



# CHALLENGING CONTEXTS – ADDRESSING OBSTACLES TO ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRATION

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## Introduction

Environmental integration (EI) denotes the incorporation of environmental considerations into cognitive systems, policies and institutions with the aim of resolving and preventing environmental problems. From the late 1960s, environmental advocates have pursued the integration of environmental values into decision making, behaviour and actions, at all levels of government as well as in society at large. Many of these efforts have been directed at central or national governments, and have resulted in the adoption of policies, rules and tools designed to take note of environmental matters and concerns. Among the measures introduced by governments are systems for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), (Comparative) Risk Assessment, environmental legislation, the establishment of environmental agencies, the development of a wide array of environmental policies, and the introduction of environmental rights (Bührs 2009).

However, environmental integration continues to be limited and subject to considerable constraints. Although some countries, at different stages, have taken the lead in some area(s), in the cognitive, policy and/or institutional realm(s), progress towards EI has stagnated, for a variety of reasons including financial-economic downturns, the rise to prominence of other issues (such as terrorism and immigration) on political agendas, and the shift in environmental focus to climate change. In the mid-2010s, it is difficult to identify countries or governments that are clear leaders in EI. At the same time, environmental pressures have been shifted rather than addressed, and continue to build globally.

This paper looks at some of the main obstacles to environmental integration in a comparative perspective. The main argument is that governments usually follow the path of least resistance to EI, a path that is conditioned by the particular political-institutional framework of their country. Countries differ with regard to the kind of opportunities and constraints to EI related to their political institutional context, leading to differences in approaches, with varying emphasis on cognitive, policy and/or institutional (external and internal) forms of integration. Arguably, approaches in all countries are more or less skewed, limiting the degree of comprehensiveness and consistency, and thereby the effectiveness, of EI efforts.

Hence, overcoming obstacles to more effective approaches to EI requires political-institutional change, the nature and scale of which depends on the country and political institutions involved. If, I argue, environmental integration needs to encompass mutually supportive, or at least congruent, efforts in the cognitive, policy and institutional domains to be effective and durable, then countries and governments need to address and overcome the political-institutional obstacles that prevent them from taking such a comprehensive and coherent approach. However, for several reasons, such political-institutional change is likely to be very difficult, and may seem impossible, to achieve. Apart from the historically and politically entrenched nature of political institutions that makes them resistant to major change, increasingly, the ability and willingness to undertake such reform is also constrained by the process of political-economic globalisation. If anything, national-level environmental integration efforts have been eroded and undermined by the rise to international prominence of neo-liberalism and its agenda for cognitive, policy and institutional changes that militate *against* comprehensive and coherent environmental integration efforts.

First, I will briefly discuss the notion of Environmental Integration, a concept which is still not commonly used although it arguably constitutes the core of the environmental challenge. Second, a variety of

approaches to EI will be illustrated by describing the EI efforts and developments in three countries, the United States, the Netherlands and New Zealand, which, at different stages, have been considered environmental leaders. Third, these differences in approaches will be explained by relating them to the political-institutional and political-cultural contexts of the countries involved. Finally, the conclusion pulls together the main findings.

## Environmental integration: our common challenge

Environmental integration (EI) refers to the incorporation of environmental considerations in human thinking, actions, and institutions. The concept is based on a recognition that humans, individually and collectively, do not automatically act and behave in ways that avoid (potentially) damaging effects on their environment, to the extent that they undermine their own well-being or even survival. Throughout history, humans have blundered their way through nature, often “fouling up their own nest”, in part, out of ignorance of the effects that they were having on the ecosystems and resources around them. As they became increasingly aware of these effects, often by learning lessons the hard way, traditional societies, now often referred to as indigenous peoples, developed norms and practices that mitigated their impacts on their environment, to the extent that they are sometimes said to have lived in harmony with nature or, in contemporary terms, sustainably. Nonetheless, there is also evidence that many societies failed to learn such lessons and to adapt their practices, resulting in their demise (Diamond 2005).

With the rise of “modernity”, the spread of “modern” values, science and technology across the globe, population growth, and the enormous expansion of production and consumption, the human impact on the environment has grown to an unprecedented scale and level. Concomitantly, but especially from the 1960s, knowledge and awareness of that impact has also increased. With this development, and the emergence of the environmental movement, governments, especially of western countries, introduced or adapted policies and institutions to address the perceived environmental problems. Over time, a broad range of means or tools have been developed and adopted aimed at integrating environmental concerns into the knowledge basis on which decisions and policies are based (“cognitive environmental integration”), into policies (“environmental policy integration”) and into institutions – rules and organisations (“institutional environmental integration”).

For instance, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was introduced, first in the United States but also in many other countries) as a means to develop a better understanding of the potential effects of proposals (mostly development projects), with the aim of mitigating the foreseeable impacts. Similarly, Risk Assessment (RA), Integrated Environmental Assessment (IEA) and environmental education are also means by which environmental knowledge is sought to be enhanced with a view to incorporating that knowledge in decisions, practices or behaviour. In the policy realm, governments have adopted tools like Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA), Sustainability Assessment, and economic instruments, among other, to integrate environmental concerns into policies, in particular those that are traditionally not regarded as environmental policies (such as agriculture, transport, energy, and economic policies). In the institutional sphere, most governments have created agencies with particular responsibilities for the environment (like Environmental Ministries or Departments), and passed laws to promote environmentally responsible behaviour and practices. As these mechanisms are aimed foremost at incorporating environmental concerns into what are normally considered non-environmental issues, areas or sectors, they can be labelled forms of “external” environmental integration.

While many of these mechanisms have been directed at particular environmental problems, proposals, and policies, governments have also tried to give or develop a degree of coherence to these efforts by stating their commitment to broader ideas and principles, in particular, the notion of Sustainable Development, and by adopting more comprehensive policies, such as Sustainable Development Strategies

or Green Plans, or even by integrating environmental rights or principles into constitutions. Potentially, such ideas, policies and institutions provide the basis for a “whole of government” approach to environmental issues and policy development within and across all areas or sectors. Thus, in theory, rather than dealing with environmental problems one-by-one, they are meant to address the environmental challenge as a whole, thereby avoiding that problems get shifted rather than resolved. As such mechanism are aimed at promoting or providing coherence between all environmental integration efforts, including environmental policies themselves, they can be labelled forms of “internal” environmental integration.

Putting together the different approaches to environmental integration in the three domains or spheres of environmental management (cognitive, policy and institutional) and the two dimensions of environmental integration (external and internal), we can distinguish six areas of environmental integration: cognitive-external, cognitive-internal, policy-external, policy-internal, institutional-external and institutional-internal. Within each area, we can identify a range of different mechanisms (or tools or forms) by which environmental integration has been advanced, as depicted in the following table.

**Table 1 – Forms of environmental integration**

<b>Management dimension</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Institutional</b>
<b>External/ internal</b>	<b>Information, knowledge and interpretations of the environment</b>	<b>Policies, plans, programmes, strategies</b>	<b>Institutions: rules and organisations</b>
<b>External forms</b>	Environmental Impact Assessment, Cost Benefit Analysis, Risk Assessment, Integrated Environmental Assessment, Environmental education	Strategic Environmental Assessment, Sustainability Assessment, Economic instruments, Voluntary Agreements	Greening of government, green accounting, Environmental Management Systems
<b>Internal forms</b>	Sustainable Development, Ecological Modernisation, Environmental Space, Ecosystems Management	Integrated Pollution Control, Comparative Risk Assessment, Green Planning	Environmental rights, integration of environmental institutions, National Sustainable Development Councils

Source: Bührs 2009, p.23

As human behaviour and practices are based on cognitive frameworks (comprising ideas, knowledge, and interpretations, influenced or shaped by values or ideologies), policies (individual and collective), and institutions (formal and informal), to be effective, environmental integration should occur in mutually compatible and preferably complementary ways in all three dimensions of management (cognitive, policy and institutional). Without a coherent cognitive framework, external policy integration efforts are likely to be incompatible, as policies and policy areas often serve different and conflicting goals and interests. If rules and organisations are not amended or created to support environmental integration efforts, such efforts are likely to lack the teeth and support needed to give them effect. On their own, environmental institutions that not backed up by policies are likely to be hollow and merely symbolic. Ideally, therefore, environmental integration should be undertaken in all three areas or dimensions (cognitive, policy and institutional dimension), and through both external and internal forms, and in mutually supportive ways. However, although this might be considered theoretically desirable, many would argue that, in practice, this is very unlikely to happen or even impossible, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed below. In reality, governments have taken a rather eclectic approach to environmental issues. Some have chosen to rely mostly on means aimed at cognitive environmental integration, and then primarily through external forms, while others have put in considerable effort into “green planning”, and again others have taken recourse to mostly institutional reforms to integrate environmental concerns.

