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Lonely Minds: Natural Resource Governance Without Input from Society

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Introduction

This book has presented 18 case studies of major oil- and gas-producing countries in order to explore how different states utilize, or fail to utilize, public debate and civil society involvement to ensure good governance of their natural resources. The findings of the 18 case-study chapters were summarized in the previous chapter. In this concluding chapter, I attempt to draw together these threads and relate them to the argument presented in the introductory chapter.

The introductory chapter hypothesized that it is not formal institutions as such that are important for successful handling of natural resources, but rather their embeddedness in a conducive socio-political context and the dynamism of the long-term process of institution-creation and re-creation. At the core of this book is the theoretical concept of ‘public brainpower’, which involves polycentricity or the

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coexistence of many different public actors, all freely expressing their thoughts. The concept of public brainpower highlights the importance of creativity, dynamism and flexibility in effective long-term resource governance. The case-study chapters have therefore sought to highlight the extent to which the societies examined here are characterized by freedom of speech, a dynamic and wide-ranging public debate through multiple independent media channels and an active civil society that engages in issues concerning petroleum policy.

All 18 countries covered are major oil and/or gas producers, and the questions discussed in the book are examined through the lens of petroleum governance. However, the analysis is relevant also for countries that are not oil and gas producers but have major earnings from the export of other natural resources. These countries face similar policy questions: how should they license and tax the extraction of their natural resources and protect the environment? How should high and sudden windfalls be dealt with? And above all, how should decisions on these matters be made?

In the next two sections, I present some cross-country analytical observations on the characteristics of public brainpower and its limitations. In the fourth section, these are condensed into a set of tenets on public brainpower, followed by a ranking of oil- and gas-producing countries based on the tenets. The final section indicates some possibilities for further research. For definitions of key terms, see the introductory chapter.

Assessing the Concept of ‘Public Brainpower’

In this section and the next one, I discuss some aspects of public brainpower and the management of petroleum resources, attempting to identify clusters among the country case studies.

Having Many Legs to Stand On

The way that Norway has gone about managing its petroleum sector served as an important source of inspiration for the book. The case study of Norway is thus particularly significant, and its similarities with the historical trajectory of the Netherlands are especially interesting. In both countries, civil

society and public debate at first played little role in shaping oil and gas policy but gradually became more important. This has several implications. Firstly, it shows that the resource management of these countries has not always been firmly rooted in the kind of diverse and lively public debate hypothesized in the introduction. Secondly, it indicates that such countries can manage their natural resources reasonably well without an active civil society and public debate—at least for a while.

This could indicate that the hypothesis put forth in the introduction is only partly right: civil society and public debate can be advantageous, but may not always be strictly necessary for successful management of natural resources. The strength of the Dutch and Norwegian systems may be that most of their parts function quite well, on their own and in interaction with each other. This makes for flexible systems that can function in several ways: if the government bureaucracy is left to its own devices, it is likely to govern reasonably well; if the public gets involved in politics, it is not very likely to fall for populist excesses, although the temptation will always be there (Moene 2017).

In any case, government and civil society are never entirely severed from each other in these countries (for further discussion, see Drazkiewicz-Grodzicka 2016). Government feeds its policies to the public, for example, through whitepapers, and civil society feeds into the many political parties, which have an important role within the strongly parliamentary systems of both Norway and the Netherlands.

Public Debate: A Luxury Item?

In the four most developed countries covered in this volume—Canada, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK—climate change has become a central, and sometimes conflictual, topic in public discussions about the petroleum sector (Pickering 2015; Asdal 2014; Barr and Pollard 2017; Perlaviciute et al. 2016). In Norway, the Bondevik government even stepped down because it refused to allow the construction of natural gas power plants, on the grounds that they would generate increased greenhouse gas emissions. In the 14 non-Western countries covered, there is much less trace of public debate over climate change and the petroleum

sector (see also Obani and Gupta 2016, 211). One might argue that this is because these countries have even more immediate concerns: it is easy to understand that Iraqis and Libyans have more urgent worries than climate change. The other countries may not be at war, but they are significantly poorer than the four Western oil and gas producers. Thus, public debate about climate change may be a luxury that some countries can afford and others cannot.

