

The construction of urgency discourse around mega-projects



Josef van Wijk



Overview

Mega-Projects

introduction

Urgency

literature review. what do we know about the role of urgency in mobilizing biases?

Our Research

case study on urgency in the planning of natural gas infrastructure in Israel

Results

what did we find?

Conclusion

what does it mean?

Josef van Wijk

Swiss Center for Conflict Research, Management and Resolution & The Advanced School for Environmental Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

1

Mega-Projects

why are mega-projects a problem?



Mega-Projects

what are mega-projects?

- many stakeholders
- \$ multibillion
- long-term
- far-reaching social impact



Mega-Projects

what are the problems of mega-projects?

- cost overruns
- benefit shortfalls
- unorthodox planning
- high risk, high losses
- public resentment



**how to deal with
planning uncertainty?**

?

Most politicians prefer to speed-up decision-making processes, take firm decisions and offer certainty at a relatively early stage. However, in order to deal effectively with the pitfalls of mega-projects, we need to increase uncertainty instead of certainty. This approach creates time and space for learning processes and for reaching consensus, it encourages people to organize private funding and other private commitments and it enhances the probability that the commitments at the start of a mega-project can be optimally aligned with the state of public finance and conditions on the markets.

“

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a clock face. The numbers 11 and 12 are prominent. A red second hand is visible near the 11. The word 'Urgency' is written in a bold, black, serif font, centered over a yellow rectangular background.

Urgency

2

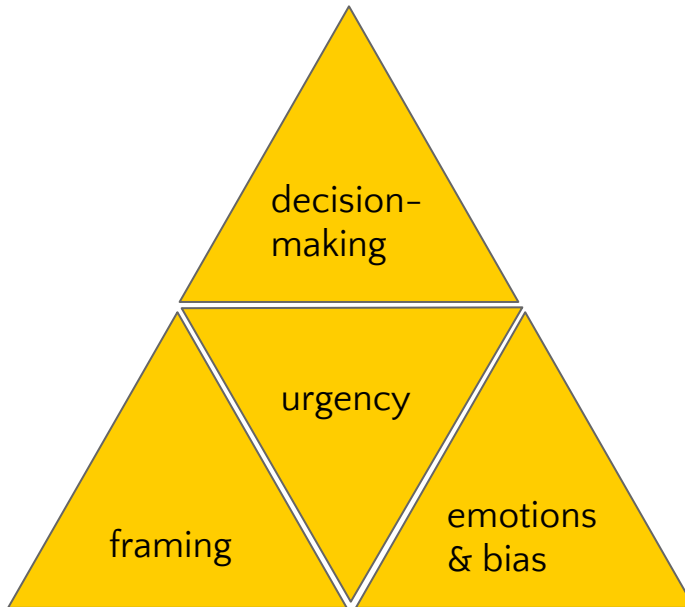
The relative attractiveness of options varies when the same decision problem is framed in different ways.

“

Tversky & Kahneman 1981



Urgency



- mobilizes cognitive bias
- triggers emotional response
- discursive framing
- drives decision-making
- permeates policy



Urgency

what do we know

- limited cognitive ability to detect biases and maintain critical outlook
- social construct
- discourse
- effect of crises on the policy process
- improper planning measures are proposed



what don't we know

- how is urgency constructed?
- how is urgency communicated?
- role of urgency in creating crises?
- which planning measures facilitate urgency?

Our Research - NOP 37/H





National Outline Plan 37/H

Research questions

- how, when and by whom is urgency constructed in the policy process?
- how is urgency institutionalized in the adopted policy?
- how do actors respond to urgency?



National Outline Plan 37/H

Methodology

- 117 official protocols
- relevant planning venues
- discourse analysis to trace:
 - by whom urgency is raised
 - when during the policy process urgency is triggered
 - the rationale for urgency
 - which policy measures are proposed to facilitate urgency



