

Towards an international comparison of Integrated Product Policy

Dissaccordance in Europe

Integrierte Produktpolitik ist ein vielversprechender Bereich der Umweltpolitik. Obwohl es bereits eine ganze Reihe von Forschungsergebnissen auf diesem Gebiet gibt, fehlt immer noch eine internationale vergleichende Policy Analyse. Im Folgenden wird ein solcher Vergleich unternommen.
 Von Frieder Rubik

Integrated Product Policy (IPP) is a relatively new and promising policy area within environmental policy. Some scientific research has been done and several countries have begun political activities in this area. What is still missing is an international comparative policy analysis of IPP focussing on the important characteristics of IPP. This paper is an attempt at such an analysis and presents an overview of the European IPP-“landscape“, i.e. the policy practises of some European States. We concentrate on some countries, namely Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom and also look at the level of the European Union (1).

The paper is organised according to a policy-cycle approach (von Beyme 1991). It firstly illustrates the background for the emergence of an IPP. It then focuses on the formulation of an IPP-policy – if this has been done at all. However, the formulation of a policy is one phase, the implementation of IPP another. The article furthermore considers the implementation of an IPP. IPP might be reformulated and this is treated in the subsequent part. Finally, the paper concludes with some summarising and prospective recommendations.

Emergence of Integrated Product Policy

Product-related environmental issues, nowadays increasingly termed Integrated Product Policy (IPP), have emerged on three main complementary tracks. Starting in the early nineties, there has been comprehensive research, both on a conceptual level and into specific questions, such as the effectiveness of certain policy instruments. Simultaneously, public policy began to deal with these issues, producing a large number of policy documents and consultation papers. Last, but not least, a series of workshops, conferences, and meetings have taken place, providing room for intensive discussion on the subject.

The formulation of an IPP varies considerably among Euro-

pean countries. We will examine this state from an actor-oriented view and from a view on the different policies in the countries considered in this contribution. Institutions and organisations determine and influence the development process of a policy area, either directly or indirectly, by way of their concepts, strategies, instruments, and tools. These actors might push and pull business and society to share the development and implementation of an IPP.

In nearly all countries, the environmental ministry or department is the institution responsible for IPP-issues. The co-operation with other ministries or agencies is sometimes very intensive and institutionalised (Sweden, Switzerland), but in most cases consultations with other departments/ministries happen on a case-by-case basis. The interest of stakeholders seems nowadays to be generally modest. In Denmark, for example, stakeholders were more interested during the period from 1999 to 2002. But on the level of the European Union its role as (possible) regulatory institution „encourages“ stakeholders to deal more often with IPP.

More formalised routines of consultation exist in form of the formal IPP network supporting the Commission. Sweden holds dialogue meetings on the subject, while Denmark maintains regular discussions in the Environmental Council. In other countries, institutionalised formal exchanges of opinion are rare.

Characteristics of IPP-formulation

In the following, we want to illuminate the state of the art with regard to the formulation of an IPP, i.e. the „political“ and „material“ content of IPP in some countries. The formulation of an IPP has developed in several phases. Some countries have elaborated an own national framework concept, namely European Union (European Commission 2001a and European Commission 2003a), Denmark (MEE 1995, MEE et al. 1999a, MEE et al. 1999b and MEE 2001), Sweden (Government Communication 2000) (2), Switzerland (3), United Kingdom (DETR 1998) (4).

In other countries, like Austria and Germany, some IPP work has been done. An IPP-tradition has arisen, but these activities are more a collection of measures and instruments and lack a conceptual basis. Other EU-Member States are in most cases laggards, e.g. Spain or Portugal. The acceding countries of 2004 are still far from IPP-concepts. Looking outside Europe, Japanese initiatives are emerging, and the USA are dedicating some effort to this area. All in all, IPP-leaders in Europe are Denmark and Sweden – both Nordic countries – and to some degree Switzerland and the United Kingdom. IPP-activities in some other

countries are focussed more toward singular conceptual efforts that have not resulted in a comprehensive conceptual approach (Austria, France, Germany, UK). But the majority of other EU Member States IPP-activities are far behind regarding first conceptual steps.

IPP and the strategy for sustainable development

IPP has several relationships to other issues dealt with in sustainable development strategies. Most European countries have developed such strategies (5). The relationship between IPP and sustainable development follows different paths in Europe. The most stringent and clear embedment of IPP in the Sustainable Development strategy is the Swiss approach. A strong relationship also exists in Sweden and the different strategies and concepts of the EU often stress the point of an IPP. Other countries, like Austria, Germany and the UK refer to a modest degree to IPP in their strategies for sustainable development. A connection, although existing, is interpreted as weak, especially in Germany. IPP is dealt under another heading in the French sustainability strategy.