However, it is also true that less-developed countries are more vulnerable than developed countries to climate change, because they lack the technology, educational institutions, political stability, financial muscle and/or governance capacity needed to deal with the consequences of climate change (Overland 2015). Rather than reflecting a rational prioritization of issues, the lack of public debate about climate change and the petroleum sector in such countries may reflect the more general weakness of public debate and the lack of relevant expertise: the failure of the state to draw on the public brain.

Out of Sight, Out of Public Mind?

Some of the case studies indicate that the remoteness of oil- and gas-producing areas is an obstacle to public debate. For example, Robert Springborg notes that Egypt's oil and gas resources are located in remote desert locations or offshore. Concerning the UK, Philip Wright and Juan Carlos Boué make the point that the hydrocarbons are located offshore—except for shale gas, which has only recently been considered for development. In both countries, the remoteness of oil and gas resources appears to have discouraged public engagement in the sector. Although there has been considerable engagement in Scotland and Shetland, this has been more locally confined, with limited impact on national petroleum policy.

Concerning the UK, Wright and Boué argue that when the resource is located offshore, the activity is immediately distanced from stakeholder constituencies. Offshore there are few political constituencies with Members of Parliament representing them, and petroleum activities are less likely to disturb communities directly, except for fishermen. Moreover, the offshore industry generally employs relatively few people, and they

are often drawn from a wide geographical area without creating concentrated communities of workers who might stimulate inquisitive awareness about the petroleum sector. This contrasts with the UK's former coal mining communities of workers and their families who lived in pit villages and often wanted to keep the mines operating. Within the oil and gas industry, there is a similar contrast between offshore and onshore oil exploration and production. Shale gas production in the UK immediately generated intense public debate on a scale much greater than offshore oil and gas production (Williams et al. 2017; Gouldson et al. 2014; Jaspal and Nerlich 2014).

However, the contrast between Norway and the UK calls for further elaboration. The petroleum resources of both countries are located offshore in the North Sea—but in Norway the public debate ultimately became much livelier and empowered a more diverse set of actors at the national level than in the UK. One possible explanation is that Norway's population is less than a tenth the size of that of the UK, so petroleum revenues have come to play a far greater role in Norway. It is also reasonable to assume differences in political systems, and cultures have played a role. Whereas the UK has a first-past-the-post electoral system that leads to a quasi-two-party configuration and normally majority governments with strong decision-making capacity, Norway's proportional representation system leads to a proliferation of parties, with frequent minority governments dependent on the support of other parties in parliament to implement policy. This may have contributed to a more wide-ranging public debate in Norway than in the UK.

Global Brainpower: The Role of International Actors

When a domestic society does not have the opportunity to influence policy, international actors can sometimes help fill the void (Bates 2015). International NGOs, multilateral organizations or foreign companies can help keep governments in check through criticism and by providing ideas for the renewal and improvement of natural resource governance (Bebbington 2013, 5). Examples of international initiatives and organizations that try to improve natural resource revenue management in countries

around the world include the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), the online platform Sharing in Governance of Extractive Industries (GOXI), the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI), Publish What You Pay (PWYP) and the World Bank (Papyrakis et al. 2017, 295; Sequeira et al. 2016; Van Alstine 2014). Although some authors, among them Stevens and Dietsche (2008, 57), are sceptical about the role that international actors can play, Tsani (2015, 95) notes that several resource-rich countries with weak governance have established sovereign wealth funds on the advice of international financial institutions.

