Transversal Environmental Policies

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Modern times have seen the environment degraded due to careless production and consumption. Attempting to overcome this, nation-states have developed environmental policies according to their own perspectives, interests and geopolitical strategies. Many of them are traditionally viewed as 'inherently regulatory', dominated by national governments stipulating in law-specific standards (Jordan et al., 2013: 168). Of which, some are characterised by a prevalent focus on the 'here and now'; meaning that we often react to problems only when they affect our daily lives (Rudel, 2013: 2).

The amelioration of pollution and the preservation and protection of natural resources are two issues that remark the importance of regulating interactions between societies and the environment. Being made at both the national and international levels, policies present different features. On one hand, environmental management at national level is characterised by different domestic policy-making processes, economic and ecological conditions, sociocultural values, levels of activism, as well as land-use and natural resource regimes (Healy et al., 2014). On the other hand, the international level promotes an understanding of the implications of environmental problems that do not recognise political boundaries, implying the potential development of global, international and regional policies. This stance suggests the consideration of additional variables, such as the type of interactions that nation-states sustain at global forums, political parties in power, and national interests, to cite a few.

The varied features mean that a multi-field approach is suitable to understand the environmental policy landscape. There are different interpretations for 'field'. Boasson (2014: 27) enlists DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Greenwood et al., (2002) and Scott (2008). Common ground corresponds to relationships among individuals and societies, or between sections of societies, in their aggregate, around specific industries, or merely as part of institutional life.

Diversity of related policy areas, instruments, institutions and actors shape policy-making towards what they understand and identify as best for their natural surroundings. Despite of the acknowledgement of common shared environmental values; political culture, identity, idiosyncrasies, and interests make national and local environmental objectives to differ. In this sense, variables like personal ability, motivation, corruption and nepotism should be of mandatory consideration, as they can often shape environmental values, identities, and national interests. To do this, it is important to identify the roles that humans – politicians, businessmen, social actors, etc. – and institutions – in subnational, national and regional arenas – play.

The multi-field approach helps to explain the reason and the manner in which political actors behave on policy-related issues. It also allows setting up the role that other political and non-political actors play in environmental policy-making processes. Furthermore, this approach uses the concept of multi-level governance, which refers to decision-making interlinked at different levels (international, national, subnational and local) and geographical areas over a specific issue. The relationship 'field-level' relies on the use of policy systems that is made across multiple hierarchical levels (Boasson, 2015: 26).

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Considering that policies dealing with environmental matters should be developed in accordance to other seemingly unrelated policies, the multi-field approach provides the opportunity to examine diverse aspects. First, it allows observing the links it has with broader sets of policies. Second, it assists to explain the policy interaction that national governments have between and within them, especially in cases when transboundary environmental problems occur. In this context, this chapter aims to offer an insight about the role environmental policies play in overall policy frameworks. The transversal nature of these policies has long been acknowledged. However, this does not mean that environmental policy is accurately related – let alone integrated – to a wider policy framework. There are cases in which the link is subtly established. In some others, the relationship is clearly and properly set up. Notwithstanding, the importance of environmental policies is not equally recognised. At times, they play a central role. In other cases they are peripheral to policy developments.

This background allows setting the present contribution as follows. The second section presents divergent approaches to include the environment in policy frameworks – administrative rationalism, democratic pragmatism and economic rationalism – and the importance of environmental policies. The third section distinguishes the role that environmental policies have in broader policy frameworks. In this sense, explanations about the intrinsic role that environmental policies have with other policies are presented. For this, industry, security, science, climate change and urban planning are used as examples. The fourth section then aims to identify the adequate conceptualisation of environmental policies. It questions whether transboundary cooperation or international governance better explain the transversal approach that environmental policies have. Lastly, conclusions observing if environmental policies are central or peripheral are shown.

Divergent Policy Approaches and the Importance of Environmental Policy Instruments

Each nation-state has its own environmental policy style. Within its realm, different ministries, even political parties, 'formulate environmental policies as part of their ordinary activities, regardless of whether they believe in them' (Buzan et al., 1998: 73). They treat environmental problems 'tractable within the basic framework of the political economy of industrial society' (Dryzek, 2013: 73).

