



**The OECD Environment Directorate:
The Art of Persuasion and its Limitations**

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The Global Governance Project is a joint research programme of eight European research institutions. It seeks to advance understanding of the new actors, institutions and mechanisms of global governance, especially in the field of sustainable development.

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Abstract

Recent scholarship has questioned the adequacy of the existing organizational architecture for global environmental governance. Little research, however, has yet been directed to the questions what the actual effects of international environmental organizations are and how international organizations achieve these effects. The paper explores these questions by analyzing and explaining the influences of the OECD environment directorate on national and international environmental governance. It directs the attention to the organization's bureaucracy as administrative apparatus that manages and influences the activities of the collectivity of member states and acts in the international arena. The paper is part of the research project MANUS—*Managers of Global Change*, which analyses the influence of international bureaucracies in global environmental governance. In line with the analytical framework of the MANUS project, this paper distinguishes three dimensions of influence: cognitive, normative and executive. Bureaucracies can act as 'knowledge-brokers', as 'negotiation-facilitators', and as 'capacity builders'. The variables which may explain possible influences are integrated into three clusters: the external problem structure; the polity set by the bureaucracies' principals within which the bureaucrats operate; and the activities and procedures that the staff of the bureaucracies develops and implements within the constraints of problem structure and polity framework. The analysis shows that the environment directorate has been able to make an independent contribution to environmental governance and has been particularly successful in shaping public and scientific discourses (cognitive dimension) as well as strengthening international cooperation (normative dimension). Its influence is largely based on the production and distribution of high-quality knowledge. In particular, the internal organization of the knowledge production and the excellent educational background of the staff help to explain the persuasiveness of the knowledge and the resulting influence of the environment directorate.

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Foreword

This working paper was written as part of the Global Governance Project, a joint research programme of eight European research institutions that seeks to advance understanding of the new actors, institutions and mechanisms of global governance. While we address the phenomenon of global governance in general, most research projects focus on global environmental change and governance for sustainable development. The Project is co-ordinated by the Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and includes associate faculty members and research fellows from eight European institutions: Science Po Bordeaux, Bremen University, Freie Universität Berlin (Environmental Policy Research Centre), London School of Economics and Political Science, Oldenburg University, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Wageningen University.

Analytically, we define global governance by three criteria, which also shape the research groups within the Project. First, we see global governance as characterised by the increasing participation of actors other than states, ranging from private actors such as multinational corporations and (networks of) scientists and environmentalists to public non-state actors such as intergovernmental organisations ('multiactor governance'). These new actors of global governance are the focus of our research group MANUS—Managers of Global Change.

Second, we see global governance as marked by new mechanisms of organisation such as public-private and private-private partnerships, alongside the traditional system of legal treaties negotiated by states. This is the focus of our research group MECGLO—New Mechanisms of Global Governance.

Third, we see global governance as characterised by different layers and clusters of rule-making and rule-implementation, both vertically between supranational, international, national and subnational layers of authority ('multilevel governance') and horizontally between different parallel rule-making systems. This stands at the centre of our research group MOSAIC—'Multiple Options, Solutions and Approaches: Institutional Interplay and Conflict'.

Comments on this working paper, as well as on the other activities of the Global Governance Project, are highly welcome. We believe that understanding global governance is only feasible through joint effort of colleagues from various backgrounds and from all regions of the world. We look forward to your response.

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Introduction

The intergovernmental bureaucracy that supports the cooperation of countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the OECD secretariat, was the first that featured a separate environmental division: the environment directorate (Sullivan 1997:50). In 1971, when the environment directorate started its operations in Paris with a staff of 35 (Long 2000:37), no other intergovernmental organization had institutionally responded to environmental pollution and degradation in a comparable way.

As for example, the environmental department in the World Bank, the OECD environment directorate is part of a larger intergovernmental bureaucracy that has addressed a number of different policy areas. Since the creation of the organization in 1961, the OECD secretariat primarily supports the thirty, mostly developed, member countries¹ of the organization in the development of macro-economic policies that sustain economic growth and prosperity. It assists member countries in the promotion of international trade and competition, but also helps them to improve their development, education, or agriculture policies. Overall, it fosters intergovernmental cooperation in 25 thematic committees, including the environmental policy and chemicals committee, which the environment directorate services. In contrast single-issue bureaucracies, the environment directorate has addressed almost any environmental policy and problem in its work on domestic and international environmental governance. However, reflecting the predominant economic character of the organization, it focused on the one hand on the use of economic instruments and the integration of environmental with other, most notably, economic, trade, and energy policies. On the other hand, it gave priority to the reduction of environmental impacts of chemicals, energy production and consumption, transport, waste, and agriculture as well as the protection of biodiversity and the global climate (OECD 2001b, 2002a).

In this paper, I assess and explain the role and autonomous influence of the environment directorate in domestic and international environmental governance. This study is one of the first to analyze the role of the OECD secretariat in environmental governance. Only Bill Long, former director of the environment directorate, has given a historical account of this role (Long 2000). In general, only a handful of studies have directed the attention to the intergovernmental bureaucracy of the OECD, possibly because many “see the OECD as little more than a nebulous group of wealthy industrial countries and not as an intergovernmental organization with a professional secretariat” (Julin 2003).²

¹ Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxemburg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America (as of 2005).

² See for notable exceptions Marcussen (2004a; 2004b; 2004c) and Trondal, Marcussen, and Veggeland (2004). The former categorized the roles and influence of the secretariat on the formation and diffusion of ideas in OECD member countries. The latter treated the secretariat as dependent variable. They sought to explain the roles and behaviour of what they labelled “international executives”—the international civil servants working in the OECD secretariat.

I start with a brief introduction to the analytical framework, on which my research draws (see for details Biermann and Bauer 2005 and Biermann and Siebenhüner, forthcoming), and subsequently give an overview of the directorate's mandate and its output. I proceed with an assessment of the cognitive, normative, and executive influence of the directorate and then link the observations to the explanatory variables of the analytical framework, namely polity, problem structure, and people and procedures.

