

Review

Policy Transfer Framework in the Environmental Governance of Non-EU and EU Member Countries: A Comparative Analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia

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Abstract: This study offers a comprehensive examination of environmental governance within the European Union (EU), focusing on the comparative experiences of Bosnia and Herzegovina (a non-EU member) and Croatia (an EU member). The research uses policy transfer theory to investigate the practicality and effectiveness of EU-led environmental initiatives when implemented at state and local levels. The study reveals a disconnect between these initiatives and their execution, with corruption and fragile political arrangements identified as significant barriers to environmental protection. The research further underscores the complex nature of EU-driven environmental governance policies and the impact of post-war political agreements and transitional struggles on Bosnia and Herzegovina's and Croatia's governance structures. The methodology involves a detailed analysis of the legal frameworks, policies, and plans employed by the EU and the countries under study. The results highlight the importance of context and capacity in evaluating the effectiveness of environmental governance. The study contributes to understanding environmental governance in the EU context and provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for policy transfer to state-level governments.

Keywords: environmental governance; policy transfer theory; sustainability; Bosnia and Herzegovina; European Union; Croatia



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1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has established itself as a global pioneer in environmental protection, boasting an extensive environmental policy framework and programs [1–5]. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies significantly across member and non-member states, underscoring the complexities of environmental governance in diverse political and socio-economic contexts [5–9]. This paper delves into the intricacies of environmental governance within the EU, focusing on the experiences of Bosnia and Herzegovina (a non-EU member state) and Croatia (an EU member state). It employs a case-oriented approach, utilizing policy transfer theory to explore the challenges and successes of implementing EU-led environmental initiatives in these countries [10–12].

The EU's aspiration to ensure uniform approaches to environmental protection across its member nations has been met with skepticism. The competence in implementing EU environmental protection rules varies significantly [13,14], with recent trends of transferring the administrative role and implementation of environmental and other laws and regulations from member states to EU institutions [15–17]. This shift has created an uneven playing field among EU member nations, with corruption, fragile political arrangements, and transitional struggles often hindering the effective implementation of robust environmental policies, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia [10,11].

This research adopts a case-oriented approach to environmental governance in the EU, examining the broad structure of environmental protection initiatives and conducting a comparative analysis of environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia

using a policy transfer theoretical framework. Both countries experienced intense conflicts in the 1990s, with Bosnia and Herzegovina bearing the brunt of the destruction. The post-conflict political arrangements and the residual effects of previous economic and political systems have significantly influenced their governance structures, leading to challenges in implementing EU-led environmental initiatives.

The experiences of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina serve as a microcosm of the EU experience, highlighting the successes and challenges in achieving environmental initiatives and protecting the environment in an increasingly nation-focused context. The EU's environmental policy framework and programs are extensive and intricately linked to the project of environmental governance. However, implementing these directives at the state and local levels can be ineffective, leading to challenges in achieving environmental protection goals. This is particularly evident in non-EU member states like Bosnia and Herzegovina and EU member states like Croatia, where political challenges and post-war security concerns have hindered the implementation of EU-led environmental initiatives [10,11].

While the European Union aspires to ensure conventional approaches to environmental protection across its member nations, its capacity to deliver on this promise has been questioned. Competence in implementing EU environmental protection rules runs the gambit from highly advanced to emergent, and significant variance exists [18,19], with the recent trends of moving the administrative role and implementation of environmental and other types of laws and regulations from member states to EU institutions [19]. Additional layers of bureaucracies and the differences in the support and implementation of these rules and programs have created an uneven playing field among EU member nations. Ineffective environmental governance has been a significant roadblock to implementing and enforcing robust environmental policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a non-EU member state, and Croatia, an EU member state. These two countries' experiences underline the importance of considering context and capacity when assessing the effectiveness of environmental governance in different nations.

Policy transfer theory examines how policy ideas, experiences, and practices are transferred from one country or region to another [20]. It recognizes that policy solutions developed in one context may be adopted and implemented in another, either voluntarily or due to external pressures or incentives. Policy transfer theory offers valuable insights into how EU member states and non-EU countries align their policies with EU standards and environmental goals in environmental governance [21].

The EU has been a significant driver of policy transfer in environmental governance, with member states influenced by EU directives and regulations [22–25]. EU member states must harmonize their national legislation with EU standards, which often involves adopting and implementing EU directives related to environmental protection. Non-EU countries aspiring to join the EU, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, also use policy transfer to align their environmental governance with EU standards. Through accession and stabilization agreements, these countries commit to adopting EU legislation and regulations in various policy areas, including environmental governance.

The application of policy transfer theory in environmental governance is evident in non-EU countries' adoption of the EU environmental acquis. The acquis refers to EU laws, regulations, and standards that new member states must adopt and implement. For example, Croatia's path to EU membership involved extensive policy transfer and alignment with the EU acquis in various environmental policy areas, such as nature protection and climate. The European Union (EU) is a global leader in environmental protection, with a comprehensive environmental policy framework and programs. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies significantly across member and non-member states, highlighting the complexities of environmental governance in diverse political and socio-economic contexts. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of environmental governance in the EU, focusing on the experiences of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a non-EU member state, and Croatia, an EU member state. It employs a case-oriented approach, utilizing policy transfer

theory to explore the challenges and successes of implementing EU-led environmental initiatives in these countries.

The EU's environmental policy framework and programs are extensive and interconnected. Still, their implementation at the state and local levels can be ineffective, leading to challenges in achieving environmental protection goals. This is particularly evident in non-EU member states like Bosnia and Herzegovina and EU member states like Croatia, where political challenges and post-war security concerns have hindered the implementation of EU-led environmental initiatives.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows: How does the EU's environmental policy framework impact member and non-member states, specifically Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina? What are the challenges and successes of implementing EU-led environmental initiatives in these countries? How does the policy transfer theory apply to the environmental governance in these countries?

This study adopts a case-oriented approach to answer these questions, focusing on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia as representative cases. The methodology involves a comparative analysis of these two countries' experiences with EU-led environmental initiatives, drawing on policy transfer theory to understand the mechanisms of policy adoption and implementation. The study also employs a review of the relevant literature and policy documents, as well as interviews with key stakeholders involved in environmental governance in these countries. The findings of this study will contribute to the broader understanding of environmental governance in the EU and the role of policy transfer in shaping environmental policies in member and non-member states. The study employs purposeful sampling for data collection and analysis using documentary analysis, with more details provided in the Materials and Methods section.

While the authors deployed policy transfer theory, they also examined other theories relevant to environmental governance and policy transfer in the European Union (EU) and non-EU member states. They are worthwhile for consideration in future research. For example, neo-institutionalism, a theoretical approach focusing on the role of institutions in shaping policy, emphasizes the formal and informal rules, norms, and structures influencing the behavior of actors and shaping policy implementation [26]. Such institutional arrangements in the EU and member states affect the adoption and transfer of environmental policies. Also, the collaborative governance theory analyzes stakeholders in decision-making processes and fosters collaboration among them [27]. It recognizes that complex environmental challenges require the participation of multiple actors, including governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, in designing and implementing effective environmental policies and inclusive and participatory approaches to address environmental issues.

