

Environmental NGOs in an Emerging Global Civil Society

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1. Introduction

Environmental issues are among the most prominent when dealing with transnational non-governmental organizations. More than 1,400 environmental NGOs were officially accredited with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro 1992, and a total of about 7000 NGOs took part, in one way or another, in the "Global Forum" organized as a special event for NGOs apart from the UN conference itself - (Haas/Levy/Parson 1995: 160; Jasanoff 1997: 579). The most significant development during the last two decades is the dramatic increase of NGO activities *outside formal political processes*, such as international negotiations or the work of international organizations. Here, they operate as voices and agents of civil society vis-a-vis governments, state bureaucracies, and transnational corporations as they seek to come to grips with the threats to the human environment on the local, national and global levels. It is the notion of environmental NGOs as a societal response to the erosion of democratic participation and accountability in internationalizing political processes that has prompted research to re-focus attention on transnational politics after it had already been an important, but short-lived research topic in the 1970s.¹

In addition to the participatory revolution brought about by NGOs outside formal political processes, international politics is also witnessing a change of roles which environmental NGOs play *within formal international*

¹ On the earlier concept of complex interdependence see Keohane/Nye 1978. Risse-Kappen (1995:7) argues that the former concept of transnational relations was "ill-defined" and makes an effort to refine it.

political processes. The post-Rio process has seen a continuous participation of NGOs within political processes of the United Nations such as the work of the Sustainable Development Commission and of other international organizations including notably the World Bank, or conferences of the parties of a large number of international conventions for the protection of environmental goods. International conventions on the environment increasingly provide for the participation of NGOs. One example for NGOs' improved access to intergovernmental bodies is their recent participation in the UN General Assembly's Special Session to Review Agenda 21 held in New York in July 1997. On this occasion, Greenpeace and the Third World Network spoke as representatives of environmental NGOs and criticized state representatives for insufficient political achievements since Rio 1992.²

However, there are still complaints about NGOs' limited access to international bodies. One analyst has recently remarked on NGOs' access to UN bodies dealing with human rights issues that "even with respect to UN structures - that is, meetings with state representatives, officials or experts - which are open to NGOs, doors are never opened wide" (Dunér 1997: 308). Although such observations may also apply to many political processes in the field of the environment, one should note that access to, and participation in, such political processes differ widely across the broad range of such processes. UNCED has certainly been one of the key events fostering participation of NGOs within the UN-system, and especially the Sustainable Development Commission has been praised for its

² See United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS): Environment and Development File: Briefings on Agenda 21 Follow-Up, Vol. III, No.15, September 1997.

"relative openness" towards NGOs (Conca 1996: 115). However, openness also creates new difficulties with regard to the ability to manage a political process, as the number of actors involved with policymaking increases significantly. Another, quite different critical issue arising from the openness of policymaking systems for NGO participation and input is the question of the competence of environmental NGOs: they can claim to represent civil society adequately if their skills contribute to getting environmental issues on the political agenda or to improving the implementation of environmental policies.

Current research on environmental NGOs focusses primarily (1) on identifying the conditions for the growth of NGOs in the field of environmental politics, (2) on NGOs' behavior vis-à-vis states and IGOs, and (3) on their role in international environmental negotiations. It distinguishes, by and large, two types of NGOs, one which concentrates on advocacy and another on providing services to the community including public and private actors or institutions. This research seeks to answer the question of how and why NGOs have become seemingly successful players in environmental policymaking. However, this research cannot escape shedding light on the policy failures and the many varied shortcomings of NGOs either. The NGO analyst has to beware himself of a normatively inspired over-optimism.

Research on NGOs' role in environmental policymaking faces a number of open questions related to their relationships with other actors especially when considering long-term historical trends in the international system. For instance, there are acute knowledge gaps when it comes to the complex

interrelationships between environmental NGOs and private firms. Economic globalization results in the growing importance of a privatized space of value allocation between transnational economic actors which critically affects the exploitation of environmental goods like tropical forests, mineral resources, fossil fuels, or living resources like fish, etc. Rather than dwelling on the more traditional research items of environmental NGO scholarship, the following sections of the paper will deal with the following questions:

-- Has growing self-organization of civil society changed the relationships between state actors and civil society or will it contribute to changing them in the future? Is the emergence of global civil society, in particular, only (or also) a response of national civil societies to national governments' practices of shifting formerly domestic political decisions to the international level and thereby reducing the opportunities for political participation of their national civil societies (Scharpf 1991, Zürn 1996)?

-- Which of the different types of NGOs is most important for, or successful in, the field of the environment? What kinds of activities do they pursue in order to push and assist states and international organizations to protect the environment? Are these activities causally relevant to the success of environmental policymaking, and to what extent does the absence of such activities account for policy failures?

-- How competent are NGOs and what kind of expertise can they contribute to international environmental policymaking? How does their

dependency on funds from private donors and their members influence their work? Does the availability of financial resources affect their ability to participate in policymaking on the local, national, or international levels?