The Analytical Framework

This research is part of the comparative research project MANUS—*Managers of Global Change*, which studies the influence of international bureaucracies in global environmental governance. This paper thus follows the overall analytical framework that has been developed by the MANUS project team (Biermann and Bauer 2005, Biermann and Siebenhüner, forthcoming). The MANUS project distinguishes the influence of international bureaucracies in three dimensions: cognitive, normative, and executive. Bureaucracies may act as “knowledge-brokers” that gather, synthesise, process, and disseminate scientific or other forms of knowledge and change the knowledge or belief systems of other actors (cognitive dimension). They may perform as “negotiation-facilitators” that create, support, and shape norm-building processes for issue-specific international cooperation and can thus influence the outcomes of international cooperation (normative dimension). And they may operate as “capacity-builders” that assist countries in their efforts to implement international agreements and thereby help countries to comply with international rules or even shape domestic policies (executive dimension).

To explain any observed cognitive, normative, or executive influences, this paper explores the explanatory potential of three groups of variables that have been identified in the MANUS project as affecting the capability of international bureaucracies to change the behaviour of other actors: *polity*, *problem structure*, and *people and procedures*. These factors have been derived from different bodies of literature, namely international relations theory, organizational theories and management studies (see in detail Biermann and Bauer 2005 and Biermann and Siebenhüner, forthcoming). *Polity* refers to the formal structures, the legal and institutional setting within which international bureaucracies operate, as well as the competencies and resources at the secretariat's command. *Problem structure* refers to the stakes and costs involved in addressing or not addressing a given problem, its saliency and urgency, and its complexity in terms of the availability and feasibility of solutions. *People and procedures* comprises four variables: 1) *expertise*, that is the ability of international bureaucracies to generate and process knowledge; 2) *organizational structure*, that is the formal structures of bureaucracies and the formalized internal rules and procedures that assign tasks and positions in the hierarchy; 3) *organizational culture*, that is the processes of decision-making, professional cultures and backgrounds of the staff members in the international bureaucracy; and 4) *leadership*, that is the specific behaviour of staff members, in particular of the executive level, vis-à-vis external actors.

Structure and Activities: knowledge, meetings, and legal instruments

Two kinds of output exist: output of the environment directorate and output of the OECD intergovernmental governing bodies, that is the council, 25 thematic committees and over 140 subsidiary bodies.

The environment directorate provides information and produces knowledge that it generates through own research on environmental conditions and policies in OECD member countries and beyond. It then introduces its findings into discussions in the environmental policy and the chemicals committee and publishes reports. For example, in the category “Environment and Sustainable Development” the online library “SourceOECD” lists over 350 books for the period between 1997 and 2005. The environment directorate’s website grants access to over thousand publications and documents that deal with environmental issues and that the environment directorate prepared as single, lead or co-author. In addition, between 1995 and 2005 staff members of the OECD secretariat have contributed to 55 articles on environmental issues in academic journals. Staff members in the environment directorate wrote authored eight of these articles.³

Altogether, the documents and publications spread across three distinct categories: informatory, conceptual, and analytical. The informatory knowledge output comprises all inventories and databases in which the environment directorate presents information about past, present and future environmental conditions or policies. The conceptual knowledge output includes all publications in which the environment directorate develops indicators or methods for designing, testing, and assessing environmental policies and conditions. The analytical knowledge output covers all publications that feature advisory, supervisory, or evaluative elements, that is assessments of policies and instruments, evaluations and reviews of national environmental performance, analyses of implementation processes, and the identification of environmental challenges and trends.

The most visible but less important output of the OECD governing bodies has been the adoption of “OECD acts”, that is council decisions, council decision-recommendations, council recommendations, and other legal instruments (declarations, understandings and arrangements). The only legally binding OECD acts are council decisions and decision-recommendations. However, they do not qualify as international treaties in a legal sense, although they entail the same kind of legal obligations (Bonuci 2004; OECD 2004a). OECD member countries can avoid any legal obligations by abstaining from the council meeting where their peers adopt the decision. All other legal instruments may unfold influence through normative or moral forces. In 2005 six council decisions, eight council decision-recommendations, 49 council recommendations, and four other legal instruments related to environmental issues were in force (OECD 2005c). Compared to other policy areas, environment-related OECD acts add up to the largest share (35 percent of 191 legal instruments). Nevertheless, if compared with other intergovernmental organization the sheer number of OECD acts is negligible.

³ According to the SCOPUS database (accessible at www.scopus.com, subscribers only).

The most important but less visible output of the OECD intergovernmental bodies is to host forums for consultation, exchange, and discussion. Every year more than 40.000 government officials, national civil servants, and independent experts get together at meetings of the committees and their subsidiary bodies, conferences, workshops, and seminars that the OECD secretariat organizes or co-organizes (OECD 2004e). For example, the environment directorate's website lists more than 140 conferences, workshops, and meetings that took place in the period between 1998 and 2005.

The Influence of the OECD Environment Directorate: does anybody listen?

Cognitive Influence: "playing the idea game" ⁴

Scholars often describe the OECD and its secretariat as "think tank" (e.g. Dostal 2004) or "laboratory of policy concepts" (e.g. Sullivan 1997). These attributes suggest that the organization and its bureaucracy influenced other actors by generating and disseminating new ideas and knowledge. Indeed, the environment directorate has cognitive influence on four dimensions.