Moreover, the network governance theory of interconnections and relationships among the actors involved in policy processes, networks, and social interactions shapes policy outcomes [28]. In the context of environmental governance, the network governance theory features the collaborative and influencing power of the networks of actors, such as government agencies, civil society organizations, and businesses, in policy transfer processes.

Finally, the market-based instruments and ecological modernization theories on economic incentives and market mechanisms to achieve environmental goals [29] and mutually reinforcing economic growth and environmental protections [30]. One relies on the role of market forces, such as pricing mechanisms and emissions trading, in shaping environmental governance and economic incentives for behavior change and can effectively promote environmental sustainability. The other is useful for examining how countries can transition to more environmentally sustainable practices while fostering economic growth.

The complexity of governance models is recognized and integrated into the analysis, realizing the top-down approach in certain instances of environmental governance and the adaptability [31,32], as well as the potential for a retreat from positive to negative policy-making in governance despite administrative and ethical obligations [33,34]. These theories offer valuable perspectives for understanding the EU and non-EU member states'

environmental governance and policy implementations. The authors contend the policy transfer theory to be the most relevant in the case of Bosnia and Croatia.

1.1. The EU Environmental Protection Framework and Policy Regime

The EU's approach to environmental protection has been characterized as a patchwork of environmental policy instruments and regulatory strategies. The instruments include standard-setting, with an emphasis on the role of states in achieving environmental quality goals, and technical and impact assessments of cross-national boundaries environmental impacts. The desire to protect the environment has sometimes been difficult to balance against the priority of trade and economic growth [35]. EU agencies have increasingly been normative leaders, regionally and internationally, on environmental protection—able to spread EU perspectives well beyond the union's borders [36]. However, environmental protection has often competed against foundational EU economic development, trade, and growth priorities.

EU environmental policy was established and has evolved based on internal and external pressures. The EU has historically created environmental regulations even though such directions were not formalized until the Single European Act (SEA, in force as of 1987) [37]. The European Commission is the group within the EU that ultimately may be engaged to ensure compliance with official directives. The Council of the European Union is the power center within the EU institutions, with its Environment Council as the group with policy-making responsibility. Also, within the EU structure, some committees address environmental quality and policy-related matters, such as the Committee on the Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety, which is responsible for environmental quality, sustainable development, and regional and international agreements on such matters. The EU has worked with the International Maritime Organization on climate change issues. Within the EU, effort- or burden-sharing have set compulsory targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions, including a 30% reduction by 2030 [38]. However, member nations are given wider latitude on how to reach the targets. Under effort sharing, EU members are responsible for nation-level policies to limit emissions and meet union targets [38].

Generally, government policy concerning environmental protection between regional groupings and nation-level efforts may be complex and fragmented. To better understand the EU case, it is worth asking whether the instruments utilized to align with one another bring about desired effects [39]. It may be anticipated that the regional and national systems, utilizing the appropriate policy tools effectively, would show convergence in the attainment of goals. While it is acknowledged that there is fragmentation in policies from the regional to the national level, problems continue to exist. Positive rhetoric and spin have kept the region from rising above immediate concerns like the economic benefit of alignment between competing institutions [40].

The lack of alignment and seeming willfulness to avoid the issue deserve discussion. For countries, the immediate realities of economics and employment and national security and legitimacy of public institutions, are the top priority, with issues of equity and environmental protection being relatively less important. From regional and global viewpoints, there is a need to address complex, science-driven challenges that affect nations generally, such as climate change and related effects. Climate change issues enable a refocus of environmental protection as a global issue to a concern that poses profound questions for all levels of government [41], and environmental and social priorities tend to evidence themselves when the system is under duress. However, there has been some tendency to pull back from the environment as a priority in light of economic concerns [42], showing the primacy of economic performance and employment.

While the path for alignment between regional and national policy for environmental protection may be challenging, it is possible. Coalitions may form for and against a general policy direction, such as addressing timber regulation or water governance. With attention to common ground and hard work, alliances may be formed to offer a way forward for

effective regulation [43]. Complex environmental questions require public participation to account for stakeholder perspectives as a source of strength for both involvement and outcome. Deliberation can create awareness and understanding in populations and allow citizens to develop consensus [44]. Still, participation is time- and resource-intensive, requiring a commitment to realize positive benefits.

Moreover, the possibility of success is further confounded by the voluntary nature of some commitments. Internal and external stakeholders are essential for meeting consensus-building objectives and successful sustainability and resilience planning implementation; involving the public may raise questions about the legitimacy of stakeholders included in processes [45–48]. Additional involvement might reduce the legitimacy and effectiveness of the whole in exchange for greater transparency [49]. Motivating the public in environmental and sustainability governance requires a systems approach and understanding of stakeholders' engagement for short-term and ongoing involvement [48].

There is anxiety between national desires and the sweeping goals of supranational groups [50]; even regional groupings such as the Southeast European Association, supposedly closer to nations and representatives of their concerns, are not immune to the potential for divergent viewpoints. For their part, countries show breaks and inconsistencies in environmental protection objectives and approach various levels of government. As an example, wind power is an essential normative priority in Sweden. Still, permitting practices at the local level and prioritization of planning efforts may interfere with the attainment of nation-level goals such as renewable energy targets [51], as instrumental matters may interfere with normative and value-driven pronouncements.

There are several criticisms of the approach taken by the EU on environmental protection and related policy issues, including problems of the local application of region-wide directives, differences in levels of decentralization from one nation to another, and a strategy of absorbing costs until adaptation to EU policies is necessary. A lack of flexibility may prevent some nations from achieving EU-level targets [52]. While the EU has made its climate change objectives clear, it has nevertheless set non-binding goals at levels that were expected to be achieved. Since 2010, there has been evidence of policy dismantling due to less environmental engagement and entrepreneurialism [53]. This undermines the clarity of what the EU requires from member nations, even though the EU's reputation for environmental leadership remains strong.

The neoliberal, market-centered approach to environmental protection fails, at least partly, because it ignores ideas of fairness and dampens the scientific view on what exactly is needed to adequately address problems, such as climate change. The supposedly common values may need to be more familiar. Member states may provide their interpretation of EU directives and issue guidance documents undermining a common stance on environmental protection throughout the region [54]. Such activity undermines the legitimacy of the regional to national project to protect the environment; environmental quality is seen as necessary, but it still must compete as a policy objective that can be embraced by all [55]. Leadership from above, in other words, is insufficient to accomplish the gravely important task at hand, especially when it has been demonstrated that the complexity of problems and approaches may interfere with the effective implementation of environmental protection policy [56].

