

Environmental Policy Integration in Times of Transition

Report from the Working Group's three panels at the ECPR General Conference, Prague, 7-10 September 2016

The aim of this Section, comprised by three panels, at the ECPR conference in a warm and glorious Prague was to take stock of the evolution of EPI – conceptually as well as how it is implemented – to date. Since the strong interest in the principle of EPI in the 1990s, we know that its pre-eminence and popularity in diverse policy sectors and communities has waxed and waned, but just as it appears to go into abeyance in one policy domain, in any given policy cycle, it appears resurgent in another. This Section set out to explore how the principle co-exists or not along new concepts and approaches, such as those emphasizing transformation to low-carbon and climate-resilient societies.

In the first panel, we learnt how, at the international level, organizations further from the core of global energy decision-making, more often call for the need for policy integration with other sectors as a way of preserving or enhancing their position in the multi-organizational arena. Three papers then evaluated the practice and performance of EPI in different contexts. EU agricultural policy was concluded to have been ‘greened’ over the latest CAP reforms, although it may be driven by public or interest group opinion rather than adhering to a policy principle. In Dutch urban planning, greater devolution as well as recognition of the multiplicity of environmental aspects to be integrated was called for to make EPI more effective. In Rwandan land use planning, incoherent policies from the (strongly top-down) central government impeded sustainable forest landscape restoration, and landscape governance was proposed as an alternative approach.

The second panel focused in on climate policy integration (CPI), as a sub-set of EPI or sometimes as a conflicting principle. A quantitative study of climate legislation data (GLOBE database) showed that more policy sectors are increasingly recognized as important and there is no significant difference between developed and developing countries, while also pointing to data and methodological challenges. Four papers then addressed and evaluated the integration of climate adaptation across other policy areas in different contexts: EU development cooperation, EU coasts and marine policy, and at the national level in five EU member states, and in Switzerland. Progress was generally seen as patchy and partial. While adaptation is increasingly on the agenda of sectors, it needs to align with traditional sectoral objectives and/or the perceived lack of urgency to adapt is a major barrier to more binding policy instruments and action.

The third and final panel aimed to expand the focus on EPI within government institutions to changing governance contexts, where there is an increasing role for non-state actors. A preliminary study of mainstreaming biodiversity at the national level in the Netherlands suggested a growing interest from the business sector. A literature review contrasting EPI with the recently popular ‘nexus’ approach, found that the latter community of practice (often from a technical resource planning or security background) can learn substantially about governance and policy processes from the former. The role of public participation for CPI was explored in one paper, with a case study of the multiple constructions of the ‘energy citizen’ in Irish climate and energy policy. A fourth paper compared barriers for biodiversity mainstreaming in five governance contexts, characterized by global supply chains and non-state actor participation. It was found that the potential for motivated

leaders to emerge is increased, although the effectiveness of the various EPI initiatives is unknown or limited.

Altogether, the thirteen papers suggested that progress is steadily made with EPI and CPI, especially when narratives and instruments are found that align well with existing sectoral objectives. Increasing awareness of global and local environmental change appears to have left a mark and built new constituencies favouring broader transition, where EPI can play one part. Key limiting factors still appear to be political leadership, short-term priorities, lack of perceived urgency, and competition among sector institutions. Some new themes and issues raised in the papers included greater attention to devolution and 'vertical' EPI, the unexplored role of non-state actors and the public for effective EPI, studying calls for and pursuit of EPI as strategic behaviour, and use of quantitative methods for the study of EPI.