In order to dissect them, three varying approaches have been recognised. One is administrative rationalism, which encompasses the dominant governmental response to environmental problems, emphasising the role of experts over the citizenry. Institutions identified in this approach are pollution control agencies that exist at international, national and subnational levels. However, there is no global perspective being identified, which means that expertise and research can be influenced or driven towards a preferred perspective or ideology. Right-wing politicians have even claimed that scientific neutrality is effectively impossible (Dryzek, 2013). The second approach is democratic pragmatism. Thought of as a response to the shortcomings found in administrative rationalism, this approach aims to make administration more responsive and flexible according to the circumstances that exist at a given time period (Fiorino, 2004). For this to happen, democratisation of environmental administration is necessary; which can happen through public consultation, alternative dispute resolution, policy dialogue, lay citizens' deliberation, public enquiries or right-to-know legislation. Of course, any of these types implies – or intends –widening the scope of participating actors. The third approach, economic rationalism, offers a way for market mechanisms to reach objectives of public interest. Governments should play a peripheral role. Their participation would relate to setting up basic market rules, with the potential implication of natural resources privatisation. Developing markets in environmental goods would provide a further pathway of action, one regarded as environment protective by supporters (Dryzek, 2013: 100–124).

Whether these approaches are successful depends on the context and the extent to which such policies are formulated and implemented. This also relates to differences within and between nation-states in attitudes and behaviours towards the environment, which can be either benign or self-destructing (Watts, 1999: 266).

The politicisation of the environment may relate to the knowledge governments and societies have about the natural world and the interaction that humans have with it. However, these actors may not share the same perspective nor have a similar position of power. The citizenry tends to be more environmentally minded than its government; despite the environment not being located high in the list of concerns that many sectors have, especially in developing countries. Income, economic development, health and security are four areas generally located above environmental

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concerns.

Environmental policies are carried out through policy instruments, understood as the numerous practices at the disposal of governments to implement and reach their policy objectives (Howlett, 1991: 2). They assist to clarify the relationship between government – the state-led governing that relies on laws – and governance – used with horizontal forms of societal self-coordination (Jordan et al., 2005); although they are influenced by policy-makers' goals, outlooks and philosophies defining national interests (Hall, 1993). Jordan et al. (2013) comment that environmental policy instruments are aiming at an interdisciplinary holistic approach that takes into account political processes and contextual factors – such as voting rules, power of industry, dominant ideas and policy paradigms – that shape designs, calibrations and usage of such instruments. Market-based instruments, including emissions trading and eco-taxes, are some of the most important. Some others are used to provide information – such as eco-labels and management systems – or are set up through voluntary agreements, like clean development mechanisms. The ultimate instrument becomes the regulation, as its mandatory status infers reaching policy objectives. For this purpose, implementation programmes are developed, although they have not been sufficient. In many cases, failure to adequately implement environmental programmes responds to features such as corruption, lack of expertise and technical unviability in remote places. In some cases, secondary programmes are formulated to assist in the implementation of main programmes; but this spillover of programmes does not ensure that implementation takes place.

Interdisciplinary Role of Environmental Policies

Intended to preserve and protect the environment, policies in this area are interdisciplinary – incorporating understandings of the natural and social sciences as a means to understand routes forward. Nonetheless, they are not always branded and developed as such, as widening the scope of a given policy can pose serious limitations to implementing institutions. The interdisciplinary status should be regarded as a challenge (Salter and Hearn, 1996), one that allows more freedom and creativity to work across different types of experience and fields of knowledge (Hackett and Rhoten, 2009).

One area in which environmental policies participate – or should do so – is the industrial sector. Both industry and government 'evolve and function in accordance with governmental regulations' (Boasson, 2015: 12), with the possibility to develop shared worldviews and preferences on the environment. In this sense, there are current trends showing an interest to reduce carbon emissions while saving money in the process. For this to happen, initial investment in reduction projects is required. Acquisition of greener company vehicles, more efficient production gear and processes, use of recycled materials, reduction of energy consumption and methane emissions cuts are, among others, diverse actions made under the auspices of certain industrial programmes set up as a result of public policies aimed at improving environmental conditions. However, there are many key sectors that pose environmental challenges due to their core processes, like plastic, paper, automotive, agricultural, livestock, energy-producing and energy-intensive industries.

