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*Detoxing the Celtic Tiger: An Investigation of the Irish Political Ecology of
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Introduction

This paper investigates the circumstances surrounding the dynamics of the Irish political ecology of climate change and the effects that lobbying has had on the decision of the Irish Government to abandon their plan for national carbon taxation and also looks at how key stakeholders reacted to the deregulation of the energy market as well as measures to increase Ireland's renewable energy portfolio.

The author discusses the key global events which took place in Kyoto, Brussels and domestically which caused a sea-change in the Irish Government's attitude towards climate change. It aims to understand why Ireland signed the Kyoto protocol in 1998 and then why six years later they abandoned the carbon tax which was the main policy instrument designed to achieve the required reductions domestically. In order to do this, the author set out to explore the interaction of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and various environmental NGOs with the energy policy process and the effect this interaction had on the abandonment of this instrument. Moreover, it looks at how the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) and Airtricity reacted to the Government's decision to deregulate the energy market in 2001 as well as measures to increase the portfolio of renewable energy as part of EU2020.

The author endeavors to understand how each of these stakeholders negotiated government channels and how they went about trying to secure the well being of their institutional destinies through engagement with the policy process. In order to do this the motivation of each stakeholder is examined along with their level of influence. This influence is then weighed up against the resources they had to lobby. In the case of the carbon tax, the level of influence of the IBEC is contrasted against that of environmental NGOs who try to communicate their messages with more restricted means. In doing so, this study aims to determine whether Irish lobbying activity in the energy policy arena is corporatist or pluralist and if resources such as money and access to the political agenda are in fact prerequisites to a successful lobby.

This study also examines the role of the Irish media as the agenda setter of climate change and the effects that increased media coverage had on how Irish publics and the Government focussed on climate change issues. It also explores the issue of nuclear power, which is a controversial topic in Ireland and looks at changing views towards it over the past three decades.

Literature Review

In order to choose the most relevant theories to apply to this investigation the following research questions were formulated:

- To what extent is climate change policy being properly implemented?
- How highly is taking action on climate change regarded on the political agenda?
- What changes have occurred in terms of Government action on climate change?
- Are these changes the result of lobbying? In what way?
- How important are resources when lobbying the Government?
- What part does the media play in how issues related to climate change are perceived and acted on?

Having researched a vast number of areas in order to answer these questions, the author decided to narrow the scope of secondary sources to the theories of issues management, political ecology and agenda setting while also researching resources on energy policy and policy making both in the European Union and domestically.

Issues Management

As a starting point, the term issue was defined by W. Howard Chase as “a gap between stakeholder expectations and an organisation's policies, performance, products or public commitments”. From this definition, it is safe to deduce that matters surrounding climate change and renewable energy would be considered as issues for certain organisations, who, due to energy policy decisions, are affected in their operations. Issues management was coined in 1976 by Chase who identified it as;

“The capacity to understand, mobilise, co-ordinate and direct all strategic and policy planning functions and all public affairs/public relations skills towards the achievement of one objective: meaningful participation in creation of public policy that affects personal or institutional destiny”.

Ewing in Caywood (1997:173) states that issues management;

“is not the management of issues through the public policy process in our democracy or the management of the public policy process itself...Instead it is the the management of an institution's resources and efforts to participate in the successful resolution of issues in the public policy process that will affect the future viability and well-being of the organisation and its stakeholders”.

These two important definitions both contend that issues management is the planned effort to resolve issues through the public policy process to ensure the future well-being of an organisation. However, Chase's definition also provides four key stages in the issues management process which

are essential to this study: identification, mobilisation, co-ordination and participation in creation of public policy. These stages are also known as Issue identification, Issue analysis, Issue change strategy options, Issue action programme and a fifth, Evaluation of results which Chase recommends in order to ensure an issue is managed well even after it appears to have been resolved. These elements describe a typical process that lobbyists and interest groups follow to achieve their institutional objectives.

The focus of this paper is Chase's stage of "issue action" or lobbying with regards to the carbon tax. This is the point where the organisation actively engages in communication with the public policy process. Also important is the participation stage as the author endeavours to understand the role of lobbying in the creation of public policy. To this end, literature on lobbying and interest group behaviour is essential.

Various literature including Chubb (1992) usually weighs up the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of participation in policy making. One of the disadvantages that is often referred to is that of access to the political agenda. Chubb states that in Ireland the legitimacy of pressure group activity is fully accepted and is even welcomed as it aids democracy. However he also questions the issue of access to the political agenda as he claims there is a tendency in Ireland for public authorities "to accept the role, place, or power, of those interest groups that have earned a close relationship with the Government". Coakley and Gallagher (2006), believe the question of access is crucial for all interest groups if they are to be successful.

