

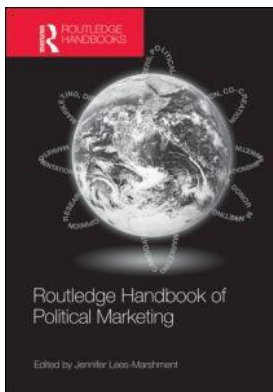
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# Advocacy coalitions strategies

## Tensions about legitimacy in environmental causes

*Émilie Foster, Raymond Hudon and Stéphanie Yates*

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### **The topic: marketing and advocacy coalitions in environmental causes**

In a context where authorities are pressed worldwide to maintain a balance between ever growing demand for energy and resources and the preservation of natural areas (Aldrich 2008: 6), public infrastructure projects raising environmental concerns, such as nuclear installations or dams, have sparked off, in the last decades, a series of popular protest movements (Hudon *et al.* 2009). In most instances, protesters, increasingly reunited in amateur advocacy coalitions, have been quick to claim that they represent the general will and promote the common good with the objective of influencing decisions to be made. In this perspective, they have occasionally relied on political marketing techniques.

In this chapter, we examine the extent and the form of political marketing techniques used by advocacy coalitions, through five cases raising environmental concerns that took place in Quebec (Canada) over the recent decades back to the 1970s. First, we briefly develop our theoretical framework. Second, we introduce our five cases and sketch our methodology. Third, we analyze and compare the political marketing techniques used by each of the advocacy coalitions involved in our cases and assess their impacts in term of the coalitions' legitimacy. Finally, we draw general lessons from our cases, and assess the impacts of political marketing on politics.

### **Previous research**

Political marketing has traditionally been studied by reference to parties and elections, but a few researchers have recently expanded the field to include interest groups (King 2006; McGrath 2006; Lees-Marshment 2003), associating political marketing with lobbying by interest groups. For Mack (1997: 4), both marketing and lobbying aim at persuading policy-makers. Andrews (1996: 79) argues that businesses are successful in influencing public policy not because they buy influence but because they apply appropriate marketing strategies in their lobbying activities. For his part, McGrath (2006: 108) notes that 'the persuasion function of lobbying can be bound into political marketing theory'. Despite these close links between the two fields of practice, Lock and Harris (1996: 318) observe that political marketing techniques are still neglected by scholars studying lobbying.

Even if they pertain to a comparable logic, political marketing strategies elaborated by interest groups remain different from those used by political parties. Interest groups have no ambition to govern: they are rather empowered to represent certain values (and interests) and to persuade rulers and the public that their stand is legitimate and socially (and politically) acceptable (Foster and Hudon 2010: 5). Accordingly, groups are prone to think of their strategies in terms of political compromises to prevent being subjected to unilateral solutions imposed by political authorities and to attract and retain members and donors. So, they regularly, in relation to ‘upstream marketing’ mechanisms, have to build compromises internally before attempting to influence the rulers. Since parties aspire to become the rulers themselves, they have broader incentives to attract members and supporters and, structurally, they appear to have an advantage over interest groups in their strategies to influence policy outcomes, referred to as ‘downstream marketing’. Similarly to parties, interest groups can be considered as offering a ‘product’ (in fact, a message or a position) in competition with other groups’ ‘products’. Comparatively, however, they must establish their legitimacy and the validity of the claim that they speak for a majority of citizens and, by extension, promote the common good.

The multiplication of advocacy coalitions (Hudon *et al.* 2008; Hula 1999) since the beginning of the 1980s has played a significant role in the articulation and aggregation of citizens’ interests and their translation into political demands. We define advocacy coalitions as at least two organizations, sometimes joined by lay citizens, working together, often on a limited basis, to influence a specific policy outcome (Hudon *et al.* 2009: 7). By their very existence, coalitions can encourage political dialogue and compromises both internally – between the members of the organizations involved – and externally – with public authorities.

