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Global Policy Outcomes: The Role of NGOs

Abstract

Globalization may be seen to affect international relations in a number of ways. More efficient government and business links can be seen as providing a means to negotiating high levels of political and industrial cooperation, while expanding civil political consciousness may be seen to affect the nature of government approaches toward such cooperation. The paper explores the role played by environmental Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in international policy processes. It is argued that certain such NGOs have had influence over international policy outcomes through a number of their activities, but notably through tapping into, and contributing to, the political demeanor of first world polities. Results of such activities may have mixed costs and benefits for society at large. Despite this, we suggest that NGO forms of politics serve important functions by opening political spaces that may otherwise remain closed, particularly in the environmental arena. Just as many of the negative environmental effects of globalization are common to all humanity, so too are some of the political benefits. We suggest that as a result of this dynamic, NGO forms of politics traverse North/South lines.

Keywords: international environmental policy, civil society, non-government organisations, global commons, interdependence

1. Introduction

One of the great ironies in contemporary politics emerges as a result of the devastating effect that many economic activities in highly industrialised, liberal and democratic states have on the natural environment. It appears that the principles of liberty and democracy as espoused by many modern democratic states create space for economic and political modalities that cause severe damage to the natural environment. There are powerful liberal democracies, on the one hand, which strive for the economic emancipation of their people through tireless development and the accompanying exploitation of natural

resources, including globally shared ones such as the atmosphere and the oceans. On the other hand, there are less powerful states, which are condemned not only to suffer the effects of occasional economic subordination in international trade but also to share certain consequences of environmental degradation, many of which they cannot be held responsible for creating. This modality is a *tragedy of the commons*, where the benefits of environmental exploitation of common resources are not shared while the consequences are (Hardin, 1968, 1243-8). The costs associated with assuring the prosperity of the world's most privileged citizens (in the industrialized world) place many of the rest of the world's less affluent inhabitants in bondage to looming environmental crises.

Despite the recent focus on 'sustainable development', much of the accompanying rhetoric appears to reinforce a notion of environmental goods as deriving their primary value from their instrumental worth to humans. However there are signs that this may be changing – albeit very slowly. The increasing emergence and growing prominence of special groups and individuals appear to be counteracting environmental imprudence through taking advantage of certain principles, such as freedoms of association, speech, and expression, which are upheld in most modern democracies. Employing ideals championed by western liberalism, these groups are making important headway for environmental discourse and action by mobilizing the opinions of the world's publics in favour of nuanced views of the value of nature, including one that sees the natural environment as having implicit value. These international environmental Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) appear to be turning the tide of environmental degradation that thus far has been fiercely supported by liberal and democratic economic systems.

This article seeks to examine the nature, role, and importance of these international environmental NGOs. We attempt to assess their political influence on the policies of sovereign states and multilateral structures, such as regional and global organizations, through a multidisciplinary research methodology. Theorists such as Stanley Fish have implicitly supported multi disciplinary approaches to research, contesting that the behaviour of individuals and organizations of individuals is dictated to a large degree by their circumstances and experiences within an 'interpretive community'.

This interpretive community is determined by the nature of one's experiences with one's 'significant others' in a society encompassed by a variety of active participants. For example, the interpretive community for states may include influences as considerable as the World Bank, and as apparently negligible as individuals in civil society. The behaviour of states, organizations, and individuals is informed by their experiences within an elaborate interpretive community (Fish, 1989, 4). If the academic endeavour in the social sciences is in some sense to do justice to examinations of the relationships between actors, and the theory that defines those examinations, then this endeavour is an endeavour toward objective truth. Though, without the infinite energy, time and access to information required by the quest for ultimate truth, the academic process must seek credible proximity to truth. At lease in the social sciences, the quest for such proximity to truth is increasingly leading writers to multidisciplinary forms of study. This article seeks to interpret the role played by NGO groups by drawing upon primary and secondary literature from the fields of economics, sociology, political philosophy, law, and political science. Using conceptual analysis to interpret and synthesise this interdisciplinary information, the cognitive outcome for the study is an attempt to outline the role played by specific sociological phenomena within the diverse and complexly interdependent interpretive community that is international relations.

