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Growing Green Democracy? Barriers to Ecological Modernisation in Democratising States

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Abstract

Ecological modernisation has established an important position in the field of environmental politics. The adoption of technocratic solutions to environmental challenges is attractive to policymakers. Ecological modernisation enables such an approach, in combination with mechanisms for participation and reflexive policy development. However, there are questions regarding the applicability of the concept to political contexts differing from those in the Northern European states in which it first emerged. This paper examines the challenges associated with adopting ecological modernisation in the context of democratisation and draws on analysis of the development of environmental politics in Bulgaria to illustrate the difficulties identified. The findings suggest that the adoption of ecological modernisation during a period of democratisation may lead to the hardening of closed technocratic policy making, limiting wider participation and preventing the development of stronger and more reflexive forms of ecological modernisation.

Keywords: democratisation, participation, ecological modernisation, administration, Bulgaria.

Introduction

The concept of ecological modernisation emerged in the 1980s as a "more foresighted and preventative type of environmental policy…steering the development away from production processes that are environmentally problematic." (Andersen and Massa, 2000: 338). Ecological modernisation has consolidated its position as one of the dominant approaches to addressing environmental challenges within the nation state. The concept of ecological modernisation rests on the assertion that economic growth and environmental protection can be self-reinforcing in a positive-sum relationship (Hajer, 1995). Despite the apparent ubiquity of ecological modernisation, Andersen (2002: 1395) argues that:

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> ecological modernisation will occur if sufficient societal, political, administrative, and organisational capacity is available and then only in response to the strength of specific hypothesised variables, such as strong corporatist institutions, the innovative character of legal and informational systems, and a certain regulatory proficiency.

However, the concept remains attractive as it offers the possibility of a win-win situation, where economic development and environmental protection can be achieved in conjunction with minimal disruption to 'business as usual' (Christoff, 1996). Ecological modernisation may therefore be pursued in the absence of the need for wholesale change, leading to distortion and misrepresentation.

There have been a number of studies in the past decade examining the application of ecological modernisation. Summarising the tone of this research, Mol et al (2010: 4) argue that:

> ecological modernisation studies reflect on how various institutions and social actors attempt to integrate environmental concerns into their everyday functioning, development and relationships with others, including their relationship with the natural world.

These started in the birthplace of the concept, Western Europe,[1] with studies on ecological modernisation in industries ranging from waste management and livestock through to carbon capture and storage in the developed world (Breukers and Wolsink, 2007; Harring *et al*., 2011; Howes *et al*., 2010; Jay and Morad, 2007; Jensen and Gram-Hanssen, 2008; Scheinberg, 2003; Schlosberg and Rinfret, 2008; Tjernshaugen, 2011; Toke and Strachan, 2006). More recently though, there have been efforts to expand the concept beyond its origins and consider its applicability in developing and democratising states (Gille, 2004; Glenna and Mitev, 2011; Kehbila *et al*., 2010; Konak, 2008; Kotilainen *et al*., 2008; Milanez and Buhrs, 2008; Wattanapinyo and Mol, 2011; Zhang *et al*., 2007).

Applying the concept of ecological modernisation in democratising states raises new challenges and questions regarding whether it can be translated into this context. As Bäck and Hadenius (2008) argue, state capacity declines following a change of regime and takes time to recover, eventually reaching higher levels as the new regime consolidates. This also includes the rejuvenation of the form and practice of civil society, which is restrained and suppressed under non-democratic political systems (Lagerspetz, 2001; O'Brien, 2009a). As ecological modernisation builds on

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the assumption that a certain level of capacity is present, its application in democratising states were capacity is being rebuilt may be counterproductive and damaging. The focus on improving efficiencies and technical expertise embodied by ecological modernisation has the potential to foster an elitist/closed approach to questions of environmental protection. In a context of uncertain state capacity and mechanisms for participation this can lead to further exclusion, potentially undermining the development of robust and effective environmental governance.