The legitimacy of groups (and coalitions) relies, on the one hand, on the proceedings allowing internal discussions and expressions of dissent prior to their downstream strategies to influence policy outcomes and, on the other hand, on mechanisms and dialogue intended to making arguments or action accepted by the members of a society (Guibentif 2005: 262). In this context, legitimacy can be understood as ‘a sense that an organization is lawful, proper, admissible and justified in doing what it does, and saying what it says, and that it continues to enjoy the support of an identifiable constituency’ (Edwards 1998: 258).

Political marketing techniques can powerfully contribute in establishing a group’s or an advocacy coalition’s legitimacy. Lees-Marshment (2001: 1074–76) has developed a comprehensive political marketing model, (CPM) accounting for the extent to which an organization has included political marketing techniques in its operation. She emphasizes that ‘[m]arketing concepts as well as techniques can be applied not just to how political organizations communicate with their market, but how they determine their behavior or product’ (Lees-Marshment 2001: 1074–76). In her model, she makes a distinction between a ‘product-oriented’ approach, a ‘sales-oriented’ approach and a ‘market-oriented’ approach. As for political marketing theory in general, these concepts were developed first and foremost to examine political parties’ strategies and positions. However, it turns out that they also appear particularly relevant for the analysis of interest groups’ tactics and actions. The three approaches (Table 24.1) make it possible to classify groups on the basis of their strategic thinking and, more specifically, of their use of political marketing techniques. They also make it possible to compare groups between themselves by referring to the different steps that characterize each approach.

In a first category, we find groups adopting a ‘product-oriented’ approach. These groups typically put their ‘cause’ at the forefront of their decisions and stick to the initial message promoting this cause. Indeed, these groups, ideological in nature, appear especially reluctant to

Table 24.1 Ideal types of political marketing approaches used by interest groups

1. Product-oriented group	2. Sales-oriented group	3. Market-oriented group
Step 1: Product design	Step 1: Product design	Step 1: Market intelligence
Step 2: Communication	Step 2: Market intelligence	Step 2: Product design
Step 3: Campaign	Step 3: Communication	Step 3: Product refinement
Step 4: Delivery	Step 4: Campaign	Step 4: Communication
	Step 5: Delivery	Step 5: Campaign
		Step 6: Delivery

Source: (Lees-Marshment 2004: 99–105).

fit their message to their audience, which could be helpful to increase their membership, obtain financial support, or heighten public awareness about their cause. In fact, it seems that they do not care about developing long-term strategies to ensure larger support.

In a second category, ‘sales-oriented’ groups also tend to stick to the message promoting their cause, regardless of the demands emerging from ‘their’ political market; however, they appear more prone to resort to marketing techniques. According to Lees-Marshment (2004: 99), groups generally choose this approach to cope with highly competitive conditions for raising funds and holding public attention. Furthermore, the decline of traditional social networks (Putnam 2000) makes it plausible that a number of groups have realized that mass communication has become the most profitable means to reach a maximum of potential supporters.

Finally, in a last category, ‘market-oriented’ groups try to find ‘the best means by which to attract and maintain supporters’, using ‘market intelligence’ to ‘identify supporters’ demands, design a “product” to reflect the results, and communicate campaign progress to retain their support’ (Lees-Marshment 2003: 359). Despite the relevance of the comparison between the business and the interest groups’ universes, there are non-trivial limits to this exercise. While market-oriented businesses create products that meet the needs and requirements of their potential clients, interest groups do not create products *per se*: they rather react to given situations (such as a public infrastructure project). This reaction mainly consists of a message, the formulation of which can follow a market-oriented approach (i.e. that groups articulate their message according to the results of a preliminary market intelligence exercise). Hence, these groups can identify the new circumstances they face, through focus groups, surveys, or media monitoring, and adapt their strategy accordingly in order to secure their support. Therefore, they devise strategies very different from the traditional ‘product-sales-market-orientation cycle’ (Keith 1960, in Lees-Marshment 2003: 360) by making market analysis a central factor of their decisions.

The objective of this chapter is to explore in greater detail how Lees-Marshment’s CPM model can be applied to interest groups and, by extension, to advocacy coalitions, through five cases of public infrastructure projects marked by tensions over environmental concerns.

