



Intergovernmental organizations' normative commitments to policy integration: The dominance of environmental goals

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ABSTRACT

Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) influence policymaking in states by devising and promoting policy ideas. In this study, we examine to what extent a set of IGOs make normative commitments to integrate environmental concerns as well as to contrast this commitment to environmental policy integration (EPI) with climate policy integration (CPI) and energy policy integration (EnPI). Which characteristics of an IGO increase its likelihood to make a normative commitment to EPI? Do environment-related IGOs commit themselves to integrate environmental policy with concerns regarding climate change and/or energy? What is the ratio between the IGOs' normative commitments to EPI relative to CPI and EnPI? Drawing on primary law texts of 78 IGOs, we find that organizations concentrating on Europe and IGOs in which the European Union (EU) Commission participates are more likely to commit themselves to EPI. Furthermore, the sectors covered by IGOs matter: organizations active in the field of general economic concerns and multi-issue IGOs are more likely than IGOs assigned to the 'other' category for embracing EPI. These findings still hold when controlling for the time when an IGO adopted its original or amended relevant primary law, its membership size and whether it is a United Nations organization. Environment-related IGOs commit themselves to a limited degree of CPI and EnPI. More broadly, the IGOs' normative commitment to EPI clearly dominates over their commitment to EnPI and CPI.

1. Introduction

Policy analysis has shown that to be successful, sectoral policies need to take into account the objectives of, and the activities in, other policy sectors as to avoid inconsistencies or to attain synergies. The corresponding literature refers to this theme by using different terminology and correspondingly paying attention to different features such as the process of policymaking or its outcome (see, e.g., [Tosun and Lang, 2017](#)). The terms used in the literature to study this phenomenon range from 'policy coherence' (e.g. [May et al., 2006](#)) to 'coordination' (e.g. [Peters, 1998, 2015](#)), and from the 'nexus' approach (e.g. [Visseren-Hamakers, 2015](#)) to 'policy integration' (e.g. [Candel and Biesbroek, 2016](#); [Lafferty and Hovden, 2003](#); [Nilsson and Persson, 2003, 2017](#); [Runhaar et al., 2014](#)). In this study, similar to the other contributions to this special issue, we use the notion of policy integration (see [Persson et al., this issue](#)).

The concept of policy integration dates back to the early 1970s and

coincides with the emergence of environmental policy as a policy domain in its own right. Upon its first appearance, the concept was discussed under the term 'mainstreaming' and referred to the development of instruments that would align environmental policy with other policy domains. After producing disappointing results, the concept disappeared for a while, only to reappear on the political agenda in 1987 with the publication of the Brundtland Report and its promotion of sustainable development as the simultaneous realization of goals related to economic, ecological and social development ([Jacob et al., 2008](#), p. 24; see also [Fleig and Tosun, 2017](#)). Politically, policy integration started to become popular in the early 1990s, subsequent to the United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development in 1992,¹ and has since been embraced by a growing number of national governments and international organizations. While policy integration is not limited to the environmental policy domain (see [Tosun and Lang, 2017](#)), given its origin, it is predominantly associated with environmental policy integration (EPI). In the European Union (EU), for

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¹ In this context, it should be noted that, according to the [Jordan and Lenschow \(2010, p. 149\)](#), the action plan Agenda 21 adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit (re)introduced some ambiguity with regards to the meaning of the concept.

instance, EPI is included in Article 11 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU and therefore even enjoys a ‘quasi-constitutional’ status (Jordan and Lenschow, 2010, p. 149).

Considering that the international level has been influential in making an initial case for the need of EPI (see, e.g., Biermann et al., 2009; Nilsson et al., 2009; Oberthür, 2009), in this study, we strive to learn more about the presence of EPI among international organizations. While we acknowledge the variety of organizations involved in global environmental governance (e.g. Hale and Held, 2011; Jordan et al., 2015; Van de Graaf and Colgan, 2016), we concentrate on intergovernmental organizations’ (IGOs) ‘normative commitment’ to EPI. Following Nilsson and Persson (2017, p. 36), we define normative commitment as the IGOs’ willingness to define “constitutional and legal provisions to consider environmental objectives in policy formation and implementation”. While we are predominantly interested in advancing our understanding of how IGOs commit themselves to EPI, we are equally interested in learning whether EPI dominates over commitments to other forms of cross-sectoral policy integration. Since environmental policy is closely interrelated with the governance of climate change and energy (e.g. Visseren-Hamakers, 2015), thus our empirical investigation also covers climate policy integration (CPI) and energy policy integration (EnPI).

