

System Theorizing and Environmental Governance in the EU

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Introduction

Although the conceptualization of society as a system has a long history in sociology, system theorizing has achieved sound scientific developments in approaches like functionalism and neo-functionalism, historical and Marxian theories, and actor-oriented dynamic system theories. When addressing governance issues, this conceptual complex allows sociological research to unveil and explore the social dynamics that underlie agential strategies, structural arrangements and systemic change. Although it is not the purpose of this paper to comprehensively review all the major contributions to system theories in sociology, it will attempt to draw on their most relevant aspects in order to adequately frame the issue of governance, especially in the case of European environmental governance networks.

This paper first explores how system theories conceptualize and contribute to explain governance arrangements in the field of environmental policy-making processes. It then draws on the results of a cross-national research project (Paraskevopoulos, Getimis and Rees, 2006) on adaptation to EU multi-level governance to provide insights on how different national socio-political frameworks interact with the European polity model and bring about diverse institutional learning patterns and governance arrangements in the field of environmental policy.

System theories

Tom R. Burns' (2006) entry on System Theories in the Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology defines "a system [as] a set of objects together with relationships among the objects, [which] implies that a system has properties, functions, and dynamics distinct from its constituent objects and relationships." The author then goes on to note that the two core and interconnected elements common to all system theories in sociology are, on the one hand, complexity and interdependency, and, on the other, the "burning ambition" to achieve a

metatheory (or supertheory, in the words of Niklas Luhmann) of social phenomena.

Within the three main schools of system theories identified by Burns — functionalism and neo-functionalism, historical and Marxian theories, and actor-oriented dynamic system theories — five particular contributions will be discussed: Parsons' AGIL model and power theory; Luhmann's ecological communication approach; Wallerstein's world system theory; Buckley's morphogenetic program; and Burn's actor-system dynamics and rule system theory.

Parsons' AGIL model and power theory.

According to Parsons (1967 and 1970), the aim of social theory is to develop a meta-theoretical complex that would eventually be applicable to any given social phenomena. In the course of pursuing this aim, his own work sought inspiration in such different traditions as Freud's psychoanalysis, Malinowski's anthropology, Durkheim's functionalism and Weber's comparative institutionalism. Aiming for its universal application, the desired wide-scope and multi-informed analytical approach to social theorization led him to a considerable level of abstraction.

Building on the continuum from acts to action to action system to social system, Parsons' AGIL conceptual model constitutes an analytical instrument based on the premise that any given system incorporates four functions — adaptation, goal-attainment, integration and latency. In social systems, these are assigned to specific sub-systems, respectively economy, polity, societal community and socialization. Adaptation refers to the need to manage the relation between the system's needs and the resources it can access; economic actors such as businesses would be the contemporary institutional correlative. Goal-attainment relates to the need to set a common direction for the system and to manage priorities; governments fulfil this function in present societies. Integration mediates conflict and ensures conformity to social norms; institutions like law, regulations and courts play this role. Latency relates to the need of perpetuating values and basic

principles across society; this is achieved through socialization within institutions such as religion, family or school. Moreover, Parsons argues, each of these sub-systems can be continuously decomposed into more specialized analytical levels, in a way that the same four functions would reemerge.

On the other hand, the author suggests that four media of interchange flow within and between the sub-systems - money, power, influence and value commitments. Parsons (1963 and 1964) conceptualizes power as a commodity that can be traded for other commodities, e.g. votes for political commitments in representative democracies. The fact is that power «behaves» much like money value as it can assume the form of a deposit or a loan; hereon, there is an equilibrium issue between deposited (or existent) power and assumed commitments, and just as a bank would not be able to honour all its obligations at the same time, governments, for instance, cannot fulfil all the commitments it assumed before its constituency. Moreover, in modern societies, all social actors have some degree of power, insofar as rights have been institutionalized; particularly in Welfare states, this is evident in the universal and constitutional rights to health, education, employment, freedom of speech and association, etc. However, Parsons points out two types of power dynamics in social systems, namely, the economic and the political. Economic power is, in our interpretation, closely related to the Marxian concept of capital, to the extent that it “is focused on the possession of means to maximize advantage in a range of alternatively possible exchange transactions” (Parsons, 1991: 85), a feature that is socially harnessed through legal and regulatory institutions. Political power, contrastively, relates to the degree a system can control relationships within it, thus having a more qualitative — or hierarchical — character than quantitative, as in the case of economic power.

With this «frame of reference» in mind, it is of particular interest to analyse how the sustainable development paradigm is incorporated into the social system. One can trace back the emergence of environmental concern in society to the values system, as it has been inspired by scientific disciplines such as philosophy, geography, anthropology and ecology. In fact, a directional flow is identifiable in the system integration process of environmental issues across the AGIL conceptual frame. From its formation as a value in specific socialization settings (L), it evolves into the integration system by way of social movements and actors striving to institutionalize it through normative arrangements (I). As environmental values grow more and more as a societal imperative, the polity structure has to further accommodate them, thus rearranging the goal-attainment system (G). This new arrangement then compels the economy to adapt to these new system priorities, commitments, norms and values and such

adaptational dynamics take form, generically, in new strategies, new production models and new markets (A).

However, one can unveil the exact opposite direction of flow by intersecting this analytical perspective with that of power systems. As Parsons points out, economic power is systemically prevented from «undue influence» over political power. But since social structure entails dysfunction and conflict, in situations of diminished community power, economic interests (A) are able to contaminate the polity system (G) by influencing the original set of common goals. In turn, this rearrangement eventually leads to more or less extensive institutionalization of cognate normative frames (I). Ultimately, the combination of the three media of interchange — money (as marketing strategies), power (as political decisions) and influence (as norms of conduct) will carry changes to the fourth media — value commitment.