The next section will provide an overview of the different approaches to environmental integration that have been followed in various countries that have often been regarded as environmental leaders (Liefferink, *et al.* 2009).

### Environmental integration in a comparative perspective

Using Table 1 as a basis, we can analyse the environmental integration efforts of countries or governments, and see what forms of integration have been adopted and possibly used or relied upon more than others. Although governments and countries may have introduced many or even most of the mechanisms of environmental integration identified in Table 1, it appears that some have been more “popular” than others, and in some countries some forms may not have been used much, if at all. By identifying the forms that have been most commonly or primarily used, and which less or not at all, we may be able to detect a relative emphasis on tool aimed at advancing environmental integration in one or two of the management dimensions or spheres. Hence, governments or countries may be said to have followed an approach to environmental integration that emphasises the cognitive, policy or institutional dimension, or any two of these three. In line with what has been said in the previous section about the need for a comprehensive and coherent approach to EI, we would expect a country or government that takes such an approach to use (some of) the mechanisms identified in each of the six areas of environmental integration (or any others that have not been mentioned here) in mutually consistent and supportive ways.

Such an analysis also allows us to identify countries or governments that have been leaders in environmental integration, even if such leadership may have been confined mostly or primarily to one or two areas. Here, I will focus on three countries where, at different stages, governments can be considered to have played a leading role in advancing environmental integration, notably by the development and introduction of innovative forms. The rationale for doing so is twofold: first, to highlight particular forms of environmental integration that can be seen as exemplary and that have been, or can be, the subject of diffusion or collective “learning” between countries and governments; second, to explore why countries or governments have taken a leading role in this particular area of environmental integration, as a basis for identifying political-institutional factors that have been conducive or, by contrast, that have been obstacles to adopting particular approaches to, and forms of, EI. Arguably, insight into such factors,

positive and negative, may enable us to draw lessons and/or conclusions about the prospects of environmental integration in particular countries and, by implication, the international context.

For obvious reasons, the comparative analysis undertaken here is very limited: confined only to three countries that have been, at various stages, innovative in three of the six areas of environmental integration distinguished. The countries focused on here are the United States, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. Alongside these three countries, Table 2 identifies several other countries that could be considered to have been, or still be, leaders in particular areas of EI. No doubt, classifying countries as leaders in this respect is contestable and others may qualify, on good grounds, as equally if not more deserving of such a status. As the discussion below will show, assigning leadership status to countries is a rather risky affair as, over time, such depictions are often overtaken by developments. Nonetheless, such analyses can still be useful as they can provide valuable insights into the contextual factors (political-institutional, socio-cultural, and political-economic) that are conducive to, or constrain, environmental integration.

The analysis here is exploratory rather than in-depth, but hopefully demonstrates the potential and usefulness of studying the environmental integration efforts of countries and governments on the basis of such a framework. Table 2 classifies several countries, at different stages, have been regarded as environmental leaders because of the EI initiatives taken by their governments. Here, I will briefly discuss the efforts and developments in the United States, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, as the approaches followed by the governments in these countries illustrate the differences in emphasis on the cognitive, policy, and institutional dimensions of environmental management.

**Table 2 – Leaders in environmental integration**

	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Institutional</b>
<b>Management dimension</b>	Information, knowledge and interpretations of the environment	Policies, plans, programmes, strategies	Institutions: rules and organisations
<b>External/internal</b>			
<b>External forms</b>	United States of America	Denmark, Sweden	Canada, The United Kingdom
<b>Internal forms</b>	Norway; Germany, Bhutan	Netherlands	New Zealand

### Environmental integration in the United States

The United States was one of the first countries where “the environment” became a subject of public concern and consequently of public policy (Caldwell 1963). The publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 played an important role in raising environmental awareness and the emergence of the environmental movement. The extent of environmental concern in the United States, boosted also by a major oil spill in California in 1969, was reflected in the twenty million people that attended the first Earth Day in New York on 22 April 1970 (Earth Day Network 2015).

In 1969, the United States government introduced the National Environmental Protection Act that came into force in 1970 and that created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Council on

Environmental Quality (CEQ). The EPA was given significant responsibilities and powers, including the setting of standards, to address pollution of air, water, and land, potentially laying the basis for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to pollution of all kinds. It also received responsibility for the protection of endangered species, and was tasked the implementation of a new environmental integration mechanism, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (referred to as Environmental Impact Statements Review). The provision requires federal agencies to assess the potentially significant environmental impacts of their proposals and to describe these in statement which is subject to review by the EPA and open to public scrutiny. Environmental impact statements are required to be rigorous and scientifically based. Thus, EIA is foremost an informational decision aid tool aimed at identifying important foreseeable environmental impacts of decisions, and assessing how these can be prevented or mitigated.

The introduction of this new tool made the United States a leader in the development of knowledge-based environmental integration. This leadership role was not confined to EIA, but was also extended to other forms of cognitive environmental integration, notably Risk Analysis and (Comparative) Risk Management. It was also the first country to develop and apply Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) systematically (Pearce, 2000:49). Each of these mechanisms has become a discipline in its own right, supported by professionals, extensive literature, journals and training courses. This professional development has given these tools a solid standing, and a science-like status. They have also been institutionalised in legislation, regulations, and executive orders, encouraging or mandating their use and further entrenching them as areas of professional practice and career opportunities. These developments have also encouraged the transfer and diffusion of these instruments to other countries, especially of EIA and CBA. However, the USA remains the main centre of application and development of these tools and disciplines.

By contrast, in the United States, environmental integration into policy, via external and internal forms, has received much less emphasis. During the period between 1964 and 1980, which has been called the “golden era” of environmental law making in the US, Congress passed 22 major laws, introducing new federal policies in the areas of pollution control, land management, and wildlife protection (McGrory Klyza and Sousa 2013, 1). The new policies created a new institutional framework that has remained largely intact until now (2015). The policies contained in the laws significantly advanced environmental protection related to air, water, land, waste management, and nature conservation. Thus, they covered a wide range of issues falling within what is commonly regarded as the realm of environmental policy.

Since then, virtually no major new environmental legislation has been adopted, for reasons to be explained below. This stagnation does not imply that attempts at changing policies have not occurred, and both environmental advocates and their opponents have used a range of alternative pathways, including the use of executive (presidential) power, the courts, and the states, to advance their cause (McGrory Klyza and Sousa 2013, 2). However, these efforts have produced mixed and unstable results, in large part because they have not been back up by legislation. Arguably, the most significant gains on the environmental side related to the expansion of protected land, and the Supreme Court ruling, in 2007, that the Environmental Protection Agency has the responsibility, under the Clean Air Act, to regulate greenhouse gas emissions if these are considered to pose a health hazard. However, the anti-environmental camp, including President Bush Jr. who was keen to get rid of “excessive” environmental regulation, has been successful, through presidential appointments and budget cuts, in clipping the EPA’s wings by significantly reducing its regulatory and enforcement activities. The impotence to pass major new environmental legislation is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the area of climate change. In the past decade or so, more than 20 Bills have been proposed in Congress, without success. The latest failure was in 2010, even at a time when the Democrats had a majority in both houses of Congress (Bartosiewicz and Miley 2014).

