

PALLÀS SECALL, Pol, *The Principle of Integration in International Watercourse Cooperation Regimes*, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden/Boston, 2025.

Whether considered a paradigm, goal, parameter, norm, principle or concept, sustainable development has undoubtedly become a key element of the international agenda and of international environmental law in recent decades, including international watercourses law. Integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions is essential for implementing sustainable development, a process which is extremely complex. Despite its practical importance, the author of this book rightly describes the principle of integration as ‘poorly conceptualised compared to its theoretical relevance and the magnitude of its practical application.’ (p. 2) At the same time, the vital and multidimensional nature of international watercourses makes it an interesting and relevant area in which to analyse the integration of their economic, social and environmental dimensions, with important mutual influences evident in the evolution of both sustainable development and international watercourses law. This analysis is even more crucial in the current context of ecological and climate crises.

This is precisely the research presented in this book, which is an abridged and revised version of the doctoral thesis written by Pol Pallàs Secall to obtain his PhD at the University of Barcelona (Spain). Though its pages, the author seeks to answer the following main research question: How the principle of integration is applied in current and potential practice in international watercourse cooperations frameworks?. The underlying hypothesis is that general international law, including international watercourse law, incorporates the objective of sustainable development by integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions, which in turn requires the implementation of specific legal and institutional integration mechanisms.

The book is divided into three parts and thirteen chapters, in which the main research questions and background hypothesis are thoroughly explored. Part 1 introduces the concept of integrating economic, social and environmental factors to achieve the sustainable governance of international watercourses. To this end, Chapter 1 presents the legal basis for the principle of integration. Chapter 2 then analyses how the principle of integration interacts with international watercourse cooperation frameworks, providing specific analyses of its relationship with the main substantive and procedural obligations of international watercourse law as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 covers the analysis of this principle in the context of the substantive obligations of equitable and reasonable utilization, not causing significant harm, and protecting international watercourses. And Chapter 4 covers the analysis of the principle of integration in relation to the procedural obligations of prior notification of planned measures, conducting environmental impact assessments, consulting with other riparian states, and exchanging data and information.

Part 2 and 3 focus on the two dimensions of the principle of integration: legal integration and institutional integration, including their study thought the lens of existing cooperation regimes on a set of selected international watercourses, mainly: the

Danube River, the Dniester River, the International Joint Commission between Canada and United States of America, the Mekong River, the Niger Basin, the Sava River and the Senegal River.

The study of the legal integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions in international watercourse regimes in Part II begins with an analysis of the inclusion of a legal integration mandate in selected international basin agreements (Chapter 5). The author then examines additional ways of legal integration in this context: a) the indirect application of other international agreements through inter-treaty, inter-regime, and inter-disciplinary references (Chapter 6); b) the utilization of norms that promote the consideration of economic, social and environmental values in the application of international basin agreements through intra-treaty integration, integrative principles guiding their implementation, and integrative approaches developed by soft law instruments; and c) the interpretation carried out by international watercourse dispute resolution mechanisms through teleological treaty interpretation, evolutionary terms interpretation, and open-textured obligations interpretation.

Part 3 is devoted to the mechanisms for the institutional integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions in international watercourse regimes. It begins with an analysis of the institutional conditions for an integrated decision-making process, i.e. the practices and instruments that international river basin organisations use to implement this form of integration (Chapter 9). The subsequent chapters expand upon this analysis of institutional integration at various levels, from general to specific: in the development of an international basin policy (Chapter 10), the management of international river basins (Chapter 11), and the planning of projects affecting international watercourses (Chapter 12). The methods for making informed decisions and policies, stakeholder involvement, and other integrated policies and approaches are identified and studied at these three levels. This section and the book conclude with a final chapter containing final conclusions (Chapter 13).

The main conclusion reached by the author is that despite the analysed wide availability of instruments for the recognition and application of the principles of integration, they are still insufficiently utilized in international watercourse cooperation mechanisms. While practice show considerable flexibility by International Rivers Basin Organizations in the adoption of institutional integration mechanisms not foreseen in international basin agreements, mechanisms for legal interpretation are still widely underused, offering potential opportunities for improvement (p. 319).

Therefore, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical and practical implications of applying the principle of integration to international watercourse law, as well as a review of how this principle is currently being implemented. In doing so, it enriches studies of both sustainability and international watercourse law and on mechanisms for legal and institutional integration by providing a detailed and extensive treatment of a research topic that was previously under-researched. At the same time, it provides practitioners and policymakers with an excellent tool to help them implement the principle of integration more effectively in specific transboundary river basins and at different levels. The book also showcases the author's profound legal expertise, demonstrating his mastery of international watercourse law, the principle of integration, and regulatory and institutional integration techniques. It also demonstrates the author's

extensive knowledge of other areas of international law, as evidenced by examples drawn from international diversity law, law of the sea, and European Union law.

In short, this book is essential reading for all those working in the field of international watercourses law, including scholars, policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders. Given the broad applicability of the principle of integration, it is also highly relevant to other areas of international environmental law.

Laura MOVILLA PATEIRO
University of Vigo