Our argument is four-pronged. First, we show that the pursuit by states of parochial national interests has left a policy vacuum in regard to environmental affairs and action, which has put all of humanity under severe and under-appreciated threat that can only be averted with collective and sustained attention. Also in this part, we examine the constraints facing the international community of states and organizations with regard to meaningful and proactive environmental actions. Second, we identify and explain the reasons for the increasing importance of international environmental groups. In this second part, we suggest that the principles upheld by large modern democracies bring a mélange of environmental costs and benefits to the international arena. Importantly, some such benefits (and costs), which may be relevant also for small and economically disadvantaged states, can be credited to the international activities of environmental NGO groups. Third, we demonstrate that so far the international environmental NGO groups

have served the function not only of environmental watchdogs and conscience, but also as one of the most important sources of challenge and influence over state policies that affect the environment. Finally, we conclude by assessing the future of international environmental groups, recommending that the versatility of these groups will ensure that they have roles to play for international policy processes, even after some of their primary objectives may have been achieved.

2. A Policy Vacuum

During the period between the two world wars, environmental issues were not at the fore of the international agenda. Other than some superfluous attempts by The League of Nations at solving the problem of marine pollution, precious little attention was paid to environmental concerns. After the World War II (1939-1945), environmental issues were still not afforded much notice while other apparently more pressing issues dominated international political agendas. However, this period was important for it saw the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, as well as several important NGOs which would play important roles for environmental action in the future. The year 1965 marked the nascence of an age of environmental awareness. This was characterized by a growing understanding of the seriousness and scale of environmental calamities to come. A perceived need for a coherent response to the problem resulted in at least 47 significant developments in international environmental affairs between 1965 and 2002. One development of particular significance was the tabling of Agenda 21 at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. This agreement recognized that the environmental problems in one country could have an effect, directly or indirectly, on the inhabitants of the rest of the world (Doyle and Mc Eachern, 2001, 172). Domestic political pressures within the legislature, the government bureaucracy, and the broader political system are immense, and often conflicting (Doyle and Mc Eachern, 2001, 21). A coherent policy approach to environmental issues is therefore difficult for a national government to achieve. Timothy

Doyle and Doug McEachern argue that this political space may be occupied effectively by Non Government Organisations:

> The search for effective and substantial environmental reform has to be pursued in a domain below and beyond the nation-state level. The predominant answer is to value the style of NGO politics that has emerged from this fragmented and diffused political situation (Doyle and Mc Eachern, 2001, 85).

The policy vacuum created by the complicated and sometimes contradictory constraints upon governments is not restricted to the national policy setting but permeates international relations through constraints within each state of the international community. International policy progress may be hampered or enhanced by the international political climate, as determined by the collectivisation of localised political priorities toward a more widely shared and environmentally sensitive global consciousness has yet to take a meaningful place in global policy processes. States, it would appear, have been slow to implement reforms and to embrace new priorities. It seems as if environmental security, though on the agenda, is rather low on the hierarchy of many administrations' political priorities. When economies are sluggish and matters of national security are tainted with incertitude, prioritizing 'green' policies is unlikely to win elections.

Despite our understandings of the long-term consequences of sustained environmentally bombastic behaviour, states, as the supreme law makers, continue to sanction (or turn a blind eye to) unsustainable practices. For example the phenomenon of global warming threatens economies and ways of life all over the world. Perhaps not ironically, the places that are likely to suffer great losses are those that contribute significantly to the atmospheric changes thought to be at the root of the problem. Now densely populated coastal cities not only face the rigours of attempting to keep their economies and societies economically afloat, but also face the looming threat of the rising oceans swallowing their hard won civilisations (Chanton, 2002, 1).

It is surely not the case that states, as the supreme authorities in our lives, and other important organisations will the prevalence of environmental catastrophes. Rather,

these unions are faced by an array of circumstances that constrain their behaviour in such a way as to cause them to commit repeated tragedy of the commons' indiscretions. Environmental crises may seem to emerge as the result of the world's sovereign decision makers simply attempting to perform some of their important functions. Christopher Pierson outlines some of the important functions of states as follows: advancing their economic interests; providing the necessary infrastructures for the sustenance and proliferation their societies; protecting their citizens and borders from possible threats, both internal and external, and projecting a suitable image among other states (Pierson, 1996, 265). Ideologically, many states may support environmental preservation but are unable or unwilling to adhere to their ideological commitments due to any number of practical constraints. Often such states pay lip service to environmental issues, but can be slow to follow up with concrete action. Although the rhetoric may be sincere, budgetary and other factors may hamper the realisation of the promised goals:

> In practice, states have frequently proven unreliable in representing what we might call environmental goods, when faced with short term economic costs such as potential restrictions on industrial activities, or added costs to those activities in order to safeguard the environment (Hurrell and Kingsbury 1992, 111).

