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Coordinating European Union environmental policy: Shifting from passive to active coordination

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by

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Abstract

Environmental policy provides one of the oldest and most puzzling cases of policy coordination in the European Union (EU). The integration (or 'mainstreaming') of environmental objectives into 'non' environmental policies such as agriculture, energy and transport, has a long history and commands high level political support among heads of state. However, the implementation of environmental policy integration (EPI) has not yet matched these ambitions. One of the main problems is that EPI has been seen as a 'macro' problem of drafting sweeping statements and writing long term integration strategies. The need to embed EPI in 'micro' policy processes – i.e. the bottom-up formulation and implementation of EU policies in administrative settings – has, however, mostly been ignored. This paper analyses the administrative coordination mechanisms at the micro-level within the Commission, the Netherlands and UK governments to gauge how 'fit' they are to deliver on the EU's broader EPI objective. Using different theories of coordination, this paper concludes that all three have relied too heavily on setting long term coordination targets, without putting in place the administrative coordination (i.e. delivery) mechanisms. This paper concludes that the EU's macro approach (dubbed the 'Cardiff process') cannot perform effectively without the support of implementing actions at the micro level. At the same time, activities at the micro level need the political commitment expressed at the macro level. Moreover, environmental information needs to be transferred within and between the actors in a much more active manner so that environmental impacts can be designed out of policy proposals early on in the policy process. The conclusion of this study is that, in the face of greater interdependence between policies and the concomitant demand for greater policy coordination, passive coordination has had its day. But for many different reasons, the actors have not yet come to grips with what is required to implement active coordination.

Keywords: Governance; coordination; European Union; environmental policy integration; environmental policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental policy provides one of the oldest and most puzzling cases of policy coordination in the European Union (EU). The integration (or 'mainstreaming') of environmental objectives into 'non' environmental policies such as agriculture, transport and energy, has a very long history and commands very high level political support within member states and the European Commission. The need for environmental policy integration (EPI) in the EU¹ emerged as long ago as the early 1970s (Lafferty and Hovden, 2003). The Heads of States have repeatedly emphasised their desire to have environmental considerations more strongly incorporated into EU policies. Their aim is to 'design out' environmental damage much earlier on in the policy process, rather than adopt environmental legislation to deal with problems after sectoral policies have been implemented. They agreed to place a high profile reference to EPI in the Amsterdam Treaty (Article 6) and then created an awareness-raising and implementation process - the 'Cardiff process'; a reference to the location of the June 1998 European Council – to follow it up. The EU's espousal of EPI and sustainability is one of a number of recent commitments which put it firmly in the vanguard of the world's environmental pace setters, well ahead of other large industrialized trading nations such as the USA which used to have comparatively more advanced environmental protection systems (Vogel, 2003).

Despite the creation of a vast corpus of EU environmental rules (some 500 in total) (Jordan, 2002a) and the widespread promotion of EPI as a principle of 'good' EU governance, there is, as we shall show, abundant evidence that the implementation of EPI in the EU has not yet met these ambitions. One of the main problems is that EPI has been interpreted as a 'macro' level problem which can be suitably resolved by drafting sweeping statements and writing long term integration strategies (see Lenschow (2002) for example). The importance of embedding EPI in 'micro' policy processes – i.e. the bottom-up formulation and implementation of EU policies in administrative settings – has, however, mostly been ignored. Sector officials have simply been assumed to 'own' the environmental objectives. If EPI is to mean anything, it has to bite at the level of daily policymaking, otherwise grand political and legal commitments to principles such as integration and sustainability will not be translated into daily practice. As we shall discuss, the coordination systems at Member State level as well as in the Commission are of vital importance in this respect. But thus far, these important, but apparently mundane administrative aspects of coordination, have received little or no sustained attention from either politicians or academics in the environmental sector.

This empirical point of departure forces us to broaden the discussions of EU policy coordination systems in a number of ways. First of all, the existing literature (e.g. Kassim, 2000; 2001) often seeks to explain coordination by first describing coordination mechanisms i.e. the directly visible procedures and committees. However, if we want to analyse – or diagnose – administrative capacities we have to move beyond descriptions and present coordination capacities in a comparable format. We therefore utilize coordination concepts from the organization science literature as reviewed by Henry Mintzberg (1979; 1983; 1989).

Secondly, we broaden the discussion by starting from the other end of what is often perceived to be 'the coordination problem' in the EU i.e. we analyse what the EU demands from national and EU administrations, rather than how the constituent parts of state governments coordinate their activities in Brussels. In this sense, we visualize the EU more as a single political and administrative system (Hix, 1999) and less as a (special) case of international politics.

¹ Similarly, Member States also have EPI strategies, but this chapter only deals with EPI in European policies.

European integration has moved on. It is insufficient to know how member states coordinate their policies and it is time to deal with the question of what requirements the EU imposes on national coordination systems.

Thirdly, national coordination capacities in a multi-level governance system such as the EU, should ideally be discussed in the context of EU-wide coordination capacities – in our case specifically the European Commission's. Typically, the coordination literature looks at national actors, but a problem like EPI spans many actors (i.e. many sectors and many EU institutions) and many administrative levels (i.e. not just the EU level, but also national and sub-national policy making) i.e. it is multi-levelled. To add to this complexity, policy interventions aiming to deliver greater EPI must also be coordinated across the different EU policy phases (e.g. the internal Commission procedures, through to negotiations in the Council and, eventually, its interactions with EP).² Even though the Commission has to be centrally involved, it is already too overloaded to ensure the delivery of a cross cutting problem like EPI. Moreover, the Commission lacks the information, resources and political support from Member States – due, amongst other things, to the fragmented structure of the Council of Ministers – to deliver 'mainstreaming' on its own. Hence, the coordination capacities of the Commission and of the Member States have to be seen as interrelated. It is necessary to study national and EU coordination mechanisms in both the Commission and Council phases. The role of the Commission during the Council phases and of the Member States during the Commission phases have to be made explicit.

Fourthly, the discussion of governance in the EU underlines the importance of exploring the administrative implications of cooperation. To move, as is being attempted in the environmental sector, away from regulation as the primary means of delivering environmental goals, to better horizontal cooperation between administrations, is actually a major new direction across many areas of EU policy making. But what better coordination in a multilevel governance system actually requires of national administrative systems has still not been adequately explored in more recent discussions of the Lisbon process or the open method of coordination (OMC). As with these other macro-level initiatives, the delivery of EPI depends upon national and EU-level administrations cooperating horizontally as well as vertically. This case may, therefore, provide important new insights into the wider coordination challenge of achieving greater administrative cooperation (or 'governance') in the EU.

In seeking to analyse why the implementation of EPI has turned out to be more difficult than was initially imagined, we concentrate on the administrative processes at the micro-level in the development of particular items of policy. The study below looks at the coordination capacities used within the EU institutions – i.e. the Commission - and two Member States - namely the Netherlands and the UK. Importantly, these three actors have strong domestic coordination systems (Metcalfe 1994), strong domestic environmental policies and have created EPI systems in their own jurisdictions (Schout and Jordan, 2004). We have selected them because they appear to us to represent a useful 'critical' case of EPI. That is to say, they probably represent the best that the EU currently has to offer in terms of functioning administrative capacities to coordinate across policy sectors in pursuit of EPI.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. Section Two reviews the history of the EPI principle since the 1960s and analyses its incorporation into EU policy and practice starting in the early

² This chapter draws upon a wider study that also includes the European Parliament and Germany (Jordan *et al.*, 2004).

1970s. We describe how the EU interprets the challenge of EPI. One major point we seek to make is that it has largely conceived EPI in EU policies as a *macro* political objective, without adequately addressing its administrative implications at the micro-level of daily policy making.

Section Three reviews the administrative tasks that will have to be undertaken to implement EPI. We show that many of these challenges have not been fulfilled because of the EU's macro-level approach and weak micro-foundations.

Section Four draws upon Mintzberg's work to review six broad types of coordination mechanism that the actors in our study can (and, in some instances, do) utilise to implement EPI. To a large extent, the success or otherwise of any coordination effort depends upon the manner in which information is shared between actors operating in different sectors. In this respect, we present an important distinction between passive and active information (as initially introduced by Drewry (1995) and Schout (1999)). We use this distinction to explain why EPI has been such a formidable challenge to the traditional ways of working in these different administrative settings.

