that have carried on during Evo Morales' mandate –even though the Pacific-LNG project has now been completely discarded from the policy agenda. The problem is that windows of opportunity do not remain open for long and therefore the final decision between promoting an infrastructure project or not is necessarily the result of an inexact calculation based on the available information, the cognitive experience of policy makers, and the normative values that prevail throughout the process. For example, in the

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[5] 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)

[6] 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.

[7] 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).

case of the 'Gas War' in Bolivia it seems that GSL's administration overvalued the prevailing market opportunities and the need to secure a long-term 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 take advantage of the policy window, even if not all the potential difficulties were foreseen and well tied up (Domínguez, 2005: 8).

A third example is the so-called 'Water War' which took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia in the year 2000. In this concrete case, the problems stream can be summarised in three interrelated components. Firstly, the region faces the challenge of finding a source of water supply that is reliable and sustainable in the long-term; the competition between urban and rural uses of water makes this task especially urgent. Secondly, it is necessary to have a water enterprise that is financially, technically, and administratively healthier so that it is able to pay for the water and to distribute it in the urban area of Cochabamba (Justiniano, 03-08-05; Los Tiempos, 10-08-96). Third and finally, the distribution of water should also meet higher parameters of social equality in the access to water. These problems have been present for more than fifty years, but they became particularly pertinent during the 1970s and 1980s when the city of Cochabamba became an important recipient of migratory flows, consequence of three factors: a) the shutting down of mining centres in other regions, b) the economic absorption facilitated by commerce and services activities in the city of Cochabamba, and c) the booming production of coca leaves in the Chapare. The resulting population growth has been translated into an excessive and disorderly urban expansion that has surpassed the technical and administrative capacity of the municipal provider of water and sanitation.

In this context, the main policy solution that has been advanced to cover the water deficit in Cochabamba is the MISICUNI multiple project. Its history goes back fifty years in time and its main components are a dam and a tunnel for transporting the reservoirs of the River Misicuni and other rivers located 20 Km away from the Central Valley of Cochabamba. The project's core technical parameters were already defined since 1975 (Rico, 21-09-05) and the project appeared on and off on the policy agenda, but its implementation was never officially announced before year 2000. Only then a number of factors coincided, signalling the existence of a window of opportunity.

In the problems stream, the water deficit worsened in the context of more frequent droughts and the increasing competition between rural and urban uses of water during the 1990s which culminated in the 'War of the Wells'. These latter were a series of conflicts between authorities promoting the perforation of wells to extract underground water in rural areas as means of satisfying the ever growing urban demand and rural communities expressing their opposition to this sort of policy (Presencia, 21/02/95; Los Tiempos, 8/02/98). At the same time, in the policy stream, the proposal to lease SEMAPA and MISICUNI jointly to attract private investments and the availability of funds for the first phase of the project seemed an opportunity to solve at once the three main problems in the WSS. And finally, in the actors and politics streams he election of ex-dictator Banzer – who had always been a strong advocate of the MMP- in the presidential elections of 1997 coincided with the mandate of a mayor in Cochabamba who had already positioned himself as a supporter of the same project. Altogether, these factors seemed to indicate that in year 2000 there was a window of opportunity that could not be missed out.

Unfortunately, leasing MISICUNI-SEMAPA in year 2000 was not possible without offering conditions and concessions to private investors which were unsustainable from a social and political point of view. First, it was necessary to make changes in the Bolivian law, affecting alternative systems of water provision, which had emerged as second-best solutions to the limited coverage of SEMAPA's network, and affecting

traditional systems of water management in rural areas, based on uses and customs (García et al, 2003:42-43). Second, there were two main alternatives to get the resources necessary to build MISICUNI's dam and to increase the service coverage: to complement the concession with public subsidies or to compensate for the financial differential with a raise of water fees. As explained in the following section, given that *fiscal discipline* has become a dominant normative value in the policy process the first alternative was *de facto* discarded.

IV. Normative Values and Dimensions of Conflict in the Policy Process

The existence of feasibility criteria and normative values that condition the survival of policy initiatives in the policy agenda is a decisive factor in the policy stream; they determine if a project is implemented, discarded definitely, or postponed temporarily. In other words, it is possible to talk about the 'natural selection of ideas' (Kingdon, 1984:125-127): a struggle between arguments and images that do not appear from one day to the other, but evolve over time and according to broader social, economic, and political contexts. There are at least three important criteria for a proposal to survive in the policy agenda: feasibility criteria, value acceptability, and the anticipation of future constraints and obstacles (*idem*: 132-138).

For example, regarding its technical feasibility any project involving the extraction, transportation, liquefaction, or regasification of natural gas 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 (Domínguez, 2005:6). In a similar fashion, the operation of an airport is a matter of minimising the risk of an accident and guaranteeing the safety of millions of passengers. The right location is a function of highly complex variables such as wind direction and intensity, surrounding mountain elevations, proximity of other nearby airports, required landing and take-off trajectories, and topographical specificities, between other variables (López-Meyer, 2003).

The criterion of technical feasibility is not sufficient to conclude about the convenience of an infrastructure project with environmental, social, political, and economic implications that are highly complex. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to obviate other aspects when evaluating policy proposals between other reasons because the technical aspects should be considered beforehand (Vanderburg, 2000). Following the airport example, interviews with different public servants confirm this practice. When asked about the parameters that were taken into account to evaluate the airport, the technical dimension was mentioned much more than the social and the political ones, at least comparatively (Domínguez, 2004:50).

The second condition for the survival of an idea is its value acceptability (Kingdon, 1984:132). That is, a project may be acceptable or not depending on prevailing normative values and policy principles such as equity, efficiency, or the environment. For example, *fiscal discipline* has become a decisive normative value for the survival of ideas in the policy agendas of Latin American governments in the last decades. Public expenditure - especially for investment in infrastructure- has been constrained, and all major policy goals are now subordinated to attaining an acceptable governmental deficit. And even when a project is not significant relative to macroeconomic numbers, the sole possibility of sending 'wrong signals' to the international markets is avoided at any price.

The NIAMC in the Mexican case, the Pacific-LNG project in Bolivia, and the MISICUNI project in this same country are not exceptions. In the first case, one of the reasons that kept Texcoco as a possible location on the agenda was the possibility of financing the project with long-term concessions to private investors in the existing IAMC area and in general, because there was little doubt of the project's future potential to attract private investment. However, there was still a problem of financial engineering. Although the existing IAMC represented an opportunity to finance part of the new airport in the long-term and the financial fundamentals would allow a long-term compensation that exceeded the original offer (anonymous interview, 08-2005), such resources would not be available during the first phases of the project; and therefore it faced budget constraints in the short run. This problem of 'financial timing' was crucial for the decision that the 'best' way to launch the project was to expropriate the necessary land and offer a long-term compensation for displaced people, instead of buying the land according to its commercial price and expected future use.

There was a similar situation in the case of SEMAPA-MISICUNI. In the short term, under the pressure of international agencies and in the context of budgetary constraints and new normative values such as fiscal discipline, the Banzer administration decided not to implement a cross-subsidy scheme that would help to avoid the rise of fees, at least until the service and the coverage of the network were improved significantly (Brockman, 08-2005). As explained in subsequent sections, such fee increases became one of the main grievances that provided the social movement led by the *Coordinadora* with enough cohesion.

In general, this sort of normative values or policy principles are closely related to the diffusion of policy images and policy discourses that provide causal stories and that simplify and reduce reality to scales that are intellectually manageable (Dryzek, 1997:80-81). In this way, policy-makers define under what conditions a project may survive in the policy agenda and justify –publicly and for themselves- why some value dimensions are more important than others. Beyond its technical feasibility, changes in ideas and/or normative values may bring about radical adjustments on the nature of public policies.

 For example, MISICUNI's final design was only concluded in 1973 (Pareja, 26-09-05). Being the 1970s, in the context of fashionable ideas such as 'integral rural development' and the 'green revolution', it is not surprising that MISICUNI was conceived as a project with 'multiple' purposes. The main goal of the project was not only to solve the water scarcity in the metropolitan area of Cochabamba, but to promote big scale agriculture, produce electricity to facilitate industrial activities, foster economic development, and transform the department of Cochabamba into a regional economic enclave that would bridge the development of the Eastern tropical areas and the Bolivian High-Plateau. It was conceived when normative values such as 'food self-sufficiency', 'maximisation of food production', and 'articulation of traditional rural communities to the market' were strong in the agenda of international agencies (Escobar, 1995:158-159).

But these ideas changed after the debt crisis that began in the early 1980s. The adverse economic circumstances brought about the diffusion of values that had been traditionally endorsed by actors in the private sector, such as economy, efficiency, profitability, and effectiveness (Peters and Wright, 1996:628-629). In the case of MISICUNI, the magnitude of the project was simply inconsistent with new normative values such that began to dominate the policy agenda. Already in 1991, external consultants and representatives from international agencies had changed their minds regarding the project's economic and financial feasibility (Lopez, 13-09-05). In some cases the advice was to completely discard the project from the government agenda and in

others, to adjust it so that it could be implemented in three successive phases, giving priority to the provision of drinkable water. The Banzer administration was at a crossroads. On one hand, the attraction of private investors would fail and a number of credits from different international donors could be cancelled if the project was not in line with new normative values. But on the other hand, there was a strong social and political pressure to keep MISICUNI unchanged, as a project with multiple development purposes and therefore, adjusting and reducing its magnitude would undermine its public acquiescence. At the end, the Banzer administration and other promoters of the project opted for an intermediate solution that did not contribute to avoid any of these two difficulties and the results were disastrous: increasing water fees, unsustainable conditions and concessions offered to private investors, and widespread social discontent that derived in a strong and vigorous social movement (Dominguez, 2006: 13-14).

