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## Environmental NGOs at a crossroads?

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Environmental NGOs (ENGOS) have never been better supported, and their concerns have never been more urgent and compelling. Yet, despite the extent to which they have become embedded in the institutions of the most affluent states – and many less affluent ones – ENGOS are at a crossroads: do they continue on the path to deepening institutionalisation in the hope of influencing environmental policy from within the tent of the political mainstream, or do they embrace their concerns about climate change and biodiversity by staking out more radical positions that challenge the failure of mainstream politics to take action commensurate with the urgency of the problem? Do they continue to consolidate their position as a public interest lobby or advocacy community, or do they seek to mobilise the public in order to offer a radical alternative to institutionalised environmental politics?

Setting up the problem in that way is, of course, overly simple; the choice is not binary, and we have become accustomed, in many countries, to witnessing ENGOS having their cake and eating it: lobbying and taking up opportunities to participate in, and sometimes critically shaping, policy debates and even environmental protection legislation, while also supporting, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly, more audacious actors who more outspokenly and sometimes disruptively challenge the pale green politics of governments, established parties and corporations who talk the talk of environmental protection but barely stumble in the simulation of walking it.

Certainly, the environmental movement can be represented as a very broad church, a network, in which ENGOS in various ways support the activities of less institutionalised, more radical activists, and in which ENGOS themselves reap rewards from the initiatives of more disorderly innovators, recruiting campaigners from among them and, especially, leveraging the disruptive challenges of the ‘radical flank’ of the movement to secure access to and influence in policymaking circles.

That symbiotic relationship between ENGOS and radical environmental activists is not, however, a stable one. In particular, it is asymmetric, for while established

ENGOS have a continuing existence and relatively stable sources of income, the less institutionalised groups are more ephemeral, depending more upon the serendipity of mobilising issues, enterprising activists and hospitable contexts for mobilisation. In between bouts of widespread mobilisation, ENGOS may play the role of what some sociologists of social movements have called 'abeyance structures', ready for action when opportunities arise but acting as repositories of knowledge and reservoirs of mobilising expertise in times when external circumstances provide few opportunities for successful mobilisation. But do ENGOS content themselves with biding their time in such hard times? Or do they instead seek to transform the milieu in which they operate?

These are questions to which we shall return

### **Getting from there to here**

Environmental NGOs have, since nature preservation organisations first emerged in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, been formed in response to actual or perceived threats to wildlife, landscapes and / or places of special environmental or amenity value. They are the organisational expression of those concerns and a means by which to act upon them.

Gradually, during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as scientific understanding of natural ecology developed, the scope of environmental concern was extended beyond individual species to their habitats and to biodiversity in general. Increasingly, and especially from the 1970s, as it was recognised that issues could not effectively be contained by local or national boundaries, environmental concern extended to the transnational and, ultimately, the global level. The organisational embodiments of that concern followed suit, either through the transformation of the agendas of existing NGOs or through organisational innovation, so that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many ENGOS embraced broadly ecological perspectives and an increasing number organised transnationally; some, notably Friends of the Earth (FoE) and Greenpeace, expanded beyond the Northern industrialised states in which they originated and developed affiliates in a variety of countries in the global South.

### ***Institutionalisation***

The transnational diffusion of ENGOS was paralleled by their institutionalisation at home. Following their rapid rise in the 1970s and 1980s, the growth in the numbers of ENGOS' members and supporters, in the most industrialised countries, levelled off. If the 1990s was a decade of consolidation, it did not mark the beginning of the stagnation of environmentalism so much as a stage in its institutionalisation.

Institutionalisation has two faces, one external, the other internal. The external institutionalisation of ENGOS was, in some countries, well developed even during the 1970s, as governments accepted ENGOS as authoritative voices and sources of expertise on a wide range of environmental issues, even to the extent of facilitating the formation of networks that might coordinate their

representations. Perhaps the most important example of this process was the role of the European Commission in the formation and funding of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) in 1974. Environmentalists, who desired a collective organisation at the European level that might facilitate the transnational networking of ENGOs and so better represent environmental interests to the Commission. They found a willing partner in the Commission's Service de protection de l'environnement et des consommateurs, initially based in the Industrial affairs Directorate-General. The service became the Directorate-General Environment in 1981, but, remaining relatively small in a rapidly developing policy area, it sought to supplement its own limited expertise with the greater knowledge and experience of already well-established ENGOs (Berny 2016, Berny 2008).

In some countries, including France, the external institutionalisation of ENGOs extended even to their provision of services to governments, especially at local and regional levels. In others, such as Spain, where ENGOs were relatively weak, their development was encouraged by government in order to enhance their capacity as policy interlocutors and service providers. In the Netherlands, ENGOs were directly funded by governments anxious to ensure that policy debates were not dominated by industry lobbies at the expense of environmental protection.

