The impacts of environmental movements

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[pre-publication (author-accepted) version of chapter published in
Oxford Handbook of Social Movements (Mario Diani & Donatella della Porta, eds.),
Oxford University Press, pp. 729-742. (2015). ISBN 978-0-19-967840-2.
DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199678402.013.55]

Abstract

The impacts of environmental movements (EMs) are indirect and mediated outcomes of efforts by actors ranging from environmental NGOs to grass-roots activists to influence environmental policies and practices of governments and corporations, usually by mobilizing public opinion. With fewer resources than industry groups, EMs' impacts are dependent on mass media coverage, the fluctuating salience of environmental issues, and political opportunities. EMs influence policy by deploying scientific knowledge, more successfully where they have special expertise. In international negotiations, EMs have acted as brokers between North and South to influence global environmental policies. In authoritarian states, EMs have enlarged scope for civil society and democratic participation.

Keywords: environmental policy formation, environmental policy implementation, agenda setting, scientific expertise, public opinion

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In the academic and—especially—in the activist literature, claims or assumptions about the impacts of environmental movements upon policy, practice, and outcomes are legion. Indeed, grand, often inflated claims have been made for the influence of environmental movements by their activists and opponents alike. Yet, because the impacts of social movements are notoriously difficult to assess, the impacts of environmental movements have been relatively under-investigated, and because such competing claims are so difficult to assess, the impact of environmental movements remains highly contested.

From the 1970s onwards, the history of environmental movements in North America, western Europe, and Australia has generally been told as one of a series of inspiring victories as one relatively unspoiled fragment of the natural environment after another has been spared from developers, and as some of the most egregious instances of pollution of air, land, and water have been mitigated. Yet, even since the 1960s, the great strides that have been made toward effective environmental protection have not been solely the products of environmental movements. The US Clean Air Acts, for example, resulted from initiatives of Congress even before anything recognizable as an environmental movement emerged. In many cases, despite the undoubted value of the efforts of environmental movements, there is a pervasive chicken and egg problem: did

the movement discover the problem or did it, rather, amplify existing public or elite opinion and, by mobilizing some of the public, channel it into the policy arena?

Environmental Movements

Since the 1960s, we have become accustomed to speaking of "the environmental movement". Although many of its constituents do not take action as demonstrative or conflictual, even confrontational, as that we commonly associate with other social movements, some do. Indeed, "environmental movement" is a problematic denotation of a phenomenon that is highly diverse in its forms of organization and action, from the radical, but sometimes covert, direct action of the "green" movement (Doherty 2002), through demonstrative public protest, to the often publicly invisible actions of bureaucratized formal organizations that lobby governments or work in concert with governments and/or corporations to achieve desired environmental outcomes.

The latter end of the continuum presents particular difficulties, and some have suggested that it is better referred to as a "public interest lobby" or an "advocacy coalition" rather than a movement (Bosso 2005). Some environmental NGOs, however, rarely lobby, let alone protest, but are preoccupied with practical action to remedy environmental degradation or to protect remnants of relatively pristine natural environments.

To define "environmental movements" restrictively would be at odds with the discourse of environmentalists themselves, which is generally inclusive and recognizes commonalities among environmental groups and organizations that are rooted in the shared concern to protect the natural environment that exists among the members and supporters of environmental organizations of various kinds. Thus, we define an environmental movement as a loose, non-institutionalized network of informal interactions that includes, as well as individuals and groups who have no organizational affiliation, organizations of varying degrees of formality, and is engaged in collective action motivated by shared identity or concern about environmental issues (Rootes 2004).

Much grass-roots environmental activism is only loosely linked to mainstream environmental movement organizations (EMOs) or, indeed, to other instances of grass-roots action. Yet though the links and networks may be precarious, such local action is informed by the climate of opinion to which EMOs have contributed, and has often played a discovery role for national EMOs (Carmin 1999) and served to train activists who have gone on to rejuvenate wider environmental movements.

The Bases of Impact

The impact of environmental movements, and the pressure they exert on governments, corporations, and other actors, is not simply proportional to the frequency or intensity of their mobilization of public protests or, indeed, of the numbers of participants therein. Indeed, recourse to street demonstrations may mark not the strength but the weakness of a movement, and its embrace of confrontational tactics may reflect the desperation of the politically excluded.

For the most part, in highly economically developed Northern states, especially in Europe, the environment has generally been a valence issue that attracts a relatively high measure of endorsement across the political spectrum and does not sharply divide mainstream political parties. Under such conditions, environmentalists may enjoy relatively easy access to policy makers and decision makers.