Effective leadership, however, should surely not be constrained by the advancement of short-term interests, but also by a wider, longer-term vision. In an international setting, the presence of a need for collective action, and the political will to resolve pending environmental calamities is obvious, particularly in the light of the assertions of agenda 21 of the Rio convention. The political constraints faced by governments makes them unlikely supporters of a globally inclusive environmental effort.

Operating in the public sphere NGO groups have become important political forces, both within and between states. International NGOs are capable of a type of influence that has fewer, or perhaps simply different, limits or constraints compared with those faced by states, where the power to influence the political inclinations of voting publics around the world becomes a power to influence the local policy approaches of not just one, but numerous governments.

3. The Importance of NGOs

Proponents of Game Theory suggest that the activities of states and other international actors are determined by the nature of the structures, which have emerged from proceeding discourses of interaction (Hargreaves and Varoufakis, 1995, 33). Players may choose to co-operate with other players, or not, while the impetus for these interactions is provided by a desire to advance ones interests within a complex interactive discourse. Each interaction plays a role in the evolution of an interpretive community, which in turn, informs the behaviour of each player within their own interpretive communities.

Particularly since the inception of international bodies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations, and an array of other trans-national non-government actors, the understanding of international relations has developed into one which recognizes that there are numerous significant actors, with numerous histories, who interact frequently and at many levels of importance. This interaction can be credited with determining the nature of diplomacy and international relations as we know them. States therefore:

> cannot make decisions without due regard to the concerns and aspirations of a wide array of groups such as industries, commercial companies, political parties, religious organizations, universities, and professional associations and other citizen groups (Uzodike, 2002, 4).

This view of international relations creates space for an analysis of how NGO participation in international affairs might result in policy outcomes, though pinpointing the precise nature of their influence remains challenging given the complexity of relevant policy environs.

Although in this article we argue that NGO groups have influence over national and international policy outcomes, there are theorists who believe the political influence of these groups to be small. Bas Arts and Piet Verschuren have advanced a thesis which offers a technique for assessing the political influence of actors involved in complex

decision making processes. The authors suggest that NGO groups are seldom effective in achieving their goals.

A special method is used to gage the political effectiveness of NGOs in labyrinthine decision-making processes. The technique employs a heuristic formula denoted by the following equation: $PI = GA \times AS \times PR$, where PI represents the political influence (effectiveness) of an actor (A), GA denotes the extent to which A has achieved its goals, AS indicates the extent to which the goals achieved by A can actually be attributed to the activities of A, and finally PR signifies the political relevance of the outcome. Each of the variables; Goal Achievement, Ascription and Political Relevance are assigned a 'significance' value between 0 and 3, where 0 = no significance, 1 = some significance, 2 = substantial significance, and 3 = great significance (Arts and Verschuren, 1999, 419). Due to the heuristic nature of the formula, neither goal achievement, ascription, nor political relevance are sufficient conditions for showing political influence, while the product of all three is. Hence, if any (or only) one of these variables is assigned a significance value of 0, then the total political effectiveness of the particular actor is equal to 0. Similarly, if under some as yet unforeseen circumstance it be appropriate to assign any variable or combination of variables a negative value, results of the equation will be grossly skewed.

This being as is may, the formula was applied by the authors to case studies involving NGOs operating in specific issue areas in the period between 1990 and 1995. The findings of the study reported that although NGOs claimed credit for beneficial outcomes in all eight cases, only four cases showed NGOs as having any influence at all, while the other four were exposed as having no influence upon the outcomes of their specific case(s). While Arts and Verschuren contest that NGO influence can be measured in the short run, it may be argued that the heuristic formula used to measure influence discounts NGO effectiveness by neglecting to take into account more qualitative outcomes which may result from NGO activities in the long run. Hence the nature of NGO influence remains curious without an adequate model of how public opinion can affect political processes.