The NIAMC presents a similar story. Originally, the project of Texcoco survived in the policy agenda during the 1980s for its aeronautical and engineering feasibility. But during the last two decades, the environment became 'visible' (Dryzek, 1997:14; Escobar, 1995:192-211) in the policy arena and dictated new normative values, helping to reshape the concept of technical feasibility. This change caused Presidents Salinas (1988-1994) and Zedillo (1994-2000) to hesitate in choosing Texcoco. The uncertainties were cleared up when new technical studies and new comparative analyses were published in year 2001. Such studies constituted an additional element of the window of opportunity that was described above (Section III). Nevertheless, the third condition for the survival of an idea on the policy agenda is related to the anticipation of future constraints and obstacles during its implementation. One of the most important is the public acquiescence to a policy (Kingdon, 1984:138). In the same way that adjustments to the MISICUNI project were not acceptable from a social and political point of view, the technical feasibility and the comparative advantages of the airport in Texcoco did not guarantee that the project's environmental impacts and population displacement were acceptable to public opinion in Mexico.

In this context, based on official documents and interviews with ex-public servants it seems that the strategy of the Federal Government and other actors advocating Texcoco was to stress the advantages of the project beyond the aeronautical dimension. The discourse changed the Texcoco from being a 'mere airport' with socio-economic and environmental impacts that should be compensated, into an 'integral development project', understood as an attempt to comprehensively plan long-term social and economic transformations (Ferguson, 1990: 11-17). Suddenly, it was not only a solution to satisfy the air traffic demand of Mexico City, but the possibility to attract financial resources for an ecological restoration zone that was located nearby and a poverty-fighting solution to one of the most socially and economically depressed zones of Mexico City (Domínguez, 2004:53-54).

The results were also disastrous. In reality, the development discourse publicised by institutional actors was accompanied with a conception of 'peasants' that were supposed to feel 'fortunate' for the long term benefits or that in any case did not have the capacity to oppose the project. This discourse however, was a solution for the project and not for the people in Atenco (following ideas of Schaffer, 1985). In this way, the social and historical specificities of the affected communities were not taken into account, creating discontent and frustration among them. A detailed analysis of public stances and interviews with leaders of the movement show that the source of grievance was not the expropriation *per se*, but a combination of two factors: a) the dismissed attempts to talk with the authorities before the public announcement of the project and b) the nature and timing of the expropriation decrees.

V. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES

Analysing the policy process from the State's perspective, including the construction of democracy and development discourses only constitutes part of the story. There is a new distribution of political power and new channels of participation and representation have been created. This necessitates studying new actors that do not necessarily belong to formal institutions and yet, are capable of defining the outcomes of projects and public policies. These are contentious groups that mobilise and challenge the State even though they have limited access to material and institutional resources and even though their chances of success may seem non-existent. After all, even in the same adverse circumstances, other projects have been implemented. Therefore, it is necessary to answer the following questions: What conditions and strategies determined the success of the mobilisations that were led by the *Frente Popular* against the airport project? What conditions and strategies were determinant for the success of the mobilisations that were led by the *Coordinadora* against the privatisation of WSS in Cochabamba, Bolivia? What were the main arguments, claims, and discourses to justify such social movements?

According to recent social movement theories in the area of Political Sociology, the emergence of a broad and vigorous social movement not only requires the existence of a grievance, but requires that potential supporters frame grievances in wider economic, socio-political, and historical contexts; interpret the surrounding events and construct a guide to action (Della Porta and Dani, 1999:68; Tarrow, 1992:177). They need to construct and deploy the pronouns 'we' –the challengers- and 'they' –the challenged, usually the State and its allies. It is necessary what Tarrow (1992; 1998) calls a collective action frame (CAF) or in other words, a discourse with the symbolic power to turn grievances into worthwhile reasons to mobilise (Della Porta y Dani, 1999:68).

For example, the *Coordinadora* was a loose collection of diverse organisations and its discourse or collective action frame played a paramount role for providing the movement with cohesion and sense of direction. The construction of a collective identity that was shared by rural and urban groups alike was not trivial. These were groups representing sectors of the population that a couple of years before had opposing interests in the midst of another water conflict: the conflict between urban and rural uses of water, staged in the context of the 'war of the wells' (Domínguez, 2006). Such a discourse was based on a very simple and yet powerful thought: the idea that water is a condition for the reproduction of life, that the right to have water is inalienable, and therefore, that its management concerns everybody (Grandydier, 18/08/05; López, 18/08/05). That is, the privatisation of WSS not only affected those who managed water sources in rural areas, but those paying higher fees in the city (Crespo, 11/08/05; Olivera; 12/08/05).

In this way, the CAF offers causal stories that contrast with those offered by institutional actors. It fulfils the function of introducing new dimensions of conflict not considered originally or minimised during the policy process. But this does not mean that the CAF is a mere rhetorical device. In the case of the *regantes* in Cochabamba such idea is based on uses and customs, a set of complex rules and social arrangements to control the access to water, which in many cases go back to pre-Inca times. Beyond its normative functions, they actually embed a right that indigenous groups have historically earned to control a resource that is vital to preserve their conditions of social reproduction. In the case of urban groups, the cultural and historical value attached to water is more ambiguous and less visible. Only in the more economically and socially marginalised areas –like the south of the city- it is possible to find that such non-economic value is based on communal

efforts undertaken during the last two decades to implement traditional systems that make up for the limited access to the water and sanitation network (Grandydier, 18/08/05).