Environmental NGOs, especially in the North, generally ground their influence and legitimacy upon their insistence that their claims are based on the best available scientific evidence. Sometimes they commission original research; more generally, they deploy published research. As a result of long engagement with particular issues, such NGOs earn respect for their expertise and are, as a result, sometimes drawn into advising or acting as contractors to governments and corporations that lack either scientific expertise or the capacity effectively to communicate to the public the environmental issues that they confront.

Nevertheless, if their reliance upon scientific evidence gives such environmental NGOs credibility with the powerful, it inhibits NGOs' ability to campaign on issues where scientific evidence is weak. This is especially problematic where public concern about an issue, such as incinerator emissions, cannot be warranted by scientific evidence of harm. Even in the absence of such evidence, and without overt support from established NGOs, local environmental campaigns may nevertheless be successful in mobilizing against proposed developments, not only in Northern countries with nominally democratically accountable governments and officials, but even in authoritarian states such as China (Lang and Xu 2013) where governments' desire to avoid sustained civil unrest may outweigh concern to implement development policies. Although it is by no means inevitable, the frequency of local environmental campaigns may lead governments and corporations to avoid particular strategies and technologies altogether, and so local campaigners may achieve impacts where environmental NGOs cannot.

The impacts of environmental movements may be direct or indirect, negative or positive. Thus environmental movements may embrace action designed to head-off, derail or obstruct the formation or development of draft or mooted policies, or they may promote the formation or development of policies designed to achieve desired environmental ends. Equally, once policy is formulated and promulgated, environmental movements may oppose or obstruct its implementation, or contrive to make the implementation of environmentally desirable policy more effective.

Impacts on Policy Formation

Examples of the negative impacts of environmental movements on policy formation or development are legion. In the United States, anti-nuclear and anti-incineration campaigners have been credited with preventing the commissioning of any new nuclear power stations or waste incinerators for three decades from 1980. In the UK, the Blair/Brown Labour government (1997–2010) essayed a series of policies concerning genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and new housing on greenfield sites, and repeatedly backed down when faced by

environmental movement protests. Similarly, that government's coalition successor watered down proposed changes to land-use planning in the face of concerted opposition.

Of the many cases in which EMOs have positively influenced the shaping of environmental policy, perhaps none is more iconic than the role EMOs played in securing passage of the UK Climate Change Act 2008, then the most ambitious and potentially consequential environmental legislation in the world. Beginning in 2005, Friends of the Earth (FoE) and other EMOs began to mobilize public support for decisive action to combat climate change. FoE proposed a draft Climate Change Bill requiring annual 3 per cent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions leading to an 80 per cent reduction by 2050, and worked with representatives of each major political party to steer the issue into parliamentary debate. FoE encouraged its supporters to lobby their Members of Parliament to sign declarations of support for the Bill, which 412 of the 646 MPs eventually did. This led the government to adopt the Bill, whilst watering down its more ambitious provisions. However, as the Bill proceeded through the parliamentary process, FoE urged its members to continue to lobby MPs to strengthen the Bill. Public and private lobbying persuaded many MPs to press the government to accept the 80 per cent reduction target and to include annual indicative targets while maintaining five-year binding targets (Nulman 2015).

Not the least interesting aspect of this case is the extent to which an EMO successfully engaged with the formal political and legislative process to secure passage of legislation that realized most of its objectives; even when it sought to mobilize its supporters it did so by conventional means: a petition, albeit online, and a campaign of writing letters and sending emails and postcards to MPs. In securing passage of unprecedentedly ambitious legislation, FoE undoubtedly made an impact, but it did so by means not generally central to the repertoires of social movements. Yet FoE's methods were appropriate to the circumstances. Whilst it is unlikely that any such ambitious legislation would have made its way to the statute books without FoE's initiative and persistence, it was widely perceived to be timely, as the ease with which so many MPs were persuaded to support it attests.

The experience of the US environmental movement with respect to climate change is in stark contrast. With federal government action on climate change blocked by hostile Republican majorities in Congress, the US climate movement has more often taken the form of protest, and its impacts have been greatest in states and cities where legislators have been sympathetic.

