

Strategically approaching environmental integration

Ton Bührs

Lincoln University



Environmental integration (EI)

- The incorporation of an environmental dimension into thinking, discourse, decisions, and action/behaviour
- Inherent element of sustainable development discourse and practice
- The substance of the environmental dimension is contestable and evolves

Targets of environmental integration

EI involves the integration of an environmental dimension into:

- Interpretations (including knowledge frameworks, science)
- Policy (across areas/sectors; at all stages)
- Institutions (rules and organisations)

Focus here on what (national) governments have done to promote EI, in an international context

Main arguments

- Complementarity argument (for EI to be enduring and effective)
- EI can be subservient to non-environmental interests
- Role of national governments is important
- The nature & extent of EI depends foremost on the “politics of environmental integration” and the institutional (political, economic, socio-cultural) context
- Identifying linkages (“levers”) between EI “gaps”, politics and context holds the key to strategically advancing EI

Approaches to EI

Three types of approaches to EI have evolved, each with a different emphasis:

- Science/knowledge based (cognitive) approach (EIA, CBA, (C)RA, IEA)
- Comprehensive/integrated policy (green planning; sector policy integration)
- Institutional reform

Comparative analysis

There have been differences in emphasis on these approaches between governments/countries:

- USA: dominance of the science/knowledge based (cognitive) approach (home to most cognitive integration tools)
- European continent: greater emphasis on policy integration/green planning
- New Zealand, UK, Canada: institutional reform appears to have been a preferred approach

Australia?

Explaining different approaches

“Road of least resistance”:

- US: policy integration and institutional reform very difficult; adversarial political system; dominance of science, pragmatism (anti-ideological tradition)
- Continental Europe: corporatist/co-operative policy style/tradition; stronger ideological basis of policy development (values/principles more than science)
- NZ, UK, Canada: adversarial policy style/tradition; Westminster system makes institutional reform more feasible and attractive

Outcomes/developments

- US/knowledge-based approach: fragmented, reactive, ad hoc integration; depoliticising effect; little (lasting) effect on policy and institutions
- Continental Europe/policy integration: vulnerable to political rhetoric and swings; difficulties in implementation and institutional consolidation
- NZ, UK, Canada: limited effect of institutional reforms; business as usual under a green gloss?

International arena

- Diffusion of knowledge-based approach (EIA etc), via international organisations (World Bank; OECD) and professional groups
- Initiatives towards policy integration (Agenda 21, Millennium Development Goals; promotion of sustainable development strategies by World Bank, CSD), but weak commitment and follow-up
- Institutional integration most problematic (for instance, IMF, WTO, UNEP/CSD; status MEAs)

Strategically advancing EI: national level

Electoral reform - PR (US, UK)	Policy integration	Political disillusionment, legitimacy lever
(Re-) politicisation of environmental demands (UK/EU)	Cognitive integration; policy integration	Quality of life/society lever
Democratisation of science & economy (UK; EU; NZ)	Institutional integration	Science/ technol. debate; corporate corruption lever
Sustainable dev. councils (quango)	Policy integration	Sustainability lever

Strategically advancing EI: International level

Strengthening env. monitoring and reporting capacity	Cognitive integration	Uncertainty and transparency levers
Strengthening env. agencies (UNEP, CSD, GEF – WEO?)	Institutional and policy integration	UN reform lever
Democratisation of global institutions (WB, IMF, WTO)	Institutional integration	Global democracy/ justice lever; anti-terrorism lever

Conclusions

- There has been considerable and significant movement towards environmental integration
- Approaches tend to be skewed towards one dimension; not concerted; limited effectiveness
- International & global moves towards EI increasingly important (also to push national EI agendas)
- (Re-)politicisation crucial, holds key to institutionalisation; no shortage of levers