Reflecting on mainstreaming through environmental appraisal in times of financial crisis — From 'greening' to 'pricing'?

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ABSTRACT

The issue of mainstreaming has witnessed a revival over the last few years, not least because the latest financial crisis has triggered a renewed enthusiasm and a remarkable comeback amongst policy-making and environmental appraisal (EA) communities. Traditionally, environmental mainstreaming is linked to ideas of (environmental) integration and to the 'greening' of public policies. Yet, more recent mainstreaming efforts are building on the idea that the achievement of economic growth and of social well-being is not only dependent upon the protection of the environment, but on the fact that the environment should be valued as a source of goods and a provider of services, as well. In this context and despite the many shortcomings that EA has experienced as a mainstreaming tool over the last two decades, calls for EA to engage with ecosystem services and incorporate pricing valuations in its approach to mainstreaming are emerging, raising questions about the role and purpose of EA as an environmental mainstreaming tool.

This paper aims to reflect on the role of EA as a mainstreaming tool, in terms of the extent to which it is mainstreaming the environment into policies for sustainable development and changing 'the mainstream' by breaking down the false dichotomy of environment and (economic) development. If mainstreaming through EA was to incorporate both greening and pricing logics, could EA be more effective in reframing the environment and development as correlated variables rather than competing variables?

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1. Introduction

The idea of 'mainstreaming' has witnessed a revival in recent years. Triggered by the recent global financial crisis, mainstreaming is emerging as an instrument for rationalising finances and policies and for responding to the failure of sectoral approaches to transectoral and cross-cutting issues (Halpern et al., 2008). These include the environment and sustainability. Revived interests in this concept can be seen at the international (TEEB, 2010), European (European Communities, 2007; Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2010) and national levels, with countries such as the UK (Defra, 2011) and South Africa (Sowman and Brown, 2006) having their own mainstreaming strategies. Further, interests in mainstreaming have emerged in a range of applied fields, such as biodiversity conservation (Cowling et al., 2008) and strategic planning (Williams, 2002).

The term 'mainstreaming' is particularly well-known in the public policy arena (Picciotto, 2002), including organisational performance evaluation (Gutner, 2005; Liebenthal, 2002) and policy evaluation (Fitzgerald, 2002; Taylor et al., 2001). Since it became prominent in the 1990s other terms have come to the fore. Within the context of environmental mainstreaming, the most notable terms are the 'greening'

of public policy or 'environmental integration', particularly through the 'integration principle' (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2010). Analogies between 'mainstreaming' and 'integration' led Jordan and Schout (2006) to question whether the idea of mainstreaming is in reality 'old wine in a new bottle'. In effect, the revival of environmental mainstreaming is reminiscent of debates that took place in the 1990s, where the idea of environmental policy integration (EPI) was presented in Europe as an alternative strategy to the traditional 'end of pipe' approach, which looked at the environment as a policy add-on, resulting in high economic costs and little environmental improvements (Lenschow, 2002). Through EPI, the environment was positioned at the heart of policy-making across different sectoral departments (Hertin and Berkhout, 2003; Russel and Jordan, 2007), and different appraisal types emerged to inform (Owens et al., 2004) and/or to test (de Ridder, 2006) a range of political motives and behaviours (Turpenny et al., 2009). Difficulties in agreeing on a common understanding of what the environmental integration principle meant and on what it entailed led to failure of its application (Lenschow, 2002), and to the introduction of mainstreaming as a European policy instrument (Halpern et al., 2008).

By mobilising actors and resources across departments in different policy areas, mainstreaming was introduced to foster policy change and re-orient policy-making towards more environmentally sustainable outcomes. Following a post-positivist stance, it stresses the importance of knowledge (Radaelli, 1995), underlying the political nature of policy development (Turpenny et al., 2009) through learning paradigms

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(Adelle and Weiland, 2012; Radaelli, 2009). During its first decade of existence, mainstreaming failed however to create a sense of collective responsibility towards the environment (Halpern et al., 2008). The more recent revival of mainstreaming encompasses the idea that the achievement of economic growth and societal well-being is dependent upon the protection and enhancement of environmental resources (Defra, 2011), recognising therefore that the environment is both, a source of goods and services to use and an asset to enhance. This understanding stems particularly from evaluation practices of policies in development assistance, given the extent to which developing countries are dependent on environmental assets and are vulnerable to environmental problems, hazards, risks and impacts (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2009; see for example, European Communities, 2007; GEF, 2008; TEEB, 2010); and from the recent take-up of ecosystem services based economic valuations (de Groot et al., 2010; Fish, 2011; von Haaren and Albert, 2011).

Understanding the interdependencies between economically viable, socially responsible and acceptable development and the environment has become paramount in recent years. The revival of interests in mainstreaming ideas and the recent financial crisis suggest that the environment should be the starting point for stimulating both growth and development. In the UK, for example, the government has launched the 'Mainstreaming Sustainable Development' package through which it expects to 'sustainability-proof' its policies, "by making sure they help to deliver sustainable economic growth, improve ... quality of life and protect ... [the] natural environment" (Defra, 2011). If more environmentally and socially 'appropriate' development is to be pursued, then mainstreaming strategies should lie at the heart of policy- and decision-making for sustainable development. This should occur at different levels and stages, and by the different actors involved in the policy-making process. This means integrating the environment into development decisions to ensure that environmental assets are safeguarded and potential impacts are taken into account. It also means integrating the environment into those organisations that drive development to facilitate organisational and cultural change, foster learning and the reorientation of policies towards more sustainable outcomes (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2009; Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2010).