1.2. Environmental Governance in the EU: The Regional Perspective

Regarding industrialization and the need to respond to the externalities of development, Europe's approaches to resolving public problems like pollution differ from those of other regions worldwide. The EU had early involvement in the Industrial Revolution and first-hand experience in addressing the excesses of pollution with a less technical capacity than what is available now. EU nations have thus had more time to consider the consequences of environmental degradation and possible responses in a thoughtful manner. Consistent with this attitude, the European Union has become a world leader in environmental protection, from a normative standpoint, in sharing knowledge and

disseminating standards. The EU's positions on climate change and regulatory approaches are well-known and serve as exemplars for nations in other parts of the world and different regional groupings [57]. Moreover, most of the world closely follows EU law to draw lessons about "how emerging standards might shape future policies and investment choices also outside the EU" [58]. The EU model has worked in large part because the regional grouping shows awareness of globalized alignments as well as an internal alliance and integration.

A portion of the EU's legitimacy is due to its strong environmental protection and climate change positions. The shared platform for trade that is the centerpiece of the EU's framework presupposes a level of attention to environmental concerns; a lack of consistent policy in this respect might, for example, result in the creation of pollution havens or severe pollution problems on a state level, which might require regional attention. However, as noted in the section above, the EU has long fought an uphill battle responding to member nations' particular needs and desires. While the EU motto may be "unity in diversity", diversity of approaches to environmental protection is not a characteristic that tends to suggest success, notably concerning transboundary pollution issues. Having many options for approaching environmental protection may lead to inconsistency in attaining region-wide goals, as all nations are at different capacity levels in responding to EU mandates. The inconsistency can result in extreme variances in the economic prospects among member nations [58].

While the perspective from Brussels is that the EU is unified in its common cause of environmental protection, the reality of policies in practice in implementing EU directives and the experience among member nations have sometimes been quite different. A definite link between the efficacy of environmental governance and the tendency toward sustainable behaviors exists; however, the relationship was seen in higher-income countries but not in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany [59]. As a significant concern for the EU, there is a range of income and development, with various nations unable to respond to environmental governance efforts similarly. It is possible to govern regionally and globally [60,61]. Still, the contested nature of the policy environment, along with disagreement on definitions and a sense of ambiguity in conceptual matters, may result in a muted sense of responsibility and trim meticulousness in implementation.

Another relevant framework in the EU governance is the Energy Community, which aims to create an integrated pan-European energy market by bringing together the European Union and its neighboring countries. The organization was established by the Treaty establishing the Energy Community, signed in Athens, Greece, in October 2005, and has been in force since July 2006. The primary objective of the Energy Community is to extend the EU's internal energy market rules and principles to countries in Southeast Europe, the Black Sea region, and beyond, based on a legally binding framework. The mission of the Energy Community Treaty is to establish a stable regulatory and market framework that can attract investment in power generation and networks. It aims to create an integrated energy market for cross-border energy trade and integration with the EU market. The Energy Community also seeks to enhance the security of supply to ensure a stable and continuous energy supply, which is essential for economic development and social stability. Furthermore, it aims to improve the environment of energy supply in the region, foster the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency, and develop competition at the regional level to exploit economies of scale [62]. The Energy Community plays a crucial role in the governance of energy, climate change, and environmental protection, especially for countries like Bosnia that aspire to be EU members. The institution aligns with the EU Commission by aligning with the EU legislation in these countries, making it a key player in their environmental governance.

The EU case is unique concerning global and regional cooperation through its movement on the part of EU member nations to set new common environmental protection standards. There was an awareness that environmental protection policy was not only popular among EU citizens but essential on a regional basis if the union was to address

transboundary pollution among member nations. Nevertheless, considerations were made for multi-level governance alternatives to allow greater national autonomy in specific policy areas. Member states have shown that they are willing to give the EU collective more power in some areas but have increasingly reserved power in other areas of policy related to nation-level considerations, which differ from nation to nation. To support countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international community should make a concerted effort to empower local government actors to actively participate in environmental governance. A consistent commitment to prioritizing environmental quality over other narrow interests can help overcome barriers to effective natural resource management. Failing to address these issues will only perpetuate the widening gap between the EU and non-EU member states regarding environmental governance.

2. Methods and Materials

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing content analysis to scrutinize environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The case-oriented research design focuses on these countries' unique contexts, challenges, and environmental governance outcomes. The methodology comprises a comprehensive review of literature, reports, and studies on environmental governance in both countries, EU directives, and the political and social contexts. Additionally, the authors expand upon the qualitative data to include quantitative data, comparing Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina's environmental indicators, SDG rankings, greenhouse gas emissions, and air quality index ratings [63–73]. The analysis is a side-by-side comparison of the countries' data.

The qualitative analysis identifies common themes, challenges, and successes in environmental governance, comparing the experiences of an EU member state (Croatia) and a non-EU member state (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The authors utilized a qualitative case study using a documentary analysis of country-level documents to address the research questions [74] with an in-depth analysis of a country's sustainability during a severe political crisis. Data sources include official reports of environmental governance at the national level of government and the EU [75]. The research aims to answer several key questions: How does the EU's environmental policy framework impact member and non-member states, specifically Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina? What are the challenges and successes of implementing EU-led environmental initiatives in these countries? How does the policy transfer theory apply to the environmental governance in these countries?

The research process begins with a thorough review of environmental governance in the EU and the critical components of the EU's environmental protection program. EU regional directives and competency requirements are evaluated in the context of environmental governance in Croatia and Bosnia. The impact of these requirements on EU member states is compared with their effect on aspiring EU members. This is followed by a review of the current political circumstances and the outcomes of implementing environmental initiatives. The paper concludes with a discussion and recommendations for future research. The authors use findings from the analysis of available documents to inform the typology of environmental governance. Documentary analysis analyzes existing documents to gain insights into a particular subject or phenomenon [76]. A documentary analysis of government policies related to environmental governance involves reviewing the available documents. Developing straightforward research questions and criteria for selecting relevant documents and the need for careful analysis and interpretation of the data are critical components of successful qualitative documentary analysis research.

In researching the documentary analysis of existing documents, the authors designed a valuable setting for conducting a qualitative documentary analysis [77,78]. Selecting multiple sources of evidence is critical for analyzing complex documents such as environmental and sustainability reports. Reflexivity and self-awareness assist the researcher in identifying potential biases and assumptions in their analysis [75], creating a solid foundation for conducting a rigorous and insightful documentary analysis of environmental gover-

nance. It enables rigorous and systematic analyses of the contents of written documents, facilitating an impartial and consistent written analysis.