The internal institutionalisation of ENGOs was a gradual process and a direct consequence of their success in recruiting public support, especially financial support. During the 1970s and 1980s, ENGOs grew rapidly from a very modest base so that, by the 1990s, the largest of them had substantial budgets, dozens or hundreds of employees and, especially in the case of conservation NGOs, substantial property. With these came responsibilities to account for their spending and to respect the legal rights of their employees to security of employment, pensions and conditions of work. Thus professionalization of ENGOs' management became inescapable, and their organisations became at least partly bureaucratic. To illustrate this and its consequences, we draw on developments in England (for a more sustained account, see Rootes 2014).

With the obligations and responsibilities of legally incorporated organisations, ENGOs inevitably lost some agility. The classic case in England is that of FoE. Engaged alongside local campaigners, new age campers and activists protesting under the banner of Earth First!, FoE members were in 1992 prominent in the resistance to the UK government's project of driving an extension to the M3 motorway through Twyford Down, a protected landscape much valued by inhabitants of nearby Winchester. However, served with a legal injunction, failure to comply with which would have bankrupted the organisation, FoE was obliged to withdraw from direct action protest (though not from the campaign in which it had supported local activists even before the start of direct action).

### ***Innovation and its discontents***

To the mostly younger Earth First!ers, FoE's formal withdrawal from the front line appeared a betrayal, even though many FoE members continued to protest as individuals independent of any organisation, simply turning their FoE t-shirts inside out to obscure the logo and avoid embarrassing the beleaguered

organisation. Moreover, FoE's formal withdrawal etched deeper the frustrations with ENGOs that had incited many practitioners of ecological direct action to abandon Greenpeace, FoE and other ENGOs in order to assemble as Earth First! In this they were, of course, following the path trodden by the founders of Earth First! in the USA – from frustration at the timidity and inaction of established ENGOs to direct action 'in defense of Mother Earth'.

Thus, particularly in the 1990s, the institutionalisation and alleged taming of Greenpeace and FoE was often cited as justification / explanation for the formation of new, anarchistic groupings committed to environmental direct action (EDA). However, their lack of formal organisation left these new groupings vulnerable to fallout from the controversial actions of some activists acting under their banners, or perceived by others to be acting in their name. Thus, Reclaim the Streets (RTS), an urban offshoot of Earth First!, was lambasted when its most prominent activists refused, on grounds of anarchistic principle, to condemn the property damage in central London that followed, but was not directly associated with, the non-violent 'guerrilla gardening' that RTS activists had organised in Parliament Square, London on May Day 2000. This episode exposed some of the limitations of anarchistic organisation, and RTS disbanded soon thereafter.

Because RTS was always a mobilising slogan and never a formal organisation, 'disbanding' it amounted to no more than ceasing to organise actions under the RTS banner. Indeed, Earth First!ers privileged direct action above formal organisation and never attempted to establish enduring organisations. Instead, they embarked on a series of loosely networked anarchistic protests that made no attempt to ride out the cycle of protest; as one protest wave ebbed, new forms of action followed.

Attempts to preserve their integrity made new direct action groups heavily dependent on the continued commitment of small numbers of core activists. These were often organised into 'affinity groups' isolated by their busy-ness and their wariness of infiltration by the police or agents of their antagonists, and they rarely succeeded in recruiting new activists to replace those whom 'burnout' and the pressures of life circumstances forced from the field (Plows, Wall and Doherty 2004).

EDA groupings did not completely disappear; often, they reappeared under new banners, but usually with little long-term continuity of personnel. Perhaps the most interesting new form of action to emerge in England was the Camp for Climate Action (CCA). But it too, after five years of actions designed to highlight the contribution to climate change of the burning of coal and the expansion of aviation, folded its tents before some of its activists embraced Occupy and issues of energy justice. Other protests came and went, notably around climate change and against the prospect of fracking for the extraction of oil and gas. Yet, for all that these waves of protest eschewed the formal organisation now characteristic of ENGOs, they for the most part developed in conversation with ENGOs, some of which provided resources, both financial and in the form of training and advice, that enabled direct action to endure and to be effective. ENGOs in turn, by

providing support for the very direct action that their vulnerability to litigation prohibits them from taking in their own names, gained leverage on policy debates and access to the powerful, chiefly because direct action has dramatized issues, attracted media attention and required policy responses.