Natural gas in Israel

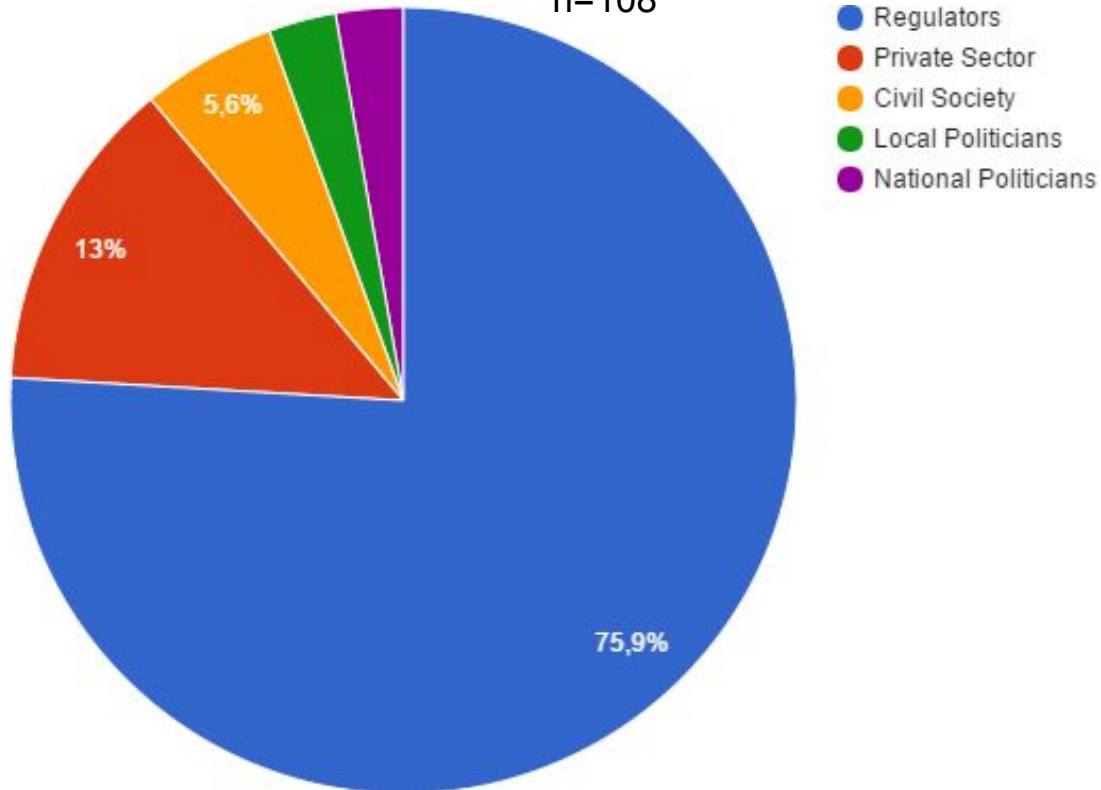
- Resource scarcity
- Tamar gas field discovery
- New gas treatment and transportation infrastructure

A photograph of an industrial facility, likely a refinery or chemical plant. In the foreground, there is a complex of blue metal structures with white pipes and valves, possibly a distillation or separation unit. A person is walking on the ground in front of this unit. In the background, there are tall distillation columns, storage tanks, and other industrial structures under a clear sky. A large yellow rectangular box with the word "Results" in black text is overlaid on the center of the image.