Under President Obama, environmental concerns started to receive much greater attention, especially in the areas of climate change and energy, than under his predecessor. Obama recognised the reality and dangers of rapid, human-induced climate change, and has expressed a commitment towards reducing US GHG emissions by more than 80 percent by 2050 (compared to 2005). However, his introduction of climate change legislation faltered because of strong opposition in Congress. Obama also launched a multi-billion dollar energy policy aimed at reducing the country's dependence on imported oil and at boosting energy efficiency and conservation, and renewable energy generation. Compared to the policies pursued during the Bush era, it is perhaps not surprising that Obama's election victory has been referred to as signalling a "rebirth of US environmental policy" (The Guardian, 5 November 2008). Coinciding with the advent of the world's worst economic crisis in decades, the administration's new environmental policies have been heralded as a 'New Green Deal' (Custers 2009). However, it is questionable whether these policies represent a genuine break with the unsustainable economic policies of the past, and even more whether they are inspired by a commitment towards the greening of economic institutions. While they reflect a higher level of concern about environmental issues, they are also based on a strong belief in the ability of science, technology and rational management (backed up by more funding) to resolve such problems, making more fundamental changes unnecessary (Beddington 2009). Although these changes are significant and can be seen as a move towards the greening of energy policy, they do not amount to the adoption of a more comprehensive and integrated environmental policy (green planning), and have not been accompanied by institutional changes aimed at a significant strengthening of environmental interests within the machinery of government.

US federal governments have never developed a comprehensive or overarching environmental policy, making the country a definite laggard in the area of green planning. This neglect is also mirrored in the relatively weak support that the notion of sustainable development, or any other integrative concept, has found among federal governments. Although, in 1993, a President's Council on Sustainability was created, and produced a "national vision" of a "Sustainable America" (Maurer, 1999), this has had no practical effect, and the Council was dissolved in 1999. This has left an important gap in the area of cognitive-internal environmental integration, leaving environmental integration efforts without a compass (or, in US government jargon, a road map). As a result, whatever environmental policy continues to be made in the USA, is made in a piece meal fashion

Moreover, although the United States has adopted a raft of policies covering all or most areas considered to be in the environmental realm, these have left the main sectors in which many of the drivers of environmental pressure can be found, such as energy, transport, and agricultural policies, largely untouched. Although the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process, introduced with the adoption of the Environmental Protection Act in 1969, was intended to also integrate environmental concerns into policies, this has hardly eventuated, and EIA has been applied mainly to (development) projects. Energy, transport and agricultural policies, let alone economic policy, continue to be driven predominantly by non-environmental goals and interests, in particular aimed at economic growth.

As noted above, the environmental-institutional framework that was created during the 1960s and 1970s has remained largely unchanged. The National Environmental Policy Act, which came into force in 1 January 1970, established the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the main administrative and regulatory agency, and the Council on Environment Quality (CEQ), an advisory body to the President. However, although the EPA has responsibilities and power within what is commonly regarded as the environmental realm (pollution, hazardous substances, waste, nature/wildlife protection), it has had little if any impact on non-environmental institutions, such as the laws and organisations governing energy, transport, and agriculture. Although the introduction of the environmental impact procedures imposed a requirement on all government departments to assess and consider the environmental implications of

their proposals, this has been primarily applied at the level of projects, not the broader policies that guided the departments. Hence, the extent of institutional change within departments aimed at the strengthening of internal environmental advocacy has been very limited. Moreover, neither the EPA, nor any other agency, has responsibility for the “greening” across government departments to promote coherence and consistency between any such efforts (institutional-internal environmental integration). And unlike in many other countries, environmental rights have not been included in the American federal constitution. Arguably, this is less surprising as doing so in the US could significantly enhance the power of environmental advocates for whom litigation is already an important tool in their arsenal.

Even within the EPA the development of a more integrated approach has proven to be difficult. Although initially the EPA was tasked to view “the environment as a whole” and to treat “air pollution, water pollution and solid wastes as different forms of a single problem”, and set out to take a systems approach (Lewis 1985), it did not take long before the many units started to operate more or less on their own, a legacy of the fact that the organisation was the result of a merger of a raft of functions previously located in different departments, each with their own culture and goals, and because of the fragmentation in environmental legislation for which different units are responsible. The EPA’s organisational structure has remained a big obstacle to a more comprehensive and integrated approach even in the area of pollution control alone. The institutional-external integration challenge is also not helped by the fact that the EPA has only the status of a Presidential agency, not of a department at the Cabinet level, giving it less power and opportunity to counterbalance non-environmental interests at the highest level (Arnold and Whitford 2005).

To conclude, although the United States has been an early leader in cognitive-external environmental integration, aimed at the enhancement of the knowledge basis for decision-making, in particular with regard to specific proposals and projects, it has been a laggard rather than a leader in the other areas of environmental integration, including cognitive-internal environmental integration, environmental policy integration (internally and externally), and environmental-institutional integration (both internally and externally). Environmental integration in the United States, especially in the realms of policy and institutions, has stagnated and has not even been a priority for most federal governments. Possible reasons for this will be discussed below. Perhaps not surprisingly, assessments of the USA’s environmental performance indicate that its performance has declined, to the point that according to one assessment, in 2000, it occupied the bottom place in the rankings of developed countries (Lieberferink, *et al.* 2009).

### Environmental integration in the Netherlands

Although, like in many other countries, environmental integration in the Netherlands has been pursued in a variety of ways, it stands out for its environmental policy integration (or green planning) efforts, in particular in the form of the adoption of a comprehensive environment policy (plan), and its implementation during the 1990s. Although Dutch governments, at different stages, have also introduced cognitive forms of environmental-external integration, such as EIA, formally expressed a commitment to sustainable development (cognitive-internal environmental integration), and introduced an environmental clause (Article 21) in the constitution (institutional-internal integration), it is the Dutch approach to green planning that constituted the core of its environmental integration efforts.

During the 1990s, the Netherlands was widely regarded as a leader in the development of comprehensive environmental policy or green planning (Bennett 1997; Johnson 1995; 2008; Van der Straaten 1992). This gave it the status of one of the world’s environmentally progressive nations, being portrayed as a model from which other countries could or should learn. However, as the discussion here will demonstrate,

green planning in the Netherlands, although innovative, partially successful, and in many ways still exemplary, arguably reached its limits and came to a halt in the 2000s.

In 1989, following the publication of the first national state of the environment report that sketched a very gloomy picture of the country's future (Langeweg 1988), the Dutch government adopted the first National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP). The plan was remarkable in many ways. It provided not only a broad and strong factual overview of the state of the environment, but was based on a rigorous scientific analysis of the drivers behind the environmental pressures, making explicit the extent to which all the sectors of society, including the main industries, contributed to problems. The plan put forward very ambitious objectives and specific targets for tackling these problems, focusing on their immediate sources, often in the order of a 70 to 90 percent reduction of existing levels over a twenty year period, with the aim of making the Netherlands a sustainable country within one generation. Moreover, it laid much of the responsibility for achieving these targets with the industries and sectors that contributed to the problems (referred to as "target groups"), based on the idea that those responsible should "internalise" it, make it theirs. Although the ultimate targets were set by the government, industries and sectors were given considerable flexibility to identify and implement to most cost-effective ways to achieve the reductions required. Yet, the government set up a system, including mandatory reporting, to goad target groups towards action, and to hold them accountable for achieving interim targets. Meanwhile, the government made it clear that it would introduce stringent measures if progress towards the targets proved to be inadequate ("the stick behind the door").

The approach was accompanied and supported by an impressive monitoring and reporting system. The degree of progress was assessed and reflected upon in annual state of the environment reports which were produced by an independent scientific body (the RIVM). Observers were impressed by the frankness and honesty that characterised the reporting (Johnson 1995; 2008), which made it hard for the government to claim success if it was not backed up by the facts.

