

Editorial

The articles presented this issue of the Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies focus on chemicals regulation and covers different aspects of the complexity involved when formulating chemical regulations.

Pia Vestergaard and Inge Røpke's article "Experience with Chemicals Regulation – Lessons from the Danish LAS Case" throws light on how social and political processes shape chemicals regulation and what lessons different regulatory measures hold in regard to effectiveness. The authors review the history of the Danish of LAS regulation with respect to changes in problem understanding, regulatory strategies and the set-up of the political processes. Based on the case study, the authors suggest awareness raising concerning the character of problem understandings underlying regulatory initiatives, favouring measures supportive of more forward looking and holistic approaches, and state support for free and independent research as a basis for regulatory reform. Drawing on ecological modernisation perspectives, the authors advocate more direct regulation and redefining the role distribution between science, the political system and society.

In the article "Classification and Risk Assessment of Chemicals: The Case of DEHP in the Light of REACH", Jette Rank highlights some of the antagonisms inherent in the process of classification and risk assessments of chemicals. Based on a study of the changes in the classification and risk assessment of the plasticizer DEHP, and in particular the latest classification as a substance that can produce reproductive toxicity in humans, the author draws attention to the limited role of the precautionary principle and links it to the influential role played by the European Council for plasticizers. According to the author the new EU chemical law on Registration, Evaluation and Authorization of Chemicals (REACH) could justify a restricted use or phasing out of DEHP with reference to the precautionary principle. However, the author foresees that the chemical industry will try to open discussions on the reproductive toxicity of DEHP in search for arguments that will change the classification of DEHP to a non CMR substance. A change that will favour industry as it will not need authorisation.

The ecological modernisation perspective gained widespread attention in the 1990s and around the beginning of the new millennium. Ecological modernisation is founded on a rather optimistic view concerning modern societies' capacities to deal with the environmental crisis. At the core of the theory lies an understanding that eco-efficiency and greening of the market place is built into or a distinctive feature of the ongoing modernisation process in capitalist societies. At the core lies also the idea that a modernisation of politics and regulatory action is closely linked to achieving environmental goals (Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000). More collaboration with industry and in particular the introduction of economic incentives and market based solutions are seen as indicators of the ecological modernisation of environmental politics and regulatory action (Buttel 2003). Ecological modernisation is an appealing and positive perspective that gives rise to many issues such as how far the ongoing ecological modernisation of regulatory approaches will be conducive to enhancing environmental performance. Will ecological modernisation still be a vibrant perspective or will it loose momentum as the analytical basis for understanding the ongoing environmental reform? We would like to invite papers discussing the ecological modernisation perspective and in particular studies taking a critical perspective on some of the later changes in environmental regulation. Are new perspectives emerging that could open up a wider discussion on the regulation of modern environmental problems and the quest for sustainability?

Bente Kjærgård, Co-editor

References:

- Buttel, F. H. (2003): *Environmental sociology and the explanation of environmental reform*. Organization & Environment 16 (3): 306-344 SEP 2003.
- Mol, P.J. and D A. Sonnenfeld (2000): *Ecological Modernisation Around the World: An Introduction*. Environmental Politics, Vol. 9 (1): 3-14.