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NAVIGATING POLICY DYNAMICS: FOCUSING EVENTS, MULTIPLE STREAMS FRAMEWORK, DISCOURSES AND CRISIS-DRIVEN AGENDA SETTING IN PUBLIC POLICY**

Abstract. *The article explores how policymakers respond to focusing events like pandemics, natural disasters, and other critical incidents. Using the “multiple streams framework”, “windows of opportunity” for policy change created from the convergence of political, problem and policy streams are identified. The research primarily brings the Streams concept together with policy discourse approaches to form a combined framework. Special attention is paid to the way the media, social networks, and various policy actors construct the ‘disaster’ reality. The presented case study concerns wildfires that spread across Slovenia in 2022, which were among the worst natural disasters to affect the Karst region and Slovenia generally, exposing institutional and structural weaknesses in organising a response to manage such events. An essential foundation is provided for future research since it is established that focusing events can accelerate agenda setting when discursive coalitions, policy entrepreneurs and stream coupling align around a dominant narrative of urgency. In the Karst wildfires case, this mechanism facilitated selective policy institutionalisation and implementation, but not a radical restructuring of the broader disaster-governance system.*

Keywords: *policy discourse, Multiple Streams Framework, natural hazards, wildfires, Karst, Slovenia.*

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INTRODUCTION

As Kingdon ([1984]2011) and Birkland ([1997]2020) suggest, radical changes to policies are rare in normal political conditions because policymaking is typically subject to institutional routines, selective attention, and incremental adjustment. Any more substantial change generally comes when extraordinary events disrupt established problem definitions, demand intensify public and political attention, and thus create pressure for a governmental response. In this regard, focusing events conceptualised by Birkland ([1997]2020) are especially valuable by opening windows of opportunity for agenda setting and policy reform. With the above-mentioned in mind, the 2022 Karst wildfires in Slovenia provide a relevant case for examining how such dynamics unfold in practice.

The varied geography of Slovenia means it faces several natural hazards, including earthquakes, floods, ice storms, and wildfires. In recent years, the wildfires in the Karst region have been the most destructive. The Karst is mainly rocky terrain, with limited soil, strong winds, while restricted land and forest fuel management add to the area's considerable vulnerability to fires, especially in summer. In July 2022, a series of wildfires broke out between Italy and Slovenia, burning over 4,450 hectares in the Karst region. Municipalities on each side of the border were heavily impacted. In Slovenia, the fires burned around 48% of the Miren-Kostanjevica municipal area, making it one of the most severely affected regions. Urgent collaboration between Slovenia and neighbouring countries was initiated immediately (GZS 2022).

This article uses Birkland's (1997, 21–22) classification of such occurrences as focusing events, which he defines as: "sudden, relatively rare events that spark intense media and public attention because of their sheer magnitude, or sometimes because of the harm they reveal". Besides natural disasters, these can include aeroplane accidents, industrial accidents such as factory fires or oil spills, large protest rallies or marches, and government scandals (Birkland 2020).

We examine how the response to natural hazards with deadly effects on residents and the environment can lead to different levels of radical policy changes. These changes may assist in identifying potential technical and policy improvements after specific events are analysed. The research concentrates on analysing policy discourse (Fischer and Forester 1993; Hajer 1995; Dryzek 2013) as the primary analytical tool, along with the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) theory (Kingdon 1984; Birkland 2020).

The MSF theory is mostly based on the work of Kingdon's ([1984]2011), which defines public policies and the concept of 'streams': the political stream, involving events like elections, public opinion, political climate, or pressure groups; the policy stream, consisting of potential solutions and ideas; and the problem stream, where issues must be identified and framed as problems that require government action, with the media playing a crucial role. Although these streams do not operate independently, they can converge at certain points. In this setting, windows of opportunity arise as possibilities for changing policy (Birkland 2020).

While the Multiple Streams Framework helps explain how problem, policy and political streams converge during extraordinary events, it does not really address the style of governmental response that follows. Richardson's (1982) discussion of policy styles is useful here, particularly the notion of reactive policymaking whereby governments respond to crises under pressure, with limited time available for strategic deliberation. This perspective is relevant in cases of focusing events for which the urgent need to respond may prioritise rapid, selective and operational measures over broader long-term reform.

For many years, public policy has been influenced by at least two contrasting approaches. First, the positivist approach has dominated debates and analyses. Initially, Laswell (1951) leaned towards more rationalist and scientifically oriented analyses. Wildavsky (1967) advocated the use of empirical data to analyse the budgetary process. Sabatier (1999), Sabatier and Weible (2007) and Weible et al. (2014) applied the Advocacy Coalition Framework in empirical analysis and a more qualitatively oriented discourse analysis. Second, key authors labelled "post-positivists" include Fischer ([1993]2003), who argued that modern policies are the result of different discourses and symbolic meanings. Hajer (1995) noted that policies emerge from clashes among various discursive frameworks. Stone (1988) agreed that policy is not just technical decision-making but a symbolic process.

A positivist approach to public policy highlights empirical observation, causal explanation, and methodological objectivity. It assumes that policy problems can be identified through observable indicators and policy change can be analysed by tracing interactions among measurable events, institutional responses, and political conditions. In this perspective, official reports, administrative data and other forms of technical evidence are seen to be key sources for explaining how issues gain agenda status and governments formulate responses. With focusing events, positivist analysis is especially valuable by helping to specify the empirical conditions in which a sudden, highly visible event triggers policy attention and opens a policy window.

Only a few attempts to combine the MSF approach with discourse analysis in broader contexts have been made (see Wienkel and Leopold 2016). The leading idea of Wienkel and Leopold (2016) in their theoretical policy experiment was to show the potential for integrating these two approaches. They stated: "Our starting point is the MSF; from there we investigate linkages to discourse analysis in relation to structures (streams and discourses), the understanding of agency, and strategic practices of manipulation" (p. 9). The connection between the presented theories and focusing events is as follows: focusing events are treated as the empirical trigger of agenda-setting dynamics; the Multiple Streams Framework explains how such events can open a policy window through the coupling of problem, policy and political streams; and discourse analysis complements this by revealing the way actors construct the event's meaning, urgency and legitimacy by way of public narratives and discursive coalitions.

The article combines three levels of analysis that have different albeit complementary purposes. First, the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon [1984]2011; Birkland [1997]2020) provides the central theoretical explanation of how a focusing event can open a policy window by bringing problem, policy and political streams together. Second, policy discourse analysis (Fischer [1993]2003; Hajer 1995; Winkel and Leopold 2016) is used as an interpretive analytical lens to investigate how actors frame the event, construct a sense of urgency, and legitimise specific solutions. Third, process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2013; 2016) serves as the methodological strategy for empirically reconstructing the sequence of events and determining whether the proposed causal mechanism linking the wildfires to policy change is plausible in the Slovenian case.

Accordingly, the article does not present these theories as separate perspectives, and instead as analytically complementary tools for understanding the way the 2022 Karst wildfires moved from being a sudden crisis to a case of crisis-driven agenda-setting and selective policy institutionalisation.

The presented study analyses the 2022 Karst wildfires in Slovenia as a focal event and examines whether it created conditions for agenda-setting and selective policy change. Using the Multiple Streams Framework, policy discourse analysis, and process tracing, it traces how discursive coalitions, stream coupling, and policy entrepreneurship shaped the opening of a policy window and the institutionalisation of selected disaster-governance measures.

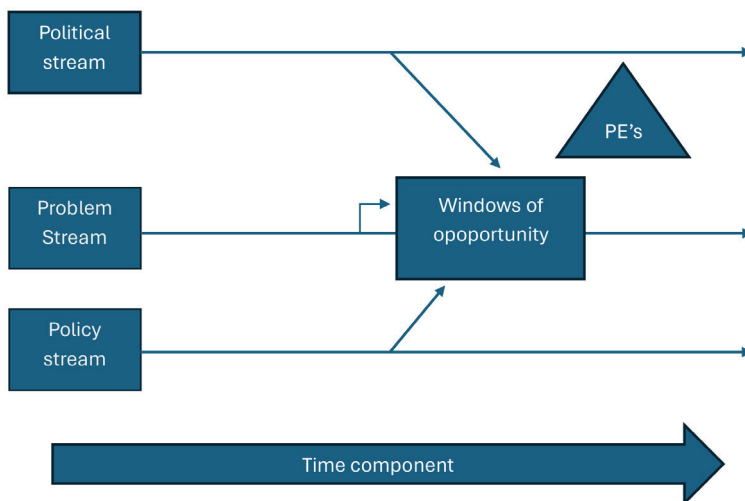
MULTIPLE STREAM FRAMEWORK AND FOCUSING EVENTS

Focusing events, as defined by Birkland (2020), are typically sudden and shocking incidents that are highly visible and attract the attention of specific policy actors. Such events can reveal weaknesses in critical infrastructure systems, prompting advocacy coalitions or interest groups to become active in a policy issue. At the same time, some policy actors may serve as “gatekeepers” or “selectors” of ideas, limiting the participation of various interest groups. Agenda setting emphasises the importance of issue salience and directing the focus towards problems. Standard mechanisms include: (1) media framing, which concerns the way policy issues are presented in the media; (2) policy windows, which are opportunities for policy change when political, policy and problem streams align to create favourable conditions for further action; and (3) policy entrepreneurs, who are key players supporting particular solutions at the right time (Kingdon [1984]2011; Birkland 2020).