IPP traditions are diverging among European countries. Some countries like Switzerland pursue primarily a national approach. Other countries such as Sweden or United Kingdom consider the relationship between the activities of the European Union and the national activities as important. Other countries like Austria consider IPP as a primarily European concept and focus on the European level.

Characteristics of IPP-strategies and approaches

Conceptual and pragmatic approaches co-exist in the European IPP-landscape. In the following, we examine in more detail some important characteristic aspects of these strategies as well as regulatory approaches, integration of instruments, priority setting, objectives, policy integration and life-cycle consideration:

■ **Governance and government:** Each area of policy-making is confronted with the challenge of balancing the division of power between government and society. Different regulatory regimes are in existence. An interventionist regulatory approach in the area of IPP does not exist. One could say that mixtures of different regulatory approaches are pursued and clear allocations are difficult. It seems that pure self-regulation does not exist on a national level. An exception may be the German state of Bavaria, which encourages business by voluntary agreements and subsidies. The present EU-IPP approach is also more self-regulatory as it avoids rules and prescriptions in favour of encouraging engagement of interested stakeholders.

Most countries combine mandatory and voluntary instruments to strengthen IPP. The challenge of the market and its two sides of supply and demand are treated in a fair and balanced way in most IPP-approaches. However, the concen-

tration might differ between a balanced approach (most countries), a more demand-side approach (e.g. European Union, France, United Kingdom) and a more supply-side approach. It is interesting to note that the Bavarian IPP-practice is focused primarily on support of business and could be regarded as a supply-side approach.

■ **Integration of instruments:** IPP might encompass several instruments, partly under the responsibility of different ministries. Therefore, exchange of insights and co-ordination of activities are important to really integrate instruments to optimise their impact.

Instrumental integration in Europe is not very well introduced and different patterns exist: Some countries have recognised that this is a challenge: Switzerland integrates instruments step-by-step. Sweden looks for a systematic approach by examining this issue and the UK pursues an instrumental integration in the area of information. Other countries, e.g. Austria and France, do not seem to consider this topic explicitly. The EU and German IPP-approaches are aware of the integration, but pragmatism, formally restricted competences and limited responsibilities of the environmental ministry seem to restrict integration.

■ **Priority setting:** Environmental policy and IPP are always confronted with a series of action areas, of challenges and of problems. To optimise financial and personal resources, it is necessary to set priorities to avoid an overflow of activities that cannot be systemised and implemented.

Priority setting occurs in Europe in most cases only implicitly. The IPP-communication of the EU is the most remarkable exception, clarifying a clear and explicit time-schedule and a reporting in some years. More implicitly, IPP concentrates on some areas (e.g. UK) or some pragmatic and „easy-to-get“ areas (e.g. Germany).

■ **Objectives:** Objectives and goals are important elements in a policy-cycle by giving orientations and corridors where IPP-approaches should and might develop,

The objectives of an IPP have sometimes been formulated explicitly but most of the times implicitly. The dominating goal is an increase of market share for more eco-efficient products and services. The innovation challenge for products, and their diffusion, is often not mentioned explicitly; but one might imagine that this is considered. Denmark and Sweden are remarkable in the way they link IPP with the objective of strengthening competitiveness.

■ **Policy integration:** Neither environmental policy nor IPP are restricted to one single policy field. Other areas such as agriculture, energy, consumer affairs, fiscal policy, and so on are of importance especially due to their responsibilities for some IPP-instruments. Integration is regarded as one core element of a modern environmental policy (6). →

„The intensity to which countries consider IPP in their national strategies is diverse.“

The policy integration seems to be rhetorically fulfilled in some countries (e.g. Sweden, Switzerland) and at the level of the EU. More pragmatically and in daily business, integration is still a challenge for policy makers and this is also the case for IPP. However, it must be admitted that this is not a specific failure of IPP, but a general failure of policy making: In the case of IPP the challenge of integration – although claimed in the term itself – is not dealt different as in other policy areas

- Integration of the product life-cycle: The cradle to grave approach, i.e. the life cycle of substances, is quite often considered as a core conceptual element of an IPP. Looking on the European landscape, this can be confirmed. All countries have announced their intention to integrate the life-cycle of products and services. But this does not necessarily mean that the life-cycle is always considered in implementation issues.