### New research: advocacy coalitions’ strategies in five cases

Our five cases took place between 1972 and 2009 and involve amateur advocacy coalitions opposing developers’ infrastructure projects. The five cases are presented in greater detail in Table 24.2. For each case, our data were collected by means of an extensive survey of media

Table 24.2 Details of the five cases

Case	Project outline	Protest movement	Outcome
Beauport highway project 1970–78	Build a motorway between Beauport (then a suburban municipality east of Quebec City) and downtown Quebec City.	A coalition of citizens called <i>Sauvons les battures!</i> (Save the strands) was formed in 1978 on the initiative of the <i>Association des biologistes du Québec</i> (Quebec Biologists Association).	The highway layout was substantially modified to take into account environmental concerns.
Champigny project 1972–73	Build a power station in the Jacques-Cartier River Valley, north of Quebec City.	As soon as the project was announced, residents from local communities at the outskirts of the site created the <i>Comité pour la conservation de la Jacques-Cartier</i> (Jacques-Cartier River preservation committee), to prevent the destruction of a unique natural heritage.	The developer withdrew its project.
Mont Orford project 2002–07	Develop a pedestrian village with condominiums at the foot of the Orford mountain, within the Mont Orford National Park, located near Sherbrooke (about 150 km from Montréal).	In Spring 2006 the coalition <i>SOS Parc Orford</i> urged the government to stop the developer's project in order to protect the provincial park from residential developments.	The developer withdrew its initial project.
Rabaska project 2004–08	Build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal on the south shore of the Saint Lawrence River, in front of Quebec City.	A few months after the developer presented its project, opponents joined under an umbrella coalition called <i>Rabat-joie</i> , determined to stop the project.	Governmental authorities have approved the project, which is still pending for gas supply considerations.
Sept-Îles uranium exploration project 2007–10	Prospect for uranium at Lac Kachiwiss, located 20 km north from Sept-Îles, a small town on the north shore of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.	In December 2007 about a dozen citizens formed a coalition, <i>Sept-Îles sans uranium</i> (SISUR, or Sept-Îles free of uranium), which called for the end of the project and ultimately a provincial moratorium on uranium exploration and exploitation.	The developer withdrew its project.

Note: Information and data about our cases were collected in the context of a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Raymond Hudon and Christian Poirier, *Coalitions et groupes d'intérêt au Canada. Dynamiques, enjeux et reconfigurations de l'action politique*).

coverage and of interviews with selected stakeholders. The press clipping was made of more than 1,600 articles for the Orford case, 1,000 articles for the Rabaska case, 170 articles for the Sept-Îles uranium project, 50 articles for the Champigny case and about 30 for the Beauport case. Some 32 interviews were also conducted from February 2008 to July 2010, with an average of five or six interviews for each case. Three additional interviews were done with ‘general observers’, selected on the basis of their in-depth historical knowledge of environmental issues in Quebec. The interviews were recorded and transcribed (except for the Sept-Îles case), and interviewees were guaranteed anonymity.

For each case, we examine the advocacy coalition’s use of ‘market intelligence’ (research, strategic positioning/targeting), the message developed by the organization (the elaboration phase), and the means deployed to persuade citizens (the ‘communication’ phase). As already seen, a given organization gives more or less importance to these various elements, and tackles them in a different order, depending on its approach to political marketing. We conclude each case by highlighting the links between the advocacy coalition’s approach to political marketing and its perceived legitimacy, which is closely linked to success or failure to stop or modify the developer’s project.

### *Beauport project opponents’ strategy as a ‘product-oriented’ approach*

In the Beauport case, the group called *Sauvons les battures!* (Save the strands) appears to have adopted a ‘product-oriented’ approach. In terms of market intelligence, opponents were on a reactive mode, intervening belatedly in the process – the highway was almost completed! – to mitigate the anticipated impacts on the environment. Their organization was mainly ‘amateur’, composed of about 30 people, academics and members of different environmental groups, who gathered once a week in a restaurant to discuss the actions to be undertaken. There was no official leader or spokesperson.