-- To what extent do environmental NGOs and private firms influence each other? Are the relationships between both of them only competitive, or can they also cooperate?

The paper will first discuss the role of civil society in international environmental politics. Second, we will then distinguish the different types of environmental NGOs and their types of activities relevant for environmental policymaking. Third, the paper will address the competence of environmental NGOs and their dependency on financial resources. Finally, we will deal with the relationship between environmental NGOs and private firms.

2. Civil Society and States in International Environmental Politics

Related to the world-wide acuteness of environmental problems the emergence of a global civil society is a consequence of two different developments. *First*, the salience of environmental problems gives rise to actors pushing for international collective management by national governments. Growing ecological interdependencies in the "global village" set the stage for international cooperation for the preservation of environmental goods but do not make it certain. Certainly, collective action among states is often the only way to avoid the "tragedy of the

commons" (Hardin 1968) or individual as well as collective suboptimal outcomes in a mixed-motive situation.³ For example, the riparian states of a regional sea can only protect the marine environment if they *all* agree to limit the emission of pollutants to the regional sea. As long as one important individual riparian state refuses to go along with the limitation of marine pollution, other states will not tolerate the free-riding, and together they will hardly arrive at collective action.

Second, the growing need to establish international policymaking systems for the environment confronts national societies with the prospect of losing control over political processes and of being deprived of governmental authorities which they can hold responsible for their (in)actions. Due to the transnational, or even global, character of many environmental problems states deal with them more and more internationally rather than domestically. The last three decades have thus seen a significant increase of international conventions for environmental protection. Most of these multilateral treaties resulted from negotiation processes initiated by UN organizations, notably UNEP.

Legislation within the European Union dealing with issues like exhaust fumes from automobiles or harmful substances in food has significantly increased as well; moreover, it has been accompanied by legislation on other environmental issues that the European Union had agreed to pass in order to implement multilateral agreements like the Montreal Protocol

³ On the distinction between collaboration and coordination games see Stein (1990). On the situation-structural approach see Hasenclever/Mayer/Rittberger (1997: 44-59) and Zürn (1992). See List/Rittberger 1992 on the different types of situation structures in the field of the environment.

and its subsequent adjustments and amendments or the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). The outcomes of international environmental negotiations or the programmes established by international organizations such as UNEP affect domestic policies and constrain a national civil society's ability to influence the political process by traditional means. Within such multi-level negotiation systems governments retain the main authority for environmental foreign policies, whereas participation or control by societal actors as well as national parliaments, domestic constitutional courts or subnational institutions run the risk of being undermined. The practice of multi-level environmental negotiations and the need to comply with their outcomes can open up a *democracy gap* as national governments bring pressure to bear on national parliaments and constitutional courts to accede to intergovernmental accords by pointing out that rejection could lead to both the failure of international collective action and a loss of international reputation making it more difficult for the government to be accepted as an effective diplomatic player in the future. Thus, NGOs as well as private interest groups respond to this internationalization of governance by participating as observers, lobbyists or advisors in international negotiations if they wish to exert similar influence internationally as they used to exert on the domestic level.⁴

⁴ However, democratic legitimacy is also a critical question in the relationship between global civil society and environmental NGOs. NGOs claim to represent national societies in international negotiations, but their leaders are not elected by civil society and lack legitimacy. They also pursue particular interests of their organization which must not always be identical with the public interest, nor do environmental NGOs always provide procedures for democratic participation within their organizations (Schmidt/Take 1997, 18; Beisheim 1997: 23).

2.1. Towards a Power Shift from States to Civil Society?

What effects will growing ecological interdependencies and the need for states to create international environmental regimes have on global civil society in the future, especially with regard to its political influence on these processes? Are activities of environmental NGOs an expression of a more fundamental shift in the relations between states and civil society? Since national governments are perceived to increasingly share power with business groups, international organizations, and even a multitude of citizens groups it has been asserted that the "steady concentration of power in the hands of states that began in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia is over, at least for a while" (Matthews 1997: 50).

Although NGOs have been quite successful in challenging states in international political processes dealing with environmental issues since the first UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, it is by no means certain that the frequency and strength of NGO activities have already led to a power shift in favor of civil society anywhere. On the contrary, states began to negotiate on environmental problems at the international level long before NGOs articulated their demands. Participation of nongovernmental actors was a response of national civil societies which realized that international policymaking circumvented democratic participation. Apart from the work of experts and service organizations which had been invited early on to take part in information-gathering about, and technical assessments and monitoring of, environmental hazards, states were first to seek collective action on the international level, and it was not before the mid-1980s when the number

of nongovernmental participants increased commensurate with the frequency of intergovernmental negotiations on environmental issues.