In Section Five we use Mintzberg's typology to explore the EU's macro approach to environment mainstreaming, centring on the Cardiff process of sectoral reporting and long term targeting setting. Crucially, many of the putative failings of this process stem from the coordination deficits at the micro-level (i.e. of weak coordination capacities at actor level). Thus the Cardiff integration strategies published to date are only really summaries of the preferred outputs of the policy process, and do not delve into the multi-actor, multi-level policy processes that generated them. Moreover, without an administrative 'transmission belt' at the micro-level, it is difficult to see how macro-level strategies and indicators developed by the Cardiff process can successfully steer the development of individual policy proposals through the policy process in a way which satisfies the principle of EPI.

Section Six uses the same typology to explore the micro-level coordination mechanisms within the Commission, and the Netherlands and UK governments. This Section also examines whether the coordination capacities in these actors are 'fit' to deliver the EPI objective. The concluding Section (Seven) draws together the main threads of our argument and looks forward to the next phase of policy and politics emerging around the EU's ambition to implement EPI. One important conclusion from this study is that passive coordination is no longer possible in an EU that has to manage interdependent policy fields. This has important implications for the way in which we assess the effectiveness of national and EU coordination capacities. At least two out of the three actors which we study are weakly equipped to deliver joined up policies.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY INTEGRATION: A SHORT HISTORY

2.1 Why Integrate?

The integration of environmental thinking into all spheres of human activity is one of the oldest and most enduring themes of green political thought. The fundamental mismatch between a natural 'environment' that functions as a single, integrated whole and the human world with all its strongly sectorised structures and ways of working, is a recurring theme in environmentalist writing dating as far back as the eighteenth century (Pepper, 1996). There are, however, a number of more specific factors which have helped to push EPI up the political agenda in the EU.

The first and most important factor has been the Commission's continuing efforts to promote EPI as a concept of 'good' European governance. DG Environment's active espousal of EPI (other DGs have been much less supportive – see below) can be traced back to the dawn of EU environmental policy in the early 1970s (Lenschow, 2002). But for a very long time DG Environment relied upon the traditional harmonising strategy of proposing 'end of pipe' environmental regulations to the Environment Council which then adopted them to force other sectors/Councils to take environmental issues more seriously.³ DG Environment was also instrumental in finding a place for EPI in the new, environmental section of the 1987 Single European Act (Jordan, 2002a; 2002b). In addition, it also actively supported the inclusion of stronger references to EPI in the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties (see below). In contrast, the Council of Ministers has only relatively recently pledged its support and the European Parliament, while issuing many political declarations, has hardly begun to adjust its own internal procedures to implement EPI (Jordan *et al.* 2005). Some member states have pioneered their own national EPI strategies, but the majority have tended to view environmental protection as a policy problem that can best be addressed from within the environmental sector.

Secondly, in recent years, the Commission has been able to draw upon the language of sustainable development to justify the need for greater EPI (Lafferty and Hovden, 2003). In particular, in the mid 1980s, a famous United Nations committee chaired by the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, published a hugely influential report on sustainable development. It stated that "the major central economic and sectoral agencies of governments should now be made directly responsible and fully accountable for ensuring that their policies, programmes and budget support development that is ecologically as well as economically sustainable" (WCED, 1987, 314). Brundtland did not invent EPI, but she helped to forge an international consensus on the link between EPI and sustainable development. Crucially, sustainability is an inherently integrative concept, since it is concerned with finding ways to make social, economic and environmental progress more mutually supportive.

A third and much more recent factor is the increasingly forceful demand for greater EPI made by environmentally ambitious EU member states, such as Austria, Sweden and Finland, which only formally entered the EU in the mid 1990s. They provided the Commission with the political backing it needed post-1995 to achieve a stronger legal commitment to EPI. Crucially, the new Article 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty states that environmental protection requirements "must be integrated into the definition and implementation of Community policies and activities." This change effectively elevated the status of EPI from just a narrow, 'environmental' concept (it was

³ The Commission could arguably have pushed for EPI much earlier, but lacking a secure legal mandate for environmental protection and strong support from some member states, early on it decided to concentrate on establishing formal legal competence (by adopting environmental Directives), rather than interfering in the work of other DGs/Councils.

moved from the 'environmental' part of the Treaties to the main body of the Amsterdam Treaty), into a guiding objective of European political and economic integration.

2.2 The Nature of the Drivers

The most striking feature of these three drivers is that they could all be broadly described as 'environmental'. Although the political demand for EPI originated in the environmental sector and although other sectors and/or 'non' environmental international bodies (e.g. the OECD 2002) have begun to respond more positively, its main champions are still mainly to be found in the environmental movement. Interestingly, until relatively recently, environmental NGOs tended not to campaign on EPI as a cross-cutting issue but instead concentrated on more detailed sub-areas of environmental policy such as pollution control or biodiversity where they could exert greater political leverage. In passing, it is also worth noting that although the European Parliament is often regarded as the EU's strongest advocate of ambitious environmental policies (Burns, 2005), it has never consistently campaigned for EPI in the EU. However, it has often helped to engineer a number of more specific changes (e.g. to the structural and cohesion funds, or to proposals for specific 'non' environmental Directives) on a more *ad hoc* basis, that are nonetheless consistent with the broad philosophy of EPI.

The pursuit of EPI could also be interpreted as another example of the EU's continuing search for less hierarchical, governance-led solutions (Jordan, 2001; Jordan *et al.* 2005). Most actors now accept that sustainability cannot be achieved by forcing sectoral policy areas to adopt and implement EU environmental regulations (i.e. which is typical of a more 'government' model). In a recent assessment, the European Environment Agency (EEA) concluded that "despite more than 25 years of Community Environmental policy – which has been successful in its own terms – general environmental quality in the EU is not recovering significantly, and in some areas it is worsening" (EEA, 1999, 4). According to the EEA's 1998 comprehensive assessment of Europe's environment (Dobris II), there has to be a wholesale shift in focus away "from the environmental problems themselves to their causes.... from "end of pipe" environment ministries, to "driving force" sector ministries (EEA, 1998, 283). In effect, the EEA's headline message is that the EU needs to adopt a more governance-based perspective because the old, government-based model has not (and, crucially, will not) solve the sector's long term policy problems. Environmental Directives are often not fully implemented (Jordan, 1999; Knill and Lenschow, 2000) and in any case, the main policy drivers of unsustainable development lay in cognate sectors. However, we shall seek to reveal the practical, administrative challenges which emerge in trying to move from 'government' to more diffuse, multi-actor and multi-sector 'governance-based' solutions.

2.3 The EU's Approach to Implementing EPI

In the early 1990s, the Commission tried to push the rest of the EU to adopt a more coordinated approach to environmental protection by publishing another (its 5th) Environmental Action Programme. This programme sought to embed EPI in everyday practice by identifying target sectors (namely, industry, energy, transport, agriculture and tourism) and a set of environmental performance targets they should each aim to achieve. The Commission also adopted a number of internal management changes to ensure that its core tasks (namely the publication of new policy proposals) facilitated greater EPI. However, as is well known (Wilkinson, 1998), a package of implementing measures, which included a new integration unit in DG Environment, the creation of integration correspondents in each DG and a system of environmental appraisal covering all new Commission proposals, never really achieved the support from other DGs that DG Environment had hoped for.

The signing of the Amsterdam Treaty in June 1997 marked a turning point in the history of the EPI principle. Before Amsterdam, other than the Commission, none of the main EU institutions had seriously embraced the idea of, let alone the need for, EPI. Some Member States had developed their own national-level EPI systems (Jordan and Lenschow, 2000), but the majority had none. Even those that had innovative national systems in place by the late 1990s (e.g the UK – Jordan, 2002c) had not dovetailed them with EU-level processes (Jordan *et al.*, 2004). This suggests that very few if any had fully accepted or sought to adjust their administrations to take account of the fact that environmental policy making (and, by implication, the EPI challenge) is characterized by complex patterns of multi-level and multi-actor governance.