The institutionalisation of ENGOs is real, but it should not be exaggerated; it did not eclipse less institutionalised forms of direct action in behalf of the environment so much as it complemented them and, to some extent, existed in a symbiotic relationship with them. The challenge that EDA groups posed to larger / mainstream ENGOs was, for the latter, never existential. The personnel of established ENGOs generally recognised the interests they had in common with their insurgent critics, sometimes referring to the EDA groups as ‘the conscience of the environmental movement’. Mainstream ENGOs picked up the issues raised by EDA groups, even if they did not embrace the methods of the latter, and they parlayed those issues into mainstream politics in often surprising ways: thus the actions of CCA, supported by independent but parallel actions by Greenpeace, so highlighted the contributions of coal-burning and aviation to climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions that they led to a government ban on new coal-burning power stations, unless coupled with carbon capture and storage, and to further delay in approval of Heathrow airport’s proposed third runway.

Although the groundbreaking Climate Change Act 2008 was principally an achievement of mostly conventional lobbying by FoE (Carter and Childs, 2018 – this volume), it capitalised on a climate of opinion on climate change that had been heightened by the activities of the practitioners of EDA. Nevertheless, EDA appears to be a less prominent strand of the environmental movement now than it was in the 1990s.

### ***Global issues, global movement?***

In and since the 1990s, some ENGOs continued to grow, and new ENGOs emerged, even though, in most developed countries, the rate of organisational innovation has slowed. Even as new, more specialised ENGOs emerged, the older ENGOs continued to consolidate, and the insurgents of the 1970s – notably Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace – consolidated their positions as substantial organisations both within individual states and transnationally. However, neither can yet claim to be global in its reach, and both remain small and modestly resourced by comparison with older, mainstream preservation / conservation organisations, let alone when compared with the governments and transnational corporations that are often their antagonists.

It would serve only to obscure the unevenness of these developments for us to describe environmentalism as a global social movement, but the major development affecting ENGOs in the present century is the increased sense of urgency to address what are now almost universally seen as global environmental issues: climate change and the loss of biodiversity. These are not single issues. If it has done nothing else, the proliferation of specialised ENGOs in recent decades has demonstrated that ‘the environment’ is *not*, as many institutionalised political actors claimed in the 1970s and 1980s, a single issue.

Rather, 'the environment' is increasingly recognised as a set of interconnected issues that can only be somewhat arbitrarily teased apart. Thus, while some argue about whether global climate change or the loss of biodiversity is the greatest environmental challenge we face, the fact is that *both* are in large part the products of human activity; moreover, climate change will greatly accelerate the loss of biodiversity, and loss of biodiversity, especially in the form of deforestation, will have feedback effects upon climate change.

The sense of looming eco-catastrophe and increasing frustration at the inadequacy of the response of states and corporations to these challenges has stimulated the formation of new activist networks that seek to force the pace of action to address global climate change and its social consequences (see Hadden 2015, de Moor 2018 – this volume). At the international level, as at national levels, these new networks have not supplanted ENGOs but have supplemented them.

### **ENGOs in hard times**

Hard times have not made life easier for ENGOs. Their progress was checked by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), and the regimes of austerity that followed. It was not so much that the GFC reduced the finances of ENGOs; for those that were least dependent on government grants, it did not, and they are richer today than they were a decade ago, often because they are the beneficiaries of an affluent, ageing constituency. But the GFC shifted the focus of attention of the public and politicians away from the environment, which lost salience and slipped down the public agenda.

In France as in Britain, right-wing governments promoting ambitious policies made sharp U-turns. When in 2005, David Cameron assumed leadership of the UK Conservative Party, he embraced green issues as the emblem of his modernisation project and as a means of de-toxifying the Conservative brand. As Prime Minister in 2010, he promised that the coalition government he led would be "the greenest government ever". By 2014, however, Cameron was urging his ministers to 'get rid of all the green crap' (Carter and Clements 2015). In France, President Sarkozy in 2007 promised a "new deal" for the environment with policies discussed and planned by various stakeholders, including ENGOs. But two years later, in the aftermath of the economic crisis, he declared: "the environment, that's enough" (Berny 2018 – this volume).

Mol (2016) has documented the decline of the environmental state under conditions of neo-liberal globalisation. This process has proceeded unevenly, from state to state and from sector to sector, and has not everywhere led to a decline of environmental standards or outcomes, chiefly because in many cases other environmental authorities have stepped in to fill the breach. The problem, however, is that other authorities and ENGOs cannot effectively take over all the functions hitherto discharged by the nation state. The challenges are most acute in those countries where austerity and neo-liberal ideology have motivated sharp reductions in funding to state and non-state organisations to deliver environmental services. Thus in the UK, after 2010 the Department for

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs suffered a larger proportional cut (70%) to its budget and staff headcount than any other government department. Immediate casualties included the Sustainable Development Commission and the venerable Royal Commission for Environmental Pollution, hitherto invaluable sources of information on critical environmental issues. Coupled with the drastic paring down of government websites, this led to a significant loss of information and accessible statistics on environmental performance. Thus the intelligence of government has been reduced, and the work of ENGOs is made more difficult just as it becomes more necessary.