As the plan was very comprehensive in its coverage of environmental problems affecting the Netherlands, identified all the major (immediate) sources of the problems based on independent scientific research and analysis, and laid much of the responsibility for addressing them with those who had been found to contribute to them (all the sectors), it was a remarkable example of rational-comprehensive environmental policy. It provided an overarching policy framework for environmental integration across all sectors and levels of society (policy-internal integration), as well as pushing and facilitating environmental integration within each sector, including all non-environmental sectors (policy-external environmental integration). Even though it was sometimes (mistakenly) said to have been a participatory exercise, in fact, the first NEPP was developed with very little public input. As such, it has been referred to as a technocratic, top-down approach (Bennett 1997, 81) – "the best job of technical environmental planning done by any nation to date" (Johnson 1995; 2008, 45). Yet, it also acknowledged that, to address environmental problems effectively, all those who contributed to the problems must carry responsibility, even though there is flexibility in the ways they choose to achieve the set targets. As no group or industry was singled out and everyone was expected to "do their bit", the approach was widely perceived to be fair, even by the industries. Moreover, as internalisation ("verinnerlijking") of environmental concerns and responsibilities with all the main groups in society as a major guiding principle, the approach did acknowledge the need for the involvement of all the main "stakeholders" in the implementation of the plan.

Moreover, the plan was not a one-off (paper) exercise, but was a continuous process that was reviewed regularly (this was made a statutory requirement). In 1990, the plan was amended to include new CO<sub>2</sub> emission targets and some additional measures (NEPP-Plus). Further reviews were published in 1994 (NEPP2), 1998 (NEPP3), and 2001 (NEPP4). However, the subsequent reviews left most of the initial plan

(NEPP1), and the targets contained therein, intact. NEPP2 and 3 focused foremost on implementation issues. Over time, however, it became apparent that the implementation of the plan was very challenging, and that many of the targets (including interim targets) would not be achieved. Although, at times, the government allocated additional funding to address some of the sticky problems, this was not sufficient.

Increasingly, it became clear, and was as much acknowledged in NEPP4, that many of the problems were “systemic” and that achieving the objectives of NEPP1 would require more fundamental change, among other, in production systems and consumption patterns, institutions, including the role of government, and social attitudes. NEPP4 acknowledged that many of the original targets would not be achieved within the set timeframe (of twenty years), suggesting that the targets and/or timeframe needed to be reviewed. NEPP4 differed from the preceding plans in that it took a broader and longer view of the environmental challenge, identified the emergence of potentially new and very serious problems (notably associated with biotechnology, nanotechnology and robotics), and looked at the issues in a global context, recognising the interdependence of the Netherlands with the rest of the world. It also identified the need for a need for the development of a “transition policy” to bring about the technological, economic, socio-cultural and institutional change that is required. Altogether, the report makes fascinating reading, unusual for government publications (Ministerie voor Volkshuisvesting 2001).

Perhaps ironically, the publication of NEPP4 also signalled the demise of the Dutch green planning effort. Arguably, with the publication of NEPP4, the government took the view that the approach that had been followed during the 1990s had run its course, and had addressed and reduced the most pressing problems to “manageable” levels. With the coming to power of a conservative-led government in 2002, environmental interests were put on the back-burner, even to the point that the main responsibility for environmental matters was delegated to a state-secretary (not in Cabinet) rather than to a minister. Although, in 2007, a new environment minister was again appointed, government commitment to environmental interests arguably reached a new low when, in 2010, the environment ministry was dismantled and its responsibilities scattered over other government departments with predominantly development related functions. Many environmental targets were relaxed, postponed or even abandoned altogether. In 2010, the government openly admitted that it no longer wished to play the role of an environmental leader, but that it would adjust Dutch environmental norms and ambitions to those set by the EU, which apparently it already found difficult to comply with (Hoogervorst and Dietz 2015, 19-20; 30-31).

These developments indicate that, although formally the government has not completely relinquished its responsibility, *de facto*, it leaves it to the business sector to set the parameters of Dutch environmental policy under the cloak of the need for a greater involvement of society. In practice, it has abandoned the previously strong efforts towards policy integration (both internal and external), and it even has largely dismantled the state’s institutional capacity to undertake such efforts.

With the demise of green planning, the Netherlands also relinquished its status of an environmental leader. Yet, despite its limitations and limits, the Dutch approach to green planning remains worthy of note, and still offers valuable lessons for future efforts towards environmental policy integration.

### Environmental integration in New Zealand

New Zealand arguably has gone further than most countries in the creation of an integrated institutional framework for environmental management. Institutional-internal integration, as discussed earlier, refers to the creation of institutions (rules and organisations) that promote coherence and consistency between environmental integration efforts, for instance, by integrating legislation covering different areas of environmental management, based on common principles or goals.

Between 1984 and 1990, New Zealand's fourth Labour government embarked on a programme of institutional and policy reform that left few areas untouched. Based on the ideas and principles associated with public choice theory, the New Public Management, and a belief in the superiority of the "free market" as a collective choice mechanism, a set of ideas commonly associated with neo-liberalism or the New Right philosophy, the government overhauled the public service, devolved much of its traditional involvement in the production of goods and services to semi-independent state corporations and to the private sector through a programme of privatisation. It also reformulated policies in virtually all areas. The main principles on which the reform were based were the separation between commercial and non-commercial activities, the separation between policy, regulatory and management functions, and enhanced accountability (to Ministers), transparency (reporting requirements), and efficiency (Boston 1991).

Based on these ideas and principles, the institutional framework for environmental decision-making was also drastically changed. Much of the responsibility for environmental decision-making, previously spread over a raft of public bodies at different levels, was devolved to and concentrated in local government, in particular in newly established Regional Councils. More than 70 environmental laws were consolidated into one, the *Resource Management Act 1991* (RMA). The act has the sustainable management of resources as its main goal and provides an integrated process for decision-making on activities that potentially impact on the environment. Responsibilities for nature conservation and the management of national parks, previously also scattered, were concentrated in a Department of Conservation. An independent environmental watchdog, the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, was established to keep an overview of the functioning of the whole environmental management system, and to advise on how to address possible shortcomings, gaps and weaknesses in that system, a world first in environmental-institutional learning of a systemic nature (Bühns 1996; Bühns and Bartlett 1993; Memon 1993).

When they were introduced, despite their political-ideological basis, the new institutional arrangements held considerable promise. The premises and processes contained in the RMA made it compulsory that all proposals for development, not just the government's but also those initiated in the business sector, be assessed on their environmental implications. Previously, only developments that were initiated or sponsored by the state had been subject to environmental impact assessment procedures. Also, as the New Zealand state (both governments and government departments) had been a major driver of, and vested interest in, development, mostly through state-owned enterprises and government departments with development oriented missions (sometimes combined with environmental responsibilities that usually took a back seat), "getting the government out of business" seemed a positive step, enabling the state to take some distance from specific development proposals and to take its environmental (regulatory) responsibilities more seriously. Moreover, the RMA provided for virtually unlimited public participation in the approval processes, and in the development of environmental policies of local and regional governments that were supposed to provide guidance to development in their areas. Hence, the new institutional framework appeared to provide for the greening of "on the ground" (economic) development across the whole country, commensurate to the "clean and green" image of New Zealand that governments, businesses and many New Zealanders wished to portray, and even believe in.

However, over time, it became apparent that this was a pipe-dream. For one, the RMA has had very little if any impact on the day-to-day environmental practices of many businesses, in particular in the agricultural sector. It did not prevent a big shift to and expansion of dairy farming, an industry with a big environmental footprint, responsible for contributing significantly to a raft of environmental problems, including the pollution of rivers and streams (and most likely aquifers, although that takes more time to show up), greenhouse gas emissions (notably methane), and increased pressure on water supplies (for

irrigation) especially in drought prone areas of the country, and continued heavy reliance on fertilisers and pesticides. The act did not prevent the enormous expansion of (sub-) urban development, notably in the Auckland region, contributing to the loss of agricultural soils, growing air pollution from the increase in private transport, the expansion of road networks (with the environmental impacts thereof), the continuation and expansion of mining activity, even in areas considered to be of significant ecological value, the continued promotion of oil exploration and exploitation, notably in deep sea areas, the expansion of marine farming (with adverse environmental effects), the run-down of the country's rail network following privatisation, resulting in an increase in road transport, the introduction, with the growth of trade, of new species of pests and diseases posing threats to streams, indigenous forests, horticulture and forestry, and public health, and the continuing decline of biodiversity. Overall, the RMA may have prevented or mitigated developments that would have been blatantly damaging to New Zealand's environment; but, despite being "effects" oriented, it did not stop environmental deterioration, especially with regard to water, biodiversity, and greenhouse gas emissions (Ministry for the Environment & Statistics New Zealand 2015; Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 2013).