Although the influence of environmental movements is mediated by the variety of other actors and interests, and identifying specifically movement impacts is accordingly difficult, it appears that the influence of environmental movements upon policy is greatest in the early, agenda-setting stages of policy formation, when policy preferences are malleable rather than entrenched (Olzak and Soule 2009). Thus, at this liminal stage, movement organizations may strategically frame policy issues so as to shape the preferences of elite actors. Some, however, may seek to raise awareness even of issues on which attitudes are culturally

embedded or politically entrenched in order to problematize them and to mobilize public opinion to demand policy change.

Impacts on Policy Implementation

The impacts of environmental movements upon policy implementation may be positive as well as negative. Thus environmental campaigns and mobilizations may ensure local implementation of national policies and international treaties. In many countries, wildlife conservation organizations campaign principally to ensure the implementation of protective legislation.

Often, however, environmental campaigners have resisted, and sometimes successfully obstructed the implementation of government policy. In some cases the impact of the environmental movement appears clear, as, for example, in the case of the protests in Germany that disrupted the transport of nuclear waste. In both Germany and the United States, protests have prevented the construction of permanent nuclear waste repositories. Yet although it was sustained pressure from environmentalists that maintained the high profile of the nuclear issue in Germany from the 1970s onward, it was an external event—the nuclear disaster at Fukushima, Japan—that triggered the decision to close Germany's nuclear reactors.

The 1990s campaign against the UK road-building program stimulated a series of protracted and innovative protests that delayed and escalated the costs of road-building, but it is less clear that it was their impact, rather than a recession-induced state fiscal crisis, that brought the program to a premature end.
In general, the impact of environmental movements upon policy implementation is often indirect and difficult to distinguish from the impacts of other actors, processes, and events.

Impacts on Public Opinion

Social movements are usually conceived of as phenomena of civil society. However large the initial mobilization, most movements, in the attempt to build a constituency for social and/or political change, appeal to wider sections of the public, either directly to change social practice or in order to enlist public opinion in the struggle to persuade governments or corporations to change policy and/or practice. Indeed, Burstein (1999) concludes that movements influence policy outcomes only when their actions are mediated by public opinion.

Many of the achievements of environmental movements have resulted from lobbying and persuasion that is not usually publicly visible. Precisely because it is not visible, the extent of its impact is disputable and cannot easily be assessed (Giugni 2004). But even where the actions of environmental movements are highly visible, determining the extent and significance of their impact is more art than science. Studies that purport to demonstrate the impact of movements on public opinion are generally correlational, observing the correlation between a movement's articulation of a discourse and the appearance of its traces in public opinion, ideally after a plausible elapse of time. In a notably sophisticated study of the impact of protest upon public policy, Agnone (2007) found that,

controlling for media attention, legislative context, and election cycles, more federal environmental protection legislation was passed in the United States when environmental movement protest amplified, or raised the salience of, pro-environmental public opinion. Such impacts may be amplified by the relatively high levels of public approval of the environmental movement and trust in environmental NGOs (Dunlap and Scarce 1991; Inglehart 1995).

In general, in democratic states, the impact of environmental movements upon public policy is greatest where it runs with the grain of public opinion, and especially where the movement's diagnostic and prognostic frames resonate with (significant parts of) the public. In an apparently infinite iterative process, environmental activists seek to shape public opinion and thereby influence the formation of environmental policy. In this the mass media have been an indispensable tool, for it is through the mass media that most people gain information about the environment as about other issues. Of environmental NGOs, Greenpeace has been the most consistently adroit and assiduous in its exploitation of the opportunities provided by mass media to reach the public and thence to bring pressure to bear upon governments and corporations. Whether campaigning against nuclear weapons testing, whaling or sealing, or latterly against transnational oil companies, Greenpeace has highlighted environmental degradation and parlayed public opinion into persuading governments and corporations to change policy and practice (Zelko 2013).

By engaging the public, environmental movements have often been credited with setting the agenda for public policy on environmental matters, but in general their impact is perhaps better conceived not as agenda-setting so much as highlighting neglected issues, maintaining their salience, keeping public concern alive even at times when the attentions of policy makers are diverted elsewhere by other pressing issues such as those of economic crisis management, and pressing their advantage when windows of political opportunity are opened. Thus Rucht (1999) concluded that, although environmental movement pressure was correlated with improvements in the quality of the environment, that pressure appeared to be mediated by public opinion, and it was by no means sufficient to guarantee favorable outcomes; likewise in some countries, the United States included, strong movement pressure was associated with only moderately favorable public opinion and environmental outcomes. Nor should government resistance be simply assumed; ministers in the 1997–2010 UK Labour government actively encouraged the environmental movement to mobilize in favor of policies that ministers desired but which they feared lacked sufficient public support.