Many international negotiation processes occur simultaneously. This may easily lead to an overcrowding of the global political agenda because both any political system and the public can only deal with a limited number of issues at a certain point in time (Cobb/Elder 1972). States are less autonomous vis-à-vis their societies when negotiating on issues to which domestic societies assign great importance; in these instances, it will be much easier for nongovernmental organizations to mobilize societal support for their demands. Conversely, states have more leeway in their negotiations on issues to which the public pays less attention. Many environmental issues are considered as less important or have lost salience on the global or domestic political agendas although states continue to negotiate or implement internationally agreed-upon regulations domestically. As the number of international negotiations on environmental issues has increased, environmental NGOs certainly face difficulties to focus public attention on issues that do not rank highly on the political agenda. Cases in point are follow-up negotiations on the so-called Rio conventions; regular Conferences of the Parties (CoPs) on ozone depleting substances or greenhouse gases, for example, get much more attention in industrialized countries than CoPs on the desertification convention or the biodiversity convention.

Scientific and technological experts can contribute to undermining state autonomy in the long-term due to their participation in scientific and technological programmes of international organizations. Most international

research or monitoring programs like UNEP's 'Global Environment Monitoring System' or the 'Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-Range Transmission of Air Pollution in Europe' (EMEP) build on participation of experts and research institutes that can communicate their concerns about increasing environmental problems to the public or 'green' NGOs. The nature of the environment as a technical issue area constrains states' abilities to maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis their societies because international management is impossible without inclusion of domestic and transnational actors representing civil society. The work of assessment panels like the 'Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change' (IPCC) or scientific experts' contributions to the drafting of various chapters of Agenda 21 show that the growing number of environmental issues regarded as internationally important also afford participation of such actors *within formal political processes* that can enhance the prospects for consensual knowledge and the development of technical solutions (Haas 1992, Litfin 1994). States can also try to instrumentalize 'green' NGOs for their purposes or form tacit coalitions with them in negotiation processes as it was the case of the United States and a number of NGOs like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, when both were lobbying for stronger global regulation of ozone depleting substances under the Montreal Protocol in the second half of the 1980s (Parson 1993, Rowlands 1995, Breitmeier 1996).

The new salience of environmental NGOs in international political processes does not imply that states will automatically suffer a loss of status in the international system. International negotiations will only succeed when and if states will guarantee the domestic implementation of

their internationally given promises. So far, environmental NGOs' international activities are mainly aimed at maintaining the balance of power between states and civil society; they have not fundamentally changed this power relationship in their own favor.

2.2. NGOs and the Fragmentation of Global Civil Society

The concept of "world civic politics" presumes the existence of a global society of citizens. It builds on Hegel's notion of a civil society and implies the existence of a sphere on the global level wherein "free association takes place between individuals. It is an arena of particular needs, private interests, and divisiveness but within which citizens can come together to realize joint gains" (Wapner 1996: 5). Civil society is not fully independent from the state. It interacts with the state and is permeated by laws, governmental or semi-governmental organizations, and the like. The concept of world civic politics applies the core assumptions initially developed for a civil society *within* the boundaries of a nation state to a global civil society *across* national borders.⁵ Global civil society conceived as a set of actors which are able to act spontaneously and to organize themselves freely without states imposing their wills on them presupposes that the same states respect fundamental human rights, especially political and civil rights. For instance, the growth of activities of environmental NGOs in Asia are not only a consequence of "increasing economic integration and liberalization, which have provided incentives for the development of the

⁵ On the conceptualization of a world society see World Society Research Group (1995).

nongovernmental sector", but they are also driven by "growing democratization of political systems in the region" (Gan 1997: 4). Although democracy has been on the advance in the last decade,⁶ 'global civil society' is still far from denoting a political reality at the end of the twentieth century. The concept is useful for describing a global socio-political process that, eventually, may result in achieving a more integrated world society. At present, however, the concept should not blind the analyst to the large number of constraints that forces us to conceive of global civil society as a fragmented society.

States differ with regard to their political systems. An integrated global civil society would comprise national civil societies with basic democratic rights and the ability to act independently from state influence. However, even when populations are exposed to extreme environmental pollution, their ability for self-organization and transnational action depends on their living in a democratic or authoritarian political system. Thus, world civic politics can only be achieved in a world of democracies. Although many former socialist or authoritarian political systems have made the transition to democracy or are in the process of making this transition, democracy has not yet become the universally established practice of exercising public authority.

In the field of the environment, the space of global civil society is currently filled primarily with actors from the societies of the Western

⁶ Huntington (1991) describes the democratization of a large number of countries in the 1970s and 1980s, but points out that Asian and Islamic countries have been immune to more recent efforts of Western countries to support the democratization of these systems.

liberal democracies; however, the recent influx of Southern NGOs should not be discounted. The high degree of environmental cooperation among the member states of the OECD has led Western environmental NGOs to improve their collaboration on specific issues. Western environmental NGOs have reached agreement on many programmatic issues. Although Northern and Southern NGOs agree in principle on the preservation of environmental goods, programmatic consensus is much more difficult to achieve between them. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) has demonstrated that environmental NGOs do not always agree on the means for environmental protection because their interests and political views are often in conflict. Northern and Southern NGOs, for example, had different views concerning the policies necessary for the preservation of the tropical forests. Also, Western environmental NGOs still have to learn that Southern interests in wildlife protection are different from, and more pragmatic than, those prevailing in Europe or North-America. The 1997 Conference of the Parties to the 'Convention for International Trade on Endangered Species' (CITES) revealed that Southern NGOs, although in favor of measures for the protection of elephants or rhinoceroses, wish that protection measures should take into account the needs and living conditions of developing countries, where newly increasing herds of elephants have already led to crop failures and the destruction of farmland. Northern and Southern environmental NGOs also differ over cultural values and technical capabilities for communication. Since they operate in societies with different levels of socio-economic development they have different views about the priority of economic development. Global civil society will only be able to overcome such intellectual, cultural and technical barriers if environmental NGOs from North and

South enhance communication with a view to achieving mutual accommodation.

3. Types of NGOs: Advocacy and Service Organizations

Recent studies of NGOs have focussed on identifying different types of NGOs based on their activities ranging from making demands on states and international organizations to offering their cooperation with them. This emphasis in NGO scholarship is based on the fact that there still is little systematic knowledge about what actions of NGOs have the greatest impact on international political processes. Distinguishing three types of NGOs already suggested for the field of international peace and security may serve as a starting point. Although environmental issues differ in many regards, such a typology of NGOs consisting of *advocacy organizations*, *service organizations*, and *transnational criminal organizations (TCOs)* can contribute to making research about NGOs more comparable across a variety of issue areas (Rittberger/Schrade/Schwarzer 1996: 11).

Advocacy organizations can be understood as influencing, first of all, the process of political agenda-setting. They educate the public, mobilize and organize citizens to show their concern about the issue(s) in question, and create pressure on, and lobby for their goals with, decisionmakers. The main character of *service organizations* is to provide services to other organizations or groups and to contribute to implementing public policies. Unlike these two types of NGOs, *transnational criminal organizations* create, and operate within, a transnational extra-legal 'governance' system.

In addition to the enhancement of their interests in making illicit gains, a further goal of these NGOs consists in protecting them against state prosecution.

The analytic distinction between advocacy and service organizations loses much of its neatness when we apply it to the empirical world. Service organizations, in particular, can, of course, contribute to getting an environmental issue on the political agenda; advocacy organizations, on the other hand, may also provide services to states and international organizations but this is rather the exception. What distinguishes one type of NGO from the other is, therefore, not only the character of their main activities, but also the extent to which the activities of environmental NGOs tend to become politicized. NGOs with a strong advocacy orientation tend to challenge states and international organizations; therefore, they are likely to generate a more confrontational climate between themselves and the other actors.

We posit that two types of NGOs seem to be most important in the issue area of protecting the human environment: *advocacy organizations* and *service organizations*. Nonetheless, *transnational criminal organizations (TCOs)*, cannot be ignored completely since they are active in black markets for products whose production or use is strictly regulated or forbidden by international or national law. Recent cases involve the illicit trade in ivory from protected elephants or the smuggling of phased-out chlorofluorocarbons out of member states of the Montreal Protocol whose export controls for these substances are weak (Brack 1996, Werksman 1996). The practice of transboundary or transcontinental shipments of such

products provides sufficient evidence to support the presumption that only organized groups are able to seize such products, to circumvent national customs clearance procedures, to make deals with, and organize the delivery to, buyers. Compared to the issue area of security, however, such transnational criminal activities appear to be exceptional cases and to have a smaller negative impact in the issue area of environmental protection.

3.1. Environmental Advocacy Organizations

Advocacy is often conceived of as aiming at influencing the process of agenda-setting, but it also affects other phases of the policymaking process; NGOs also seek to influence intergovernmental bargaining or to push states toward implementing internationally agreed-upon rules (Breitmeier/Levy/Young/Zürn 1996a und 1996b). Nearly any activity which can be subsumed under the category of advocacy may become manifest during the various phases of the policymaking process. Two components of advocacy can be distinguished, in particular. The *first* is agenda-setting which includes both getting an issue on the political agenda and keeping it there, or getting it back on the agenda after having been eclipsed by other issues. The *second* component of advocacy refers to activities by NGOs to affect a change of the ideational context of an issue in order to promote public awareness of, and sensitivity for, the need for new public policies.

3.1.1. Agenda-Setting

Activities through which environmental NGOs seek to shape the process of agenda-setting consist, first of all, in informing the public about an environmental problem and, thus, in enhancing awareness of, and sensitivity for, a new problem-solving approach. Environmental NGOs provide the public with information about the state of the environment gleaned from reports produced by research institutes, international organizations, or state agencies operating as transmission belts for, and as interpreters of, scientific knowledge. They often use sudden external shocks like accidents in nuclear power plants (Chernobyl) or chemical firms (Bhopal) as windows of opportunity for communicating their concern to the public and to ask for strong political action.

The international context within which environmental NGOs have operated has changed significantly during the last decade. Ever since the release of the Brundtland Commission's report (WCED 1987) international environmental policymaking has moved into a higher gear. NGOs, *inter alia*, account for the increase of environmental negotiation processes and the establishment of new intergovernmental institutions dealing with environmental problems (e.g., Global Environmental Facility, Sustainable Development Commission) as well as for the heightened relevance of environmental policy within the European Union. At the same time, this changing international context has also posed a challenge to environmental NGOs which had to adapt to the newly institutionalized policymaking processes at the international level; they had to learn how to educate the international public about the new opportunities for

environmental policymaking, and, at least to some extent, they had to cope with the newly posited link between environment and development. After UNCED, NGOs in many industrialized countries faced difficulties to keep environmental issues on the political agenda due to economic recession, declining state revenues and growing unemployment. Confronted with the rising salience of socioeconomic issues, the prospects for environmental NGOs of keeping issues of environmental protection on the political agenda depend even more than usual on their access to the mass media and on external shocks in order to maintain the public's attention focussed on environmental issues.

Environmental NGOs have been among the first transnational actors adapting to changes in global telecommunications. They have used the new communications media such as the Internet to create information networks and to disseminate reports, press releases, etc.. The new media provided them with opportunities to strengthen their impact on agenda-setting processes, for early warning on environmental problems, and for shortening the time span between problem identification and eliciting a policy response. While spectacular action often predominates the agenda-setting activities of some environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace, such action will achieve its purpose only if the NGO can persuade the mass media to report about blockades of whalers, oil tankers, or ships loaded with hazardous wastes. Spectacular action of the same type cannot be repeated too often without losing its newsworthiness. Therefore, some environmental NGOs feel the pressure of being innovative in their public relations work in order to win the attention of the mass media and the loyalty of the public. However, not every environmental NGO sees an

advantage in spectacular action as a means of influencing agenda-setting processes, and even Greenpeace makes use of a wide range of agenda-setting activities including softer forms of action. Dissemination of printed materials, issuance of special reports, public hearings and international conferences about an environmental issue are less spectacular but by no means less important methods of influencing agenda-setting processes.

3.1.2. Changing the Ideational Context

While the activism of environmental NGOs certainly shapes political agenda-setting, they are also expected to develop policy proposals and scenarios for long-term action in order to educate the public and decisionmakers about the economic and financial consequences of their policy recommendations. Environmental legislation or negotiations will only gain momentum if legislators or negotiators and the public can be convinced that policies and technical solutions suggested for dealing with the problem are economically and financially feasible. To gain acceptance for their policies and to change the substance of public debates which, at least initially, are often dominated by arguments about costs and economic feasibility, NGOs will have to change the ideational environment of the issue area. Ideational and entrepreneurial leadership (Young 1994: 39-42) by NGOs can help to change such debates and establish new worldviews about the value and the use of environmental goods. A case in point is the pressure that environmental NGOs have brought to bear on the World Bank with a view to modifying its lending policy for development projects in the Brazilian Amazon region which, until the early 1990s, were contributing to the destruction of tropical ecosystems. A similar critique was directed by

environmental NGOs against the construction of hydroelectric dam projects like the Narmada Dam in India and the Three Gorges Dam in China (Gan 1997: 16-17, Wapner 1997: 12).

Such criticisms have led the World Bank to reconsider its lending criteria and contributed to fashion a new perspective on ecologically sustainable development. However, in order to avoid political conflict with member states international organizations like UNEP or WMO have been cautious to demand of member states laying down exact targets and timetables for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions based on the scientific assessments of the 'Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change'. Unlike these IGOs, environmental NGOs can translate scientific findings into political demands and policy proposals, and they can act more independently and forcefully than them.

Environmental NGOs have not shied away from confronting enterprises with demands for ecologically meliorative structural change of industrial production. They can inform the public about environmentally sound products and encourage consumers to buy these rather than other products. Such a "bottom-up" approach can induce private firms to restructure their production if and when they realize that the markets for environmentally sound products will grow. In the late 1980s, for instance, Greenpeace has made great efforts to persuade consumers to buy CFC-free refrigerators manufactured by an East German firm. This campaign prompted other firms to change their line of production to CFC-free refrigerators and cooling systems. In addition, environmental NGOs can also talk private firms of a given industrial sector into establishing a voluntary

code of conduct making it more easy for them to agree on producing less environmental ly damaging products (Wapner 1997: 13).