Birkland developed the concept of focusing events by building on Kingdon's ([1984]2011) MSF theoretical framework. The core idea is that three streams come together in a ‘window of opportunity’. The first, the problem stream, involves identifying major societal issues, such as natural disasters, revolutions, pandemics, national elections, or external political pressure on weaker states. The problem stream should also be recognised by wider society, where public perception often outweighs objective facts. For instance, health issues may

become policy concerns when strict privatisation incentives affect a specific national public health system. To promote certain solutions to policy problems, various indicators can be used to illustrate the seriousness of a societal issue. The policy stream is also the third key component of the model and the source of potentially applicable policy solutions to a given situation. Here, the political stream is also important. In Kingdon's sense, it refers to changes in the political environment, encompassing shifts in public mood, government priorities, pressure from organised actors, and the broader institutional climate in which policy decisions are made. With focusing events, the political stream is crucial because even highly visible problems and available solutions are unlikely to advance without political receptiveness and support.

Scheme 1: MULTIPLE STREAMS FRAMEWORK



Sources: Kingdon 1984; Birkland 2020 PE = policy entrepreneurs).

Like with all other approaches, this model of the policy process is open to criticism. As Sabatier (1991) argues, little analysis remains to be done after a policy window opens. Similarly, Howlett (2018) noted that the MSF and other relevant theories of the policy process, for example, the Punctuated Equilibrium and the Advocacy Coalitions Framework, should be merged to a create a more coherent and integrated framework rather than being treated as separate experiments. He also criticised these approaches for lacking methodological consistency. Further support for this view is found in poststructuralist policy analysis by David Howarth and Steven Griggs (2013) that looked at airport expansion in the United Kingdom, notably the debate on the third runway at Heathrow. They show that policy conflicts are not only influenced by material interests or

institutional limits, but in addition by struggles over how problems are defined and made politically relevant. In this manner, discourse does more than accompany policymaking; it shapes a policy problem by determining what counts as valid knowledge, acceptable solutions, and important political divisions (language and ideas (discourse) are not just a neutral way of talking about policies—they actually shape how policies are created and understood). Their analysis is also useful by showing how different ways of talking about issues can be traced through statements, rhetorical strategies and coalition-building in policy documents, public discussions and media debates.

POLICY DISCOURSE, COALITIONS AND STREAMS

Policy discourse influences the direction of policy problems, their definitions, and whether they are seen as relevant by decision-makers, the public, and interest groups. Each policy event features important slogans, words, metaphors and ‘buzzwords’. Any environmental issue can often thus be viewed as a security concern, a business opportunity, or a security challenge.

Fischer (2024) argues the ‘post-truth era’ essentially dismisses evidence-based policy, undermining the role of facts in public policymaking. However, the core idea of the interpretivist paradigm is that ‘objective reality’ is always somewhat a matter of interpretation.

Drawing on the concept of discourse, Hajer (1995) introduces the idea of discursive coalitions, namely, groups of actors that collaboratively construct social realities. The challenge for each coalition is how to ‘capture’ a social problem, interpret and understand it – influencing the perception of social reality. The power of language in expression and interpretation appears to be vital for understanding discourse. The distribution of discursive power can either unify or divide actors within the discourse field, potentially leading to conflict or cooperation.

Winkel and Leopold (2016, 110) discuss the phenomenon of “couplings”, stating: “Coupling is the process of connecting two or three streams into a compelling whole. Through coupling, a policy problem (or a policy solution) is made ready for the agenda”.

Authors (2016) describe a set of discursive strategies that define the main parameters of our study. First, the “production of storylines” impacts the way interpretations, counter-stories, the logical development of discourses, and potential for change in ideas are formed. Policy entrepreneurs have a significant role in creating storylines and conflicting discourses, making them crucial policy actors in connecting streams and couplings. They link specific problems with possible solutions, as “story lines revitalize existing valleys in the discursive terrain through new practices and prepare the confluence of the problem and policy stream” (Winkel and Leopold 2016, 123).

Discourse rationalisation and scientification, along with emotionalisation and polarisation, enable policy actors to justify political debates, objectify ideas, and reinforce dominant bureaucratic narratives. This can become a cause for conflicts between expertise and policy concerns. Moreover, discourses of exclusion – such as omitting alternatives – may appear in political debates without referencing the policy actor, especially amid new policy conditions. Delegitimation occurs when the opposing group's narrative is not fully accepted, meaning it is not seen as legitimate by decision-makers, thereby undermining its credibility in discourse. Institutions can also use normative power to promote certain ideas, policies, and positive political messages. The use of normative power is a strategy when, for example, decision-makers call for new rescue equipment to be included in the national emergency response system, even if there are limited funds for that purpose. Finally, repeatedly de- and re-issuing particular themes weakens the meaning of an existing policy or redefines the same issue in a different way (Winkel and Leopold 2016).

In the hypothetical model of public-political discourse in the context of MSF, it is important to first clarify the concepts of normative power and institutional structures. This framework sets the boundaries of acceptable discourse. Winkel and Leopold (2016) use the metaphor of a “shoreline” to describe discursive structures that define legitimacy, moral perspectives and the range of discourse. For instance, the moral note highlights messages advocating for environmental protection to prevent fires (see Schmidt 2008).

Discursive practices are divided into three “streams”: problem, political and policy. The political one reflects changes in the political environment, such as swings in public opinion or a new leadership, like a prime minister. The problem stream outlines the characteristics of a given social issue. Finally, the public policy stream provides solutions to address the identified problem. “Dikes” are stable discursive structures that restrict political change (Winkel and Leopold 2016). The above indicate that citizens trust the system to respond efficiently to natural disasters as well as the actors responsible for rescue and logistics.

The authors (2016) metaphorically interpret the concept of “meander” as a symbol of discourse that is not straight, but winding. The course of discourse deviates from an ideally outlined structure. When a dike collapses, or “demolishing dikes”, flows can start to meander and merge to form new paths. Here, the meander represents the free, unrestricted movement of discursive flows after any rigid dividing lines are no longer in place. The metaphor of “erosion” refers to a decrease in discourse intensity and to ‘refilling the riverbed’. In this context, control over the discourse diminishes, and pressure rises from lower levels, where new ideas develop.

Table 1: COUPLING MSF AND POLICY DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Multiple Streams Framework	Discourse analysis	Couplings
Policy, problems and politics: how institutions perceive reality and their procedures	Various discursive practices, perception of reality, importance of language and knowledge, “institutions as sedimented discursive structures”	Streams are imagined as discursive patterns filled with water (water = discursive practices)
Stream independence: possible couplings among them	Streams are connected through story lines – story lines are imagined as policy discourses	Story lines are perceived as couplings, stories may be empirically investigated, discursive structures integrate streams, discursive channels interweave the streams when they are ‘filled with water’
A policy window as a brief opportunity to push further potential solutions	Shifts in political communication; radical changes in discourses	Policy windows are imagined as flooding the streams; discursive practices are increasing
Policy entrepreneurs: manipulation of all three streams – opportunities for policy change	Influencing discourses by policy entrepreneurs, possible manoeuvres to change the course of action	Entrepreneurs as ‘engineers’ – managing discursive connections among all three streams
Skills and resources of policy entrepreneurs	Upon skills and positions in the structure involved in discursive structures	“The characteristics of policy entrepreneurs are dialectically constituted”
Coupling: manipulation as ‘riding the wave’	Establishing discourse coalitions – governance and discursive strategies	“Floods and erosion” – manipulation of streams; dikes can be destroyed; new channels among streams as new policy practices

Source: Winkel and Leopold 2016.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN, AND ANALYTICAL THESES

The study combines three analytically distinct, yet corresponding components. First, the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) provides the main theoretical explanation of how a focusing event can open a policy window by merging the problem, policy and political streams. Second, policy discourse analysis is employed as an interpretive lens to see how urgency, legitimacy, responsibility, and acceptable solutions are constructed in discourse and discursive coalitions. Third, process tracing (PT) is used as the methodological strategy to reconstruct the causal sequence in which the aforementioned dynamics unfolded in the case of the 2022 Karst wildfires in Slovenia. PT is therefore not an alternative

conceptual framework, but a methodological tool for assessing whether the mechanisms suggested by MSF and discourse analysis can be empirically identified in the selected case.