Chubb, Coakley and Gallagher confer that the access that some lobbyists have to ministers and their advisers is ethically questionable. Chubb however, provides a closer look at the interactions that occur in policy-making by using Lindblom's classification of contributors to policy making. He identifies a core group whom he calls "proximate policy makers". This group has legal authority to make decisions on specific policies. He distinguished these from other participants who influence them for example lobbyists and pressure groups. According to Chubb, Lindblom contends that both these groups are involved in a "play of power" that constitutes an important element of democracy of the pluralist variety. Chubb believes that the strongest influences over these 'proximate policy-makers' are political parties, pressure groups, the mass media and lastly public opinion.

Coakley and Gallagher offer two different paradigms to examine interest group interaction with public policy, corporate and pluralist. The corporatist model suggests that interest groups are strongly linked to and influential in the political process. They go on to state that such groups are

typically large organisations that represent the interests of a large section of the population, such as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) or the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC). The pluralist model suggests smaller, individual interest groups in a more competitive manner. Coakley and Gallagher claim that due to the difficulty of measuring degrees of corporatism and pluralism it is difficult to state which one applies to Ireland. The author believes this to be a limitation that merits more attention.

Lobbying and Resources

Central to this paper is the notion that different interest groups and professional lobbyists have unequal access to the resources needed to put their organisation's message across. Ewing's definition contends that issues management "is the management of an institution's resources and efforts to participate in the successful resolution of issues in the public policy process that will affect the future viability and well-being of the organisation and its stakeholders". Chubb (1992) maintains that the resources a group has at its disposal governs its means of communicating a message. Lerbinger (2005), believes that these resources are: access, information and a mutually beneficial relationship. Lerbinger contends that access includes having the financial means and the appropriate contacts. Information as a resource means having the *savoir faire* to negotiate the correct channels and to do so in the correct manner, in order to put an organisation's objectives across. Moreover, he emphasises the importance of financial resources for mounting campaigns that are coherent, intelligent and credible. This view is shared by Heath (1997) who claims that having the financial means to support arguments is a resource which 'poorly funded activist groups' do not have. Finally, Lerbinger believes that when an organisation's message is communicated in a way that is or appears to be mutually beneficial, the organisation's objective has a better chance of success.

According to Coakley, Gallagher and Chubb, access endangers the transparency of lobbying. Both the professions of public relations and public affairs operate under codes of conduct which warn against unethical behaviour. However, such codes are not always abided by, as can be seen from numerous cases of corruption in Ireland over the past decade. Thus, in applying Lerbinger's resources to the situation which saw the carbon tax abandoned in 2004, this study aims to answer this question: Does commercial lobbying have an advantage over environmental NGOs due to such resources as access and information?

Agenda Setting

Norris (1997) believes that it is possible that the media, in raising the prominence of an issue, have an effect on how higher-level policy-makers perceive and act on it. The theory of agenda setting was introduced by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. It explains the role of the media in shaping political reality. McCombs and Shaw in Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) state that the agenda-setting theory's central axiom is that of *salience transfer*, or the ability of the mass media to transfer importance of items on their mass agendas to the public agenda. The newsworthiness of an issue depends on a core list of twelve factors which Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge introduced in the 1960s.

In setting their agenda, the media cause publics to become aware of issues and in some instances mobilize on them which in turn may impact the political agenda of the Government. Grunig's (1992) Situational Theory of Publics states that there are different categories of publics who react differently to media coverage. Firstly, passive recipients or "information processors" do not actively seek information. Alternatively, Grunig explains that there are audiences that are "information seekers", these publics become aware publics more often than publics whose members do not communicate or who only process information. According to Grunig, aware publics are those that recognise a problem and active ones are those that take action on that problem. Ewing in Caywood (1997) contends that the media are central in the development of an issue, its life-cycle and how it causes publics to become aware and active. Ewing also maintains that the public policy process is the meeting ground of the public sector and the private sector and that this process is facilitated by the media.

Political Ecology

Bryant in Hempel (1996:151) defines political ecology as "an inquiry of the political sources, conditions and ramifications of environmental change". It examines the political issues surrounding the environment, studies power relations in the context of environmental crises and analyses the influence that society, state, corporate, and transnational powers have on environmental problems and on influencing environmental policy. It investigates the power relationships that produce hegemonic beliefs and by consequence behaviours towards the environment. Scott and Sullivan (2000) contend that to understand the political ecology of a country is to understand the sources of political power over the environment and how this power is used.

Coghlan (2007) investigates political and corporate influences as a combination of factors that explain why Ireland abandoned the carbon tax. He examines why Ireland agreed to reduce carbon emissions and subsequently took three years to develop a set of policy instruments to deliver that commitment before eventually abandoning them. Coghlan finds that the answer lies in a combination of two levels of influence. One, the interaction of domestic and international factors, and the other, the interaction of interest-based approaches to policy-making. When Ireland made a commitment to the Kyoto Protocol, international factors/pressures dominated, such as pressure from the international community to concede with the agreement. At the next level, which involved developing policy instruments to honour the Kyoto agreement, domestic interests/pressures became a dominating factor with a strong influence over policy-making, thus resulting in the abandoning of the carbon tax.

