

Harriet Bulkeley, Ray Hudson, Matt Watson:

Vertical and horizontal integration in the governance of UK municipal waste policy.

Tackling environmental problems demands the development of new modes of integrating policy regimes and institutional structures. Putative moves from old government to new governance, characterised by the diffusion of state power and duties from hierarchical state structures into multi-level and cross-sectoral networks, promise to open up opportunities for the vertical and horizontal integration of environmental policy. However, the relationship between vertical and horizontal modes of policy integration in the context of changing modes of governance, and their effectiveness in promoting greener policy, is deeply complex and requires empirical interrogation.

Our research explores the relationship between governance and sustainability in the management of municipal waste in the Northeast of England, through analysis of policy documents and interviews with government officers and other significant actors in the region's waste policy networks. Recent years have seen something of a transformation of UK municipal waste policy, with performance in recycling and landfill diversion improving substantially, driven by a marked tightening of vertical integration, as national government has translated EU imposed demands into binding targets and other statutory requirements for local authorities. Associated policy statements will promote, rhetorically at least, the cross-sectoral and inter-agency partnership characteristic of new governance. However, the modes of vertical integration deployed have served to embed, rather than destabilise, existing axes of horizontal fragmentation. We argue that the modes of vertical integration used have failed to promote the horizontal integration required to move beyond the limits of institutional structures historically developed in response only to the needs of local waste disposal, to maintain long term performance improvements in sustainability by developing the policy and institutional structures to enable integrated resource management. Finally, we reflect on the implications of this case study for understanding the relationships between modes of integration and effective progress in the greening of policies.