



European
Research Area

EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF



Environmental Policy Integration and Multi-level Governance (EPIGOV)

Finalised project

SUMMARY

Objectives of the research

The integration of environmental issues into other policy areas (environmental policy integration; EPI), such as transport and agricultural policy, is widely recognised as a key requirement for sustainable development (SD). EPIGOV aims to co-ordinate and synthesise ongoing and existing research on EPI and multi-level governance and to generate new impulses for research.

Scientific approach / methodology

EPIGOV employs a multi-level governance perspective to analyse EPI. The project team aims to identify and analyse modes of governance which characterise EPI at various levels of governance. In addition, EPIGOV looks at inter-level interactions between these modes.

New knowledge and/or European added value

EPIGOV broadens the scope of EPI research in several ways. The project reaches beyond the prevailing focus on EPI instruments and country studies to include structural variables and "unintended" EPI effects. The project also looks at areas - in particular Central and Eastern Europe - and governance aspects and levels with respect to which EPI has so far only rarely been studied.

Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors

Researchers studying EPI, environmental policy-making and governance as well as processes of political and administrative coordination and multi-level governance; environmental and sectoral policy-makers; environmental NGOs; sectoral NGOs (business/professional, trade unions, other civil-society).

Objectives of the research

There is a growing body of academic literature analysing and discussing EPI approaches and measures. EPIGOV aims to structure these findings and to stimulate new research initiatives by focussing on two main themes: First, is it possible to identify typical modes of governance which benefit EPI at particular levels of governance, eg. at local/regional, national, EU, and global levels? Second, how do EPI measures at different levels of governance affect each other and how could governance be improved to increase synergies and minimise negative interaction effects across different levels of governance? Assembling and discussing findings which are relevant for these themes should ultimately facilitate progress in improving the design and implementation of EPI in the context of the EU multi-level governance system and beyond.

Scientific approach / methodology

Three thematic conferences form the backbone of EPIGOV and were held over the duration of the project. Each conference focuses on two main themes: EPI and modes of governance/ EPI at EU level; EPI at national level/EPI at local/regional level; EPI at international level/EPI and multi-level governance. In preparation of each conference partners produced research papers as well as a literature review and a state-of-the-art report for each conference theme. To obtain feedback and disseminate results, EPIGOV also involves policy-makers and stakeholders.

To ensure a common focus, EPIGOV research papers refer to a common framework which was produced as part of the project. The common framework sets out a particular definition of EPI, discusses and describes various modes of governance and aspects of multi-level governance. It sets out common points of reference for the project, but does not constitute a full-blown analytic framework.

While the EPIGOV literature reviews provide a broad overview of the main research strands falling under the respective conference themes, the state-of-the-art reports adopt a more specific perspective on the same bodies of research which draws on the governance perspective set out in the common framework.

**New knowledge and
European added value**

The EPIGOV project format is a Co-ordinated Action (CA) rather than a more conventional research project. CAs aim to promote networking of European research institutions and co-ordination of research. The activities and impulses for research generated by EPIGOV serve to achieve these general aims.

ACTIVITIES

EPIGOV involves institutions and researchers who have been involved for some time in EPI research as well as others, in particular from Central and Eastern Europe, who are relatively new to the field. Additional researchers who are not part of the EPIGOV consortium, policy-makers and stakeholders participated in the EPIGOV advisory committee and thematic conferences. The conferences, the respective preparatory meetings, and the production of research papers referring to the EPIGOV common framework created opportunities for networking and co-ordination of research as well as for obtaining feedback from researchers outside the consortium, policy-makers and stakeholders. Among other things, the planned publication by consortium members of two edited volumes and a special journal issue (see section "Further reading" at the end of this brief) which directly result from the EPIGOV conferences illustrates the success of the co-ordination activities.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND IMPULSES

Based on the EPIGOV research papers, literature reviews, state-of-the-art reports and conference contributions, the project generated numerous questions and impulses for further research which need further investigation and could be pursued in future.

Conceptual issues

EPIGOV illustrates the continuing need to clarify the concept of EPI. Relevant issues include the following:

EPI: institutional and normative dimensions

EPI has a political process and a normative dimension. From a process perspective EPI requires environmental aspects to be considered at appropriate stages in sectoral decision-making processes. The normative interpretation of EPI requires sectoral decision-making processes to actually produce policies which

are acceptable from the point of view of environmental sustainability. Frequently, these two perspectives on EPI cannot easily be separated in empirical research.

EPI: a matter of political decision-making

A second problem concerns the distinction between political and non-political sectoral environmental measures. Initiatives by sectoral non-state actors, for example farmers and companies selling and promoting ecologically sound products, do not automatically correspond to EPI. To be relevant for EPI, these initiatives must produce direct or indirect feedback effects which lead to a greening of decision-making by sectoral state-actors.