Results

Urgency Statements per Actor Group

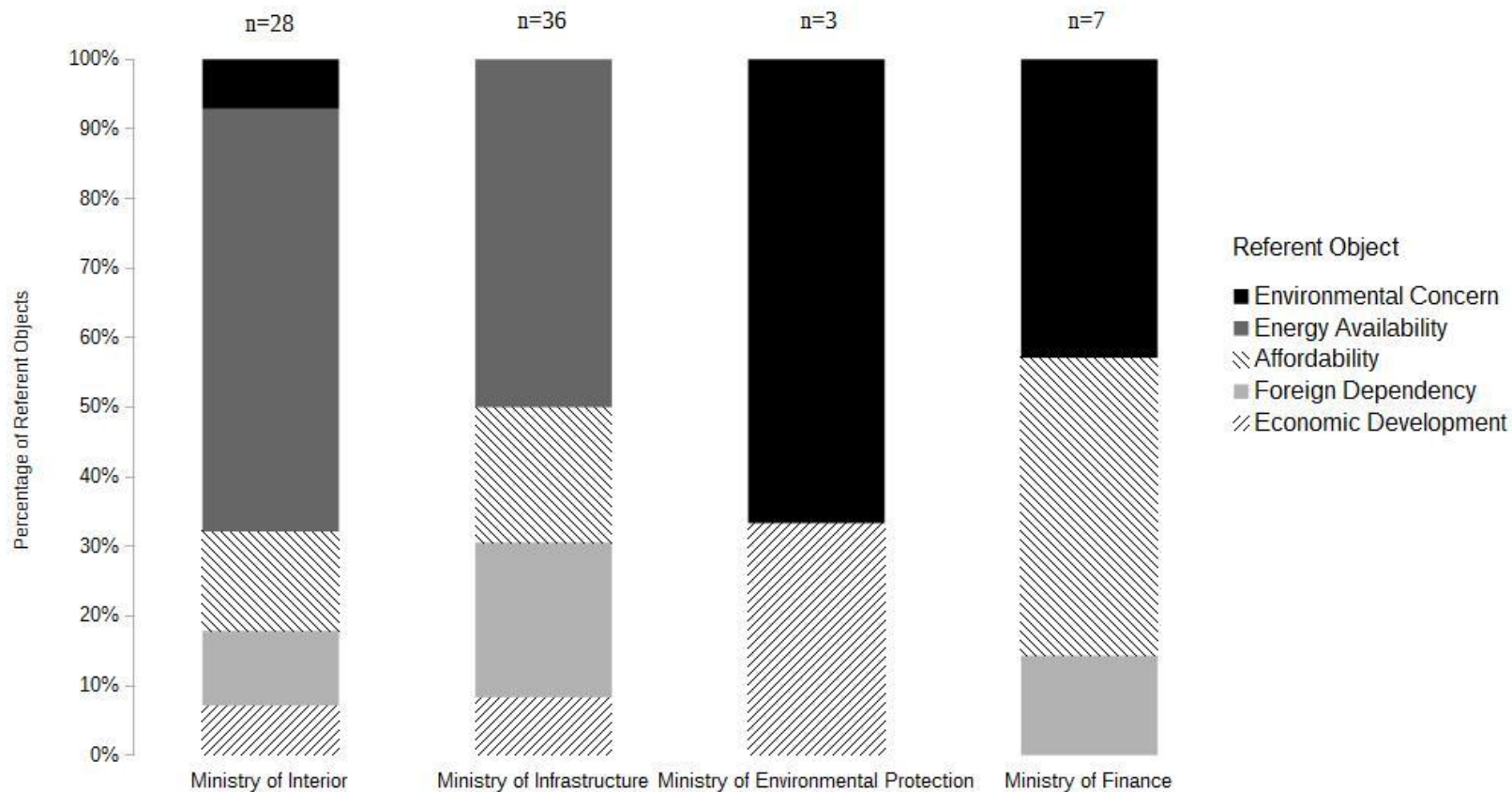
n=108



who raises urgency?



