

NAVIGATING POLICY DYNAMICS: FOCUSING EVENTS,  
MULTIPLE  
STREAMS FRAMEWORK  
AND CRISIS-DRIVEN AGENDA SETTING IN PUBLIC POLICY:  
THE CASE OF WILDFIRES IN KARST, SLOVENIA

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# Natural hazards in Slovenia

- Slovenia faces several natural hazards due to its diverse geography –earthquakes, ice storms, floods, wildfires...
- In July 2022, Slovenia was hit by the biggest wildfires in the country's history. More than 3600 hectares of the Goriška and Komen Karst region were burned, more than 15,000 firefighters with 3,500 vehicles, and 4,500 members of intervention services took part in firefighting in very challenging conditions. Fire reoccurred in 2024 on a smaller scale.
- Urgent collaboration of Slovenian and Italian forces, several countries' assistance through bilateral cooperations (Italy, Hungary and Slovakia), EU civil protection mechanism (Italy, Croatia, Austria, Slovakia and Serbia) and other agreements.

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# Agenda Setting

- A crucial stage in the policymaking process where the course of government action is shaped.
- Influenced by many factors, including external shocks, media coverage, public opinion, political factors, and lobbying efforts.
- Discourse importance: how various actors present and narrate issues through public discourse greatly affects their prioritisation and acceptance on the policy agenda.
- Cross-border collaboration as a crucial driver in shaping the EU agenda setting.

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# Focusing events

- Birkland (2020): "A focusing event is a sudden, rare, and harmful event that is known to policymakers and the public virtually simultaneously, and that can be understood as illustrative of some broader problem."— Birkland, Thomas A. (1997).
- Typical cases: natural hazards, airplane accidents etc..
- Significant material damage: caused by human activity or unpredictable event in nature.
- Gain wider attention of the general public and decision-makers.

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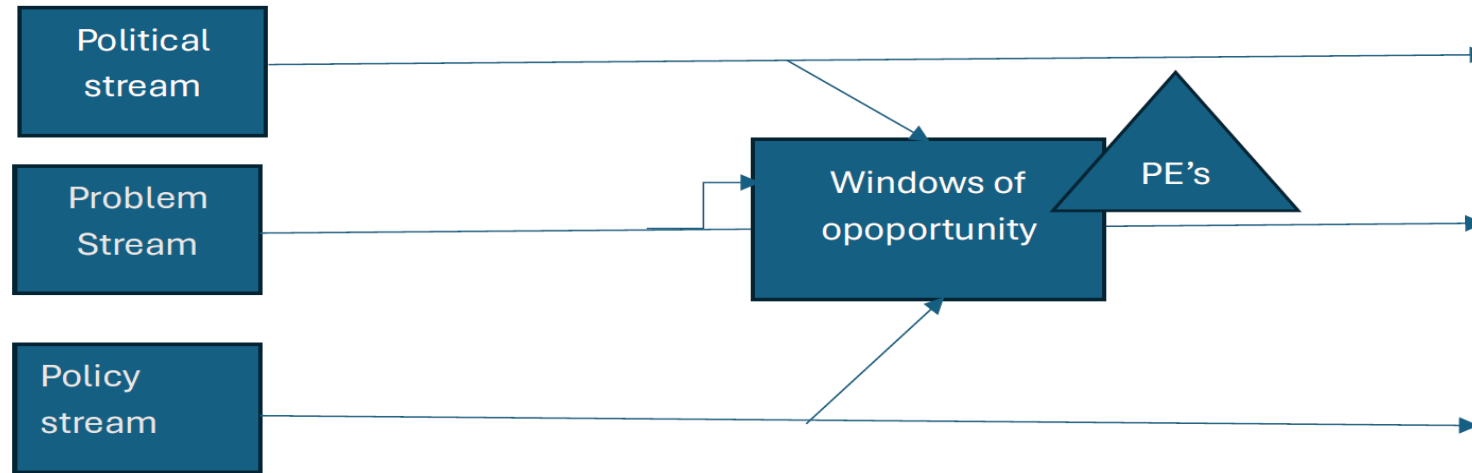
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# Multiple Streams Framework

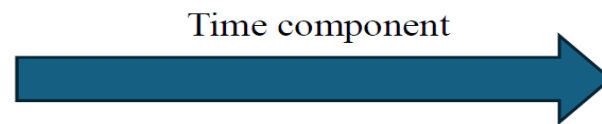
- Kingdon (1984/2011): "Problems, policies, and politics flow along in their own separate streams. At certain critical times, the three streams come together, and a policy window opens. This is the time when agenda-setting is most likely to happen."— Kingdon, John W. (1995). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (2nd ed.). HarperCollins, p. 88.
- Policy entrepreneurs (brokers): important policy actors „pushing“ policy proposals into agenda-setting
- „Windows of opportunity“: interaction of political, problem and policy stream.
- "A policy window is an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their solutions, or to push attention to their special problems. These windows are opened by the appearance of compelling problems or by events in the political stream."— Kingdon, John W. (1995). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (2nd ed.), p. 165

# Multiple Streams Framework

Scheme 1: Multiple Streams Framework (source: Kingdon, 1984; Birkland, 2020).