EPI and “traditional” environmental policy

A third, somewhat related conceptual problem refers to the distinction between “traditional” environmental policy and EPI. While traditional environmental policies frequently change the behaviour of sectoral non-state actors, they usually do not “green” sectoral political decision-making. It is only in the case of significant feedback effects which lead to a greening of sectoral decision-making that traditional environmental policy supports EPI. Arguably, these feedback effects are more likely to occur if flexible environmental policy instruments, such as certain types of framework legislation, eco-taxes, eco-labelling or emission trading, are used. This may be because such instruments create stronger incentives for polluters to reflect on their activities and tend to be more compatible with established sectoral rationality and routines than less flexible instruments. Flexible instruments may also be more likely to create winners from environmental regulation which may become sectoral advocates of further greening.

Modes of governance

While most existing studies of EPI contain information which is highly relevant from a governance perspective, they usually adopt alternative approaches. In particular, many studies either provide analyses of EPI in particular national contexts or they focus on one or more EPI instruments. There is also research which combines these two approaches or uses a public administration perspective focussing on co-ordination of policy-making. In particular the combined and the policy co-ordination approaches often resemble the governance perspective. Nonetheless, given that EPIGOV mainly relies on existing research, the lack of studies adopting a governance perspective

constitutes a significant challenge for clearly identifying modes of governance which support EPI.

EPIGOV distinguishes between two ways of analysing modes of governance which support EPI: the analysis of either “basis modes” or “EPI modes”. In the first case, the analysis focuses mainly on the effects on EPI of modes of governance which exist independently of efforts to improve EPI. By contrast, EPI modes of governance are closely linked to initiatives to promote EPI.

Analysis of basis modes

Regarding the analysis in terms of basis modes of governance which is frequently adopted in studies of EPI in particular countries, strong sectionalisation and departmentalisation of policy-making appears to be a major, probably even the single most important obstacle to EPI. Federalism and multi-level governance also appear to cause problems, but may also provide opportunities for EPI.

There are some indications that well co-ordinated, “traditional” hierarchical governance may provide a favourable context, at least for implementing EPI. However, in hierarchical governance contexts, EPI tends to be particularly dependent on fluctuating political leadership. Its effectiveness also tends to be undermined by path-dependence. As the analyses of EPI in Sweden suggests, it may be possible to partly overcome these obstacles if hierarchical governance is combined with a consensual political culture which is broadly supportive of environmental concerns. In general, globalisation and decentralisation increasingly tend to constrain opportunities for hierarchical governance.

Analysis of EPI modes

Reflecting the lack of relevant research adopting a governance perspective, the analysis in terms of EPI modes mainly relies on studies of the types of instruments which are used to support EPI. Most of these instruments appear to be closer to “new” than to “old” governance, although in some cases instruments which are usually associated with hierarchical steering are also applied to improve EPI.

Communicative governance, which is based on information and learning (policy co-ordination, assessment, deliberation etc.), and voluntarism, which is similar to strategic management (sustainable development strategies, sectoral strategies etc.),

appear to be particularly common, at least in OECD countries. However, hierarchy, targeting and a range of other modes which partly overlap with one another can also be found.

Modes and levels of governance

Existing research mostly focuses on EPI in EU Member States and at the EU level. It only allows for very limited, preliminary conclusions regarding the link between particular modes and levels of governance. There are few indications of significant differences in the incidence of particular modes of governance which support EPI at national and EU level. The use of market-based governance relying on economic instruments which is significantly more common at national than at EU level appears to be a notable exception (however, as mentioned above, to what extent economic instruments can be considered to support EPI is far from clear and seems to depend on potential feedback effect which have rarely been studied).

Regarding the regional and local level of governance there are some indications that network governance plays a prominent role. However, specific research is rare. This also applies to the international level. In addition, EPIGOV research suggests that existing concepts of modes of governance may not be adequate to analyse EPI at international level because of the specific nature of governance at this level. Rather, discussions to reform the system of global governance, for example by creating a World Environment Organisation (WEO), as well as the analysis of interactions between international institutions provide useful insights.

Multi-level governance

Europeanisation research as well as research on “uploading” policies from a lower to a higher level of governance provides some tentative insights regarding interactions between modes of governance affecting EPI. Europeanisation research suggests that the impact at Member State level of EU EPI measures associated with various modes of governance ranges from positive ideational effects to problem transfer and that these effects may be influenced by pre-existing governance patterns at the national level. Effects of EU EPI measures corresponding to hierarchical governance may have positive impact on EPI in the context of international institutions.

**Key messages for
policy-makers,
businesses,
trade unions and
civil society actors**

The success of efforts to improve EPI has so far been limited. While EPI measures appear to have had some effect on political discourse and strategies, decision-making procedures and routines in core sectors were rarely affected. In addition, in some of the more successful instances of EPI, notably the integration of climate change concerns into energy policy, cases of problem transfer have occurred, such as the promotion of environmentally questionable sources of biofuels. However, experience with, and knowledge of, EPI so far remains limited. Research and discussions which took place in the framework of EPIGOV suggests that intensified consideration of the following issues may contribute to improving EPI:

Constraints on EPI: institutions, capacities, political culture

Research results suggest that the introduction of EPI measures such as environmental and sustainability assessment, sectoral environmental strategies and interdepartmental co-ordination frequently has limited effects. However, causes often remain somewhat obscure. In some cases, basic institutional characteristics of the political system, such as federalism, are important. Insufficient administrative capacities and weak political support is another factor. Factors related to administrative and political culture may also be highly relevant, but have so far hardly been studied. Further clarification of the impact of these factors on EPI in specific governance settings and at different levels of governance appears necessary. This should ultimately assist in the design of more effective EPI approaches and instruments.