Shortly after Amsterdam, the post-1995 member states were instrumental in pushing the Luxembourg European Council to request the Commission to develop a strategy to implement Article 6. Entitled a “Partnership for Integration”, it was supposed to develop “some practical steps towards implementing the integration principle in the *daily work of the Community institutions*” (emphasis added) (COM (98) 333). This partnership was supposed to involve many new actors in the task of implementing EPI, most notably the Heads of State and the Council of Ministers. The idea was to tie these bodies together in joint processes of review, reporting and long term target setting. In effect, it sought to explicitly address the fact that EU-EPI is a *multi-actor, multi-level* problem.

During 1998, the UK Presidency worked hard to translate this newfound enthusiasm for EPI into a set of more practical administrative steps. The centrepiece of the Cardiff Process was a process of sectoral reporting, target and timetable setting. The Cardiff Summit invited all relevant formations of the Council of Ministers “to establish their own strategies for giving effect to environmental integration and sustainable development within their respective policy area” (European Council, SN 150/98, 13). This initiative was very much a precursor of subsequent macro-level strategies such as the open method of coordination (OMC), which the EU is now using to coordinate activities in policy areas where its competence is less developed and more contested than it is in relation to environmental protection on the old model.

The first three sectors invited to participate – agriculture, transport and energy – were clearly ‘driving force’ sectors of environmental damage. A number of other sectoral Councils were subsequently added to the list (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The three waves of the Cardiff process

| |
|---|
| First wave - Agriculture, Energy and Transport; Second wave - Development, Industry and Internal Market; Third wave - Ecofin, General Affairs (or GAC) and Fisheries. |
|---|

In the late 1990s, hopes were high that the self-discipline of reporting would generate new information, intra-sectoral learning and, eventually, the sort of new and all pervading sense of self-responsibility that the OMC seeks to engender. After all, many of the sectors involved had never really thought about environmental issues comprehensively before, let alone produce a long-term environmental strategy. However, Kraemer (2001) maintains that the Cardiff Process quickly metamorphosed into a Council dominated process of reporting, in spite of DG Environment’s efforts to extend ownership to other key EU actors, namely the European

Parliament and Member States. Moreover, Cardiff required individual sector Councils to produce their own strategies, rather than an independent, third party (e.g. the European Commission or the European Environment Agency). Importantly, the Environment Council was both unable and, to an extent, unwilling to intervene too much in the actual writing of the strategies; in some important instances, it was actively excluded.

2.4 Assessments of the Macro Approach

The first few independent assessments of the outputs of the Cardiff process (e.g. Görlach *et al.* 1999) did not rate the quality of the resulting strategies very highly. Most were considered to be vague in many crucial respects, and tended to treat existing policies as 'given' and hence not open to change. The sectors were therefore instructed to go away and try again. The Commission presented its own analysis of the new versions to the December 1999 Council in Helsinki. In its assessment, the Commission emphasized the lack of timetables and environmental targets. Understandably, it felt that the strategies should contain a much more detailed analysis of the causes of environmental change and measures to address them, rather than simply describing existing environmental trends (as though they were in some senses pre-ordained) and listing the 'end of pipe' solutions that the EU had already adopted (CEC, 1999, 5).

The Cardiff process rolled on throughout 2000-1 as each sector tried to respond to mounting criticism from environmental NGOs that the whole exercise lacked momentum, credibility and a clear sense of direction. In the Spring of 2001, the UK government commissioned a report which concluded that there was considerable variation in how each Council formation had thought about and reported on its EPI-related responsibilities, and none of the strategies were sufficiently strategic. In fact, the main reason why the reports in the first wave were of a higher quality could simply have been because they had been heavily targeted by environmental legislation in the past (IEEP, 2001, 14). In other words, the 'value added' of the Cardiff process was actually very low. Another common criticism was that the sector strategies had been very poorly coordinated within the Council. Importantly, there was no common framework to guide the quality of the different documents –each sector reported differently – when one might have expected them to at least adopt the same format. They also adopted very different indicators and timetables.

By early 2001, enthusiasm in some of the sectors has dropped so low that serious questions were being asked about whether 'Cardiff' should continue at all, and if so, in what form. Some sectors probably regarded Cardiff as a one off process. Having prepared one sectoral integration strategy, they believed that they had effectively discharged any responsibility they had under Article 6. Environmentalists also feared that the entire Cardiff process could be permanently and entirely eclipsed by the newly emerging Lisbon process on social and economic reform. The Swedish Presidency eventually succeeded in building an environmental dimension into the operation of the Lisbon process,⁴ by committing each Spring Council to review an annual 'synthesis' report produced by the Commission, incorporating a series of headline indicators. The first set of indicators, which were reviewed at the December 2001 Council, contained one or two very crude environmental indicators. The current list of thirteen indicators includes only one direct environmental indicator (greenhouse gas emissions) and two indirect ones (energy intensity and transport volume). As the political focus has gradually shifted to the Lisbon process, doubts have grown about the EU's long term commitment to both

⁴ If sustainable development had been as important as the environment sector would have liked, the process would have encompassed society, economy *and* the environment, but environment was not initially involved.

EPI in general and the Cardiff process in particular. Although they have different foci (i.e. Cardiff – EPI; Lisbon – economic competitiveness and sustainability), both require micro-level support to deliver on the goals that they set. Realising the need for greater micro-level support, some NGOs (e.g. Kraemer *et al* 2001) began calling for interlinked Cardiff processes to be created at the national level. The Commission is also looking for ways to better coordinate activities taken at different levels which aim to implement EPI. For example, it has suggested the creation of administrative networks to coordinate the production of impact assessments at different administrative levels and also in the European Parliament (COM (2002) 278 final). Action, like this, which seeks to strengthen the coordination of individual dossiers at the micro-level, will almost certainly be required to implement any ‘macro’ level strategies developed as part of the Cardiff process. It will also be necessary to ensure that the Lisbon indicators move in a sustainable direction.

3. EPI IN THE EU: COORDINATION AMBITIONS AND TASKS

3.1 Co-ordination Ambitions

This very short policy history shows that the EU's co-ordination ambition in the environmental sphere is relatively explicit (i.e. several clear references in the founding Treaties; a designated soft coordination mechanism based on reporting; countless references in Council conclusions and Commission strategy documents etc.). But it is also relatively general in the sense that it implicitly includes *all* policy areas that have an environmental impact, although in practice there is a widespread assumption that EPI will inevitably bear more heavily on some sectors than others (i.e. the sectors that were included in the first wave of the Cardiff process (see above)).

Nevertheless, there are still many ambiguities which have not been adequately resolved. First and foremost, there is still some debate about who (or what) is legally responsible for implementing Article 6. Thus far, the Commission and the Council have opted to lead the Cardiff process of reporting (see above), but other, equally important, actors continue to play a more peripheral role. Article 6 does not, as Jans argues (2000, 22), have any direct legal impact on Member States, because it explicitly refers to 'Community policies and activities'. But in practice, there may be indirect consequences as the Member States will be bound by any legal acts that the EU adopts to implement EPI (*ibid.*, 22). We would go further still by suggesting that the spirit of Article 6 implies that Member States should take active steps to resolve the ambiguous relationship between EPI initiatives at different levels of EU governance. That was certainly uppermost in the Commission's mind when it proposed a *Partnership for Integration* (see above). Moreover, the need for collective responsibility is also very much consistent with the spirit of the new governance approach which is based not on hierarchical control, but on sharing responsibility and working together as part of a process of mutual, long term learning.

This sharing of responsibility between levels of government still leaves the open the question open of who is responsible for EU-EPI at each level. It is clear that environment will only be integrated if there is sufficient pressure from environment officials on their counterparts in sectoral policy fields during the policy processes. This makes EPI a bureaucratic politics phenomenon: EPI only succeeds if there is sufficient power struggle. This makes it so important to study the coordination procedures that determine in part the efficiency with which environmental experts can influence policy processes in other policy fields.

Second, determining whether the EU's coordination ambition is maximal or minimal is complicated by the lack of a clear definition of EPI. In principle, EPI is supposed to provide a rationale for giving the environment as equal a status in the policy process as economic and social objectives. In accordance with the nature of bureaucratic politics, the EPI principle does not indicate how heavily environmental factors should be weighted in decision making, only that they are integrated into the process of comparing and evaluating different policy options. In that sense, EPI gives a higher principled priority to environmental factors than has existed thus far in the EU (Lafferty and Hovden, 2003) but the level is determined in part by the power environmental officials can muster and the effectiveness of EU policy coordination mechanisms.

