

Social and environmental policy: Theoretical perspective

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Abstract

Societies are faced with the problems which are of many and various, but nowadays there are increasing evidences on the close links that exist between environmental problems and social injustice. Various studies tend to place their focus on solving environmental problems through integrated and multi-dimensional social policies. This study considers social injustice through environmental lens by analyzing environmental issues more clearly in terms of social justice. New effective ways for dealing these problems should be considered coherently, rather than each issue should be tackled separately.

Key words: Environmental issues, Environmental policy, Social policy, Social injustices.

Sosyal ve Çevre Siyaseti: Kuramsal Yaklaşım

Özet

Toplumların karşılaştıkları problemler çok ve çeşitlidir. Ancak günümüzde çevre sorunları ve sosyal adaletsizlik arasında çok yakın bir ilişki olduğu da aşikâr. Çeşitli arařtırmalar, çevre problemlerini çok boyutlu ve bütünleştirilmiş sosyal politikalar aracılığıyla çözmeye odaklanmış durumdadır. Bu çalışma sosyal adaletsizlikle ilgili meseleleri çevreci bakış açısıyla sosyal adalet perspektifinden çözümlenmektedir. Bu sorunların çözümünü için en uygun yol, sorunları tek tek çözmek yerine toplu çözümler üretmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevre Sorunları, Çevre Politikası, Sosyal Politika, Sosyal Adaletsizlik

Each one of us acts and executes individual activities and thus affecting the environment. Our influence could come as a result of production and/or consumption. This occurs when we consume energy, fuels, produce waste or exploit other natural resources. Daily economic activities also have a considerable impact on the environment. These activities use energy for the machineries, fuels for the transportation or the raw materials processed in the production operations and at the end of the production cycle, huge stocks of waste are created which require to be processed. So eventually human activity besides increasing our wellbeing, instantly beget negative and harmful impacts which do not affect and remain on environment only. These effects are reflected in serious health problems, social disparities and in the quality of life itself.

Recent years there are increasing evidences linking environmental issues to social injustice.

Environmental justice is the idea which addresses the extent of the relationship between the social and environmental injustice and tries to provide proper ways into tackling environmental problems as well as social exclusion through proper integrated and developed policies.¹ At the same time, it serves as a very useful guide for governments, communities, and individuals in order to implement the environmental justice. By carefully considering the social justice issues through the environmental lenses and vice versa this paper suggests that we can develop and apply more sustainable effective ways for the treatment of these addressed issues.

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¹ ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme, "Environmental justice: Rights and means to a healthy environment for all", Special Briefing No.7, University of Sussex, 2001.

Fundamental right to a healthy environment for all people is proclaimed in various forms in many international documents. For example, Douglas-Scott notes that the Spanish Constitution contains the right to enjoy an "enabling environment for the development of the person", the Portuguese Constitution states that "everyone shall have the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced human environment and duty to protect it".² There are also international codes, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights established draft laws principles for human rights and the environment, such as "All persons have the right to a safe, healthy and environmentally sound".³

Methodology

Studies show that the procedures and processes necessary to address adverse environmental impacts are not fully developed, nor equally accessible to different social groups. Environmental injustices may be caused or exacerbated by procedural injustice in the processes of policy making, land and territory planning, science and law. Achieving an environmental justice requires a policy-making and actions which would treat people equally and fairly.

Environmental justice policy is also attacked from many sides: health, transport, housing, employment, waste treatment, etc. based on the typology and the objectives of this study. The method of this study relates closely to the analysis of the literature, stressing the fact that Albania lacks empirical data on this topic which could give us a clear picture about the link between environmental and social issues. Literature used in this study refers mainly to western books and articles etc.

Environmental justice perspective

Social and environmental goals may be in conflict with each other, as an example would serve the introduction of the new fuel tax. This may cause disappointment to some individuals who are subject to this tax, especially to those who have lower income. Isolated environmental policies addressed can harm the progress of achieving social goals and vice versa.⁴ Although integrated policy packages may be designed and developed to avoid such conflicts, it does not implemented very easily. It may be the case that the government's decision to apply local taxes on businesses causes damage to the environment. This will not be welcomed, thus increasing dissatisfaction and controversies between local government agencies and economic operators.