First, the environment directorate has defined principles and concepts in environmental policy. Often quoted as its major achievement, it defined and promoted the polluter-pays-principle.⁵ Since its conception in the environment directorate and its approval by OECD member countries, this principle guided national and international environmental policies alike. For example, in the 1972 declaration of the United Nations (UN) conference on the human environment, the action plan for the human environment and the 1992 Rio declaration on environment and development governments resorted to the polluter-pays-principle when defining their environmental policy approaches. Other comparable influential principles were the principles of national treatment, that is identical treatment for imported products and similar domestic products, and non-discrimination, that is identical treatment for imported products regardless of their national origin (Long 2000:44). These applied the relevant principles in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to environmental product standards. Their further elaboration and the monitoring of their implementation by the environment directorate "has placed the OECD in the centre of international efforts to define environmental goals, strategies and programme priorities for governments" (Long 2000:124).

Moreover, other actors used concepts that the environment directorate had developed. For example, in the evaluation of environmental policies many other intergovernmental bureaucracies copied the concept of "pressure-state-response", which has its origins in the environment directorate (Comolet 1990; Long 2000). It goes back to the first report of the environment directorate on the state of the environment in OECD

⁴ Marcussen (2004b) introduced this characterization of the OECD.

⁵ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004; and Long 2000; Lönngren 1992.

member countries (OECD 1979). Likewise, when collecting data, EUROSTAT, the statistical office of the European Union, and the UN statistical office (Long 2000:67) applied a questionnaire that the environment directorate had developed for collecting comparable data in its reports on the state of the environment. Comolet (1990) characterized the OECD and its secretariat as “leader in this field”. Lehtonen (2005) even labels the concept of pressure, state, and response the “OECD model”.

Second, the environment directorate has framed discourses, diffused ideas and changed perceptions of problems. Government officials and representatives from non-governmental organizations in a number of OECD member countries commended the environment related work of the OECD secretariat and referred to it as a source of new reference frameworks (Lehtonen 2005:178). Because of their participation in the OECD processes, government officials often develop a common language, identify common concerns, or establish professional contacts and networks. These processes might even result in the development of a common worldview or common frames of reference (Lehtonen 2005 see also Dostal 2004:447; Porter and Webb 2004:9; Marcussen 2004a)

The secretariat could frame the discursive frameworks and shared understandings. The secretariat is “playing the idea game through which it collects and manipulates data, visions, and ideas and diffuses them to its member countries” (Marcussen 2004b:91). Marcussen (2004b) shows that in many policy areas the secretariat has operated as “ideational artist” creating, experimenting with and diffusing ideas, as “ideational agent” picking up ideas from OECD member countries and transferring them to other members and beyond, and as “ideational arbitrator” teaching ideas to national civil servants and socializing them (see for related arguments Dostal 2004). The analysis of Lehtonen supports the argument of Marcussen and shows that environment directorate driven socialization processes have taken place in the environmental field, too (2005:178). In the 1970s and 1980s, the environmental policy committee was the place to be for the heads and senior staff of environmental ministries in the developed world (Long 2005:118). This attractiveness of the committee and the appreciation of the debates by government officials is an achievement of the environment directorate, since it has prepared the meetings and provided the basis for the discussions.

In particular, the environment directorate has promoted the integration of environmental policies with other policies. Other intergovernmental organizations and bureaucracies drew on its pioneering work, which is “unsurpassed in the international community” (Long 2000:128), e.g. the European Communities or the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade and later the World Trade Organization. The input of the environment directorate into debates about policy integration in the environmental policy committee has changed the perspectives of government officials and provided them with new knowledge. Delegates participating in these discussions reported learning processes and appreciated the debates.⁶ For example, the directorate helped government officials “to demystify some of the perceived wisdoms about environmental rules being bad for competitiveness”⁷. It changed domestic discourses about the im-

⁶ Author’s interviews with staff members of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19, 20, and 23 April 2004.

⁷ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 23 April 2004.

pacts of environmental regulation on economic growth by providing delegates with arguments against the allegation of business that environmental policy reduces economic growth. Once delegates returned home to their capitals the working relationships between different ministries often improved (Long 2000:128; see also Sullivan 1997:98). In sum, the environment directorate raised the awareness of governments and other international bodies about the necessity of pursuing interdisciplinary and interinstitutional approaches in environmental policy (Long 2000:128).

Third, the environment directorate has set agendas—within and beyond the organization—thereby raising the awareness among OECD member countries about newly emerging issues. It convinced OECD member countries to include topics that it considered being important in the official two-year work program (see for examples Long 2000:42-50 and 60-65). For example, the environment directorate wrote the “OECD Environment Program 2005–2006”, which the council approved.⁸ In 1989, the then environment director defined nine goals for sustainable development, which—after their endorsement through the environmental policy committee—spread across the entire organization and bureaucracy. They “were treated as the ‘gospel’ on sustainable development for the next decade” (Long 2000:73). Throughout the 1970s, the OECD secretary-general Emile van Lennep together with the environment directorate succeeded in setting the agendas of the committees. They prompted delegates of OECD member countries to discuss issues such as the relationship between environmental and economic policies, environmental indicators, the trade and environment relationship, and the economics of transboundary pollution. In sum, the secretary-general aided by the environment directorate “was extremely prescient, or influential, or both in his formulation of the key issues for the organization” (Long 2000:40, see also 49). Moreover, the environment directorate convinced member states to approve voluntary financial contributions for research on issues where it saw the need of more knowledge. In 2003, these contributions amounted to 5.91 million Euros.

Fourth, the use of its knowledge output in public or scientific debates indicates that the environment directorate has influenced these debates. For example, between 1995 and 2005 over 2.700 academic articles on environmental issues quoted OECD publications.⁹ Most frequently, these articles quoted the OECD environmental data compendiums (over 140 citations); publications on the use of economic instruments (over 250 citations); assessments of national environmental performance (over 70 citations); and environmental indicators (over 120 citations). Moreover, OECD member countries demand research of the environment directorate. They turn to it for assistance in developing policy options to counter environmental degradation (e.g. Long 2000:60). Overall, “a lot of countries really look to the OECD for the latest information and sharing of experiences on how they might actually put policies in place”.¹⁰ That the OECD environmental outlook received the 2001 award for notable government documents of the American Library Association indicates furthermore the relevance of the output of the environment directorate for governments.