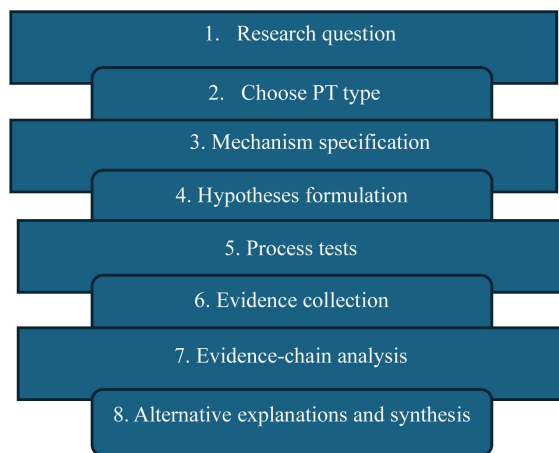
The central research question guiding the article is how the 2022 Karst wildfires served as a focusing event and whether it created the conditions for agenda setting and policy change. More specifically, the study considers how discursive coalitions, stream coupling and policy entrepreneurship helped open a policy window and with the subsequent institutionalisation of the measures selected.

Given the qualitative, case-based and process-oriented nature of the study, the article formulates analytical theses rather than hypotheses in a strict positivist sense. These theses derive from the central research question and serve to guide the empirical analysis. The first thesis addresses whether the wildfires took on the characteristics of a focusing event and generated a dominant discourse of urgency and disaster. The second thesis analyses whether the coupling of the problem, policy and political streams was reinforced by emotionalised and scientific discourse, in turn establishing a legitimising frame for intervention. The third thesis considers whether institutional filters and dominant discursive coalitions stabilised the interpretation of the crisis and restricted alternative narratives. The fourth thesis examines whether policy entrepreneurship and the opening of a policy window led chiefly to selective institutional and infrastructural adjustments rather than any genuinely transformative policy changes.

To organise the empirical analysis, the case is divided into six analytically defined phases labelled F0–F5. While these labels do not represent empirical findings as such, they refer to heuristic phases of the investigated policy process stemming from the combined conceptual framework. Specifically, F0 refers to the focusing event; F1 to the interaction of the problem, policy and political streams; F2 to discursive and institutional filters that shape legitimacy and exclude alternatives; F3 to the role of policy entrepreneurs (“water engineers”) in coupling streams; F4 to the opening of a policy window and the decisive phase of intervention; and F5 to spillover, institutionalisation and implementation. The function of these labels is to translate the combined framework into observable analytical stages that can be examined empirically through process tracing.

Despite F3 and F4 being closely related, they are analytically distinct. F3 relates to the role of policy entrepreneurs in actively coupling streams by linking urgency, expertise, political support and available solutions to create a coherent and legitimate policy narrative. F4, in contrast, refers to the subsequent opening of a policy window, that is, the moment such coupling becomes politically actionable and leads to concrete decisions, interventions and the initial implementation measures. They are analysed in close sequence because they form two consecutive parts of the same causal mechanism, where the former stresses coupling and agency, while the latter emphasises decision-making and the window for policy change.

Scheme 2: PROCESS TRACING FLOW – THE KARST WILDFIRES IN 2022



Source: Beach and Pedersen 2013.

Note: PT = process tracing.

In line with Beach and Pedersen ([2013]2016), the analysis relies on several process-tracing tests, including the hoop, smoking-gun, straw-in-the-wind, and doubly decisive ones. These are not applied mechanically, but serve as heuristic tools for assessing the strength of the empirical evidence over phases F0–F5. The tests are used to evaluate whether the proposed causal sequence – from focusing event and discursive stabilisation to coupling, policy-window opening, and selective institutionalisation – is plausible in the Karst wildfires case.

Three groups of sources were used to gather empirical material. The core empirical corpus consisted of 54 media items published between 12 July and 25 July 2022 on various national, regional, and institutional platforms. These 54 items were the only sources that were systematically coded and subjected to detailed qualitative analysis.

The media corpus covered national online news portals, such as 24ur, N1, RTV SLO, Siol, Žurnal24, Delo, and Večer; regional and borderland outlets, including Primorske novice, Primorski dnevnik, Regional Obala, Koroške novice, Radio 94, Kozjansko.info, and related regional portals; as well as a small number of selected public and institutional sources. Most items consisted of online news reports and portal-based coverage, alongside some public communication materials. Items were identified through keyword searches, including “Karst fire”, “Kras fire”, “wildfire Slovenia”, “požar Kras”, and “Trstelj fire”. They were included only if they directly discussed the July 2024 Kras/Trstelj wildfires, reflected on the 2022 Karst wildfires, or addressed related issues of state response, recovery, prevention, or post-crisis policy. Reports that merely repeated breaking news or lacked substantive analytical content were excluded.

Beyond the coded media corpus, official, policy, expert, and technical documents were used as contextual and descriptive material. These sources included legislative proposals, laws, government programmes, selected ministerial documents, statements by politicians and public agencies, and reports from institutions such as ARSO, ZGS, and Civil Protection. They were selected for their relevance to wildfire governance, emergency response, recovery, prevention, political framing, damage assessment, response coordination, risk evaluation, and recovery planning in relation to the 2022 and 2024 Karst wildfires. Unlike the 54 media items, these materials were not systematically coded but were used to contextualize and support the interpretation of the empirical findings. Together, these three groups of sources enabled triangulation between systematically coded media coverage, policy and institutional context, and expert knowledge. However, the analytical coding was limited to the 54 media items, while the remaining sources were used to enrich and substantiate the interpretation of the findings.

The four analytical theses are closely tied to the central research question and the article's empirical structure. The first thesis examines whether the wildfires became a focal event (mainly F0). The second explores how stream interaction and discursive legitimation developed (mainly F1). The third considers how institutional and discursive filtering stabilised dominant interpretations (mainly F2). The fourth investigates policy entrepreneurship, the opening of the policy window, and the degree of institutionalisation (mainly F3–F5). The analysis that follows is not a simple description of the event, and is instead a structured look at how these themes appear in the defined phases of the case.

The central research question is how the 2022 Karst wildfires served as a focusing event and whether they created the conditions for agenda setting and policy change. In more detail, the study looks at how discursive coalitions, stream coupling, and policy entrepreneurship helped open a policy window and led to the institutionalisation of certain measures.

Since this is a qualitative, case-based and process-focused study, the article presents analytical theses rather than strict positivist hypotheses. These theses stem from the main research question and guide the analysis. The first thesis asks if the wildfires became a focusing event and created a dominant sense of urgency and disaster. The second examines whether the problem, policy and political streams were linked by emotional and scientific discourse, thereby creating a framework for intervention. The third considers whether institutional filters and dominant discursive coalitions stabilised the interpretation of the crisis and limited other narratives. The fourth enquires into whether policy entrepreneurship and the policy window largely led to selective institutional and infrastructure changes more than a complete policy transformation.

To structure the analysis, the case is divided into six phases, labelled F0 to F5. Rather than empirical findings, these are heuristic stages based on the combined conceptual framework. F0 is the focusing event. F1 covers the interaction of the problem, policy and political streams. F2 involves discursive and institutional

filters that shape legitimacy and exclude alternatives. F3 looks at the policy entrepreneurs, or “water engineers,” who link the streams. F4 is the opening of the policy window and the key intervention phase. F5 covers spillovers, institutionalisation and implementation. These phases assist in turning the framework into clear analytical stages for process tracing.

While F3 and F4 are closely connected, they have different analytical roles. F3 focuses on policy entrepreneurs who bring urgency, expertise, political support, and solutions together to establish a strong policy narrative. F4 is about opening the policy window when this narrative leads to real decisions, interventions, and early implementation. These phases are analysed together given that they are two steps in the same process: F3 highlights the linking of elements and agency, whereas F4 centres on decision-making and the move towards policy change.