Also in this book, we can note several examples of international actors playing constructive roles. In the case studies of Nigeria and Kazakhstan, Cyril Obi, Roman Vakulchuk and I find that international multilateral institutions and NGOs have actively and sometimes successfully influenced the handling of oil and gas resources and revenues. In Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Nigeria, EITI has provided a platform for civil society to engage with government and industry on petroleum governance issues. In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Mark C. Thompson and Martin Hvidt hold that other types of international actors—consultants, banks and companies—have played important roles as advisors to the government on petroleum issues.

Robert Springborg's chapter on Egypt gives an example of negotiations between Egypt and Israel over gas exports, where the Egyptian government was highly secretive about the process, and Egyptian civil society had to resort to Israeli and international sources for information. In the chapter on Iraq, Ibrahim Al-Marashi argues that the most influential civil society organization—apart from political parties and religious organizations—is the Iraq Energy Institute, which is based in London. Concerning Algeria, Rivetti and Cavatorta note that when a debate was organized in Algiers on the Algerian sovereign wealth fund, a lecturer from the University La Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, Abdeldjellil Bouzidi, was invited to speak. Thus, even when the Algerians wanted an Algerian to speak on the management of Algerian petroleum revenue, they invited an expert from abroad.

In the chapter on Azerbaijan, Kenan Aslanli notes the pivotal role played by a report published by Global Witness in 2013—'Azerbaijan Anonymous'—revealing lack of transparency in the Azeri national oil

company SOCAR (Global Witness 2013). The report also highlighted a credibility problem for EITI, where Azerbaijan was the first country to be classified as ‘compliant’. Aslanli also argues that Azeri civil society has been weakened by Western countries that have ignored government repression because the West wants Azeri oil and gas. If the failure of international organizations to put pressure on a government has an adverse effect, that also implies that such organizations can play an important role when they do put pressure on governments.

The role of international civil society can be seen as an aspect of the globalization of the energy sector and the Fukuyama-style ‘end of history’, in the sense of the spreading of certain forms of governance throughout the world (Fukuyama 1989; Overland 2016). However, there is a risk that governance of the petroleum sector may be neglected as international civil society increasingly focuses on climate change. Yet even if oil and gas production were to be reduced by half, it would still be one of the world’s largest industries and a major source of income for oil- and gas-exporting countries. Apart from their use as fuel, oil and gas are used to make plastics, fertilizers and other products. The petroleum sector may well remain an important sector for many years to come. International organizations therefore still have a critical role to play in ensuring effective governance of the sector.

Public Brainpower Pitfalls

The concept of public brainpower implies a need for freer and more active civil society and public debate in many resource-rich countries. However, pitfalls abound, and several caveats should be noted.

Volatility

Adaptability and dynamism are important aspects of public brainpower. In the introductory chapter, I hypothesized that what has enabled Norway to manage its petroleum resources effectively is not that it has the right institutions in a static sense, but that it has been able to keep adapting old institutions and creating new ones as the world and Norway itself change.

Having emphasized the importance of this dynamism, it is worth noting that stability and predictability are also important, especially for investors. The challenge is to govern in ways that are dynamic without becoming volatile or unpredictable. Achieving this balance requires communicating policy changes to stakeholders in a timely manner and ensuring that beneath the dynamism of policy formulation lie the basic principles of the rule of law, non-discrimination and transparency.

Polarization

Colombia and Venezuela represent a special type of Latin American case. They have similar historical patterns of open and direct public debate with the vocal participation of many actors. However, political positions in society are also highly antagonistic, making it difficult for the actors to reach compromises and move forward together. Carlo Tognato writes about Colombia that one is struck by the polarization of the public sphere, which

...often precludes the possibility of developing new approaches to petroleum-sector governance or other policy areas through public debate. However, we should also recall that this polarization is not unique to Colombia ... Participation in the public sphere under high levels of polarization degenerates into a commitment ritual whereby actors merely reaffirm in public their allegiance to one camp or the other. In such countries, public discussions tend to become zero-sum games where the friend-or-foe logic resembles the logic of war more than that of democracy.

