

Chapter 5

Environmental Reporting and Accounting: Sustainability Hybridisation

Radiah Othman

Massey University, New Zealand

Nirmala Nath

Massey University, New Zealand

Fawzi Laswad

Massey University, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the context in which ‘accounting-sustainability hybrids’ were constructed in anticipation of the Environmental Reporting Act (ERA) passed in 2015 in New Zealand. Using governmentality perspectives, the researchers consider how the key individuals in local government discursively articulate the ‘sustainability programmatic’ – sustainability policies that deploy the Act as a regulative intervention, the mediating instruments (reporting medium), and the hybridisation of accounting and sustainability (accounting-sustainability hybrids). The chapter draws on archival materials and qualitative survey of 90 key individuals from all 78 local authorities. The analysis showed that local mediating instruments were aligned with ERA and sustainability programmatics, resulting in modification of the existing hybrids and the creation of new ones. The chapter demonstrates how legislation facilitates action from a distance.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0441-3.ch005

INTRODUCTION

Accounting-sustainability¹ processes and practices are regarded as central to embedding sustainability within public service organisations. They act as intermediaries between government programmes of reform and local service imperatives (Thomson, Grubnic, & Georgakopoulos, 2014, p. 453). Accounting-sustainability practices are considered to be hybrids of accounting with different aspects of the sustainability programmatic (Thomson et al., 2014, p. 455). For instance, full cost accounting (Bebbington et al., 2001; Herbohn, 2005) can be seen as a hybrid between conventional costing, sustainability science and environmental economics.

In New Zealand (NZ), the central government has introduced policies aimed at fostering greater sustainability in public service delivery. In 2014, the Environmental Reporting Bill was introduced by the Environment Minister, Amy Adams, and was later passed as a new law (the ERA) in September 2015. The ERA sets a broad framework to scope the reporting of one of the five environmental domains (air, freshwater, land, marine, atmosphere and climate), with the cycle beginning with freshwater in mid-2016 (MFE, 2016b). The framework requires a synthesis report, with analysis of air, freshwater, land, marine, atmosphere and climate trends and interactions, to be published every three years. The Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991 has also been amended to make local governments' (LG²) responsibility in collecting data and reporting³ the state of their local environment explicit. Collectively, these policies and acts are referred to as programmatic. Programmatics are high-level discourses with purposive attempts to organise and reorganise institutional spaces, their routines, rituals and procedures, and the conduct of actors in specific ways (Dean, 1999, p. 32; Raco & Imrie, 2000; Thomson et al., 2014). As such they can be seen as part of many central government's strategies and interventions for LGs to transform their processes and practices.

In regard to environmental sustainability programmatics, in NZ the local authorities are required to report on the state of the environment under the RMA, and now the ERA has added on a new framework for local authorities to report on. In absence of specific standards and criteria of reporting the LG are left to interpret both Acts (considered as regulative sustainable programmatics) and other programmatics relevant to the public sector to construct their accounting-sustainability hybrids and to select mediating instruments (Kurunmäki & Miller, 2011, p. 222) to embed environmental sustainability. Mediating instruments are vital for constructing points of common reference between environmental sustainability reform and the local authorities' processes and practices. Mediating instruments can be local (internally generated) or non-local (generic solution by external body, such as GRI

35 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/environmental-reporting-and-accounting/236492

Related Content

Impact of Public Policy on Small Third Sector Social Enterprises

(2018). *Influence of Public Policy on Small Social Enterprises: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 84-107).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/impact-of-public-policy-on-small-third-sector-social-enterprises/187612

Determination of Energy Performance of Residential Buildings as a Tool for Public Economics

Jan Fukaand Robert Baa (2021). *Handbook of Research on Global Challenges for Improving Public Services and Government Operations* (pp. 191-221).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/determination-of-energy-performance-of-residential-buildings-as-a-tool-for-public-economics/266103

The Shape of Educational Equity: Using GIS to Explore the Intersections of Space, Race, and School Choice

Elizabeth A. Gilblom (2022). *Policy and Practice Challenges for Equality in Education* (pp. 172-187).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-shape-of-educational-equity/289699

Assessment of 21st Century Skills: Use of Creative Story Writing for Assessing Graphs

Garima Basnal (2022). *Cases on Global Innovative Practices for Reforming Education* (pp. 202-221).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/assessment-of-21st-century-skills/294881

Rethinking the Origin of the Behavioural Policy Cube With Nudge Plus

Sanchayan Banerjee (2021). *Behavioral-Based Interventions for Improving Public Policies* (pp. 1-16).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/rethinking-the-origin-of-the-behavioural-policy-cube-with-nudge-plus/269972