On the other hand, social justice offers a new perspective.⁵ Two of its basic premises are, first, that every man should have the right and the opportunity to live in a healthy environment with sufficient access to environmental resources for a healthy life. Second, they

² Douglas-Scott, S. "Environmental Rights in the European Union: Participatory Democracy or Democratic Deficit in Human Rights Approaches to Environmental Protection", Oxford, Oxford University Press: 109-129, 1996.

³ UN Commission on Human Rights, Sub Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Human Rights and the Environment, Final Report of the Special Rapporteur, UN Doc.E/CN.4/Sub.2/1994/9 (6 July 1994) 74.

⁴ Burningham, K. "The environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups", Guildford, University of Surrey, 2001.

⁵ Agyeman, J. "Environmental Justice: From the Margins to the Mainstream", London, TCPA, 2000.

are predominantly the poorest and powerless people restricted to these conditions.⁶ Taking into consideration of both these premises, it can be suggested that our priority should be the treatment of unfavorable conditions faced less powerful, implying that environmental rights also constitute environmental responsibility. For this reason, we should try to consider environmental issues as important and critical for the achievement of social justice more than a set of priorities in conflict with social goals. If social justice can be assumed that it provides individuals the basic minimum conditions for a healthy life, then, having healthy, safe and sufficient resources for all individuals is the essential part of achieving prosperity and social justice. Environmental justice actually seeks to ensure environmental part of social welfare.⁷

The concept of Environment Justice is mainly a product of the activity of community network groups in the USA. These groups made robust resistance against installations of polluting factories and waste dumping in boroughs mainly populated by colored and other non-white people.⁸ Focus of the USA has always been placed on pollution treatment in waste collection sites and other industrial plants. But as seen in GECP researches, this focus does not cover many other important aspects of environment justice.⁹ First, it has not processed so far formal definitions of the victims of environmental injustice. This means that it remains unclear of how to define the status of victims by law. For example, victims who cannot speak on their behalf, such as unborn babies or a person whose intellectual abilities are severely damaged due to radiation. Second, it has generally emphasized cases of injustice in remote isolated geographic areas, which does not take into account injustices over wider geographic areas or entire social spectrum, such as unpredictable implications of chemical elements circulation into the environment.¹⁰ There are more examples of environment injustice, where some individuals reap economic and other benefits from the industrial or development process meanwhile the majority suffers from the consequences of the social and environmental problems. Third, environmental justice is a global issue involving many generations.¹¹ According to Dobson, “no theory of justice can be considered complete from now on if it has not taken into account the possibility of expanding the community of justice beyond the sphere of the actual living generations”.¹²

There exists a well-respected range of thoughts which considers the right for justice in the natural world as a fact which complicates the environment justice and reinforces the need to analyze the consequences of policies and developments.¹³ So environment justice is a much

⁶ ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme, “*Environmental justice: Rights and means to a healthy environment for all*”, Special Briefing No.7, University of Sussex, 2001.

⁷ Worpole, K., “In our backyard: the social promise of environmentalism”. London, Green Alliance, 2000.

⁸ Hofrichter, R.(ed.),“Toxic Struggles: The theory and practice of environmental justice”, New Society Publishers,Philadelphia, 1993.

⁹ Williams, C. “An environmental victimology” in Williams C. (ed.) Environmental victims, Earthscan,London, 1998.

¹⁰ Sandau, C, Ayotte, P, Dewailly,E et al “Analysis of hydroxylated metabolites of PCBs (OH-PCBs) and other chlorinated phenolic compounds in whole blood” from Canadian Inuit Environmental Health Perspectives Vol 8 no 7, 108:61-616, 2000.

¹¹ Boyle A and Anderson M, “Human Rights Approaches to Environmental Protection”. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1996, p. 313.

¹² Dobson A: “Justice and the Environment”, Oxford University Press, 1998.

¹³ Christie, I. in Warburton, D, “Community and Sustainable Development” London, Earthscan, 1998.

broader issue and not just related to race and inequality, or other problems regarding isolated localities.