This article examines the concept of ecological modernisation in the context of democratisation. The aim is to determine whether ecological modernisation can be effectively adopted by democratising states. The article analyses environmental governance in Bulgaria following the 1989 regime change. An examination of the presence of conditions for ecological modernisation in the context of democratisation in Bulgaria points to potential challenges to the adoption of such an approach. The paper is divided into four sections. The first examines the concept of ecological modernisation in more detail and explores the potential challenges presented by democratisation. Following this, the article briefly covers the research methodology used to collect and analyse the data. The third section provides an overview of environmental policy and politics in Bulgaria during the democratisation period in order to determine whether the conditions are suitable for the development of ecological modernisation. The final section reflects on the applicability of ecological modernisation in democratising states and barriers to its effective deployment in such contexts.

Ecological Modernisation and Democratisation

Although ecological modernisation developed from the base provided by sustainable development, it has adopted a narrower focus on the link between economic growth and environmental degradation (Langhelle, 2000). Examining the application of the concept, Gibbs (2000: 12) argues that it:

> proposes that structural change must occur at the macro-economic level through broad sectoral shifts in the economy and at the micro-economic level, through the use of new and clean technologies by individual firms.

In this sense, ecological modernisation is focused on structural change involving the state and market. Absent from this approach is the role of wider society and

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mechanisms for participation, potentially establishing an exclusionary approach to environmental policy-making. There have been attempts to give greater attention to institutional and cultural dynamics, but these have been constrained in practice (Mol, 2000). Further to this, Toke (2011) argues that it is important to take account of the role of social movements in supporting technological innovation. Despite these interventions, environmental policy often continues to be framed in the narrow terms of technical expertise.

In many settings, the positive-sum nature of ecological modernisation does not seek to challenge the political or economic system or to pre-empt environmental problems. Much of the practice of ecological modernisation is focussed on achieving consistency between material flows, resource use, and consumption (Andersen and Massa, 2000). The need to simultaneously undertake democratisation and transformation of centrally planned, materials-intensive industrial economies in Eastern Europe (Waller and Millard, 1992) presents a serious challenge to this conceptualisation of ecological modernisation. Democratisation provides an opportunity for suppressed grievances and issues to be expressed, accompanying a fall in the capacity of the state, with the likelihood that environmental issues will receive less attention (Bäck and Hadenius, 2008). This point is reflected by van der Heijden (1999) who notes that where 'old' political conflicts (i.e. capital and labour) are unresolved it is less likely that 'new' political conflicts (i.e. environment) will make it onto the political agenda. The introduction of ecological modernisation during a period of democratisation when fundamental relationships are being redefined may reinforce exclusionary tendencies and lead to a closed technocratic approach to environmental policy-making.

An important limitation of ecological modernisation is the fact that it does not have a settled definition, allowing it to be stretched and manipulated to fit different contexts. Seippel (2000) has argued that for ecological modernisation to be useful it needs to be clearly defined and framed, with theoretical and empirical divisions established. In a paper synthesising approaches to ecological modernisation, Christoff (1996: 490) distinguished between weak and strong forms. Weak ecological modernisation can be seen as the 'business as usual' approach, seeking to find tools that can address the worst excesses of economic development without challenging the underlying assumptions embodied in the growth model. This approach also rests on a

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closed system, where technological solutions to environmental problems are prioritised. At the other end of the spectrum, strong forms of ecological modernisation adopt a more holistic, systems-based approach, prioritising ecological goals over economic. It also involves a much greater degree of participation and openness to external feedback. Although the strong form is intuitively favoured, it is also much harder to achieve, as it challenges embedded interests and questions the environmental costs associated with the economic growth that underpins society.

