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Abstract

There has been a lot of discussion lately about whether or not environmental aspirations can be reconciled with those of economic competitiveness in a satisfactory manner. The purpose of this study is to make a contribution to this discourse by assessing how successful the European Union has been in combining these two very different kinds of goals, both at strategic and implementation levels. The three sub objectives derived from this overall purpose are: to evaluate the EU's contribution to the promotion of environmental sustainability from a global perspective, to assess the strategic choices the Union has made when trying to combine the goals of environmental sustainability and economic competitiveness, and finally, to estimate the success of the implementation of these strategies on an individual member state level.

The theoretical framework of this study begins with definitions of the two key concepts from the viewpoint of this study: sustainable development and economic competitiveness. Furthermore, a short introduction is given to the policy tools that the European Union has put in place in order to facilitate the task of environmental integration.

Due to the nature of the purpose of this study, the research approach is qualitative. More specifically, the study is carried out by conducting five (5) partly structured, theme-based expert interviews. In order to form a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon, representatives from all the relevant interest groups from the perspective of this thesis (i.e. government, private sector and non-governmental organisations) are interviewed.

The research findings suggest that, first of all, in order to achieve environmental integration, the EU needs to increase the role of cooperation with other parts of the world. Other implications of this study indicate that the roles of strategic and legislative frameworks within the EU should be streamlined and more attention should be paid to overall policy coordination. Furthermore, it is discovered in this study that the so-called best practices cannot be directly transferred from one member state to another, but they can serve as inspiring examples among the member states.

Key words	European Union, sustainable development, environment, competitiveness, economic growth
Further information	