Urgency Statements by Regulator

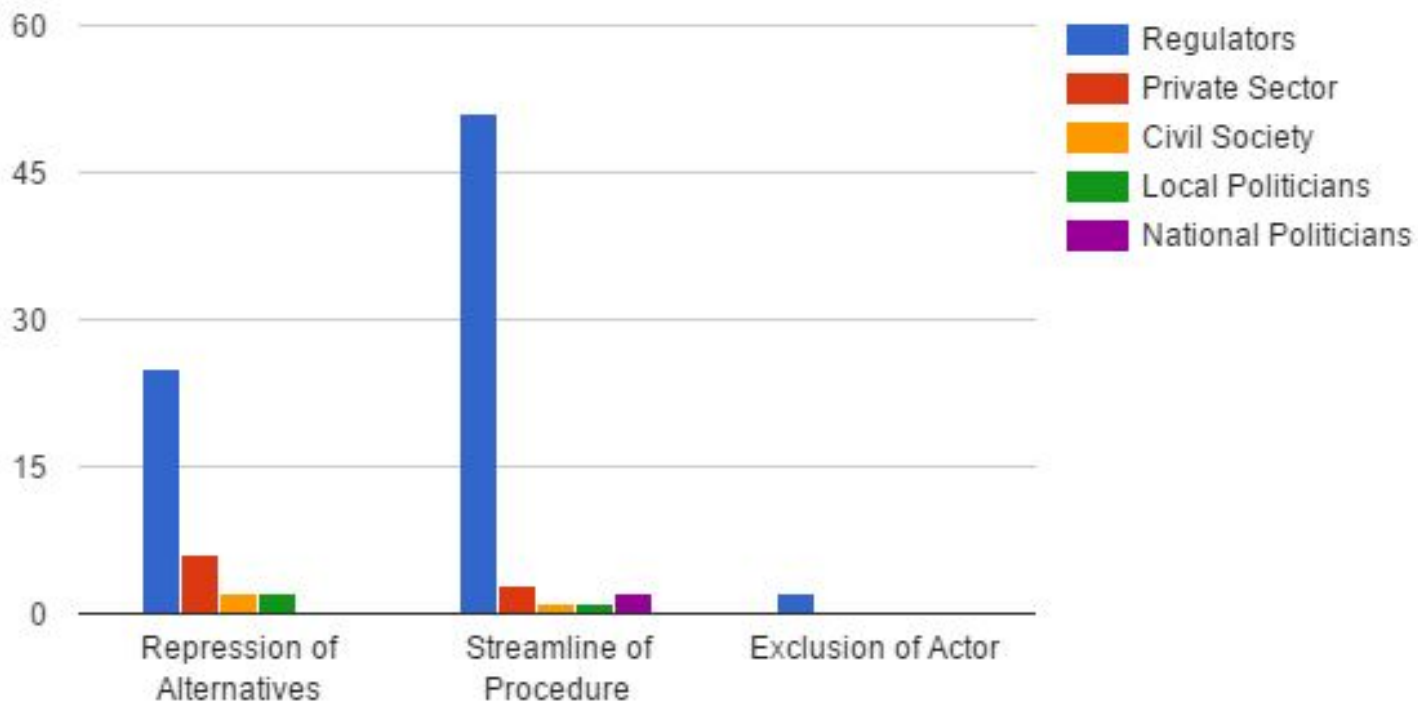


היה צריך להתחיל להקים אותו [המתקן] אתמול. אנחנו צריכים נקודת קליטה נוספת בצפון הארץ, כמה שיותר מוקדם, מהסיבות שאמרתי. אסור לנו להסתמך על מקור אחד, שאינו ישראלי, במשק הגז הטבעי, לכן החשיבות של המתקן הזה היא חשיבות מכרעת, וצריך לקבל את ההחלטה, כפי שאמרת, חבר הכנסת, כמה שיותר מהר.

“

שאול צמח, מנכ"ל משרד התשתיות. ועדת הפנים
והסביבה, 05/07/2010

Institutional Measures by Actor Group



who institutionalizes urgency?



אסדה בים מבחינת מערכת התכנון או מבחינת המרחב הפיזי של מדינת ישראל אין ספק, כמעט ואין ספק שאסדה בים זה הפיתרון הטוב ביותר. אבל מה לעשות, מישהו כאן אמר, הבעיה הגדולה של הפיתרון הזה הוא גם משך ההקמה, שהוא כפול, לפחות כפול מאשר כל פיתרון אחר. [...]

“

דן סתיו, יועץ מינהל התכנון. המועצה הארצית לתכנון
ובנייה, 13/04/2010

בדקנו לעומק את העניין הזה, הנושא של האסדה זורק אותנו מבחינת לוחות זמנים להרבה מאוד זמן. [...] ולכן אמרנו, אין טעם להיכנס לעניין הזה.