Reviewing previous studies of ecological modernisation, Mol (2010: 460-1) argues that "the social mechanisms, dynamics and actors through which social practices and institutions are transformed by the incorporation of environmental interests and considerations" point to three key elements supporting ecological modernisation. These elements can be developed to determine the ability of a particular state to realise ecological modernisation. The first element is classified as political modernisation, which focuses on the role of the state, non-state and external actors (international and supra-national institutions). Mol (2010: 461) argues that decentralised, flexible and consensual styles of governance are more conducive to environmental improvements. This position is supported by Scruggs (1999) who notes that institutional structures are important for environmental policy development, particularly electoral rules, legislative/executive separation, ideology of ruling party, federal sub-unit complexity, and consensual or majoritarian political institutions.[2] The significance of non-state and external actors derives from the role they play in supporting and shaping the decisions of the state, thereby providing legitimacy.

The second element identified are economic and market dynamics and the role of economic agents. This category incorporates producers, consumers, and business associations that are seen as playing an increasing role in reflecting social demands for change. As Spaargaren (2010: 318) argues, there is a "general trend to attach greater importance to the role of citizen-consumers in shaping and reproducing some of the core institutions of production and consumption." Where demand for sustainable goods is prevalent there is increasing pressure on producers to adapt, which in turn leads to pressure on the state to oversee the changes. As Mol (2010: 461) notes these actors "use market, monetary and economic logics in pushing for environmental goals." The influence of this condition would therefore seem to rest on the existence of a functioning and relatively free market economy.

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Civil society is identified as the third element supporting the development of ecological modernisation, through its push for new positions, roles, ideologies, and cultural frames regarding environmental issues (Mol, 2010: 461). Capturing the significance of civil society actors, Hajer (1995: 280) argues that:

> The challenge seems to be to think of an organisation of ecological modernisation as a process that allows for social change to take place democratically and in a way that stimulates the creation of an – at least partially – shared vision of the future.

The degree of engagement of such actors within the spectrum of ecological modernisation forms is perceived to range from technocratic (weak) through to open and deliberative (strong) (Christoff, 1996). Where specialist and elite communities dominate, it is less likely that stakeholders within society will feel engaged in environmental protection and may turn against it (Lidskog and Elander, 2007). The degree of flexibility and participation may therefore point to and derive from wider practices and priorities of the state regarding environmental policy-making.

Developments within these three elements reinforce the importance of strong and effective state capacity in allowing the state to choose between different options and engage effectively with other actors (internal and external). In cases where capacity is weak or developing, such as during democratisation, the likelihood of achieving a strong form of ecological modernisation is reduced. The democratisation process is a period of fluidity and uncertainty as elite actors compete for positions of influence in the emerging political system (see Linz and Stepan, 1996). However, it has been noted that uncertainty does not last and that decisions made early in the democratisation process will become embedded with the passage of time (Alexander, 2001; Rose *et al*., 2011). In order to ensure its longer-term durability a democratising state may choose to prioritise stability over openness and participation, thereby undermining reflexive policy development.

The ability of elites to control the democratisation process is also shaped by the persistence of legacies from the non-democratic period. Examining these legacies Hite and Morlino (2004: 28) identify two distinct forms "(1) those that refer to values, institutions, and behaviour introduced by the authoritarian regime; and (2) those that reinforce, strengthen, or entrench previous values or institutions…" The result is that the removal of an authoritarian regime is only part of the process of establishing an open democratic political system. Time is required to (re)learn democratic behaviours

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and establish institutions that can guarantee necessary freedoms. The length of time the authoritarian regime was in power and the nature of the regime change complicate attempts at reform designed to chart a new course. In this context, the introduction of policy frameworks that emphasise elite control in the absence of robust civil society activity may prolong non-democratic legacies.

During the democratisation process, civil society actors can encourage liberalisation and legitimise the regime by voting, yet they are largely excluded from shaping the character of the emerging regime. Similar claims can be made against ecological modernisation, given its largely technocratic nature (in the weak form), with limited scope for wider interaction. The effects of exclusion are important and can range from disengagement from political concerns through to active attempts to undermine the establishment of stable, democratic political mechanisms (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005). Further to this, Lane (2010) argues that civil society as understood in democratic states differs from those in Eastern Europe where civil society was used by oppositional groups in the late stages of the communist system and has not developed the same level of autonomous formation during democratisation. The result is a need for a more robust and inclusive state, a goal that has not often been achieved in practice.

