



Presentation

Transatlantic Environmental Partnerships

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1 Introduction

It's a great pleasure to have the opportunity to represent my research to you and I am thankful for your coming. Before starting with my presentation, I would like to deeply thank the AICGS for their hospitality in the last weeks. In particular during the time of the German election, this was the place to be to get a first insight view from the oversight.

2 Background

U.S. and European views on a number of environmental issues, such as climate change or genetically modified organisms, are frequently viewed as irreconcilable. Interestingly, there seems to be more mutual understanding and agreement on the sub-national level. In recent years, a number of transatlantic partnerships between regional and local institutions have evolved in order to change information and best practices in the environmental policy area.

You might ask yourself why regional and local initiatives are of any importance. Aren't there more pressing international environmental problems? The fact is, a great deal of the implementation and practice of environmental protection aimed at addressing global problems takes place among subnational actors at the local, regional and state level. Moreover, subnational authorities may also employ more innovative policies and act as a laboratory for the federal level and last but not least, subnational actors can also play a crucial role in the formation of environmental policies at the federal level.

In my presentation I would like to speak about a number of these partnerships, in particular about:

- The Sister City partnership between Chicago and Hamburg;
- The Bavaria-Wisconsin Regulatory Reform Working Partnership ;
- The State-Country Partnership between New Jersey and the Netherlands;
- The State Partnership between Maryland and Schleswig-Holstein; and the
- Regional Partnership between the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) and the Verband Region Stuttgart.

Questions that I will address include the formation of the various partnerships, their frameworks for cooperation, their objectives and methods of exchange etc. Let me go to some of the key findings and afterwards conclude with some thoughts on future challenges and opportunities.

3 Establishment of the Partnerships

Most partnerships investigated within this study came about through the development of friendships between individuals on both sides of the Atlantic. International conferences and workshops, as well as delegation visits, were frequently the occasion for the beginning of these international acquaintances. In general, similar environmental challenges, socio-economic or geographical characteristics in Europe and the U.S. often served to encourage partnerships. Also, in a number of cases, historical ties between the continents helped to create a supportive atmosphere for the environmental partnerships.

4 Objectives

Generally, the objectives of partnerships are to mutually benefit through exchange. However, the objectives stated in the partnerships' founding documents vary widely in their scope and precision. In some partnerships environmental issues play only a minor role in the exchanges, whereas others regarded the environment to be of equal importance to other issues or even the central focus of the entire partnership. Not only do some Memoranda of Understanding focus specifically on environmental issues, some partnerships point to specific environmental policy instruments and methodologies which address these issues, such as market based instruments.

5 Methods for exchange

Partnerships make use of a variety of methods for exchange regarding environmental issues across the Atlantic. Short-term visits, usually less than one day in length and often including brief presentations of best practices and site visits, represent a frequently-used method for exchange. However, information flows during short term visits are often very much biased towards the visitors, as there is usually not sufficient time to discuss environmental policies of the visitors' country. Longer visits for a number of days or a week therefore seem to be a more productive method for exchange and transatlantic policy learning, as there is sufficient time to understand the characteristics and challenges of the hosting countries, to experience first hand the implementation of innovative methodologies and best practices, as well as to discuss open questions with the partners. As part of these long-term visits, but also as single events, conferences, workshops and case studies are also effective learning and exchange fora.

For individual experts there are a number of opportunities for transatlantic exchanges on environmental issues through working exchanges, fellowships or scholarships. Remarkably, most partnerships have thus far not considered

taking advantage of these opportunities. As a result, most individuals who carry out research or exchange on environmental issues seem to do so without the framework of a transatlantic partnership.

6 Participants in the Cooperation

Generally speaking, the selection of participants in delegations or partnerships tends to be done on the basis of existing networks and personal relations. A diverse array of actors, from NGOs, local activists, businesses, academia, labor, policy-making and other fields are represented in transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level. However, the range of actors taking part in longer visits and their working levels differ from partnership to partnership.

Whereas some longer visits are undertaken by groups of stakeholders from numerous fields of expertise, such as non-governmental organizations, trade unions or even media and universities, other visits may be largely limited to policymakers. Likewise, the working levels of the participants in some delegations is relatively homogenous, whereas the participants' working levels varies widely within other delegations.

7 Financing of Cooperation

While the expenses of email and phone exchanges are negligible, the resources needed to organize longer visits or conferences may be substantial, and most partnerships suffer from limited financial resources for the organization of travels and visits. While the time for the organization of and the participation in exchanges is usually provided by the employing authority, subnational entities often lack the resources for international activities. It should be noted, however, that the costs of exchanges are easily overestimated, as most lunches and dinners are sponsored by local business or authorities. Moreover, environmental aspects can sometimes be integrated into visits that focus mainly on fostering business and economic development, which are often better funded. Generally, partnerships do not possess institutionalized funding for exchanges or conferences. Therefore, financing is sought on a case-by-case basis. To cover the travel and accommodation costs, many partnerships attract private or business donations. Foundations play an important role in the funding of exchange visits, and most of the delegations that embarked on visits received support from foundations, such as the Heinrich Boell Foundation, the German Marshall Fund or the American Council on Germany.

8 Environmental Issue Areas

Generally, transatlantic partnerships cooperate on a wide variety of issue areas, such as education, business, culture, social and environmental issues. The selection of issues to be addressed is mainly done through the identification of common challenges, where practitioners foresee mutual benefits as a result of transatlantic exchange. With regard to the environment, these issue areas include, but are not limited to, smart growth, the revitalization of city centers, brownfield redevelopment and green rooftops and building techniques. Aside from the general challenges identified, a number of partnerships spent some time on specific issues dealt with at the local or regional level. These issues included emissions trading, the enhanced role of new technologies for the participation and involvement of grassroots organizations, environmental management systems, alternative pollution prevention and control approaches and environmental benchmarking. Additional issues about which views and experiences were exchanged ranged from sustainable agriculture to environmental justice, river restoration, traffic calming, supply chain environmental management and waste management and recycling.