(source: Kingdon, 1984; Birkland, 2020).



# Discourses

## Critical policy discourse analysis????

### Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):

- How power and language are covered in ideological structures.
- How power in language creates inequalities among policy actors?
- Critique of certain reforms of national emergency plans in cases of natural hazards.

### Policy discourse

- How are realities interpreted using narratives, stories etc?
- Interpretation of meanings.
- Social constructionism/hermeneutics.
- The way natural disasters and policy change are interpreted through different lenses

# „Discursive streams“

Source: Birkland (2020); Kingdon (2011); WiWinkel and Leipold (2016).

Scheme 3: Hypothetical integrated approach MSF+CDA

[Problem stream] [Discourse construction of policy problems: "catastrophic events", "guilt", "non-intervention", "us and the other"]



[Policy stream] [Potential solutions as represented in discourse; "reforms", "better policy response", "modernization"]



[Politics stream] [Political climate in discourse construction; "police/army as heroes", "solidarity among people"]



+-----+

| Windows of opportunity +  
| discourse construction  
| (policy changes as changes in  
| discourse re-construction)

+-----+

# Policy discourse vs. CDA: possible „translation“ of realities (elements of evaluation)

## Policy discourse:

- Different interpretations, counter-stories, logical construction of discourses; possible transformation of ideas.
- Possible rationalization of political debates, objectification.
- Non-inclusion of alternatives (?), without reference to the policy actor.
- “Narration” of the opposite group cannot be fully accepted (not legitimate in the eyes of decision-makers).
- Advocacy of certain concepts, policies, powerful positive political messages (reframing issues).

Source: Winkel and Leipold (2016); Fairclough (2003), van Dijk (1998), Wodak & Reisigl (2001), van Leeuwen (2007), Mouffe (2005).

## Critical discourse analysis:

- “Narrativization”: structuration of discourse as stories with beginning, development, plot, resolution (framing, ideological squaring).
- Technocratic argumentation, “rationalism”.
- “Suppression”, „silencing“, „backgrounding“.
- Moral, rational, authoritative, mockery delegitimation.
- Language as an element of normative power.
- Existing discourses are relevant again; inter-discursivity.

# Analysis

- Political stream: national mood (Kingdon, 2011): elections, ideological disputes, pressure from various groups.
- Problem stream: perception of focusing events, feedback, problem interpretation, values.
- Policy stream: solutions feasibility, technocratic vs. political rhetoric, improved regulation.
- Windows of opportunity: mayors of local communities, state agencies and government proposed different improvements.

# Methodology

- CDA was used to compare media narratives of the 2022 and 2024 Karst wildfires
- 34 media reports from different sources (Večer, Delo, RTV Slovenija, Primorske novice, Koroške novice, 24ur ect.)
- How did the media construction of a policy problem differ in 2022 from 2024, and how did that affect agenda setting and policy change?
- A major-scale focal event (2022) is more likely to open a window of opportunity for policy change than a recurring, smaller-scale event (2024).

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# CDA on the case of 2022 and 2024 wildfire

## 2022

- Production of storylines
- Exclusion
- Delegitimation
- Using normative power
- Re- and de-issuing
- Emotionally charged, ideological, exceptional disaster
- Including local voices and environmental issues
- Criticism of Italian authorities and preparedness
- Solidarity, gratitude as moral norms
- Calls for unity, some mention of systemic issues

## 2024

- Technocratic, structured, rational, institutional response, data driven
- Strong exclusion of alternative views, local voices and environmental issues
- Few attempts. Reinforcing trust in official actors
- Response as a moral imperative, institutional legitimacy
- Returning to 2022 experience

# Preliminary findings

- 2022 media coverage was more inclusive, emotionally driven, highlighting solidarity and cross-border cooperation, while in 2024, media prioritised institutional effectiveness and rationality, shaping public focus on state coordination and technical aspects of the response → shift, indicating a narrowing of public discourse, steering attention away from deeper political and environmental challenges
- Problem stream shifted from urgent, exceptional crisis opening space for recognising systemic weaknesses (2022) to routine event with no call for structural change (2024)
- Policy stream shifted from hinting at potential policy solutions (2022) to the absence of the same (2024)
- Politics stream shifted from pushing for new policies (2022) to discourse dominated by institutional voices, limiting political debate, little to no pressure for pushing new policies (2024) → the “window of opportunity” remains closed
- Influential actors: Firefighters' Association of Slovenia, Civil Protection, mayors, Forest Service, Office for Protection and Rescue, Local Communities, Politicians

## Future steps

- Deepen and broaden the theoretical construct of the research,
- Conduct interviews with key stakeholders involved in wildfire response,
- Continue with the critical discourse analysis of media reporting, adding statistical analysis.

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