The situation in Venezuela is not much better (Morales et al. 2015; Hauge 2010). Also Bolivia and Ecuador, not covered in this book, suffer from similar problems (Barndt 2010; Perreault and Valdivia 2010). This phenomenon also occurs on other continents—in countries such as Angola, Iran, Iraq or Libya (Cross and Sorens 2016). In Iraq, polarization is largely along ethno-religious rather than ideological lines, and in Libya it is mostly along geographical and clan lines, but the consequences are similar. It is therefore necessary to add a caveat to the hypothesis of this

book: public debate can be productive—*if* contributors to the debate respect each other and are able to compromise.

Populism

While civil society and public debate can contribute to good resource governance, they may also have a negative impact—in the form of populist and nationalist policies that have popular support but are not economically rational or oil and gas extraction that is not environmentally responsible. For example, although both experts and decision-makers may see fossil-fuel subsidies as irrational, they have often failed to do away with such measures, for fear of a public backlash (Overland 2010; Overland and Kutschera 2012). As a result, many oil- and gas-producing countries have heavy energy subsidies which they have been unable to remove for many years (Breton and Mirzapour 2016; Siddig et al. 2014; Dansie et al. 2010).

Another example is Venezuela, where mismanagement of the national oil company PDVSA started off with the democratically elected President Hugo Chavez implementing populist measures that had support from a significant part of the population. In the chapter on Venezuela, Ricardo Villasmil writes

...despite having the largest oil reserves in the world and having been at the receiving end of the longest and largest oil price boom in history – Venezuela managed to seriously cripple its domestic oil industry and its national oil company in particular through political capture, saddling it with social and political mandates, non-oil investment-related debt, firing most of its best-trained professionals and destroying its credibility in the oil industry and in the financial markets. Furthermore, the country squandered resources far and beyond the extraordinary revenue stream. As a result, Venezuela now finds itself overburdened with high public debt, significant arrears and unsustainable external and fiscal deficits. Mismanagement has not been confined to the petroleum sector. Venezuelans now experience widespread scarcity of essential goods, exploding inflation, high and growing levels of violence, recurrent violations of political and civil rights, human and financial capital flight, political conflict with

neighbouring countries and a rapid deterioration in the capacity of the state to provide even basic public goods, let alone the protection of life and property. Moreover, these problems began surfacing before the oil price collapse of the second half of 2014. And after that, of course, the situation took a turn for the worse.

Venezuela exemplifies how democracy and public debate do not always lead to the effective management of the economy and natural resource wealth.

One of the keys to public debate without populism is checks and balances—within the media, within civil society and within politics. If civil society is sufficiently diverse and strong, such populist impulses can be kept in check by actors with other arguments. In the case study of Norway, I found that the potential for populist policy has been tempered by a strong technocratic element both inside and outside the government bureaucracy.

Research institutes and think-tanks can serve as a particularly important type of countering force. Many of them strongly encourage their governments to conduct sensible policies such as cutting energy subsidies, diversifying the economy or fighting corruption. Examples of such institutions include Notre Algérie Bâtie sur de Nouvelles Idées (NABNI) and the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) in Azerbaijan.

Mock Democracy

After two and a half decades of supposed transition from supposed communism and central command economy to supposed free-market democracy, several post-Soviet states have become adept at *ersatz* democracy—variously referred to as hybrid regimes, semi-authoritarian regime or managed democracies (Toepfl 2013; Overland et al. 2010; Diamond 2002; Schedler 2002). Perhaps most successful of all at faking democracy have been the three post-Soviet petro-states covered in this volume—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia. For a while at least, they were able to draw on their oil and gas revenue to get the best of both worlds: full authoritarian control, with a veneer of democracy (Overland 2012, 35).