Democratisation would appear to present challenges to the development of ecological modernisation. Undergoing democratisation does not preclude the emergence of robust environmental policies and practices, but the need to rebuild capacity and the range of changes that need to be introduced may lead to temptations to simplify the process, limiting opportunities for free spaces, identified as being important in debate, emerging. The task is complicated where democratisation involves reforming a communist totalitarian state, as the extent of change in practices and mind-sets is more comprehensive, particularly the move away from command and control structures. To assess the extent to which this is the case the paper now turns to examine the case of Bulgaria and addresses the issue of whether ecological modernisation is possible or feasible in the short to medium term. The analysis that follows draws on Mol's (2010) three elements to determine where the Bulgarian case sits in relation to the ideal conditions for the introduction of ecological modernisation.

Methodology

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The research in this article draws on a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with participants familiar with environmental politics in Bulgaria. An interview-based methodology was used to develop an understanding of how democratisation impacted environmental politics, from the perspective of those directly involved. This is important in identifying perceived failings and gaps between policy and implementation. The NGO participants were all experienced practitioners with a range of professional backgrounds, providing a more nuanced and complete picture. The research reported here also drew on policy documents and secondary literature on environmental politics and administrative practices.

The interviews drawn on in this paper were conducted by the author between April and June 2007, lasting an average of 45 minutes. Six interviews were conducted, five with NGO members and one with an academic familiar with environmental politics in Bulgaria. Interview questions were structured to capture the experience in Bulgaria, incorporating: environmental policy, effects of democratisation, public participation, environmental NGO activities, media, foreign influence and state administration. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by the author and all interviewees checked the transcript to ensure accuracy and to clarify any points that were unclear. All relevant interviews were consulted in the preparation of this article. In addition to formal interviews, the article draws on discussions with two NGO representatives, one of whom had previously worked in the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MOSV), and written correspondence with a senior NGO representative.

Environmental Politics and Democratisation in Bulgaria

Communist regimes placed a heavy burden on the environment in Eastern Europe (Waller and Millard, 1992). A focus on heavy industry with little consideration of the environmental, social, or even health effects left a significant legacy that continues to shape environmental politics in the region. The environment was to be mastered and controlled by the state. Mikhova and Pickles (1994: 229) have argued that in Bulgaria the

> state...had a practical interest in the unregulated and rapid development of industrial capacity and had very little immediate interest to protect against, or even monitor accurately for environmental impacts.

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Environmental policies were developed to address the worst effects of environmental degradation, but these were undermined by lack of mechanisms for enforcement or effective sanctions (Baker and Baumgartl, 1998; Koulov, 1998). Writing in the early democratisation period, Carter (1996: 61) noted that "[a] crucial gap exists between various economic sectors and planners; the latter set targets, often failing to provide means for their fulfilment or appreciation of environmental dangers incurred."

Although the Bulgarian state did little to address the environmental effects of the focus on industrialisation, it did recognise the potential political risk environmental issues could present. Civil society was restricted and closely controlled with regard to environmental issues and more widely. The regime relied on the use of state organisations, such as the National Movement for the Protection of the Environment, which was reported to have 30000 members in the late 1980s (Ashley, 1987). Despite their size, these organisations were not recognised as legitimate by the population. Baumgartl (1992: 165) argues that "[m]ost of them served more as an alibi than as criticisms of environmental damage." When the independent Social Committee for the Environmental Protection of the Town of Ruse was formed in 1988 the regime refused to recognise it and used the security apparatus to intimidate and break up the organisation (Baumgartl, 1992). Members were subsequently able to form Ekoglasnost in March 1989 as a loose association of like-minded individuals to publicise environmental issues, but their impact was limited prior to the regime change (Koulov, 1998).