A further policy area found in this context is security. Scarcity, detrimental effects of resource use and environmental destruction due to expansive economic activity can all lead to conflict (Dalby, 2014: 230). Potential threats to a state, its population, or its natural resources can update security policy. A perspective from International Relations studies suggest that a matter becomes an issue of security or emergency when securitising actors affirm that something constitutes a threat to an object that needs to survive and hence should be dealt with immediately (Floyd, 2010). In turn, the objective becomes the 'desecuritisation' of the threat at hand, understood as the process by which securitisation is reversed and the threat disappears, leaving the issue out of emergency mode (Buzan et al., 1998). Given the fluctuations of environmental threats – like an increase in floods, high intensity hurricanes, wildfires, deforestation and droughts – and the lack of true commitment to act as international community, desecuritising the environment is not suitable for the time being. In fact, a broader range of areas may be securitised in the near future. Freshwater supply for human consumption fits in this case. There is a trend showing an increase in water shortage in many regions of the world. Two-thirds of the world's population may face this problem by 2025, with subsequent implications for ecosystems and wetlands (WWF, 2015). Hence, competition over declining natural resources, like freshwater, may lead to conflict between and within states. For this reason, an international policy approach –

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consistent with national lines – linking the environment and security needs to be developed. In this sense, an Environment and Security Initiative is under development, assisting national governments, as well as their local communities, to identify common solutions and develop work programmes and project portfolios (Environment and Security Initiative, 2015). However, this initiative is not planned on a global scale, focusing instead on four regions at present: Central Asia, South Caucasus, Eastern and South East Europe.

Science is another area where policy needs to interact with the environment. Its relevance includes different perspectives. In security terms, the scientific perspective of a policy can relate to the authoritative assessment of threat for securitising or desecuritising moves (Buzan et al., 1998: 72). Science is essential for knowledge-sharing, which can assist to develop policy frameworks aimed at protecting the environment, foment sustainability, and promote social welfare. This can be made through adequate international cooperation strategies destined for such purposes. Research findings are the basis by which policy is – or should be – formulated, developed and implemented. In fact, referencing science to make people understand about the importance and implications of mishandling the environment is becoming the norm. However, science can also be used to develop counter-arguments about the context in which the environment is found. For example, it can be used to deny the existence of climate change – as it has been used to claim its existence.

Energy is a sector that is intrinsically related to the environment. Fossil fuels remain the most used energy source despite of common knowledge about its negative implications for local eco-systems and climate change. Indeed, there is a growing industry for renewable energy. Eolic (wind), geotermal (heat from Earth), biomass (biological material), hydroelectric, ocean, and solar sources are slowly becoming operational; although it will take them some time to overcome hydrocarbon production – if we are to see it. Nuclear energy is also in the frame, although it deserves special consideration due to its potential catastrophic environmental consequences in case of accidents or careless use. All these types of sources are getting included in national energy legislations, some of which show signs of a true commitment to a shift of energy origin, such as those of Austria, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. All four are already setting deadlines for the change to take place (go100percent.org, 2015). Some other countries refer to these mechanisms but are slow to move in such a direction, as is the case with China (Pedong et al., 2009) and Mexico – the latter characterised by an oil industry representing an important source of revenue (Sosa-Nunez, 2015). A third group of countries would not contemplate renewable energy. This is the case with members of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), who insist that fossil fuels will still contribute 82 per cent of the world's energy supply in 2035 (OPEC, 2012). Their position is understandable, as a change of direction would be against their national interests (Assis, 2014).

A further topic is climate change. The degrading trend of the environment has led the international community to join their efforts to develop a common framework to combat it. Understanding that climate change derives from humankind's overproduction, which releases overwhelming amounts of dioxide carbon and other polluting emissions; policymakers attempt to develop policies on modifying the population's behaviour and consumption patterns towards a more sustainable approach. For this, production processes also need to change, implying a potential overhaul of existing industrial policies. Obviously, reticent stances from many sectors of the world society are likely; but the present environmental situation leaves no room for further delay given the delay embedded in the setting of long-term deadlines to accomplish what are already overdue objectives.

The world's population is expanding faster than ever, meaning an increase of urban areas – in both size and number. Urban planning is yet another area in which environmental policies should play a key role, looking at adequate land use, electric public transport, cycling lanes, distributional networks to reduce traffic, adequate waste disposal and even the location of recycling bins. Actions in many of these areas would not only improve the environmental conditions of the cities in which they are implemented; they would also lead to significant savings, regardless of the size of the cities or whether they are in developing or developed countries (where these policies are not fully implemented). The 'smart cities' approach could help to reduce energy and water use and waste generation. At the same time, this approach should have an emphatic environmental perspective that combines infrastructure improvements, connectivity, social and societal development, as well as citizens' wellbeing. Only then will cities be able to meet their environmental targets.