The CG in Bolivia and the FPDT in Mexico offer similar examples. In the first case, the CAF was based on three discursive references that did not appear from one day to the other: a historical-ideological reference that situated the social movement in the context of a longer struggle of the indigenous people against the unjust economic and political elite; a reference to the role that social movements have played during the process of re-democratisation in Bolivia; and finally, a reference to an ethno-nationalistic discourse that advocates radical changes to reduce the social and economic inequalities faced by indigenous groups in this country (Domínguez, 2005:11-12). Together these three references provided an identity-umbrella for different social groups and introduced different value dimensions to the policy process: the most important, that any scheme for exploiting and monetising the reserves of hydrocarbons in Bolivia could not be based exclusively on parameters of financial profitability and economic competitiveness, but on a radical redesign of the rules pertaining to the political and economic game.

On a different scale, the movement against the NIAMC also shows that the historical and social specificities of affected communities are crucial and may sometimes weight more than the project's mere financial and economic assessment. In this case, the price offered for the necessary land to build the new airport was negligible because according to existing laws that were outdated, the land should be valued according to its current use and not according to its future use (*Ley de Expropiaciones,* 1936). But the land in Atenco and Texcoco is labelled as agricultural land with a very low productivity, in many cases for auto-consumption. In this context and according to the policy discourse publicised by institutional actors (Section IV), peasants of these communities should feel fortunate regardless of the low prices: the airport was to be constructed on their land, triggering economic development in the region (Cerisola, 2001).

The people in Atenco know that their land has very low productivity and it is often for self-consumption. However, this does not change that the value of the land is often a product of a cultural construction that may be incommensurable; that land symbolises a historical fight to keep a space, a patrimony that is transferred from generation to generation and as studied by Castells (1983) in other areas of Mexico City, the basis for the identity formation of people joining urban poor movements. In a few words, its importance is rooted in the physical space *per se* and not in the production of maze and beans.

VI. LATIN AMERICA AND THE PROBLEM OF THE 'AUTISTIC' STATE

The different case studies illustrate how the policy process is much more complex and imperfect than usually assumed. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that such complexity and imperfection is inherent to the process itself and is not necessarily related to the ruling by any particular political party. That is, the same conditions –problematic preferences, partial understanding of the overall policy system, advocacy coalitions, and prevailing normative values- are faced one way or another by right wing presidents such as Vicente Fox in Mexico or left wing governments such as Lula da Silva in Brazil or Evo Morales in Bolivia. Moreover, such difficulties can also be found in the case of developed countries such as Germany or the United States.[8]

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[8] In fact, as mentioned in Section II, the John Kingdon's multiple streams framework was originally thought to analyse policy process in different policy subsystems in the United States such as health, environment, and transport.

The Latin American case is particularly interesting because many policy decisions, especially those taken in the context of windows of opportunity as described in Sections III and IV, are frequently based on a limited number of variables and evaluative dimensions. A likely hypothesis is that given the complexity of new democratic settings and the domestic and international pressure faced by the State in Latin America, policy makers have been trapped in a sort of inertia left behind by authoritarian regimes –often military dictatorships- that preceded democratic transitions. That is, reality continues to be simplified, assuming that all decisions can be taken hierarchically, with a top-down approach, pretending that the world is a chessboard where the subjects of development are turned into 'clients' or objects with limited or no agency over the policy process. If this is the case then the authoritarian State has maybe been replaced by the 'autistic' state, defined by a set of institutions characterised by their continuous learning difficulties, its automated and one-dimensional reasoning, its lack of common sense, and in general, by its limited capacity to communicate with the outside world.

In Cochabamba, for example, the institutional efforts to justify the privatising trends in the water and sanitation sector were accompanied by two discursive practices. First, by the invalidation of other policy alternatives based on the idea of *inevitability* and second, by the annulment of popular participation based on the idea of *institutionalisation* – i.e. the market and the respective regulator constitute the only valid actors. As a consequence, the importance of uses and customs in rural areas and of traditional systems of water provision in the city were completely erased. This is not surprising if the *only* criteria to assess a public policy are the criteria of technical and economic efficiency.

At the same time, the idea that popular participation was only legitimate if channelled through institutional and/or formal channels such as the Civic Committee of Cochabamba prevailed throughout the design and implementation of the process to lease SEMAPA-MISICUNI. But being institutional, those channels were aligned with the normative values that had prevailed all along the policy process (Domínguez, 2006). In a similar fashion, the efforts to discuss Law 2029 were almost non-existent (Crespo, 11/08/05). Moreover, it was an instrument promoted at the margin of ongoing discussions about a new water law and it was a result of strong pressure from international financial institutions.