In their message, opponents focused on the protection and preservation of the strands; however, their slogan, *Sauvons les battures!*, was not strongly echoed in the population. In a vast majority, citizens in the region were rather enthusiastic about finally being given the possibility to drive freely to the city. In fact, opponents did not devote resources to get information about their political environment, like surveying public opinion or monitoring the government’s actions. Having done so, they would have found that their message was going against the tide of public opinion: back in the 1970s, the construction of a highway was considered an essential asset to foster regional economic development.

In terms of communications, opponents did not specifically target publics who would likely sympathize with their message. They gave a few interviews to media and benefited from some press coverage, but again, without a clearly devised strategy. In fact, it appears that the cause was insisted on alive in the public with the help of two local journalists who had insisted on questioning the government’s plans. The fact that the issue of the environment was still a new item on the political agenda in Quebec at the end of the 1970s (a Ministry of the Environment was created in 1978) could explain their professional interest in the cause: the protest offered them a good occasion to establish their own reputations and make alliances with this new movement.

On that basis, the project became highly salient. The rightfulness of the project began to be doubted and the government agreed to organize public consultations. More than 300 people showed up at the audiences organized by the newly created environmental public hearings office, the *Bureau d’audiences publiques sur l’environnement* (BAPE). Hence, the degree of local mobilization did not mainly result from action orchestrated by opponents, but was due to the media coverage.

Indeed, protestors never claimed to be representative of citizens and, as such, never put forward upstream marketing techniques that could have helped them to recruit supporters. At one point, they produced a poster showing their slogan (*Sauvons les battures!*) which could have created the impression that the movement was well organized. In reality, protestors called upon people who were part of their own network, such as university professors, public servants, or intellectuals active in a few learned societies. They gathered, in so doing, different types of expertise that provided them with some legitimacy in the eyes of the two local journalists already mentioned.

In view of the number of participants at the BAPE public hearings, public authorities could not help but acknowledge that the protestors' claims were representative of lay citizens' views; accordingly, they modified the highway layout. Hence, despite their weak marketing approach and thanks to the credibility granted by two journalists, the opponents won their battle.

### *The Rabaska project opponents' strategy as a 'sales-oriented' approach*

Opponents of the Rabaska project formed a coalition called *Rabat-joie*. Their action seems to have corresponded to a 'sales-oriented' approach, since they mainly focused on the promotion of their message – or product – without developing a coherent strategy in terms of market intelligence. With several spokespersons and, generally, a weak coordination between the different groups within the coalition, opponents were mainly on a reactive mode that led to some muddled actions. Given their lack of market intelligence, the opponents had no particular targeting or positioning strategies: they just opposed the project, multiplying their communications, but generating little impact, if any. Apart from some efforts to document the risks associated with natural gas terminals (as exemplified by similar projects around the world), the opponents did not have the resources to conduct reliable research and analysis.

*Rabat-joie* had a central message and stuck to it for the most part of the protest. As such, the coalition's main argument revolved around security concerns such as risks of spills or explosion. From the outside, this message was repeatedly interpreted as a typical NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome. This impression was reinforced as one prominent organizer resided on the Orleans Island, a natural heritage area well known for its tranquility and its stunning view.

Nevertheless, opponents of Rabaska tried everything they could to promote their cause and disseminate their message: they multiplied media contacts and interviews, organized concerts to raise funds, created a website, wrote many opinion letters in newspapers, distributed pamphlets to citizens and circulated a number of press releases. In brief, they used many 'media-attention-seeking campaigning techniques' (Lees-Marshment 2004: 99) to 'sell' their message.

At the end of 2007, with the help of national environmental groups like Greenpeace, opponents modified their approach by adopting some principles pertaining to 'market intelligence'. Hence, they tried to operate a 'rise in generalization', a process that turns an argument or an issue that is essentially local and limited into a phenomenon having a general impact, whether at the local, regional, national or international levels (Trom 1999; Lolive 1997). The rise in generalization also enables actors to 'politicize the singular', or to expand the political arena, multiply the actors interested and mobilize more supporters. In that perspective, opponents claimed that the project presented a real danger for the region as a whole, and that it should be an issue involving all Quebec inhabitants. Opponents also argued that Canadian sovereignty in the energy sector was at stake, since the project would require a foreign supply of gas, most likely (if ever) from the Russian Gazprom. The very energy needs of Quebec were

further questioned in the climate change context. The rise in generalization was also reflected, finally, by pointing to foreign counter-examples: according to the opponents, the project would never get approval elsewhere, especially in the US, because of its proximity to residential areas.