In the study, purposeful sampling is utilized for data collection and analysis and to interpret the findings [74,75]. The purposeful sampling technique selects key informants or cases for the study based on their relevance to the research questions, which is appropriate for studying two countries' environmental governance. The case study research approach is applied to collect and analyze data from these cases through document analysis [75]. The authors identified patterns, themes, and connections between the data and the research questions, proposing a typology for identifying the environmental governance framework under policy transfer regimes [76]. Finally, the ethical considerations are examined with integrity and respect for the research process [77].

The research methodology involves a qualitative case study using documentary analysis of country-level documents to address the research questions. The study provides an in-depth analysis of a country's sustainability during a severe political crisis. Data sources include official reports of environmental governance at the national level of government and the EU. The research aims to answer several key questions, including how institutions in EU and non-EU countries advance environmental governance.

The findings from the analysis of the available documents are used to inform the typology of environmental governance. Documentary analysis involves reviewing existing documents to gain insight into a particular subject or phenomenon. Conducting a documentary analysis of government policies related to environmental governance includes the following:

- Developing clear research questions.
- Selecting relevant documents based on set criteria.
- Carefully analyzing and interpreting the data.

In the documentary analysis, the researcher designed a robust qualitative analysis setting. Multiple sources of evidence were selected for analyzing complex documents such as environmental and sustainability reports. Reflexivity and self-awareness were employed to identify potential biases and assumptions in the analysis, providing a solid foundation for conducting a rigorous and insightful documentary analysis of environmental governance. This approach enables rigorous and systematic analyses of the contents of written documents, facilitating impartial and consistent written analysis.

Purposeful sampling was used to collect, analyze, and interpret the findings. This technique selects key informants or cases for the study based on their relevance to the research questions, making it suitable for studying environmental governance in two countries. The case study research approach was applied to collect and analyze data from these cases through document analysis. Patterns, themes, and connections between the data and the research questions were identified, leading to the proposal of a typology for identifying the environmental governance framework under policy transfer regimes. Ethical considerations were also examined with integrity and respect for the research process.

The EU's environment policy, based on precaution, prevention, rectifying pollution at the source, and the "polluter pays" principle, is grounded in Articles 11 and 191 to 193 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The policy has evolved since the 1970s, with key developments in treaty revisions, including the Treaty of Maastricht (1993) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), which integrated environmental protection into all EU sectoral policies. The Treaty of Lisbon (2009) established specific climate change and sustainable development goals. The European Green Deal, launched in 2019, aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent. The EU's environment policy framework includes multiannual Environment Action Programmes (EAPs) that set legislative proposals and goals. The 8th EAP, in force until 2030, focuses on greenhouse gas emission reduction, climate adaptation, circular economy, zero pollution, biodiversity protection, and sustainable production and consumption. Horizontal strategies, such as sustainable development and biodiversity, integrate environmental concerns into other EU policy areas.

The EU actively participates in international environmental negotiations and is a party to various agreements. Environmental impact assessments and public participation are essential elements, ensuring high levels of environmental protection and public involvement. Implementing, enforcing, and monitoring EU environmental law is crucial, with the European Environment Agency (EEA) providing support and the European Parliament playing a significant role in shaping legislation.

The research methodology was designed to comprehensively understand the selected countries' environmental governance. The first step involves collecting data from various sources, including official reports, policy documents, and academic literature. These documents are then subjected to a rigorous content analysis process. This process involves coding the data, identifying patterns and themes, and interpreting the findings in the context of the research questions.

The content analysis is conducted using a systematic approach to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The data are preprocessed to remove irrelevant information and then coded using a predefined coding scheme. The coded data are then analyzed to identify patterns and themes. The findings from the content analysis are then interpreted in the context of the research questions and the existing literature on environmental governance.

In addition to content analysis, the research methodology also involves a comparative analysis of the environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. This involves comparing the policies, practices, and outcomes of environmental governance in these countries and identifying similarities and differences. The comparative analysis provides insights into the effectiveness of EU-led environmental initiatives in different political and socio-economic contexts.

The research methodology also critically reviews the EU's environmental policy framework. This involves analyzing the key components of the policy, its evolution over time, and its impact on member and non-member states. The review comprehensively explains the EU's role in promoting environmental protection and sustainable development.

The research methodology is designed to ensure the robustness and validity of the findings. It involves rigorous data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and straightforward research questions and objectives guide it. The methodology is also transparent and replicable, allowing other researchers to verify the findings and build upon the research.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of this study. Firstly, the analysis relies on existing research and literature, which may have inherent biases or limitations. Additionally, the scope of the study focuses specifically on environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and the findings may not easily be generalizable to other countries or regions. The qualitative research approach provides in-depth insights into the specific cases examined but may only capture part of the full complexity of environmental governance dynamics.

Table 1 below is an overview of several environmental programs and strategies launched primarily by the European Union and the years they were established. The Environment Action Programmes (EAPs) started in 1973 and have been a foundation for environmental policy. In 2019, the European Green Deal was launched to enhance Europe's economy through sustainable means. The Sustainable Development Strategy was initiated in 2001, followed by the Biodiversity Strategy in 2011 and 2020. In 2020, the Farm-to-Fork Strategy was also implemented. The Aarhus Convention of 2001 established access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. The table also lists the Environmental Impact and Strategic Environmental Assessments but does not specify their inception years. The Environmental Implementation Review started in 2016 to help EU member states achieve their environmental goals. The European Environment Agency (EEA), established in 1990, provides independent environmental information. The European Earth Observation Programme (Copernicus) and the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (E-PRTR) are also part of the framework. However, their launch years still need to be provided. Lastly, the Amended Aarhus Regulation was introduced in 2021.

Table 1. EU environmental policy frameworks.

Framework	Year
Environment Action Programmes (EAPs)	1973 onward
European Green Deal	2019
Sustainable Development Strategy	2001
Biodiversity Strategy	2011, 2020
Farm-to-Fork Strategy	2020
Aarhus Convention	2001
Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment	N/A
Environmental Implementation Review	2016
European Environment Agency (EEA)	1990
European Earth Observation Programme (Copernicus)	N/A
European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (E-PRTR)	N/A
Amended Aarhus Regulation	2021

Appendix A represents additional relevant documents from the EU reviewed for this paper.

3. Results

Through the lens of the policy transfer theory, comparing environmental governance in Croatia (an EU member state) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (a non-EU member state) reveals significant differences in the implementation of EU policies and the complexities involved in policy transfer. In Croatia, the policy transfer process from the EU is relatively smoother compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia's previous alignment with EU principles and its well-established foundation in environmental protection regulations have facilitated the adoption and implementation of EU policies. The policy transfer mechanisms in Croatia have been successful in addressing environmental challenges, particularly in the areas of air quality improvement and emission reductions.