Parsons’ multi-level multi-factor analytical complex, namely the AGIL frame - theory of power intersection, represents a useful tool to address contemporary political and social issues, such as the environment and sustainable development, which rest to a large extent in the sphere of contention between economic and political power. According to Hewson and Sinclair (1999: 32), Parsons’ legacy to global governance approaches rests on the attention paid to patterns of societal decision-making and its interdependency with shared values, in a way that “order emerges out of consensus regarding governing rather than the legitimation of a top-down authoritative government.”

Luhmann’s ecological communication approach. Whereas Parsons saw individuals and their actions as the fundamental units of social systems, for Luhmann (1995), the indivisible social element is communication. This brought forward a different conceptualization of social theory, where systems are no longer analytically divided in functional terms but on communicational grounds. Luhmann’s theory of society comprises four different epistemological and theoretical complexes — *autopoiesis*, a biology-fathered concept which here refers to the reproduction of the system’s elements, the maintenance of its boundaries and the informational interaction with its environment; *communication theory*, which aims at analysing the social dimension of the system; *evolution theory*, in a Neo-Darwinist perspective, which concerns structural changes over time; and *differentiation theory*, which is related to the process of formation of new systems.

Communication is therefore the most important element in this theoretical design. A system is defined by the boundaries it has with its environment, and by selecting and processing only meaningful information, it reduces overall

complexity. In this sense, interaction between different systems only occurs in the form of information exchange. This is particularly important for sustaining the macro-system, as each part depends on the functioning of the others, not in a material sense but by incorporating no other elements than information from them. In this sense, society is the most inclusive system formation, unlike the simpler types (interactional and organizational systems), and is hence conceived as a unique «world society».

In the process of system differentiation, new communicational needs arise, bringing about new generalized symbolic media in order to «translate» meanings across systems. If language is considered the traditional «semantic device», its counterparts in modern society, the author claims, are such as power, money, love and truth. Moreover, differentiation is a systemic response to increasing complexity in dealing with the environment, and it occurs in the form of either “a series, an order of rank, the difference between centre and periphery or the differentiation of function systems” (Luhmann, 1995: 19). Modern society is in this respect defined by functionally differentiated worldwide macro-systems, such as law, science, mass media, the polity or the economy.

In this context, it is important to note the essential divide between environment, which encompasses all material existence, including human individuals, and social systems, which are solely made of communicational activity. According to Mathur (2003), ecological communication¹ is defined as social communication about “exposure to ecological dangers”, which is to say that only socially meaningful, «resonant» ecological phenomena are in fact processed — as information — by society and therefore bare an impact on the social system. This approach to the natural realm is however (re)produced by a society dialectically changing the definition of itself and of its environment. It so happens that natural activity forces society to respond and in this sense, ecological menaces are but a socially dysfunctional response to this activity. In light of Luhmann’s Neo-Darwinist evolutionary theory, the incapacity of society to resolve a system/environment clash represents an adaptational by-pass, a dismissive selection process.

On the other hand, society is composed of subsystems, which in turn represent environments for one another, as they define themselves as being unique and different from all externalities. The question is then that of the difference in claims about the environment made by different subsystems and in different communication media and codes. Luhmann (1989: 26) offers the following example: science (a subsystem) can produce *improved*

knowledge but its real universal value depends on the resonance it finds, for instance, in the polity, the economy (other subsystems) or in society (the system). This sheds light onto the contemporary contradiction between the continuously sustained anthropocentric view of the world and its scientific disclaiming. Luhmann then proceeds to develop the concept of «second-order cybernetics», by which he means modern social systems develop multi-level systemic self-reflexivity in order to improve communication and thus enabling society to more accurately and holistically address ecological challenges.

The problem is also relevant in inter-system communication, as Luhmann (1989: 48) observes: “the internal dynamics and sensitivity of function systems like politics, economy, science, or law are disturbed by environmental problems. Sometimes this happens directly as when resources dry up or catastrophes threaten. But it also occurs indirectly via socially mediated interdependencies when, for example, the economy is forced to react to legal precepts even if it would attain better results following its own ideas.”

Despite the shortcomings attributed by many to Luhmann’s theoretical complex, its relevance for the sociological approach to environmental governance cannot be dismissed. In fact, the rise and consolidation of the sustainable development paradigm within global governance patterns are better grasped by thoroughly examining the dialectics between different appropriations of the environment that different, opposing or conflicting segments of society make, and by observing the dynamics and mechanisms of interest, influence and power at play.

Wallerstein’s world system theory. Both socialist and capitalist ideologies have long acknowledged the importance of economic and political hegemony to ensure the viability of their respective societal programs. The latter has prevailed, as neoclassical economic theories and *modernization* perspectives remain the cornerstones of contemporary worldwide polity, all the while being unable to bring about convergent development. One theoretical approach to these macro-dynamics and to find meaning for the sociological realm has been developed and structured into the form of Immanuel Wallerstein’s World System Theory (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980 and 1989).

World System Theory envisages the world-system as an interactive system with “all of the economic, political, social, and cultural relations among the people of the earth” (Chase-Dunn and Grimes, 1995: 389), setting the distinction between three types of countries — core, peripheral and semi-peripheral. As a theoretical construct, it is strongly based on historical analysis of world-wide evolution

¹ Cf. Mathur’s Chapter IV on “Niklas Luhmann’s Communicative Systems Theory Framework”

of nations, states, economies and civilizations, looking deeply into issues such as modes of accumulation; core-periphery mobility; population, technology, market and labour-capital relations trends; and long- and short-term economic cycles.

The present historical moment, characterised by the speeding of the globalization wave in all social domains — economy, politics, culture and science — can be more accurately understood resorting to such an approach. Despite the magnitude of that trend, its equalitarian pledge is denied by the sensible disparities in human welfare both in different parts of the world and inside the same nation. World System Theory's comprehensive interpretation pinpoints the power hierarchy that allows core states to continuously control peripheral ones, under seemingly fair market rules that in fact exploit labour in weak countries, thus transferring surplus wealth to the core.