At this point it is worthwhile distinguishing between what Hill and Jordan (1993, 5) originally referred to as *strong* and *weak* variants of EPI. Weak EPI occurs when the policy sectors simply take environmental considerations 'into account' but leave the fundamental elements of their policies untouched. This is the interpretation that many of the sectors implicitly adopted when they set about preparing their Cardiff strategies. For example, the transport sector might

discuss the ways and means of reducing the environmental burden of car transport (e.g. by fitting pollution abatement equipment) without challenging the underlying societal demand for greater travel. The Cardiff strategies were criticised by environmentalists, who expected a much *stronger* form of EPI. This would involve the development of sectoral policies that *consistently* benefited the environment, rather than simply reporting the environmental repercussions of 'taken for granted' policy commitments. That something as simple as the definition of EPI is so deeply contested, is symptomatic of the ease by which high-level political support can be secured on on general principles and the relative difficulty of translating this agreement greater policy coordination.

3.2 Coordination Challenges

Thus far, EPI policy in the EU has focused on the development of long term targets and indicators. In order to implement these, the EU has to have ways of anchoring them to practical, day to day policy making. In this respect, a number of important tasks have to be undertaken – as they result from our study.

- *The environmental implications of individual EU policy proposals have to be assessed in a reliable way.*
- *Information must be shared* so that all actors understand the environmental implications of their activities and their relationship with EPI related challenges in cognate sectors.
- *Long term priorities must be set.* EU policy is simply too spatially and temporally expansive to assess everything, so long term targets and priorities will have to be set to implement macro-level targets/indicators, linked to work planning within and across individual sectors. This means in concrete terms that Presidency and Commission agendas will have to be scrutinised in order to single out the policies where EPI may be important.
- *Workloads will have to be shared.* Given the scarcity of administrative resources in the EU, no one actor will be able to analyze the environmental implications of every single EU policy proposal and to monitor it through the entire course of the EU policy proposal.
- *The focus on achieving EPI must be maintained,* otherwise the EPI-related ambitions of particular sectoral proposals made by the European Commission could easily be diluted at subsequent negotiations in sectoral Councils.
- *Inter and intra-sectoral perspectives must be identified in advance and conflicts will have to be solved proactively.* Coordinated solutions will have to be found to sectoral conflicts Commission and Presidency agendas will have to be scrutinized for their possible environmental/sustainability implications. To ensure that environmental considerations are part of the deliberations at every step of the way, departments have to work together to identify overlapping interests and solve differences that are likely to arise. It is too late to postpone interministerial differences until the commencement of inter-governmental bargaining in the COREPER (Jordan *et al.* 2005). Use will have to be made of the Commission and Presidency agendas to allow sufficient lead-time.

At present, the EU has hardly even begun to face up to these tasks. As our interviews show, everyone more or less expects someone else to implement EPI. At the national level, environment officials often argue that sector officials should 'own' (and hence be responsible for achieving) environment objectives. The sector officials, however, assume that the Environment Council should deal with environment policy and, by implication, EPI. National officials clearly expect the Commission to produce 'green' proposals and defend these during the Council

phase. The Commission, meanwhile, continually points to the responsibility that the European Parliament and the Member States must share in maintaining a focus on EPI in negotiations taking place in the different sectoral formations of the Council. Finally, it is difficult for officials, for a number of reasons, to have an overview of the vertical and horizontal interdependencies associated with the delivery of EU-EPI, let alone to manage these.

Rather than assuming that responsibilities are divided, it is clear that EPI imposes a *collective* responsibility upon the Council and the Commission. This leads to a number of onerous administrative challenges to horizontal and vertical cooperation. First, sector DGs of the Commission must give sufficient attention to environmental implications when a new policy is contemplated. However, as sectoral DGs have their own objectives, have to respond to sectoral pressures from their working environment and lack time, it is naive to assume that sector DGs will automatically give the environment equal status to their own, sectoral interests. Therefore, DG Environment must also monitor new policy proposals emerging from other DGs. Whether they do so is explored more fully below.

Second, sector DGs must ensure support from their sector Councils. Commission officials from the sector DGs will be particularly motivated to keep an eye on environmental consequences if they know that the Council is actually keen on more ambitious environmental objectives. Hence, national officials that support DGs in the writing of new proposals in the experts committees already have to indicate that their countries will support and subsequently monitor environmental implications. The link between the administrative levels of government is clear: the Commission DGs will be motivated if their national counterparts show they are strongly committed to EPI (i.e. vertical interdependence).

Third, environment officials must shift their current focus on environment policy development towards policy making in other, cognate sector DGs and sector Councils. To put pressure on sector DGs and to ensure that officials negotiating in the sector Councils keep an eye on sustainability, officials from environment departments have to monitor during each phase of decision making. This means that national environment officials have to monitor national experts during early phases of policy making, so that the Commission knows that integration is being taken seriously. Both these observations underline the interrelationship between vertical and horizontal interdependence.

Fourth, to identify the major new policies in which integration is important, environment departments have to be able to work proactively on the basis of the workplans and agendas produced by the Commission and the EU presidencies respectively (see above). This allows identification of the important new initiatives for the coming half year (Presidency agenda) and year (Commission agenda).⁵

Finally, in our sample of three, the Netherlands and the UK have created mechanisms for assessing the environmental impacts of new national policies but, importantly, these have not been extended to the relevant new EU policies. The Commission is still in a very difficult position as regards the production of (environmental) impact appraisals, in spite of having adopted a new, more integrated methodology (see below). Combining national impact mechanisms would create a broader administrative basis as well as clarify the nature of the

⁵ The multi-annual Presidency and Commission agendas that are now being issued provide new tools in this respect. The expectations that the Commission and the Presidency have to plan their work better (see the Wise men Reports (1999a; 1999b), and the European Convention (2003)) also offer Member States new opportunities to better anticipate EU policy.

trade offs that will have to be made to implement EPI. The national focus of the national EPI systems however underlines the implicit assumption that the Commission – despite its small size - is able to deliver sustainable proposals and that Commission will ensure the EPI perspective during the negotiations in the sectoral Councils.

The consequence of the multilevel interdependence is that both the Commission and the national coordination systems (at inter- and intra-ministerial levels) must be sufficiently equipped to support coordination between policy fields and levels of government.⁶ This requires a greater focus on micro-level coordination capacities.

⁶ This paper is devoted to coordination capacities of the actors. For a discussion of the network capacities that are needed, see Schout and Jordan (2005).

4. CLASSIFICATION OF COORDINATION MECHANISMS

4.1 Coordination Capacities

Horizontal policy ambitions such as EPI force analysts to adopt a different perspective on national administrative coordination capacities. So, instead of improving the presentation of national interests in EU negotiations, coordination is asked to contribute to the fulfilment of larger, EU-wide objectives, rather than simply the achievement of national interests at the final stages of the negotiations. To assess the available coordination capacities we draw upon the organisational science literature, and in particular the work of Mintzberg (1979; 1983; 1989). He presents an eclectic perspective on coordination capacities that can be used to go beyond descriptions of committees and procedures. His overview of the coordination literature is sufficiently broad to include political and organisational science perspectives (cf. Allison and Zelikow (1999)).

Summarising Mintzberg's work, six different types of coordination mechanisms can be distinguished:

1. *Hierarchical mechanisms* i.e. making one part of an organisation responsible for a common task (e.g. EPI), and then asking it to monitor the activities of all the other parts to ensure they make a contribution. A higher authority legitimises the objective and the monitoring of progress.
2. *Bureaucratic procedures* i.e. rules, guidelines and formal obligations that have to be met (e.g. quality standards such as impact assessments).
3. *Skills development and training* i.e. training sector officials to perform certain tasks such as (environmental/sustainability) impact assessments.
4. *Specification of output* i.e. telling each part of an organisation what contribution they must make to the achievement of a common objective but leaving the implementation to those involved (e.g. management by objectives).
5. *Horizontal coordination mechanisms*: informal relations, bureaucratic politics, coordinating committees, integrating managers (also known as 'coordinators', 'linking pins' or 'integration managers' – see Galbraith (1973)).
6. *Mission statements*: the production of general statements which seek to influence the culture and values in the whole administrative system.