However, the generalization process appeared severely impaired by the highly complicated nature of the Rabaska project, with experts hired by the developer bringing a counter expertise to the opponents' argument. Moreover, as often observed in this kind of collective action (Chetkovich and Kunreuther 2006: 161), there was strife among environmental groups, some of them giving their support to the natural gas industry, viewed as an acceptable alternative to more polluting energy sources. Finally, as the rise in generalization came very late, it appeared difficult to block decisions already made.

As a result, despite the fact that the population was mainly distrustful of the project during the first year and a half in which it was discussed, Rabaska was later accepted by a majority of citizens (according to all polls realized in 2006–07 in the Quebec region). The developer, who could be considered the winner in this struggle, finally obtained, in early 2008, all the approbations required from local, provincial and federal authorities.

In retrospect, it appears that in the first months of their protest, opponents tried some upstream marketing strategies to recruit supporters, such as the distribution of pamphlets; however, because their main argument, pertaining to security concerns, was viewed as a typical NIMBY reaction, they were not able to make their claim legitimate in the eyes of the public authorities. They did not succeed in being considered representative of the 'silent majority'. Even though opponents relied on volunteer experts to put their arguments forward, their amateurism could not counterbalance the expertise of the developer, well prepared to discredit any opposition to the project.

The shift in the opponents' argument, which followed the market intelligence analysis brought in by national environmental groups, allowed them to make some gains in terms of legitimacy, their struggle having become associated with broader environmental concerns and relying on more solid expertise. As a result, opponents received greater and more positive media coverage and more citizens rallied to the cause. Combined with the huge amount of briefs (more than 600) presented at the BAPE, the protest movement made significant gains in terms of perceived representation.

### *Champigny, Orford and Sept-Îles uranium exploration projects: examples of 'market-oriented' approaches*

The Champigny, Orford and Sept-Îles uranium exploration projects seem to have adopted a market-oriented approach.

#### Champigny

From the beginning, opponents to the Champigny project demonstrated a position that took account of the limited environmental concerns in the population at large. In such a context, they focused on the importance of preserving the Jacques-Cartier national park, arguing that the developers were infringing the National Parks Law (*Loi sur les parcs*). This message was easy to understand, and movement leaders did everything they could to control it. They also looked for allies, obtaining support from important and credible political or social actors such as the mayor of Tewkesbury (municipality located near the Jacques-Cartier park), who was directly



concerned by the project, and the *Corporation des ingénieurs forestiers du Québec* (CIFQ, or the Quebec Forest Engineers' Corporation).

A group of about five people orchestrated the whole protest campaign. They planned concerted actions, using the diversity of their expertise to gather different kinds of information and to target a variety of stakeholders and publics prone to hearing their message. In terms of market intelligence, opponents proved to be constantly conscious of their political environment, seizing every opportunity to quickly react to every move from the developer. With his own international scientific network, one of the opponents helped to build a credible argument. Contrary to Rabaska, the developer was not ready to fight back with proper counter-expertise.

In terms of communication, opponents to the Champigny project were among the first in Quebec to make a systematic use of the media as part of a political strategy aimed at blocking a public infrastructure project raising environmental concerns. One of them was particularly instrumental in ensuring privileged access to local and regional media. In fact, one journalist in the local media was personally involved as an unofficial opponent! He organized – and covered – a press conference that resulted in a decisive shift in the protest campaign: on that occasion, the CIFQ presented a scale model that ridiculed the developer's plan of nature preservation.

