



EDITOR'S NOTE

Policy debate: editorial introduction

This issue of *Sustainability: Science, Practice, & Policy* launches a new section called "Policy Debate" as a forum for discussions pertaining to sustainability policy making. My sincere hope is that it becomes a useful and dynamic space for the journal's international community of contributors and readers.

The first policy debate kicks off with an article by Alan Hecht & William Sanders on efforts to transform the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency into a "national environmental architect" and to fuse its multifarious legal mandates, voluntary initiatives, and educational programs into an integrated urban sustainability framework. The authors are ranking EPA officials who have played key organizational roles trying to move the agency beyond pollution control and remediation and to proactively engage in sustainability planning. This task, as anyone who has had close contact with EPA can attest, is not easy and success is by no means assured. Nonetheless, after a long period of public silence on the part of the federal government regarding such matters, Hecht & Sanders offer a set of ideas with the potential to catalyze constructive debate.

This new section of *SSPP* seeks to facilitate exactly this sort of consideration. Three distinguished sustainability scholar-practitioners have been asked to reflect on this vision for EPA. First, Martin Bierbaum offers a skeptical perspective on the ability of sustainability champions to effect meaningful change within the agency given its long-standing commitment to media-focused pollution management. Institutional reorientation, he insists, requires commitment and endurance, as well as willingness to engage in protracted bureaucratic struggle. Bierbaum contends that it is one thing to develop lists of programmatic initiatives that have a sustainability veneer, but quite another matter to effect systemic and durable organizational change.

Second, David Pellow is similarly critical of Hecht & Sanders and is furthermore adamant that sustainability will be elusive for EPA unless the agency overcomes its predisposition for voluntarism. He argues that progress to enhance the livability of urban districts will only be achieved through the application of strenuous regulations. Pellow also encourages EPA to assume a leadership position in questioning prevalent notions of economic develop-

ment and typical ways of distributing the gains of growth.

Finally, Arnold Tukker offers a few observations on Hecht & Sanders' sustainability blueprint from a European perspective. He is heartened to see such interest within EPA, but is perplexed over how any conception of urban sustainability could fail to consider the deeply problematic role of the automobile. Drawing on recent work in the Netherlands on transition management, he also highlights the cultural barriers to change, as well as the infrastructural and political obstacles that transformative progress must necessarily overcome.

This policy debate gives the last word to Hecht & Sanders who acknowledge the challenges that EPA faces but, at the same time, insist that the task is not futile. They describe several initiatives by the agency to work with local communities to anticipate climate-change risks and to meld regulatory and nonregulatory programs. They also reflect on the inevitable instability that is created by political shifts and the continual need to rebalance priorities in light of these circumstances.

I anticipate that the discussion will not end here. I encourage you to carry it forward by submitting your own reactions via the journal's "e-Letter Box" and details on how to respond in this way are available at <http://ejournal.nbii.org>. I heartily look forward to hearing from you and also welcome suggestions for future policy debates.

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Editor