Mitchell (2008) claims that there are four pressures that face a Government when deciding on policy instruments to combat climate change. Firstly, those relating to technology and innovation, are discussed in the context of the pressures the Irish Government face in trying to enhance Ireland's renewables portfolio. A second pressure the Government faces in implementing climate change action is its relationship with the main stakeholders of energy policy. Mitchell claims that a third pressure is caused by a privatized and regulated energy market. Finally she claims that those issues relating to human behaviour and consumption can also cause pressures for the Government. All but one can be applied to Ireland. Ireland's energy market was deregulated to allow for greater competitiveness in the Irish energy sector and in an attempt to strengthen the country's renewables portfolio. Mitchell's theories are adapted and applied to Ireland to examine the pressures faced by the Government in trying to meet Kyoto targets.

Research Methodology

The principle objective of this study is three-fold. To understand the dynamics of the Irish Government's action on climate change and the extent of the influence that lobbying has on those decisions and also to examine the importance of Lerbinger's resources in launching successful lobbying campaigns.

The primary research objectives are:

- To examine the Government's past and current action on climate change and the dynamics of the policy-making process.
- To investigate how each lobbyist/pressure group reacts to energy policy change.
- To investigate how environmental NGOs, the ESB, Airtricity and the IBEC interact with policy makers.
- To establish whether Lerbinger's lobbying resources, as outlined in the previous chapter, play a role in how successful a campaign is at getting a particular message across.
- To determine if Irish lobbying activity is corporatist or pluralist.
- To understand the media's role in influencing energy policy.

The secondary research objectives are:

- To investigate the theories of best practice in issues management.
- To look at the pressures that a Government typically faces when deciding on and implementing environmental policy in order to understand their reactive attitude to environmental issues.
- To examine media coverage of climate change and energy policy.

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach was chosen. The author conducted interviews with a small number of individuals who have specific knowledge of the issues involved in this study. The author chose interviews rather than questionnaires as a more intimate way of gathering data with the possibility of interaction between interviewee and interviewer. This facilitated a dialogue, which greatly enhanced the learning process and provided vital inspiration for this study. This would not have been possible had the author chosen quantifiable methods. The purpose of qualitative research is appropriate to the subject of this study, an interpretative investigation of the relationships between institutional structures involved in Irish energy policy.

Primary Research

The primary research was conducted through qualitative analysis of interviews. Interview subjects were chosen for their proximity and involvement in energy policy matters. In order to maintain balance and to have a well-rounded scope of opinion, the choice of interview stakeholders deserved considerable thought; especially due to the vast number of possible stakeholders. The few that were chosen, were so due to their closeness and expertise in the issues investigated. Other primary research consisted of a vast number of reports that have been carried out in the fields of climate change, renewable energy, sustainability and energy policy and regulation.

Interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders:

- **Irish Government:** Minister for Energy, Eamon Ryan & Senator Dan Boyle, Green Party
- **European Parliament:** Mary Lou McDonald , Sinn Féin MEP
- **Environmental correspondents:** RTE: Paul Cunningham & Irish Times: Frank McDonald
- **NGO representative:** Pat Finnegan Director of GRIAN
- **Energy providers:** John Wall, ESB & David Manning, Public Affairs Manager, Airtricity
- **Environmental Economics Organization:** Richard Douwathie, executive committee member FEASTA

The format of interview was chosen because specific questions were asked of each interviewee, the questions varied depending on the viewpoint of the subject. The author adapted the questions to each interview, however, the author also made sure not to corrupt or manipulate the viewpoint of the interviewee in the phrasing of the questions. Moreover, each stakeholder was asked if he/she had anything further to add at the end of each interview. This ensured that the individual had an opportunity to express something that was not asked in the interview and also provided the author with additional knowledge. The interview process was a learning curve, as each interview went by, the author learned better techniques. Some interviews were conducted in a more informal fashion, while keeping the research at the forefront. This conversational approach was useful in some circumstances, while others were more formal, depending on the interviewee.

Considering the sensitive nature of some of the topics it was crucial to have as good a mix of opinions as possible to maintain balance. For example, in relation to lobbying, NGOs believe that they are disadvantaged by a lack of resources. In contrast, the corporate entities believe that communicating with the Government and lobbying for or against policy changes is an even playing field. Some stakeholders refused to be interviewed. However, every consideration was given to remedy this limitation, the author compiled other forms of primary data to use as “responses” such as parliamentary debates, speeches and newspaper articles.