In the UK, most ENGOs have been increasingly focused on practical environmental conservation work. Many of these organisations claim that lack of unrestricted funds prevents them from investing more in public advocacy (Miller et al. 2017), but this appears to be more an excuse than an explanation. For the most part, ENGOs are no longer sure what they can effectively advocate to whom. Those organisations that are most committed to public advocacy – Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace – may be better aware of the immensity and urgency of the issues but they are severely constrained by the modesty of their resources. They are also constrained by the other preoccupations of their potential audiences. At a time when the public is distracted by continuing austerity, and the UK government is preoccupied by Brexit, it is safest for ENGOs to stick to their knitting, and for most of them that is practical environmental protection work, usually at a local level.

Nevertheless, even in hard times, there is innovation. Perhaps most notably, Client Earth has imported to Europe US strategies of litigation to defend the environment [Goodman and Connolly 2018 – this volume]. Client Earth has had some success in the case of urban air pollution, particularly in litigating before the European Court of Justice against the UK and some other national governments for their persistent failure to enforce EU air quality standards in their largest cities. This success in raising an important but relatively neglected issue up the environmental agenda has won admirers within the ENGO sector, and Client Earth was in 2017 perceived by its peers to be the most effective ENGO in the UK (Miller et al. 2017), eclipsing Greenpeace, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and FoE, which had been regarded as the most effective ENGOs just four years earlier [Cracknell et al. 2013]. It is nevertheless symptomatic that it is an ENGO that is focussed on litigation in the courts that is now regarded as most effective rather than any organisation that, even intermittently, seeks to mobilise its supporters in the streets or to employ any form of environmental direct action. It is a moot point whether it is a mark of progress that defence of the environment has moved so conspicuously from politics to the courts.

### **Global climate change politics in hard times**

The gap between political pledges and actual achievements also resonates at the international level. Preparations for COP-15 in Copenhagen in 2009 raised environmental issues to their highest level of saliency, pinpointing the critical urgency of the situation. The COP's poor results exacerbated doubts among

NGOs and other environmental activists about the effectiveness of participation in international conferences.

Even before the delegates convened, COP-15 began inauspiciously. The release of leaked or hacked email correspondence from and to the Climate Research Unit at the University of East Anglia sowed confusion and was reported so as to undermine the credibility of climate scientists in the week before the COP. More immediately damaging were the events in Copenhagen during the COP and its failure to reach the anticipated agreement on the post-Kyoto climate regime. In an atmosphere made tense by the actions of a loose alliance of radical climate justice activists, NGO delegates found themselves excluded from the conference venue. The failure of street demonstrators and NGOs to persuade COP delegates to reach an ambitious agreement, in spite of increasing evidence of the accelerating pace and damaging consequences of climate change, produced widespread demoralisation, uncertainty about how to proceed, and loss of momentum. The fallout was worst for the most radical groups because they had invested so much hope in their ability to move the agenda in Copenhagen; the more mainstream NGOs, by contrast, had their organisations and other activities to fall back upon.

Three years later, the Rio conference failed to adopt any strong agreement in response to major environment challenges. Linking together UN development policies with environmental concerns, the UN sustainable development goals are meant to improve the wellbeing of the world's population by 2030. But UN processes have already failed to achieve ambitious targets such as halting biodiversity loss by 2020, as agreed by the Parties to the Biodiversity convention.

In the meantime, pressures on the environment have accelerated since the GFC. The boom in new information technologies has increased pressures on the natural environment by extractive industry at an unprecedented pace. The 'mining' of virtual currencies such as Bitcoin, which exploit blockchain technology, requires prodigious quantities of energy and threatens to produce electricity shortages in places where it was formerly abundant. The race for minerals and substitutes for oil has sped up everywhere, with an upward trend in exploitation of the South by the South (Temper 2018).

Across Europe, innovative policies in favour of renewable energy or greenhouse gas emissions reduction were curtailed even in the countries that pioneered them (Würzel et al. 2017). The European Commission, which initially played an active entrepreneurial role in environmental policy, from 2009 became more focussed on better implementation and less on innovation. The Juncker Commission, nominated in 2014, prepared no new environmental policy proposals during its mandate, and in EU circles environmental legislation became seen as expensive and suffocating red tape that impeded business (Gravey and Jordan 2016). Particularly since the onset of economic crisis, when it comes to policy adoption and implementation, environmental priorities have changed (Burns and Tobin 2018). However notions such as sustainable development and ecological transition still prevail in the political authorities'

discourses in Europe. Yet, despite repeated commitments, the European Union's record is patchy at best: agriculture and urbanisation are still deteriorating soils at an alarming rate (EEA 2015).

COP-21 in Paris in 2015 was marked by a recovery of at least cautious optimism (de Moor, 2018). But within a year hopes were severely dented by the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency, and thereafter by the US administration's effective sabotage of the UN Climate Change Finance Facility, the key institutional innovation of the Paris COP. Despite the optimistic tune of the officials concluding the Paris conference in 2015, emissions of greenhouse gases increased in subsequent years. Climate change remains the core challenge confronting ENGOS. But what are they to do, and how should they do it?

Compared to previous cycles of attention favourable to environmental issues in Europe and at the international level – the 1960s-1970s, the late 1980s and the start of the new millennium – never has awareness of the ecological has been more developed and the engagement of governments to fight back been more explicit. Environmental problems are difficult to ignore but conversely current attempts fall short of the action that is needed. This paradoxical situation returns ENGOS to the crossroads faced by the fourth environmentalism. On one hand, ENGOS engaged in institutional politics try to protect what has been granted in terms of legislation and procedural rights, which absorbs most of their activity at the possible expense of long-term objectives. On the other hand, more radical mobilisation may keep environmental conflicts alive, at the expense of respect for the law. The protracted occupation of the site proposed for a new airport in rural northern France, the Notre-Dame-des-Landes ZAD (zone à défendre = zone to defend), is a spectacular example, but the grassroots network, "unnecessary mega-projects", started in France and expanded to Italy, Germany and Turkey (Martinez-Alier et al. 2016).

### **Where next?**

We are now at a point where the enormity of our environmental predicament is acknowledged, at least rhetorically, by most national governments and many transnational corporations. However, for the ENGOS whose lobbying and campaigning has been so influential in getting and keeping environmental issues on policy agendas, it is far from 'job done' so long as effective action to mitigate the threats to our environment and to remedy the damage already done remains so modest. Now, indeed, the risk is that the efforts of ENGOS appear as mere pinpricks compared with the magnitude of the problems, while the new, less formally organised activist groups struggle to make an impact.

This is, accordingly, an appropriate moment at which to pause and reflect on the past of ENGOS, the present patterns of their engagement, and their future.

Central to this is the organisational dilemma. Which goals to choose and which to prioritise? Whom to address, how to organise and whom to mobilise? How to maintain an established organisation without becoming lost in the business of

organisational maintenance and losing momentum? How to stay apparently relevant in uncongenial times when agendas are dominated by other compelling issues and in which opportunities for intervention by ENGOs are elusive?

### **Which strategies for the new millennium?**

Research on environmental movements has focused on three main areas: the movement itself, policies and public institutions, society and behaviours. The converging trends affecting these movements have been well documented, among them the internationalisation of the conservation movement in the early 20th century, as well as the professionalization of many of the new ecology organisations set up in the 1960s and 1970s (Dalton 1994, Rootes 2003). ENGOs have changed, but they have changed the world around them. ENGOs have been influential in many states and internationally. They have influenced the agendas of governments and political parties, proved useful allies for national, regional and local administrations in the implementation of environmental policies. They have provided new solutions based on soft law when policies as usual were poor or unlikely to be implemented. But while they have demonstrably had impacts upon the formation of environmental policies, their effects in terms of policy outcomes and societal change, as well as their accountability according to democratic standards, have been much debated.

This volume aims to stimulate new insights into the questions raised by the development of ENGOs since the 1970s. Taken together, the various contributions provide the bases for a comparison both over time and between Western organisations that is especially relevant when addressing the priorities and strategies open to environmental movements in troubled times. From different theoretical perspectives, the contributors analyse the co-variation between means and ends on various aspects of the lives of these organisations, both for small and big things, from changing the name of a publication to joining an alliance. The end-means relation is also a key topic, often debated to address the results and failures of the environmental movement (Torgerson 2000). It raises two questions, crucial for any organisation and addressed in the contributions assembled here: how to get organised? which ends to choose? The answers to these questions are not necessarily consistent (Diani and Donati 1999). Although they draw on different theoretical frameworks, by focussing on organisations themselves, all the contributors underline the constraints upon them and the specific logics of their actions.

The questions of desirable social change and organisational design are intricate, and are still very topical in debates between academics and between activists. Such debates have often revolved around discussion of two exclusive options – radicalism and reform – that would shape collective action. However this binary choice is irrelevant in the present period of great uncertainty, not least about strategies. After distinguishing between present and longstanding challenges, we will expose the main arguments of the contributors, and discuss more thoroughly lessons learned from the different organisations and periods brought together in this volume.

### **Still looking for the fourth environmentalism**

The 'fourth wave of environmentalism' is a notion developed in the 1990s to speculate about the future environmental movement in the new millennium. What it means varies greatly between its initial promoters (Thiele 1999, Dowie 1995). Although developed about the US case, the notion and its different meanings reflect the controversies raised by environmental mobilisations and their transformation since the 1960s. They question the effects of the institutionalisation of the environmental movement and whether environmental organisations are still a force battling for the environment even as they cooperate with governments and/or firms.

### ***Environmentalism between reform and radicalism***

Framing the environmental movement as the outcome of successive waves (Guha 1999, Jamison 2001) underscored the temporal synchronicity of organisations emerging in different countries, suggesting comparable properties and causes for their emergence. The first conservation organisations, which appeared in the 19th century, expanded over the next century. Mostly centred on nature protection, their members belonging to social elites concerned by the damage triggered by the industrial revolution or by policies of settlement in the USA and Australia. The ecology organisations of the 1970s were more radical, targeting the consumption society and the hegemony of political authorities over choices engaging the future.

Both Thiele (1999) and Dowie (1995) identify cooptation of both conservation and ecology organisations by public authorities and firms as the key feature of the third wave of environmentalism. This third wave resulted from the efforts environmentalists invested when trying to shape environmental legislation or international law. ENGOs subsequently accessed decision-making process by demonstrating their expertise, thus engaging their public image and reputation. Professionalization has enhanced their capacity to enrol new members and communicate with different audiences, and they also developed close links with environmental administrations, have been accorded rights of standing, and can sometimes access public funding to sustain their activities. The notion of sustainability nailed down by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 extended this cooptation to the international level, with the suggestion that reconciling economic growth and environmental concerns depends on new forms of cooperation between various actors, with ENGOs becoming "partners" of both firms and government, with solutions to be found in both "civil society" and the "market" (Tatenhove and Leroy 2003). Mainstream environmentalism embraced this discourse in order to take advantage of the opportunities these possibilities for cooperation represented.

In the 1990s, the debate around fourth wave environmentalism revived the dilemma of the 1970s for the then new organisations: radicalism versus reform, contention versus expertise, "resistance" or "cooperation" (Jamison 2001). Thiele's thesis represented the optimistic perspective suggesting that societies and policies are becoming greener and smarter, by developing more ecological, integrated ways of producing and consuming. By contrast, Dowie was sceptical about the capacity of mainstream NGOs to reverse the serious threats to the environment at local and global scales; resistance to politics- and business-as-usual, notably by the grassroots environmental justice movement in

the USA, represented the most promising means to achieve ambitious objectives (Dowie 1995, Rowell 1996).

Beyond activists, the two options – radicalism *versus* reform – have also shaped academic debate. For their critics, ENGOs have been trapped in a compromising trade-off, incapable of struggling against the global forces of predatory capitalism (Blühdorn and Welsh 2007). By trying to change behaviours, with co-regulation or private governance agreements, NGOs assumed implicitly that economic growth was compatible with environmental priorities. Western NGOs have participated in greening global capitalism, by endorsing forms of private governance in less regulated countries and with little benefit for the environment locally (Dauvergne 2016).

Behind these debates lie different conceptions of social movements. For those who see the power of social movements as inhering in their veto power and their disruptive capacity, collaboration of environmental activists with government and / or corporations is a worrying development. On one hand, institutionalisation of environmentalism embedded environmental issues in mainstream politics and governance. On the other hand, it circumscribed the range of environmental issues deemed worthy of attention at the cost of excluding other and new issues that were perhaps less tractable or less palatable to entrenched powerful interests. The network perspective on social movements shows however a more complicated picture by evidencing overlapping affiliation in membership and covert cooperation between groups and organisations (Diani and Rambaldo 2007, Rootes 2007).

This volume aims to re-establish the point of view of individual ENGOs in the analysis, opting for an organisation-centred perspective in order to offer a more comprehensive view of the rationale of their choices and their multi-tiered strategies. The predicament faced today by ENGOs also justifies going beyond the antinomy between reform and radicalism.

Analytical value is added by shifting the discussion about efficiency, between means and ends, from the movement to the organisation level. Indeed, two assumptions lie behind the fourth environmentalism: first, a subset of the movement, groups and organisations, shapes its direction; and, second, a unitary and cohesive movement is more efficient. ENGOs face a number of challenges that do not simply revolve around the dilemma between fundamental social change and reformist policy-making that underlies much of the debate on institutionalisation. So framing such dilemmas may also oversimplify ENGOs' links with other actors. In the next section, we examine the present challenges faced by ENGOs and their actual novelty.

### **Contemporary or long-standing challenges?**

Less than a new cycle in terms of public attention, the present times may reveal the expansion of the green backlash identified by Rowell (1996); repression against environmental struggles has increased since the mid-2000s in both democratic and less democratic countries (Matejova et al. 2018). This suggests that citizen participation, ostensibly valued by ecological modernisation, today meets resistance, while public policy efforts would thus be mere attempts to mitigate or adapt to coming threats (Hamilton et al. 2015). Indeed, the concept of

the anthropocene underlines the irreversibility of the changes caused by human activities to system earth with consequences widely unknown. The present situation seems to invalidate ENGOS' old ways of doing things but they also correspond with specific and longstanding critical choices for NGOs, which offer possibilities for action.

### ***Contemporary challenges: innovation in policy design***

The choice of strategies and targets over time reveals how ENGOS have adapted in order to promote their cause. But they are now confronted with new difficulties as regards their interaction with public authorities, firms and the general public.

ENGOS playing the political game proved initially successful as states adopted environmental legislation. They expended effort to set them on the agenda or shape them, and subsequently used them. Many monographic studies have documented this somewhat ambivalent relationship made of defiance and mutual trust, as well the active part they played at the implementation stage, reporting to state authorities or the European Union, and / or exerting pressing by engaging in litigation. But by 2000, the state had become their "enemy" and ENGOS had to explore the more promising venue of cooperation with firms willing to tackle environmental problems (Mol 2000).

ENGOS were indeed becoming one policy player among others and faced more difficulties to push for ambitious legislation. Besides, as in any public policy, there is often a gap between what exists on paper and what is actually implemented. Criticism of ineffective implementation started in the 1980s, and environmental legislation was stigmatised as a "control-and-command approach" (Dryzek 2013). The change affecting the state itself has probably realised Mol's assertion but for a different reason than the one he raised: the downsizing, in the long run, of environmental public administrations, affecting most OECD countries (Mol 2016). The scarcity of resources affecting them made the previously usual cooperation with ENGOS more difficult. Besides, ENGOS may have lost capacity to influence governmental decision-making. Merging of administrative departments, such as the Department of Energy and Climate Change with Business and Industry in the UK, and the Ministry of Ecology with Sustainable Development in France, has reduced exposure to conflicting views on issues such as resource exploitation, land-use planning or corporate regulation because most decisions are prepared within a single administrative department and are not discussed between ministers.

While ENGOS, like other organisations representing citizens or large causes, were praised for enhancing the democratic nature of political processes in the 1990s, they have become seen as a potential threat to public order and today face more overtly hostile attitudes from governments. Since the mid-1990s, legislation banning the funding of national NGOs from abroad and constraining the activities of foreign NGOs has multiplied and now applies in more than half the world's countries (UN Environment 2018)<sup>1</sup>. Environmental activists are labelled 'extremist' even in such countries as Australia (Matejova 2018), UK (Schlembach 2018) or France, where anti-terrorist legislation was

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<sup>1</sup> "Between 1993 and 2016, 48 countries enacted laws that restricted the activities of local NGOs receiving foreign funding, and 63 countries adopted laws restricting activities of foreign NGOs" (UN Environment 2018).

used to prevent French activists from leaving their homes to participate in the side-events in Paris during the COP 2015.

Research studying arrangements based on cooperation between firms and NGOs has tempered the initial optimism about market-based solutions. Private governance arrangements based on cooperation rather than legislation do not necessarily deliver better implementation than sound legislation. Beyond the widely disputed assumption of the goodwill of concerned actors to cooperate for the sake of the environment, firms also lack resources when it comes to fulfilling their commitment vis-à-vis workers or the protection of the environment via corporate social responsibility. ENGOs played a variety of roles in this regard. For instance, Friends of the Earth helped local NGOs and peasants to file complaints in these corporate social responsibility frameworks (Cheyns 2014).

Institutionalisation also resulted in a more widely shared green knowledge (Jamison 2001). What could be acknowledged as a sign of success also created an additional challenge for ENGOs. Once translated into public policies or corporate practices, innovative ideas are sometimes toned-down versions of the initial proposal. ENGOs then need to be critical, taking the risk of blurring their initial message. How to have a distinct voice in the flow of public communication and information from media? Communication is a key challenge for NGOs whose credibility also depends on their public image and getting support from citizens to take part in their activities or sustain them.

ENGOs' activities and their outcome depend on other actors whose logics and priorities are different from and partially independent of their own. The "bandwagon effect of climate change", impacting the agenda of governments, international institutions, media and NGOs (Wapner 2011), is emblematic of such constraints. Since the 1990s, NGOs have bridged between climate change and a number of other causes they promoted, such as biodiversity. Most conservation organisations wanted to benefit from better media coverage, but had little choice to act differently. They contributed to blurring the line between issues related to climate change and those related to the environment more generally. However, as most public funding and governmental actions focus on climate change, NGOs' choices of campaign and activities are more and more constrained. It may become hard to go against the mainstream assumption that anything that combats climate change is necessarily good for the environment. However, choosing the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions or, worse, carbon dioxide as the main criterion has actually led to measures (such as the switch from petrol to diesel road fuel) that have had damaging effects on air quality and biodiversity (Sainteny 2015).