Variations in the relationships between movement pressure, public opinion, and environmental outcomes may be explained by variations in political opportunity, both structural and conjunctural. But another element Rucht did not attempt to measure was the strength of corporate and political opposition to environmental protection measures that conflict with libertarian political ideology and/or corporate interests entrenched in and protected by informal networks of power and influence.

The widely celebrated successes of environmental movements often exert a constraining effect on corporations which are obliged, when devising policies and strategy, to consider the possible impacts of antagonizing Greenpeace or other campaigning NGOs, but they have also stimulated the development of vigorous countermovements both in the industrialized North and in the developing South. It may be a tribute to the effectiveness of environmental movements that coal-mining, oil, and other resource extracting corporations have funded pre-emptive campaigns to counter the claims of environmental NGOs, but the corporate fightback has made the struggle for environmental justice more hazardous, especially for activists in developing countries in the global South, where modernizing elites often see their interests as aligned with those of resource-extracting corporations.

It might be supposed that the dramatic increase in the numbers of environmental organizations and the numbers of their members and supporters is testimony to the impact of the mobilizing efforts of those organizations upon a wider public. But there is an equally plausible case to be made that EMOs were often largely passive beneficiaries of wider secular changes in societies. The case of FoE in England is instructive. FoE set out in 1971 to be a lobbying organization and did not seek or expect a mass membership, but its first public action—a "bottle drop" outside a drinks manufacturer in London—attracted so many calls from people asking "how can I join" that FoE responded by licensing the formation of more than 100 local FoE groups. FoE had not so much mobilized the public as it had taken an action that chimed with the public mood at the time and, by its existence, provided a vehicle for the organizational reflection of that mood.

It is clear that public opinion alone does not provide sufficient opportunities for the environmental movement to influence policy, but others conditions have been identified that bolster the impacts of EMOs.

How Movements Make an Impact

Political opportunities are important factors in the ability of environmental movements to influence policy. The opening of an environmental policy window during periods of electoral competition is particularly important as it gives EMOs greater access to policy makers. In these contexts, EMOs often work to generate solutions to policy problems or influence the designs of existing or government-proposed policies, working as expert stakeholders. EMOs are at a particular advantage here as they are regarded as a "scientific social movement" (Yearley 1989).

Yet movements do not make an impact only through the direct efforts of NGOs that engage with policy makers. Radical activists also make an impact, often by creating a "radical flank" effect that enables more institutionalized NGOs to gain an audience. Thus environmental movement impacts are often better considered as the outcomes of a variety of strategies and tactics all directed to broadly shared ends, than simply to the efforts of a single NGO.

As well as attempting to address specific issues or policies, EMOs participate in electoral campaigning around the environment more generally. Green parties do this in many countries, but in the United States the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) works to promote environmentally friendly policy makers and shame others. In 1971, the LVC began compiling a record of Congressional environmental votes and giving each Congressman a score between 0 and 100. Analysis of these scores revealed some correspondence with the strength of the movement in the Congressman's state. Thus, in 1971, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey received scores of 50, 68, and 70, respectively; of the three states, Pennsylvania had a weaker environmental movement (Hays 1993: 41). This strategy was favored particularly in contexts where the environmental movement had little access to policy makers. Such was the case in the United States following George W. Bush's first presidency, when the environmental movement's distaste for Bush after his administration attempted to undermine the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and forest protection and pollutant regulations led the Sierra Club, LCV, and other environmental organizations to spend over $15 million during the 2004 campaign (Bosso and Guber 2005: 79). However, environmental organizations spent significantly less on campaign contributions than other advocacy groups, and the movement's attempt to determine the outcome of the election failed. Bush's rival in the 2004 race, John Kerry, was unable to generate media coverage through support for environmental initiatives despite high levels of public support for environmental legislation, probably due to its relatively low salience following the terrorist attacks of 2001 and the subsequent war in Iraq (Bosso and Guber 2005).

Influence of Environmental Movements on International Agreements

The increasing number and scope of international agreements concerning the environment has presented a new pattern of opportunities to environmental NGOs. The limited capacities of new supranational institutions of environmental governance have sometimes led them to deliberately foster the development of networks of environmental groups, as, for example the European Commission did when, in seeking to expand its competence in the hitherto neglected environmental sphere, it funded the establishment of the European Environmental Bureau. Environmental NGOs were presented with a platform and opportunities to participate in the shaping of agreements at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and they have made influential contributions to international Conventions on a wide range of topics, including biosafety, desertification, endangered species, forestry and whaling (see, e.g., contributors to Betsill and Corell 2008).