⁸ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19 April 2004.

⁹ According to the SCOPUS database (accessible at www.scopus.com, subscribers only).

¹⁰ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 22 April 2004.

OECD publications that the environment directorate prepared influenced domestic public debates on environmental policies, most prominently the OECD environmental performance reviews (see for a comprehensive discussion of their effects and the limitations Lehtonen 2005). In the reviewed countries, governments feel to have to react and comment publicly through press declarations on the conclusions and recommendations of the reviews (Lehtonen 2005). Often domestic environmental institutions use these conclusions and recommendations to advance the domestic debate about environmental policies (Lehtonen 2005). For example, in Canada, the environment minister used the findings of the 1995 review to demand more government action in the mitigation of climate change (Environment Canada 1995). The German government used the 2001 review to counter criticism of the ecological tax reform.¹¹ In the same year, the then German environment minister concluded that the “OECD performance reviews have proved to be useful and helpful for promoting national debate about the environment” (Bundesministerium für Umwelt 2001). Often, public and private environmental actors used the reviews to strengthen the legitimacy of environmental policies (Lehtonen 2005:179). Above all, the performance reviews unfolded effects in particular through the argumentation processes following their publication (Lehtonen 2005:179). However, one should not overestimate their cognitive influence. Often the debates on their recommendations ended quickly (Lehtonen 2005) and, only occasionally, the performance reviews resulted in domestic policy changes.

Normative Influence

The environment directorate has neither initiated negotiations, nor attempted to direct any negotiations in specific political directions. In his historical review of international environmental policy Tolba et al. (1995) nevertheless conclude that the “OECD has also been an important forum for international policy development” (770). In fact, the environment directorate had normative influence on the one hand by supplying analytical support to international negotiations. On the other hand, it provided guidance in the implementation of international agreements. The latter is comparable to the role as “implementation engineer”.

SUPPLYING INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AND CO-OPERATION WITH ANALYTICAL SUPPORT

Above all, scholars highlight the important role of the organization and its secretariat in the international cooperation on chemicals control (Lönngren 1992; but also Long 2000; Tolba et al. 1995). It “can be legitimately cited as one of the OECD’s most outstanding environmental successes” (Long 2000:124). By 2005, eleven legally binding OECD council decisions, 15 council recommendations, 2 other legal instruments, and more than 100 guidelines were in force in the field of chemicals control (OECD 2004a, 2004b). Referred to as landmarks in the history of chemicals control (Lönngren 1992:301), some have evolved into global standards (OECD 2004b)¹², e.g. through their

¹¹ Author’s interview with country expert, Berlin, 2 February 2004.

¹² In particular, the Council Decision C(81)30 concerning the Mutual Acceptance of Data in the Assessment of Chemicals, the Guidelines for Good Laboratory Practice, the Guidelines for Chemical Testing, and the OECD Notification and Consultation Procedure stand out.

incorporation into other international agreements.¹³ Together with two other intergovernmental organizations, the OECD operates as the basis for international cooperation on chemicals policy (Lönngren 1992:167 and 201; Tolba et al. 1995:252). Since the environment directorate provided analytical support to the formulation of international chemicals policy at the OECD¹⁴, “[g]reat credit for the success of this pioneering work should be paid to the OECD secretariat” (Lönngren 1992:194, see also 201-204 and 246-247). Notwithstanding these merits, the environment directorate encountered severe difficulties, for example when attempting to convince OECD member countries to adopt legal instruments for an improved risk management in the chemicals policy.¹⁵

In other environmental policy areas, the research findings of the environment directorate have often constituted the vantage point of international negotiations. In the 1989, Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal governments resorted to the environment directorate’s preparatory work (Tolba et al. 1995:273; Long 2000:17, 74-75). Haas and McCabe (2001) conceive of the OECD and its secretariat as one of three important actors driving the adoption of the 1979 Framework Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution. Through an international project on long-range transport of air pollutants, the environment directorate together with its partners had sensitized countries for the nature and seriousness of the problem (Jäger et al. 2001; Hanf 2000; Tolba et al. 1995). Likewise, governments drew on the environment directorate’s research on production and consumption of fluorocarbons and their potential health and environmental effects when they adopted the 1987 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the related 1989 Montreal protocol (Long 2000:55). However, when the environment directorate later started developing a set of legal rules targeting transboundary air pollution, OECD member countries stopped its work.¹⁶ In the area of environmental taxation, too, the environment directorate faced resistance. Although since the early 1990s, it urged OECD member countries to coordinate and harmonize their environmental taxation policies, by 2005 OECD member countries had yet to take concrete steps.¹⁷

HELPING TO IMPLEMENT INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS BY PROVIDING GUIDANCE

Once governments had concluded international agreements, the environment directorate has influenced the implementation in many cases by providing guidance to the signatories and the implementing bodies. For example, it has contributed to the

¹³ Namely, the 1999 Guidelines for the Identification of Polychlorinated Biphenyls of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (UNEP 1999), the International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (FAO 2002), or the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (www.pic.int).

¹⁴ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004.

¹⁵ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004.

¹⁶ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 22 April 2004.

¹⁷ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004.

implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change by developing methodologies for the assessment and inventories of greenhouse gas emissions. With some modifications, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as well as the implementing bodies and parties of the climate convention continue to use these (UNFCCC-COP 2002:92 and 127, 1998; Long 2000). In the implementation of international biodiversity policies, the European Union, for example, recommends governments to use relevant OECD guidelines. The protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD-COP 2004) as well as statements of convention bodies advise parties to draw on OECD guidance documents of the environment directorate when they implement the convention and its protocols (CBD 2001, 2002).

Executive Influence: does talk turn into action?

