

1,897 Views | 17 CrossRef citations to date | 0 Altmetric

Articles

Environmental policy implementation during the economic crisis: an analysis of European member state 'leader-laggard' dynamics

Michail Melidis  & Duncan J. Russel 

Pages 198-210 | Received 13 Dec 2017, Accepted 07 Dec 2019, Published online: 29 Jan 2020

 Cite this article  <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2020.1719051>

 Check for updates

Sample our
Geography
Journals

>> [Sign in here](#) to start your access
to the latest two volumes for 14 days

 Full Article  Figures & data  References  Citations  Metrics

 Reprints & Permissions

[Read this article](#)

 Share

ABSTRACT

The long-standing debate on environmental policy 'leaders' and 'laggards' lends itself to a new analysis following with the advent of the 2008 economic crisis. This paper, therefore, asks the question to what extent do European Union (EU) member states have the capacity and willingness to implement EU environmental policy amid austerity, budget cuts, and rising costs over the period 2008–2014. Building upon previous studies, 26 interviews with European, Greek and United Kingdom participants and records of environmental infringements, the paper provides a contemporary picture of the environmental policy 'leader-laggard' dynamic in Europe. The findings demonstrate that the impact of the economic crisis seems contestable and varies amongst member states, while the reduction in environmental infringements appears

to have a link with the decrease in economic activity. Although environmental policy 'leaders' maintain patterns of strong implementation, the improved implementation performance of some 'laggards' reflects a shift in their implementation patterns amid a period of intense political and economic controversies.

KEYWORDS:

Economic crisis EU environmental policy leaders and laggards implementation performance

policy outputs and outcomes

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Michail Melidis is an Associate Lecturer at the University of Exeter. His work and research interests are focused on the analysis and implementation of environmental policies in EU, Greece, and the UK.

Duncan Russel is a Professor of Environmental Policy at the University of Exeter. His work research among other things, evidence-policy interactions, how institutional processes affect environmental policy outputs and policy coordination for the environment in the UK and Europe.

ORCID

Michail Melidis <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0042-4001>

Duncan J. Russel <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3843-7892>

Correction Statement

Notes

- 1 The UK in many studies is regarded both leader and in-betweener interchangeably.
- 2 The former as a small country which exercised leadership in certain stages of EU policy making, the latter as a larger state that provided leadership throughout all decision-making stages. Both of them introduced environmental policy innovations and exhibited high levels of ambitions and standards in different timings. In addition to this, another factor is the six-month rotating Council Presidency that permits Member states to hold the grip and wield great influence to the EU (Liefferink & Wurzel, [2017](#), p. 956).
- 3 Environmental infringements relate to the violation of Community environmental law. The EU Commission may take legal action and initiate a formal infringement procedure (of several stages each ending with a formal decision as laid out in the EU treaties) if an EU country fails to transpose the provisions of directives and implement EU law. Similarly, it may refer the issue to the Court of Justice which in some cases (of persistent non-compliance) results in the imposition of financial penalties. A telling example is the referral of Greece by the Commission to the European Court of Justice over poor waste water treatment presenting a risk to public health (26/02/2015) (IP/15/4491).
- 4 For more information please see the Annual Reports of the European Commission on monitoring the application of EU law, the infringements cases, court documents and rulings here: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/legal/law/press_en.htm.
- 5 The Pilot Scheme was gradually introduced from 2008 to 2012 as an informal mechanism to dispute settling by which the EU Commission aims to settle violations of EU law preceding the initiation of the formal infringement proceedings.

Additional information

Funding

Related research

People also read

Recommended articles

Cited by
17

[Environmental leaders and pioneers: agents of change? >](#)

Duncan Liefferink et al.

Journal of European Public Policy

Published online: 29 Apr 2016

[EU environmental policy in times of crisis >](#)

Charlotte Burns et al.

Journal of European Public Policy

Published online: 11 Jan 2019

[Leaders and laggards in environmental policy: a quantitative analysis of domestic policy outputs >](#)

Duncan Liefferink et al.

Journal of European Public Policy

Published online: 16 Jun 2009

[View more](#)

Information for

[Authors](#)

[R&D professionals](#)

[Editors](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Societies](#)

Opportunities

[Reprints and e-prints](#)

[Advertising solutions](#)

[Accelerated publication](#)

[Corporate access solutions](#)

Open access

[Overview](#)

[Open journals](#)

[Open Select](#)

[Dove Medical Press](#)

[F1000Research](#)

Help and information

[Help and contact](#)

[Newsroom](#)

[All journals](#)

[Books](#)

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email



Sign me up



Copyright © 2026 Informa UK Limited [Privacy policy](#)

[Cookies](#) [Terms & conditions](#) [Accessibility](#)

Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG



Taylor & Francis
by informa