Political Modernisation

The regime change that resulted in the removal of Todor Zhivkov and the reconstitution of the Bulgarian Communist Party in November 1989 saw a change in the character of environmental policy. The 1991 Constitution[3] introduced a responsibility for the state to protect the environment (Article 15) and a right for citizens to a healthy environment (Article 55). This was followed by the introduction of framework legislation (Environmental Protection Law[4]) in the same year. A series of sector specific laws addressing areas such as air, water, harmful substances, and protected areas were subsequently developed to build on the framework legislation.[5] These developments were tempered by the continued lack of enforcement, with an

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academic (Interview 11 April 2007) familiar with environmental politics in Bulgaria arguing:

> on the one hand you have got a tremendous revolution in environmental regulation, on the other you still have a tendency to fudge the issue, to chop and change...to obfuscate and if all fails, you will simply be bloody-minded and go ahead an do what you were going to do in the first place.

This reflects the legacy of the communist period, with change in behaviours taking longer than institutional reforms.

The effects of communist rule become apparent when the key elements that support (or hinder) the development of conditions necessary for ecological modernisation are considered. There has been some decentralisation of responsibility for environmental protection, with Kodjabashev (1998: 110) noting "local regulation can set stronger environmental standards than national guidelines...when it is necessary for local conditions." In spite of this development, central state agencies continue to maintain control, with an NGO member (Interview 1 June 2007) arguing:

> after years of efforts from different sides, Bulgaria tends to be a bit less centralised country, unfortunately not to the extent that the EU recommends, or that most municipalities and citizens would like to see.

Another NGO member noted that this was due in large part to the influence of political party priorities and a desire to maintain control (Interview 16 May 2007).[6] Reforms in 2003 introduced greater funding control at the local level and encouraged transparency, but municipalities remain underfunded (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2006). These pressures limit the emergence of flexibility within the political system that would support a drive for greater environmental innovation.

Development of formal environmental policy in Bulgaria has been driven to a large extent by forces outside the government. This has involved replacing the policies of the previous regime with policies and goals that can be achieved and enforced, resulting in a "complete overhaul of the regulatory apparatus." (Interview Academic 11 April 2007) Much of the drive for this change has come from the EU, with the government reacting to change, rather than proactively directing it (Interview NGO member 1 June 2007). Although there have been some improvements, the implementation and enforcement of the policies is still lacking. The volume of legislation required to meet the EU obligations placed a heavy burden on the

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government. Considering the importance of the EU, Goetz (2001: 1040) argues "European integration may be a trigger for, or an intervening variable in, domestic institutional development, but explains little on its own." The legacy of the communist period continues to shape the ways in which these policies are shaped at the national level. Issues of corruption have also been identified as playing a role in determining how European regulations translate to this level (Ganev, 2006; Noutcheva and Bechev, 2008).

Economic Actors and Market Dynamics

Liberalisation and privatisation of the Bulgarian economy created new opportunities for the development of environmentally sustainable practices. However, change in business practices remain constrained by the wider institutional environment, as Pfeffer and Salancik (1975: 39) note, "organizational activities and outcomes are accounted for by the context in which the organisation is embedded." In Bulgaria "incoherent reforms, frequent change of governments until 1997, and delayed privatization and restructuring led to... weak performance of the Bulgarian economy." (Bitzenis and Marangos, 2009: 84) Although the economic performance has improved the nature of the privatisation process and other key reforms worked against the establishment of formal patterns of behaviour and resulted in pervasive informality (Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Bojkov, 2005). The persistence of these problems was captured in a World Bank (2009) survey of enterprises, that found the three top obstacles facing businesses were: access to finance, practices of the informal sector, and political instability. This uncertainty has worked against the development of a business context that could support environmental innovation and action from the private sector.

In a situation of uncertainty where the rules are being redefined, as during democratisation, the risk of opportunism is greater. Manolova and Yan (2002: 178) argue that there is "a U-shaped relationship with the strength of the institutional environment.... opportunism occurs when the environment is either too lenient or extremely harsh." This point is supported by Barnes (2007: 72) who argued that "managers, bankers, and corrupt officials... stood to gain from incomplete reforms." Discussing business practices an NGO member (Interview 16 May 2007) argued that "there is a lot of pressure from different power structures, different businesses to

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make compromises with different environmental issues in order to make their own interests." The economic crisis and exclusion from EU accession talks in 1997 shocked the country into action and encouraged subsequent reformist (and anti-reformist) governments to make necessary changes (Ahrens and Zweynert, 2012).