We have identified four of the crucial roles played NGOs in the national and international policy settings. First, NGO groups highlight environmental issues that may otherwise have been sidelined. This role may be denoted by and index for Critical Attention (CA). Second, NGOs provide 'Scientific Evidence' (SE) to provide support for their claims and guidelines for the policy process. Third these groups rally 'Popular Support' (PS) from civil societies, which provides political impetus for formal action. Finally, in some cases, NGOs even play a role as 'Mediators' and 'Arbitrators' (MA) in negotiating new environmental policies within and between governments, commerce and industry.

If we marry the formula offered by Arts and Verschuren to the four roles described above to create a stepping stone toward a different model for assessing the political effectiveness of NGO groups, the results may be slightly different from those offered by the authors. Suppose that PI (political influence) = CA (critical attention) + SE (scientific evidence) + PS (popular support) + MA (mediation and arbitration). Again each variable may be assigned a significance value between 0 and 3, where 0 equals no significance and three equals great significance. However, under these conditions PI becomes the sum, and not the product, of an NGOs effectiveness for each of its important roles in the policy process. This means that an NGO may be credited with due political influence in those cases where the policy process may be slow, or where there may be political constraints upon their ability to rally popular support or mediate and arbitrate deals effectively. The relationship: PI = CA + SE + PS + MA is credible since, given an interdependent view of international relations, the stochastic complexity of pinpointing precise moments, or degrees, of 'goal achievement' or 'ascription' is incalculable given current mathematical tools. Based upon the theoretical implications of this article, our revised formula for assessing NGO effectiveness in complex policy environments assumes a qualitative causal link between NGO activity and the nature of the policy process. Simply aiming to assess the extent to which an NGO performs its important functions provides an indication of the political effectiveness of the particular group with respect to it's process, and ultimately outcome, based goals.

To date NGOs may be credited with a number of important developments, where consistent and timely pressure has caused states and organisations to do things that they otherwise may not have done. Examples of this may be the development, signing and broad based ratification, of the CTBT (Zero Yield Nuclear Test Ban), the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) international moratorium against commercial whaling, as well as several other important developments in the international policy setting. Although there are times when the interests of an environmental NGO may be out-gunned by the power of state interests, at least in the short run. The Kyoto protocol on greenhouse gas emissions is a prime example of this. In this case some states refuse to ratify the protocol because the economic costs may be too great. However, and importantly, this is not to say that the battle has been lost, the process is simply retarded by an array complex political and economic imperatives. At the time when the problem of greenhouse gas emission becomes more urgent, popular pressure may increase, and states are likely to be more inclined to enter into a process toward reform. At this stage NGOs may be able to play their additional roles as brokers of new environmental deals, but for now, at least in the case of the Kyoto treaty, they fulfil a crucial, though perhaps temporary, role as environmental watchdogs.

Ian McLean advances a view of public choice and a market model of political interactions between groups that reveals the origin of the muscle behind civil society groups and individuals. The author shows that as individual preferences are aggregated into social consensus through awareness campaigns and word of mouth, civil society groups are afforded significant power to influence political decisions of their government. This power stems from a market model of government politics which operates through the democratic selection of government officials and political party groups by the citizens of a state (McLean, 1987, 42). The power to influence the hearts and minds of the voting public is, therefore, one which is not to be taken lightly, while the ability to affect social consensus within many states renders these groups powerful players in international relations. And an ability to affect the international relations climate on certain focus issues affords these groups some implicit influence over the activities of smaller states that may be incapable of accommodating sophisticated civil movements of their own.

In a sense NGO groups serve to bring those aspects of the market for political action to national and international policy processes that states may otherwise fail to bring. The invisible hand in some sense ensures that political spaces are identified and occupied by appropriate groups, but only given the advent of groups which may be capable of filling those spaces. Thus, as Louise Amoore and Paul Langley have suggested, the voluntary associations of actors within NGO groups may make a place for not only counter weighting government processes but also for contributing to forms of global governance in certain ways (Amoore and Langley, 2004, 89). The principles espoused by modern liberal democracies, therefore, bring a certain mélange of costs and benefits to the environmental well being of the planet. On one hand these principles may underpin environmentally harmful production patterns, while on the other, the same set of principles provides a forum through which action can be taken to counter such activities. In both instances the effects are global in reach. Just as the costs associated with the production of environmental externalities in the first world are shared, hence becoming *tragedies of the commons*, so to are the benefits associated with first world support for non governmental environmental action shared – thus becoming *felicities of the commons*, or any appropriate variant.

James Connely and Graham Smith suggest that although such extrapolations of the role played by NGO groups in international policy processes may be a useful, there are some environmental groups that would claim not to be seeking to influence public policy at all. Rather some anarchical groups suggest that public policy may be one of the causes of environmental crises. For Connely and Smith important distinctions must be made in terms of who and what different groups represent, and by whom they are recognised as legitimate. The first distinction relates to groups known as 'cause' or 'promotion' groups as opposed to 'interest' or 'sectional' groups. Cause groups represent particular beliefs and principles. Some of the more famous groups that fall into this category are Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth (FoE) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Each represents a particular set of principles as well as certain environmental causes.

Interest groups are somewhat different; for these groups membership is restricted and activities are usually informed by a desire to advance the common interests of the members of the exclusive group. Typically trade union and land owner groups fall into this category. The second important distinction that can be made is one between 'insider' and 'outsider' groups. Insider groups are viewed by large government or commercial agencies, who may from time to time consult a particular group on public or company policy issues, as being legitimate. Outsider groups are not recognised by large agencies as being legitimate and therefore do not have any direct input on public and company policy decisions (Connely and Smith, 1999, 75), although they may have significant indirect influence.

The forms of action employed by both insider and outsider environmental groups are diverse, while the approaches for each group are likely to be constrained by their status as an insider or an outsider group. The various methods include informal contact and influence over politically influential individuals and clusters, formal lobbying, letters and petitions, scientific research and reports, consumer boycotts, court action, demonstrations and marches, media stunts, non-violent civil disobedience and violent direct action. Some of these techniques have in the past proven to be highly effective mechanisms for allowing NGOs to express and realise their political will.

After its nascence in 1971 Greenpeace began its career as an organisation with heroic members who were prepared to challenge previous limits to direct action. Using the media as a vehicle for catalysing public opinion on environmental issues, this organisation has made environmental action a form of heroism in societies across the globe. From its beginnings as a renegade group of activists from the Sierra Club, Greenpeace has accrued such public acclaim that it is now a multi-million-dollar organisation with citizen support across the globe. The public appeal of this organisation is so great that occasionally news agencies have been reluctant to publish stories that might damage its image. And nowadays Greenpeace is so highly regarded that its scientists offer some of the most reliable evidence concerning environmental issues, and are frequently called upon for information intended to inform policy frameworks for particular problems. Although at times their activities have been viewed by states as

being excessive and over subversive, public perceptions remain key to their political effectiveness. In the wake of the bombing of the Greenpeace flagship, the Rainbow Warrior, by the French government in Auckland harbour, and in response to organisations overt opposition to the 1995 French nuclear tests at the Muroroa atoll, many of the world's people were behind Greenpeace.

4. NGOs as Environmental Watchdogs

Activists within mainstream political parties, more formal green political parties, green business and consumer groups, and individuals searching for alternative ways of life in green communes are some of the different components of the environmental movement (Connely and Smith, 1999, 68). Although the desired outcomes for these groups may be diverse and numerous, ultimately sustained change is desired. Attempts to achieve this change may cause NGOs to pursue narrow objectives such as the signing of unilateral agreements, the adoption of multilateral treaties, or even the development of new environmentally protective laws. Problematically though, such agreements and laws seldom address the causes of environmental questions, but rather the effects. Thus a desirable outcome for these groups is one that addresses the attitudes, practices, and circumstances that form the foundation of a particular problem. Indeed it seems probable that environmental action may have either (or both) a direct or an indirect affect on policy outcomes by way of their influence over the consciences of the voting public, while this influence in itself can take different guises (Zeff, 1994, 63). Robert Morris argues in support of this view suggesting, particularly when it comes to economic policy, that public (consumer) pressure is a principal determinant of new policies (Morris and Duffy, 1998, 292). However, such effectiveness is not restricted to economics, but can (and has) affected government decisions on an array of matters including national defence. In 1995 the Greenpeace opposition to the French nuclear tests in Muroroa Atoll was so highly publicised that one commentator said '..as 1996 approaches, it is difficult to tell if the

French government is more unpopular at home or abroad..' (Greenpeace Organization, 1995, 1).

As a result of heightened environmental awareness in the USA: 'Many members of Congress who had never been interested before have begun leaping on the environmental bandwagon with their own pet conservation[al] proposals' (Hurrell and Kingsbury, 1992, 313). The pressure from other international actors, spurred on by NGO activities, may also be seen to have an important effect on the political posture of the ruling party (Busch and Mansfield, 2000, 364). The effectiveness of such groups arises since, despite the enormous and various priorities for states, no government at the head of any democratic state can afford to loose favour with its own constituency. If they do, they should be trumped by more politically correct opposition. Thus, public opinion becomes a catalyst for bridging the political space between a government and a NGO in a sedimentary political evolution.

The influence of these NGOs also has an impact upon the behaviour of other important non-government institutions. The president of the World Bank has credited NGO pressure with 'spurring needed changes in the way that the World Bank does business' (Hurrell and Kingsbury, 1992, 313). Perhaps one of the most significant impacts on the global community by civil society movements has been with regard to whaling. The case of whaling is particularly interesting as, unlike many other ecological issues, the preservation of whale species has little direct impact upon the sustainability of global commerce, nor does the potential eradication of whales impose a direct health risk to the globes population. The anti whaling movement may then be stemming from an appreciation of biodiversity or reverence for life that transcends traditionally more positivist forms of socio-economic consciousness and political imperative.

In 1925 the first large scale whaling factory ship floated onto the worlds oceans - this revolutionized the whaling industry. Whalers typically hunted one population after another, moving from species to species, killing an estimated 1.5 million whales between 1925 and 1975. The decimation of the globe's whale populations caught the attention of NGOs and media organizations around the world. Soon whales became favourite creatures in millions of households, and their hunters' public images were tarnished by

explicit video footage of the bloody slaughter of some of the world's largest and most intelligent mammals. Later, and after repeated requests from the world community, the IWC agreed to a moratorium on commercial whaling which would come into effect in 1986. Despite attempts by the Fisheries Agency of Japan and other whaling bodies to overturn the international moratorium by using political persuasion to 'buy' pro whaling votes from smaller constituencies such as Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Guinea, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Solomon Island, Panama and Morocco, the moratorium remains unbroken. It seems that even in the face of financial reward, smaller states may be reluctant to oppose the momentum of an international policy movement that may be seen to have gained much of its support from evocative broadcasts into the television rooms of first world households. While there are those who argue that due to imperfections in the system of international law the moratorium has never been fully implemented, today whaling is rare by contrast to the period between 1925 and 1975. Of the 43 signatory states to the IWC, Norway continues to conduct commercial whaling, Japan is whaling under the auspices of scientific research, and the USA, Denmark, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines engage only in subsistence whaling by their indigenous peoples (Greenpeace Organisation, 2003, 1).

In Japan, where whale meat has traditionally formed an important part of the local diet, social attitudes toward whale hunting appear to be changing. An independent poll, which questioned 3000 consumers, released in 2002 by the Japanese national newspaper, the Asahi Shimbun, shows Japanese attitudes toward whales to be significantly different than that reflected a Japanese government commissioned poll released two weeks earlier:

> In that poll, the government claimed that 75 percent of the Japanese people favour a return to commercial whaling under controlled conditions. The Asahi Shimbun poll in contrast shows that only 47 percent of the Japanese public agree with whale hunting. This is down by seven percent from Asahi Shimbun's 1993 poll figure showing 53 percent of those polled supporting whale hunting. According to the current poll over one third of the Japanese public opposed whaling (Greenpeace Organisation, 2002, 1).

Another study by Milton Freeman of the Canadian Circumpolar Institute, comprising a questionnaire consisting of 48 questions, was administered to a representative random sample of about 500 adults in Australia, England, Germany, Japan and Norway, with a sample of 1,000 being drawn in the United States. The first question addressed the ethical acceptability of whaling:

Respondents in Australia, England, Germany and the U.S. held opinions markedly different from those expressed by Japanese and Norwegians when each was questioned about whaling.