Environmental activists have also demonstrated and made representations at several global climate summits, none more spectacularly than the 2000 Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-9) when concerted action by environmental NGOs persuaded the US delegation to drop its proposal to include nuclear energy in the Clean Development Mechanism associated with the Kyoto Protocol. That victory proved short-lived when, unable to secure EU agreement that the United States might offset its greenhouse gas emissions by treating its forests as "carbon sinks," the United States withdrew from the Kyoto process. The 2009 (COP-15)

meeting in Copenhagen, billed as the summit at which a successor climate agreement to Kyoto would be developed, was an even more devastating failure for environmental campaigners; present in unprecedented numbers and with different groups employing a variety of insider and outsider strategies, the meeting ended with all non-official delegates excluded from the conference center and with no new agreement (Hadden 2015).

Access in itself is only as useful as is the level of seriousness of policy makers in advancing environmental protection in relation to other interests. EMOs were given significant levels of access both formally in the climate change negotiations process and as advisors to (or even members of) national delegations but, despite their formal inclusion in the governance process, EMOs failed to influence many important decisions as they were unable to affect the incentive structures of national delegations.

In other international negotiations, NGOs were able to affect debates on carbon sinks and emissions trading in addition to having some influence on positions taken by the US and EU delegations (Betsill 2008; also see Burgiel 2008 on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; Corell 2008 on the Desertification Convention; Andersen and Skodvin 2008 on the International Whaling Commission; and Humphreys 2008 on Forest Conversation and the Trade in Forest Products). In general, the impacts of EMOs in international negotiations, and upon the eventual agreements, have been limited both by movement actors' relative outsider status compared to industry groups (Lund 2013), and, most critically, by their frequent need to be perceived to act transparently, in public, when most of the real work of such negotiations takes place behind closed doors. It is noteworthy that environmental NGOs have had most influence when they have engaged practically in areas in which they had accumulated expertise and where they were able to act as brokers between North and South. On climate change, by contrast, where environmental NGOs have no special expertise commensurate with the magnitude and complexity of the problem, and where the issues have become polarized and politicized, they have, despite their intermittently highly public interventions, been much less influential.

The two major international EMOs—FoE and Greenpeace—present different patterns of response to the dilemmas of attempting to make an impact on global environment politics.

Greenpeace International has privileged efficiency and campaign effectiveness over internal democracy, and has retained the capacity to restructure and sometimes amalgamate national Greenpeace organizations, which are concentrated in the global North. The result is that it is sometimes viewed with suspicion not only by national governments but also by the citizens of states whose cultures and interests it offends, most notably in the case of Norway (Strømsnes et al. 2009). Yet its organizational structure has given Greenpeace the flexibility and capacity to respond to issues as they arise, and has contributed to its becoming the most formidable environmental campaigning NGO in the world, particularly on marine issues.

FoE International, by contrast, has over seventy national affiliates, and is well represented in the global South. It has insisted upon preserving internal democracy even at the expense of operational efficiency and, very likely, the effectiveness of some of its short-term campaigns (Doherty and Doyle 2013). In the longer term, however, its respect for the autonomy of its national affiliates, deliberate inclusiveness in the determination of policy priorities, and determination to keep together a disparate grouping may increase its impact and make it a more important player in global environmental politics.

Often in the global South, environmental movements have utilized a "boomerang effect" in order to bring international resources to bear upon local and national concerns. An early example occurred during a campaign to clean up the "valley of death" in Cubatao, Brazil in the 1980s when campaigners sought to reduce international funding for development that increased pollution and deforestation (Hochstetler 2002). Environmental movements in the global South often called upon allies in the North for support, particularly regarding the halting of environmentally destructive practices associated with large projects funded or commissioned by actors from the North, but as transnational environmental networks developed, the boomerang effect was put into play more frequently even without the clear presence of Northern interests (as in the case of the campaign against the Narmada Dams in India, which persuaded the World Bank to withdraw funding).

It should not be imagined, however, that all the effective initiatives of environmental movements at international level originate in the global North. GAIA, the global alliance against waste incinerators, began in the Philippines and thence spread through the South and to the North. More generally, assisted by improving communications networks, South–South environmental movement networks are becoming increasingly common.