All of these features made it less likely that firms would push for improvements in environmental practices. During the 1990s the "overwhelming majority of private firms... [were] very small in size (less than 5 employees)" further restricting innovation (Manolova and Yan, 2002: 167). Williamson and Lynch-Wood (2012: 947; see also Garcia et al 2009) argue that the reason for this is that:

> smaller firms tend to be instrumental and pragmatic, doing no more than required by law unless other factors compelled them to do so.... Research indicates that external stakeholders generally have little interest in, and insufficient power to influence the environmental practices of smaller firms.

Although larger firms have more of an incentive to take action this has had little impact in Bulgaria. The nature of the privatisation process meant that they became independent late and to a lesser extent than would be ideal. Examining regulations in Bulgaria, Fay et al (2007: 4) argue that:

> State control over the economy is still significant. The size of the public enterprise sector and the extent to which the state controls strategic decisions of public enterprises are still somewhat higher than among comparator countries.

The result of these patterns is that economic actors exerted little positive influence over environmental practices, particularly during the early democratisation.

Civil Society

Public participation presents a significant challenge in post-communist states, as institutions need to be reformed to facilitate and engage with civil society actors. At the same time, the public needs to see participation as something in which it can engage. Discussing the approach of the state to development of environmental policy in NGO member (Interview 16 May 2007) made the point that:

> when the government develops legislation or strategy or something, there is not public participation process from the beginning, they just [use] experts to develop something and then they present it to the NGOs.

Low levels of public participation in environmental issues are also the result of a feeling of inability to affect change combined with economic difficulties associated

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with the democratisation process (Cellarius and Staddon, 2002). NGO members reflect this view, although they note that while participation is low, it has increased slowly as the economic and political situation has stabilised (Interviews 16 and 21 May 2007).[7]

There are differing interpretations of the role of NGOs in promoting the protection of the environment in Bulgaria. Cellarius and Staddon (2002) have argued that the structure of the NGO network in Bulgaria is based around professionally funded bodies, limiting participation of grassroots members. This raises an issue that if people outside the organisations do not feel they have a stake in what is happening, they may be less willing to get involved and contribute. Despite this, it was argued by an experienced NGO activist (Interview 21 May 2007) that the sector has stabilised and attempted to play a more active role in the community, arguing that:

> if some local people start to work on specific problems, at the end of the day they appeal to NGOs when they finish with the procedures and see that no-one is dealing with their problems

The difficulty faced by the general population participating in administrative procedures has led them to turn increasingly to NGOs and local government agencies for remedies (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2006). Legal protection for NGO activities under the Law on Non-Profit Legal Entities has also led to improvements, as non-profit organisations are required to register with the state and define specific goals in a more formal manner.[8]

The difficult relationship between civil society actors and the government is illustrated by the Belene project. In 1981 the communist government began work on Bulgaria's second nuclear power plant, on Belene Island in the Danube River.[9] The project was shelved in 1992 due to lack of funding, local and national opposition, as well as "a negative evaluation of its social, technical and economic characteristics and concerns regarding seismic safety of the site prepared by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences." (Miladinova, 2006: 406) The project was reopened in 2002 for re-evaluation and a decision to build two units was announced in April 2005, with the support of the major political parties and the general population (based on the expected economic and technological benefits) (Miladinova, 2006). A prominent critic of the project has argued that Bulgaria possesses excess power production capabilities, and much of the power produced will be exported to the Balkans and

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Italy to help repay construction loans (Interview NGO member 1 June 2007).[10] There have been concerns raised regarding the safety of the site due to seismic activity and the quality of the environmental impact assessment conducted is acknowledged to be poor, yet "the voice of those opposing the project is not heard very loudly and very few of their recommendations are given serious consideration by the government." (Miladinova, 2006: 408) This case would seem to represent the perception that participation is tolerated by the administration, but only where it does not challenge strategic interests or goals, reinforcing the perception that non-state actors have limited impact on environmental policy and practice.

