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Multiple streams, resistance and energy policy change in Paraguay (2004–2014)

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ABSTRACT

Most Latin-American countries have undergone policy reforms in their Energy Sector during the last 60 years. In Paraguay, despite several attempts at introducing policy innovations, the organisation of the sector has remained virtually unchanged. Why have attempts at introducing policy changes failed? While crucial for the country's development and the future of the regions' energy sector, there has been little academic study of Paraguay's energy policy-making processes. This paper presents an account of how the politics have influenced the current state of energy policy in Paraguay through the lens of Kingdon's multiple streams approach (MSA). The analysis suggests that battle for political power, as well as changes in government, have played a key role in hampering change during the period under study, weakening the efforts of policy entrepreneurs. The absence of Kingdon's conditions for policy change also offers a way of understanding sociotechnical 'regime resistance'. In terms of policy implications where institutional change is an objective, the case implies a need to empower policy entrepreneurs, here including the Vice Minister of Mines and Energy via the creation of a dedicated Ministry for Energy.

1. Introduction

Understanding energy transitions in developing countries is of paramount relevance to sustainability, as energy consumption in the developing world will continue to increase in the future as a consequence of population growth and economic development [1]. Encouraging transitions away from the predominant fossil-fuel and unsustainable biomass consumption in the developing world entails grand challenges in all orders, but above all it poses governance issues for policymakers. Governmental policy makers are both constrained by and embedded in the complex political processes and dynamics inherent to the transformation of large socio-technical systems, where path dependence patterns are pervasive and resistance by the status quo is high [2,3].

Sustainability research has historically focused policy design, neglecting the political circumstances that make the adoption of policies for energy transition likely [2–5]. Understanding political

circumstances is increasingly viewed as critical to understanding the conditions under which more sustainable energy policies might develop [6,3,4]. The roles that the State and Government play in these processes is key [7–9], as are appropriate institutional frameworks ([10], p. 92, 194). This is particularly relevant in emerging and developing countries, which tend to have weaker institutions and be more prone to rent-seeking behaviour by interest groups [11].

There are still considerable gaps in our knowledge of the ways in which politics influence energy transitions (or the lack thereof) in developing and emerging economies [12–14]. Even more so with respect to individual Latin-American countries, particularly hydropower-rich economies, with the exception of Brazil [15]. In this study, we aim to describe and explain instances of energy policy failure in Paraguay, a little-studied emerging South American economy. We find Kingdon's "Multiple Streams Approach" (MSA) (2011) useful for understanding how particular policy choices are made under particular conditions, with its account of the particular role of politics alongside policy

Abbreviations: ANDE, Administración Nacional de Electricidad (Paraguay's state-owned utility); MEN, Mesa Energética Nacional (National Energy Advisory Forum); MOPC, Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Comunicaciones (Ministry of Public Works and Communications); MRE, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); MSA, Multiple Streams Approach; NEP, Paraguayan National Energy Policy; NIPSA, Ingeniería, Estudios y Proyectos NIP, S.A. (Spanish consulting firm); OLADE, Organización Latinoamericana de Energía (Latinamerican Energy Organisation); PTIEE, Producción y Transporte Independiente de Energía Eléctrica (Independent electrical energy generation and transport); RTA, Río Tinto Alcán; SIN, Sistema Interconectado Nacional (National interconnected system); VMME, Viceministerio de Minas y Energía (Energy and Mining Vice Ministry)

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problematization and opportunity exploitation. Kingdon's theory being initially intended for application to the pre-decision stages of policy-making, here we use the version of MSA expanded by Zahariadis [16] to encompass the entire policy formation process, including political decision making. While we apply the MSA as an explanatory heuristic, given the limited degree of political data that could be accessed during the period under study, we do not make definitive claims regarding the validity of the MSA per se.

Sharing many characteristics with other emerging countries in the South American region in terms of economic, social and political development, Paraguay is at the same time unusual in two ways. First, it showcases a unique situation where the level of renewable energy generation is beyond the country's own needs, but where progress towards an environmentally and socially sustainable energy mix is stalling [17]. Secondly, in terms of the governance structures of its energy sector, Paraguay is the only country in South America that has not put in place structural reforms since the 1960s [18]. It is also one of only three members of the Latin American Organisation of Energy (OLADE) to not have dedicated ministerial level authority to guide the energy sector. This last situation has led to widely recognised policy coordination issues in Paraguay's energy sector [19,20].

In studying Paraguay, we contribute to the small but growing literature on energy transitions in emerging economies. We focus in particular on the long-term failure to: (a) create a Ministry of Energy in Paraguay [21] and (b) adopt a national energy policy (NEP): an all-encompassing long-term plan for the development of the energy sector. Both of these are pivotal to steering a transition towards sustainable energy supply and use in Paraguay. Almost all (99%) of the electricity that Paraguay produces comes from renewable sources [17].