One of the main issues in this context is that, despite the comprehensive nature of the institutional reforms in New Zealand, they have done very little with regard to the greening of government policy and decision-making in the non-environmental sectors where most of the drivers of environmental pressures are located. The reforms left largely untouched the core of the central government's policies in the areas of energy, transport, and agriculture, for instance, which continued to be driven foremost by economic considerations, despite some marginal moves towards the promotion of sustainability. If anything, the reforms shifted the onus for the greening of economic activities to the private sector, in line with the market-oriented ideology underlying the reforms.

On a related point, although the reforms strengthened the position of environmental agencies within the system of government, these have had little influence on, let alone power over, non-environmental institutions. From its establishment in 1986, the Ministry for the Environment, despite its name, was expected to "balance" the wide range of interests and views on the environment that exist within and outside government. But the ministry has never been a strong advocate for environmental groups and interests. As a government department, as a rule, it has taken an "neutral" and expert-based stance on issues, resulting in mostly grey-tinted policy advice. In line with the prevailing ideology and government preferences, the Ministry's policy development efforts have been oriented foremost to the development of economic/market instruments rather than the introduction of strong regulations or standards, which at the national level, have been slow in coming and remain weak, for instance, with regard to the protection of water quality. And as its main responsibility is the provision of policy advice, it has not played a significant role in the enforcement of whatever rules were adopted by councils.

The situation was different with regard to the Department of Conservation which, despite being a government department, was given legal responsibility for the protection of the country's protected areas (national parks, reserves and other categories), and which had both a policy advisory role as well as responsibility for implementation and on-the-ground management. While this created a strong institutional advocate for conservation within government, the department has been hampered by the discrepancy between the resources needed to fulfil its tasks effectively and the funding that it received, and by frequent reorganisations aimed at making the department more efficient, a euphemism for cost-cutting. Increasingly, the department has been forced to increase its revenue from charges for (mainly tourism) operations undertaken by private companies in the national parks, opening it up for criticism of diluting its conservation mandate. Perhaps most fundamentally, the Department has had very little influence on the sectoral policies and practices that threaten the environment (including biodiversity)

outside the protected areas, while being prodded by governments to accommodate development (including mining) within those areas.

One of the more innovative outcomes of the reforms was the establishment of a Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, which was given a broad mandate encompassing what has been referred to as the roles of environmental ombudsman and “systems guardian”. The ombudsman role involved, in particular, monitoring the way councils fulfilled their environmental functions and responsibilities, triggered often by complaints from citizens and/or obvious cases where their performance fell short. The “systems guardian” role implied looking at the performance of the environmental system as a whole, but in particular at the national level, with the aim of identifying, researching and reporting on important areas where environmental protection appeared to be inadequate. While Commissioners differed in their approach to, and relative emphasis on, these roles, the Commission’s work and reports have been generally regarded useful and constructive, although, at times, it was seen as an “irritant” by governments. However, in the wider picture, it is difficult to gauge what the influence of the Commission has been on the environmental integration efforts of the executive power, in terms of either institutions (legislation and organisational change) or policy development, in particular in non-environmental areas (Bührs 1996; Young 2007).

In summary, although New Zealand’s efforts in institutional-internal integration have been significant and have drawn attention from around the world, its performance in greening non-environmental institutions and environmental policy integration (on both external and internal dimensions) has been much less impressive. Although the *Resource Management Act* provides a framework for integrating decision-making on policies and projects at the local and regional level, it does little if anything to promote the integration of environmental concerns into non-environmental policies at the national level. Contrary to some perceptions (Johnson 1995; 2008, 68-87), the Act itself does not constitute an integrated environmental policy or green plan. Although New Zealand governments have, at several points of time, made some moves towards strategic environmental planning, these have been weak and inconsequential (Bührs 2002; Bührs and Bartlett 1997). New Zealand’s experience demonstrates the limitations of partial environmental integration efforts, in this case characterised by an emphasis on institutional-internal integration but not accompanied by moves towards policy (external and internal) integration (Bührs 2009, 174-179).

From the brief discussion above, it will be apparent that countries that are often referred to as environmental leaders do not do necessarily very well in all areas of environmental integration. The status as a leader is influenced by the emphasis of governments on one of the three approaches to environmental integration, even only on one or more particular form(s) (mechanisms) of integration that have been adopted and developed to a point that can be said to have been innovative and/or that have been implemented with more rigour than in other countries. However, as illustrated by the examples above, this does not mean that these countries or governments have taken a comprehensive approach to environmental integration extended to all six areas identified in the framework. Although governments may have adopted or introduced a range and variety of forms of integration, in most countries there remain significant gaps. Moreover, as the brief record of the three countries discussed above illustrates, there is no guarantee that the lead that countries take in one or more domains of environmental integration will be enduring and effective. It is no exception that a country that was, at one time, an environmental leader, subsequently became a laggard. In fact, this has been the case with all three countries focused on here.

These developments provide support for the argument that environmental integration efforts that are skewed towards particular areas or domains, and that are not supported by mutually consistent efforts across all areas and domains, are likely to be limited in their effectiveness, and stagnate, as they

encounter obstacles in the areas and domains that have been largely unaffected by these efforts. As argued elsewhere, all forms of integration have their limitations (Bühns 2009), and to be effective, environmental integration needs to be pursued comprehensively and by mutually supportive forms, within and across all areas and domains. On their own, particular forms of integration will be of limited effectiveness also because of the way they are designed and implemented, influenced by political considerations and interests.

But although it may be desirable or necessary to take a comprehensive approach to environmental integration, there are good reasons for thinking that this is made (very) difficult by the political-institutional framework of a country's political system. Arguably, under pressure to integrate environmental concerns, governments commonly choose the path of least resistance, introducing forms of integration that encounter the least obstacles and opposition. By contrast, they are less likely to adopt or develop forms of integration that the political-institutional context makes very difficult. This idea will be explored in the next section.

### Political-institutional influences on environmental integration: political institutions and cultures

In the policy literature, there is widespread support for the view that "institutions matter". Institutions, both formal and informal, play a major role in guiding or channelling the development of policies, both procedurally (the processes by which policies are developed) and substantively (by holding up certain values, norms and principles). Policy does not develop in a vacuum, or purely on the basis of rational decision making. Although agency (the choices made by individuals) plays a crucial role in decision-making, policy development is a collective, political and not always rational process constrained and/or enabled by rules and norms that have been laid down over time. It is by comparing politics and policy development between countries or political systems that the importance of institutions becomes most apparent.

A considerable literature has emerged in the field of comparative environmental politics and policy that supports the idea that institutions matter. My aim here is not to summarise or discuss that literature, but to highlight some of the findings that seem most relevant to an analysis and explanation of why some countries, in particular the ones that have been looked at above, have taken the lead in environmental integration efforts. In particular, I am interested in finding out why these countries, which, at some stages, can be considered to have been leaders in a particular approach to environmental integration, with an emphasis on cognitive, policy, or institutional forms, have taken these paths, and not others. If it is true, as argued above, that environmental integration efforts need to be developed comprehensively and in mutually supportive ways within and across the cognitive, policy and institutional dimensions, then it is crucial to find out why this is not happening. Moreover, if countries or governments are to learn from each other's experiences, a rationale that underlies many comparative studies, we need to assess to what extent, and in what ways, it would be desirable, necessary, and possible or (un)likely, to change a country's institutions to make them more conducive to (more) comprehensive environmental integration.

My focus is on the role of the political institutions of the three countries discussed here, comprising formal and informal institutions, including what is often referred to as political cultures or policy styles. Although political institutions are not the only institutions that may help explain differences in approaches to environmental integration, and broader socio-cultural and political-economic institutions arguably are even more important factors affecting environmental integration, an argument that will be taken up in the following section, it is important to assess the role specifically of political institutions for the reasons mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

## The United States: Checks and balances and a distrust of government

The United States has a federal political system characterised foremost by a strict separation of powers. Formally, by Constitution, power is divided between the two houses of Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate), the President, the Courts, and the States, providing for an elaborate system of checks-and-balances in which no single entity is able to dominate. Power is divided vertically between the central government and the states, and horizontally between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. The system was purposefully designed like that by the “Fathers of the Constitution”, who wanted to avoid that any particular interest group (“faction”) would be able to capture or dominate the collective decision-making process to serve its own ends (Hamilton, *et al.* 1787-1788).