These mechanisms facilitate coordination and form the input side of coordination (the output being the extent to which coordination is actually achieved). Mintzberg argues that these mechanisms are mutually reinforcing. As a general principle, with higher levels of differentiation (i.e. between actors and/or sectors), more coordination qualities have to be available (i.e. not just more of the same). Together the capacities have to be able to live up to the challenges of EPI: sharing information and proactive problem detection and solving.

To understand coordination capacities more fully, we also need to know who the *main actors* are in the coordination system. In the context of EPI this is the Secretariat of the Commission (for planning and problem solving) and DG Environment and, in the UK and the Netherlands, the ministries for the environment and foreign affairs. The cabinet office also plays a major role in the UK system. The roles played by these actors determine the extent in which the organisation is: centralised or decentralised; based on event or issue coordination; and based on active or passive coordination (see below). Finally, EPI places special burdens on environment departments. Therefore, for the reasons discussed in the previous Section, our analysis below pays particular attention to the role and resources of the EU coordinating units in the Commission (e.g. the sustainable development unit in DG Environment) and the two

member states (i.e. those bodies in national environment departments that prepare work for discussion in the Environment Council). These elements combine to produce a basic definition of coordination capacities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Coordination capacities defined

| | | Commission | NL | UK |
|----------------------------|--|--|----|----|
| | EPI support | | | |
| | Administrative system - Active or passive coordination system - Role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Role of Cabinet Office | | | |
| Inter-ministerial | 1 Hierarchical | | | |
| | 2 Bureaucratic | | | |
| | 3 Skills | Not relevant (see text) | | |
| | 4 Specification of output | | | |
| | 5 Horizontal | | | |
| | Informal relations | The key question is whether informal contacts are based on active or passive coordination. | | |
| | Liaison roles | | | |
| | Task forces | In all three cases: officials often work in task forces but prefer to leave work as much as possible to the lead department for efficiency reasons (see text). | | |
| | Teams | | | |
| | Linking pins 1) General 2) Role of the environment department | | | |
| | 6 Mission statements | | | |
| Who is in the lead? | | | | |
| | Fit for EPI? | | | |

We will use Table 1 to analyse the way in which the Commission and Council have sought to implement EPI at the macro level. The subsequent Section complements this macro perspective by assessing the coordination capacities of the actors (i.e. the Commission, the Netherlands and the UK) to implement EPI at a more micro-level. But in order to understand the differences between these actors, a fundamental systemic difference between the three actors should first be mentioned. This can be summarised under the headings of *active* and *passive* coordination.

4.2 Active and Passive Coordination

Active coordination typically goes together with *issue coordination*. Active coordination is based on active exchange of information, i.e. it is up to the *lead* department to inform others of new developments, of the consequences this may have to other policies and to ensure that the dependent departments stay informed. It means that dependent (or affected) departments do not have to put as much work into monitoring policy developments in cognate fields, as the ministries are expected to do the thinking for them. Active information increases coordination efficiency and is the only way in which with overburdened national and European agendas can be managed. As we shall see below, the UK system is based on a very active exchange of information. Active information leads to 'issue' coordination. Because it is a proactive way of coordination, problems are detected early on the process. When issues arise they can be dealt with – hence 'issue coordination'.

Passive coordination typically goes together with *event coordination*, and is used in most EU Member States and in the Commission. Coordination is reactive and postponed until a specific coordination event (e.g. a Coreper instruction meeting or the meeting of the College of Commissioners) is being prepared. It is the event, not the issue that is coordinated. Passive coordination is based on other departments having the right to be informed, but the effort to show an interest and to be kept informed has to come from the dependent department. This system goes together with collegial governments such as the College of Commissioners. In the case of EPI, the environment departments in the Netherlands and the Commission have to continuously give feedback otherwise, as officials often put it 'we will stop sending information if they are apparently not interested'. This makes a coordination challenge like EPI particularly time consuming for environment departments, and it increases the likelihood that difficulties (i.e. cross-sectoral spillovers that undermine EPI) are only spotted at the very end of the decision making cycle, by which time it is very often difficult to resolve them. In the case of EPI, this means that environment officials have to continually exert pressure and influence on cognate departments; sectoral departments expect the environment department to do the environmental 'thinking' for them and to take the lead in defining a coordinated position. Crucially, the environment department will struggle to do either if it does not know what cognate sectors are planning by way of new policy proposals. Consequently, coordination in passive systems tends to be minimal and reactive.

A passive exchange of information drifts inexorably towards event coordination. If the dependent officials have to put effort into monitoring the development of policy they will easily be inclined to fall back on their primary interests, i.e. national sectoral policy, instead of keeping an eye on EU policies in other fields. As a result, they will wait until the formally coordinated events arise when policies emerge from the less transparent phases, i.e. they will usually wait until policies reach COREPER in the Council, when a member state government has to subject its preferred negotiating position to national parliamentary scrutiny, or as in the Commission, senior cabinet members prepare College meetings.

In Section 6 we will argue that the difference between active and passive coordination is closely connected to the types of coordination mechanisms as presented in Table 1.

The distinction between active and passive coordination also leads to a fresh look at the debate on convergence of national coordination systems. There seems to be a widely shared impression that systems become more alike. If so, would the traditional passive countries become more like the UK? We will come back to this question in the conclusion.

5. COORDINATION MECHANISMS AT THE MACRO LEVEL

5.1 Hierarchical Coordination

The instruments – i.e. coordination mechanisms – that fall into this category are the ‘old’ legal instruments of EU environmental policy (see above) – the very many Directives and Regulations adopted by the Environment Council. These are examples of hierarchical coordination mechanisms as far as they impose environmental obligations on sectors from the outside in. They also place the Commission in the hierarchical role of guardian of the EC legislation and making cases before the European Court of Justice if necessary. But this approach is failing short on its ambitions due, among other things, to the accumulated implementation deficit in the environmental sector. One of the issues is that there are competing hierarchies with competing objectives. So-called ‘new’ environmental policy instruments such as eco-taxes and voluntary agreements are being trialled, but they only constitute a very small proportion of the EU’s total stock of environmental policy instruments (Jordan *et al.* 2003a; Jordan *et al.*, 2003b). By contrast, EPI aims to go beyond these predominantly end of pipe approaches by encouraging the sectors themselves to ‘design out’ environmental impacts at a much earlier stage in the policy process.

5.2 Bureaucratic Procedures

Bureaucratic procedures or standard operating procedures are the rules and guidelines that aim at standardising the behaviour of officials in their work processes. They indicate what has to be done, when and who has to be involved (March and Simon, 1958). Rules help to determine priorities and inform actors of when differences should be identified and, where possible, resolved. These are typically internal procedures indicating which departments to inform and whether impact assessments are needed. An important distinction that we introduced above in relation to EU policy coordination was between standard operating procedures that are based on an *active* or a more *passive* exchange of information. There are many rules in the UK that make coordination active. In the UK environment ministry they are even referred to as a ‘Bible’. Many underline the need to inform other departments proactively, as the following excerpt from an internal handbook emphasises:

“The rationale for keeping others informed, from a selfish or departmental point of view, is to try to avoid the introduction of new objectives to the UK position towards the end of a negotiation...For this reason, copying papers is not necessarily enough. The implications of [Commission] proposals often have to be made clear [to other departments].... For outsiders, even in other Departments it can be very difficult to spot the implications of a proposal in their specific fields..... It may take considerable time and effort to have to do the thinking for other departments, but is likely to pay dividends both in achieving your policy aims and avoiding major hassles in the endgame of the negotiations” (Humphreys, 1996, pp. 37-8) (emphasis in original).

There are also standard operating procedures in the UK for if these rules are breached. Problems will go up to the Cabinet Office which helps prevent the active coordination rules from becoming dead letters. What this shows is that, contrary to a widely shared dislike of red tape, bureaucratic procedures can be very powerful instruments for getting things done (Bendor and Hammond, 1992).