On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina faces numerous challenges in policy transfer. The country's complex political structure, fragmentation, and weak governance systems hinder the effective implementation of EU environmental policies. The lack of a clear path to EU integration, political dysfunction, and corruption further complicate policy transfer efforts. These complexities make it difficult for Bosnia and Herzegovina to align with and fully adopt EU environmental governance practices. Ineffective environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, to a lesser extent, in Croatia has stalled the application and execution of meaningful policies for adequate protection of the environment in those two countries. The lessons learned in these two cases point to the importance of context in how nations can realize environmental quality outcomes or be limited in their efforts. The difference in achievement is not a matter of EU interest in these nations or their importance to the European context. Still, it is instead the result of historical aspects and readiness to set aside differences and achieve common goals.

The gap between aspiring and member EU states in implementing various EU-led initiatives and the capacity to adopt environmental policies is evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia cases. Nations that aim to ascend to member-state status have a problematic threshold. Dysfunction in individual nations can prevent countries from responding effectively to the EU mandate. However, even with intent and political resolve at the highest levels of a national government, the expansive normative mandate of the European Union prevents problems for nations of varying capacities. This is most notable in regions that have been hampered in their development by conflict.

Given the above, policy transfer theory provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with transferring environmental policies from the EU to member and non-member states. The theory highlights the importance of considering recipient countries' political, economic, and institutional contexts to facilitate successful policy transfer.

Table 2 below categorizes environmental governance styles into informational means, voluntary means, and eco-taxes for both EU and non-EU member states.

Table 2. Environmental governance styles.

Environmental Governance Style	EU Member States	Non-EU Member States
Informational Means	Implement EU directives into national legislation (Air Quality Directive). Sharing best practices and knowledge exchange (Natura 2000 network).	Adapting to EU standards through policy alignment (Accession and Stabilization Agreements). Participating in capacity-building programs (EU environment and climate action program).
Voluntary Means	Encouraging public participation in decision-making (e.g., public consultations and Energy Community). Promoting eco-labeling and sustainable consumption schemes (EU Ecolabel).	Engaging stakeholders in environmental initiatives (e.g., public private partnership). Implementing voluntary environmental standards (ISO 14001 certification).
Eco-Taxes	Imposing carbon pricing mechanisms (EU Emissions Trading System). Promoting renewable energy subsidies and incentives (e.g., Feed-in Tariffs)	Implementing environmental taxation (taxes on pollutants and waste). Encouraging green investments and tax breaks.

For informational means, EU Member States focus on implementing EU directives into national legislation, such as the Air Quality Directive, and sharing best practices via networks like Natura 2000. The non-EU Member States, on the other hand, adapt to EU standards through policy alignment, specifically Accession and Stabilization Agreements, and participate in capacity-building programs such as the EU environment and climate action program.

Under voluntary means, EU Member States encourage public participation in decision-making processes, for instance, through public consultations and the Energy Community. They also promote sustainable consumption schemes, like the EU Ecolabel. Non-EU Member States engage stakeholders in environmental initiatives, often through public-private partnerships, and implement voluntary environmental standards like ISO 14001 certification.

Regarding eco-taxes, EU Member States impose mechanisms like the EU Emissions Trading System and promote renewable energy subsidies and incentives, including Feed-in Tariffs. The non-EU Member States implement environmental taxation on pollutants and waste while encouraging green investments and tax breaks.

Policy transfers from the EU to EU member countries often involve directly adopting EU policies and directives into national laws. EU member states harmonize their policies with EU standards to ensure consistency and alignment with the EU acquis. The EU provides capacity-building programs and technical assistance to help member countries implement and enforce environmental policies effectively. Additionally, funding from the EU contributes to implementing environmental projects in EU member countries. Knowledge exchange among EU member states facilitates the sharing of best practices and policy experiences, fostering policy convergence and learning.

In contrast, policy transfers from the EU to non-EU member countries follow a similar pattern but with some unique complexities. Non-EU countries aspiring to join the EU must align their policies with EU standards as part of the accession and stabilization agreements. This involves the adoption and adaptation of EU policies into national laws. The EU provides capacity-building support to enhance the policy capacity of non-EU countries, enabling them to meet the environmental requirements for EU membership. Financial support from the EU aids in the implementation of environmental projects and initiatives in non-EU countries [18,19].

The case of Bosnia presents additional complexities in policy transfer compared to other non-EU countries. The political situation in Bosnia, characterized by a fragmented

governance system and ethnic divisions, hampers effective policy implementation and coordination. The Dayton peace agreement, which established the political framework in Bosnia, has created challenges for environmental governance due to institutional complexities and political deadlocks. The divided political structure with multiple entities and cantons makes harmonizing and coordinating environmental policies more challenging. Moreover, corruption and limited policy capacity hinder Bosnia's effective policy transfer and implementation.

The complexities in Bosnia's political arrangement and governance system require a more context-sensitive and capacity-focused approach to policy transfer. Addressing corruption, improving institutional coordination, and enhancing policy capacity at the local and regional levels are crucial for effective policy transfer and implementation in Bosnia. A less clear path to integration and ascension into the EU for Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a critical problem for a post-conflict non-EU country in the heart of Europe on the one hand, but also provides ample evidence of the limits of EU normative leadership that does not translate into regional and local results. There is a clear need to more firmly connect EU-level goals with considerations for context and capacity in member states. A lengthy and complex political transition, coupled with slow economic growth and high unemployment rates, conspires to give protection of the environment as a precarious place; this unfortunate scenario is further complicated by undue attention to the whims of corrupt local and national politicians and faulty decision-making processes.

To assist nations like Bosnia and Herzegovina, a more concerted effort by the international community could be made to enable local government actors to become actively involved in environmental governance. The more that there is clear and consistent resolve in placing environmental quality above other more particular considerations, the better the odds of removing obstacles to effectively managing natural resources. Otherwise, the widening gap between neighbors, the EU and not, will continue to exist.

In summary, as indicated in Table 3, policy transfers in environmental governance involve various typologies such as immediate adoption, harmonization, capacity building, funding, and knowledge exchange. While EU member countries have a relatively smoother policy transfer process, non-EU countries face challenges in adapting and implementing EU policies due to contextual factors. The case of Bosnia highlights the complexity of policy transfer in a fragmented governance system, requiring special attention to overcome institutional barriers and build policy capacity to implement EU environmental standards successfully.

Table 3. Typologies of policy transfers in environmental governance.

Policy Transfer Typology	EU to EU Member Countries	EU to Non-EU Member Countries
Direct Adoption	EU policies and directives are directly adopted into national laws	Non-EU countries adopt EU policies and directives into their laws
Harmonization and Alignment	EU member states to harmonize their national policies with EU standards	Non-EU countries align their policies with EU standards
Capacity Building	EU provides technical assistance and capacity-building programs	EU supports non-EU countries in enhancing their policy capacity
Funding and Financial Support	EU provides financial support for implementing EU policies	EU offers funding to non-EU countries for environmental projects
Knowledge Exchange	EU member states to exchange best practices and policy experiences	Non-EU countries learn from EU member states' environmental practices

Based on the data gathered, a side-by-side comparison of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia's environmental indicators is outlined below in Table 4. Environmental indicators provide insights into the environmental health of a country and the effectiveness of its policies and initiatives, allowing for a comparison of the environmental situations in Croatia,

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Data indicates better performance for the EU member country, Croatia, in all environmental indicators.