In all three countries, there is a paradoxical combination: a relatively active civil society, coupled with an increasingly repressive state that ensures that civil society has little real influence on natural resource management. The government ensures that there are alternative political parties, media and election candidates subject to indirect government control. These are referred to variously as ‘pocket parties’ or ‘the systemic opposition’ (Blackburn 2016; Ross 2015; Ratelle and Souleimanov 2016). In all three countries, it is difficult to disentangle the internal weaknesses of civil society, such as infighting, corruption or incompetence, from the weaknesses caused by government repression. In all three countries, corruption is a major issue. Had civil society and the media been freer and stronger, corruption would probably have been less rampant—although the case of Nigeria shows that free media and an active civil society as such cannot guarantee low levels of corruption.

The phenomenon of *ersatz* democracy is found not only in the post-Soviet area but also in countries such as Algeria and Angola. Like the post-Soviet countries, Angola is run by an entrenched post-communist government. Determining whether transitioning/stagnating post-communist states are particularly prone to this type of development requires further research. There might even be a direct causal connection, with one country inspiring another. For example, in 2015, Angola’s president issued a decree similar to a law passed in Russia in 2012, requiring all NGOs to register with the government and international NGOs to register with the Foreign Ministry.

What is clear is that mock democracy cannot supply the diversity, creativity and checks and balances that could ensure dynamic institutions. With mock democracy, the rulers rule alone.

Public Brainpower Tenets

One ambition of this book has been to draw on lessons from the petroleum sector to reflect on natural resource governance more widely. Based on the preceding discussion in this chapter and the contents of this book, ten tenets on the relationship between public debate and the

management of natural resources have been formulated. As in the introductory chapter, 'successful natural resource governance' is here defined as being able to translate natural resources into high long-term human development index scores and limited environmental harm. The first five tenets outline public brainpower and its requirements; the last five contain caveats related to the limits of public brainpower.

1. The quality of resource governance institutions depends on the capacity of a society to *provide checks and balances on institutions*.
2. The quality of resource governance institutions depends on the capacity of a society *modify existing institutions and create new ones* in response to changing circumstances.
3. The capacity for keeping institutions in check and changing them when necessary is reinforced by the presence of *diverse, free and responsible mass media*.
4. The capacity for keeping institutions in check and changing them when necessary is reinforced by the presence of a *diverse and independent civil society*.
5. *International civil society and media can be important supplements* to domestic actors.
6. Open public debate can benefit natural resource management only if it does not become overly polarized and if contributors to the debate *respect each other and are open to compromise*.
7. Both the electoral majority and the loudest voices in society can make mistakes: it is essential to *avoid populism and counterbalance public opinion with a competent, technocratic government bureaucracy that has a strong culture of integrity*.
8. Public opinion should be well-informed by *robust, independent and high-quality institutions of education and research, as well as responsible and well-informed media*.
9. While dynamism and flexibility are highly valuable for natural resource management, stability and predictability are also important, especially with regard to the *rule of law, property rights, taxation and transparency*.
10. *Institutions copied from one country to another are not likely to function as they did in the first country*.

Ranking the Public Brainpower of Resource-Rich Countries

Drawing on the tenets above, I have assembled a ranking of the public brainpower of resource-rich countries. The purpose of the ranking is to highlight which countries are making good use of the mental resources of their populations and which have an unrealized potential. Perhaps some of the latter might be inspired to make better use of their available brainpower.

For the purpose of the ranking, I have developed a new methodology—Segmented String Relative Ranking (SSRR). Many rankings based on expert opinion start with a grading or scoring system, with items subsequently being ranked according to the scores they achieve. Such systems are problematic, as they involve the assumption that grades or scores are ascribed objectively and consistently, while in fact it is difficult to ascertain that different experts apply the grades with the same degree of strictness. Grade B given by one expert may not be equivalent to grade B given by another expert, especially when they are grading different groups of units (e.g. one expert may be grading African countries while the other may be grading European countries). By asking the expert respondents to instead assess countries *relative* to other countries, one gets a purer form of ranking based exclusively on data concerning the hierarchical relationships between the ranked countries. That is the purpose of SSRR.

