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Policy integration: what does it mean and how can it be achieved? A multi-disciplinary review

There are increasing calls for greater policy integration from a number of areas, one of the most prominent being environmental policy-making where integration is frequently recognised as being crucial for sustainable development. This is coming at a time when decision-making is facing increasing complexity as a result of various concurrent trends. Some of these trends are toward globalisation and greater centralisation of decision-making, whilst other trends are toward fragmentation and decentralisation of decision-making. A variety of factors have increased the number of actors involved in the policy process, such as the emergence of the information society, greater emphasis on public participation and the increasing role of non-governmental organisations, pressure groups and agencies in the decision-making process. All these developments make policy integration increasingly difficult but more compelling to achieve.

Policy integration concerns the management of cross-cutting issues in policy-making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, which often do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments. In the academic literature, several disciplines address policy integration although not always referring to this particular term. A variety of other related (and sometimes synonymous) terms are used such as policy coherence, cross-cutting policy-making, concerted decision-making, policy consistency, holistic government, joined-up government and, most especially, policy co-ordination. These concepts are developed within organisational theories such as those on inter-organisational co-operation and co-ordination, collaboration, intergovernmental management and network management.

In order to improve understanding of the concept of policy integration, the paper reviews and compares these various concepts and theories and relates them to the issue of policy integration. Bringing about more conceptual clarity to the concept of policy integration is the first objective of the paper. This literature also opens up a wealth of material concerning facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration. Identifying and synthesising these facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration is the second objective of the paper. The paper examines and categorises these facilitators and inhibitors of policy integration and demonstrates that achieving more integrated policies is dependent on a multitude of different types of factors including organisational factors, behavioural and individual factors, political factors, economic factors, process and instrumental factors.