“

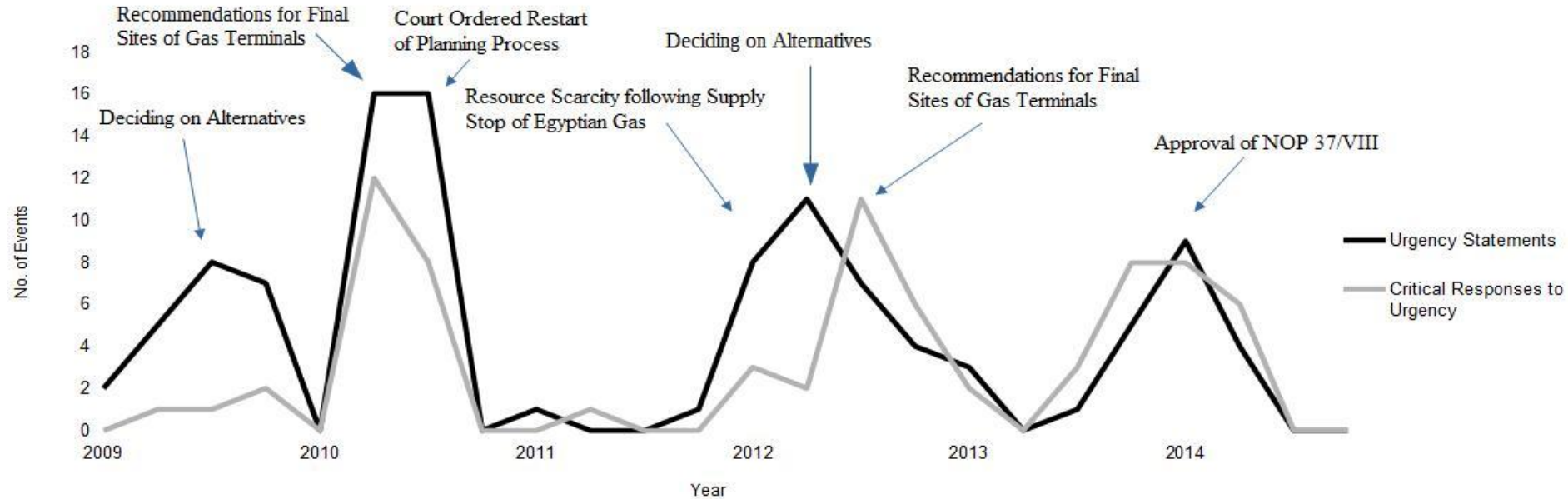
שמאי אסיף, יו"ר המועצה הארצית לתכנון ובנייה.
המועצה הארצית לתכנון ובנייה, 13/04/2010

[...] ההבדל הקטן והקריטי בין תסקיר לבין חוות דעת סביבתית הוא בכך שבחוות דעת סביבתית את ההנחיות נותנים מראש ובתסקיר נותנים את ההנחיות בשלב יותר מאוחר. שזה יוצר מצב שבו הנושאים של התסקיר הם פשוט נמשכים הרבה יותר מידי זמן. [...] אין מה לעשות מבחינת לוחות הזמנים. אנחנו מנסים לקצר לוחות זמנים במוסדות התכנון.