To start with, all contributors to this book were asked to rank how effectively resource-rich countries utilize their public brainpower potential. They were asked to rank the countries they were familiar with, selecting them from a list of countries that included all of those covered in the book, plus another 15 countries—a total of 33 countries. In ranking the countries, they were to bear in mind the following criteria: free speech, diversity and independence of the media, diversity and independence of civil society organizations, transparency in government decision-making, extent of consultation between the government and non-governmental actors and the strength and variety of institutions of higher education and research. In addition to ranking the public brainpower of the countries, the experts were asked to rank their own competence on the countries. These self-assessments were used to resolve contradictions between the experts. In case of a contradiction between an expert who knows a

country well and an expert less familiar with that country, the opinion of the former should carry greater weight.

Input was received from 19 of the contributors to the book, including two reviewers, who had a good overview of the different case studies. Although this may not be a very large number of experts for such a ranking, their assessments draw on the extensive work they have done for the book, giving them further weight. On the other hand, an expert-based ranking will always have an element of subjectivity, and if other experts had done the work, it is possible that the results would have been different. Nonetheless, I hope that this ranking exercise gives some useful pointers and can help inspire countries to maximize their public brainpower.

As each expert ranked only those countries on which they had competence, each of them contributed a segment to the overall ranking. The

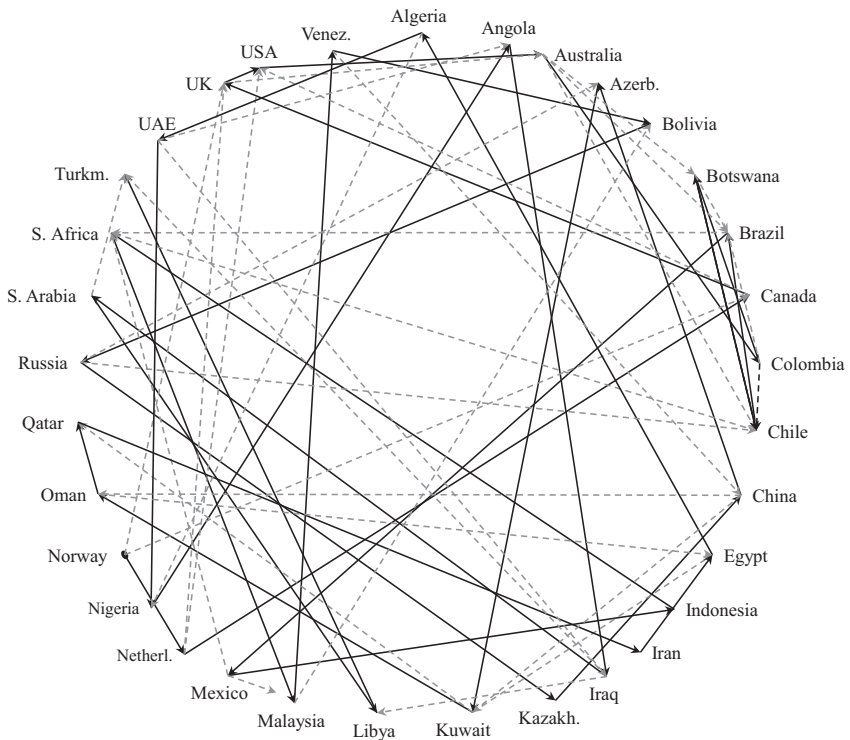


Fig. 21.1 Input for public brainpower ranking

challenge is to string together these segments into a comprehensive ranking. This was done by checking each country against the three countries most often placed directly above and below it by the experts. That way, I checked whether a country that was placed above another country by one expert might in fact be placed below it more often by other experts. This process is illustrated in Fig. 21.1. The solid-line arrows point at the countries that are placed directly below the ones that the arrows emanate from. The dotted-line arrows point at countries that are further below them in the final ranking, and that were checked as part of the process of checking the three countries most often placed directly above and below each country by the experts.