The American political system is commonly referred to as being highly fragmented and adversarial, making policy development, including environmental policy, a challenging process. Schreurs notes that US decision making is “highly pluralistic and quite often confrontational”, with a high propensity to rely on the courts (Schreurs 2002, 243). Bryner argues that the US political system “is so divided by federalism, the separation of powers, and other institutional devices, that coherent policy efforts seem impossible in the absence of a national crisis” (Bryner 2000, 302). Policy development in the USA is a slow, tiresome process, fought out between rival factions and lobby groups via the two houses of Congress and the President, and often the subject of further battles in the courts even after formal adoption.

Associated with, and commensurate with this system of government, is a political culture characterised by a distrust in government, in particular central (federal) government. States strongly safeguard their powers and responsibilities, also in the resource management and environmental policy sphere, against what they regard as the growing intrusion of federal government, in particular by the EPA. State representatives in Washington protect and promote what they see as important state interests, notably related to their local industries and economies. Anti-statism has been a dominant feature in American political culture from the formation of the United States (Stillman 2003).

However, as Stillman points out, the paradox is that, over time, the American state has grown and become one of the most formidable in the world. The development of the American state has been incremental, grown largely in response to crises and developments that made it necessary for the government to take on new tasks. This pragmatic development of the state has given rise to the development of public administration as a discipline, which in turn also supported its expansion. However, several other public policy schools of thought, mostly advocating a minimalist state, compete for dominance and keep on tapping into the anti-statist political culture (Stillman 2003).

Pragmatism, as noted above, has been an important driver behind the expansion of government policy in the United States. But the pragmatic approach to policy development did not just arise from practical needs; it was also supported by a belief, notably a belief, finding its roots in the Enlightenment, in the possibility of making a better world through the application of reason and science. This idea, the seeds of which could already be found in the *Federalist Papers*, together with the belief that government’s role is to protect the public interest, developed into an important school of thought within the realm of public policy, among other advocated by John Dewey (Brown 1983, 358; Hamilton, *et al.* 1787-1788; Stillman 2003, 23-24; 32). In a political culture where there is little taste, and space, for explicit ideological debate and positioning, science came to play a significant role in the legitimation of policy.

The importance of the role of science in the development of environmental policy in the United States is reflected in most environmental legislation, including the choice of processes, tools or mechanisms by which policies are to be implemented, such as science-based environmental impact assessment and (pollution control) standards. Whenever there are any doubts about whether assessments or standards are not adequately backed up by scientific evidence, they can be challenged in the courts, where the

strength of scientific evidence again plays a central role in decisions. The importance attached to science and apparent “objectivity” is also reflected the adoption of “science-like” tools like (Comparative) Risk Assessment (RA) and Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA), applied by experts, even though their claim to objectivity has no foundation (Bührs 2009, 54-67). Such tools, and science in general, can be and has been used by parties on opposite sides of an issue to claim support, validity and legitimacy for their cause, as illustrated also with regard to climate change. Despite the overwhelming consensus among scientists about the human contribution to climate change, opponents still try to legitimate their position by arguing that the idea of climate change is “manufactured science” and a “hoax” (Bartosiewicz and Miley 2014, 127). The emphasis on science is often used as a cloak for conservative ideological positions, putting the onus on environmental advocates to prove that problems are “real” and that the solutions advocated are supported by science and seen as being “objectively” the best. In practice, therefore, the emphasis on science and objectivity skews the selection of environmental integration mechanism towards those that deliver practical and technological options, and that require minimal change and costs. By contrast, it makes it much harder to advocate for major policy and institutional change, let alone fundamental political-economic and socio-cultural change that may be required to effectively address the environmental challenge.

For the same reason, it is perhaps not surprising that, in the United States, broad ideas or concepts like sustainable development have failed to attract strong political support (Bryner 2000, 288). Given the difficulty or near impossibility of developing a comprehensive environmental policy, and the virtual absence of initiatives in that direction, there has also been no need for the adoption by governments of broad principles such as sustainable development that (can) serve as a cornerstone for such a policy. Moreover, such broad concepts are often dismissed as too broad and vague, and lacking in their scientific or objective basis. Also, during the “golden era” of the introduction of environmental legislation, the notion of sustainable development was not yet in vogue, and “the environment” and environmental protection were the main foci of environmental discourse, as reflected in the labels used for the institutions and mechanisms created.

Given the political-institutional and cultural obstacles to major change in the environmental institutions and policies of the United States, how to explain the significant changes that happened during the “golden era”? A possible explanation for this exceptional period may be found in the then prevailing climate of grave environmental concern, which affected the public, the members of both political parties and, not in the least, an otherwise conservative President (Nixon). The main pieces of environmental legislation were approved by Congress with overwhelming majorities and bi-partisan support. This situation proved to be exceptional and dissipated during the 1980s. Since then, environmental policy became more of a battle field between those who were trying to undo the institutional framework that was put in place and those who defended it. Again, science and the courts have played a main role in this battle. Moreover, from the 1980s, Congress (and politics in general) has become increasingly polarised along ideological lines, hardening gridlock, and making environmental integration even more difficult (McGrory Klyza and Sousa 2013, 286-287).

To conclude, the reasons for the emphasis in the United States on knowledge-based approaches to environmental integration can be found, to a large extent, in the political institutions and culture of the country. First, the strict separation between the three branches of power (legislative, executive, and judicial), a federal system that leaves significant powers with the states, and a political culture dominated by anti-statism, create significant constraints on the federal government to introduce more than minor institutional changes and policies aimed at environmental integration. Second, the dominant political culture promotes a form of pragmatism which favours an emphasis on science and science-like tools and mechanisms for environmental integration, even if these are used as a cloak for ideological positions and

vested interests. In practice, such mechanisms produce incremental, and mostly technological and managerial, changes that maintain the status quo, and mitigate against the adoption of courses of action aimed at more fundamental political-economic and socio-cultural change. At the same time, these forms of environmental integration do little to bring about a greening of environmental policies and institutions of the United States, and leave unaffected the drivers behind the growing environmental pressures and the fundamental sources of the environmental challenge. And given the difficulty of bringing about major policy and institutional change in the United States, the prospects for a more comprehensive and effective approach to environmental integration look grim.

#### The Netherlands: Corporatism and pragmatism

In contrast to the United States, the Netherlands has a number of features that make it more conducive to, or at least pose lower obstacles to, environmental integration at the national level. It has a unitary political system in which formal power is concentrated at the national level, with provincial and local governments playing a role mainly in the implementation of government policy. Although power is divided over the legislative, executive and judicial branches, governments are usually able to govern, pass legislation and adopt policy, with sufficient support in parliament, and without their decisions being challenged in the courts. Moreover, traditionally, the dominant political culture in the Netherlands accepts or even expects governments to play a leading role in addressing the problems facing the country, including environmental problems, and until the turn of the century, anti-statism had no widespread support in the Netherlands. Since then, however, at the government level, there has been a strong move towards rolling back the role of the state, notably in environmental matters.

While formal power is concentrated at the national level, it is shared between the executive and the two houses of Parliament (the first and second chamber, the second being the most important). Moreover, as the electoral system of proportional representation makes it very difficult for any one party to rule on its own, governments invariably govern on the basis of a coalition agreement between several parties that, together, form a majority in the second chamber. The need to govern by coalition is long-established and deeply ingrained in the political culture. All political parties that aspire to become part of the government (Cabinet) need to be willing to compromise and cooperate. Most parties have internalised such an attitude, even though (religious) beliefs, principles and ideologies have also played an important role in Dutch politics. Overall, this makes for a less adversarial political system compared to that of the United States or to countries that have government systems in the Westminster tradition (such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand). Based on several criteria, the Netherlands has been found to be one of the most consensual democracies (Lijphart and Crepaz 1991, 245).