In relation to EU-EPI, it is worth noting that the Commission introduced various impact assessment systems over the past decade which have been implied to be part of the internal decision making procedures. Its new impact assessment regime was originally supposed to

deliver a system of *sustainability* impact assessment, but the sustainability part was dropped following criticisms from the sector DGs. Many believe its primary purpose is not so much environmental, as making regulation better targeted, more implementable and more acceptable to stakeholders. As this procedure is still relatively new (it was formally established in 2001, but not implemented until 2003 onwards), we will leave it aside in the analysis presented below.

5.3 Skills-training

Training for EU-EPI is, to some extent, relevant. In fact, many national and EU officials in the Commission have been trained to apply e-tests or appraisals. However, the relevance of training is still to be demonstrated. It may raise awareness in the hope that sector experts will start to 'own' environmental thinking but, in a world full of multiple objectives and policy assessment procedures, the value of (training in) environmental tests, sustainability appraisals and impact assessments is often quite poor (cf. Schout 1999).

5.4 Standardisation of Output

Closely linked to EU-EPI are the Cardiff and Lisbon processes, which attempt to engineer 'macro' coordination in a top down manner by stating general objectives - with the Commission taking a role in reporting on progress. However, the EU now has a glut of coordination strategies and frameworks to effect change. For instance, it now has not one, but two long term environmental strategies (the sustainable development strategy and the sixth EAP), and two integration processes – Lisbon and Cardiff. These attempts of standardising outputs are non-committal and involve unspecific obligations. Insufficient effort has been put into setting targets and creating adequate transmission belts for making these prematurely heralded policy processes effective. They also suffer from unclear terminology and definitions of 'integration' and, like other OMC-related activities, are not legally enforceable because they function outside the EU's formal competence. This increases the potential importance of the next mechanism: horizontal coordination.

5.5 Horizontal Coordination Mechanisms

Horizontal coordination mechanisms consist of:

- Informal relations.
- Liaison roles.
- Task forces i.e. topic related committees.
- Teams e.g. higher level committees with wider outlooks.
- Integrating managers i.e. those responsible for ensuring momentum and problem solving.

In relation to Cardiff, there are two relevant levels to discuss, firstly the intra-Commission mechanisms to produce green proposals. Here, progress in the EU has been especially limited. The Commission has tried to strengthen informal contacts between DGs by publishing guidelines for early consultation and nurturing formal contacts through the creation of 'green ambassadors' and the holding of informal meetings between Commissioners closely connected to EPI. However, not much has come of these initiatives because the Commission is so deeply sectorised.

Secondly, the committees that should serve the Cardiff and Lisbon processes. No relevant committees can be mentioned to support horizontal coordination between Member States and Commission (but see the discussion of the Commission's senior environment committee known

as 'EPRG' in Schout and Jordan (2005)). There have been suggestions to create a sustainability committee in the framework of the Lisbon process but that has never materialised.

The EU coordinating units within environment departments could play important liaison roles. For this we need to know how many people actually work in them, and how effective they are in monitoring the involvement of the other ministries in the EU negotiations. In the Cardiff context, the sustainable development unit in DG ENV has not been able to play a major role and left the writing of the sector strategies to the individual DGs. The reasons for this include and lack of staff and support from senior management to interfere with other DGs. Crucially, the primary objective of the Commissioner and her senior management is to make a mark in the field of environment policy by adopting a new, high profile piece of environmental legislation rather than continuously monitoring (and interfering in) the work of cognate sectors.

5.6 Mission Statements

With the limited legal value, the political and Treaty-based EPI commitments are akin to mission statements – i.e. a way to change the administrative and political culture of the EU towards sustainability. The main problem with mission statements is that they often embody aspirations that are wholly disconnected from the daily life of bureaucrats, who have to juggle multiple objectives. In organisations, mission statements therefore often reflect things that are particularly difficult and which are in fact *not* part of the organisations culture i.e. they often contain a large amount of wishful thinking (Schein, 1985; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This is especially the case when the declared mission is associated with values – such as giving priority to environmental objectives – that are alien to the very actors (or, in our case, sectors) whose active participation is needed to put it into effect.

To conclude, the macro level is only one instrument behind EU-EPI. Despite the hopes for Cardiff [and Lisbon], these/these processes are important in acting as mission statements but they seem to be weak without the appropriate transmission belts that ensure integration at the micro level.

6. COORDINATION MECHANISMS AT THE MICRO LEVEL

'Integration' in EU policies cannot be delivered by the Commission only. Even if the previous Section would have been more optimistic about the macro level approach, what is needed is also the pressure from national environment officials on their sectoral colleague to maintain environmental objectives during the negotiations in the Councils. Hence, we have to examine whether sufficient capacities (staff in coordinating units, mechanisms to distribute information between departments in each phase of the policy cycle and problem solving mechanisms) exist at the micro level that facilitate integration in the processes of daily policy making. Our findings are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Inter- and intra-departmental capacities of the actors

| | Commission | NL | UK |
|---|--|--|--|
| High level political support for EPI | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Administrative system | <p>Decentralised: DGs have a high level of autonomy</p> <p>Highly regulated & formalised</p> <p>Passive information</p> <p>Event coordination</p> <p>Fragmented</p> <p>Overloaded</p> <p>Protracted system of problem solving. Weak at setting priorities and detecting problems proactively</p> | <p>Decentralised: departments have a high level of autonomy</p> <p>Increasingly regulated & formalised</p> <p>Passive information</p> <p>Event coordination</p> <p>Fragmented</p> <p>Overloaded</p> <p>Protracted system of problem solving. Weak at setting priorities and detecting problems proactively</p> | <p>Decentralised as well as centralised</p> <p>Heavily regulated for informal behaviour</p> <p>Active information</p> <p>Issue coordination</p> <p>Integrated</p> <p>Priority oriented</p> <p>Subsidiarity-based system of priority setting and problem solving i.e.; at the lowest effective administrative level</p> |
| 1 Hierarchical | - | - | - |

| | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Inter-ministerial EPI related EU policy coordination capacities | 2 Bureaucratic | (Impact assessments, internal procedures for managing new proposals – but frustrated by independent position of DGs and strong tradition of reactive coordination in the College.) | (Many rules but hardly known and no attempts to keep them alive). (There is formal link between the BNC ⁷ and the national EPI test, but this is hardly ever used.) | Many (written and unwritten) rules guide EU coordination in general, ensuring active information. There are formal rules governing the link between Commission proposals and the national EPI scheme, but these are not strictly enforced. |
| | 3 Skills | Not relevant. (see Table 1 in Section 4) | | |
| | 4 Specification of output | The Cardiff and Lisbon processes have not yet produced targets that would be sufficiently concrete and binding enough to classify as 'management by objectives' | | |
| | 5 Horizontal | | | |
| | Informal relations | Highly informal – based on passive information | Highly informal, but suffering from the workload and absence of civil service code to make sure that others are informed and involved i.e. passive horizontal coordination. | Highly informal system of active exchange of information Backed up by a subsidiarity-based system of problem solving at the lowest effective level |
| Liaison roles | Green ambassadors | - | - | |
| Task forces | (Often avoided due to workload) | (Often avoided due to workload) | (Often avoided due to workload) | |

⁷ An interministerial committee that examines new Commission proposals. It is more a committee for distributing primary responsibilities for proposals than a strategic problem detecting or solving body.

| | Teams | Normal internal committees (Hebdo etc.) | Normal EU coordinating committees: BNC, Coreper instruction meeting and CoCo | Subsidiarity-based cross-sectoral links which only occur as and when conflicts arise |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| | <p>Linking pins for EPI: 1) in general; and 2) role and resources of the Environment department (as coordinators/integrating managers)</p> | <p>1) The SG as a linking pin 2) DG environment has sustainable development unit, comprising c. 7 people. Its role is not to monitor Commission policies.</p> <p>Responsibility for EPI is decentralised to the sector officials in DG Environment (who have little incentive) and, especially, to the lead DGs.</p> <p>Main focus is on the Environment Council</p> | <p>1) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (albeit more procedural than content related; not a powerful role) 2) The Environment ministry does not have the resources to monitor EU-EPI. The resources of the EU coordinating unit has not been adapted to the new opportunities that EPI has offered.</p> <p>The unit has 5 people.</p> <p>The focus is still on the Environment Council.</p> | <p>1) In the subsidiarity-based system, the Foreign Office monitors whether there are problems and either deals with them or passes them on to the Cabinet Office. Hence, in accordance with the subsidiarity system there are 2 levels of linking pin.</p> <p>2) There is no EU coordinating unit in the environment department other than c.2 people who prepare dossiers for the Environment Council. Responsibility for EPI is devolved to sectoral departments.</p> |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| | 6 Mission statements | (The importance of 'integration' has been widely emphasised and incorporated in among others communications about quality of legislation and White Paper on European Governance. The effect, however, is limited.) | - | - |
| Who is in the lead? | | No one ('ownership' / decentralised responsibility) | No one ('ownership' / decentralised responsibility) | No one ('ownership' / decentralised responsibility) |
| | Fit for EPI? | No | No | In theory, yes. In practice, often no, because the political ambition is quite weak and the staff needed to make administrative hardware work are missing |

Key

(): some procedures exist but they are only partial solutions.