Amidst this influence network, there is some degree of mobility, as some states have been able to move upwards (the US being the paradigmatic example). In a market economy/consumer society paradigm, the core, formerly grounded on military superiority, is nowadays sustained by technological, industrial, marketing and military innovation. Moreover, in-between the two extremities, this approach places semi-peripheral states that combine aspects of both. According to Wallerstein (1976), acting both as the periphery for the core and the core for the periphery, these states are considered transitory stages between the two, and are characterized by a mix of particular labour composition, economic position and political instability. Situations of oversupply in the core provide semi-peripheries an advantage in power of choice as buyers, which entails political adaptation, and often agitation. However, this analysis was made in a very different world scenario than today's, where the socialist block was still a major world player. Nonetheless, even within contemporary Europe, this type of approach to transnational political bargaining processes can be of extreme value.

More recently, Tayfur (2003: 17) notices that “state policies in the semiperiphery can immediately and directly affect the accumulation of capital by controlling the flows of goods and capital across frontiers, controlling the internal work force, taxation, redistributive expenditures and expenditures on social overheads, etc.”, which leads economic actors to greatly depend on governmental action. On the other hand, Chase-Dunn's approach considers semi-peripheries to be “fertile locations for the emergence of new innovations and transformational actors” (Chase-Dunn, 2001: 594).

Buckley's morphogenetic program. In Walter Buckley's modern systems theory and morphogenetic program (Buckley, 1967 and 1998),

society appears as a complex adaptive system where agency and structure are interrelated in an uninterrupted dialectical process. Drawing on such diverse scientific disciplines as cybernetics, thermodynamics or generalized Darwinism, modern system theory focuses on socio-cultural regulation and control in terms of structural change (*morphogenesis*) and structural stability (*morphostasis*) processes. Social structure emerges from, and is sustained by, “patterned regularities of interaction” (Buckley, 1998: 175) based on rules and institutions that somewhat relate to the Parsonian AGIL systems of latency and integration. Generically, *morphogenesis* has historically evolved from a destructive type (violent conflict) into a more democratic type (self-regulative competition). However, one can argue that, as societies attain higher complexity levels, the increasing institutionalization of regulatory mechanisms and accommodation of more and more “information and motivational forces” (Buckley, 1998: 178) weaken change processes and strengthen *morphostasis*.

Social control is conceptualized as depending on two simultaneous processes, structural pre-programming and informational feedback error-regulation. The latter is of particular importance for understanding the dynamics involved in social goal-seeking, which again brings to mind the polity realm of the Parsonian system of goal attainment. Cybernetics provide a simple imagery of this process, which is here further simplified: goals and means are defined centrally, administratively transformed into outputs which affect the system and its environment; feedback information is centrally processed, goal-attainment is evaluated, and eventual corrective measures are taken.

Following the author's logic, power, authority and legitimacy are particularly important when focusing on institutionalization processes. One synthesizing approach to this is to define a continuum between authority and power, respectively defined as patterns of social control *with* and *without* general consent and informed understanding, and involving different degrees of consensus or dissent. Moreover, whereas power often refers to competitive goal orientation, authority is usually associated with cooperative goal orientation. Legitimacy, on the other hand, is itself an emergence of this complex systemic process, as a function of the existent structure, the pattern of individual and collective goal promotion and the social consensus, and is commonly found to be closer to authority than power. Democratization is therefore seen as a historical social quest for authority, “the institutionalization of a process of informed, consensual self-determination of the whole” (Buckley, 1998: 218).

Power, however, is not legitimized into authority by its mere institutionalization, as rules can be followed and roles played in very diverse manners, from the totally upholding to the unmindful to the totally

antagonistic. In this sense, any given social system in any given moment can be perceived as a system of authority by some and as a system of power by others. Similarly, one system can simultaneously have power-based subsystems (institutions, goals, values, etc.) and authority-based subsystems. This is easily recognized in the history of class struggles or in current public policy-making processes. One example provided by Buckley (1998: 232) is the influential role played by private corporations in today's polity. While some consider it the expression of institutionalized power, others see institutionalized authority. In fact, the types of goals pursued in these two processes are quite different, as power is driven by private interest and authority by collective goals.

Margaret Archer (1995 and 1996), on the other hand, when distinguishing cultural system from socio-cultural interaction, argues that however open or inconsistent the system is (and therefore vulnerable to change), transformation is ultimately determined by the distribution of power. If it is mainly held by «conservative» elements, actors or groups, change will not come about (*morphostasis*); if «progressive» or «revolutionary» forces prevail within socio-cultural interaction, the system is more likely — or even bound — to be transformed (*morphogenesis*). The author also develops the notion of agency *morphogenesis*, by which corporate agents (powerful and influential) and primary agents (powerless and uninfluential) interact, compelling the latter to «corporatize», and causing new social roles to emerge.

These analytical complexes ascribed to Modern System Theory lead previous approaches towards the understanding of action processes inside the social system, and of how these can influence either *morphogenic* or *morphostatic* systemic behaviour. Moreover, these perspectives allow for a more comprehensive notion of the interrelation between structure and agency — for long considered fundamental dichotomies in sociology — to the point of synthesis into a multipartite interactive social process.

Burn's actor-system dynamics and rule system theory. As a conceptual complex, Actor-System Dynamics Theory² distinguishes two major structural elements in social systems — social structures and physical or ecosystem structures, and a mid-way element between these two — socio-technical systems. On the agential side, it discriminates social agents from social action, as the former refers to reflective individual or collective agents in determined social positions or roles, and the latter to structured interaction processes. By synthesizing structure and agency in this manner, human activity

is considered as being simultaneously a product and a producer of social and physical structures, as they create, reproduce, transform, and destroy them. This interaction is mediated by social rule systems, which are dynamic social constructs that organize and regulate social activity, through institutionalized media and systems like values and laws, or family and social organizations.

In practice, this complex is formed of several theoretical contributions, as different empirical objects are addressed and models created, including a general theory of rule systems, theories of institutions and cultural formations, a theory of games and social interaction, a theory of consciousness, a theory of materiality and a theory of socio-cultural evolution.