The executive influence of the environment directorate have been rather weak. The literature lacks concrete examples for autonomous executive influence of the environment directorate, e.g. on the creation of new institutions, the adoption of new policies, or behavioural changes of actors. Nor did the expert interviews reveal such examples. In his more than 150pages long analysis of the OECD involvement in international environmental issues, Long mentions one single example where activities of the environment directorate resulted in the creation of a new institution: when the government of New Zealand established an environment agency in response to the 1996 environmental performance review (2000:67). Even explicit enquiries for concrete examples during the expert interviews did not unveil any cases. Moreover, although the environment directorate supported the implementation of international agreements through its research, it has not prompted governments to adopt implementing policies and measures.

Instead, in many of the priority areas where the environment directorate has been advocating the adoption and implementation of new environmental policy approaches, OECD member countries do not shine with serious efforts to follow the advice. For example, the environment directorate has criticized the many exemptions that governments concede to energy intensive economic sectors in the taxation of energy consumption (e.g. OECD 2001a). However, although it had even formulated detailed recommendations how to remove these exemptions without harming the international competitiveness of these sectors, these exemptions continue to exist in many OECD member countries. Likewise, the environment directorate has invested time and resources in convincing OECD member countries to abolish environmentally harmful subsidies (e.g. OECD 2003a). Yet, progress has been rather modest (e.g. OECD 2005a). Despite some progress in the area of policy integration—one of the major activities of the environment directorate—the overall implementation record has remained poor: “Countries always support the idea of policy integration verbally, but they do not spend enough resources to actually implement it”.¹⁸

¹⁸ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19 April 2004.

Executive influence has at best been indirect.¹⁹ The environment directorate has supported governments in designing and implementing policies once they had made the political decision independent from it (Long 2000:93-94 and 117-128). Even if the environment directorate prepared policies like during the accession processes of Mexico, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Korea or the implementation of the environmental action programme in Central and Eastern Europe it did not have executive influence on the actual decision to introduce new policies.

Explaining the Influence: the art of persuasion and its limitations

In sum, the cognitive and normative influence of the environment directorate was strong when compared to its executive influence. The strengths of the environment directorate are its ability 1) to develop and define principles and concepts; 2) to frame discourses, pick up or generate and diffuse ideas, and change perceptions; 3) to set agendas and raise awareness among OECD member countries; 4) to generate knowledge that is relevant for public and scientific debates alike; 5) to supply analytical support on which governments drew in international negotiations; and 6) to provide guidance for the implementation of international agreements. The obvious weakness of the environment directorate is its poor record in “turning talk into action”. The environment directorate faced difficulties in changing the behaviour of political actors at the domestic level and in prompting governments to adopt new policies. It has neither triggered the start of international negotiations nor provoked any measures implementing international agreements. Hence, governments and other actors made fundamental political decisions *whether* to take action often independent from the environment directorate. By contrast, in many cases when actors decided *how* they design and implement policies, they drew on the environment directorate’s work.

Against this background, two questions guide the following explanation of the environment directorate’s influence: How did the environment directorate achieve the cognitive and normative influence and why is similar strong executive influence missing?

I argue that the polity, namely the resources the environment directorate avails of as well as its status and role in the organization, is crucial in understanding the differences in the three spheres of influence. They likewise constrain and enable the environment directorate to influence actors by defining boundaries within which parties expect the directorate to operate. They do however not elucidate the question *how* it has realized its influence. The environment directorate’s expertise and the organizational culture best explain its influence.

Although other variables, namely organizational and problem structure, also played a role, they are not as powerful in explaining the directorate’s influences as the others were. Therefore, I do not discuss these variables in separate sections but deal with these where appropriate.

¹⁹ Author’s interviews with staff members of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 20, 21, and 23 April 2004.

Polity: constraint and opportunity alike

RESOURCES: BEING LIMITED TO THE PERSUASIVENESS OF ARGUMENTS

That the secretariat and the environment directorate lack any legal or financial resources to influence other actors partly explains the minor executive influence and the qualifications of the normative influence. It can neither legally compel other actors to adopt measures nor lure them by offering funds. Occasionally and on the request of parties, the secretariat monitors implementation, but peer-pressure remains the only compliance mechanism because the secretariat is not entitled to enforce sanctions (OECD 2004a; Marcussen 2004b; Pagani 2002). Even the OECD as intergovernmental organization and its intergovernmental bodies lack financial or legal resources. It does not issue any grants or loans. Nor does it dispense money for the implementation of projects. The entire budget of the OECD and its secretariat serves to fund the generation of knowledge in the secretariat and to organize conferences, workshops, and meetings.²⁰ Hence, the OECD cannot offer financial rewards in exchange for behaviour complying with the organization's rules or expectations. In addition, although the council adopts legally binding decisions, it lacks formal means to enforce the implementation. Therefore, even indirect influence of the secretariat on the distribution of funds or legal measures, e.g. by submitting proposals, preparing decisions, or enforcing legally binding decisions, is not possible.

Arguments are the only resource the secretariat and the environment directorate have at their disposal. These arguments, however, come up quickly against limiting factors when the environment directorate attempts to have executive influence, e.g. by prompting actors to adopt specific policy measures. It has no direct control over the implementation of its proposals (Dostal 2004:454). Often the governments in OECD member countries lack political will to follow its advice. Even when governments agreed to act, political opposition from domestic actors prevented governments from adhering to the suggestion of the environment directorate.²¹ For example, in the case of environmental taxes and environmental harmful subsidies, the environment directorate excelled in criticism of the policies in OECD member countries. However, staff reported that although "we are doing what we can; there are elements that are out of our reach in terms of implementing policies".²² These limitations also applied to the normative influence within the OECD.²³ Often the structure of the problem at hand increased or decreased the willingness of OECD member countries to agree on the adoption of legal instruments. In general, the likelihood that actors agreed on the adoption of a legal instrument increased when larger number of actors shared the costs. Moreover, OECD member countries welcomed anything that helped to increase the efficient use of resources because it promised to save costs to the governments as well as to the regulated actors. For example, the fact that many of the measures in chemicals policy

²⁰ In 2005, the OECD budget amounted to 329 million Euros of which 10.2 million Euros were allocated to the environment directorate.