WILDFIRES IN SLOVENIA: THE ULTIMATE CASE IN KRAS IN 2022

What makes natural hazards in the Slovenian context so unique? Komac (2022) explained how natural disasters limit a country’s development potential. There are two main responses to them: (1) avoidance, when possible; and (2) co-existence, where states or regions have gained specific knowledge about managing disasters. As Komac (2022, 12) noted, some important symbolic factors may hinder a wider understanding of the risks.

The deadly natural disaster examined in the article is the wildfires in the Kras area in 2022, which prompted urgent cooperation between Slovenian and Italian forces, including fire brigades, military personnel and other available intervention groups, and several other countries. Meanwhile, the European Union’s Civil Protection Mechanism was activated to organise and coordinate support from EU member states. The wildfires were expected to be the biggest in Slovenian territory in recent decades. Like with many similar cases, there was a significant lack of rainfall and higher-than-normal temperatures in July (LSA SAF 2023). Alongside temperatures reaching around 35°C (95°F), the Bora wind – a common weather phenomenon – helped spread the fire considerably. The fire then greatly impacted residents, forests and grasslands. Overall, the rugged terrain also slowed the firefighting efforts and response times.

Between 15 July and 1 August 2022, fires scorched over 3,600 hectares in the Goriška and Komen Karst regions. The damage was concentrated in Miren-Kostanjevica (11%), with smaller areas affected in Renče-Vogrsko (11%), Komen (8%) and Nova Gorica (0.14%). More than 15,000 firefighters, supported by nearly 3,500 vehicles, fought the blaze along with over 4,500 support personnel, including Civil Protection, Police, Emergency Medical services, the Slovenian Red Cross, the National Unit for Explosive Ordnance, the Slovenian Army, Air Force, Rapid Intervention Unit, Forestry Institutes, volunteers, and others. Operations were assisted by nine helicopters, five aircraft and firefighting units from seven countries working near the Slovenia–Italy border with Slovenian Armed Forces aircraft, police and aeroclubs (GZS 2022).

The first fire broke out on 15 July 2022 on the Miren–Opatje Selo road. The response saw 120 firefighters from the Professional Firefighting Unit Nova Gorica and nine firefighting teams from Goriška and Nova Gorica–Šempeter attend, with help from helicopters from the Slovenian Armed Forces and the Italian Civil Protection. The second fire came on 17 July 2022 in the area above Renče. The national plan for large wildfires was activated while a request for EU assistance was sent via the Civil Protection Mechanism. In response, nine helicopters, five aircraft and a firefighting team with four vehicles and nine personnel were deployed. Support arrived from Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Italy. Relief efforts continued until 24 July (Slejko 2024). Three days later, the fire jumped over the border from Italy due to sparks from a braking train. In turn, rail traffic, the Monfalcone–Villes motorway, and several local roads were closed, mostly impacting the broader Kostanjevica na Krasu area. On 20 July, the fire reached its peak and even led to a fatality when a Civil Protection Coordinator lost their life at a separate burn site in the Italian Karst region near Gorizia. On the next day, fires were underway at three major sites – Nova Vas, Vojščiće, and along the line between Cerje and Trstelj – and several smaller fires. They spread from the northern part of Kostanjevica na Krasu and approached Renski Vrh. Over 400 residents from the affected areas were evacuated. Fire jumping distances of 200–250 metres was observed. To better understand the situation, satellite images of the Karst fires were taken using the Copernicus EMS system. On 22 July, bad weather saw the fire intensify on all fronts, moving towards the village of Opatje Selo, which prompted more evacuations. New hotspots appeared, and firefighters struggled to contain them. The most severe fires were in Cerje above Miren and toward Trstelj. On the morning of Sunday 24 July, a brief weather front bringing rain moved over the fire zone, improving the situation somewhat. However, the Bora winds soon made the area dry again. Between 25 and 28 July, smaller fires remained active, yet were under control. On the morning of 28 July, the Civil Protection of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (it. *Civile della Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia*) requested additional forces and resources to extinguish the fire in Brestovac. Units from the North Primorje Firefighting Region were called to assist on the Italian side, primarily to protect the villages of Devetaki and Cotiči. The situation in Slovenia was managed well, with efforts concentrated on clearing and watering the perimeter of the fires (GZS 2022).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

FO – FOCUSING EVENT

If we interpret Birkland (1997) and his concept of a focal event correctly, the fires in the karst qualify as a sudden incident necessitating an immediate institutional response. The fires spread quickly, boosted by the strong winds (Bora) and very dry undergrowth and vegetation. Media coverage of them was

quite sensationalist, which was somewhat needed because it prompted quick action from authorities and led to the evacuation of some residents. Reports by the media were highly emotional, with messages from state agencies carrying a strong emotional tone. A discursive coalition, called a “security-catastrophe” coalition, played a key role in excluding alternative narratives. As a radical and urgent event, it met the Hoop test criteria – indicating it can advance the policy process. Such a dramatic natural disaster creates opportunities for action and attracts public attention.

Scheme 3: FOCUSING EVENT: PLAYERS, COALITION, AND DISCURSIVE THEMES



Legend

Symbol | Meaning

◇ Metaphor: Streams, Shorelines, Dikes, Erosion, Flood (policy window), Meanders, Spillover effect, Water engineers

■ Discourse coalition (A: disaster/safety; B: expertise/operations; C: critique/accountability; D: climate/forest/long-term)

● Actors (URSZR/PGD, ARSO, Police, SAF, government, PM, ministries, DZ, media, mayors, ZGS, EU mechanism, NGOs, climatologists, residents)

▲ Themes in 2022 articles (Bora winds, helicopters, water-scooping aircraft, drones, Trstelj ridge, evacuations, firebreaks, pipeline/hydrants, cross-border coordination etc.)

Source: The image created by the authors.

F1 – STREAMS

In Winkel and Leopold's (2016) analysis, metaphors like "stream" and "shorelines" are very important. Streams symbolised competing interpretations of policy issues, with discursive structures often referencing statements that connect the wildfires to climate change – suggesting the state bears no responsibility for the environment (forests) – or media portraying firefighters as national heroes. Shorelines acted as discursive boundaries, influencing which narratives are seen as legitimate and accepted; they directed the flow of the stream and may have deliberately excluded certain discourses as a government strategy. The Nova24TV portal, generally voicing conservative opinions in Slovenian politics, was critical of the government, stating: "Government representatives used the fires in the Karst in July 2022 for self-promotion, while not a single cent of state aid has reached those in need" (Mezeg, 2024).

The discourse of exclusion is clear since mainstream media largely reiterated statements by public officials and government data, yet avoided addressing certain analytical questions, such as the lack of effective preventive measures and criticisms of the current climate policies. Even when specific issues were discussed, like exploding grenades or impacts of the storm, they were presented as unrelated to human factors, without identifying the actors responsible (the 'agentless' discourse), and included no calls for change or accountability. In this manner, the crisis was presented as 'natural' rather than the outcome of political decisions, as shown in the statement: "The largest fire in the history of independent Slovenia, caused by the strong bora wind and an exceptional drought, required the efforts of thousands of firefighters" (ZSPG 2022).

Kingdon ([1984]2011) describes the political stream as a "national mood", meaning that major political events, shifts in public opinion, and elections can significantly influence how the public views issues like climate change, constitutional questions, or health reforms. At the time of the 2022 wildfires, a new government led by Prime Minister Robert Golob had just been inaugurated, replacing the conservative administration of Janez Janša. Ex-SDS MP Anže Logar was critical of the government's response, stressing the need to "immediately approach the formation of a joint interstate mechanism for the restoration of the Karst" (Primorske novice 2022, August 19).¹

Kingdon (2011) argued indicators are essential as they help identify key aspects of a policy issue and add legitimacy. Even with clear numerical evidence, interpretations can vary depending on the indicators chosen (Kingdon 2011). This section underscores the social construction of reality where statistical data and discourse can shape different perceptions. A statement by journalist N1 exemplifies both elements – data and discourse: "We have not yet forgotten the fear of the locals, who trembled that the flames would engulf their

¹ The formation of a joint Slovenian–Italian post-fire coordination framework for the restoration of the Karst, rather than a formal domestic "interstate mechanism" in the Slovenian institutional sense.

homes. Despite inhuman efforts, more than 3,700 hectares of land have burned” (N1info.si 2023, July 20).

Expressing emotions has a considerable role in influencing social issues, especially while sharing personal stories. A 24ur article highlights the strong feelings people experienced during the event: “Smoke. Sirens. Explosions. Heat. Fear. And courage, greater than fire” (24ur.com 2024, July 21). It also shares the personal experience of one rescue leader, Simon Vendramin: “Fifteen long days at headquarters ... there was no room for doubt or fear. Every moment counted” (Mezeg, 2024).