Actor-System Dynamics Theory provides a framework for interpreting the dynamic social arrangements and forces at play, enabling an integrated approach of the multiple systems that influence and are influenced by social agents. Political regime, institutional structures, economic organization, scientific and technical knowledge, ecological environment as well as social movements are in fact both structuring of, and structured by, human action. Moreover, it is clear that the resulting configuration of society, as a set of «emergent properties», is not exactly the one social agents intended in the first place, but instead the result of complex interactions — ultimately, a compromise between different *agencies* that continuously struggle to reproduce or transform the *structure*.

Within the Actor-System-Dynamics theoretical complex, Rule System Theory³ holds centre-stage, as it addresses the dialectic role of, and processes involved in, interacting human agency within a structural configuration. Drawing from long and diverse traditions in multiple scientific disciplines, one can trace back these “social natures of human beings” to George Herbert Mead's concept of Self, made of the individualistic “I” and the social “me”. Other “reconciling” approaches to the agency-structure dichotomy are mostly recognized in Bourdieu's *habitus* and Giddens' *duality of structure*, both incorporating the concept of social rules.

Rules provide guidelines for behaviour, as they constrain and promote action, thus structuring a meaningful, recognizable and shared set of patterns of social interaction. On the basis of this set, actors are able to perceive, interpret and apprehend social phenomena, in a reflective process, and accordingly adapting their reactions and responses. On the other hand, these same actors are the formers and reformers of rules, thus raising the issue of rule change, where power plays a central role in organizing, regulating and enforcing them. Besides power struggles, rule change can come about from

² Cf. Dietz, Burns and Buttel, 1990; Burns and Dietz, 1992; Dietz and Burns, 1992; Burns, Baumgartner and DeVillé, 2002

³ Cf. Burns, and Dietz, 1992; Burns and Flam, 1987

continuous adaptation to the social situation, the overriding of formal by informal rules, the institutionalization process of abstract rules, ineffective performance of the current rule system, ecological material pressures or perceived advantages in incorporating new rules, even if dissonant with the established cultural system.

Agency also reveals itself by the selective (voluntary) adherence to and (socially enforced) compliance with the rule system or specific rules and norms. Adherence or compliance are normally distinguished in terms of voluntaristic and customary respect for rules, actors' social identity dependence on rules, acceptance of authoritative legitimacy, shared expectations, as well as material, social and situational benefits or losses.

As an evolutionary perspective within new institutionalism, Rule System Theory identifies the structure-agency-environment triangle as the essential frame in order to understand and to explain *morphostasis* and *morphogenesis* processes. Modern societies have complex rule systems that structure its activity, and individual or collective social actors occupying specific positions only have deep knowledge of particular parts of them. Elites have a more comprehensive understanding of the whole system, although only to some extent, or can more easily access information to that end. This entails the coexistence and overlapping of societal segments with different rule systems and institutional arrangements — *structural incoherence*.

Institutional transformation is then in part determined by the *agential power* that specific actors in the political, economic and social spheres exert on the established arrangement. *Institutional power*, on the other hand, refers to the top-down implementation of new rule systems, which is highly dependent on legitimacy conditions. Finally, *selective-environment power* determines the institutional arrangement inasmuch as existent material, ideal, legal and social resources simultaneously constrain the possibilities of action and are constrained, in terms of accessibility, by the rule system in place. Non resolved overlapping structural incoherence or structural competition can lead to institutional change, as actors conveying different rule systems will struggle to enforce their perspective.

However, the change produced by these processes is not as linear or straightforward as it may seem, as only part of the result of actions is intended. In fact, in addressing isolated elements of structural inefficiency or ineffectiveness, small changes can result, in the long run, in major transformation. Rule System Theory's conceptual diversity, situational flexibility and theoretical comprehensiveness allow us to address both macro realities like worldwide geopolitical arrangements and micro situations like day-to-day behavioural change.

Environmental governance

Although governance may be considered as old as governing itself, during the two last decades it has been the focus of particular attention by both the political realm and the scientific community. According to Kohler-Koch and Eising (1999: 5), within European political science, governance “is about the structured ways and means in which the divergent preferences of interdependent actors are translated into policy choices ‘to allocate values’, so that the plurality of interests is transformed into co-ordinated action and the compliance of actors is achieved.”

One of the main governance arrangements is found in the form of networks, whereby actors demonstrate a pragmatic vision of politics as a means for problem-solving and organized social subsystems participate in policy decision-making processes. On the other hand, the State is not conceived as authority, referee or mediator, but mostly as an activator of state and social actors, coordinating their diverse interests. Interaction is therefore characterized by multilateral negotiation and is confined to specific functional domains of policy, although encompassing different geographical levels (local, regional, national and supranational). According to Klijn (2008), governance networks represent the locus of formulation and implementation of policies, through a web of relations between state, private and societal actors.

At the European level, environmental governance has changed its pattern from a fragmented and legalist perspective to a network mode. Lenschow (1999: 46) states that “on the basis of the globally emerging new understanding of environmental protection as constituting the basis for economic development, the governance problem became identified as one of policy integration and learning”. This trend has pushed governments to broaden policy boundaries and to create networks that connect authorities and society. This in turn has had implications both in legitimacy and accountability of actors, as well as in facilitating and sustaining the policy-making process.

Global governance. Global sustainability awareness and concern are rising, as it permeates the discourse of many agents, the policies of many systems and the practices of many individuals. However, global sustainable development indexes are still far from being positive, as both environmental stresses and stressors indicators continue to grow (Burns and Witoszek, 2007). Socioeconomic equity indicators are not very different, as income differences between the richer and the poorer countries have not

improved significantly⁴. In a world system perspective, different agendas promoted by different agents come to conflict and it is their influential power and the degree of institutionalization each attains that ultimately determines their success. In this sense, global geopolitics can be seen as the battlefield where, simplistically put, strictly-economic-driven and holistic-oriented interests are fought for.