In the case of the NIAMC, interviews with social movement leaders confirm that attempts to initiate a dialogue before the project was officially announced were blocked by the government's dismissive and indifferent reactions. In every case, the answer was that the project's final decision had not been taken yet or that it was premature to talk about the project and/or the expropriations before these were announced (Del Valle, 08-2003; Arévalo, 08-2003). To a great extent, this attitude is caused by two factors. First, the importance that non-institutional channels of political participation and representation may have was systematically minimised. Second, democracy and development discourses were based on conceptions of social and political processes that were essentially incomplete. Hence, once the decision was officially announced, the character of the expropriation decrees created a perception within the people of Atenco and Texcoco that the Fox government was trying to deceive them (Domínguez, 2005:61-62). Likewise, the Pacific-LNG project and the concession of SEMAPA-MISICUNI are also examples of how the inadequate management of a window of opportunity may bring about the perfect setting for constructing and diffusing a CAF to legitimate a social movement, portraying the State as an 'enemy' and framing a project or public policy in the context of broader social and economic grievances.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY AND INEQUALITY

Based on the analysis of previous sections, it is still necessary to explore the role that these social movements have had as alternative channels of political participation and representation. To a great extent, the answer depends on the theoretical framework that is used to analyse and measure the achievement of a social movement. In general it is possible to talk about three big areas: the democratization of the public space, the introduction and discussion of new normative values and assessment criteria in the policy process, and the securing of political rights and material demands. A movement has effectively positioned itself as an alternative channel for political exchange between the State and civil society to the extent that it represents a genuine alternative to achieve any of these three goals.

The case studies illustrate how institutional actors in Latin America have often understood the processes of democratic consolidation from an elitist standpoint, often based on the narrow idea of electoral democracy. That is, consolidating democracy has been understood as part of a modernising task that should be led by political elites and that does not require the participation of popular groups beyond the periodical election of political representatives and the respect for the rule of law. The problem with this vision is that it creates a false dichotomy between the 'masses' and the 'elites', implicitly assuming that these latter have a sort of ontological superiority. This opens the door to institutionalise undemocratic practices by political actors and to have democratic practices by social actors that are legitimate and yet remain without being institutionalised. (Avritzer, 2002:29). For these reasons, the processes of democratic consolidation can alternatively be conceived as centred on the democratisation of the public space (Cohen and Arato, 1997; Habermas (1989), cited in Avritzer, 2003: 39-41); on the consolidation of a space that minimises the dichotomy between civil society and political society, strengthening the linkages between participation and public debate.

The CdA in Cochabamba constitutes the most illustrative example. Their leaders took advantage of the general discontent towards the institutions of political representation and offered an alternative space for public participation and discussion, at least throughout the conflict of 2000. After more than a decade since the transition to democracy, political parties had been incapable of representing the genuine interests of numerous sectors of the population. They were far from undertaking the necessary internal reforms after 1982 and from improving their relations with civil society. By contrast, traditional political parties had a mild reaction to their own crisis of representation. They promoted normative changes that had little implications for the system of representation and only delayed its own demise (Lazarte, 2005:185-186). Faced with this 'representative void', the meetings and assemblies that were organised by the Coordinadora became a space of participation and deliberation wherein the people could take decisions about a theme that interested everyone: the control over water.

Following 'new' social movement theorists,[9] it was about questioning and redefining existing boundaries between the public, the political, and the private (Kitschelt, 1993:15; Pichardo, 1997:414). The concession of SEMAPA-MISICUNI and the approval of new regulations in the water and sanitation sector were 'the straw that broke the camel's

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[9] By contrast with other approaches to studying social movements, these theorists do not agree with an instrumental and strategic conception of social movements because they consider that constructing and projecting a collective identity should be considered as a goal on its own (Cohen and Arato, 1997:510).

back' and warned the population in Cochabamba about the importance of direct participation, in contrast with a model of representative democracy that had proven to be useless to bring their interests to the fore of public decisions (Domínguez, 2006). In the case of Cochabamba, this opening of public space was also conducive to project and diffuse new identities, not only as a precondition for collective action but *through* collective action.[10] As many 'water warriors' express it, the barricades, the marches and the blockades were spaces where people that had never seen each other before used to exchange and share personal experiences. And after realising that they were fighting for the same cause, their feelings of solidarity were strengthened (interview with 'water warrior', 18/08/05). In the case of the FPDT in Mexico, the conflict contributed to diffuse collective identities grounded in the importance of 'solidarity around the land' and strengthened the self-conscience that many communities in Atenco and Texcoco have about their semi-urban character. In this way, these social movements have contributed to transform and problematise the public space, offering alternative symbolic articulations that contrast to those that prevail in the policy process (Section IV). An airport does not only imply a policy solution for problems of aerial capacity, but the potential disruption of the social tissue in the affected communities; the concession of water and sanitation services is not only a matter of efficiency, but social justice; and the construction of a pipeline is not only a way to export and monetise natural gas reserves, but a serious offence from a historical point of view.

