

Foreword

In 1963 David Braybrooke and Charles Lindblom coined the phrase ‘disjointed incrementalism’ to characterise the way that decisions are made in a world of imperfect knowledge. No sooner had the phrase entered into circulation than it came to be used in descriptive and analytical studies of governmental decision making. Decision making is incremental, because it only advances slowly away from its existing commitments. It is disjointed because more often than not the right hand of government does not know what the left hand is doing.

A good case can be made for the proposition that this feature of government poses special problems for any policy goal that requires high levels of co-ordination and foresight across many branches of government, whether it be community care for mentally ill people, protection of individuals from discrimination or the reduction of crime. However, for the achievement of sustainable development, the barriers to implementation created by disjointed incrementalism are particularly severe, for policy making has to cope not only with the difficulties of disjointed political organisations but also with the cognitive problems created by the complexity of natural systems.

Good empirical social science may not raise our spirits, but it should improve our understanding. Andrew Jordan and Andrea Lenschow have produced a volume that provides a subtle and empirically informed understanding of the issues in question, using a design that looks both at the policy cycle and at cross-national comparisons.

Among their conclusions, the following stand out. No country has succeeded in institutionalising sustainable development in a strong sense, that is in a way that gives environmental protection a trump card in respect of other policies. Such institutionalisation as there is produces a balancing of environmental against other concerns, but no more.

Secondly, communicative integration – in the form of declaratory documents and strategies – is stronger than organisational and procedural integration. In short, the easy things have been done first and further integration is then stalled. Thirdly, whatever may be true of governments generally, distinctive national styles persist. Consensual Sweden manages more integration than most; German ministries are still compartmentalised; and UK governments continue to reorganise departments rather than develop

the integrated policies. Fourthly, politics matters, whether in the form of the composition of governments or the commitment of individual leaders.

Sustainable development was never going to be easy. The merit – the depressing merit – of this book is that it shows the many different ways in which it is difficult.

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