Reviewer's report

Title: Environmental Policy and Children's Health in Mexico

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Reviewer: Marco Martuzzi

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This paper addresses an important question and contributes to fill a persistent gap. The question is how a large country, Mexico, is governing its rapid modernisation with respect to health implications, notably on children. The gap is in the science-policy interface i.e., whether and how available evidence, in its various degrees of robustness, translates into policy response and action.

We often hear pleas for more systematic analysis of such questions, based on sound methodology, and the authors have just managed that, showing that qualitative methodology for policy analysis and research largely based on grey literature can be carried out rather rigorously. So I am wholeheartedly supportive of publication in a scientific journal such as Environmental Health. In the following I make some points to be taken as suggestions for the authors' consideration (i.e., "discretionary revisions"). A possible exception is point 5, which I recommend rather strongly - but I appreciate the editors may have different views.

1. Throughout the paper there is some ambiguity as to whether current limitations in policy making, lack of governance instruments, gaps in science-policy are discussed at national Mexican, American, or international level. In the introduction, for example, Mexican data are first used, US-based evidence is then referred to, and "few governments" are finally said to have translated evidence into action.

2. Also in the introduction, some data are described that purportedly indicate the adverse impact of rapid industrialization on Mexican children's health. However, they are not fully convincing: asthma prevalence at 4.7% in Mexico City is, if anything, surprisingly low for a City whose air quality is notorious. The 12.5% prevalence in Merida is also considerably lower than prevalences reported in many other settings, ie in Europe. Similarly, increases in childhood leukaemia (reported for a rather old time period, 1982-91) is reported to occur in many parts of the world, and the role of environmental contaminants is unclear. Other pieces of information provided are more compelling, e.g. figures on hazardous child labour or malnutrition, but may be less directly connected to industrialization, or at least can appear so to the uninformed reader, who may even think the opposite.
3. In the literature review, I was surprised not to see any reference to what I think was a major conference on Environment and Health for the Americas, held in Buenos Aires in 2004 or early 2005. The Conference established some connections with the European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Budapest in June 2004 on "The Future of Our Children". The authors may want to search for such event, which may (or may not) provide some more entries in the GIs list. If this is not the case, even an example of an initiative that did not produce tangible results may be informative.

4. Under the "Results - Interviews" section, a rather crucial point is mentioned in passing that would deserve more attention. It is said that "MExico is still focusing on improving health overall, rather than focusing on policies to protect children [...]". This tension between broad environmental health protection and specific measures for children surfaces in other parts of the manuscript: how is Mexico doing in general? Are there bad policies? or good policies for adults that fail to protect children? It would be helpful to spell out why government should target children or other vulnerable groups with dedicated policies. I am personally in favour, but others favour the view that improving public health overall in an equitable way would benefit most those groups that are most in need.

5. In the same section, the authors should consider doing away with direct speech, or reduce it drastically. The words of the interviewees are the raw material of this work, reported verbatim is powerful, but can be misleading. Admittedly, I have no specific competence for this (on the other hand, who has?), but reporting soundbites comes across as vaguely manipulative. Statements like "it's not our job", "it's a waste of time" are extremely negative, the reader can easily imagine a senior official saying it, but I feel the authors almost have a duty to describe, in their own words, what the respondents really meant, what were the overall attitudes, the moods, the prevailing atmosphere. I have the strong impression that interviewees would not be happy to see that, despite anonymity. Thus, the first part of the Discussion can be considered results.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.