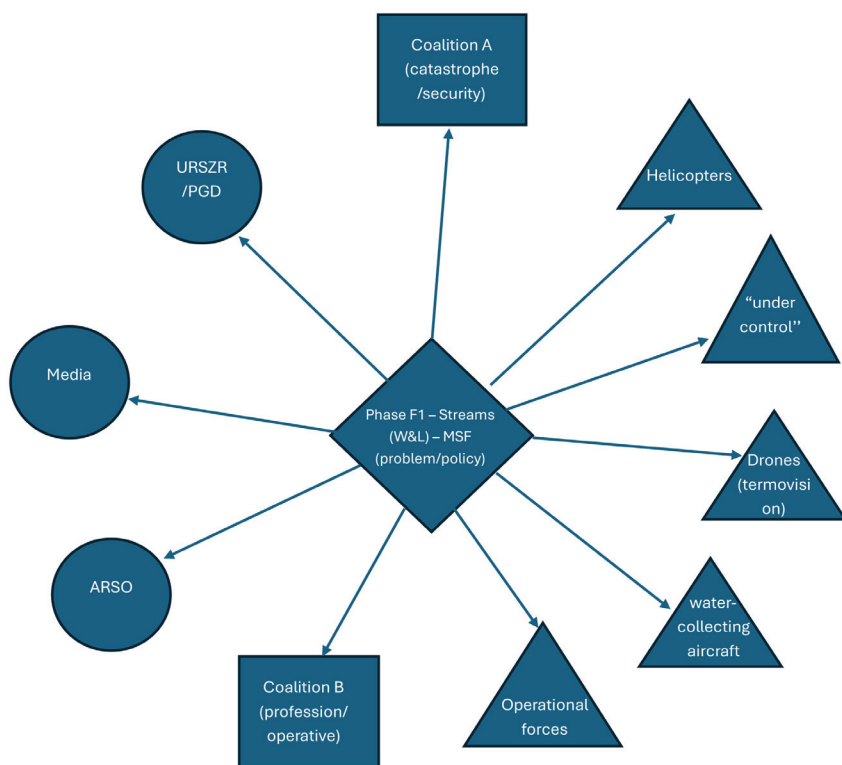
One of many potential policy solutions (policy stream) was an initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food to put the Plan for the Rehabilitation of Forests Damaged by Fires in the Goriška Karst out for public discussion. A core goal of the proposed document was the “establishment of firebreaks and improvement of area accessibility (forest roads and paths)” (Gozd in gozdarstvo, 2022). The Government of Slovenia launched the “Programme for eliminating the consequences of direct damage to property due to the fires in the Karst,” which outlined ways to renovate infrastructure and compensate for the damage caused by the wildfires (Ministrstvo za naravne vire in prostor 2022).

The ‘de-legitimation’ strategy was evident in statements by various policy actors. A resident heavily affected by the wildfires, Robert Cotič, was critical of the government: “After 19 months, despite the damage inventory, we still have not received a single answer as to where these inventories ended up. As for the funds, despite the enormous damage, there is still not a single cent” (N1info.si. 2024, 12 March).

In the context of discourse rationalisation and scientification in the policy-stream solutions, a particular form of “economisation” within the discursive structures must be highlighted, as indicated: “Forest rehabilitation in Goriški Karst estimated at more than 47 million euros”. (24ur.com 2023, 15 November). Andrej Breznikar, Head of the Silviculture Department, Slovenian Forest Service, explained: “Tree diversity of forests is the only guarantee of successful forest development in a climatically unstable environment... By promoting the growth of autochthonous tree species... we not only strengthen the resilience of forests, but also significantly promote the natural diversity of the forest” (Slovenske novice 2023, 5 May).

Firefighters and other rescue teams engaged in the wildfire response were portrayed as heroes fighting large wildfires. The main story aimed to show the complex effects of the wildfires as somewhat natural events, minimising human responsibility. Emotional appeals were used to rally public support and gain more attention. At the same time, statistical data provided a logical basis for the discussion, which may have limited storytelling within official policy debates. There is evidence of what can be called discourse blending: the wildfires were shown to be both a disaster threatening lives and property, and a technical challenge needing expertise and coordination. The ‘catastrophe-security’ discourse coalition (A) emphasised the urgency and fear related to the policy issue.

Scheme 4: STREAMS, ACTORS, AND MAIN THEMES IN THE DISCOURSE COALITION



Legend

Symbol | Meaning

- ◇ Metaphor: Streams, Shorelines, Dikes, Erosion, Flood (policy window), Meanders, Spillover effect, Water engineers
- Discourse coalition (A: disaster/safety; B: expertise/operations; C: critique/accountability; D: climate/forest/long-term)
- Actors (URSZR/PGD, ARSO, Police, SAF, government, PM, ministries, DZ, media, mayors, ZGS, EU mechanism, NGOs, climatologists, residents)
- ▲ Themes in 2022 articles (Bora winds, helicopters, water-scooping aircraft, drones, Trstelj ridge, evacuations, firebreaks, pipeline/hydrants, cross-border coordination etc.)

Source: The image created by the authors.

F2 – DIKES AND SHORELINES (FILTERS/NORMS)

“Shorelines” refer to discursive structures or boundaries within institutional discourse designed to prevent alternative discourses from infiltrating the established framework (Winkel and Leopold 2016). The normative power held by the state defines the limits of discourse, legitimation, and potentially universally accepted truth. With the “Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief

of Slovenia,” in several instances it was confirmed that it formally determined the preparedness for crisis response. Thematic dependence may also be understood as “institutional preparedness” being used as a discursive strategy in various earlier cases. In some ways, these phenomena resemble selective memory.

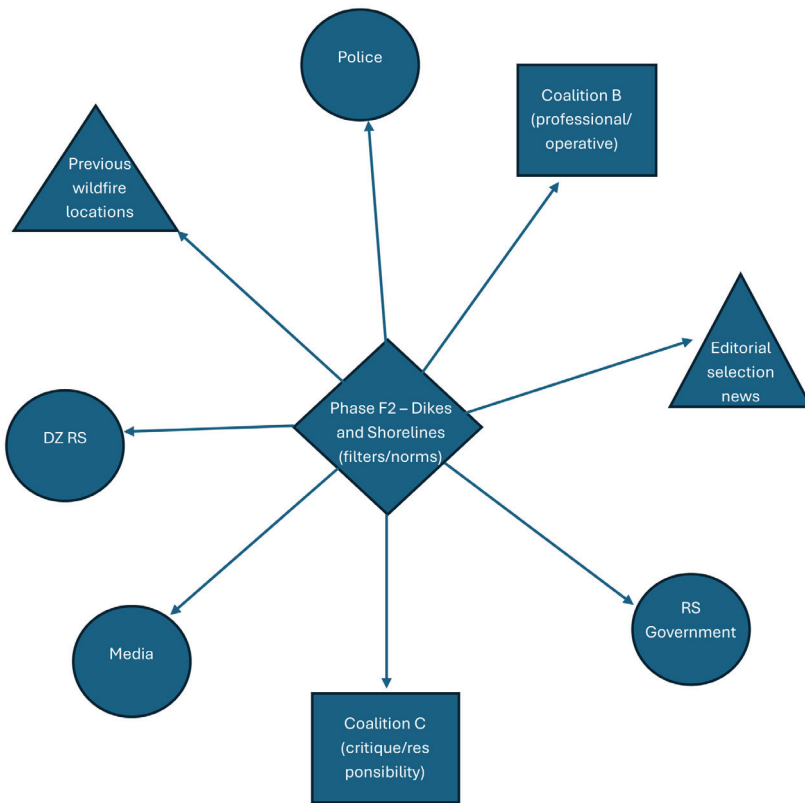
In discussions about the 2022 Karst fires, the concept of “normative power” appears through the naturalisation of political debate, the recurring nature of the fires, and the framing of institutional responses as morally right, unquestionable, and collectively beneficial. Emphasis on “swift, effective and coordinated response” built trust as a moral duty for citizens, while “solidarity, cooperation and support” were presented as universal values. Similar displays of normative power included framing gratitude as a moral duty and respect for public institutions and crisis measures as the only proper attitude. Both the media and government also stressed the importance of volunteering, cooperation and solidarity for managing crises. The Forest Rehabilitation Plan conveyed a normative message: “the tasks of foresters were redirected to fulfil the oral order of the Prime Minister ... to carry out logging along roads where it would be possible to stop the spread of the fire” (Zavod za gozdove 2022, 11).

