

Editorial

This issue of the Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies contains three articles that from different angles reflect on the linkages between environmental performance and policy design or implementation.

In the article “Cadmium Flows in Recycling Waste to Agriculture in Thailand”, Nanette L. Schouw and Jens Christian Tjell analyse the potential risk of substituting urban waste for phosphorus fertilisers in agriculture in Southern Thailand. On the basis of three case studies of the mass flow of cadmium, the authors discuss the findings and compare them to international threshold limits for waste application to agriculture. In the concluding remark the authors judge that the quality of the urban wastes is well above that which is acceptable and thus will not pose a risk and contaminate crops with toxic cadmium.

Henrik Gudmundsson’s article “The Policy use of Environmental Indicators – Learning from Evaluation Research” is based on a tentative analysis of the Transport and Environment Reporting Mechanism (TERM) developed by the European Environment Agency. The tentative analysis of indicator – policy linkages is grounded on an analytical framework (direct, conceptual or symbolic use) developed on basis of evaluation research. The two-step document analysis shows that there has been little direct use of TERM in selected transport policy documents, which the author suggests is due to the fact that the TERM system represents an information and monitoring framework with few formal accountability mechanisms. The tentative analysis indicates that most of the references to the TERM system were symbolic, and the author concludes that there is a need to explore the role and functions of symbolic uses of environmental indicators.

The last article “The potential of Eco-Taxes as Instruments for Sustainability – An Analysis of the Critical Design Elements” by Stuart Wright and Christina Mallia is based on a comparative analysis of the design and effect of two environmentally successful eco-taxes. The two success cases explored are the Swedish charge on nitrogen oxide emissions from energy production and the Dutch MINAS system targeting the nutrient surpluses from agriculture. The authors take a critical perspective on the underlying theoretical assumption of economic rationality, the policy design and its various pitfalls, and the environmental performance over time. It is concluded that eco-taxes have a definite value as instruments for diffusion of environmentally beneficial techniques and technologies.

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