Since the Champigny project took place in a context when citizen mobilization in defense of the environment was only just emerging (the BAPE was created a few years after the Champigny case), lay citizens did not appear especially concerned by the preservation of this natural area. In fact, opponents had to struggle against a popular tide of sympathy for the project and its developer (Hydro Quebec, the state-owned enterprise in charge of developing hydro-electricity in Quebec). In reality, despite some upstream marketing techniques to drum up support, such as circulating a petition to visitors in the park, opponents in the Champigny case remained mainly local and confined to interest groups concerned with nature preservation.

Although citizens were not directly involved in the protest, opponents succeeded in creating the impression of general disapproval, and of a huge protest movement supported by public opinion. These downstream marketing strategies increased the legitimacy of the protestors' claims, particularly in the eyes of some public office holders (elected and non-elected), who were paramount in the decision to stop the developer's project. Since citizen involvement in the policy process was only emerging in the 1970s, the protestors' representation was not thoroughly examined by public authorities to shed light on their decision.

## Orford

From the outset of its protest action, the coalition *SOS Parc Orford* made use of techniques characteristic of market intelligence by forming a committee in charge of strategic planning. Thus, a few people made all the decisions pertaining to protest actions and citizen mobilization. These decisions were based on public opinion 'surveys', realized through open meetings held on a regular basis with local citizens, wherein the opponents' official position was discussed and debated. Opponents made a thorough analysis of their position in the political environment. Based on this analysis, they set up sub-committees and, relying on volunteer experts from different fields, developed environmental, economic and legal arguments. Fully aware of their insufficient financial resources, they also formed a strategic alliance with *Nature Québec*, a provincial ecology group, which gave them access to more funding.

*SOS Parc Orford* adapted its message from the outset to rally a broader array of citizens, including those living outside the immediate region in which the project was planned. Through a rise in generalization, the coalition claimed that the Mont Orford Park was public property and that all people of Quebec should feel concerned by the project. Then it was suggested that the privatization of a part of the Mont Orford Park would inevitably lead to the privatization of other national parks. Furthermore, there were efforts to stretch the debate across the Canadian scene by referring, for instance, to the problem of climate change (due to increased automobile traffic). The fact that the Mont Orford Park is geographically close to metropolitan Montreal likely helped the rise in generalization, by ‘montrealizing’ the case, which brought about broader support for the opponents, notably from national environmental groups.

In terms of communication, the coalition strategically involved well-known personalities with the intention of winning a friendly attitude towards the cause from citizens, which was witnessed by two successful public demonstrations, a petition signed by thousands of people and concerts organized to raise funds. The coalition also developed an exemplary media strategy that ensured steady coverage, with arguments regularly renewed. In retrospect, *SOS Parc Orford* achieved success in ‘selling’ its message both locally and on a provincial scale.

The coalition’s legitimacy relied essentially on a perceived representation of a vast array of lay citizens opposed to the developer’s project. Indeed, in its analysis, the BAPE stated that the final approval of the project was conditional upon getting support from environmental groups, municipal authorities and citizens in the region. Thanks to a market-intelligence analysis, opponents were able to develop different types of arguments and elaborate an upstream marketing strategy. Consequently, they were able to recruit thousands of supporters and make it convincing that they were representing a vast protest movement, gathering citizens from across the province. In terms of downstream marketing strategies, opponents went as far as having one of them elected mayor of Orford. Thus, they got a direct say in the authorization process (for zoning, for example), and exerted a great influence on other elected and non-elected public office holders.

### Sept-Îles uranium exploration project

From the beginning, opponents in the Sept-Îles uranium exploration case, united under the SISUR (*Sept-Îles sans uranium*) umbrella, were well organized in terms of market intelligence. On a daily basis, the coalition’s founder and a few collaborators were making decisions, but a small board of ‘governors’ was holding monthly meetings to confirm or modify all these decisions. Thus, the opponents’ leaders were making sure that they were in-tune with citizens in the region. In terms of messaging, SISUR’s leaders wanted to make it clear that they were not against mining development in general, but against uranium mines in particular. They attempted a rise in generalization when appealing to a provincial moratorium on uranium development activities (this appeal was rejected by governmental authorities).