According to Winkel and Leopold (2016), “dikes” are metaphorically understood as stabilised discourses that mostly stop more radical discourses and policy changes from entering the agenda-setting process. The primary goal of policy actors is typically to maintain a certain status quo. The media often excludes or silences certain discourses that were once at least partially present. For example, in 2022, it was rarely noted that the increase in fires was linked to drought, warming, and vegetation changes.

Only a small share of the discourse involved messages aimed at preventing soil or climate resistance. There were no radical institutional changes to the entire system; just partial reforms were implemented. Using the metaphoric language of Winkel and Leopold (2016), the dams were slightly damaged, but not completely broken. A clear ‘incremental’ tone is evident in these statements; each indicates a gradual, non-revolutionary change in practices and measures.

The roles of “dikes” and “shorelines” were to transparently define the problem’s structure and present the flow more understandably for the public. The “Straw-in-the-wind” test shows that simply providing basic facts and technical details is not enough to influence how policy outcomes are understood and communicated. In this context, narrative or storytelling acts as an additional form of policy evidence, blending information with interpretive frameworks. Coalition A (the catastrophe-security group) and Coalition B (the operational-scientific group) drew attention from policy actors, yet faced only minor obstacles.

Scheme 5: DIKES AND SHORELINES (FILTERS/NORMS) AND DISCOURSE COALITIONS



Legend

Symbol | Meaning

- ◇ Analytical metaphor/phase: streams and their interaction in the MSF-discourse framework
- Discourse coalition (B: professional/operative; C: critique/accountability; D: climate/forest/long-term)
- (circle) | Actors (e.g., URSZR/PGD, ARSO, Police, SAF, government, Prime Minister, ministries, media, mayors, ZGS, EU mechanism, residents)
- ▲ A recurrent discursive theme identified in the analysed media material

Source: The image created by the authors.

F3/F4 – WATER ENGINEERS AND COUPLING

“Floods” serve as metaphors for heightened discussions that attract greater attention during a focal event. During this time, public interest in an issue can grow significantly. The role of the media and social networks is crucial in shaping this focus. Some politicians or prominent figures may advocate additional solutions to the problem. A policy window opens, offering an opportunity for specific policy options, yet it is not fully used for more radical institutional changes.

Windows of opportunity are vital channels for experts to have their proposals appear on the policy agenda. As Kingdon observed, the timing of bringing issues to the agenda is very unpredictable. Therefore, “brokers” or “entrepreneurs” must be ready to act quickly when a favourable opportunity arises. As he noted: “Policy entrepreneurs play a major part in the coupling at the open policy window, connecting solutions to problems, overcoming the constraints by redrafting proposals, and taking advantage of politically propitious events” (Kingdon 2011, 165–66).

Some mayors of local communities in the Kras region pointed out problems such as the huge area of the Karst (Orešnik, 2022). The Slovenian Forest Institute prepared a plan for restoring forests damaged by the Goriški Karst fire, which specifically outlined recovery strategies (Ministrstvo za kmetijstvo, gozdarstvo in prehrano 2022, 16 November). A major outcome of the wildfires was the creation of a dedicated air unit for fighting wildfires (Uprava Republike Slovenije za zaščito in reševanje 2025, 23 May). Further, collaboration among local municipalities in the region was strengthened due to the severe damage caused by the fires. Local efforts were combined to pressure the national government.

Various major policy actors, such as the Civil Protection Agency, mayors, ARSO, and the state government, acted as policy entrepreneurs or, as Winkel and Leopold (2016) describe, “water engineers”. Their role was to intervene in decision-making, maintain coordination and assure effective communication channels. Given the urgent focus on decision-making, technical solutions and policy responses, their actions had to be systemic and swift. The government and PM Robert Golob supplied information to the public, with ARSO and the Civil Protection ensuring dissemination. As the scientific authority and urgency reinforced each other, they added credibility and strengthened Coalitions A and B, while Coalition C (centred on blame and criticism) faded in influence. This process acts as a valuable test for process tracing. Regarding the “hydro engineers,” they linked diverse flows to a form coherent “hydrological” system, facilitating the merging flows. Without the “double decisive test,” the flow of public policy could not progress; it involved written discourse, emotion and rationalisation. Using the “flood” metaphor, the merging of rhetorical necessity with professional and political interests created a window of opportunity. Both the Hoop test and the Smoking Gun test provided essential and sufficient conditions for pushing public policy into subsequent phases.

Even though F3 and F4 are closely related, they do not refer to the same analytical moment. F3 captures the role of policy entrepreneurs (“water engineers”) in actively coupling the streams by weaving the urgency, expertise, political support and available solutions into a coherent and legitimate policy narrative. F4, by contrast, refers to the subsequent opening of the policy window (“flood”), namely, the phase in which this coupling becomes politically actionable and enables concrete decisions, interventions and the initial move towards implementation. Thus, F3 describes the mechanism of connection, whereas F4 captures the decision-enabling moment produced by that mechanism.

Scheme 6: WATER ENGINEERS (POLICY ENTREPRENEURS) – COUPLING (MSF): PLAYERS, COALITION AND DISCURSIVE THEMES



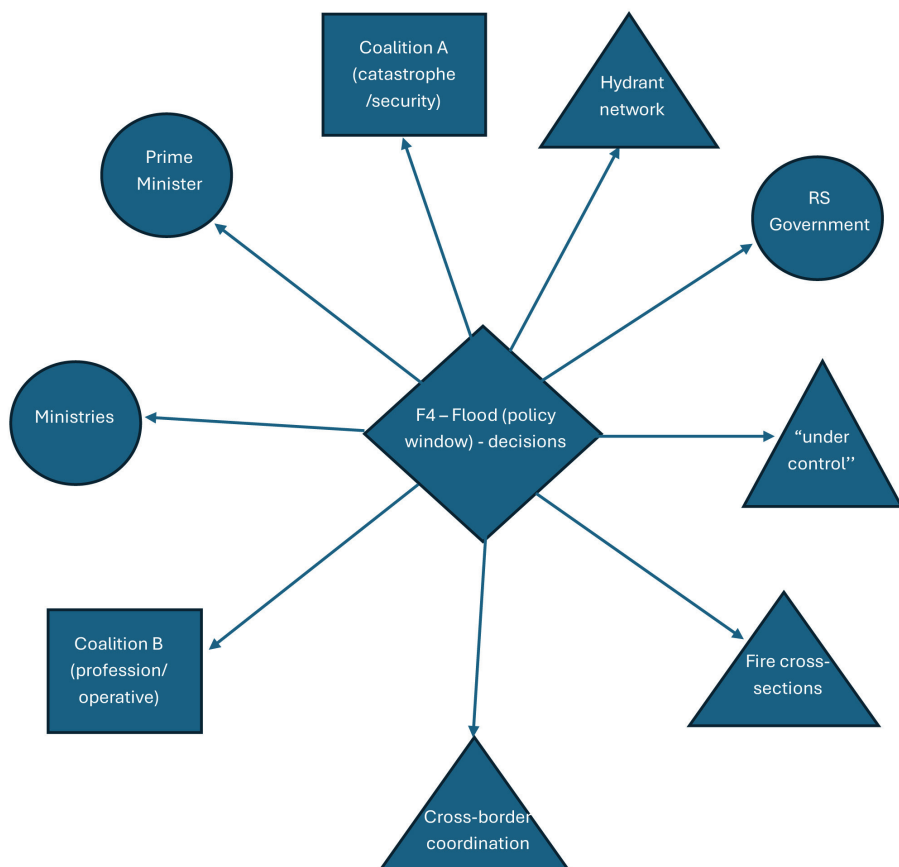
Legend

Symbol | Meaning

- ◇ Analytical metaphor/phase: streams and their interaction in the MSF-discourse framework
- Discourse coalition (B: professional/operative; C: critique/accountability; D: climate/forest/long-term)
- (circle) | Actors (e.g., URSZR/PGD, ARSO, Police, SAF, government, Prime Minister, ministries, media, mayors, ZGS, EU mechanism, residents)
- ▲ A recurrent discursive theme identified in the analysed media material

Source: The image created by the authors.

Scheme 7: FLOOD (POLICY WINDOW) AND DECISION DISCOURSE COALITIONS PLAYERS AND DISCURSIVE THEMES



Legend

Symbol | Meaning

- ◇ Analytical metaphor/phase: streams and their interaction in the MSF-discourse framework
- Discourse coalition (B: professional/operative; C: critique/accountability; D: climate/forest/long-term)
- (circle) | Actors (e.g., URSZR/PGD, ARSO, Police, SAF, government, Prime Minister, ministries, media, mayors, ZGS, EU mechanism, residents)
- ▲ A recurrent discursive theme identified in the analysed media material

Source: The image created by the authors.