Unfortunately, a greater democratisation of the public space has taken place at the expense of windows of opportunity that have been missed to implement projects and public policies that are still necessary. Part of this problem is derived from the relation between the publicised collective action frames and the deficient management of a window of opportunity. In other words, when social and historical specificities are left out or minimised by policy makers, the CAF fulfils the function of accentuating identities and exaggerating causal stories to render them more visible in the public space. But the boundary between exaggerating and radicalising are very thin and therefore social movement demands that are just –and justified- can easily become intransigent.

For these same reasons, the contribution of these social groups to the democratisation of the public space has often been restricted to the first stages of mobilisation. That is, social movements have often fulfilled the important task of catching the attention of institutional actors and public opinion regarding the existence of a problem, contributing to protect groups of citizens from arbitrary actions on behalf of the government –e.g. the expropriation of land at a negligible price or a disproportionate rise of water fees. No doubt, such 'protection' is essential for the processes of democratic consolidation (Tilly, 2000:4). Nevertheless, the contribution of these social movements has been very limited once it is necessary to reach a compromise, find points of agreement, or look for intermediate solutions. This is partly explained by the lack of confidence on State institutions, inherited from authoritarian or semi-authoritarian governments, but it is also partly explained by the nature of the collective action frames.

For example, in the case of the opposition against the NIAMC the social movement always sustained publicly that the land was not for sale at any price. Yet, many communities that had reached an agreement with the Federal Government expressed their disenchantment when the airport was cancelled and some confrontations between members and non-members of the FPDT have been registered thereafter. This suggests that behind the banners, the movement to oppose the airport project was not homogenous. There were

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[10] Para una discusión más detallada sobre estas diferencias en el caso de Cochabamba, ver Domínguez (2006).

those willing to sell the land if and only if the terms of negotiation were improved and those who *maybe* were not willing to sell it under any circumstance. In other words, during the first mobilisation stages the social movement indeed compensated for the unequal access to channels of political representation and participation, but eventually the construction of more radical discourses and identities blocked the expression and materialisation of a more diverse set of interests.

An additional argument against an elitist and electorate conception of democratic transformations is related with the imperfections inherent to the policy process, as proposed throughout this work. In other words, if designing and implementing projects and public policies is characterised by scarce public deliberations then there is a greater chance to leave out relevant parameters and dimensions of conflict. This suggestion contrasts with Weber's original idea about the incompatibility between popular sovereignty and the complexity of public administration and about the difficulty to establish a more participative public administration (Weber, 1978, cited in Avritzer, 2002:41). The idea proposed here is that precisely because the policy process is imperfect it should be 'audited' through the participation of a more diverse set of actors.

 In this sense, the introduction of normative values and evaluative criteria on behalf of social movements should be analysed as part of the ideal connection between the public space and the political-administrative apparatus in charge of designing and implementing policy initiatives (Avritzer, 2003). The cases under analysis show that indeed these social movements have been able, one way or another, to bring back normative values and dimensions of conflict that were originally not considered by policy makers: the importance of uses and customs and alternative systems of water provision in Cochabamba; the valuation of land as a physical and cultural space in the case of the NIAMC; and the redefinition of the political and economic rules of the game in the case of the 'Gas War'. But again, as part of a broader process of democratising the public space, this has not happened without missing important windows of opportunity. The only exception being maybe the case of the 'Gas War' in Bolivia where the true window of opportunity has been the high prices of hydrocarbons in the international markets, allowing for a higher level of royalties received by the Bolivian State. But in general, the outcome in Latin America is that important policy problems have been left unsolved.

On the other side, the securing of political rights and material demands should be analysed as part of the medium and long-term effects of these movements on the instrumentation of public policy and on the processes of democratic consolidation. Without doubt the policy initiatives here analysed have worked like 'shocks' that have triggered or accelerated broader processes of political change (Tilly, 2000:13). Nonetheless, the direction and magnitude of such changes depend on a complex set of factors such as the capacity of a democratic regime to absorb such shocks, the magnitude and significance of the respective project, and the capacity of a social movement to break existing decision-making monopolies or to block the consolidation of new ones. Regarding the conflict in Atenco and Texcoco, the democratic regime in Mexico was more able to absorb the cancellation of the airport project in comparison with the case of the 'Water War' or the 'Gas War' in Bolivia. In the first case, the policy window closed when the federal government reassessed the socio-political dimensions as part of the project's integral evaluation and decided to cancel it. However, this did not open the door for the opposing groups to break into the decision-making monopoly of communications and transport and did not bring about any punctuation in the public policy equilibrium. In fact, beyond the cancellation of the project itself, the only visible effect on the instrumentation of new public policies was the approval of a new law of public goods that granted federal government bodies a greater manoeuvring margin to negotiate more favourable conditions

during the expropriation of goods for public purposes (Kuri-Pérez, 10-2005; *Ley de Bienes Nacionales*, 2004).