SISUR devoted resources to monitor its political environment and, in particular, to figure out who had to approve or reject the project. The coalition also kept an eye on every government move concerning the project, and based its decisions on this socio-political watch. The opponents rapidly entered into an alliance with other provincial groups concerned by the mining exploration project in Sept-Îles, such as the *Coalition pour que le Québec ait meilleure mine*, *Radon* and *Fondation Rivières*. Physicians from the Sept-Îles regional hospital were also of invaluable help.

Benefitting from these allies, SISUR gathered the expertise necessary to put together a solid scientific background to its stand; however, with the aim of having as much media exposure as possible, SISUR deliberately chose to publish its own press releases, hence multiplying the possibility of being noticed by journalists. Hence, in terms of communication, the coalition's leaders were very active in the media, targeted them according to their high visibility, and made sure that they had regular coverage every week or every two weeks. Opponents managed to be heard and seen by using, apart from press releases, a broad array of tools such as press conferences, petitions, demonstrations, creation of an official website, extensive use of social media (Twitter and Facebook), and dissemination of videos on YouTube. These websites allowed opponents to segment their public by regularly collecting data from their visitors.

The results of this communication strategy were quite impressive: in December 2009, according to a Leger Marketing survey commissioned by the Sept-Îles municipality, 100 percent of people surveyed were aware of the uranium exploration project, and 91 percent expressed their opposition to it (Dupont 2010). Thus, the opponents were successful in raising the public attention and winning citizen support. As such, they won the battle for legitimacy over the developer. Their credibility arose, on the one hand, from the physicians of the region, who rallied to the opposing forces: their argument that uranium exploration poses a threat for citizens' health – and that of children in particular – could hardly be set aside. On the other hand, the collaboration with provincial environmental groups like the *Fondation Rivières* and *Nature Québec* also allowed another set of credible arguments revolving around environmental concerns to be put forward. Furthermore, the opponents' legitimacy was strengthened by their main spokesperson becoming advantageously known in the region, while being also well-articulated and liked: witness the mailing of Christmas cards by citizens who encouraged him to keep fighting against the developer. Finally, SISUR's legitimacy was reinforced by the apparent representativeness of the coalition: the street demonstration against the project, which gathered thousands of people, including the children and babies who were more vulnerable to health hazards caused by uranium, being a tangible sign that the coalition's view was shared by a great portion of the Sept-Îles population.

By contrast, the developer, though sufficiently credible to be allowed by the government to start the exploration phase, was virtually absent in the region. No communication plan was implemented, to the point that interviews solicited by in the media to explain the project were declined. In the end, the project did not arouse any significant support within the Sept-Îles region, with no groups speaking in favor of it. The developer finally discreetly moved away with all its machinery.

### Advice for practitioners

Even if our small-*n* study precludes us from overly generalizing our conclusions, our cases show clear tendencies from which we can draw general lessons to be learned by opponents of other public infrastructure projects that raise environmental concerns, in Canada or elsewhere. We believe that a market-oriented approach provides advocacy coalitions with the legitimacy required to influence the decision-making process, while purely sales-oriented or product-oriented approaches seem inappropriate to provide this legitimacy. From this assumption, we suggest that advocacy coalitions could find it advisable to follow five principles relating to market intelligence, organization, message and communication. These principles, presented in more detail below, would enhance their chances to reorient the course of decision in their favor.

First, market intelligence (segmenting, targeting and positioning) should always be prioritized. Before elaborating their message and undertaking communication actions, opponents should review existing polls and the press coverage on the issue at stake. They should also make an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses and identify their potential allies and enemies. After these preliminary operations, opponents should be able to define the most attractive message to rally as many people as possible to their cause.

Second, in terms of organization, leadership should be centralized to be more efficient. Advocacy coalitions should designate a small group of people, ideally fully dedicated to the cause, in charge of orchestrating the whole protest campaign with the mandate to make strategic decisions when necessary. As long as it has the legitimacy to act on behalf of the whole coalition, this ‘executive core’ is paramount in order to avoid internal disagreements and to manage more or less fierce disputes between big ‘egos’, thus saving precious resources, energy and time.