Table 4. Quantitative data results comparison.

Country	Greenhouse Gas Emissions (kt of CO ₂ Equivalent)	Air Quality Index (AQI)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	25,221 (2019)	38.9 (2019)
Croatia	23,726 (2019)	21.7 (2019)

Based on the information from the SDG Index dashboards, Table 5 below depicts a comparison of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia's SDG rankings and measures.

Table 5. SDG rankings.

Country	SDG Index Rank	SDG Index Score	Spillover Score
Bosnia and Herzegovina	47/166	74.0	89.3
Croatia	12/166	81.5	75.8

The SDG Index Rank is out of 166 countries, with a lower rank indicating better performance. The SDG Index Score is a measure of the country's overall progress toward the sustainable development goals, with a higher score indicating better performance. The Spillover Score measures the extent to which a country's actions and policies affect other countries' ability to achieve their SDGs, with a higher score indicating a more positive impact.

4. Discussion

This research adopts a case study approach, enabling a comparative analysis of regional priorities and instruments between an EU member nation (Croatia) and a non-EU member (Bosnia and Herzegovina). This comparison provides a deeper understanding of the pertinent priorities for future EU members. The review defines current mobilizing issues and environmental concerns, examining environmental governance and the minimum threshold of expectations for resolving environmental problems in these two countries. Despite significant EU investments and efforts, both countries still need to complete capacity-building programs and positive environmental governance changes. These cases underscore the need for a more context-sensitive and capacity-focused approach to environmental governance. By considering these factors, EU-level goals can be more effectively aligned with the realities and capabilities of member states, ultimately leading to improved environmental outcomes across the region.

The EU's environmental governance framework comprises three primary components: informational means, voluntary means, and eco-taxes [79]. Intricately linked to competencies and a nuanced understanding of EU environmental laws, these mechanisms are not uniformly implemented across EU countries. Furthermore, the EU's focus on capacity building for non-EU countries has been criticized, with studies highlighting many issues but offering scant evidence of practical solutions [80], including effective governance with accountability, the protection of civil liberties, and the control of corruption [81]. This is particularly pertinent in managing natural resources in post-socialist and post-conflict EU and non-EU countries.

Environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a recently independent country, has experienced intense transitions from a destructive war to a post-war reconstruction period. The country's post-war political arrangements have resulted in a fragmented, complex, and unmanageable governance system [82–84]. The country's political structure is characterized by a weak central government, a three-partite presidency that rotates every six months, and a division into two entities along ethnic lines (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska) and one district (Brčko District), which hampers

effective environmental governance at regional and national levels. Despite significant EU influence and the presence of international consultants, non-state actors lack mobilization in the realm of environmental governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina [85–90].

State actors' capacity and policy knowledge are limited [85]. Freedom House (2016) reported that despite over twenty years of peace, democracy has been declining. Progress has yet to be made on economic and social reforms and the required steps toward EU ascension. The impact of "constant crises, produced by interparty, personal, and ethnic conflicts at all levels of government are paralyzing all institutions, including the judiciary", characterizing 2022 as another year of wasted opportunities [90,91]. The disparity in the ability to adapt and execute EU-led initiatives and environmental policies between aspiring EU member states and current members is evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina [92–100] and Croatia's cases [101,102]. Aspiring member states face numerous challenges, including political dysfunction, which can hinder their ability to respond effectively to EU mandates. Even with political will and commitment, the general normative requirements of the European Union can pose difficulties for countries with varying capacities, especially in regions affected by conflict.

While the EU attempts to lead in environmental protection by providing standards and processes within the EU and in non-EU bordering nations, there is a policy misfit at the level of implementation and enforcement. Most efforts are misplaced, as the root cause of the dysfunctional state of affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina is its political and legal framework, which was set up by the Dayton Peace Agreement. The placement of the Office of High Representative has caused deadlocks in environmental governance. The EU's environmental governance framework comprises three primary components: informational means, voluntary means, and eco-taxes [89]. Intricately linked to competencies and a nuanced understanding of EU environmental laws, these mechanisms are not uniformly implemented across EU countries. Furthermore, the EU's focus on capacity building for non-EU countries has been criticized, with studies highlighting many issues but offering scant evidence of practical solutions [90]. This is particularly pertinent in managing natural resources in post-socialist and post-conflict EU and non-EU countries.

The Energy Community is an international organization that aims to create an integrated pan-European energy market. It brings together the European Union and its neighbors, with the European Union being a party to the Energy Community Treaty and represented by the European Commission. The Commission serves as a permanent vice-president of the organization. The Energy Community has nine contracting parties: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine. Any European Union member state may obtain the status of a participant. Armenia, Norway, and Turkey participate as observers [78]. The Energy Community operates through a robust institutional setting that supports its processes. The Ministerial Council, as the highest decision-making body, meets annually to set critical priorities and guide the treaty's implementation. The work of the Ministerial Council is prepared by the Permanent High-Level Group, which meets every three months. The Energy Community Parliamentary Plenum, which consists of elected members of parliament, aims to equip the Energy Community better to adopt and implement the acquis. The Energy Community Regulatory Board, a coordination body of the national energy regulators, fosters knowledge exchange and developments of best practices for regulated electricity and gas markets in the Energy Community. Specialized working groups and task forces also support the Energy Community's work. The Energy Community Secretariat, based in Vienna, Austria, is the only permanently acting and independent institution of the Energy Community [78].

The Energy Community is crucial in energy governance, climate change, and environmental protection. It is particularly relevant for countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, which are part of the Energy Community and working toward aligning their legislation with the EU. The Energy Community provides a platform for these countries to work toward their environmental goals in a coordinated and integrated manner, which is crucial for effective environmental governance [78].

Table 6 offers an overview of challenges faced in policy transfer from the EU to Bosnia and Herzegovina in environmental governance. The policy mechanisms examined are eco-taxes, voluntary means, and informational means. For eco-taxes, Bosnia and Herzegovina face challenges such as a lack of implementation capacity and enforcement mechanisms. This has resulted in limited adoption and enforcement of eco-taxes within the country.

Table 6. Challenges in policy transfer from the EU to Bosnia in environmental governance.

Policy Mechanism	Challenges in Policy Transfer to Bosnia and Herzegovina	Approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Eco-Taxes	Lack of implementation capacity and enforcement mechanisms	Limited adoption and enforcement of eco-taxes
Voluntary Means	Limited participation and lack of engagement from stakeholders	Insufficient use of voluntary means in environmental governance
Informational Means	Limited access to information and data gaps	Inadequate information sharing and transparency coupled with governance and political dysfunction

When it comes to voluntary means, there is limited participation and a lack of engagement from stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, resulting in insufficient use of these voluntary means in their environmental governance framework.