In general terms, true global sustainable development is seen as coming about through the progressive emergence of a universal model of global governance, as a complex, multi-level, multi-interest democratic network of rules, norms, institutions and agents. The fundamental argument for this perspective is that increasing social and environmental sustainability awareness worldwide, as well as global sharing of universal values and a sense of humanity oneness is driving the institutionalization process of such values into political and economical agendas and the formation of new governance arrangements. In fact, from the local to the global level, new movements have gained voice and new institutions have formed. Within the scope of the Oslo Sustainability Initiative, two scientific contributions to the reflection on a possible new global system have emerged. Martinelli (2005) proposes a *polyarchic model of global governance*, integrating worldwide UN-type organizations, regional EU-type unions and civil society community and market associations, thus accommodating both competitive and cooperative agential strategies, and highlighting the growing importance of scientific communities, as problem-solving strategies become more complex and interdisciplinary. Burns and Witoszek (2007) put forward a new *social-ecological order*, with renewed transversal ethics, stakeholder-reoriented economic prioritizing, organizational arrangements and technological innovation, socially and environmentally aligned governance systems, a global empowered scientific system, open-minded educational strategies, and a powerful innovative discourse on sustainable development.

In our view, sustainable development institutionalization as a global environmental governance arrangement faces not just current value systems and social structures, but also the active agency of contrasting interests actors as well as their consolidated structural power in the local, national and global scale. If environmental awareness appears to be growing in most parts of the world, the same is not clear as for the alleged universal humankind-unifying sentiment: European Social Survey data indicates an oscillating behaviour in the Schwartz's

universalism human value⁵ (4.81 in 2002, 4.77 in 2004 and 4.79 in 2006, in a 1-6 scale) and, according to International Social Survey Programme data, despite different tendencies across countries, nationalist and localist sentiments appear to be slightly increasing.

Inclusive Governance. Growing social concern for environmentally and socially sustainable and responsible consumption and behaviour has increased the pressure on the economic sector and, more precisely, on corporate end-user businesses, as they are the most exposed to public opinion. This pressure, in turn, tends to extend throughout the supply chain as social and environmental commitment has to be publicly displayed to a more and more knowledgeable and exacting civil society, both individually, as citizens and consumers, and collectively, as operational and advocacy NGOs and other civic organizations and «watchdogs».

In the context of the globalization of markets, the complexity of international political arrangements and the differentiation of national governmental approaches to economic regulation, businesses and industries are increasingly resorting to self-governing structures and layouts. According to de Man and Burns (2006 and 2008), these arrangements come to place in two levels and forms — business-to-business and industry-to-industry. In the former type, the focus is on a given product, as different private and social agents join to achieve, guarantee and demonstrate its sustainability. In the latter, the focus is on normative, standard-setting and regulatory structures, as private and social multi-level agents join to support sustainability throughout entire sectors and supply chains. The scopes, configurations, and statuses of such arrangements can vary widely, such as the expressions used to name them — partnership for sustainability, partnered governance, stakeholder governance, etc. For simplification purposes, we call them *inclusive governance*, as its most valuable and innovative feature is, in our opinion, the empowerment of traditionally neglected interests such as small economic agents, local communities and peripheral countries.

The authors associate the emergence of such arrangements with the need to ensure product quality in a globalized and, to some extent, uncontrolled producer community (namely in developing countries) as well as with the above mentioned public opinion reputation concerns. Accordingly, it is then suggested that mainly socially resonant issues are addressed as others, less likely to impact public opinion, are only tentatively and

⁴ In 1976, GDP per capita in Low Human Development countries was 4.14% of that in High Human Development ones; in 1987, that value was 3.24% and 4.64% in 2005 (United Nations Development Program). Similarly, GDI per capita in low income countries was 1.23% of that in high income ones in 2000 and 1.54% in 2005 (World Bank).

⁵ Cf. Schwartz, Shalom H. (2007), "Universalism Values and the Inclusiveness of Our Moral Universe", in *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 38, No. 6, pp. 711-728; Schwartz, Shalom H., Bilsky, Wolfgang (1990), "Toward a Theory of the Universal Content and Structure of Values: Extensions and Cross-Cultural Replications", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 58, No. 5, pp. 878-891.

hesitantly considered. Generally, the outcomes of such self-governing structures are assessed as limited, in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and legitimation. Effectiveness can be undermined by the relatively weak impact of consensus-based norms, the «instrumentalization» of partnerships by powerful economic actors, and its partial implementation in relation to the global market extension⁶. Efficiency problems usually relate to the time-consuming process of negotiation and the tendency to avoid conflictual issues. All the pointed problems entail credibility and legitimacy questions, as watchful segments of civil society and social movements depreciate their role.

In a more positive perspective, these experiences of inclusive governance arrangements are possibly the only currently available solution to mitigate the inexistence of proper regulatory and normative enforcement through national or international legal provisions and structures. On the other hand, national and supra-national governments and policy-making structures are often slow to react to regulatory needs. At the EU level, effective international forest protection policies, for example, were only formally implemented in 2003, with the Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT). However, policy-making practices in the EU, which combine features of pluralist and neo-corporatist governance arrangements, are subject to criticism for its lack of transparency and democratic deficit (Burns and Carson, 2002). The fragmented, diversified, and flexible policy-making processes and the obscurity and looseness of the participatory governance structures may undermine the EU's capacity to comprehensively and adequately address emerging issues.

In this respect, the European Commission launched in 2005 the European Transparency Initiative, whereby interest representation, EU consultation standards and funding distribution data are managed and publicized. The lobbying issue has been one of the major concerns, and a voluntary register of interest representatives was put in place in 2008, as well as a code of conduct, building up since 1992. A «comitology» register and a register of expert groups also provide information on advisory boards and committees that assist the Commission's activities. However, according to the European Ombudsman 2007 annual report, lack of transparency is still the most prevalent type of maladministration, accounting for 28% of all complaints (followed by unfairness and abuse of power, 18%). Moreover, 64% of all inquiries concerned the European Commission.

