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SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH POLICIES

Abstract:

Introduction This study was done in the framework of a PhD thesis on the environmental health public policies in Europe. Its specific aim was notably to determine how the existing conceptual links between environmental health and sustainable development translated into real case health policies in three countries, namely Switzerland, Germany and Belgium. **Methods** The study was mainly based on interviews conducted among experts of the environmental health policy process. The analysis describes the environmental health policy of the three countries from the mid-1990s until today, notably the links between their national environmental health action plans (NEHAP) and their national strategies of sustainable development (NSSD), from the agenda setting phase to the implementation of measures. **Results** The analysis shows contrasted results among the countries considered. Indeed, Switzerland is clearly lagging behind since its abandonment of its federal environmental health policy in 2007. In contrary, Germany has achieved a relatively well structured network of actors involved in the field of environmental health, allowing the country to be at the forefront of scientific research. However, the three countries face powerful drawbacks regarding the making of an efficient environmental health policy, such as limited political attention or a focus on scientific research rather than on the implementation of constraining measures. **Discussion** While these two concepts “environmental health & sustainable development” call for systemic and intersectoral approaches, the cases under study highlight common challenges and shortcomings in the making of an efficient and lasting environmental health policy. Indeed, whether the analysis highlights obstacles arising from budgetary constraints, political timing or administrative conflicts and discrepancy, they all tend to demonstrate the difficulty to translate interdisciplinary concepts with complex interactions into real world policies.

Keywords:

environmental health, NEHAP, public policy, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium