

(I)NGOs and global environmental governance: Introduction

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In the last three decades the world has experienced a marked increase in the activities of environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the local, national, regional, and global levels. The Western democracies, the former socialist countries in Eastern Europe, and the developing countries witnessed a change of state-society relationships. Early on the social sciences dealt with the causes of the rise of new social movements at the domestic level. They identified a change in Western societies toward post-materialist values and a growing demand in these societies for more political participation (Inglehart 1977; Abramson and Inglehart 1995). These new social movements reacted, *inter alia*, to environmental problems that were initially assumed to have mainly domestic causes and consequences. In the 1970s, “green” groups protested against the construction of nuclear power plants, the pollution of inland waters, or the smog in urban areas. The new social movements consisted not only of environmental groups but also civil rights groups and other actors protesting about acute social problems like housing shortages and gender discrimination. Their activities created a challenge for domestic governance in the Western democracies (Rucht 1994), which had to incorporate these new social movements in domestic political processes by establishing new, or improving existing, procedures of political participation. Furthermore, the transition to democracy in the former socialist countries and in many developing countries has also strengthened the political participation of these countries’ civil societies in the 1990s.

When national governments and international organizations intensified the international management of environmental problems, domestic and international NGOs began to collaborate across the borders of nation-states. The societies of the industrially developed countries responded quickly to the internationalization of former domestic environmental policy-making in the 1980s. In addition, the UNCED process, following the work of the Brundlandt Commission (WCED 1987), alerted the societies of developing countries to the global character of many environmental problems. Thus the salience of these problems created a global awareness of the urgent need for environmental protection and global environmental cooperation. When (I)NGOs began to direct their attention more and more to international, particularly global, environmental problems they challenged governments' monopoly of responsibility for the making of foreign policy. At the end of the twentieth century, the UN system and regional organizations like the European Union face a strong debate about the role of civil society in global governance (Commission on Global Governance 1995). The three chapters in this section will deal specifically with the roles of environmental (I)NGOs in shaping international environmental policy-making at the regional and global levels.

In the first chapter, Paul Wapner develops a definition of (I)NGOs and separates them from international organizations. The activities of both (I)NGOs and international organizations reach beyond national borders. The points of view of both do not simply reflect the view of one or more nation-states but are non-territorial. However, international organizations are funded by governments and/or have their own sources of revenues; member states also influence their staffing and fill many of their positions, and they develop concrete guidelines for their activities. (I)NGOs, on the other hand, are much more independent of governments in all these respects. Wapner focuses on those actions of (I)NGOs which are directed towards changing the behaviour of states, or aim at engaging economic forces, or alter social mores. The activities of (I)NGOs are not only directed at states but also at international organizations, multinational corporations, various domestic groups, or individuals. Environmental (I)NGOs are aware that they can contribute to, and improve the effectiveness of, global governance when targeting their activities on states that dominate the processes of environmental policy-making and institution-building. (I)NGOs have also realized that the economy is a critical factor in the effectiveness of global environmental governance. Thus, transnational campaigns of (I)NGOs against industrial production damaging the environment or depleting natural resources ultimately seek to promote structural changes of the economic sector in favour of environmentally sound production. Further actions of (I)NGOs aim at changing the routine everyday behaviour of individuals impacting

on the environment which they have acquired by their socialization. Therefore, altering social mores involves a process of educating individuals to become environmentally more conscious and responsible citizens.

Lin Gan's chapter describes the role of environmental NGOs in energy sector development in Asia. High economic growth rates have increased the demand for energy in many Asian countries in the last two decades, and Asian governments have thus developed plans for the construction of new power plants. Asian environmental NGOs became concerned about the environmental consequences of such large-scale energy development projects. They collaborated increasingly with Northern NGOs and put pressure on Asian governments and on international organizations like the World Bank as possible funding agencies to take environmental concerns into consideration when planning and executing these projects. In some cases, the politicization of these energy development projects by Asian and Northern NGOs prompted Asian governments and international organizations to reconsider construction plans and adjust them to the needs of sustainable development. This chapter further describes the activities of research-oriented NGOs providing scientific knowledge to decision-makers, lobbying NGOs which have criticized, and campaigned against, dam projects like the Narmada Dam in India, and mediating NGOs establishing domestic and transnational networks with the purpose of disseminating knowledge and coordinating joint activities.

Finally, Helmut Breitmeier and Volker Rittberger's chapter asks whether (I)NGOs have already succeeded in changing the relationship between state and civil society. The chapter argues that global civil society – despite the growing transnationalization of the activities of (I)NGOs – has not yet fully developed and remains a fragmented society at best. Furthermore, the authors conclude that the activities of (I)NGOs have not fundamentally changed state-society relationships. When discussing the possible contribution of NGOs to closing the democracy gap which occurs in the shifting of formerly domestic political processes to the international level, the authors deal with three models of global democracy, each offering different solutions to narrowing, if not closing, the democracy gap. The chapter then describes how the activities of environmental advocacy organizations put states and international organizations under political pressure to strengthen their efforts for the international management of environmental problems; and deals with environmental service organizations providing expertise that states and international organizations can make use of when managing environmental problems at the international and domestic levels. The authors then discuss the factors influencing the competence of (I)NGOs. They argue that the competence of (I)NGOs and their levels of participation depend, *inter alia*, on the availability of financial resources, on their

readiness to follow specific environmental issues on a long-term basis, or on the expertise of their staff members. The authors finally address the relationship between environmental (I)NGOs and economic actors, which represents an underresearched topic and deserves more attention from the academic community. The chapter distinguishes different types of economic actors and environmental (I)NGOs. Coalition-building between economic actors and environmental (I)NGOs depends on the constellation of interests among the actors in both camps. The authors argue that the prospects for collaboration between economic actors and environmental (I)NGOs have improved due to converging interests of environmentally like-minded economic actors and (I)NGOs.

In sum, the chapters of Wapner and of Breitmeier and Rittberger seek to provide a theory-guided analysis of the role of (I)NGOs in global environmental governance, while Gan's description of NGOs' involvement in dealing with environmental problems in Asia provides a useful complement to both chapters.

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