To a certain extent, the limited impact of the FPDT on the instrumentation of public policies may be explained by the greater government capacity that the Mexican State has had during the period of democratic transition as opposed to the Bolivian example. But other reasons may be mentioned. First, in the final stages of the conflict the FPDT radicalised in such a way that it lost the support from important institutional allies. And second, the people in Atenco and Texcoco lacked experience in dealing with issues pertaining to the policy area of transport infrastructure. At the end of the day, the conflict around the airport did not change the image of a policy subsystem whose problems are more technical than social and therefore that should be managed by a small group of technical professionals, away from public scrutiny (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991:1047).

Beyond the policy stream, the final impact of this conflict on the processes of democratic consolidation in Mexico is not clear. The conditions of the project's cancellation are a clear sign that the democratic transition has brought about a redistribution of political power. At the same time, the experience projected by the FPDT may offer 'repertoires of contention' (Tilly, 1978) that may be used by other contentious groups in other circumstances. The experience of Atenco could be the beginning of a longer term 'cycle of protest' (Tarrow, 1994). Ultimately, the contribution of new mobilisations and cycles of protest to the democratic consolidation will depend on the nature and on the specific circumstances surrounding them.

The case of the 'Water War' in Bolivia constitutes the opposite example. In general, the Bolivian State has shown less governmental capacity during the process of democratic transition. At the same time, a key for the success of the *Coordinadora* was precisely the support from experts and technical professionals that knew about water and sanitation in more detail and that complemented the physical resistance with technical, legal, and political arguments. Moreover, the policy subsystem of water and sanitation, headed by SEMAPA in Cochabamba, had never really been a policy monopoly that was completely closed. Since the 1970s, the representatives of its management board included municipal authorities, regional authorities, and at least nominally members of civil society.[11]

Additionally, the image of SEMAPA had deteriorated in the last decades in the context of serious technical, financial, and administrative problems (Pareja, 26-09-05). This negative image, reasserted by the failed concession process between 1999 and 2000, opened the opportunity for the social movement to have a more active role in the implementation of water and sanitation policies. Together, all these factors facilitated not only the expulsion of AdT and the cancellation of Law 2029, but the implementation of a new administrative model based on the idea of SEMAPA's 'social control'. Nevertheless, six years after the 'Water War' the fulfilment of the original material demands –i.e. a greater coverage and quality of water and sanitation service- has been almost nonexistent under the new social control scheme. Not surprisingly, the new decision makers have faced the same classical problems of the policy process: ambiguous preferences, power struggles between institutional actors, incomplete information, and conditionings that derived from prevailing normative values and assessment criteria. In fact, the experience of SEMAPA's

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[11] The president of the Civic Committee of Cochabamba was such civil society representative. Although this entity had been aligned with normative values promoted by institutional actors during the 'Water War', the mere presence of civil society actors in the management board of SEMAPA shows that this subsystem was relatively more open –or relatively easier to infiltrate- in comparison, for example, with the policy subsystem of transport and communications in the Mexican case.

social control illustrates the extremes that the autistic State can take. On one hand, the 'Water War' was a traumatic experience at different public and private levels of life in Cochabamba. In this sense, it is understandable that the social and political viability of certain policy alternatives has been reduced substantially. This is the case, for example, of any private participation in the water and sanitation sectors. But under these circumstances there is a danger of falling in the same autism that characterised the concession of SEMAPA-MISICUNI and the approval of Law 2029. That is, the danger of reducing the number of normative values and dimensions of conflict unnecessarily, constructing a new discourse of 'inevitability' around the experience of social control itself when there might in fact be some problems of the water company and the water and sanitation sector in general that can't be solve with such model (Domínguez, 2006).

On the other hand –even though political changes in the Bolivian case have happened much faster-, the final impact of the 'Water War' and the 'Gas War' on the democratic consolidation of this country is also uncertain. As pointed out above, in the short term these conflicts contributed to diffusing new collective identities in the public space. This in turn has contributed to the promotion of political movements –most importantly the MAS- which eventually attracted a majority of electors that was monopolised before by a limited number of traditional political parties, mainly the AND, the MIR, and the MNR.[12] In the medium term, both conflicts contributed to a longer cycle of protests that was triggered by profound economic and political reforms. The most important, no doubt, is the call for a Constituent Assembly, a process that happened rather late in contrast to other countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela (Van Cott, 2005). However, the Constituent Assembly is an ongoing process that was yet not concluded when this article was finished.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH AGENDA

This work has explored some interrelations between policy processes and processes of social mobilisation in Latin America, including implications for the democratic consolidation of the region. The object of study has been a series of conflicts that emerged in the post-electoral-transition era. These include the 'Water War' and the 'Gas War' in Bolivia and the conflict triggered by a project to build a new airport in Mexico City. The first two questions to answer are: why did government actors promote projects and public policies, even though not all the possible social and political difficulties were tied up? And second, what were the main official arguments, claims, and legitimacy discourses employed by the respective institutional actors in charge of promoting such projects and public policies?