If, as may well be the case, factors related to political culture constitute an important determinant of the effectiveness of EPI, policies supporting EPI may in future have to rely to a greater extent on measures affecting the attitudes of sectoral actors than is currently the case.

EPI and “traditional” environmental policy

To increase the effectiveness of EPI, policy-makers and stakeholders should consider a stronger integration of EPI into “traditional” environmental policy-making. As a first step, environmental measures addressing sectoral actors could be screened and evaluated not only in terms of their immediate impact on the environment, but also with respect to their likely indirect/(expected) medium- and long-term effects on EPI. Positive feedback effects on EPI may result, for example, from mechanism such as adaptation, competition, learning and socialisation. Flexible and participatory environmental

instruments, such as certain types of framework legislation and market-based instruments, which create new environmentally beneficial opportunities for sectoral actors, encourage them to constructively engage with environmental requirements and explore different options, are likely to have positive secondary effects on EPI.

EPI and multi-level governance

Although there is very little research on how different modes of governance which support EPI interact across levels of governance, there are clear indications that such interactions are highly relevant. For example, integrating environmental concerns into energy policy by setting binding EU wide targets for the use of renewable energy may have different effects depending on the sectoral governance context at national level. On the one hand, positive feedback effects on EPI may occur in some cases. On the other hand, there is some evidence that in a highly path-dependent, less favourable national governance context EU targets may lead to problem transfer.

At the global level, interaction effects between different modes of governance may provide the EU with significant opportunities to “upload” EPI. Research suggests that the (prospect of) adoption of EU environmental measures associated with hierarchical governance may provide significant incentives for relevant sectoral international institutions, such as the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), to seriously consider respective environmental issues in their decision-making processes. Again, such processes have so far only rarely been studied and their longer-term implications for a more comprehensive, sustained greening of sectoral international institutions remain unclear.

Coordinator

Dr. Ingmar von Homeyer

Ecologic - Institute for International and European Environmental Policy, Berlin, Germany

<http://www.ecologic.eu>

Consortium

- Ecologic - Institute for International and European Environmental Policy, Berlin, Germany. <http://www.ecologic.eu>
- Stockholm Environment Institute, Stockholm, Sweden. <http://www.sei.se>
- Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei, Milan, Italy. <http://www.feem.it>
- Institute for European and Environmental Policy, London, UK, <http://www.ieep.eu>
- European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht, The Netherlands. <http://www.eipa.nl>
- Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo, Norway. <http://www.sum.uio.no/prosus/>
- The University Institute of European Studies, Barcelona, Spain. http://selene.uab.es/cs_iuee/
- Department of Geography at the University of Aegean Lesvos, Mytilini (Lesvos), Greece. <http://www.aegean.gr>
- Central European University Budapest, Hungary. <http://www.ceu.hu>
- Department of Environmental Economics at the University of Economics Prague, Czech Republic. <http://www.vse.cz>
- Estonian Institute for Sustainable Development - Stockholm Environment Institute Tallinn Centre, Estonia. <http://www.seit.ee>
- Department of Environmental Economics at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Hungary. <http://www.kornygazd.bme.hu>
- Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Lysaker, Norway. <http://www.fni.no/>
- University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. <http://www1.uea.ac.uk>
- Environmental Policy Research Centre at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. <http://www.fu-berlin.de/ffu>
- Institute for Environmental Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands. <http://www.ivm.falw.vu.nl>
- Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Wuppertal, Germany. <http://www.wupperinst.org/>
- University of Osnabrück, Germany. <http://data.sozialwiss.uos.de>
- Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. <http://www.vub.ac.be>

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Collaborative Project

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Budget

€ 844.346,00 (EC contribution)

Website

<http://www.ecologic.de/projekte/epigov/index.htm>

Further reading

For references of publications which were fully or partly prepared in the framework of EPIGOV, see:

<http://www.ecologic.eu/projekte/epigov/publications.htm>

The EPIGOV papers series is also available on the EPIGOV website:

<http://www.ecologic.eu/projekte/epigov/epigov-papers.htm>

Members of the EPIGOV team are preparing the following publications:

- Ingmar von Homeyer, Alessandra Gorla, Måns Nilsson, Marc Pallemmaerts (eds.), "The promise and practice of environmental policy integration - a multi-level governance perspective", forthcoming.
 - Alessandra Gorla, Alessandra Sgobbi, Ingmar von Homeyer (eds.), "Governance for the environment. Integrating the environmental dimension into national, regional and local policies: current practices and future directions", Edward Elgar, forthcoming.
 - Måns Nilsson and Marc Pallemmaerts (eds.), "International regimes and environmental policy integration", International Environmental Agreements (Special issue), forthcoming.
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