3.2. Environmental Service Organizations

Probably the most striking example of how an environmental NGO can take on the responsibility for the administration of an international legal convention is the 1971 "Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especial ly as Waterfowl Habitat". This convention provides for the 'International Union for the Conservation of Nature' (IUCN) to serve as the treaty secretariat. The convention specifies in article 8 that IUCN "shall perform the continuing bureau duties under this Convention". International organizations, treaty secretariats, or other bodies established by the members of an international environmental convention - offer opportunities for environmental NGOs to perform management and service tasks. International environmental regimes are by far not excl usively managed by state bureaucracies and the secretariats of international organizations; instead, NGOs have increasingly become involved in regime-related functions of monitoring and verification, technology transfer, or the enhancement of scientific knowl edge.

NGOs occasionally perform important services for reassuring treaty members about the compl iance with the treaty injunctions irrespective of the legal status of these services (Breitmeier/Levy/Young/Zürn 1996a: 114). They submit information directly to treaty bodies when members assess impl ementation, or they inform parties about cases of noncompl iance. They

also inform the press and the public about the extent to which the ecological goals of a treaty have been achieved. A case in point are African NGOs for wildlife protection which have plenty of knowledge to contribute about the live-stock of animals protected by CITES. Similarly, Greenpeace knows sometimes more about the practices of whale hunting nations than certain member states of the 1946 "International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling". In general, NGO monitoring of the behavior of states in the issue area of environmental protection provides an indispensable service to states member of an environmental treaty or regime when reviewing implementation and assessing compliance.

One of the most drastic changes of the role of environmental NGOs has occurred as a result of environmental concerns being explicitly taken into consideration by development aid agencies and their policies. Regional development banks like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), international development aid programmes and, in particular, church-based and other private development aid organizations have begun to assess *ex-ante* the environmental consequences of projects funded by them in developing countries (Gan 1997: 14). The strategic intention underlying the concept of sustainable development takes on a concrete and visible form in the work of such private aid organizations which, moreover, cooperate with local, national, and international environmental NGOs. For instance, the construction of irrigation systems in arid land zones must always consider that poor soils need balanced cultivation methods in order to protect them from overuse. Private development aid organizations have shown greater openness to the environmental concerns of Southern NGOs than (inter)governmental donors.

4. Competence and Levels of Participation

Many environmental NGOs have been in existence for more than two decades and have developed an institutional memory on many issues. A few of them are older than UNEP or the environmental programmes of other UN bodies. Many individuals who had initially worked for NGOs have changed positions during their professional careers and joined national governmental bureaucracies or the secretariats of international organizations. The growing mobility of individuals moving back and forth between environmental NGOs and international or national governmental agencies indicates that many NGOs have gained a professional reputation for their expertise. Their acknowledged competence rests on their work on one or a few environmental issues and on meeting the challenge of demonstrating equal or even superior expertise than their counterparts from private firms or national governments. Environmental NGOs have realized that they will only be taken seriously as participants in policymaking if they can rely on professional staff input. Such insight has prompted many NGOs to add academic or other professional experts to their staff. Many activities subsumed under advocacy or service tasks could not be carried out without scientists, lawyers, or policy experts working as staff members of NGOs.

However, many environmental NGOs also suffer from structural constraints inherent in policymaking at the international level which prevent their staff from making the utmost use of their competence. Especially the small and financially weak NGOs feel these constraints when international

political processes overburden their travel budgets and thereby their ability to follow, monitor, and influence international negotiations. Although information on many multilateral political processes is now available on the Internet, close monitoring of, or even direct participation in, negotiations contributes to increasing the expertise of staff members because it offers opportunities for interaction with government representatives, officials of international organizations, other NGOs and business groups. There is a clear divide between the big (and financially resourceful) NGOs like Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, the Natural Resources Defense Council, or the German Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz (BUND), on the one hand, and the small NGOs that operate with a small staff and a low budget, on the other. Scarce resources constrain the long-term study of single environmental problems, the observation of international policymaking, and the accumulation of institutional competence and memory. These resource constraints account for some of the failures of environmental NGOs to influence policymaking on less prominent issues such as desertification or when intergovernmental negotiations on an issue shift from one location to another.

Environmental NGOs which are heavily dependent on fundraising for financing their activities and staff face another severe constraint. Financial support from individual donors can decrease if they do no longer identify with the NGO's goals. Therefore, these organizations must focus on issues that civil society regards as urgently in need of being addressed. It is much easier to legitimize the work of NGOs vis-a-vis private donors if they can be convinced of the crucial role played by an NGO within well-known issue areas. Environmental NGOs need to create a 'corporate identity'

in order to impress both donors and many of their individual members with their policy relevance. One way of creating such an identity is to direct the NGO's activities toward issues which can be assumed to have high salience with the public. A case in point is the overwhelming attention that environmental NGOs attribute to climate change whereas other issues such as soil conservation or desertification tend to be neglected. Such trend-dependent behavior limits an NGO's ability to deal with environmental issues over the long-term. Sometimes, it also reduces the ability of an NGO's staff to build up issue-specific expertise or to preserve institutional memory.