The proposal for a dedicated Ministry of Energy in Paraguay was presented five times between 2004 and 2014. The adoption by the government of a national energy policy was attempted three times between 2004 and 2014. The main empirical aim of the paper is to explain why these proposals for a national energy policy (NEP) and a dedicated Ministry failed systematically during the period under study, using a version of Kingdon's MSA. In this respect, we argue that the necessary conditions identified by Kingdon were simply not fully present. In a meta-analysis by Jones et al. [22], policymaking in South American countries is shown to have received the lowest frequency of attention with the MSA approach. Indeed to our knowledge, only one other study applies the MSA to Paraguay [21]. By examining the domestic politics involved, we aim to deepen the understanding of underlying political processes inherent to policy changes in complex socio-technical sectors in this particular developing country. The use of a case-study design allows detailed examination of the dynamics of processes, with insights amenable to comparison elsewhere [23].

While our main contribution is empirical, we also posit that the active suppression or simply absence of the conditions that Kingdon identifies in his theory of policy change – and that we observe here – is one means by which sociotechnical regime resistance [2] can be enacted. Hence we see connections between the MSA and Geels' [2] concept of regime stability and its operationalisation of “resistance through politics” [2]. Interest-based and instrumental forms of power are known to be active in the maintenance of this stability and can help to explain policy change and stasis [24]. The MSA takes this understanding one stage further by specifying the conditions that interests need to ensure are absent, for stability to endure.

In the next section, we outline Kingdon's approach, explaining these conditions, followed by a summary of the methodology and research design. We then present the MSA analysis, describing developments in the Paraguayan energy policy process between 2004 and 2014. Discussion, conclusions and further work follow.

2. The multiple streams approach to policy making

The Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) is one of the most widely

used theories to explain policy change — or lack thereof [25]. It conceives of policy changes as requiring windows of opportunity where three streams or processes – the “problems”, “policy” and “politics” streams that flow through the policy system – converge in a solution that is transformed into a policy output, usually through the intervention of a policy entrepreneur [26]. The MSA is also used to explore how governments make policies under ambiguity ([27], p. 368). The framework was first presented by John Kingdon in his seminal work *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* in 1984, re-edited in 2003 and in 2011 in its international edition.

The MSA approach is intended to challenge the use of metaphors to over-simplify the complexities of policy processes, specifically the “cycles” and “stages” heuristic, which enjoyed a monopoly in explaining policy processes for many years ([28], pp. 43–44). The MSA proposes that rather than a series of steps, the policy process comprises a set of processes including the setting of the agenda, the specification of alternatives from which a choice is to be made, the authoritative choice among alternatives and the implementation of a decision [29].

One characteristic of Kingdon's approach to studying policy-making is the treatment of politics as integral to the policy process ([29], p. 149): this may seem self-evident, but technocratic approaches to policymaking, in the sense of ignoring the ways in which particular policy choices may favour the interests of one group over another, nonetheless remain prevalent [30]. In Kingdon's analysis, the *Political Stream* is composed of the national mood, understood not as “public opinion” in a poll-based definition, but rather in terms of the perception of politicians (2011, p. 149), as based on communication with their constituents, commentaries and impressions of the “nature of the times” gathered from the news media. Key among these for Kingdon are the strongly held views of “important politicians” ([30], p. 147), organized political forces or interest groups, which may comprise organized labour, business and industry, election-related participants—notably, political parties—and government officials. It is important to note that any these actors may be as keen to block initiatives (2011, p. 50) arising from within or without of government, as they may be to further change. Changes relating to the executive or legislative parts of government are typically contentious for being conflicts about jurisdiction ([30], pp. 157–158). These conflicts mainly affect policymaking systems through changes in political priorities and hence resource allocation, tending to result in deadlock or stalemate ([30], p. 158).

According to Kingdon, conditions become *Problems* when policy-makers realize that something needs to be done about them ([30], p. 114). The main ways in which conditions become problems is through focusing events, which may call attention to problems in the form of both “little pushes” ([30], 94–95) and through the systemic indicators that report the situation of a given sector. The transformation from condition to problem also develops through either an evaluation of the situation through a set of values or through comparison or categorization, for instance by comparing different countries or categorizing a condition as sub-optimal in relation to an ideal vision ([29], p. 110). *Solutions* to societal problems—which might not, at the moment they are developed, have the attention of decision-makers, develop in what Kingdon calls the “policy primeval soup” ([29], p. 117) generated by a community of specialists who interact and generate ideas, concepts and notions about more or less vague or concrete proposals relating to what they consider as societal problems.

A key concept introduced by Kingdon is that of the *Policy Entrepreneur*. Now a relatively familiar concept, such entrepreneurs are defined broadly as: “advocates who are willing to invest their resources to promote a position” ([29], 179). Zahariadis [26] develops this definition by specifying that entrepreneurs may be either individual or collective actors (2014). Successful policy entrepreneurs usually carry a “claim to hearing”, have political connections, sound negotiating skills and are persistent. Besides pushing for their favoured policy alternatives, policy entrepreneurs usher in *coupling*, the bringing of the policy, problem and politics streams together at critical points in time,

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