⁶ In the forestry sector, for example, only 7.5% of the world's forests are certified; the Forest Stewardship Council represents 2.4% and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes, 5.2% (Forest Certification Resource Center, www.metafore.org).

The meeting of diverse and conflicting interests in the common steering of either a business, an economic sector or a policy issue will always involve managing actors with different levels of influence, power and access strategies. With emerging social values and concerns, like environmentally and socially sustainable development, new governance arrangements are forming, from businesses to industries, from local to supra-national governments, in order to meet society's demands. The challenge is then, whatever the scope or level of reach, to achieve equitable conditions for participation to all interested parties and guarantee transparency and comprehensive information to the public. Alongside social and environmental interests, scientific knowledge must also play a significant role in informing decisions, aware of both global imperatives and local cultures.

EU multi-level governance. Globally, the field of environmental polity has acquired considerable attention and has led to major transformations in institutional and normative configurations. Within the European Union polity model, environmental governance arrangements have been influenced by the shift from national to supra-national regulatory scope, the increasing participation of public interest organizations and social movements, and the complexity and multiplicity of interests and values in society. On the other hand, national corporatist and neo-corporatist social systems, with different approaches to governance arrangements and policy-making processes, both influence and are influenced by the European model, which is arguably neither a pluralist nor a corporatist one.

Within the context of the European Union, a cross-national research project⁷ (Paraskevopoulos, Getimis and Rees, 2006) was undertaken to address institutional and policy-making adaptation to EU multi-level governance in the fields of regional and environmental policy, involving three Cohesion and two Central and Eastern European countries. One important assumption underlying this work is that despite the bearing of the Europeanization process on national transformation of governance systems, the implementation of EU public policy is significantly dependent on the learning capacity of the pre-existing institutional infrastructure" (Paraskevopoulos, 2006: 3). Governance structures are the structural manifestation of a complex multiplicity of governing bodies, organizational practices, norms and policy styles. Multi-level governance here implies a dual interaction process

⁷ EU funded international Project, from 2001 to 2003, involving Greece (Research Institute of Urban Environment and Human Resources of the Panteion University), Hungary (Centre for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Ireland (University of Limerick), Poland (European Institute), Portugal (National Institute for Public Administration) and the United Kingdom (London School of Economics and Political Science).

within sub-regional, regional, national and supra-national authorities – vertical interaction refers to connections between different levels of government; horizontal interaction involves actors within the same level. On the other hand, Europeanization is here conceived as the process of institutional and policy-making practices' adaptation to EU policies and governance model.

In the field of environmental policy, the process involves both the national contributions to EU policy formulation and the adoption of existent and more advanced regulations and directives. This is particularly important during the intergovernmental bargaining processes prior to accession, as it affects and challenges well-established domestic policy-making structures in environmental policy. "Given the distinctive character of the policy-making structures at the European level on the one hand, and the fact that Europeanization is fundamentally conceived of as a system of continuous interactions between EU policy-making rules and regulations and domestic policy structures on the other, the better the 'goodness of fit' between EU rules and domestic practices the weaker the adaptational pressures will be for the domestic institutional structures" (Paraskevopoulos, 2006: 7). Within the new institutionalist perspective, two main approaches to the policy change and learning process have been brought forward. The *rational choice* logic underlines the importance of resource distribution and differential empowerment of national actors, and the role of multiple veto points and formal institutions as mediating factors. This process has been conceptualised as «single-loop learning», whereby actors acquire new information, alter strategies but they pursue given, fixed interests. The *sociological* approach stresses the importance of social learning in the adaptation process and of networks, informal institutions and social norms as mediating mechanisms of change in priorities of actors' interests. Although not dismissing aspects of the first approach, the actor-centred, sociological institutionalism approach was central to the theoretical and conceptual framework for the empirical development of the research, as it is considered a more powerful analytical tool for grasping the actor-structure interaction process. Change is viewed as an agent-driven process, within institutional constraints, where the learning and socialization processes play a major role. Contrarily to the liberal intergovernmentalist and rational choice institutionalist perspectives, the proposed approach refuses the purely rational self-interested utilitarianism of social actors, as they are affected in their core by the interaction process they engage in.

The main issues involved in the analysis were (1) central state policy-making (formal institutional) structures, (2) patterns of interest intermediation/representation and identification of veto points, (3) relevant forms of governance (epistemic, advocacy, issue and policy networks), and

(4) social capital, as crucial informal norm/institution playing a key role in the creation of cooperative (political and/or organizational) culture. The methodological strategy was based on comparative public policy research methods in order to measure the impact of the Europeanization process on domestic institutional structures and governance arrangements. The national case studies involved quantitative and qualitative analysis and the domestic levels of governance were investigated on the basis of Social Network Analysis procedures. Within the environmental domain, urban waste management was selected as the policy case to focus. The following remarks are drawn from the results of these analyses.

Greece. Despite the fact that institution building/institutional creation is considered as the main outcome of the learning process — crucially affected by the Europeanization of policy-making given the generally poor level of the pre-existing institutional infrastructure — the strengthening and the stability of institutions remained a key challenge for Greece's public policy arena within the EU multi-level governance structure. Indeed, institution building was significantly absent from the democratization/Europeanization agenda during both the first post-authoritarianism (1974-81) and, most importantly, the first post-accession (1981-1990s) period. Additionally, in the first period after the emergence of modernization on the domestic public policy agenda in the early 1990s, institution building was substantially misconceived as almost synonymous to «marketization». Thus, arguably, the serious process of institution building, albeit mostly reluctant and not always successful, started in the mid-1990s.

Environmental policy formulation remained strongly influenced by the need for harmonization of national legislation with EU rules, involving transposition of directives, implementation of programs and accomplishment of policy targets. An insufficient level of trans-ministerial decision-making practices was found, as well as a significant delay in EU rules adoption, which has entailed a weak enforcement of broader environmental policies. As for the particular case of sub-regional waste management policy, there was a consistent underperformance, when compared to other EU-driven programs. One resistance factor found to have a deep impact on this situation was «social reaction», namely the *nimby* syndrome towards landfills and incineration. Although the national-level legal framework does not provide for the involvement of private the sector in waste management, cooperation and partnerships were developed at the municipal level.