Bringing environmental, social and health goals together

Dobson has argued that it is not correct to assume that social justice will necessarily bring greater environmental sustainability and vice versa.¹⁴ Under the principle of Sustainable Development the main objective of "A better quality of life to everyone" lies in a "social development that meets the needs of everyone." It is said that "everyone should learn to share the welfare benefits coming from a clean and safe environment. We need to improve access to services, tackling social exclusion and reduce the damage to health caused by poverty, unemployment, poor housing and pollution. Our needs will not be met by treating others unfairly, including future generations and people around the world". What is needed for the implementation of environmental justice is a clear strategy and the will power to implement the necessary policies. The task lies in the development of this strategy and finding specific modalities for the government, the business community and civic groups.

The environmental impact

In general, poor people keep living in poor environments. These environmental injustices are the first part of what is called "environmental exclusion".¹⁵ Polluting factories or traffic congestion are also concentrated in low-income areas. Environmental health impacts are also distributed uneven.¹⁶ There are a number of causes of environmental injustices, such as the failure of governments in the implementation of laws to protect people from harming, the tendency of a certain part of the private sector to seek profit maximization without emphasizing people and the environment costs, lack of clear discussions about the effects of the distribution of policies and actions, and inadequacies in the tools and procedures for the implementation of environmental justice, inequalities of access to these tools and procedures.

Within this frame work research shows that to achieve environmental justice, there are four broad areas where changes in policy and practice are necessary.¹⁷

- Rights and responsibilities: the right for a healthy environment is a main goal of the policy, which should be supported by placing responsibility on individuals and organizations to ensure that this right is achieved.
- Assessment: projects and policies should be evaluated based on their effects on the distribution
- Participation and capacity: decision making should include those individuals or groups who have affected patient and environmental injustices, who need support in order to increase their control over decisions that in turn affect them.
- Integration: social and environmental policy goals.

¹⁴ Dobson A: "Justice and the Environment", Oxford University Press, 1998.

¹⁵ Jacobs, M., "Environmental Modernisation: The new Labour agenda", London, Fabian Society, pamphlet 591, 1999.

¹⁶ Stevenson S, Stephens C, Landon M, Pattendon S, Wilkinson P, Fletcher T., "Examining the inequality and inequity of car ownership and the effects of pollution and health outcomes such as respiratory disease" *Epidemiology* Vol 9 4 S29, 1999.

¹⁷ ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme, "Environmental justice: Rights and means to a healthy environment for all", Special Briefing No.7, University of Sussex, 2001.

Implications

Human Rights Act and the Aarhus Convention provide a great potential, if implemented carefully, to enhance the link between human rights and environmental protection. Scientific knowledge and information will likely to be used more often as they have become more accessible. New laws make possible for human rights to be perceived as an integral aspect of social justice and environmental protection, because "the actions that lead to environmental degradation may pose an immediate breach of internationally recognized human rights".¹⁸ This clearly has implications on the actions of individuals, private and public sector. Generally speaking, human rights discourses may provide a comprehensive definition to environmental rights and social justice. However, the use of human rights to protect these two legal rights is still difficult for two main reasons. Firstly, they do not relate directly to the environment. The right to a healthy environment is subjective. Secondly, the use of human rights to provide environmental assistance depends on a judgment familiar with environmental law and human rights, as well as the experience of previous issues on environmental rights.¹⁹

Creating an environment court can guarantee a judiciary that understands environmental law and environmental equity issues.²⁰ It can also bring real benefits to achieve environmental justice. But establishment of such a court alone, a new institution in itself, is inadequate. To ensure its effectiveness, needs a better financing in environmental issues is required as well. At the international level, more studies should be conducted to explore the extent and causes of the current environmental injustices, and their social and health impacts, in order to inform and shape the above-mentioned political development agenda. This challenges researchers to create an inter-disciplinary body of new knowledge and new perspectives. The way in which the environmental impacts and health risks in a given society are distributed and how different social groups are involved in policy and legal mechanisms actually strengthens the necessity for a review of environmental policies and legal mechanisms to ensure their implementation.²¹

Policy evaluation

New policies should be assessed for their impact on the environment and distribution. Another step to improve the assessment of policies will be to expand the recommendations in the evaluation of the health impact,²² so that policy makers or private sector always will be required to evaluate and report on the distribution of social benefits and policy issues. Environmental justice policies are likely to be not only more democratic, but also more effective if they tackle problems through the involvement of those decisions. In fact, the environmental inequalities and injustices are largely part of the result of the power distribution. Carolyn Stephens found that political elites face many limitations in addressing

¹⁸ Anderson, M. "Human Rights Approaches to Environmental Protection: An overview in human rights approaches to environmental protection", A. Boyle and M. Anderson (eds). Oxford University Press, 1996.