A joint analysis of EPI, CPI and EnPI is potentially instructive since these three concepts of policy integration are also integral components of one another, and therefore it is worth examining the relationship between them. Tosun and Solorio (2011) regard EPI to include the integration of environmental and energy policy goals, whilst Jordan and Lenschow (2010) conceptualize CPI as a component of EPI. Departing from the latter observation, Adelle and Russel (2013, p. 1) make an effort to illuminate the relationship between CPI and EPI and find that “CPI is less about ambitious and expansive integration across all policy sectors and more about engaging a narrower set of sectors to work together in particular ways to meet specific goals”. This view lines up with the assessment by Nilsson and Nilsson (2005) that to be effective, climate policy must become integrated with agriculture, energy and transport policy. A great deal of empirical studies of CPI have concentrated on the energy sector and investigated how climate and energy policy have become integrated (e.g. Dupont and Oberthür, 2012), which indicates the strong ties between CPI and EnPI. While investigating the interrelationships between EPI, CPI and EnPI is likely to help us obtain a clearer understanding of each of these concepts individually, the conceptual overlaps are also challenging and warrant enhanced attention when operationalizing EPI, CPI and EnPI (see Schmidt and Fleig, this issue). Given our primary research focus on the normative commitment of IGOs to EPI, together with our secondary research interest, seeking to contrast the IGOs’ commitment to EPI, CPI and EnPI, we are confident to provide a contribution to the literature.

Which characteristics of an IGO increase its likelihood to make a normative commitment to EPI? Do environment-related IGOs commit themselves to integrate environmental policy with concerns regarding climate change and/or energy? What is the ratio between the IGOs’ normative commitments to EPI relative to CPI and EnPI? To address these questions, we examine data for 78 IGOs active in different fields of global governance. The database is comprised of statements that are integral parts of the respective IGO’s primary law texts such as agreements, conventions or treaties.

The remainder of this paper unfolds as follows. We first briefly discuss what policy studies can gain from the analytical lens adopted by this study. Next, we move on to the theoretical framework and develop empirically testable hypotheses. Subsequently, we delve into the details of the IGOs included in the analysis and explain their characteristics, followed by clarifications on the coding of the data. In a next step, we present and discuss our empirical findings. The paper closes with a summary of our most important insights and offers some concluding remarks.

2. What policy studies can learn from studying intergovernmental organizations

In this study, we concentrate on how legal documents of IGOs reflect the form of policy integration to which certain IGOs are committed. IGOs are organizations that consist of states only, or states and other IGOs, and which are established by treaties signed by lawful representatives of the national governments and IGOs that are members to them (Pevehouse et al., 2004). As the individual members must ratify the membership treaty, we presume that their interests determine which themes an IGO engages in (see Abbott and Snidal, 1998).

While IGOs have originally been the subject of studies in International Relations (e.g. Van de Graaf, 2013), they have increasingly become a topic of interest to policy studies (e.g. Fergusson and Yeates, 2014; Jordan et al., 2015; Stone and Ladi, 2015). Policy ideas are an important concept for linking IGOs to domestic policymaking in the individual countries. According to Fergusson and Yeates (2014), IGOs are forums where policy ideas are generated, which subsequently have an impact on the outcome of domestic policy processes. From this perspective, and as already pointed out by Biermann et al. (2009), Nilsson et al. (2009) and Oberthür (2009), studying IGOs offers valuable insights into the origin of ideas about EPI and other forms of policy integration. In addition, adopting an analytical lens that concentrates on IGOs is instructive for learning about how the corresponding policy ideas on policy integration have diffused across countries and/or international organizations (see, e.g., Jacob et al., 2008) and reached other actors involved in international regimes (see Hale and Held, 2011). In other words, from the perspective of policy studies, we can conceive IGOs to be relevant actors at the agenda-setting stage of the domestic policy processes, which may result in the adoption and implementation of innovative policy instruments such as EPI, CPI or EnPI (see Persson et al., this issue).

We consider the role of IGOs to be limited in determining the exact form and scope of policy integration ‘on the ground’ as IGOs often just acknowledge the need for operational activities but do not propose concrete steps. The outcome of the corresponding domestic policy process can, in principle, lead to a wide range of policy approaches by national governments to implement different types of policy integration (see, e.g., Jacob et al., 2008; Nilsson and Persson, 2017; Tosun and Leininger, 2017). While this aspect lies outside the purview of this study, we are confident to provide a point of departure for future research on the role of IGOs for starting and shaping domestic policy processes and how these affect the forms of policy integration eventually embraced and implemented by national governments.

3. Theoretical considerations and hypotheses

In this study, our foremost endeavor is to explain the IGOs’ normative commitment to EPI. This means that even though we are also interested in CPI and EnPI, the scope of our theoretical reasoning is limited to exploring which characteristics of IGOs are likely to increase their likelihood to commit themselves to EPI. We selected IGOs as the unit of analysis because of the statement by Nilsson et al. (2009, p. 338) that the sectorization of policies remains strong in international organizations, but that pressures have been mounting in the last few years to integrate different policy areas.

The International Relations literature provides numerous explanations for the design of IGOs. In this study, we consider EPI to represent one dimension of the IGOs’ design – this point will become more plausible in the next sections when we turn to the coding of the data. The design of IGOs is, *inter alia*, the outcome of the characteristics of its membership base (see Tallberg et al., 2016), its voting rules (see Blake and Payton, 2015), and the preferences and strategies of bureaucrats working in the IGOs (see Johnson and Urpelainen, 2014).

While we are aware of the rich literature in International Relations, we advance an argument here that originates from the intersection

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