The competence of an NGO also affects its ability to participate in multi-level environmental policymaking. No service organization will succeed on the local level if individual members are incompetent. Environmental education, local or regional planning, or project management on any level ranging from local to international require skilled experts with long-term professional experience. On both the national and the international level, service organizations will have to demonstrate their ability and skills in order to be included in national or international projects, advisory groups, or assessment panels. Therefore, service organizations have every incentive to select their professional staff carefully and to provide them with further training. Competent staff members of environmental NGOs which are given the opportunity of participating in multilateral negotiations can often offer advice to national governmental delegations. Whereas governmental delegations of industrialized countries usually are well staffed with professional diplomats, expert civil servants and scientific advisers, developing countries or small countries are often dependent on

the advice of environmental NGOs. The 'Alliance of Small Island States' (AOSIS), for instance, which represents dozens of small islands in the Pacific in the climate negotiations, has sponsored several political initiatives for the reduction of greenhouse gases by industrialized countries after having received and accepted the assistance of environmental NGOs.

Public or private research institutes regularly participate in international assessments of the state of an environmental problem, of the feasibility of alternative political solutions, and of the implementation of international programmes for the preservation of an environmental good. These service organizations fulfill tasks which are concretely defined by states, treaty secretariats, or international organizations. The work of a research-oriented environmental NGO runs the risk of being mainly determined by the interests of states and international organizations if it depends strongly on commissioned work of national or international bureaucracies. By contrast, advocacy NGOs are much more independent in deciding on the issues to which they would like to direct attention, and whether they want to work on the local, national, or international level. Some of them like Greenpeace established bureaus in many developed and developing countries and focussed their activities on all levels of policymaking. A strong infrastructure enables big NGOs to select experienced experts from their national bureaus for leadership positions in their international headquarters and vice versa. Smaller NGOs can only focus their work on one of the policymaking levels due to financial constraints or lack of professional staff. However, any environmental NGO focussing its work on the local level will find it necessary to gather

information about policies discussed on the national and the international level or about national or internationally agreed-upon programmes. Therefore, local groups which are concerned with the implementation of the Agenda 21 in their communities will normally join national or international networks of environmental NGOs to gather information about political developments or programmatic discussions on the other levels.

5. NGOs versus Business Actors

The relationships between environmental NGOs and private firms, associations of private companies and trade unions have largely been ignored by NGO scholarship. So far, the analysis of environmental NGOs seems to proceed from the assumption that environmental NGOs and private economic actors are adversaries with conflicting goals and different constituencies. Such a view of this relationship ignores that neither environmental NGOs nor associations of private firms or trade unions are homogeneous, let alone monolithic actors when pursuing their respective goals. In addition, the attitudes of both groups toward one another have undergone some change during the last decade leaving both sides more openminded for the views of the other. Information exchange, in particular, has significantly increased, each side wishing at least to know the other side's view of an environmental problem and arguments for its preferred outcome of international environmental negotiations or national political processes. Private firms do not always share the same interests on particular environmental issues. New transnational economic interest

groups like the 'World Business Council on Sustainable Development' have shown that economic actors are moving toward seeking ways of reconciling ecological values with business interests.

Environmental NGOs themselves occasionally disagree on political strategies, i.e. on the best way of how to achieve the desired goal of environmental protection, the extent to which a compromise agreed upon in intergovernmental negotiations should be welcomed or criticized, or of how to react to offers of "enlightened" economic actors to cooperate. 'Pragmatic' environmental NGOs even accept donations from private firms, whereas 'fundamentalist' NGOs argue that these contributions will make environmentalists dependent on their adversaries and will thwart environmentalist goals.

5.1. Relationships Between Environmental NGOs and Private Companies

Private companies, associations of firms, and trade unions can have different interests in an environmental issue and, thus, may have different attitudes toward environmental NGOs. First of all, they can be interested in preserving the status-quo in an issue area in order to prevent changes of national energy policies. Mining companies, owners of power plants, or trade unions of coal miners may form a coalition which insists on continuing with the use of fossil fuels for the production of electricity while opposing efforts to strengthen energy saving measures, to increase the production of nuclear energy, or to raise the subsidies for the use of solar energy. They can form international coalitions of industrial sectors and

trade unions to prevent the enactment of strong measures for the reduction of greenhouse gases. Their relationship with environmental NGOs is therefore fraught with conflict and even hostility. Both camps - environmental as well as economic actors - mainly interact via the media and accuse each other of pursuing unrealistic goals. Obviously, constructive interaction between 'traditional' economic interest groups and 'fundamentalist' environmental NGOs is more difficult to achieve than between these economic interest groups and 'pragmatic' NGOs, for their pragmatism is built on the belief that openness to discussing even divisive issues with political adversaries will promote their goals in the long-term.

