

“The influence of the private sector in the international negotiations of the Convention on Biodiversity: myths and reality”

Introduction

This research proposal is designed to contribute to the work package 2 (Mobility) and the thematic area of Global Environmental Governance (5.3.1). The applicant, a PhD student in political science at Sciences Po Bordeaux, France, intends to spend 5 months at the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation (CSGR) at Warwick University.

The applicant will work in particular with professor Peter Newell on the influence of the private sector in the international negotiations of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) in a comparative perspective, focusing on three case studies: the implementation of the convention regime, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety linked to the CBD and the recent development of a regime to deal with the Access and Benefit Sharing issue (ABS). At the time of the mobility, the applicant will be in the third and last year of her PhD program. This project will help the applicant finalising her work while discussing it with researchers in Warwick.

Research proposal

After more than 20 years of development, the conventions signed at the Rio summit are now in their implementation stage. These processes are part of the wider web of global environmental governance. The study of environmental regimes encompasses both the inter-state system, and non-state actors. Therefore the latter have their role to play in global environmental governance (Josselin and Wallace 2001). Among these non-state actors the role of civil society and specifically non governmental organisations dominated the field. The question of the privatization of global environmental regulations has emerged also from the debates in international ecopolitics.

The literature focusing on private actors was particularly concerned by the emergence of private regimes (Haufler 2001), characterized by low standards for environmental protection. Another popular topic as well has been public-private partnerships as a mirror of the privatization wave reflecting larger structural change in the global political economy - toward commodification, accumulation and neo-liberal imperialism (Backstrand 2006, Norris 2005). Ever since the Johannesburg summit in 2002, the private sector has been perceived as interfering with environmental politics (Pattberg 2004). However, very few empirical studies have analyzed in detail the impact of business circles in international environmental politics and especially those relating to biodiversity.

The purpose of the present research proposal is to approach the challenge of the privatization of global environmental governance from a different angle that is to say through its links with and influence on the inter-state system of environmental regimes. Our point is that the level of regime analysis is particularly crucial in the understanding of business influence in the international system, and in particular the international politics of the environment.

Firstly, if indeed some governance schemes that are disconnected from the state are emerging in environmental governance- such as partnerships for conservation or private sector regimes for international environmental norms-, some key elements of global environmental politics are still dealt with only at the inter-governmental regime level. This is the case for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety or the Kyoto Protocol on gas emissions limitation. Moreover, there are no private sector governance schemes in both of these topics and no partnerships concerning the biosafety issue.

Secondly, since the inter-governmental level is situated at the crossroads of local, national and international levels, it makes it the more appropriate level to observe all the different tensions that can emerge from any arena or level of environmental governance linked to the international environmental decision-making process. This means of course that we adopt a broad definition of the concept of regime. In that case, we should not forget about the links inter-governmental regimes have with other arenas or governance developments in similar topics.

Two areas of research have studied the private sector's involvement in global intergovernmental governance: the literature on lobbying on the one hand, which developed mainly at the national and European level and gave rise to studies about the influence of non-state actors in international relations (Arts 1998, Arts 2003, Newell 2000); International Political Economy –and then Critical International Political Economy - on the other hand (Levy and Newell 2005, Newell 2003, Paterson 2003).

The private sector has generally been considered as one of the most powerful actors in international environmental governance (Fuchs 2005, Steffenhagen 2001). This derives from the main focus being placed on business resources by both approaches concluding on their influence over the negotiation process: their financial resources, their knowledge, expertise and their network abilities strengthen both their lobbying capacities and their wider structural power.

If these factors are indeed important, this study will argue that three characteristics have to be considered more specifically to assess the influence of business as an actor in environmental governance: the unity of the sector, the specifics of international environmental negotiations and the concentration of business competences on very special economic issues. These characteristics, as well as the adoption of a definition of influence based less on participation and resources but more on outcomes (Betsill and Corell 2001) will help to consider more closely the limits of business influence in international environmental negotiations.

The research questions linked to the project are:

- In which forms does the private sector influence the inter-state system of negotiations under the CBD?
- To which extent are the results of environmental regimes influenced by business activities? What are the limits of private sector impact on the CBD?
- Does the extent of business influence vary from one issue negotiated to another?
- What are the implications of the change and limits of private sector influence in the explanation and study of environmental regimes negotiations?

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