Barriers to the Adoption of Ecological Modernisation during Democratisation

Democratisation presents important opportunities for the development of environmentally beneficial policies and practices through the opening up of spaces for participation. At the same time, the pressures associated with the democratisation process, such as the design and construction of new institutions, place constraints on the emerging state. In such a setting environmental issues will fall down the political agenda to wait for a more stable future time. As noted above, political legacies and the solidifying of new practices also act as constraints on the actions that can be taken. This section re-examines the challenges presented to the adoption of ecological modernisation in the context of democratising states with reference to developments in Bulgaria.

The situation in Bulgaria illustrates the challenges faced in developing environmental policy-making during democratisation. Pressure from the population and the EU led to the development of environmental policies to address the worst excesses of the communist period. The influence of the EU in particular has been important in the development of environmental policies. The path to accession required the adoption and implementation of a significant number of environmental regulations under the *acquis communautaire* (Noutcheva and Bechev, 2008; Soveroski, 2004). On the surface this appears to be a positive development, as it allowed Bulgaria to make rapid progress in addressing the environmental legacy of communism. However, the adoption of external regulations has precluded the need for discussion of, and engagement with, the development of environmental regulations that are suited to the specific national context.

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As noted above, societal, political, administrative, and organisational capacity is important in developing effective ecological modernisation (Andersen, 2002). During democratisation this is particularly difficult given the fall in capacity that follows a regime change (Bäck and Hadenius, 2008) and the fact that patterns established early in the democratisation are likely to persist (Alexander, 2001). Developments in Bulgaria appear to support this point. Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Bojkov (2005: 69-70) argue:

> Informality has managed to sift upwards to the very top of political governance, implicating economic as well as political agents in becoming a pervasive phenomenon during the process of transition to democracy and market economy.

The solidification of these informal patterns of relations has resulted in a weakening of attempts to introduce clear guidelines and practices, as reflected in patterns of corruption (Noutcheva and Bechev, 2008).[11] It has also led to a closed policymaking process where participation is restricted and elite interests are prioritised.

The developments of a country undergoing democratisation will vary from case to case, but there are some changes and trajectories that will be common to all. This allows for consideration of the possible challenges posed by attempting to implement some form of ecological modernisation in such a context. In distinguishing between weak and strong forms of ecological modernisation, Christoff (1996) identified the importance of emphasis, structure, and reflexivity. The case of Bulgaria shows that during the democratisation period the emphasis is likely to be on economic and political developments, with environmental considerations being relegated to a lower priority. While strong and effective structural mechanisms for dealing with environmental issues may emerge during the democratisation process, these are likely to be delayed by the need to reform political (and in some cases economic) institutions and practices. Reflexivity has been identified as an important part of the equation, allowing for change to be welcomed and implemented as a necessary part of dealing with unpredictable environmental issues. The context of democratisation limits reflexivity, as legacies from the previous non-democratic regime continue to structure organisational development and behaviour, while the need to generate stability in the face of uncertainty militates against openness. This was seen in Bulgaria as participation was restricted and policy development relied heavily on expert technical input.

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The above points indicate that ecological modernisation, if adopted during the democratisation period, will fall at the weak end of the spectrum, represented by closed technocratic approaches that do not address core issues of sustainability. Consolidation of democracy is likely to harden and limit opportunities for these practices to change. Although democracy may be established, it will continue to replicate technocratic exclusionary practices established in the early democratisation period (Rose *et al*., 2011). The challenge facing the democratising state is to develop open, flexible structures and mechanisms for participation. Imposing a technocratic approach to dealing with environmental issues is likely to work against this by limiting opportunities for participation and mobilisation (Lidskog and Elander, 2007). It is also important to note that the development of environmental policy takes place in a wider context, making it important to break with past legacies restricting participation at a systemic level, thereby providing the opportunity for a more open participatory system to develop over time.