One of the mechanisms through which environmental mainstreaming is delivered is environmental appraisal (EA). It is described by the mainstreaming literature as a tool for providing information and analysis that creates "a system of environmental safeguards" and that "tends to focus on problems" (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2009: 20; IIED, 2007). As sustained by the appraisal literature, EA also has a role to play in promoting the development of values that foster greater social responsibility, and that could initiate a process of long-term change and transformational learning towards more sustainable and environmentally conscious patterns of development (Jha-Thakur et al., 2009; Kørnøv and Thissen, 2000; Owens et al., 2004; Wilkins, 2003). On this basis, EA has the potential to fulfil both mainstreaming aims: the processes by which environmental considerations are integrated into organisations' values, changing norms and practices; and the processes by which environmental considerations are integrated into policies.

Yet, doubts over the effectiveness of EA as an environmental mainstreaming and policy integration tool have been raised (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2010). Scholarly studies suggest that the consideration of economic impacts still prevails over environmental and social impacts (Wilkinson et al., 2004), and that the integration of the environment may have even worsened over time (Wilkinson, 2007 cited in Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2010: 307), despite the existence of EA-type tools. Jordan et al. (2008) go as far as saying that EA has failed to promote a sense of ownership and engagement with environmental considerations across sectors and policy areas. According to Sowman and Brown (2006), in order for mainstreaming to succeed, cross-cutting issues or transectoral policies, such as those that concern the environment should be championed and owned across sectoral

departments, addressing the divide between those responsible for the delivery of development and those responsible for the protection and enhancement of the environment (Gazzola, 2011; Nitz and Brown, 2001; Owens et al., 2004; Stoeglehner et al., 2009). As argued by Sager (2001: 200), when economic interests are at stake, both policy-making and EA processes, become "distorted". There is no doubt that EAs are political; they "are often used to support, oppose or mitigate controversial projects" (Wilkins, 2003: 404), or viewed as an anti-development tool (Bartlett and Kurian, 1999; Gazzola, 2008a,b). Whilst their political nature is well-acknowledged (Gazzola et al., 2004; Gezelius and Refsgaard, 2007; Richardson, 2005), for Turpenny et al. (2009) there has been little research investigating the politics and the motivations underlying the application of EA. In their review of policy integration practices of the past twenty years, the authors emphasise the need to develop links between "the policy and politics of policy appraisal", by exploring "research *of* policy appraisal with research *for* policy-making" (Turpenny et al., 2009: 649).

On this basis, this paper attempts to develop a deeper understanding *of* the policy mainstream and of the potentials of EA as a mainstreaming technique *for* policy-making. More in detail, in light of the recent and ongoing financial crisis, it aims to reflect on the role and purposes of EA as a mainstreaming and advocacy tool for the environment, in terms of the extent to which it can challenge the deeply rooted beliefs in economic growth and readjust and converge environmental and developmental goals towards more sustainable outcomes. This is done by acknowledging the many shortcomings that mainstreaming through EA has experienced to date and the policy, politics and underlying motives influencing the formulation and application of mainstreaming endeavours through EA. The following sections contextualise the discussion further, exploring and reflecting on the concept of mainstreaming and of mainstreaming through EA using reviews of public policy, policy evaluation and EA literatures.

2. Understanding *of* the policy mainstream

Definitions of mainstreaming outside its policy application are difficult to find. From an environmental perspective the World Bank (2009) defines mainstreaming as "the integration of environmental concerns into macroeconomic and sectoral interventions". UNEP (2009: 3) defines mainstreaming as an instrument for adaptive governance and creative policy-making aimed at addressing the environmental, social and economic challenges that arose from the latest financial and economic crisis. Regardless of the policy context in which it is used, mainstreaming refers to the act of integrating a perspective into policies, where the perspective mainstreamed is representing a view(s), idea(s) or opinion(s) in competition or in confrontation to the 'mainstream[1]'.

Picciotto (2002) explains what a policy mainstream is further, by making an analogy evoking the aquatic meaning of the second half of the term, i.e. *stream*. He suggests that adopting mainstreaming attitudes implies "going with the *flow*", following the "major *current* of opinion", minimising the risks of confrontation and maximising the "benefits from social approval" (Picciotto, 2002: 322). He goes on to acknowledge that the mainstream can be *dynamic* and *tumultuous*, as well. Just like a stream can be fed by different tributaries, policies can be challenged by different ideas and beliefs and influenced by different organisational norms and practices. Yet the mainstream can also be more or less *turbulent* depending on changes in the *flow* and *ebb* that sustain it, just like policy-making processes can be vulnerable to changes induced through external reforms, such as public law or policy (Sykes, 2008) or internal organisational reforms, such as changes in roles, strategies, conventions, forms of operation, structures and wider organisational cultures (Gazzola et al., 2011; Müller and Siebenhüner,

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[1] The Oxford English Dictionary defines "mainstream" as the "ideas and opinions that are thought to be normal because they are shared by most people; the people whose ideas and opinions are most accepted". See http://www.oed.com.