Contradictions between the assessments of different experts were resolved by taking into account the competence of experts on the countries. If two countries were placed above each other the same number of times, the competence of the experts on those countries was taken into account to determine which of them should actually be above the other.

The final ranking is presented in Table 21.1. In the highest-ranked countries, the state is judged to make best use of the capacities for

Table 21.1 Ranking of the public brainpower of oil- and gas-producing countries

Rank	Country	Rank	Country
1.	Norway	18.	Kazakhstan
2.	Netherlands	19.	China
3.	Canada	20.	Azerbaijan
4.	UK	21.	Kuwait
5.	USA	22.	Oman
6.	Australia	23.	Qatar
7.	Colombia	24.	Iran
8.	Botswana	25.	Egypt
9.	Chile	26.	Algeria
10.	Brazil	27.	UAE
11.	Mexico	28.	Nigeria
12.	Indonesia	29.	Angola
13.	South Africa	30.	Iraq
14.	Malaysia	31.	Saudi Arabia
15.	Venezuela	32.	Libya
16.	Bolivia	33.	Turkmenistan
17.	Russia		

thinking, creativity and quality control among the population, resulting in strong institutions and good natural resource management. In the lowest-ranked countries, the state appears to be trying to go it alone, restricting the input from the broader population and thus limiting the brainpower available to the state.

Further Research

In this section I offer some suggestions for future research on the issue areas touched upon in the book. For many of the countries covered here, there have been few previous such studies, and the individual country case studies themselves break new ground. Initially, the contributing authors were allowed only 5000 words per chapter, although many of them exceeded this limit (one chapter had to be cut from over 21,000 words). Clearly, in many of these countries, more in-depth studies of the modern history of the petroleum sector would be helpful.

In many cases there seemed to be a dearth of domestic institutions of education and research and of qualified people well-versed in the history of the country, local conditions *and* international academic standards. If the impression I got while trying to find suitable contributors is correct, that means that many countries lack the human resources needed for understanding and reflecting on their own predicament and for comparing it with that of other countries. This impression could be explored further through systematic empirical mapping of the competencies available in modern history, economic history, political science, sociology, social anthropology and economics in various countries.

Another indication of the weak capacity of many of the states to produce sensible government policy and to interact with the broader society in policy formulation is the unavailability of documents—white papers, green papers, framework programmes, and so on. While the best-governed countries produce reams of such documents and make them freely available to the public, some countries hardly produce any.

The magnitude and implications of this difference merit further exploration.

The qualitative case studies in this book could be used as a starting point for quantitative studies of the relationship between indicators related to freedom of expression and indicators related to governance of natural resources. Some indicators were mentioned in the introduction to this volume (including the Resource Governance Index, the Open Budget Index, the Personal Freedom indicator produced by Freedom House and the Freedom of Press indicator produced by Reporters without Borders), but there are probably also many others that could be used, depending on the research design.

There are striking similarities between the co-opted and/or mock civil society in countries such as Algeria, Angola, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia. Is this a phenomenon to which resource-rich countries or post-communist countries are particularly prone? That would be an intriguing question for further research.

The issues discussed in the book have been examined through the lens of petroleum governance. However, the analysis is also relevant to countries that are not oil and gas producers but have major earnings from the export of other natural resources—for example, Botswana (diamonds), Chile (copper), Kyrgyzstan (gold) or South Africa (diamonds, platinum, titanium). In future research, the analytical approach applied here could be extended to such countries.

Looking even further afield, the book also represents a contribution to the study of optimizing public policy and achieving good governance for countries that are not resource-driven economies. For example, it is also relevant for China, where modes of public discussion and consultation diverge significantly from those of Western liberal democracies. Will China be able to maintain alternative modes of public discussion and feedback—thereby ensuring that its rulers are well informed and able to formulate balanced government policy—without multiparty elections and free media? Or do the findings presented in this book indicate that the Chinese model may prove fundamentally flawed in the long term? That is indeed an important question for research in the near future.

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