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Industry, security, science, climate change and urban planning are just five of many policy areas that are intrinsically related to environmental policies. Other areas seem to approach the environment in slightly different ways. This is the case with the economy. Findings suggest that economic activity damages the environment; but continued economic growth – specifically, per capita income increases – eventually reverses this trend. (Stern, 2004) In fact, there are claims that encouraging economic growth is the best environmental policy option. However, this argument only stands as long as pollutant impacts are immediate and local: intergenerational impacts are not contemplated (Raymond, 2004: 327), neither is the long-term nature of climate change.

These areas provide sufficient information about the transversal nature of environmental policies. An environmentally conscious approach is easily identified with science and climate change matters, since these look to preserve natural resources or to ameliorate negative effects that we – humans – have had on our natural surroundings and the planet. At the other end of the scale, perspectives on environmental security place societies' security concerns before awareness of the environmental situation. The industry and urban planning examples are located somewhere in the middle. They have willingly – or reluctantly – embraced environmental policies, but improvements are required. For this to happen, the role of national and local governments is of utmost importance, as they set the rules by which we should play.

Transboundary Cooperation or International Governance?

The current environmental context – characterised by modifying worldwide climate patterns – has led some to argue that an 'environmental crisis' exists, making global collective action a necessity (O'Neill, 2009). Problems such as biodiversity loss, deforestation, waste management, ozone depletion, atmospheric pollution and ocean acidification mean that collaborative counteractive efforts are mandatory.

The type of action depends on the type of problem to solve. A global response is needed to tackle climate change, while a regional approach is more suitable for improving transboundary air pollution or reforestation. Moreover, collective action has to take place vertically across multiple levels of government and horizontally across multiple arenas involving public and private actors. The interdependence of actors means that cooperation is a necessary action when governing across multiple arenas. As it includes traditional modes of government and non-hierarchical modes of guidance (Héritier, 2002: 1), the resulting political steering is conceptualised as governance.

The context in which governance takes place indicates the existence or absence of legislative decision-making. Whether it is one way or another depends on the extent of the participation by public and private actors. Some forms of governance – diffusion, learning, knowledge standardisation, repetition, persuasion – can avoid regulatory requirements by promoting voluntary actions, although these can be influenced by rapidly changing economic, social and technological contexts. These in turn have implications for the type of policy outcomes.

With regard to the governmental perspective, collaborative efforts that nation-states make depend on their inner preferences, interests and needs. Vicinity plays a part when setting up environmental policies of a certain kind. This is the case for northern member-states of the European Union (EU), whereby Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany share high levels of domestic commitment and a precautionary approach to policy at international level, which is replicated at EU level (Watts, 1999). Oppositely, there are cases where political boundaries define contrasting positions. The United States of America and Mexico exemplify this, as the former has stricter environmental regulations than the latter (although this is slowly changing – Mexico is catching up as a result of trade and environmental agreements that are reshaping their relationship).

Conclusions: Are Environmental Policies Core or Peripheral?

There is an increasing tendency to get environmental policies involved in broader, seemingly unrelated policies; however, more needs to be done if we are to improve the environmental conditions that characterise our time. In this sense, the interdisciplinary spectrum of environmental policies includes not only socio-economic components but also physical, biological, mathematical and engineering ones. The environment is also considered in newer research, health and education programmes. This is desirable, since they should 'be guided by a sense of the greater public

good and a reliable moral compass' (Hackett and Rhoten, 2009: 409).

Natural sciences and technology explain the physical processes that we face but not the arguments behind choosing not to confront them (Regan, 2015: 4). Whether it is through incentives or coercion, we need to modify our consumption patterns while also learning how best to interact appropriately with the environment. Policies in such a direction should prove fruitful.

Perhaps the way forward is about formulating and implementing policies focusing on zero economic and population growth. A conservative approach would be necessary. However, this perspective attracts a lot of criticism from those stating that we should protect the environment and the planet as long as we, humans, are not affected in economic terms. The right to become – or remain – developed societies is claimed as central to this argument. However, considering the levels of environmental degradation that we have caused, the only way to reverse trends implies establishing commitments and sacrifices from all societies and all sectors. We should behave as a single race: humankind. Despite its promotion, moderate environmentalism – advocating economic growth while reaching limits of natural resource consumption – is no longer suitable, or at least not until ecosystems recover from overuse and pollution.

The role of environmental policies in overall policy frameworks has been increasing, although there is a long way to go. Their presence can assist in establishing an environmental policy reform in which the different participating – or willing to participate – actors promote the development of a strict approach to environmental protection and conservation. The relevance of each individual's actions – at local levels – should also contribute to international and global efforts to tackle environmental problems. If this occurs, implementation may be feasible and smooth.

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