²¹ Author's interviews with staff members of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 20 and 23 April 2004.

²² Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 22 April 2004.

²³ Author's interviews with staff members of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19 and 23 April 2004.

helped governments and industry to save expenses partly explains the success of the environment directorate in this policy area (OECD 2004b: 5).

In comparison, cognitive influence is easier to achieve by providing arguments. To resort to arguments, principles, and concepts of the environment directorate helps actors to strengthen their argumentation and in the end might result in policy changes. However, changes in knowledge and belief systems not necessarily result in policy measures and hence are unlikely to provoke the same powerful opposition like the implementation of new policies. Actors might simply wish to demonstrate their commitment to certain ideas and policy approaches without translating these into concrete action.

In sum, the limited resources of the environment directorate and the organization, explain the environment directorate's poor record in executive influence and the qualifications of its normative influence. However, the mere availability of resources or the lack thereof does not help to explain how the environment directorate achieved its cognitive and normative influence. In the next section, I argue that the organizational setting enables the environment directorate to have influence, namely the explicit and implicit rules that govern the work at the OECD and that determine the constraints and the opportunities in the relationship and interaction between principal and agent.

COMPETENCES: FREEDOM OF RESEARCH AND THE BOTTOM-UP WORK PROCESS AS OPPORTUNITY

The OECD secretariat and its subdivisions enjoy considerable autonomy in carrying out their tasks. At the same time, the organization's work processes assign the secretariat and its subdivisions an influential position. This combination of autonomy and positioning in the work processes best explains the ability of the environment directorate to have cognitive influence.

The OECD secretariat and its subdivisions lack any formal mandate that would precisely define the secretariat's tasks. Like all other intergovernmental bureaucracies, the OECD secretariat is not entitled to take any formal decisions. The council holds all formal decision-making power and applies the consensus rule for any of its decisions (articles 6 and 7 of the founding convention). However, the founding convention of the OECD does not spell out any other formal specifications of the secretariat's assignments. The only convention articles that deal with the secretariat (articles 10 and 11) contain vague definitions. Likewise, the mandates of the organization, of the environmental policy and the chemicals committee do not specify the environment directorate's responsibilities. Instead, they outline major functions of the intergovernmental organization and committees as well as the thematic priorities.

Only the self-descriptions of the OECD specify the secretariat's tasks. The secretariat "carries out research and analysis at the request of the OECD's 30 member countries" (OECD 2005b: 121) and works "to support the activities of the committees" (OECD 2004e). The self-description of the environment directorate reads:

"Working closely with member country delegates, the staff researches and analyses the underlying issues. The findings and recommendations of this work are discussed at meetings of EPOC, its subsidiary and collaborating bodies, or with groups of experts." (OECD 2002b: 12, 2004c: 6)

Only the definition of thematic priorities in the two-year work programs formally limits the environment directorate's activities. However, the programs, which the

council has to approve, only define *what* the environment directorate should address in its research. While the environment directorate “cannot burgeon in all directions”²⁴ and is “far from able to act as a self-governed epistemic community” (Marcussen 2004b: 99), they enjoy “quite a bit freedom and flexibility on *how* to do the work”.²⁵ In fact, OECD member countries expect the environment directorate “to come up with ideas in an anticipatory and not reactive mode”²⁶.

Three observations illustrate the environment directorate’s autonomy. Firstly, even when some OECD member countries disagree with the research, they do not necessarily stop the analysis as long as the environment directorate does not present the findings as consensus position.²⁷ Moreover, if OECD member countries object to endorse a final publication on behalf of the OECD, the secretary-general can still publish the findings and assessments as work of the secretariat. Secondly, the environment directorate does not spare with criticism of OECD member countries. In the evaluation of the progress in implementing the OECD environment strategy the environment directorate concluded that

“much more ambitious measures will be needed if the strategy is to be fully implemented by 2010. Current policies are insufficient to adequately protect biodiversity or address climate change, and the decoupling of environmental pressures from economic growth in key sectors is proceeding too slowly” (OECD 2004d; see also Lorentsen 2004).

Thirdly, the research findings of the environment directorate occasionally meet opposition from OECD member countries. In 2003, for example, OECD member countries criticized the environment directorate for a publication on the use of voluntary approaches in environmental policy (OECD 2003b) that questioned the effectiveness of these instruments.²⁸ In sum, OECD member countries concede the OECD secretariat and its subdivisions greater autonomy than the principals of treaty secretariats do.

However, the secretariat and its subdivisions can translate this autonomy into influence only because of its positioning in the working process of the OECD (see for related arguments Marcussen 2004b; Porter and Webb 2004). Dostal describes the position staff members of the secretariat as “gate keepers” (Dostal 2004:454). Exchanges between OECD member countries in the intergovernmental bodies of the organization typically “flow from information and analysis provided by [the] secretariat” (OECD 2004e). The working process starts at the bottom with the collection of data, the conduct of research and the preparation of analyses by the secretariat. The delegates in the intergovernmental committees then discuss and assess the informatory, conceptual, or analytical knowledge. Apart from publications, the working process may culminate in formal council decisions and subsequent implementation (OECD 2004e). Likewise, first proposals for actions, which the council has to approve, e.g. work pro-

²⁴ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 20 April 2004.

²⁵ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 20 April 2004 (italics added). See for examples Lönngren 1992:410-411; see also Henry et al. 2001.

²⁶ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19 April 2004.

²⁷ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 22 April 2004.

