

Intellectual Leadership, Political Leadership, and International Policy Making

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The history of international civil cooperation since the Industrial Revolution suggests that effective new international agreements can be formed with the right combination of a particular type of intellectual leadership with two types of political leadership: 1) sponsoring intergovernmental conferences, and 2) acting as a benefactor of experimental international institutions. The sources of this intellectual leadership and the sponsorship needed to establish many environmental regimes can be readily discerned.

The intellectual leadership comes from the overlapping intellectual communities of scientists who study environmental issues and the scholars of law, public administration, and public policy who focus on minimizing the conflict caused by new environmental issues. Sponsorship has come from a variety of states with strong political interests (sometimes due to domestic social forces, sometimes due to international pressures) in being considered “first movers” in environmental affairs.

It is more difficult to find potential benefactors of experimental international environmental agreements. Some theorists would argue that it is impossible since so many environmental issues, like many North-South issues, will inherently involve issues of redistribution, the transfer of property or property rights from the relatively advantaged to the relatively less advantaged. For domestic political reasons, it is difficult for any state to play this role regularly. One way the dilemma can be resolved is for the governments of “first mover” states to create domestic incentives that make it less costly for polluters to invest in reducing emissions in less advantaged regions (less developed and post-communist nations) rather than in their own countries. Not only are such schemes relatively easy to devise in some cases of global-level pollution, they are conceivable in response to a variety of problems in regional seas. Examples will be provided from the Baltic and other regions.