Wider Impacts of Environmental Movements

Environmental movements have been credited with enlarging the space for civil society and democratic participation in authoritarian states in central and eastern Europe and in the newly industrializing states of east Asia (Lee and So 1999).

Because environmental movements address universal issues and the health and well-being of whole populations, issues that can be construed as questions of national patrimony rather than sectional or subversive interests, environmental movements have been more easily tolerated by authoritarian regimes than have groups and movements that directly challenge the character of the state itself.

In China, for example, whereas human rights activists suffer restrictions and worse, environmental activists, treading carefully to sidestep official restrictions on fund-raising, have succeeded in steadily enlarging their scope of activity. This they have done by exploiting the legal gray area in which environmental NGOs are positioned—neither officially recognized nor expressly proscribed. Rather than seeking to influence policy directly, Chinese environmental NGOs have pragmatically adapted their aims and approaches based on the needs of the

public, focussing upon the health and livelihood impacts of environmental degradation. Moreover, seeking to demonstrate to the public that they are there to help rather than to make trouble, many Chinese environmental NGOs have sought to work on what the government has identified as areas for improvement, in order to accelerate and influence environmental improvements rather than campaigning for radical restructuring (Zhang and Barr 2013).

Whilst the ultimate outcomes of environmental activism in China remain obscure, elsewhere in east Asia and in central and eastern Europe under state socialism, environmental movements permitted a certain space in which to organize, and attracted activists who might otherwise have campaigned more directly for regime change. But if environmental movements thus became schools for civil society organization and cover for activists with other aspirations, when regime change occurred, environmental movements were often marginalized and effectively demobilized as activists exploited the space to address other neglected issues. This was most evident in central and eastern Europe where the collapse of state socialist regimes entailed a precipitate decline in economic activity. As a result, not only were citizens distracted from environmental concerns by the need to augment their sharply reduced real incomes, but the evident need for environmental improvement was reduced by the dramatic contraction of polluting industries, which was less the product of environmental campaigning than of the collapse of protectionist economic policies and the introduction of market economics.

In a much more modest way, environmental movements appear to have contributed to the vitality of civil society and, tentatively, to the rejuvenation of the political processes of liberal democratic states. If conventional politics holds little attraction for young people in most such states, it is among the youngest age cohorts than support for environmental movements and, especially, Green parties is greatest. Similarly, women tend to be more prominent in local environmental campaigns than they are in mainstream politics, probably because the barriers to entry are lower in the former than in the latter. Thus the existence of environmental movements may provide a path into politics for people who would otherwise remain outside the political realm.

Conclusion

The striking thing about environmental movements is that despite their many successes, and justified celebration of their increasing influence in many policy arenas, the assault on the global environment proceeds at an unprecedented pace. Scarcely a week goes by without new evidence of continuing degradation of the global environment: the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at unprecedentedly high levels and rising; tropical rainforests continue to be logged and burned so that the “lungs of the planet” are an ever smaller proportion of the surface area of the Earth; biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate; overfishing and acidification of the oceans increasingly endanger tropical reefs and marine ecology.

This increasing global environmental degradation is only partly offset by significant local gains, of which examples include the improving condition of

Europe's rivers, better air quality in many cities in the global North, and even the re-naturalization of some previously degraded landscapes and rivers. Even in the North, it is difficult to be sanguine about the prospects of environmental improvement because the business-as-usual operations of (government and) corporations and other economic actors, including, not least, consumers, continue to contribute to environmental degradation. It is this that justifies the focus of many environmental activists upon practical action at the local level because at least here the impacts of action may be demonstrable. Nevertheless, the dilemma of local action remains that its impacts are largely determined by institutional arrangements that it is beyond the power of local actors to change, or upon the actions or reactions of more powerful non-local actors (Rootes 2013).

The general paradox of environmental improvements in the domestic environments of the de-industrializing/ecologically modernized countries of the global North is that much of it has been achieved at the expense of increasing impacts abroad, especially in the global South, not simply by direct exploitation of the natural environmental resources of less affluent/less industrialized countries, but also via the normal operation of the terms of trade by which the industrial production that fulfils the aspirations of the consumers of the North has been increasingly located in the South.

However, the spread of environmental awareness is now global, transnational EMOs now exist, and the campaigns of national environmental EMOs address not merely national but, increasingly, global issues. In their interventions in international negotiations, EMOs have begun to make an impact and, although various national and corporate interests are powerfully arrayed against them, it is likely that, through their continued advocacy and deployment of scientific evidence, environmental movements will make significant impacts upon global environmental policies and their implementation.

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