Implementation of an IPP

The formulation of explicit conceptual strategies and approaches is one side of the coin. The other one is whether these „nice“ words really come down to earth and are implemented. The implementation deficit has quite often been mentioned in the area of (environmental) policy making. Implementation needs manager who takes care of the processes. Another important challenge is to arrange priorities due to the complexity of IPP and limited personal, financial, and political resources. We want to stress these points in the following.

The implementation of an IPP needs process management, a bundling of efforts, and co-ordinated developments. A management of the IPP-processes is often the duty of the department considered above. Specific units inside or outside the authorities have sometimes been proposed (e.g. Sweden and UK), but were never realised. Altogether, this means that existing units within the hierarchies have to manage the IPP-processes.

Priorities along the overloads...

The practical implementation of IPP-approaches is confronted with a plethora of actors, target groups, instruments, discussions, and target areas. It might be helpful to concentrate and to prioritise areas to avoid an overload of activities.

Implementation of IPP could take up priorities along several lines. One line is a focus on priority areas, product groups.

At the moment, this approach is pursued on a methodological basis by the EU. The other line is a focus on some specific instruments, encouraging the market and target groups. Most countries follow this line. In these cases, IPP practises mean the implementation of informative instruments like ISO-type I labels, EPDs (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, UK), of public procurement (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Switzerland), support of eco-design (France), research (Sweden), and LCA (Sweden, Switzerland).

Reformulation

Reformulation of policy is the next stage of policy-making and might always be regarded as necessary in a complex and dynamic field. I have not found – at least so far – any explicit reformulation of IPP or IPP-approaches.

However, this observation is only partly correct: In several countries, changes of governments have occurred in recent years, e.g. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, and The Netherlands. In these countries former IPP-activities were frozen or stopped (Austria, Italy), the implementation of IPP re-focused (Denmark) and IPP-activities reinterpreted and embedded in another context (France). Therefore, we must ask if IPP is perceived as a „left“ project based on a more interventionist regulative approach similar to concepts and approaches practised in the seventies and eighties under the political leadership of socialist or social democratic governments. We have not found much proof for this hypothesis but it must be in the memories of conservative and liberal parties.

A second observation is that the topic of sustainable consumption and production patterns (SCP) is rising and its links with IPP are on the one side obvious and clear. On the other, more empirical side, several countries deal with SCP (e.g. Sweden, Germany), but do not emphasize the relationship between IPP and SCP – it is more to catch product-related environmental issues with a new term. Obviously, this is not satisfactory and a clearer and stricter consideration is necessary. That means that, at the moment, we perceive this situation as a fragile balance.

Altogether, we think that it is too early to speak about explicit reformulation, but we see a tacit and hidden reinterpretation and re-focussing of IPP.

Outlook and conclusions

The emergence of Integrated Product Policy is an interesting and also exemplary field of a shift in policy attention towards a new source of environmental degradation: products and services. The political development took 10 to 15 years and nowadays, several countries and also the EU have elaborated concepts and tried to implement them. This time frame does not seem too long, given all the historical developments in the last two decades like the end of cold war, introduction of the Euro, expansion of the EU.

Several countries like Denmark, Sweden and the EU have prepared their own policy documents. Other countries such as Germany did not follow this approach, but are nevertheless active IPP-players. Countries like Austria and France have done some preparatory work, but they neither intensify this approach nor actively implement IPP.

IPP is embedded in the sustainability debate. The intensity to which countries consider IPP in their national strategies is diverse. Whereas especially Switzerland and Sweden allocate IPP a prominent role in their national strategies for sustainable development, other countries such as Germany deal with it on a minor basis. Countries like Austria and France have not prepared explicitly formulated IPP-concepts, but deal with it in their sustainability strategy. Figure 1 characterises this situation by looking at the IPP-activity-level and the national-international level.

However, the elaboration of concepts and also the mentioning of IPP in a strategy for sustainable development do not necessarily mean that implementation takes place. Implementation deficits are not new in (environmental) policy, but can also be observed in the area of IPP. The most obvious example is France which has little implementation of IPP-activities announced. The conceptually strong UK vision on IPP is confronted with a relatively minor degree of implementation.

A clear reformulation of IPP has not happened, but the challenge of sustainable consumption and production patterns (SCP) influencing the development of IPP has arisen. The political commitment to this approach was agreed at the Johannesburg-conference of 2002 and political take-up is progressing. What is lacking is any clear co-ordination with IPP and this influences both approaches.