²⁸ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004.

grams and OECD acts, originate often from the secretariat and its subdivisions (Bonuci 2004; Marcussen 2004b). Hence, the secretariat's knowledge output often constitutes the vantage point from which discussions among government officials in the committees and their subsidiary bodies evolve. Staff members control the chain of expertise and prepare political issues for discussion or decision-making in the intergovernmental bodies. This position empowers staff members to define problems and solutions (Dostal 2004:454). However, the "closer it gets to legal acts, the more difficult it gets".²⁹ In these cases, the consensus rule for formal decisions constrains the ability of the secretariat and its subdivision to have normative influence. Any government that feels essential interests threatened can veto the adoption of legal instruments.

People and Procedures: the art of persuasion or the sources of authority

Knowledge is the only resource the environment directorate avails of to influence the behaviour of actors in international and domestic environmental politics. So far, I highlighted the potentials and the limitations of this resource. I left unanswered, the crucial question *how* the environment directorate has achieved its influence with the means it avails of. In this section I argue that internal characteristics of the environment directorate, above all its expertise and lesser the organizational culture have enabled it to generate, process and disseminate knowledge that has been influential because it enjoys a good reputation and actors indeed perceive it as authoritative and persuasive. Therefore, I start with a brief characterization of the perception and reputation of the environment directorate's knowledge output and its relevance for the environment directorate's achievements. Subsequently, I highlight those characteristics of the environment directorate that have enabled it to produce this knowledge.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERTISE: INFLUENCE THROUGH AUTHORITATIVE AND PERSUASIVE KNOWLEDGE

Lacking any legal or financial competencies, the key to the achievements of the environment directorate must be its knowledge output.³⁰ The environment directorate "depends solely on the quality of its advice and expertise as it is perceived by its member states" (Dostal 2004:446) and must rely on the intellectual persuasiveness of its arguments (OECD 1985:3; Beyeler 2004:1). "You have to put enough arguments on the table and to provide very strong analytical support".³¹

Indeed, several indications suggest that the knowledge that the secretariat and its subdivisions generate, process and disseminate fulfils these qualities (Long 2000:88 and 131; Henry et al. 2001:48) and, thus, is an important source of its influence. Marcussen characterizes the organization and its bureaucracy as "mythical, neutral, scientific, and objective soothsayer that one cannot afford to ignore" (Marcussen 2004a). When authors of academic articles quote OECD publications they often see no need to

²⁹ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19 April 2004.

³⁰ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 20 April 2004. See also Dostal 2004.

³¹ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 22 April 2004.

justify the authoritative character of the knowledge beyond the mere use of the OECD label (Porter and Webb 2004). Their publications have gained a reputation of “authoritative statements of knowledge in many policy areas” (Porter and Webb 2004:7). Albeit occasionally criticized, OECD statistical data “are among the most reputable available” (Porter and Webb 2004:7). Long (2000) concluded that “high quality work has been a hallmark of the Organization’s environmental work, and must remain so if the OECD is to remain relevant, useful and influential” (132, see also 88 and 131). This high quality and credibility of its knowledge output explain the environment directorate’s cognitive influence and the resort to its input in international negotiations and the implementation of international agreements.³² “Our safeguard is the quality of work and our credibility. We have the reputation to make good quality work”.³³

On several occasions, external experts commended the environment directorate’s work. In 1996, an independent group of fourteen experts that assessed the environment directorate’s future role in international environmental affairs honoured the unique ability of the environment directorate to provide systematic analysis (OECD 1997). With regard to the use of economic instruments in environmental policy, the environment directorate has achieved expert status (Tolba et al. 1995:366-367). Likewise, it “could provide an unsurpassed quality of analytical work” in the support of the integration of trade and environmental policies (Long 2000:88). The influence of the performance reviews but also other influence of the environment directorate depends to a high degree on its reputation as an unbiased expert source of knowledge that is independent from governments under review and from its peers (Pagani 2002; Lehtonen 2005; Henry et al. 2001; Marcussen 2004a). However, how did the environment directorate establish the good reputation of its knowledge output?

The skills and status of staff members who are responsible for research and analysis enable the secretariat to generate authoritative and persuasive knowledge. The secretariat continuously attracted qualified and competent staff (Marcussen 2004a). The majority of professional staff has an academic background and/or professional experience in public administrations of OECD member countries or other intergovernmental bureaucracies.³⁴ They have several years of professional experiences within their discipline (Marcussen 2004b). The dominant peer groups are economists followed by lawyers, scientists, and regulatory experts (Dostal 2004:446). Equally important, the OECD convention guarantees professional staff members their independency: staff “shall neither seek nor receive instructions from any of the Members or from any Government or authority external to the Organization” (paragraph 2, article 11). They are encouraged to publish in academic books and journals as well as to attend international academic conferences (Trondal, Marcussen, and Veggeland 2004). Two features of the staff recruitment procedure further strengthen the independence of staff mem-

³² Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004.

³³ Author’s interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19 April 2004.

³⁴ The OECD does not publish detailed statistics on staff and their professional backgrounds (Dostal 2004). Estimates in the literature range between 700 (Dostal 2004; OECD 2004e) to 800 (Trondal, Marcussen, and Veggeland 2004) full-time employed research personnel to which approximately 500 research personnel employed on ad-hoc basis with limited time contracts add (Trondal, Marcussen, and Veggeland 2004). Altogether, including general services staff, the OECD employed some 2000 staff (OECD 2004e).

bers. The recruitment is the sole responsibility of the secretary-general and the selection criteria are professional or academic merits and experiences instead of country of origin.³⁵

The privileged and regular access of staff to inside knowledge of governments provides an additional source for the persuasiveness and authority of the environment directorate's knowledge output (Henry et al. 2001; Porter and Webb 2004). The meetings, conferences, and workshops the directorate organizes offer staff members the opportunity to establish personal contacts to government officials, thereby facilitating the access to inside knowledge. Moreover, throughout its history the environment directorate has identified new issues and devised innovative solutions by convening external experts and/or stakeholders to seminars, e.g. in the development of the polluter-pays principle (Long 2000:44, see there also for a number of other examples). This practice either helped to enhance the credibility and authority of the environment directorate when it submitted proposals to OECD member countries. Or it provided the environment directorate with alternative indirect channels of communication with OECD member countries when these stakeholders and experts supported its recommendations.