According to the analysis here presented, the answer is rooted in the opening of windows of opportunity in the policy stream (Kingdon, 1984), together with the evaluation of policy initiatives based on a limited number of normative values and assessment criteria. This has caused the minimisation or the limited consideration of important dimensions of conflict, such as the importance of uses and customs in Cochabamba, Bolivia or the value of land as a physical space in the Mexican case. The examples here presented suggest that, given the complexity of new democratic settings and the domestic and international pressures faced by the State in Latin America, policy decision makers have been trapped in a sort of inertia left behind by authoritarian regimes –often military

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[12] In fact, the current president Evo Morales and his political party (MAS) gained much more visibility thanks to their role during the 'Water War' in Cochabamba (Van Cott, 2003: 752; 770).

dictatorships- that preceded democratic transitions and that has evolved into the existence of 'autistic' States.

Under these circumstances, the policy process has provided the inputs necessary for constructing collective action frames (Snow and Benford, 1992; Tarrow, 1992; 1998), allowing social movements to be legitimated in the public space. Such collective action frames have been conducive to project new collective identities and causal stories that contrast with the policy discourses constructed by institutional actors. To a great extent, the success and/or trajectory of social movements depends on such identities and causal stories being sufficiently attractive to a broad set of potential followers.

At the same time, this work has aimed at assessing the role played by these social movements as alternative channels for political participation and representation. The answer depends on the theoretical framework that is used to analyse and measure the achievement of a social movement but in general it is possible to talk about three broad areas: the democratization of the public space, the introduction and discussion of new normative values and assessment criteria in the policy process, and the securing of political rights and material demands. Given the complexity of this kind of conflicts, it is risky to make any generalisation. However, the analysed examples point to four wide-ranging conclusions.

In the first place, these social movements have democratised the public space in two manners: by bringing back normative values and dimensions of conflict that were not originally considered and by diffusing a series of collective identities. Unfortunately, this has only been possible while missing windows of opportunity in the policy stream.

In the second place, securing new political rights and material demands has been a function of three factors: the ability of democratic regimes to absorb 'shocks' derived from the cancellation of important policy initiatives, the magnitude and significance of the respective project, and the capacity of a social movement to break existing decision-making monopolies or to block the consolidation of new ones.

In the third place, the few cases where the social movement has managed to earn the right of playing a more active role in the policy process, the results regarding the solution of policy problems have continued to be very limited. To a great extent, the new decision makers have faced the same classical problems of the policy process: ambiguous preferences, power struggles between institutional actors, incomplete information, and conditionings that derived from prevailing normative values and assessment criteria.

Fourth and finally, the impact of these movements in the longer term is at best uncertain. In countries where political changes have happened relatively slowly –e.g. Mexico-, the impact will depend on the emergence of longer cycles of protest (Tarrow, 1994); on the presence of new contentious groups that use the new 'repertories of contention' (Tilly, 1978) under different circumstances, and ultimately on whether new social movements promote democratic values or not. In countries where political changes have happened relatively faster –e.g. Bolivia-, the final result will depend on how new political and economic reforms are design and implemented.

Together, the examples presented show that any debate about development and public policy in Latin America should recognise at least four premises: 1) the policy process is imperfect, buy may benefit from the active participation of actors outside the State's institutional apparatus, including those not using institutional channels of participation and representation; 2) the plurality of actors and cognitive experiences implies different visions of development; 3) traditional approaches to assess the technical and economic feasibility of a project should be complemented with qualitative parameters, including considerations regarding the social and historical experience of those who are directly affected; and 4) the timing of a project and the way it is implemented, including

the respective discourse of legitimation, are as important or more important as its technical an financial feasibility.[13]

These four guidelines and the analysis presented throughout this work should only be taken as a first attempt to articulate a broader vision of the relations between public policy, social movements, and democratisation in Latin America. The aim was not to present an exhaustive conceptual framework, but to explore in a preliminary manner the ways in which social movement theories and policy theories may be combined to improve the design and implementation of public policies in the region, also contributing to the processes of democratic consolidation. A more extensive work should include a more sophisticated analysis of other variables here proposed. Beyond windows of opportunity, policy monopolies, and collective action frame, it is also necessary to explore the potential role of different advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1988; 1999), organisational resources and mobilisation structures used by contentious groups, and the role of potential movement allies (Tarrow, 1998).

In more practical terms, future work should include the formulation of more detailed guidelines to face the different contradictions that emerge when studying together public policy process and social movement processes. For example, it is necessary to answer the following questions: How to implement participatory schemes in the context of windows of opportunity that close swiftly? How to link the public space with political-administrative apparatuses without having public policies being taken over by narrow interest groups? How to conciliate the goals of economic efficiency and accommodation of legitimate social and political forces? How to continue implementing public policy in a context of deep political changes? These and other questions constitute the central elements for a future research agenda.

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[13] Interestingly, these four guidelines coincide broadly with recommendations derived from recent research works sponsored by international financial institutions like the Interamerican Development Bank. See for example: IADB (2006:256-258).

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