Due to the relative novelty environmental policy represented in Greece, the learning process resulted mainly in extensive institutional creation and unclear, often contradictory policy choices. Pressured by EU

regulations, environmental policy implementation was developed on the basis of problem solving instead of a holistic approach. At the administrative level, there is a lack of policy coordination and a large number of agencies involved in the environmental domain which, allied to the traditionally hierarchical nature of Greek public administration, has hindered the formulation and implementation of an integrated environmental policy.

The domestic institutional infrastructure is characterized by a low level of expertise involvement in policy formulation and consultation, a relatively strong resistance to change, closely linked to the patterns of interest intermediation, low levels of social capital and cooperative culture, weakness of civil society, along with predominance of political parties and «clientelism» in the policy process, and limited, problematic and not fully institutionalized fora for dialogue and negotiation.

Ireland. The learning process in Ireland has significantly affected the centralized Westminster-like institutional and policy-making structure. However, its primary impact has been the transformation, rather than the expansion of the existing institutional structure. Thus, institutional innovation has taken place especially at the central state level and the building of new institutions has been rather limited. Overall, the top-down administrative hierarchy corresponds to Ireland's pragmatic, *ad hoc* and reactionary stance towards the Europeanization of policy-making.

Adaptation to the EU environmental regime has been pragmatic and piecemeal with the central government incorporating EU policy into the Department of the Environment and Local Government, as well as requiring local authorities to comply with these new directives. Pressures from the EU have certainly provided a critical impetus to Ireland in adapting existing and, in some cases, creating new structures; Ireland has remained slow to implement EU policy in this area. There are, however, examples of developments at local level where new community initiatives and networks involving individuals, commercial enterprises, and NGOs that seem to be working. On the other hand, there is trend pointing to an enhanced role of expertise in the policy process

Facing a growing economy and the resulting increase in waste production, Ireland priorities were focused on coping with lack of infrastructures, illegal dumping and public opposition to new policies. Private and public arrangements were found operating in the waste management domain. The main outcome of the learning process has been significant institution building and innovation. Waste management is a crucial theme in the public domain, as national bodies, local authorities and pressure

groups struggle for acceptable solutions. Although environmental policy remains centralized, waste management specific programs are under local government responsibility. Nevertheless, a national environmental agency was created in order to address increasing regulation of waste sites, which reveals central government as a key feature of Ireland's environmental governance arrangement.

With regard to the specifics of the domestic institutional structure in public policy, Ireland is characterised by some experts' involvement in the policy process, primarily at the central state level, the presence of NGOs, albeit fragmented and limited over time, a relatively overall high level of resistance to change, especially at the local level, a relatively high level of social capital and strong civil society, presence of fora for dialogue and consultation, and significant presence of the private sector.

Portugal. In a similar vein to Greece, the learning process in Portugal has resulted in significant and rather extensive institution building at the central state and regional levels since the early 1990s. It is debatable to what extent this process should be exclusively attributed to the influence of the EU. The main insight offered by the implementation of environmental and particularly waste management policy is that it refutes the principle of «one size fits all» in comparative public policy, demonstrating that there may be variation in policy-making between one policy area to another even within the same country and/or contextual framework. Waste management in Portugal incorporates significant institutional innovation in the form of public-private partnerships and expertise involvement in policy-making, as well as important presence of civil society organizations (NGOs), especially at the national level. The policy environment is characterised by appropriate regulation since all the relevant EU legislation (directives) has been transposed.

Successful institution building, based on a relatively good quality of institutional infrastructure, is the main outcome of the learning process in Portugal. The national-level system of governance is reinforced by regional directorates that ensure the coordination of policy in conjunction with the environmental ministry. There is, however, limited coordination at a national level between ministries, and at a regional level between municipalities, given the lack of a regional tier of administrative governance. In practice, waste management is the responsibility of municipalities, but their small size and limited ability to cope with waste management problems have prompted them to rely, although not exclusively, on public-private partnerships to manage waste systems. In this sense, Portugal's approach was different to Greece or Ireland, where this solution was only slowly becoming a feature of Irish administration. However, this illustrates the

problems of the centralised state and its slowness to address environmental problems.

The specific features of Portugal's policy-making structure point to some presence of expertise in the policy process, primarily in the form of experts' associations and from the academic community, significant resistance to change, primarily at the local level, a relatively high level of social capital, especially with regard to trust in public institutions/civil service, a significant presence of fora for dialogue at the both the central and regional levels of government, and a significant presence public-private arrangements.

Hungary. In Hungary, there is some evidence of significant, although not very extensive, institution building at the central state level, given in particular the collapse of the pre-existing institutional infrastructure. Nonetheless, this remains a crucial challenge with regard to the content of the learning process. In practice, the country's environmental policy has been formulated by EU standards. Varying transitional periods for the implementation of the environmental *acquis* and some institutional innovation are the main features of waste management policy implementation in Hungary, in a policy environment characterized, for obvious reasons, by decrease in hazardous and agricultural waste and, simultaneously, significant increase in solid waste.

Institutional innovation and relatively significant presence of new forms of governance are the main characteristics of the learning process in environmental policy/waste management. Various tasks and responsibilities, which were previously carried out by the national government, have been transferred to the sub-national level of government, although its administrative capacity is limited, both in terms of resources and expertise. A national council works as a forum where local, county and regional communities, as well as economic agents and NGOs participate in the interest reconciliation process. This is an advisory body to the Government, bringing together public authorities and civil society actors, trying to achieve integration of environment with other policies.