Lastly, there is limited access to information and significant data gaps under informational means. This issue is amplified by inadequate information sharing and transparency, further complicated by governance and political dysfunction within the country.

In the case of policy transfer in environmental governance, specific policy mechanisms face challenges in being easily transferred to Bosnia from the EU. These challenges are rooted in the specific context of Bosnia, including governance complexities and capacity limitations.

One of the policy mechanisms that encounters difficulties in policy transfer is the implementation of eco-taxes. Eco-taxes involve levies and charges to promote environmentally friendly practices and discourage harmful activities. However, Bosnia faces challenges regarding implementation capacity and enforcement mechanisms, leading to limited eco-tax adoption and enforcement.

Another policy mechanism, voluntary means, which involves non-regulatory approaches such as voluntary agreements and partnerships, faces challenges in Bosnia. Limited participation and a lack of stakeholder engagement hinder the effective utilization of voluntary means in environmental governance.

Informational means, which include providing information, data sharing, and awareness-raising, also encounter challenges in policy transfer to Bosnia. Limited access to information and data gaps impede effective decision-making and hinder the implementation of environmental policies. Inadequate information sharing and transparency further contribute to the challenges in using informational means in Bosnia's environmental governance.

These challenges in policy transfer suggest that the policy framework in Bosnia requires special attention and tailored approaches. Bosnia's governance complexities and capacity limitations necessitate context-sensitive solutions and capacity-building efforts to enhance policy implementation and coordination. Addressing these challenges will require improving implementation capacity, engaging stakeholders, and enhancing access to information and data. By addressing these specific challenges, Bosnia can better align its environmental governance with the policy transfer framework and achieve improved environmental outcomes.

The Case of Croatia and Environmental Governance

Croatia, already an EU member country, had led a more successful transition to its post-war development and consideration of environmental outcomes. This is due in no small

part to a reasonably well-conceived foundation in environmental protection regulation before the effort to join the EU. As noted, “In the first half of the 20th century, provisions related to nature protection were integrated into many laws” in Croatia [101]. As part of the former Yugoslavia, Croatia passed its Nature Protection Act in 1960, making enhancements in the 1970s to its environmental governance. Croatia subsequently adopted the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1996 and followed this with the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in 2007. Croatia’s formal joining of the EU in 2013 followed years of adjustment to and alignment with EU principles from 2004 to 2013 [102].

It has been suggested that Croatia, as a new member state in the EU, is guided by New Public Management and the principle of efficiency in governance; still, the absence of an evaluation of policies and concerns about consistency in implementation limit the benefits of reform measures [103]. The slow pace of public administration and governance modernization in Croatia, explicitly concerning environmental and socio-economic matters, is notable [104]. Croatia’s population nevertheless supports the government’s role in protecting the environment more than the United States and the United Kingdom, with similarly strong support for government environmental spending [105]. This orientation bodes well because such investment will be required for Croatia to achieve its environmental goals. Still, the threat of weak or corrupt public institutions may prevent the realization of positive environmental outcomes.

Even with its positive adjustments, Croatia showed deficiencies in its energy infrastructure because it is energy-dependent, and its practices for sustainability and environmental protection continued to evidence concern about the ability to balance development with due caution for environmental impacts. While the EU has supported capacity-building in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, efforts in Croatia have been limited by existing infrastructure and a lack of liquid capital for investing in green energy technology [106]. Progress in environmental governance in Croatia is evident concerning air quality, with Croatia’s emissions of major pollutants to the air showing a decreasing trend [106,107]. Significant air pollution concerns in the early 2000s led to the enactment of governmental policies to reduce air pollution and focus on meeting the targets set by the Kyoto Protocol “with a trend of reduction in emissions of GHGs (greenhouse gases) [106]. Consistent with evidence “that establishing new modes of environmental governance requires substantial investment in the hierarchy and the EU plays a critical role in stimulating the creation of that hierarchy” [108], p. 982. In this case, the intent and realization of EU membership followed a natural trajectory for improving environmental outcomes.

Croatia readily adapted to the EU hierarchy and the demands of EU governance, allowing for policy transfers. The EU engagement in Croatia is effective mainly due to the less complex nature of the political and post-war arrangements. The commitment to meeting EU requirements for environmental prerogatives is evident in Croatia. A basic regulatory and enforcement framework in Croatia is still functional and practical despite the presence of conflict, creating a firm foundation for the success of further EU-led protection efforts. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s legislative work on environmental protection has been more recent and limited. Environmental protection results have been decidedly less impressive in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there is often a disconnect between various layers of government and across entity lines. This would limit the nation’s ability to enact “more legislation to be harmonized with the EU *acquis*” [107].

The difference is a greater permeation of EU thinking down to the level of local governments on environmental protection and enforcement prioritization. In other situations, where the level of complexity is increased, addressing these critical issues is stymied by too much attention paid to intergroup disagreements and the achievement of aims. This can undermine the possibility of adequate environmental protection, regardless of the clarity and truth of international concerns on the topic. Additionally, this shows a limitation on the potential of EU normative leadership on environmental policy matters, given the proximity and similarity of the two nations studied here, both adversely affected by conflict and yet able to achieve quite different ends in environmental outcomes. The damage caused by the

intergroup struggle in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a defining characteristic and reason for failure in policy ends. With the Republic of Croatia, a reasonable foundation in policy has interacted well with the EU-led culture in readiness to achieve environmental goals, if not always an actual achievement.

As noted in Table 7, in Croatia's environmental governance, several policy transfer means have been implemented to address environmental challenges and align with EU standards.

1. **Eco-Taxes:** Croatia has implemented eco-taxes as a policy mechanism to promote environmentally friendly practices and discourage harmful activities. Eco-taxes have been applied to various sectors and industries, such as carbon taxes on energy production and emissions from industrial processes. These measures aim to incentivize sustainable practices and reduce the environmental impacts.
2. **Voluntary Means:** Croatia has also embraced voluntary means in its environmental governance. This involves encouraging voluntary agreements and partnerships between the government, businesses, and civil society organizations. Through these agreements, stakeholders voluntarily commit to specific environmental targets and actions beyond regulatory requirements. Voluntary means allow for flexibility and collaboration for achieving environmental goals.
3. **Informational Means:** Croatia recognizes the importance of information sharing, awareness campaigns, and public participation in environmental governance. Open data sharing enables stakeholders to access environmental information and contribute to decision-making. Awareness campaigns raise public consciousness about environmental issues and promote sustainable behaviors. Public participation mechanisms, such as consultations and public hearings, allow citizens to engage in environmental decision-making.

Table 7. Policy transfer means in Croatia's environmental governance.