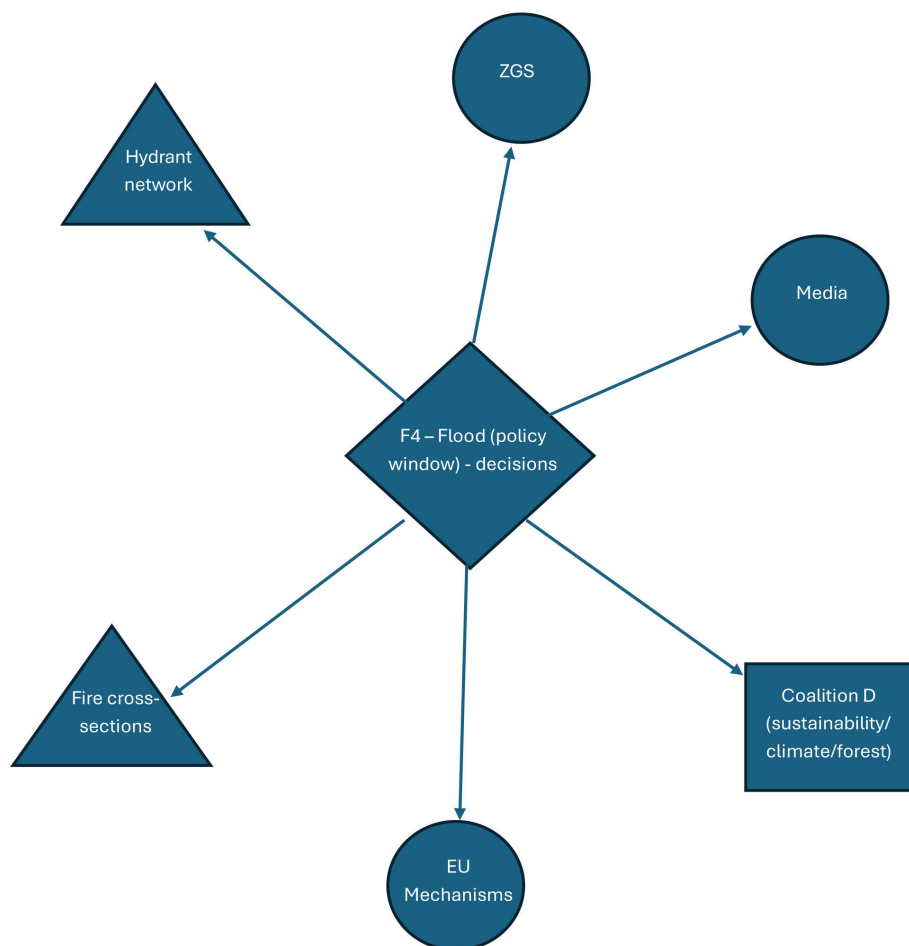
F5 – SPILLOVER AND INSTITUTIONALISATION (IMPLEMENTATION)

Minister of the Interior Boštjan Poklukar described some equipment investments made after the fires as legitimate: “Slovenia is more resilient to fires this year ... Air tractors enable an immediate and high-quality response ... The civil protection system is working” (B. B, 2024). The following statement implicitly supports the idea that “everything is settled” or “the state has already taken action” – thereby opening the door for demands for new solutions, such as favourable policies like quick payouts and more substantial social justice.

Following the deadly wildfires in 2022, several major policy changes were implemented. First, there was a shift in legislation and policies on wildfire prevention. The proposal to amend the Act on Elimination of the Consequences of Natural Disasters was approved, and wildfires in natural environments were classified as natural hazards. As a result, it is now possible to allocate budget funding to cover damage caused by wildfires (ZDU-IO, 88/23, 95/23 – ZIUOPZP in 117/23 – ZIUOPZP-A).

Decision-makers sought to swiftly address the devastation caused by the natural disaster. Attention developed from early talk to success, then to implementation, and finally to institutionalisation, as many words became deeds on the way to rapid damage control. The early event and solutions testing resulted in several discursive formations. While the fire-related reform of the System of Action for Natural Disasters was not fully implemented, some beneficial reforms emerged from it. This advancement was driven by discursive coalition D, which focused on addressing issues principally through environmental policies, such as those related to climate change and sustainability. Meanwhile, coalitions A and B (safety/professionalism), which were more potent during the original incident, remained influential, albeit in a weaker form. The ability of A and B to sway diminished while D (climate and sustainability), which reflected certain actors’ dissident voices, lost strength.

Scheme 8: SPILLOVER AND INSTITUTIONALISATION (IMPLEMENTATION), PLAYERS, COALITION AND DISCURSIVE THEMES



Legend

Symbol | Meaning

- ◇ Analytical metaphor/phase: streams and their interaction in the MSF-discourse framework
- Discourse coalition (B: professional/operative; C: critique/accountability; D: climate/forest/long-term)
- (circle) | Actors (e.g., URSZR/PGD, ARSO, Police, SAF, government, Prime Minister, ministries, media, mayors, ZGS, EU mechanism, residents)
- ▲ A recurrent discursive theme identified in the analysed media material

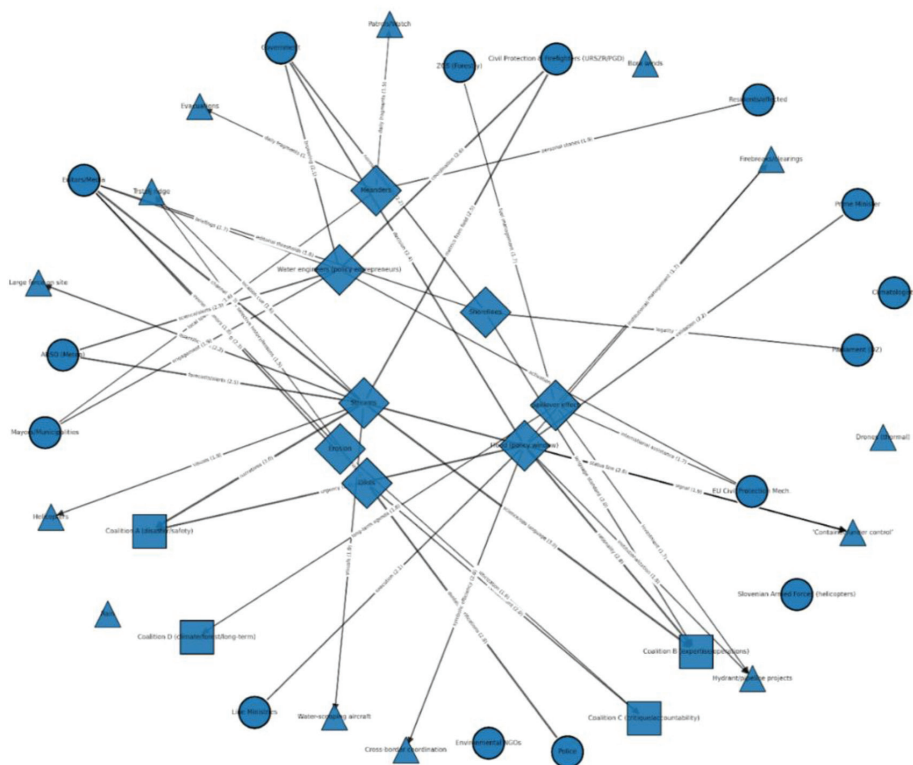
Source: The image created by the authors.

Table 2: EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW OF PROCESS TESTS AND DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES WITH THE 2022 KARST FIRES

Process Phase (MSF)	Discursive Metaphor and Hypothesis (concise form)	Process Tests (Combination)	Discursive Strategies (Winkel and Leopold)
F0 – Focusing Event (Stream Source)	The Karst fires raised the salience of issues and empowered the catastrophe-security discourse	Hoop + Straw-in-the-wind – tests the necessary condition and early indicators of process initiation	Emotionalisation, Thematisation, Narration
F1 – Streams Confluence	Expert, policy, political and emotional streams merged to form a legitimising frame	Smoking gun – strong evidence that the fusion of emotions and science functioned as a legitimising mechanism	Emotionalisation, Scientification, Quantification
F2 – Dikes and Shorelines (Filters/ Norms)	Institutional filters strengthened the dominant coalitions and limited alternatives	Straw-in-the-wind – indicates stabilisation without full control Smoking gun - desinformation	Exclusion/ Delegitimation, Normative Power, Rationalisation
F3 – Water Engineers (Coupling / Policy Entrepreneurs)	Policy entrepreneurs linked expertise and politics into coordinated action	Straw-in-the-wind + Doubly decisive – a combination of indicative and decisive evidence excluding alternative explanations	Rationalisation/ Scientification, Pragmatisation, Normative Power, Emotionalisation
F4 – Flood (Policy Window)	Urgency and consensus opened a policy window for decisive measures	Hoop + Smoking gun – confirms the necessary conditions and evidence of mechanism activation	Emotionalisation, Rationalisation, Thematisation
F5 – Spillover (Institutionalisation)	The crisis discourse spilled over into partial institutional and infrastructural reforms	Smoking gun + Doubly decisive – evidence of the implementation and exclusion of rhetorical alternatives	Pragmatisation, Normative Power, Rationalisation

Source: The table created by the authors.