Third, opponents should develop a credible message based on thorough expertise in order to counterbalance that of the developer. As shown in our case studies, developers have devoted, over the years, a growing amount of resources to build expertise about their projects. Since opponents’ resources are generally more limited, coalitions should take advantage of building a solid network with other environmental groups, which could provide expertise thanks to their larger financial and technical resources.

Fourth, again in terms of messaging, opponents should aim at generalization by pointing out that the project has an impact larger than immediately envisioned, with broader consequences regionally or nationally. If they neglect to do so, opponents are at risk of being tagged with the NIMBY label, which makes it more difficult to gather support from citizens and public officials who are not directly concerned by a given project, a condition to be perceived as a vast protest movement.

Finally, in terms of communication, opponents should be constant in their media appearances by feeding journalists weekly – if not daily – with diverse material (press releases, announcements, presentation of a new study, demonstrations, etc.). Equally important, a coalition should prevent multiple and sometimes contradictory messages by designating one spokesperson. Combined with an effective rise in generalization strategy, continuous contact with the media should lead to national media coverage. The involvement of national media usually marks a point of no return where advocacy coalitions are granted enough legitimacy ‘to appear on mainstream political and cultural agendas and register in the collective mind’ (Castells 2000: 365), hence being in a position to exert tangible influence.

## Impact on politics

The general use of political marketing techniques by interest groups and advocacy coalitions concerned with public infrastructure projects that raise environmental concerns, and the ‘market-oriented’ approach in particular, can be seen as having both positive and negative impacts on the decision-making process.

On the one hand, a political marketing approach leads interest groups – and coalitions – to care not only about the needs and interests of their own members, but also to take into account trends in the general public and among other social (and political) actors. As already seen, the legitimacy of a group mainly relies on its ability to demonstrate that its claim corresponds with the views of a broad array of citizens. In that sense, we could assert that a ‘market-oriented’ approach is instrumental in making sure that lay citizens are genuinely represented by advocacy groups, the work of which can help to find a better balance between economic development and environmental considerations when reacting to a new public infrastructure project.

On the other hand, a well-thought out political marketing strategy can also have some pernicious effects, by blurring the dichotomy between general and particular interests (Jordan *et al.* 1996: 72). As such, ‘what is done in [supposedly] everyone’s interest was harmful and disastrous consequences and is contrary to the ultimate goal pursued’ (Hirschman 1991: 67). Indeed, the defense of special interests can be easily hidden beneath the virtuous claim to defend the environment and thus the public good. In these cases, an advocacy coalition’s legitimacy follows its ability to make decision-makers believe that it speaks for the majority of citizens, often referred to as the ‘silent majority’. As seen above, marketing techniques can help to ‘sell’ this idea of a broad representation. However, one could be left with the impression of an instrumentalization of the so-called silent majority.

## The way forward

In exploring how Lees-Marshment’s CPM model could be applied to advocacy coalitions intervening in public infrastructure cases raising environmental concerns, we found that the model is relevant to characterize the political marketing approaches used by these groups. Of course, many avenues could be further explored to refine and develop this type of analysis.

First, our results remain limited since none of the organizations we have examined fits entirely into one or the other of the three ideal types of political marketing approaches (product-oriented, sales-oriented or market-oriented). Future efforts should be devoted to developing more refined indicators to associate an approach with a given organization, based on its actions and positioning.

Second, our five cases pertain to advocacy coalitions opposing infrastructure projects that raised environmental concerns, which is quite a specific field of investigation. Further research could explore the use of political marketing by advocacy coalitions opposing – or supporting – other types of political decisions in different fields: health, economy, education and so on. Extending the field of research into other countries could also provide a useful comparative perspective.

Finally, it could be interesting to study the impact of political marketing on the survival and transformation of advocacy coalitions. Indeed, groups do not aim only at influencing political decisions; they are also preoccupied with their own continuity as an organization in recruiting new supporters and finding funds (Hudon and Yates 2008: 388). Political marketing could be an efficient tool to foster and consolidate these precious assets.

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