



Mainstreaming climate adaptation in Switzerland: How the national adaptation strategy is implemented differently across sectors

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ABSTRACT

Due to few comparative studies, explanations for differences in adaptation mainstreaming between sectors remain widely unclear. The article analyzes how adaptation mainstreaming was approached during the development of the Swiss National Adaptation Strategy and to what extent adaptation objectives were mainstreamed into sectoral policies. The analysis reveals that in Switzerland, adaptation objectives are integrated more substantially into sectoral policies when they overlap with primary sectoral objectives but generally backing by organizational and procedural measures is lacking. The results suggest a similar pattern for adaptation mainstreaming as for EPI: While policy frameworks such as strategies are adopted rather easily, a move towards more binding measures that interfere with sectoral policy-making and the existing institutional structure is much more challenging. In contrast to environmental concerns, climate change impacts are expected to be considered more substantially resulting in a more substantive mainstreaming of adaptation objectives and measures on a sectoral level. As these measures might negatively affect other sectors, the main challenge of adaptation mainstreaming is to consistently address the cross-cutting nature of adaption and to establish procedures to coordinate sectoral measures in order to avoid such negative externalities.

1. Introduction

Concerns over the severe impacts of climate change have increased worldwide within the last decade. Hence, adaptation to climate change impacts is regarded as an “inevitable reaction to climate change” (De Gier et al., 2009: 32) by most governments. In this scope, adaptation mainstreaming (or the integration of climate change adaptation policy) has now become a specific focus of both public officials and scientific experts. Adaptation mainstreaming is, in general terms, referred to as taking into account climate change adaptation policy objectives in other policies and to recognize and address inconsistencies (Brouwer et al., 2013; Swart et al., 2009). Previous studies have provided overviews of how governments (intend to) tackle climate change (Bauer et al., 2012; Biesbroek et al., 2010; Swart et al., 2009). These studies basically reveal that adaptation mainstreaming is widely accepted as a policy principle but provide only very general information on how adaptation mainstreaming is adopted in different sectoral contexts. Although focusing on mitigation, studies on Climate Policy Integration indicate for adaptation mainstreaming substantial variance regarding the implementation of adaptation measures, priorities, and the perception of potential conflicts and synergies across countries and sectors (Mickwitz et al., 2009; Van Bommel and Kuindersma, 2008). Moreover,

it has been suggested that adaptation mainstreaming may manifest in very different approaches in different sectors (Persson and Klein, 2009) which was corroborated by a more recent review study (see the overview in Runhaar et al., 2017). Despite a broad range of empirical studies on climate adaptation mainstreaming, comparative analyses have received only limited attention (Persson et al. this issue). Thus, it is still an open question how adaptation mainstreaming is addressed in a broad variety of sectors, how such differences could be explained, and how issues of coherence, synergies, and contradictions between sectors are addressed.

This paper contributes to this debate by addressing the following question: How has adaptation mainstreaming been addressed in the development of the Swiss National Adaptation Strategy and the sectoral strategies, respectively, and how can different levels of adaptation mainstreaming in the sectors be explained? Switzerland can be considered as a typical example in its approach to adaptation mainstreaming. As in other countries, adaptation mainstreaming is considered as a key element in National Adaptation Strategies—the prevailing approach to climate change adaptation governance (Bauer et al., 2012; Biesbroek et al., 2010; EEA, 2014). In this context, adaptation mainstreaming is mainly promoted top-down by the executive branch of government but lacks strong formal requirements or a strong

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regulatory framework (Swart et al., 2009). Focusing on one country and on the activities related to its National Adaptation Strategy (NAS), the subsequent analysis aims to control for the institutional context and can therefore identify key factors affecting the level of mainstreaming between sectors. Thus, the Swiss case can also have implications beyond its national context, in particular for states that approach adaptation mainstreaming for a broad range of sectors by a NAS and with similar characteristics of the involved sectors. However, limitations of this research strategy occur on the one side regarding a different government architecture in terms of departments and agencies responsible for sectoral policy-making and, on the other side, by the strong sectoral approach in Swiss policy-making (Kriesi and Trechsel, 2008) in contrast to joined-up approaches (Bogdanor, 2005).

The paper is structured in the following manner. Adopting concepts and approaches that have been developed in the more extensive Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) literature, a framework for the empirical analyses of adaptation mainstreaming is developed. Its applicability is then illustrated by analyzing how adaptation mainstreaming was adopted during the development of the Swiss NAS. The paper concludes with some recommendations regarding the future analysis of adaptation mainstreaming and for further enhancing adaptation mainstreaming.