In line with this, the Dutch policy style has traditionally been characterised as corporatist, involving a system of interest aggregation and policy development characterised by a significant degree of involvement of what are considered to be the main interest groups in society, notably the business sector and the labour movement. Although legislative proposals are commonly designed “in-house” by the government department responsible for a particular area (with variable degrees of input from other departments), they are also submitted to an advisory body that has equal representation from employers’ organisations, the labour movement, and the government. This, however, does not imply that policy development is normally undertaken with a widespread public participation or input. In fact, corporatism can be seen as a means to confine input into the policy process to those groups in society that are regarded as the most important and “responsible” in terms of advocating positions that are not seen as extreme or radical. Nonetheless, democratic corporatism has been strongly linked to the notion of consensus democracy (Lijphart and Crepaz 1991), and is widely perceived to enhance the legitimacy, and the effectiveness, of government decision making.

These features of the Dutch political system and political culture generally favour a reliance on gradual and modest policy change (including legislation and the implementation of policy) to accommodate diverse, conflicting or new interests. It tends to favour incrementalism (“not rocking the boat”) as radical change, especially of an institutional nature, is likely to upset the common ground and “balance” that exist between the main parties. New issues and conflicts are usually addressed and accommodated through a process of negotiation between the parties involved, and by compromise over the amendment of policies. As mentioned above, it was the publication, in 1988, of a report on the Dutch state of the environmental, *Concern for Tomorrow*, which triggered the government to adopt a radical and rational-comprehensive approach in the form of the first National Environmental Policy Plan.

As discussed above, the Plan put forward ambitious policy objectives and targets that were sought to be achieved with the cooperation of the sectors and industries that were deemed responsible for the problems. However, it is important to note that the plan/policy was not a legal document, and not supported by legislation. It did not involve or result in significant formal institutional change, and left the responsibilities of other government departments (for sectoral policies) largely untouched. Foremost, the NEPP put in place a policy framework and process to address what was perceived to be an environmental crisis facing the Netherlands. Although, initially, the plan came about in what can be labelled a top-down process, it did not mark a definitive departure from the traditional corporatist policy style. Rather, it put in place a system and process of cooperation towards its implementation recognising that the target groups were instrumental in the achievement of the objectives and targets of the plan (De Jongh and Captain 1999).

If anything, over time, the dominant approach to policy development in the Netherlands moved away from assigning a leading role to the central government. As Driessen *et al.* argue (Driessen, *et al.* 2012), from around 2000, the government’s approach to environmental integration shifted from what they call “public-private governance” to “self-regulation”, leaving businesses to set their own environmental goals, thereby effectively abandoning the objectives and targets of the NEPP. This trend, of course, is not confined to the Netherlands, but has manifested itself in many other countries with the rise to global prominence of neo-liberal political-ideology.

A concurrent development that has affected the decline of green planning in the Netherlands is the shift of much of the responsibility for environmental matters from member countries to the EU level, leaving much less space to member countries to follow their own pathways to environmental integration. With this shift, much of the environmental integration challenge has also moved to the EU level, especially with regard to the sectors that harbour the most important sources of environmental pressure, including agriculture, transport, and energy. Formally, environmental integration has indeed become an important plank of the EU’s policies, as reflected in the adoption of a series of several comprehensive green plans (Environmental Action Programmes), and the Cardiff agreement, although it also encounters significant obstacles at that level and has still a long way to go (European Environment Agency 2005; Lenschow 2002; Liefferink and Andersen 1997).

In summary, the central role of green planning (policy-internal environmental integration) in the Dutch approach to environmental integration, although unusual in its comprehensiveness and ambition, was commensurate with a political-institutional framework and policy style that favour consensual policy development over institutional change. The ambitious nature of the plan was inspired by an exceptional situational factor, namely the perceived seriousness and urgency of the environmental situation. But even so, the response was in line with the traditional emphasis on policy change and the avoidance of significant formal institutional change (legislative or organisational). Guided by an overarching principle (sustainable development) and specific objectives and targets, the plan also provided a basis for, and an

expectation of, the greening of the sectors and industries that were seen as the source of the problems (policy external environmental integration).

### New Zealand: Authoritarian democracy and adversarialism

As discussed above, institutional innovation and has been the most important approach to environmental integration in New Zealand, which can be said to have been a leader in this respect. In the 1980s, when the fourth Labour Government overhauled virtually the whole political-institutional framework, based on New Right and New Public Management principles. By contrast, green planning efforts in New Zealand have been *ad hoc* and half-hearted. What may explain the emphasis of New Zealand governments on institutional environmental (rather than policy) integration, notably against the background of its political institutions and political culture?

The relatively emphasis on institutional innovation and integration in New Zealand should be seen in the context of the Westminster political system and tradition. The system allows the executive power (Cabinet) to exert a strong grip on Parliament supported by, in New Zealand until 1998, a “first-past-the-post” (FPP) electoral system. The system has also nourished an adversarial political culture, as there used to be no need for coalition government and compromise, and the two main political parties competed on the basis of an “all or nothing” approach, using every opportunity to “rubbish” the opposition. Although, since the change to a mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system in 1998, the two main parties have needed to rely on the support of small parties to be able to govern, this has had little if any effect on the adversarial political culture, as the two main parties, National and Labour, still compete for the government benches and as, thus far, there is no apparent desire or prospect that they would need each other to form a government.

Until the advent of MMP, the extent of concentration of formal political power in New Zealand was such that it was described as an “elective dictatorship” characterised by “unbridled power” (Palmer 1987). Given its dominance in Parliament, the absence of a second chamber, the government’s control over the judiciary, and the inability to contest the legitimacy of government decisions in court, there are few formal checks and balances on the power of the executive other than three-yearly elections. Although the introduction of MMP and some other changes, including, in 1990, the adoption of a Bill of Rights, led Palmer to soften this assessment of the New Zealand political system (Palmer and Palmer 1997), the executive remains the dominant power. Still, with the support of minor parties that are generally all too happy to support the government in exchange for a few policy concessions and/or some portfolio responsibilities, the government can pretty much put through any legislation and policy that it wishes, even if they are widely unpopular with the public.

An additional aspect of New Zealand’s political culture that supports labelling its political system as an “authoritarian democracy” is the importance assigned to “strong leadership” and “party discipline”. The electorate generally rewards and admires those who are perceived to be strong leaders, even if they provoke a love-hate relationship with different sections of the public. Based on their personal qualities, strong leaders are considered to provide stable and effective government, and without a (perceived) strong leader, a political party has difficulty to attract widespread support. Moreover, the dominance of the government in caucus (the collective of party members in parliament), is backed up by a strong expectation of party discipline, enforced by government “whips”, further strengthening the top-down approach to decision-making on issues considered to be of importance by the political leader and his or her cabinet.

The dominance of the executive in New Zealand’s political system makes it possible, in principle, for the government to introduce radical policy and institutional changes, as illustrated by the overhaul of policies and state institutions at the hands of the Labour government that came to power in 1984, even though

the scale and nature of these changes were neither demanded nor expected by the electorate. Most of these changes were imposed in a typical top-down process, although later it became apparent that they were not so much initiated by the Prime Minister, who had strong reservations about some of the proposals, but by a small group of ministers and officials who, inspired by neoliberal ideas, were able to capture the political agenda (Easton 1989; Jesson 1989).

As noted above, the environmental reforms introduced in the 1980s and early 1990s significantly strengthened New Zealand's institutional environmental framework, but have had little effect on greening of non-environmental policies and the degree of policy-internal environmental integration (the development of an overarching environmental policy). Policy development remained driven and dominated by economic interests. Given the dominance of neo-liberal ideology, government policy, also in what is generally regarded the realm of environmental policy (like pollution control), was based foremost on neo-liberal principles, including deregulation and the reduction of state intervention, devolution of responsibilities towards the market and lower levels of government, and the use of policy instruments favoured by the market. These developments underscore the importance of linking environmental integration efforts between the policy and institutional domains: institutional environmental integration can be driven and dominated by non-environmental interests and may have little if any impact on environmental integration in the policy domain. While such reforms may look good on paper, in the absence of genuine environmental integration efforts in the policy sphere, they constitute little more than hollow and symbolic moves to accommodate environmental demands.