-: not available

+: available

6.1 Hierarchical Mechanisms

Very little has been done in terms of hierarchical steering within the *European Commission*. One of the criticisms of the macro strategies is that they have not delivered sufficiently specific objectives. Furthermore, responsibility has been explicitly defined as an ownership issues, i.e. each DG has to ensure sustainability and undertake impact assessments. But these commitments have not been formulated as obligations and neither DG ENV nor the Secretariat is in a position to monitor the quality of the impact assessments. The situation is much the same in *the Netherlands* and *the UK*. Although there is general political support EPI in both

countries, there are no hierarchical objectives in relation to European targets for EPI. There are, of course, specific targets for particular pollutants (e.g. greenhouse gasses under the international Kyoto protocol), that actively inform and steer national policy development and, indirectly, facilitate EPI. But they are very much a special case of end of pipe regulations i.e. they are international agreements, that require great effort to negotiate, and attract much more political attention.

6.2 Bureaucratic Procedures

Coordination in the *Commission* is highly standardised. There are procedures for workplanning, for ensuring that initiatives are formulated in long term strategies, and for nurturing an internal exchange of information. Recently, the Secretariat General has assumed additional responsibilities for work planning (Strategic Planning and Programming) and for monitoring the various impact assessments. But the strong responsibility of sectoral DGs and the very limited resources imply that the SG's coordinating role in the internal management of new proposals remain more apparent than real. Commission officials are expected to share information as much as possible, but in practice it is often only routinely done– without indicating the real importance of specific issues in the proposal – or even not done at all in view of the sensitivities involved. The new impact assessment procedure is supposed to remedy some of these failings, but the environment is only one aspect. Moreover, in a multilevel system, procedural innovations in the Commission are unlikely to succeed if they are not backed by the appropriate support from national administrations. These links are still being developed (see, for example, COM (2002) 278 final; Council of the European Union, EN 12175/03).

In *the Netherlands*, EU policy coordination is highly routinised and supported by rules on how to behave. These rules are specified in civil service code books and EU handbooks in ministries. However, they are not supported by mechanisms to punish actors for playing strategic 'games' such as withholding or only selectively disseminating information about cross-sectoral spillover effects. Therefore, most information flows quite passively. The centrality of the COREPER instruction meeting and the preparatory meeting before Councils in the coordination has led officials to tell environment officials to wait until the proposal comes to COREPER to see what has been discussed – as if COREPER will be the point to make changes in the Dutch position. There is an inter-ministerial coordination committee to assess new Commission proposals (the BNC), which is located at the start of the Council phases (i.e. when the College of Commissioners has approved a proposal). Formally, it can ask for an environmental appraisal to be undertaken, but this procedure has hardly been used and officials generally spent little time on analysing proposals at this stage.

The *UK* has many rules on *inter alia* how to process EU legislation, who to inform, what to do in case of problems (Jordan, 2002b). Importantly, these procedures and guidelines are strongly based on active information. The system has contributed to a culture of informal cooperation that is backed-up by punishments when rules are broken. Only strong ministers are brave enough to selectively disseminate information. In one respect, the UK is event-coordinated e.g. the biannual meetings in which the Presidency agendas are discussed at an interdepartmental level. The Netherlands has no obvious comparable proactive system. New Commission proposals are also supposed to be subjected to an environmental policy appraisal as part of the UK's national EPI system, but very few are actually undertaken in practice (Jordan and Russel *et al.* 2003).

Thus, in terms of active and passive coordination: only the UK seems to be able to facilitate life of environment officials by making coordination more efficient. In the other two actors, the

environment officials have to wait before decisions are already advanced or they have to put in a lot of energy in tracking policy proposals and negotiations. One new development to facilitate coordination has been the emerging of impact assessments. However, the limited mechanisms in the Commission are not supported by impact assessment capacities in either the UK or the Netherlands. The Commission cannot possibly assess all the national implications of a proposal in its system. And because national and EU EPI systems are not directly linked, there is plenty of scope for 'EPI proofed' Commission proposals to be unpicked by subsequent interventions from national governments.

6.3 Specification of Output

In general terms, *the Commission* has accepted the need to implement EPI (see the Section on mission statements below), but little has been achieved in terms of identifying more specific EPI objectives. Most officials working outside – or even within - the environmental departments in *the Netherlands* and *the UK* are also not familiar with 'the Cardiff process'. Hence, what macro objectives exist (most are, of course very sector specific) are not really widely known about. More importantly, there is no real discussion about how macro objectives can be translated into (and actively inform) the development of specific EU policies at the micro-level of everyday policy making.

6.4 Horizontal Coordination Mechanisms

In the *Commission*, *informal relations* have been advocated, but the workload as well as the inherent fragmentation, makes them quite dangerous to rely on. Moreover, little has been done to formalise informal relations – e.g. there are no sanctions for not informing other parts of the organisation. *Liaison roles* have also been created through the appointment of environmental correspondents/ambassadors in each DG, but this innovation has not significantly improved the institutional commitment to EPI to the required extent. Most are too junior or too peripheral to have a major say in the development of new and sensitive policies. In practice, they often act as gatekeepers instead of environmental ambassadors. There are many *task forces* in the Commission, but they are inefficient and not widely liked. Due to work pressures, officials avoid being dragged into task forces covering policies on which someone else has the lead. The inefficiency inherent in task forces – several people dealing with the same issue – means they are only really suited to the most politically pressing cases, and not the more routine, day to day processes of policy development at the micro-level. In addition, task forces are sometimes avoided by the lead DGs, as they may prefer to keep cards close to their chests especially in the earlier phases of decision making.

Teams are not especially important for EPI, except possibly the Commissioners' meeting to discuss sustainable development. However, this practice never really became routinised and meetings have been very rare. Nevertheless, the Commission is full of general coordinating committees at different levels (e.g. directors meetings, the Hebdo and the weekly of the college of Commissioners). These meetings are important but still rely heavily on DG ENV putting in a lot of work (i.e. the problem with passive information). *Coordinators and linking pins* are more relevant. However, DG ENV argues that it cannot be a 'green policeman'; the responsibility for delivering EPI has to be owned by *all* the DGs, 'otherwise they will never learn'. Even if DG ENV were to assume a monitoring role, the unit for sustainable development is too understaffed and lacks high level political support to fulfil it. What this means is that the Commission is a particularly decentralised organisation when it comes to 'integration'. It relies mainly on passive coordination, and has little capacity to deal with strategic tasks such as priority setting or problem solving.

Informal contacts between officials in *the Netherlands* have increased in recent years. They have been formally stimulated through guidelines on when and who to contact. However, the problem is that they are often unreliable. They may occur incidentally – which may not be sufficient for new Commission proposals – or they may be insufficiently strong to cope with value conflicts. Moreover, the workload that everyone is under often stymies the informal exchange of information, problem-detection and problem-solving. Passive information is again one of the main problems.

Liaison roles hardly exist in the Netherlands. Most ministries have environment units, but their tasks is primarily to monitor the developments in DG ENV and the Environment Council – not to ensure EPI in the own departments or at the EU level. In addition, there are officials in the environment department who follow the main developments in other council fields, but these are often too overloaded to actively scrutinise all new policy developments – or even the main topics. The units in the environment department more or less have to assume that their colleagues in other ministries will take care of the environmental dimension. Moreover, intervening too often does not make the environment department very popular. Passive coordination inherently has its limits in terms of efficiency and acceptability.