Secondary Research

When secondary research began the author had not yet formulated the research questions. Secondary research was vital for narrowing the scope of the research by understanding what had already been explored and where potential areas of research existed. The greatest challenge was narrowing the scope of literature in order to chose the best theories to apply to this study. Consequently, the author decided that the areas of issues management, agenda setting and political ecology would be the driving forces behind this dissertation.

Findings and analysis

Findings showed that prior to 2007, Ireland had a poor environmental record and that Government efforts were focussed on economic success during the Celtic Tiger economy. Oatley (2006) claims that in times of economic prosperity the gap between environmental concern and economic growth widens, as growing industry leads to great increases in pollution. Since the 1980s, economic growth has been a priority for the Irish Government and many believe that the social partnership contributed greatly to the economic success of the Ireland's economy. Social partnership in Ireland can be described as an approach to the Government where interest groups outside of elected representatives play an active role in decision taking and policy making. It is a form of participative democracy that enables the social partners to enter discussions with the Government on a range of social and economic issues and to reach a consensus on policy. The measures to decrease carbon emissions and increase renewable energy have been met by some resistance from the partnership, whose primary concern and responsibility is to secure the economic strength of the economy. Subsequently, the IBEC, as a prominent figure in the social partnership, are concerned by any initiatives that create economic issues for the well-being of the economy. Social partnership facilitates strong access to the political agenda and thus allows great opportunities to those involved. Since the abandonment of the carbon tax and before, many environmental NGOs protested at their exclusion from it. They believed that their exclusion was unjust considering the partnership consists of employers, trade unions, farmers but also a community and voluntary pillar.

In essence the findings of this study point to an energy policy process which appears to be more corporatist than pluralist. Coakley and Gallagher state that the corporatist model suggests that interest groups are strongly linked to and influential in the political process and that such groups are typically large organisations that represent the interests of a large section of the population. The pluralist model suggests smaller, individual interest groups in a competitive manner. Policy areas other than energy are not within the scope of this research however, due to the strong presence of the IBEC in social partnership and the influence they had in the carbon tax matter, it can be suggested that within the scope of the energy policy process, lobbying activity is more corporatist than pluralist. Furthermore, the exclusion of environmental NGOs from social partnership strengthens this notion. The exclusion of such groups is contrary to the Agenda 21 framework which the Irish Government signed in 1992. This framework stipulates the importance of the inclusion of such NGOs in social partnership in order to realize sustainability. The misrepresentation of such groups from partnership talks on the carbon tax meant that the argument was strongly, one-sided, leaning in favour of those opposed – this notion was strengthened by research of parliamentary debates. Findings conclude that membership of social partnership and

financial resources provide vital access to the energy policy agenda. Therefore, it appears that Lerbinger's lobbying resources heavily influence the ability of groups to lobby successfully. As a result NGOs need to rely on their own resources to lobby to the best of their ability.

Finally, research findings showed that the decision to deregulate the energy market was widely applauded by those interviewed, with the obvious exception of the ESB. It is evident that this decision caused a seismic change in the organisation however, it was concluded that overall the company very successfully managed this issue by restructuring the organisation to facilitate the deployment of renewable energy. Upon investigation of the reactions of Airtricity to deregulation it was discovered that Airtricity's strong competitive position was due to a strong focus on the identification of possible issues that could affect their institutional destiny and their ability to capitalize on them.

The finding of this study also conclude that the increase in media coverage of climate change in recent years has played a fundamental role in how the issue is perceived by Irish publics and has therefore led to more aware publics. Through the analysis of media effects, it appears that while these aware publics may not yet have become evidently active on this issue, the heightened concern of the Irish electorate for green issues still had a strong effect over the political agenda in the 2007 general elections and thus led to the GP's participation in Government. It also appears that the Irish Government strongly rely on the effectiveness of the media to reach publics with energy efficiency campaigns as part of their climate change strategy. Similarly, environmental NGOs try to harness the power of the media in the hope that publics will become aware of the issue and act on it. This access is vital for such groups who often do not have sufficient resources to launch successful lobbying campaigns. Subsequently, it appears that due to their lack of access to the political agenda, NGOs communicate to the public through the media which the objective of mobilising action whereas social partnership have the access and necessary resources and so can directly communicate with the source of power.

To conclude, at the time of submission, the author recommended that further study could be carried out on the Green Party's participation in Government as she felt they would achieve many objectives and create a more even playing field for those lobbying the energy policy process. Since submission, the Green Party have achieved many objectives such as the inclusion of the first environmental NGO in social partnership in April this year and has brought about a renewed interest in a carbon tax.

Furthermore, the author believes that the combination of theories used to evaluate the corporatist nature of lobbying in the energy policy arena of Ireland could be applied to other countries to establish the reason behind decisions to abandon green initiatives in favour of economic gain and to find a way to move past this in order to facilitate the implementation of such measures.

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