Conclusion

Ecological modernisation presents both opportunities and challenges when addressing environmental issues. The focus on technical solutions to environmental problems is attractive to policymakers, as it does not require significant change in institutional patterns and practices. In its stronger forms, ecological modernisation also allows for the development of more inclusive and reflexive environmental policy. However, the level of capacity required to effectively implement ecological modernisation, together with the base on strong corporatist institutions, means that application beyond its Northern European base is not straightforward.

The development of environmental politics in Bulgaria illustrates the difficulties facing democratising states in this area. The state introduced many environmental regulations at the behest of external actors, in particular the EU. This has resulted in a suite of environmental regulations that have not been effectively implemented on a regular basis. The lack of domestic policy development in this area has also limited opportunities for wider participation and strengthening of reflexive policy-making procedures. This experience points to the difficulties associated with imposing ideas and concepts that do not take account of the context on the ground.

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The introduction of ecological modernisation practices into democratising states has the potential to lead to improvements. At the same time, the complex nature of the democratisation process introduces a number of potential barriers. Democratising states lack the capacity necessary, for the development of strong ecological modernisation, particularly during the early stages. The hardening of patterns of behaviour also risks incorporation of a weak technocratic form of ecological modernisation that will become embedded and difficult to change. During the democratisation period the development of robust mechanisms for participation can potentially support capacity-building efforts and lay the ground for future adoption of a stronger form of ecological modernisation. This depends on the will to elevate environmental concerns on the political agenda.

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[1] In a recent study Lidskog and Elander (2012) note that the difficulties of introducing ecological modernisation by examining the progress Sweden has made towards achieving its ambitious targets. They find that despite attempts to shift the balance, environmental aims remain secondary.

[2] Although the last factor has been challenged by Poloni-Staudinger (2008), who found little difference between performance of majoritarian and consensual electoral systems in environmental performance.

[3] Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria – http://www.online.bg/law/const/const0.htm [accessed 13/02/2008]

[4] 326/1991 – Environmental Protection Act – http://archive.bild.net/legislation/docs/9/epa.html [accessed 20/02/2013]

[5] For a discussion of formal institutional structures see: O'Brien, 2009b.

[6] Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (2006: 376) find that party control at the local level declined significantly during the democratisation, with the Bulgarian Socialist Party's vote share declining from 80% in 1995 to 30% in 2003.

[7] In a recent study Petrova (2011: 780) argues that this is changing, as "municipalities also seem to compensate for such underdeveloped local state capacity and consequently to improve government efficacy by devolving parts of their authority to societal actors through civic participation in the different stages and aspects of policy making.

[8] 81/2006 – Law on Non-Profit Legal Entities - http://www.bcnl.org/doc_en.php?DID=325 [accessed 15/02/2008]

[9] The first plant was built on the Danube near Kozloduy. Construction commenced April 1970 and the last of the six units came online in December 1993. Decommissioning has seen Units 1, 2 (2002), 3 and 4 (2006) closed down, due in part to serious deficiencies (Miladinova 2006). For a discussion of attitudes towards the Kozloduy plant see: Konstantinov, 1995.

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[10] Kovatchev (2005) also notes that threats were made against a prominent campaigner against the project, arguing that: "Given the various scandals involving business malpractice at Kozloduy and other energy companies, it seems safe to say that Belene has been marked out by the Bulgarian mafia as an excellent source of revenue. Threats of the kind used against [Albena] Simeonova, while predictable, should in no way be tolerated -- but the authorities have remained silent."

[11] Citing a World Bank study, Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Bojkov (2005: 82) note that "More than 50 per cent [of businesses surveyed] acknowledge that the state administration is susceptible to bribes producing outcomes that influence the business environment...[and] more than 50 per cent see political parties as an important element in business calculations". This reflects the process informalisation and the ability of elites and administrators to profit from the uncertainty that results.

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