Policy Mechanism	Implementation Measures
Eco-Taxes	Implementation of eco-taxes on various sectors and industries
Voluntary Means	Encouraging voluntary agreements and partnerships for sustainability
Informational Means	Open data sharing, awareness campaigns, and public participation

This policy transfer means that Croatia reflects the country's commitment to aligning with EU environmental standards and promoting sustainable development. The above-mentioned implementation measures demonstrate Croatia's efforts to adopt and adapt EU policies and practices to its national context.

5. Conclusions

This study, grounded in policy transfer theory, undertook a comparative analysis of environmental governance in Croatia, an EU member state, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a non-EU member state. The findings underscored the complexities and challenges inherent in the policy transfer process, particularly in the context of environmental governance. The relevance of environmental governance for a more sustainable and resilient future has been well documented [48,109–111].

In addressing the first research question, the study found that the EU's environmental policy framework significantly impacts member and non-member states. In Croatia, an EU member state, the impact is mainly positive, with the country demonstrating successful adoption and implementation of EU policies. This success has resulted in notable strides in addressing environmental challenges, particularly in air quality improvement and emissions reduction.

In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a non-EU member state, has faced significant challenges aligning with the EU's environmental policy framework. The country's complex political structure, fragmented governance systems, and absence of a clear path to EU integration pose significant barriers to effectively implementing EU environmental policies.

The second research question focused on the challenges and successes of implementing EU-led environmental initiatives in these countries. Croatia's experience demonstrated a relatively smooth policy transfer process, facilitated by its alignment with EU principles and a well-established foundation in environmental protection regulations. The country's successful adoption and implementation of EU policies have resulted in notable strides in addressing environmental challenges, particularly in air quality improvement and emissions reduction.

However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the policy transfer process has been fraught with difficulties, with political dysfunction and corruption posing significant barriers to the effective implementation of EU environmental policies. The country's complex political structure, fragmented governance systems, and the absence of a clear path to EU integration posed significant barriers to effectively implementing EU environmental policies. The study highlighted the detrimental impact of political dysfunction and corruption on policy transfer efforts, further complicating Bosnia and Herzegovina's alignment with EU environmental governance practices.

The third research question explored applying policy transfer theory to environmental governance in these countries. The study's findings underscore the critical role of recipient countries' political, economic, and institutional contexts in facilitating successful policy transfer. The disparities in the ability to adapt and execute EU-led initiatives between aspiring EU member states and current members were evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia's cases. Aspiring member states face numerous challenges, including political dysfunction, which can hinder their ability to respond effectively to EU mandates. Even with political will and commitment, the general normative requirements of the European Union can pose difficulties for countries with varying capacities, especially in regions affected by conflict.

This study comprehensively explains the complexities involved in policy transfer and environmental governance in the EU and non-member states. It underscores the need for more context-sensitive and capacity-focused approaches to environmental governance and offers valuable insights for future research and policy development. By considering these factors, EU-level goals can be more effectively aligned with the realities and capabilities of member states, ultimately leading to improved environmental outcomes across the region. Based on these findings, it is clear that policy transfer theory provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with transferring environmental policies from the EU to member and non-member states. The theory highlights the importance of considering recipient countries' political, economic, and institutional contexts to facilitate successful policy transfer. The study's findings contribute to the broader discourse on environmental governance, policy transfer, and EU integration, offering a robust foundation for further exploration, research, inquiry, and policy development.

Future research should focus on conducting a comparative analysis of policy transfer processes in other EU member states to further explore the factors contributing to successful policy implementation. Investigating the specific contextual factors that hinder policy transfer in non-member states like Bosnia and Herzegovina could also be beneficial. Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives in non-member states could enhance their ability to adopt and implement EU environmental policies. Lastly, investigating the challenges and benefits of harmonizing national environmental policies with EU standards in non-member states could provide valuable insights.

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Appendix A

Document Title	Date	Reference
Closing the loop—An EU action plan for the Circular Economy	2015	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS COM/2015/0614 final
A new Circular Economy Action Plan For a cleaner and more competitive Europe	2020	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS COM/2020/98 final
A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy	2018	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS COM/2018/028 final
An EU action plan for the Circular Economy	2015	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS COM/2015/0614 final
Roadmap to a resource efficient Europe	2011	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
Common agricultural policy	2021	The common agricultural policy is about our food, the environment and the countryside.
EU assessment of progress in implementing the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020	2015	EC, 2015, Commission staff working document—EU assessment of progress in implementing the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 (SWD(2015) 187 final)
Green infrastructure (GI): enhancing Europe’s natural capital	2013	EC, 2013, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions—Green infrastructure (GI): enhancing Europe’s natural capital (COM(2013) 249 final of 6 May 2013)
2030 Climate and Energy Framework	2020	EUCO 169/14 European Council (23 and 24 October 2014)-Conclusions EUCO 169/14
Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy	2020	COM(2020) 789 final ANNEX to the COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
European Climate Law proposal	2020	Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 (European Climate Law)
A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy	2015	Energy Union Package, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank “A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy”, COM(2015) 80 final, 25 February 2015.
EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS)	2020	The EU emissions trading system (EU ETS) is a cornerstone of the EU’s policy to combat climate change and its key tool for reducing greenhouse gas emissions cost-effectively.
Effort sharing: Member States’ emission targets	2020	The Effort Sharing legislation establishes binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for Member States for the periods 2013–2020 and 2021–2030.

Document Title	Date	Reference
Kigali amendment to the Montreal Protocol	2017	COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2017/1541 of 17 July 2017 on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer.
2030 Climate Target Plan	2020	With the 2030 Climate Target Plan, the Commission proposes to raise the EU's ambition on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to at least 55% below 1990 levels by 2030.
Directive (EU) 2018/410	2020	Directive (EU) 2018/410 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2018 amending Directive 2003/87/EC to enhance cost-effective emission reductions and low-carbon investments, and Decision (EU) 2015/1814.
Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition—Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people	2020	COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT Accompanying the document: COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS
2050 long-term strategy	2020	The EU aims to be climate-neutral by 2050—an economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. This objective is at the heart of the European Green Deal and in line with the EU's commitment to global climate action under the Paris Agreement.
EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030	2020	The European Commission has adopted the new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and an associated Action Plan (annex)—A comprehensive, ambitious, long-term plan for protecting nature and reversing the degradation of ecosystems.
The European Green Deal	2020	Roadmap for making the EU's economy sustainable; aims to turn climate and environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas.
European Climate Law proposal	2020	Aims to enshrine the 2050 climate-neutrality objective into EU law.
EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS)	2020	EC, 2020, "EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS)"
Effort sharing: Member States' emission targets	2020	EC, 2019a, Effort sharing: Member States' emission targets
Kigali amendment to the Montreal Protocol	2020	EU 2017/1541 Kigali amendment to the Montreal Protocol
A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy	2015	COM(2015) 80 final—A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy

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