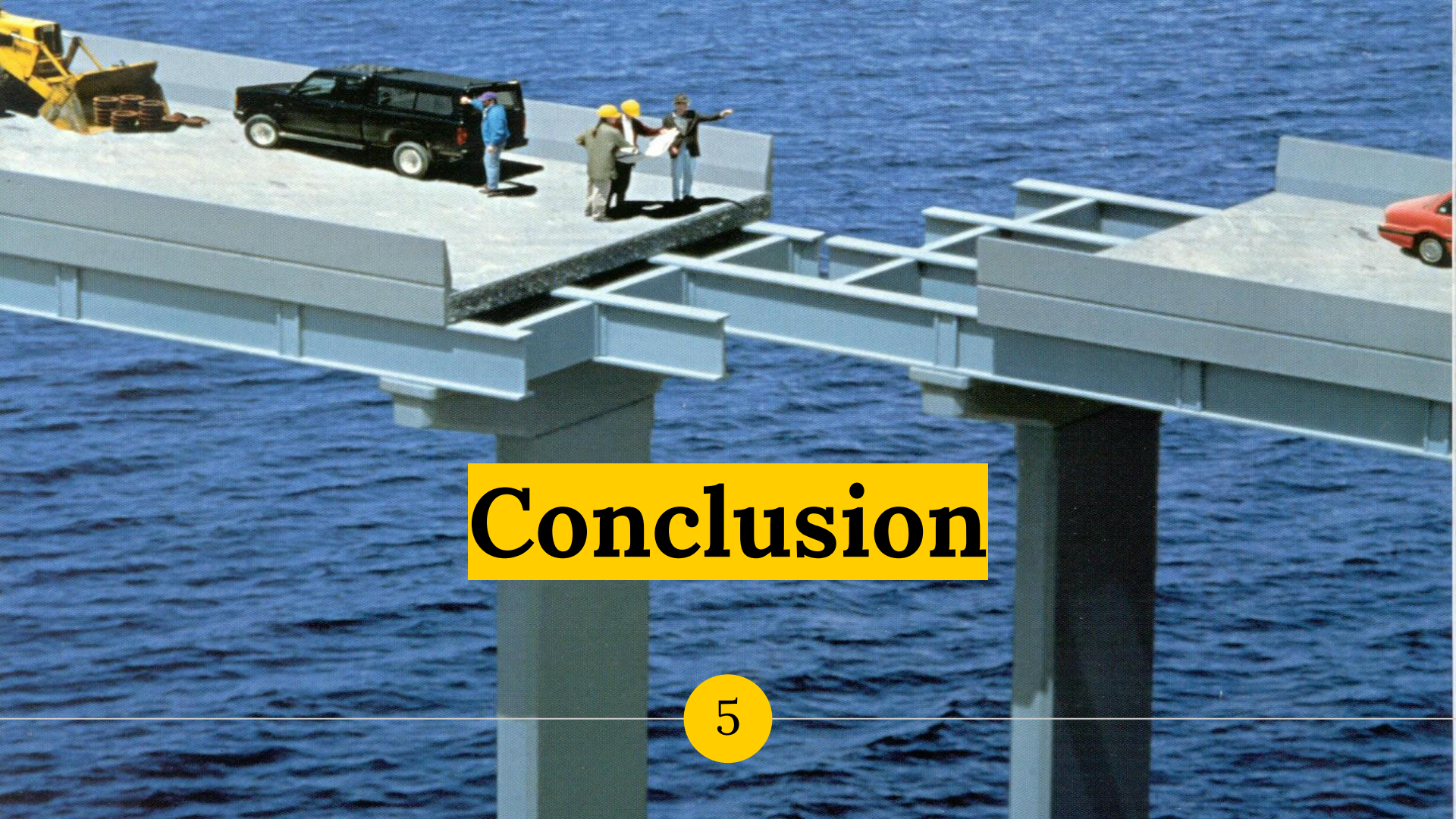
“

שמאי אסיף, יו"ר המועצה הארצית לתכנון ובנייה.
המועצה הארצית לתכנון ובנייה, 14/05/2009

Timeline of Events



when is urgency constructed?



Conclusion

Urgency is employed strategically as a discursive tool to portray the policy in a crisis frame that resonates with the target audience.

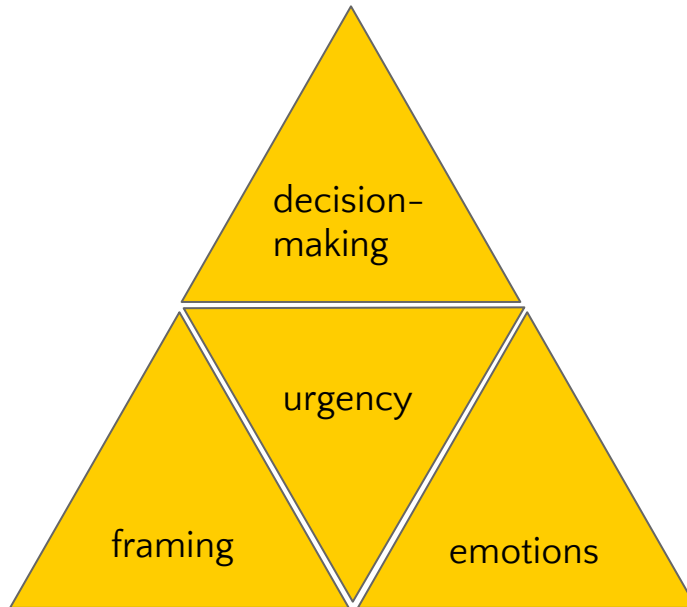
“

Van Wijk & Fischhendler, 2017



Conclusion

institutionalization of urgency



- weakens position of project opponents
- favors interests of powerful elites
- instigates a crisis frame
- escalates mega-project planning

*Urgency compromises effective policy-making
by advancing elite priorities through extreme
institutional measures whilst marginalizing
the voice of critical actors.*

“

Van Wijk & Fischhendler, 2017



Thanks!

Any questions ?

You can find me at

- yosef.van-wijk@mail.huji.ac.il

You can find the article at

- van Wijk, J. & Fischhendler, I. Policy Sci (2017) 50(3): 469–494. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-016-9262-0>