Waste management constitutes the most crucial environmental policy issue for Hungary. Hazardous waste, in particular, has often been the area of intense social conflicts related to environmental problems. Although decentralization has not always led to institutional performance in the implementation of the policy, mainly because of serious coordination problems and lack of sufficient resources, there is evidence of a particularly active role of civil society actors in the policy process. Civic organizations, ranging from nation-wide environment protection alliances to local single-issue

groups, play an important role, performing both regulatory and implementation functions.

With regard to institutional infrastructure, Hungary demonstrates a very limited involvement of expertise in policy making, some limited involvement of NGOs, a relatively significant presence of the private sector (multinationals), a limited level of resistance to change, a relatively low level of social capital and cooperative culture, considerable presence of political party-dominated «clientelism» and corruption, and some presence of EU-driven fora for dialogue primarily at the national level.

Poland. As in the case of Hungary, there is limited evidence on the outcomes of the learning process. There has been however, some institution building at the both the national and sub-national levels with particular emphasis on the administrative and territorial restructuring at the regional and local levels of government. Institutional reforms are linked to the collapse of the pre-existing structures and the extensive administrative restructuring is strongly influenced by considerations/ expediencies related to the need for compliance with the EU. As in the case of Hungary, institution building remains the crucial challenge ahead with regard to the content of the learning process.

Generally long transitional periods for the implementation of the environmental *acquis* and rather extensive institutional creation are the main features of waste management policy in Poland. There is also evidence of improvement in the state of environment, although it may be attributable to changes in the development process rather than to specific policy measures. Extensive institutional creation, albeit with serious concerns about effectiveness and efficiency, has been the dominant feature of learning in the environmental/waste management policy in Poland.

Although the main policy-making actor is the Ministry of the Environment, at the territorial level the relevant province, county and commune authorities may draw up respective environmental protection programmes, taking the necessary requirements into account. The self-governments are involved directly in provision of basic services to the community, including waste management, granting permits and provision of necessary technical infrastructure. On the other hand, there is some evidence about a relatively active role of civil society in the policy process, although their influence on policy formulation is rather limited. With regard to social participation in decision-making and implementation of environment policy, some observations point to the influence of factors such as the distrust in political institutions and weak co-operation and co-ordination links between various levels and types of authorities.

In the Polish case, there was very limited experts' involvement in the policy process, some significant presence of the private sector, limited role of NGOs, despite the strong 'tradition' of active NGOs, a rather strong resistance to change, low overall level of social capital and a civic culture dominated by distrust in political institutions, extremely weak civil society, «clientelism» and corruption, some presence of fora for dialogue, primarily at the central state level, mainly related to consultation for policy formulation under the EU pressure, and some presence of public-private arrangements at the regional level.

Conclusions

In summary, «single-loop learning» seems to be the dominant pattern of the learning process in all the

countries studied, while there has been only little and sporadic evidence of social learning. This is an important finding with regard to the impact of Europeanization on domestic institutional and policy-making structures. Europeanization may open up exit and voice options for actors in the domestic level of governance through the redistribution of resources and power, but the changing of actors' preferences or identity seems to be a much more difficult exercise and less readily amenable to pressures from Europeanization. This points to the limits of the impact that the supranational level of governance can have on the transformation of domestic governance and policy-making structures and emphasises the crucial role of pre-existing institutional infrastructure in the learning and adaptation processes in public policy. The following table summarises the main findings in relation to the patterns of learning.

Patterns of learning in Cohesion and CEE countries

	Policy Learning Capacity of Domestic Institutional Structures	Patterns of Learning
Greece	Very poor; some positive albeit sporadic evidence since mid-1990s;	Institution building as institutional creation in both policy areas; 'single loop' learning;
Ireland	Medium; Stands out vis-à-vis the other countries, but not ideal;	Transformation/adaptation of the pre-existing institutional structures; 'single loop' learning;
Portugal	Medium to poor; Central state capacity but at a cost;	Extensive institution building at central state level; 'single loop' learning;
Hungary	Poor to medium; 'Western-style' core executive;	Institution building as a challenge; danger of limited 'formal' compliance; 'single loop' learning;
Poland	Poor; 'Southern-style' central administration;	Institution building as a challenge; danger of limited 'formal' compliance; 'single loop' learning;

A crucial variable that explains different degrees of adaptational pressures across the countries may be the duration of authoritarianism, although other crucial variables, such as culture and pre-existing institutional infrastructure, must also be considered. In the field of environmental policy-making, all countries can be characterized as being «laggards», with considerable policy misfits. Europeanization has led to significant legal harmonization but this has not been successfully followed by the necessary institution-building and the establishment of the required implementation and enforcement mechanisms. Although regionalization has been, to varying degrees, a dominant feature of intergovernmental relations in all countries, the gate-keeping role of the central state has remained unchallenged and prominent in almost all of the cases. A possible explanation may be the underestimation of the crucial role of state-society relations, and particularly of civic culture and identity as important components of the local institutional infrastructure.

Two main patterns of governance were identified with regard to non-state actors' involvement in public policy-making, relative to two groups of countries. Greece, Hungary and Poland demonstrate low levels of non-state actors' participation in the policy process, and a corresponding relevant role of political parties. In contrast, primarily Ireland and, to a lesser degree, Portugal exhibit a more positive policy environment and hence governance structures, characterized by varying but increasing levels of non-state actors' participation in the policy process.

From a system theory perspective, environmental governance in the European Union has suffered from both *morbostasis* and *morphogenesis*. New governance features have been introduced at the supranational and the national levels, although with different impacts. Values and ideas seem to have been the most successful domain in penetrating all political and social discourse and practice, which may be seen as an effect not only of EU integration

but also of a global scale increase in awareness and commitment.

The influence of the European Commission is mostly felt in the field of policy instruments, as institution building remains restrained by domestic organizational and mediation structures. Differences in national culture, political and socio-economic

systems, as well as material problems facing each country, determine to a large extent the governance arrangements put in place. According to Lenschow (1999: 59), this in turn suggests that, more than a uniform new model of governance, we should be aiming at a “wide *repertoire* of governance strategies”

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