¹⁹ Environment Agency, "Achieving Environmental Equality", Bristol, Environment Agency, 2000.

²⁰ Woolf, J. "Access to Justice. Interim Report to the Lord Chancellor on the civil justice system in England and Wales (HMSO), 2001.

²¹ ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme, "Environmental justice: Rights and means to a healthy environment for all", Special Briefing No.7, University of Sussex, 2001.

²² Scott-Samuel A., "Health Impact Assessment - theory into practice *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*", 52, 704-5, 1998.

the unequal distribution of environmental resources and inequality in health issues.²³ On the other hand, legal way for citizens to enter the environmental justice may be limited or blocked. In general, economically disadvantaged groups lack the financial resources and knowledge of legal institutions to use legal paths effectively.²⁴

Development of integrated policies is at the heart of the action needed for sustainable development. However, the integration process is still slow and there is a perception of conflicts between environmental and social objectives.²⁵ A focus on environmental justice can help the integration process because it takes as its starting point a clear focus on the nature of the integrated social and environmental objectives. Environmental justice policies are likely to be democratic, but also more effective if they provide methods for the inclusion of populations influenced by the decision making.²⁶ In fact, the environmental inequalities and injustices are in large part the result of the distribution of power, as it mentioned above. Stephens argues that political elites face many limitations in addressing the unequal distribution of environmental resources and inequality in health impacts.²⁷

Taking the above mentioned perspective can assist the process of integration policies at local, national and international levels. Boardman has shown that isolated environmental and social policies often fail for certain social environmental groups respectively.²⁸ She argues that integrated policy 'package' involving the combination of tax measures, investment, regulation and market transformation, can simultaneously achieve environmental and social objectives.

Conclusions and recommendations

Social justice issues increasingly affect the environmental issues while the environment itself is becoming a source of threats to human health and welfare. Impact on people, reflected in health problems necessary for treatment, are major injuries to have problems with justice. Policy makers should bear in mind the social and environmental factors when they design environmental policies on the development of social policy. Environmental justice offers powerful analytical support for a new emphasis on future planning between business leaders, politicians and professionals in the medical and legal sectors. It challenges companies to analyze and explain the social and health impacts of their activities beyond their current focus on environmental reporting. Also, it provides a new framework and new tools for the community to pursue their rights in present and future time.

Social and public policy tend to support some people more than the others. In general, this unequal impact of distribution is managed through some general interventions like taxes

²³ Stephens C., "Inequalities in Environment, Health and Power - reflections on theory and practice in Pugh", C (ed) Urban Sustainable Development in Developing Countries. Earthscan Publications, 2000.

²⁴ Boyle A and Anderson M, "Human Rights Approaches to Environmental Protection". Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1996.

²⁵ Social Exclusion Unit, "A New Commitment to Neighborhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan". London, Cabinet Office, 2001.

²⁶ GECP, "Risky Choices, Soft Disasters: Environmental Decision-Making under Uncertainty", Brighton, Global Environmental Change Programme (GECP) of the Economic and Social Research Council:24pp, April, also at www.gecko.ac.uk, 2000.

²⁷ Stephens C., "Inequalities in Environment, Health and Power - reflections on theory and practice in Pugh", C (ed) Urban Sustainable Development in Developing Countries. Earthscan Publications, 2000.

²⁸ Boardman, B. with S. Bullock and D McLaren, "Equity and the Environment". London, Catalyst Trust. September, 1999.

and social policies. Indeed, this redistribution is widely seen more as part as an economic policy than an environmental one. In order to have an efficient system, it is necessary to address environmental and social problems in a unique set of policies. Social and environmental issues can proportionally often be in conflict with each other. Nevertheless, an integrated package of policies will tackle these conflicts.

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