Second, many transnational firms face strong uncertainty about their own interests when confronted with international environmental negotiations. They can earn money with fossil energy production as well as with environmentally sound sources of energy. Their interest structure is a mixed one consisting of both traditional elements and elements of ecological compatibility. Therefore, they tend to be uncertain about their own long-term business strategy and are undecided whether they should support the traditional, ecologically incompatible interests of coal miners, the oil industry, or of owners of fossil power plants, or whether they should invest in new sources of energy with less damaging effects to the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Deregulation of the European energy market, for instance, will increase the number of European or global players in the energy market and therefore give rise to even more *undecided players* in the energy sector. Because information gathering about possible future economic implications of any path chosen by decisionmakers in the issue area will be vital for such companies working

under strong uncertainty about their future economic preferences, such undecided economic actors have a special interest in communicating with other important actors in the issue area. They will not exclude communication with any actor from the environmentalist camp and will exchange views with both pragmatic and fundamentalist environmental NGOs if they are ready for such an exchange.

Third, structural ecological change in Western industrialized countries has spawned a growing industry with *environmentally like-minded interests*. Pollution abatement measures in many of these countries have induced the ecological modernization of national industries focussing on producing environmentally sound technologies and products. Transnational firms representing these sectors with less damaging effects on the global climate can create coalitions with environmental NGOs since the interests of both converge. Private firms may be hoping for internationally agreed-upon steps against the pollution of air, transboundary rivers or international seas, or for the preservation of the global climate as a means to create an even stronger demand for environmentally sound products. Environmental NGOs and environmentally like-minded private companies, however, still treat each other with scepticism. Transnational firms still fear environmentalists, even the pragmatists, because they credit them with the potential of blaming private firms for environmentally harmful practices or behavior for this often results in the loss of public credibility and faith with consumers.

Many industrialized countries have been opposing strict targets and timetables in the climate change negotiations due to the dominance of

powerful status-quo oriented domestic coalitions of private firms and trade unions. The political work of environmental NGOs on climate change in such countries will only pay off in the long-term if they succeed in weakening the cohesion of the coalitions of status-quo oriented economic actors in industrial countries. Therefore, increasing communication and collaboration between environmental NGOs and economic actors is crucial in order to promote environmentally-like-minded interests and to weaken coalitions of private firms such as the Global Climate Coalition in the United States which has launched a multi-million-dollar campaign to warn American consumers against the possible negative economic effects of internationally agreed-upon reduction measures.⁷

6. Conclusion

Four major issues have been raised at the beginning of this paper. *First*, the rise of environmental NGOs in national and international environmental politics has led us to ask whether their activities have already produced a power shift in favor of civil society both at the international and the global level. It has been argued that states have begun to negotiate on environmental issues long before environmental NGOs became involved. Therefore, environmental NGOs rather represent a reaction of national civil societies to the internationalization of environmental policymaking. National governments can, of course, lose autonomy towards their national societies when they see themselves confronted with the pressure of

⁷ See International Herald Tribune, September 11, 1997, page 6.

environmental NGOs in a particular issue area. However, the increasing number of internationalizing political processes also opens up new opportunities for national governments to negotiate with other governments relatively uncontrolled by their societies if these societies pay less attention to an environmental issue. At present, there is no reason to assume that environmental NGOs have fostered a power shift from national governments or state bureaucracies towards the national societies. It has been argued that global civil society is still a fragmented society because the rights of democratic participation and of freedom of association have not been secured in all states.

Second, advocacy organizations have been an important causal factor for the successful environmental treaty-making in the last two decades. They used new technical means such as the Internet in order to react more quickly to political developments in international negotiations. They were quite innovative in developing both spectacular and soft actions. International organizations like the World Bank have been put under pressure by environmental NGOs which succeeded in changing the ideational context in many issue areas in favor of environmental concerns rather than of purely economic interests. Environmental service organizations are important for the assessment of environmental problems and the assessment of economic policies and technical options. They make also important contributions for verification and technology transfer.

Third, environmental NGOs have realized that their work requires professionalism to achieve their goals. As a result, they are increasingly credited as being competent actors by international organizations and

national governments. The (non)availability of financial resources also influences the competence of NGOs. Therefore, there is a divide between the big and financially strong NGOs which can operate on each level of international environmental politics and the smaller and financially weaker NGOs which have to focus on only one of these levels.

Fourth, the relationships between environmental NGOs and private firms is one of the most promising fields for future research. Status-quo-oriented coalitions of private firms are trying to protect their economic interests against environmental legislation. Their relationship with environmental NGOs is fraught with conflict and hostility. Private firms with undecided interests more interested in exchanging views with environmental NGOs. Economic actors with environmentally-like-minded interests collaborate with environmental NGOs intensively, since new environmental regulation on the international and national level can lead to increase the market for their products.

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