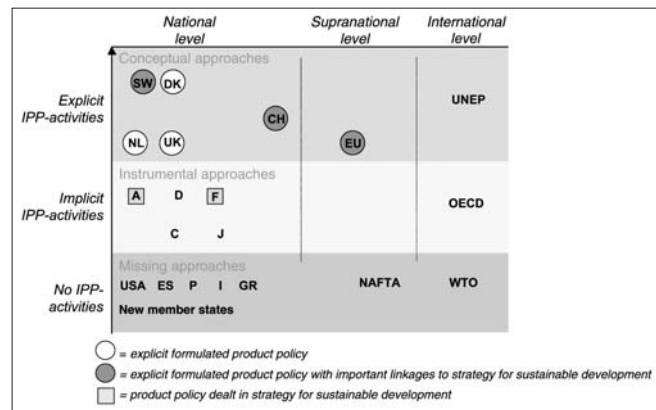
The responsibility for IPP is allocated to ministries and public environmental agencies. That means that these institutions have taken up this challenge within their structures. New institutional answers have although proclaimed not been settled. Exceptions may be Sweden and Denmark. Sweden has planned a new centre for environmental technologies and Denmark created with its environmental council a new institution.

IPP also means integration. Integration is a challenge and its realisation in IPP shows considerable deficit with regard to a coherence of policy areas, and with regard to instruments. An important problem is the difficulty of co-ordinating instruments. Often the „ownership“ of political instruments is not with the administrative unit responsible for IPP but with other ministries or departments and the intensity of co-operation is not satisfying. Inter-ministerial working groups such as in Sweden might diminish this problem.

A last point is the governance approach and the instrumental orientation. Mixtures of regulatory approaches are pursued. Pure self-regulation does not exist on a national level, but the supranational EU-IPP approach is more self-regulatory.

One could also look at the relationship between instrumental approaches and target groups. Most countries combine mandatory and voluntary instruments to strengthen IPP. Obviously, a

Figure 1: IPP practices on national, supranational and international level



Source: own representation

pure mandatory IPP approach could not be found. Denmark and Sweden focus conceptually both on mandatory and voluntary instruments and the IPP measures implemented in Switzerland are oriented towards both types. The focus on the supply and demand sides of the market might differ between a balanced approach (most countries), a more demand-side approach (e.g. Germany, France, United Kingdom) and a more supply-side approach (Bavaria). But also in this case, an important difference between the elaborated conceptual and the practised implementation stage might exist: The stated focus on all instrumental types is sometimes reduced to voluntary instruments addressed towards voluntary – often information – activities like for example in Denmark. But also the contrary can be the case and practises use mandatory instruments instead of voluntary ones. The Swiss IPP is a good example for a mandatory approach.

Having shortly looked at these aspects, I would briefly like to identify some challenges:

- a well balanced institutionalisation of IPP,
- a clarification of the governance philosophy of IPP and the roles for different stakeholders,
- clear linkages between sustainability approaches, IPP and SCP,
- better integration of different policy fields,
- better integration of instruments, and
- allocation of responsibilities to IPP-departments.

These challenges are not easily solved and some reflections are necessary for the future of IPP.

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Anmerkungen

- (1) More country-related information could be found in Scheer/Rubik (2005), Rubik/Scheer (2005) who present the IPP situation in Austria, European Union, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and in the United Kingdom, in Kornenberg/Maliszeska (2004) who give an overview about IPP in the new EU Member States, or in Cap Gemini/Ernst & Young (2003) who analysed roughly IPP in 16 European countries, Japan and the USA.
- (2) An update to this strategy is intended, but so far postponed. However, the Ministry for the Environment ordered SWEPA to present proposals for a concretisation of the strategy. SWEPA presented its report 2002 (SWEPA 2002).
- (3) IPP is embedded in the Swiss national strategy for sustainable development. This foundation and embedment is remarkable and concretises several sub-areas for implementation. Apart from that strategy, no other conceptual policy papers have been prepared. However, more pragmatic documents exist.
- (4) In the meantime, in 2003 DEFRA and DTI published a new national framework programme for sustainable consumption and production (SCP) (DEFRA 2003), which could be regarded as an outcome of IPP and post-Johannesburg process.
- (5) See for a general analysis Swanson et al. 2004.
- (6) See for a general analysis Jacob/ Volkery 2003.

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