“Non-governmental organizations are more likely to succeed in getting a door opened for us than we are. They can act as political champions who see a political necessity, can make public pressure and convince politicians that they shall have an environmental component in this or that activity”³⁶.

Even in the controversial issue of environmental harmful subsidies, the environment directorate succeeded to convince OECD member countries to abolish some of these, once it involved stakeholders in the decision-making processes.³⁷

Further enhancing the authority and persuasiveness and contributing to the reputation of their knowledge output the secretariat and its subdivisions control unique expertise that confers staff members a comparative advantages vis-à-vis other actors (Dostal 2004:446). This almost monopolistic control helps to explain the frequent references to the secretariat's knowledge output in public debates as well as scientific discourses and publications. The secretariat has pioneered the collection and processing of comprehensive statistical data on environmental conditions in OECD member countries (Long 2000; Trondal, Marcussen, and Veggeland 2004; Dostal 2004). In the harmonization of data, for example, the secretariat has established a quasi monopoly on comparable statistical data for developed countries in almost any conceivable policy area, including environmental protection (see for an overview of available and forthcoming statistics OECD 2005d). At the same time, the abundant number of analytical studies on environmental policies, instruments, and institutions that the environment directorate has conducted since its creation add up to an unmatched body of specialized knowledge the environment directorate has at its command.

³⁵ Author's interviews with staff members of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 19, 22, and 23 April 2004. See also Trondal, Marcussen, and Veggeland 2004; Henry et al. 2001.

³⁶ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 20 April 2004.

³⁷ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: ADAPTATION, ANTICIPATION AND DIPLOMATIC STYLE

The organizational culture further increases the authority and persuasiveness of the environment directorate's knowledge output. The environment directorate's practice and ability to anticipate and to adapt to the needs of OECD member countries ensured that the OECD member countries appreciated its contributions. Since its creation, the environment directorate has frequently adapted its internal structures and shifted its activities to new thematic priorities in response to new demands by OECD member countries (see Long 2000 for examples). In addition, it has managed to stay as close as possible to real-world problems and the practical experiences of its principals. "Our clients are governments and they do not want theoretical or academic work".³⁸ All publications start from the experiences in OECD member countries, emphasize practical issues and challenges, and address policy questions as well as political, economic, or societal dimensions of environmental pollution. The environment directorate picks up new ideas and policies from the countries and then develops their potential for implementation. This ensures that government officials in OECD member countries can relate and translate the results to their reality (Papadopoulos 1994: 203).

The environment directorate's predominant culture of presenting findings, recommendations, or proposals in a diplomatic, depoliticized, and non-confrontational style further adds to the acceptance of its output (Dostal 2004; Henry et al. 2001). For example, when a proposal by the environment directorate met opposition by OECD member countries staff often attempted to "circumvent the positions by making the work more technical and less political".³⁹ Staff attempts to depoliticize issues and transform these into questions of expertise (Dostal 2004:446). Often the language and formulations in the secretariat's publications are open for a number of interpretations so that almost everybody can agree with one or another interpretation (OECD 2000; Dostal 2004). In doing so, the secretariat maintains its neutrality in the public perception (Dostal 2004:447; see also Lehtonen 2005), which is essential for its ability to influence other actors (Marcussen 2004a). In sum, playing the game within the boundaries that the OECD member countries define helps the environment directorate to gain credibility among member states (Marcussen 2004b; Armingeon 2004).

Conclusion

The environment directorate is an actor in its own right that autonomously influences international and domestic environmental policies. Its cognitive and normative influence has been stronger than its executive influence. Governments of member and non-member countries as well as other political actors have often drawn on the analytical input the environment directorate provided, be it in public debates or scientific discourses, be it in the negotiation or implementation of international agreements. A number of concepts and principles that the environment directorate promoted have

³⁸ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 21 April 2004.

³⁹ Author's interview with staff member of OECD environment directorate, OECD headquarters, Paris, 20 April 2004.

shaped approaches to environmental policy in OECD member and non-member countries. This use of the environment directorate's analytical input, the acceptance of its recommendations and its definition of concepts best characterize its influence. By contrast, the environment directorate's record in executive influence remained poor. It succeeded neither in prompting governments to introduce new policies nor in triggering international negotiations. Overall, the environment directorate has guided actors in *how* they might pursue international or domestic environmental policies, whereas it had limited influence on fundamental political decisions *whether* actors take action to address environmental challenges.

Different aspects of the polity as well as the people and procedures are crucial to understand the environment directorate's achievements and the limitations to its influence. On the one hand, they define the boundaries within which the environment directorate may influence domestic and international environmental policies at all. On the other hand, they help to explain its achievements. Overall, I showed that the polity defined the principal potential of the environment directorate to have influence, while its internal characteristics determined and explained its actual achievements. The autonomy of the environment directorate and its influential positioning within the organization's work processes delineate the opportunity structure within which the environment directorate can act. This structure provides the environment directorate with leeway in deciding on how it carries out its research and prepares its analytical contributions. At the same time, it puts the environment directorate at the very beginning of almost every workflow within the organization. The *type* of resources the environment directorate commands constrained its principal ability to exploit these opportunities. Lacking any financial or legal competencies, the environment directorate had to rely on its knowledge output. It has to convince actors through arguments but cannot compel them by adopting legally binding instruments or lure them by offering financial incentives. The *quality* of its resources, namely the perceived authority and persuasiveness of its knowledge output, are crucial in understanding how the environment directorate has influenced actors. In turn, the expertise the environment directorate holds and controls and its organizational culture to respect and to anticipate the needs and priorities of its principals explains the quality of its knowledge output.

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