The Netherlands created a new *coordinating team* - the BNC – but, as discussed above, it hardly makes a contribution to EPI. The Dutch environment ministry focuses most of its effort on servicing the Environment Council. The European coordinating unit in the ministry only has about 5 (full time equivalent) staff. Their time is mainly devoted to coordinating the ministry's input into the BNC, to COREPER instruction meeting, and to major EU developments such as enlargement and IGCs. Even though they try to monitor developments in other policy fields, heavy workloads prevent them from devoting sufficient time to ensuring cognate sectors respond to the EPI principle. Like their counterparts in the Commission, when pressed, Dutch environment officials have a tendency to assume away the whole coordination problem by claiming that other ministries should themselves incorporate environmental objectives (the ownership argument). The environment coordinators actively support the *principle* of EPI, but rarely have the time to monitor specific dossiers on the Commission and Council agendas.

In terms of *informal relations*, the active exchange of information in *the UK* ensures a high level of informal coordination. Information is exchanged, problems are pointed out and difficulties are spotted – even pointed out - by the lead ministry. In addition, in contrast to the event related systems in the Commission and the Netherlands, the British way of working is highly pragmatic. In contrast to the Netherlands and the Commission, committees are only convened to solve specific problems. Higher level meetings may be called, but they are always problem related – not like in the Netherlands where each ministry is present for the coordination of each Council.

Liaison roles also hardly exist in the UK. The environment ministry has a European unit but its main task is primarily to monitor developments in the Environment Council, not to ensure EPI. Many other ministries have environment units but these tend to focus on domestic or EU environmental legislation, rather than integrating an environmental component into the ministry's core activities.

As for *teams*, the committees in the UK are not event related such as the policy group and HEBDO in the Commission. Instead, only limited committees meetings are organised at different levels in the administration when urgent problems need to be solved. Secondly, in contrast to the Netherlands and the Commission, the UK system is good at taking decisions instead of delaying them to the last possible moment. The environment ministry does not actively monitor other EU policy fields. Monitoring European policies for which others are

primarily responsible is easily regarded as doubly inefficient (i.e. it is not national and it is not in the field of environment which means that one does not 'score' on ones own policies and it means influencing colleagues who have to influence European negotiations). By the same token, the other sector ministries do not produce enough environmental appraisals in their own domains to be able to actively alert the environment ministry to developments that conflict with EPI. As a result, the much fabled 'Rolls Royce' machinery exists in the environmental domain, but the resources have not been invested to make it work for EPI. This is not merely a function of the environment having a low profile in domestic politics; there are also insufficient numbers of officials dealing with EPI to bring all but the most politically salient cross-sectoral conflicts to their Ministers' attention. Hence, very few become openly political, or do so when the die of sectoral policy is effectively cast in an unsustainable form.

These horizontal coordination mechanisms combine with rules that oblige officials to coordinate proactively ensures a 'subsidiarity-based' system of priority setting and problem solving. That is to say, problems are detected at an early stage and solved as soon as possible. Higher levels only become relevant when problems can not be solved. The Foreign Office or even the Cabinet Office may become involved to settle disputes but this possibility normally serves to prevent problems from going up the hierarchy. However, the fact that environment officials are so few in number prevents 'integration' from benefiting from Rolls Royce coordination.

6.5 Mission Statements

Finally, EPI is one of the *Commission's* long term political priorities (see Section 1) that can be regarded as mission statement. It has taken some steps to adapt its internal coordination mechanisms, but two main issues constantly undermine them. The first is its tendency to decompose tasks instead of coordinating them (Spence, 2000) which would make mission statements particularly important to create a sense of togetherness. The second is that there is only so much the Commission can do when the EU is a multi-actor, multi-level governance system. There is ample proof of the Commission trying to spread the word that 'integration' is important (e.g. in its communication on better law making, COM2002 275 Final, and in the White Paper on European governance, COM2001 428 final) and also both *the UK* and *the Netherlands* support the general principle of EPI in the EU. But in the ebb and flow of daily politics, the ideals enshrined in mission statements are all too readily sacrificed.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to the traditional EU coordination literature, this study has focused on a specific – and admittedly highly ambitious – policy objective (EPI) that has run into difficulties at the implementation stage. In so doing, we have tried to shed a little more light on what multilevel governance actually implies for day to day policy making and the administrative systems that oversee them. We have tried to show what actors have actually (not) done to construct policy coordination and coherent action in the EU's multi-level political system.

So far in the environmental sector, coordination has been almost exclusively sought at the macro level. In fact, as the Lisbon process gradually eclipses the Cardiff process, we might even conclude that the EU's strengthening preference is for an even *more* macro approach which focus on sustainability rather than EPI. This is unlikely to work because EPI is a multi-actor, multi-level challenge. The collective responsibility for EPI also implies that the Member States and the Commission have to be able to coordinate between the different policy fields, as well as across all phases of the EU policy processes.

More specifically, our study of the Commission, the Netherlands and the UK reveals that:

- The EU has relied heavily on hierarchical coordination at the macro level, without putting the administrative coordination (i.e. delivery) mechanisms in place.
- Passive information can easily overload the environment officials in the Netherlands and the Commission. Events such as College, Coreper and Council meetings are coordinated, but the systems are not good at detecting overlaps or solving problems early on. By the time COREPER becomes involved, the die of most policies is effectively cast, and EPI can only be pursued at the margins. The UK is the only system with active information and therefore is in the strongest position to build a more coordinated response to deliver EPI. However, even here resource constraints and weak political will limit its overall effectiveness.
- Thus far, none of the environment departments/ministries in the three jurisdictions have adapted themselves fully to address the administrative requirements of EPI. To a very large extent, they all remain fixed upon tracking developments in the Environment Council. Ironically, everyone seems to believe that EPI should be 'owned' by everyone, but this naive view underestimates the organisational and sectoral differentiation of the EU.
- No one in the three cases appears to be taking a firm leadership role. No one apparently has the incentive to stand back and carry out a management audit (leadership in a multilevel context is clearly a common good). In any case, the administrative ideology of 'shared ownership' helpfully assumes away the problem in the first place. Consequently, EPI is not seen as a *multi-level* coordination challenge. The exclusive focus on the macro level is the inevitable result.

These are important conclusions. First of all, they show that none of the actors has adapted itself fully in terms of either of its outlook (i.e. the focus remains on core policy fields) and coordination mechanisms, even though the political demand is for more integrated or 'joined up' working. Secondly, passive coordination seems increasingly untenable in the face of a growing interdependence of policies and policy goals. Finally, they also shed new light on the debate about the possible long term convergence of EU policy coordination systems. On the one hand we can see that the Netherlands and the Commission are trying to mimic the actively coordinated UK system e.g. by creating rules to foster early active information. However, this is being done half-heartedly so that the traditional passive coordination styles continue to

dominate. Hence, in practice, there is little convergence: passive systems appear to persist. This seems to conflict with the current political demand for greater EU policy coordination.

Coordination is not, of course, everything. We are keenly aware that macro scale approaches to EPI do play an important part. After all, EPI is, ultimately, a *political* objective and general mission statements and strategies can powerfully indicate what is regarded as politically important. Having said that, the coordination capacities that guide policies through the policy phases in the Commission, Council and its Member States, are important too. Therefore, the macro approach cannot function effectively without supporting actions being actively taken at lower, more micro levels. At the same time, the micro approach needs the political commitment of the macro context.

Ultimately, coordination capacities do need political pressure. If officials really assume that 'our minister is not interested', then no coordination system will work. But in order to generate and sustain political support, coordination systems have to be effective at identifying and resolving differences. EPI is not a cast iron rule. It requires difficult trade offs to be made. But the political sticking points and trade offs often only emerge from daily processes of administrative coordination, rather than in macro-level processes which bury them away. Coordination systems therefore have to be able to detect and raise them at an appropriately high level in order to foster the necessary political interest. Politics and administration are therefore like the proverbial chicken and egg.

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