To conclude, the major institutional environmental changes in New Zealand were made possible by the high degree of concentration of power in the executive, and occurred largely as a by-product of a sweeping programme of reform driven by non-environmental, neo-liberal ideas and principles, which were also applied across the board in (virtually) all policy areas. This occurred not just because the government had the power to do so, but because the concentration of power made it possible for a small group of political players to capture the political agenda based on political-ideological and economic grounds. Political-institutional changes (notably in the electoral system) have only marginally affected this concentration of power. While this means that, under a future government, environmental integration efforts might become more genuine and straddle both the institutional and policy domains, this would require also a major change in the dominant political-ideological paradigm, a major strengthening of the influence of environmental over economic interests, and further political-institutional change to entrench environmental imperatives for the long-term.

What becomes apparent from this brief discussion is the importance of political institutions and cultures for environmental integration. Different political systems and cultures present different obstacles to, and/or opportunities for, environmental integration. In the US political system, major moves towards environmental integration in both the policy and institutional domains are extremely difficult, as they are in general, making significant environmental integration dependent on rare occasions where the existing equilibrium between the dominant powers is punctuated. When these occasions occur, they favour an emphasis on cognitive-external environmental integration. In the Netherlands, the political system and dominant political culture made the adoption of comprehensive green planning (policy-internal environmental integration) possible when a perceived environmental crisis arose, and was implemented with a degree of success until the dominant political climate (ideology) changed. In New Zealand, the high degree of concentration of power in the executive made it possible to adopt and implement major institutional environmental integration change, but was just one element of a broader programme of institutional and policy change based on political-ideological principles and economic interests which left the integration of environmental interests into the policy domain largely untouched and/or subordinate to those principles and interests.

While this comparison indicates that the approach of governments to environmental integration, with variable degrees of emphasis on integration in the policy and/or institutional domains, it also points at two other significant findings. First, major moves towards environmental integration are rare occurrences, often triggered by perceived situations of crisis and the need for a commensurate response by governments. In the case of the United States and the Netherlands, the perceived crisis demanding urgent and radical change, was primarily of an environmental nature. In New Zealand, the justification of the major changes was framed by a perceived economic crisis, the response to which encompassed a change in environmental institutions. Second, these environmental integration efforts, while significant, have had a (very) limited effect on the non-environmental institutions and policies, as the dominant political ideology and political-economic system remained driven by and oriented towards economic imperatives. These findings indicate that political institutions and cultures mainly affect the *approach to* and *forms* of environmental integration when the occasion arises, while the underlying (systemic) obstacles continue to exist and stand in the way of political-institutional change that are likely to be needed to facilitate more comprehensive and enduring integration. Apparently, political institutions matter, but only so much...

## Conclusion

An exploratory analysis of the environmental integration efforts in the United States, the Netherlands and New Zealand shows that much of the effort of governments in these countries has been characterised by an emphasis on forms of integration that fall within one of the three realms or domains of environmental management identified in the framework: the cognitive domain in the United States, the policy realm in the Netherlands, and the institutional domain in New Zealand. Moreover, within each country, the approach to environmental integration has tended to focus on either the external or the internal dimension of environmental integration. Consequently, these countries can be considered to have been, at some stage, leaders in only one of the six areas of EI.

Political-institutional and political-cultural factors can help to explain the relative emphasis on the skewed nature of these environmental integration efforts. In the United States, changing policies and institutions aimed at integrating environmental concerns is notoriously difficult, and in fact has occurred mostly during the late 1960s and the 1970s, the “golden era” of environmental progress. Even then, many of the changes involved the introduction of EI mechanisms aimed mainly at cognitive-external EI, the integration of knowledge (especially scientific knowledge) into the decision-making of government organisations, and, in practice, more so related to development (projects) than to non-environmental policies. Although the changes also created a strong institutional basis for environmental protection, among other by establishing the EPA and by passing a raft of environmental laws, they were confined mainly to what is commonly regarded the environmental realm (pollution control, waste management, nature conservation), leaving non-environmental institutions largely unchanged. They did little to promote environmental integration within the environmental realm (internal integration) and maintained or even added to an already highly fragmented (rather than integrated) policy and institutional framework.

In the Netherlands, the political-institutional and cultural context favours an emphasis on co-operative, pragmatic and incremental policy development. Although the NEPP can be seen as a form of rational-comprehensive policy development, and hence a departure from incrementalism, this was triggered by exceptional circumstances that created a national mood of environmental crisis. Still, the NEPP, although enjoying widespread support, did not involve or lead to a significant change of institutions, and its implementation was approached in a co-operative and pragmatic manner rather than by (heavy) regulation. Although the greening of non-environmental policies and institutions was an explicit aim of the NEPP, this proved to be rather illusive as this challenge was (increasingly) left with the private and business sectors on a voluntary basis. Hence, the co-operative and pragmatic policy tradition, historically

entrenched in the political-institutional framework, while facilitating the implementation of green planning, also created obstacles to significant environmental institutional change.

New Zealand offers a contrasting experience to that of the Netherlands. During the 1980s and early 1990s, governments introduced major environmental institutional change as part of a broader overhaul of institutional and policy reform based on neo-liberal ideas and principles. The radical reforms were made possible by the degree of concentration of power in the (executive) government, and justified by the government on largely economic (crisis) grounds. While the environmental reforms significantly strengthened the environmental voice in decision-making processes at all levels of government, they were not accompanied by any serious government commitment towards the greening of non-environmental policies (policy-external EI), or towards the development of a more overarching environmental policy (green plan). Although, potentially, New Zealand governments have the power to put through major policy changes, as they have done in economic, social, education and other policies, obviously, radical policy change aimed at environmental integration has not been a priority, leaving the “promise” inherent to the environmental institutional changes largely unfulfilled.

Developments in these three countries show that major government efforts towards environmental integration are rare, triggered mainly by perceived crisis situations. Even then, given the nature and focus of these efforts, putting emphasis on environmental integration in one or two of the six areas identified in the framework, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the EI efforts in these countries, which at some stage were considered to be environmental leaders, fall far short of what is required.

A common factor in the stagnation or even demise of the integration efforts in the countries focused on here has been the (growing) influence of neo-liberalism on governments. In the US, the election of President Reagan heralded the rise to prominence of neo-liberal ideology, labelling government “intervention” as a problem rather than a solution, and heralding a long period of efforts aimed at deregulation and undoing the environmental framework established in the 1970s. In New Zealand, neo-liberal ideology provided the cognitive framework for the policy and institutional changes initiated by the government in 1984, including in the environmental area, providing a basis for privatisation and deregulation that moved the government away from intervention in the “free market”, environmental regulation and the management of resources, and from any further environmental integration efforts. Similarly, albeit it bit later, the change of government in the early 2000s brought neo-liberalist ideology to the fore and spelled the demise of green planning, shifting much of the environmental integration challenge to the private and business sectors, on a voluntary basis. These developments suggest that, despite the role and importance of political institutions and culture in *focusing and shaping environmental integration efforts if and when they do occur*, creating differences in emphasis on forms of EI between countries, other, notably political-economic, factors and developments are responsible for the stagnation or demise of such efforts. They also suggest that a revival of serious environmental integration efforts by governments may depend foremost on the emergence of a crisis (or multiple crises) in which EI is regarded as (part of) a solution or opportunity.

Finally, the tentative analysis of EI developments in these three countries suggests that, if environmental integration efforts are to become more comprehensive and effective, encompassing forms of EI in all six areas identified in our framework, it is likely that this will require significant political-institutional and possibly political-cultural change. The analysis demonstrates that the EI efforts of governments tend to focus on areas where it poses the least difficulty, or offers the most (political) advantages, and thus follow the “path of least resistance”. By contrast, as the prevailing political institutions and culture make environmental integration (much) more difficult in other areas, the adoption of a more comprehensive and coherent approach to EI, encompassing multiple forms of integration in mutually supportive ways, appears to be a daunting, if not impossible, challenge indeed. However, bringing about political-

institutional and cultural change that will facilitate such an approach is also unlikely to occur unless forced by a major crisis or, possibly, the convergence of multiple crises.

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