

Implementation of EU environmental policy at the local level within EU multi-level governance – influences and interdependencies explaining non-compliance

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Abstract

Non-compliance with EU public policy not only poses a threat to European integration which in general is increasingly at stake. Violating EU environmental policies in particular will also jeopardise the protection of human health and a healthy environment in the long-term. Policy implementation research still applies traditional implementation approaches that fail to integrate complex actor constellations. The use of multi-level governance as a promising approach is often insufficiently applied to practical cases.

This research is an attempt to overcome this gap by applying the EU MLG in order to identify possible reasons for non-compliance at the local level. Failed implementation of the EU AAQ directive at the local level in Germany is taken as an example. Results show that despite local state authorities' responsibility to ensure compliance with air quality standards, non-state actors and certain economic actors indirectly exert considerable influence on willingness of political decision-makers to take action at national, federal and local levels. The spread of overlooked and incorrect knowledge among actors – triggered by media - results in distrust of the EU directive and limit values. This explains to a certain degree why air quality standards are not perceived as an health issue.

keywords: policy implementation; non-compliance; multi-level governance; European Union; local implementation; air quality policy