For example, when asked whether they "opposed the hunting of whales under any circumstances" a sizeable majority of respondents in Australia and Germany agreed (by a two to one margin). However, even larger majorities (two and a half to three to one) in Japan and Norway disagreed with the statement that whales should not be hunted under any circumstances. Opposition to whaling under any circumstances was more moderate in the U.S. (a four to three majority opposing whaling) and even more evenly divided in England with 43% opposed to whaling, 37% not opposed, and a further 19% expressing no strong opinion one way or the other.

In response to the statement that "there is nothing wrong with whaling if it is properly regulated", about two thirds of respondents in Australia and England disagreed, whereas between two-thirds and three-quarters of Japanese and Norwegians respectively agreed that regulated whaling was an acceptable practice. The U.S. position (55% dis-agreeing with the statement) appeared intermediate between these extremes (Freeman, 1994, 2).

A second question addressed perceptions on policy issues to be addressed by a whaling authority:

The top policy priority identified by respondents in Australia, England, Germany, Norway and the U.S. was that the most humane methods of hunting be utilized and that strict international controls be put into place.

In Japan respondents placed highest priority on the sustainability of the whale fishery and minimizing wasteful practices.

Respondents in every country indicated high levels of support (80 90%) for the requirement that harvests should be based upon the best scientific advice.

In further questions about broad areas of policy to be followed in future management initiatives, all respondents placed protection of the whales' environment (against pollution or industrial disturbance) as the highest goal. There was also high priority accorded in each country to the importance of managing whales in the context of marine ecosystem considerations (Freeman, 1994, 2).

Such evidence would seem to suggest that public opinion apropos whaling issues is flexible and has indeed been mobilised in many regions. Importantly, NGO groups that engage in such public information activities also have the ability to represent false truths, be it intentionally or not. Alarmingly Freeman's study shows that although many publics are extremely concerned by the well being of whales, many of these people have little idea as to the actual state of whale populations. Another of Freeman's questions asked about the prevalence of certain whale species:

The level of correct answers was very low: less than 1 % of Germans, about 2% of Australian and English respondents and 6% and 8.5% of U.S. and Norwegian respondents respectively knew that sperm whale numbers (far) exceed 1 million. In Germany about half the respondents believed that there are fewer than 10,000 sperm whales.

In Germany and Australia about half the respondents (60% in the U.S.) believe there are less than 10,000 minke whales in the world, and only about 5% thought that the number was greater than 100,000. Respondents in Japan and Norway were three to four times as likely to select a correct answer for minke whale population levels compared to those in Australia, England, Germany, or the U.S. (Freeman, 1994, 4).

The evidence suggests that as technological advances in media and communication networks facilitate globalisation, it becomes possible for the worlds citizens to develop a politically important global consciousness. However, such an evolving political consciousness is subjectified by rhetoric, false information, or the simple manipulation of statistics by the representation of the subjective interests of citizen groups and/or news

agencies. As citizens become more aware of the world beyond their garden fence political spaces are opened and governments need to begin catering for the diversification of their constituency's political interests. In counter point to the Art's and Verschuren's thesis, NGOs seem to be increasingly well placed to take advantage of the liberties upheld in highly developed, and usually environmentally destructive liberal democracies, for their own ideological ends. Though the challenge of achieving multilateral transparency and reliability among NGO and other groupings in the international setting remains to be met, the role of citizen or non-government organisations is to provide some alternative perspective to the political imperatives of governments and other large organisations. This shift represents a movement toward a more comprehensively enlightened, though more complex and potentially more fraught, international political climate.

5. NGOs in the long run

Environmental legislation and the environmental policy process dates back many centuries:

> National legislation to protect the environment and wildlife can be traced back many centuries. In 1900 BC there were forestry las in Babylon, in 1730 BC a law establishing nature reserves in Egypt. International legislation is of more recent origin, but can be traced back as far as 1781 when a convention was concluded between the King of France and the Prince-Bishop of Basel, to protect forests and game birds on their boarders (Cousens, 2002, 1).