9 Impacts of Subnational Cooperation

Some of the strongest impacts of transatlantic exchanges are inspirations from best practices, including projects, policies, and methodologies and approaches to policy-making. While the best practice examples are certainly not always directly transferable, they nevertheless give an important stimulus for the setting of higher environmental goals, as attested to by a number of realized projects and environmental policies that can be traced directly back to transatlantic cooperation at the subnational level. Also, the lesson of learning from abroad has led to a paradigm shift in a number of institutions and an extraordinary transformation of the relationship among different stakeholders. Based on the knowledge of the partners and the more private interaction during the visit, partners were more willing to listen to different opinions and were able to work more closely and productively regardless of political affiliations or beliefs. Yet another important benefit is that international exchanges force participants to reflect upon their own work, which often contributes to a productive reassessment of day-to-day work and stimulates internal discussions about personal work and performance. Last but not least, transatlantic environmental cooperation can contribute to increased self-esteem and a better working atmosphere. For participants it is often satisfying to see that other states struggle with similar environmental problems and that there are no quick fixes.

10 Challenges and Opportunities

The transatlantic environmental partnerships surveyed in this study are very heterogeneous. Consequently, general comparisons and conclusions are transferable only to a limited degree. Nevertheless, the following gives an overview of the challenges subnational partnerships often face and the opportunities they have for becoming even more effective.

10.1 Challenges

- Funding for transatlantic environmental exchange is scarce. The financing of personal travel costs can constitute a major impediment for certain groups, such as those from civil society. As foundations scale down their support for transatlantic environmental exchanges, private or business sources are looked to more frequently for financing. However, even if business groups offer to sponsor NGO participation, it may be difficult for NGOs to accept this funding as their work relies to a large extent on financial and political independence.
- A number of partnerships see the potential of becoming unbalanced. This regards less the potential to learn from each other than the means to organize the cooperation. Some European partners, in particular states, have more resources than their transatlantic counterparts to engage in international exchanges. Also, the language was seen by some partnerships as a challenge. While Europeans were usually able to read and speak English, many visitors from the U.S. were not able to communicate in their partner's language.
- One of the biggest challenges to productive partnerships is the issue of succession of active individuals. The activities of all cooperations rely to a very large degree on the commitment of individuals that work to provide the partnerships with content. Therefore, it is difficult to sustain a high level of cooperation if people actively involved in the exchanges, who are often also the initiators of the partnership, leave the office or switch jobs.
- A change in government or political leadership may also present a challenge. In particular, some partnerships were scaled down after a change in the administration.
- Yet another challenge is the prejudice that exchanges, and in particular visits, constitute mainly a private pleasure and bring about only limited benefits for the home state.

10.2 Opportunities

- The use of monitoring systems and evaluation schemes can contribute to rendering partnerships more effective and to internally and externally justifying the effort and financial means invested. Thus far, most partnerships have used only informal feed-backs to enhance the quality and the impact of their cooperation. Positive results of these schemes would prove beneficial for attracting political and financial support for the partnerships.
- Thus far there has been only limited reporting of the impacts of the partnerships. Documented results, for example on how improved environmental protection was achieved without losing competitiveness, would certainly make the argument for transatlantic environmental cooperation stronger. An increase in the dissemination of information on the partnerships and their impacts should present an opportunity to make the benefits of transatlantic cooperation at the subnational level more widely known and might contribute to an exchange between different partnerships or facilitate the creation of new ones.
- Exchanges can be made more effective by not only identifying and exchanging views on specific issues or policies, but also cooperating on the planning, creation and implementation process. The utilization of workshops or cooperation on specific environmental issues, such as a land-use plan, might be promising in this respect. Yet another possibility for increasing the impact might be to include high-level decision makers in exchanges.
- The use of existing institutions might prove beneficial to increasing cooperation on environmental issues across the Atlantic. For instance, there are numerous sister cities programs, but many of these do not yet include exchanges on environmental issues.
- Certainly it would be beneficial to expand the number of partnerships by bringing in new actors and creating new partnerships. This is particularly true for entities which work on similar environmental problems, but have gathered different experiences. For example the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCE) has a long history of emissions trading, yet there is no active exchange between the CCE and the newly created European Emission Trading Schemes and their trading platforms. In fact, a partnership between these entities could help to avoid the development of different and perhaps even incompatible systems within the U.S. and the EU.

11 Conclusions

To wrap up, transatlantic partnerships have successfully exchanged views on how to best address local and regional environmental problems and sustainable development issues. Testimony to this is given by legislation, implemented projects and transferred ideas. Moreover, there are many intangible benefits of these exchanges, such as better cooperation among different stakeholders, enhanced working atmospheres or the self-reflection of work. However, the study also confirmed challenges and impediments to exchanges at this level. Moreover, it seems that there is little guidance on how to best organize and institutionalize these exchanges. Therefore, it might be assumed that there is a potential for even more effective and efficient partnerships and exchanges on environmental issues.

The next step in the direction of enhanced transatlantic environmental cooperation at the subnational level should comprise further research and investigation, such as the development of a more systematic approach to analysis and detailed case studies. Finally, it should be investigated in what ways the identification of common solutions to environmental problems at the state or local level has contributed to, and could continue to assist in, finding common ground, developing common positions or successfully influencing policy at the national level as well as in international relations.

I thank you for your attention and am looking forward to our discussion.