*Scheme 9: COMPLETE SEMANTIC NETWORK (BASED ON MEDIA REPORTS;
54 ARTICLES INCLUDED)*



Legend

Symbol | Meaning

- ◇ Metaphor: Streams, Shorelines, Dikes, Erosion, Flood (policy window), Meanders, Spillover effect, Water engineers
 - Discourse coalition (A: disaster/safety; B: expertise/operations; C: critique/accountability; D: climate/forest/long-term)
 - Actors (URSZR/PGD, ARSO, Police, SAF, government, PM, ministries, DZ, media, mayors, ZGS, EU mechanism, NGOs, climatologists, residents)
 - ▲ Themes in 2022 articles (Bora winds, helicopters, water-scooping aircraft, drones, Trstelj ridge, evacuations, firebreaks, pipeline/hydrants, cross-border coordination etc.)
- Edge thickness: Connection weight (heuristic salience/frequency/centrality in discourse)
Edge label: Functional meaning (e.g., narratives, rationality, fact-checking, investment)

Source: Authors' own analysis with the help of ChatGPT PRO and QDA Miner.

CONCLUSIONS

The article explores a major recent disaster caused by natural or human-made factors. The main contribution is the integrating of discursive (immaterial) and material research components using both flexible and rigorous methods. The 2022 Karst fires were a pivotal event that quickly brought the public and government actors together for collective action. Emotions and rational thinking efforts were dominant throughout.

The first hypothesis can generally be confirmed: the discourse of “urgency” and “disaster” indeed sparked greater public interest in the previously mentioned event and how it was responded to. It is also a fact that discursive coalition A dominated the forming of the focal event. On a descriptive level, we can, for example, claim that the discourse on climate change was mainly minimised. Nevertheless, additional research would need to include more material evidence and indicators, which is beyond the scope of this article. The exuberant condition required by the Hoop test is met.

According to the second hypothesis, all three streams merged to create a framework of legitimisation, which then paved the way for the implementation of measures. There was a normalisation of discourse by state actors, allowing for more rational (normalised) decision-making during the crisis. What is new in the presented research is that after 2010 the idea of a fourth stream began to emerge, involving emotions, feelings, affect, or even attention as a separate yet interconnected dimension of decision-making (Cairney and Jones 2016; Knagård 2015). Alongside the emotionalisation of discourse, a simultaneous merging occurred among scientific discourse, such as ARSO, the political coordination of activities, and the proposed technical solutions. The hypothesis (“smoking gun” test) can mostly be confirmed, although it would be worthwhile to explore this segment further and potentially establish it more firmly, provided there are no inconsistencies in the timeframes across the different streams, from 14 days before to 45 days after the peak of media attention.

Regarding the third hypothesis, we can confirm that clear institutional filters were established to standardise the discourse. Simultaneously, specific discursive coalitions were reinforced, and alternative discourses were restricted. This hypothesis could fail during the process testing chain only if there were no defined protocols for responding to natural disasters. The weak “straw in the wind” test demonstrates that the discourse stabilised without complete control over the discourse space and coalition operations. The “smoking gun” test also plays an important role, showing the limits of disinformation by state actors.

In the metaphor of streams, a window of opportunity must be opened that unifies all MSF flows, along with emotionalisation – meaning emotions and symbols – into a new, stronger watercourse representing institutional solutions and the implementation of public policy. Such a robust policy outcome required demonstrating the process by introducing the “double proof” test. In this segment, the hypothesis is generally confirmed, albeit with some reservations,

because proving such a process calls for more in-depth research. The article, above all, presents a new research idea based on fundamental research principles.

The “hoop” and “smoking gun” tests affirm the essential conditions and evidence required to activate the mechanism. The flood metaphor indicates the process of public policy formation moved further into the phase of institutionalisation and implementation of measures. As concerns the “smoking gun,” we can confirm that at least a formal consensus existed among the actors on the adopted measures. Still, some of the public likely opposed the strategies, and disagreements over potential solutions persisted. The hoop test suggests that emphasising urgency is often crucial for advancing the policy process. In some segments, a decrease in urgency among certain actors was observed. Coalition C lost its prominence.

Regarding institutionalisation and feedback, the “smoking gun” test demonstrates how consistent the same terminology remains when real actions and state strategies are used to prevent natural disasters. In this context, the “double proof” process makes sense since it can show that only specific measures were implemented (e.g., fire breaks, hydrants). In contrast, others were abandoned (e.g., long-term prevention, forest restoration).

The model we have developed is theoretically very ambitious – perhaps even too much. It combines different paradigms: rational (MSF), interpretive (discursive politics) and symbolic (metaphors and emotions). A rich yet also difficult-to-manage apparatus was thereby created that requires more empirical confirmation than there is presently. At times, the theory seems to spread faster than the evidence, which raises the question of the relationship between analytical imagination and empirical rigour.

Nonetheless, the article makes an important contribution by showing how a focusing event can be analysed via the combined lens of the Multiple Streams Framework, policy discourse analysis, and process tracing. Its biggest value lies in demonstrating that crisis-driven agenda setting is shaped not simply by the convergence of streams but also by discursive coalitions, emotionalisation, and the strategic construction of legitimacy. With the 2022 Karst wildfires, this integrated perspective helps explain why the crisis led primarily to selective institutional and infrastructural adjustments rather than to a fully transformative reform of the broader disaster-governance system.

Future research should build on this model by applying more systematic coding procedures, a broader time frame, and a larger empirical corpus, including a more comprehensive set of media, policy and expert sources. Comparative case studies of other natural disasters or focusing events would also assist to determine whether the proposed mechanism is specific to the Karst case or more broadly applicable to crisis-driven policy change.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Mitja Durnik, Maša Lemajić. 2026. "Navigating Popolicy Dynamics: Focusing Events, Multiple Streams Framework, Discourses and Crisis-Driven Agenda Setting in Public Policies". Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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VIJUGANJE SKOZI DINAMIKO JAVNIH POLITIK: DOGODKI V ŽARIŠČU, OKVIR VEČ TOKOV, DISKURZI IN KRIZNO OBLIKOVANJE DNEVNEGA REDA V JAVNIH POLITIKAH

Povzetek. Članek raziskuje, kako se oblikovalci politik odzivajo na fokusne dogodke, kot so pandemije, naravne nesreče in drugi izredni dogodki. Z uporabo okvira več tokov (*Multiple Streams Framework*) opredeljujemo okna priložnosti za politične spremembe, ki nastanejo ob sovpadanju političnega toka, toka problemov in toka politik. Naša raziskava predvsem nadgrajuje koncept tokov z diskurzivnimi pristopi k analizi javnih politik. Posebna pozornost je namenjena temu, kako mediji, družbena omrežja in različni akterji javnih politik konstruirajo "dejan-skost nesreče". Študija primera obravnava požare v naravi v Sloveniji leta 2022. Ti požari so bili med najhujšimi naravnimi nesrečami, ki so prizadele Kras ter vplivale na celotno Slovenijo, ter so razkrile institucionalne in strukturne slabosti

pri upravljanju takšnih dogodkov. Ta analiza predstavlja pomembno izhodišče za prihodnje raziskave. Naše ugotovitve kažejo, da lahko fokusni dogodki pospešijo oblikovanje prednostnega reda, kadar se diskurzivne koalicije, politični podjetniki in povezovanje tokov uskladijo okoli prevladujoče naracije nujnosti. V primeru kraškega požara je ta mehanizem vodil v selektivno institucionalizacijo in izvajanje politik, ni pa prinesel korenitega prestrukturiranja širšega sistema upravljanja nesreč.

Ključni pojmi: *diskurz javnih politik, okvir več tokov, naravne nevarnosti, požari v naravi, Kras, Slovenija.*