Indeed the most effective and substantial environmental reform is likely to come from a realisation within and among governments that environmental issues are national and international security ones. Nevertheless, today the significant policy vacuum regarding these issues has made a place for new non-governmental forms of politics. Environmental NGOs fill this niche out of a perceived need for change, while these groups are faced

with a potential paradox, for, as their effectiveness increases the need for their continued interaction in the political environment may decrease. If states adopt serious and effective policies for the preservation of environmental goods, the need for civil action diminishes. At present environmental NGOs have one place in the cacophony of often conflicting voices heard by states. Serving important functions as both watch-dogs and political consciences, their role is made important by the gravity of the numerous other constraints upon states.

In support of this thinking, Elinor Ostrom suggests that at the heart of most environmental dilemmas is the problem of the 'free rider' (Ostrom, 1990, 2-3). The free rider is the actor who takes advantage of a tragedy of the commons scenario for their own gain. For example in an atmosphere that can only accommodate 20 units of production at equilibrium, each of two factories should only produce 10 units. However if factory owner A produces 11 units, while B continues to produce 10 units, A enjoys the full benefits of the extra unit of production (+1) while she shares the consequences of the extra unit of production with B (-0,5). In this case A is free riding to the detriment of B. Hence it becomes rational for both to free ride at the expense of one another, with the long run result of the atmosphere's ability to absorb more units of pollution collapsing, at a positive cost for the both members of the two factory industry as well as any incidentally affected actors. This free rider effect plays itself out in the real world every day and within numerous industries employing numerous resources. Even in the case of the regulated industry the free rider approach remains a rational means to securing extra units of output and profit. Hence from time to time large and small-scale covert poaching operations are uncovered in national parks and fisheries around the world, as too are industries exposed as polluting where they should not be and/or in volumes prohibited by law.

Although environmental policies for preventing such behaviour are likely to become more numerous as a result of NGO activities, the logic underpinning of the free rider problem is unlikely to vanish. Regulation may improve, yet there will always be a need to regulate the regulators and weed out the free riders who take advantage of a dynamic political system. As too will there exist the need for monitoring, assessing and

redefining policies. Hence the future roles for NGO groups appear to be reinforced by both their ability to adapt to change, and the fundamental logic behind free riding. As political phenomena that have been borne out of need, new spaces created by changing circumstances will certainly be occupied by environmental NGOs which by their very nature full the spaces left by changing political circumstances. In our view then the space occupied by NGOs is unlikely to vanish, but is rather likely to keep evolving as their goal posts move in accordance with the evolution of the policy environment.

6. Conclusion

Although many powerful liberal democracies are shamed for their hegemonic approaches to international political problems, the emancipation of the environment is likely to be significantly bolstered by NGO forms of politics that are expedited by the liberal principles espoused by those states. It is also the very inhabitants of such developed countries that are enabled by technology and a certain level of affluence to participate effectively in NGO styles of politics. In contrast to present modalities, NGO success in the middle term is likely to show that the emancipatory principles of liberalism may be a key to overseeing the well being of the earth's inhabitants.

NGO groups, however, cannot achieve the same levels of success in non-democratic societies as they can in democratic ones because of their heavy reliance upon civil liberties that are generally not supported by such states. While this may limit the scope for influencing the policies in undemocratic societies, democratic societies are prominent enough to provide sufficient scope for NGOs in national and international politics (Raymand, Jancar-Webster and Switky, 2001, 256).

This study draws critical distinctions between short and long run outcomes, recommending that due to the nature of NGO influence in the long run, there exist possibilities for NGOs to significantly change the nature of international relations through affecting implicit changes in the hearts and minds of citizens of more developed democratic states and their elected officials. Hence NGOs are empowered to have

influence beyond their first world support bases and into the borders of an array of states, including less developed, and even undemocratic ones. By opening a space for building bridges between diverse political entities at an international level, these groups create the possibility of a new role for NGOs as facilitators and gatekeepers of a fresh discourse of cooperation. As the role of these groups evolves, this cooperation has the potential to engender not only greater North – North cooperation, but also greater cooperation between North and South, at an array of both formal and informal levels. In an age that will forever be remembered for globalization, new meaning is brought to the concept of civil political organisation as a common property resource.

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