2. Analytical framework

A majority of studies and reports suggests a conceptual similarity between EPI and adaptation mainstreaming (e.g., Brouwer et al., 2013; Gupta and Van Der Grijp, 2010; Mickwitz et al., 2009; Nilsson and Nilsson, 2005; Runhaar et al., 2017; Runhaar et al., 2014; Swart et al., 2009). Many scholars have adopted the “principled priority” conceptualization for EPI by Lafferty and Hovden (2003), though others rather follow the “rational” interpretation (Adelle and Russel, 2013). These (or very similar) concepts have also been used to distinguish between different levels of integration or mainstreaming for empirical studies (Adelle and Russel, 2013; Brouwer et al., 2013; Jordan and Lenschow, 2008, 2010). Regarding the threefold typology “coordination” refers to avoiding contradictory sectoral policies or compensating for adverse consequences for other policies and is considered as initial starting point, “harmonization”—aiming at bringing adaptation objectives on equal terms of—implies a more substantial level of mainstreaming. Finally, “prioritization” aims at a more fundamental change and therefore a “strong” level (see Persson et al. this issue; Runhaar et al., 2014). Table 1 provides an overview of the three concepts, their key characteristics, and the implications for the level of adaptation mainstreaming.

Assessing different levels of mainstreaming or integration has been the main challenge in the study of policy integration and mainstreaming (Candel and Biesbroeck, 2016; Runhaar et al., 2017). Previous studies referred to the analysis of particular policy measures (Jordan and Lenschow, 2008). On the one hand, several studies suggest that the more measures are adopted, the higher the level of mainstreaming or integration (Briassoulis, 2005; Lafferty and Hovden, 2003; OECD, 2002; Swart et al., 2009). On the other hand, it has been emphasized that only measures that challenge and alter the institutional structure (e.g., mandatory consultation, veto rights) indicate higher levels (Jacob et al., 2008). Following Persson (2004), three different

approaches to categorize such measures distinguished: (1) normative, (2) organizational, and (3) procedural (Jacob et al., 2008; Jordan, 2002; Jordan and Lenschow, 2008). Subsequently, each approach is briefly discussed with a specific focus on the corresponding adaptation mainstreaming measures (an overview is presented in Table 2 below; for the need of adopting the framework to the integration problem under study see Candel and Biesbroeck, 2016). While Wamsler and Pauleit (2016) propose a different categorization, the various measures are covered by both categorizations.

The normative approach refers to the development of strategies, high-level commitments, or adjustments in laws or constituencies. It is expected that such measures initiate further reform efforts, provide guidance and leadership for policy-making, or support implementation. Regarding the normative approach, adaptation frameworks such as national adaptation strategies or action plans still play a key role in climate change adaptation policy-making (Bauer et al., 2012; Biesbroeck et al., 2010; Swart et al., 2009).

The organizational approach addresses the governmental and administrative structure (Jacob et al., 2008). It entails the size of staff, the allocation of financial resources, the establishment of specialized units across departments, the establishment of interdepartmental units, and stakeholder interaction. For adaptation mainstreaming mainly the establishment of adaptation units across departments, the coordination of organizations, interdepartmental information exchange and cooperation platforms, staff training, and stakeholder workshops have been proposed (Bauer et al., 2012; Persson and Klein, 2009; Swart et al., 2009).

Finally, the procedural approach intends to alter current decision-making and information exchange procedures. On the one hand, it includes altering the institutional rules in the political system, such as establishing interdepartmental cooperation, consultation, or veto rights. On the other hand, the procedural approach entails adjustments to existing or the implementation of new instruments across sectors, and new or modified reporting and monitoring practices (Candel and Biesbroeck, 2016). As climate change adaptation is framed as a policy problem that should be addressed in established sectoral policies, the use of existing routine institutional procedures (e.g., interdepartmental consultation) has been prominently suggested (e.g., Bauer et al., 2012; Dovers and Hezri, 2010; Swart et al., 2009). Moreover, a broad variety of specific adaptation instruments were developed. Among those instruments are climate change screening, climate risk screening, climate proofing, climate risk management, vulnerability assessments, and various guidance tools (OECD, 2009; Olhoff and Schaer, 2010; Persson and Klein, 2009; UNDP-UNEP, 2011).

Analyzing adaptation mainstreaming according to the three approaches implies that normative measures indicate lower levels, and organizational and procedural measures higher levels of mainstreaming. However, Jacob et al. (2008) argue that—in the case of EPI—this may be misleading due to the often fairly undemanding design of procedural and organizational measures (see also Candel and Biesbroeck, 2016). Similar design issues have been reported for adaptation mainstreaming measures. For instance, procedural measures are often established only on a voluntary and temporary basis (Bauer et al., 2012). Thus, a framework for the analysis of adaptation mainstreaming has to assess each measure regarding its implications for the level of mainstreaming. Subsequently, selected measures and their consequences

Table 1
Typology of adaptation mainstreaming.

Concept	Coordination	Harmonization	Prioritization
Key characteristics	Cross-sectoral coordination to avoid contradictions and negative spillovers and to realize synergies.	Inclusion of climate change adaptation objectives on equal terms with sectoral objectives.	Favoring adaptation objectives over sectoral policies; redesign and reorganization of policies and decision-making processes from the perspective of climate change adaptation.
Level	weak	medium	strong

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