The omnipresence of climate change in the public discourse in Western countries illustrates the present predicament of ENGOs: it marks a recognition of their concerns, but paradoxically does not necessarily give them leverage on the behaviour of governments or firms that could make a difference. Besides, developing a capacity to appraise the outcomes of states or corporate decisions requires from ENGOs an expertise that even in Western countries governments are now reluctant to deploy.

***Long-standing challenges: organisational maintenance and political advocacy***

If one wants to assess their contribution to the governance of the environment, it is important to take organisations seriously, which implies consideration of the organisational imperatives they face and what they actually do. The four dilemmas identified here are all linked to a choice related to the ends-means relation and remain important to analyse the predicament of contemporary ENGOs (Diani and Donati 1999).

ENGOs have to assess the impact for the organisation itself of the struggles they choose to fight. Covering choices over priorities, resources and members, the question of organisational maintenance addressed both in social movement and interest group studies remains crucial for ENGOs. Although the 'iron law of oligarchy' has influenced the understanding of organisations in social movement studies for a long time, the ways to achieve maintenance in the longer run are plural (Clemens and Minkoff 2004). Only the observation of their actual activities and internal debates reveals ENGOs' goals. The case studies assembled in this volume shed light on the variety of questions ENGOs address.

Another related dilemma faced by NGOs is the alignment between values and activities. There might be dissonance, more or less temporary or problematic, between what the members expect and what the organisation communicates, as exemplified by the change in the discourses of the German bird protection organisation analysed by Bargheer (2018 – this volume). The fact that the importance of nature protection has varied across time also contradicts a reifying view of organisations as having a stable identity. Greenpeace or FOE, which initially battled in the international arena to prevent the exploitation of whales in the 1970s, returned to wider topics of biodiversity in the late 1990s. Dissonance might also happen with potential supporters or former allies, with possibly damaging impact upon ENGOs.

ENGOs have ambivalent relationships with their allies/ opponents. It is possible for mutual distrust to arise between grassroots groups and ENGOs, but also between more established organisations more used to cooperating. Competing or working together is also a choice about which audiences to target, and represents a potential driver of organisational change. The case of Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) illustrates that perceptions of which priorities matter and what modes of action are adequate are contingent upon domestic contexts, matching a Western/ global North / South divide (Doherty and Doyle 2018 – this volume). The multiplicity of audiences and opportunities for alliances does not reduce the risk of organisations being diverted, by cooperation, from their initial goals; often a counterpart of cooperation is accepting becoming partially instrumentalised, used by other actors pursuing their own goals.

Finally, ENGOs have to make a choice between long- and short-run priorities. They are not necessarily only agenda-shapers, although they have played a significant part in this respect (Mermet 2018, Stroup and Wong 2018 – this volume). The capacity to sustain a strategic action in the longer run, adapting goals as the context changes, merits close attention before reaching definitive conclusions about their achievement. Private governance arrangements have been developed at a key moment, when public policies were under criticism. The 1992 Rio Conference marked a turning in this respect with its focus on 'sustainable development'. The liberal criticism of the state gained more when in a non-democratic context. This new context offered an unknown

combination of constraints and opportunities for ENGOs. The strategy of WWF on forest certification was developed over more than a decade. It first consisted in changing the behaviour of Western firms in the global South, before lobbying, with the support of former corporate allies, for regulation at the EU level, in order to achieve regulation that was more constraining and overlapping. The short cycles of legislative elections are not comparable with the scale involved by the changes at the Anthropocene level, but both matter greatly for ENGOs. For instance, biodiversity management takes a long time to have significant effects on the conservation of species or natural habitats; in the meantime, governments will have changed repeatedly.

Underlining the added value of analysing ENGOs as organisations is not in itself new (Diani and Donati 1999, Clemens and Minkoff 2004, Prakash and Gugerty 2010), but there is still a need for new literature that addresses the travails of ENGOs and their specific challenges in the present conjuncture, the retreat of the state, continuing economic uncertainty, fiscal austerity, disillusion with the EU.

### **Learning from comparison**

The contributions assembled in this volume consist of a variety of case-studies of ENGOs. They share an interest in process and, to some extent, comparison. Several contributions embrace long time spans – Goodman and Connelly (1970-present), Bargheer (1970-1990) and Berny (1990-2012) – while others focus on shorter periods in order to establish a causal link between choice over a strategy in relation to other ENGOs and/or a public-decision making process: Carter and Childs (2004-10), Doyle and Doherty (2000s), De Joost (2014-16), Pickerill (2005-2011). Arguing in favour of action research, Mermet uses various case-studies to underscore the strategic choices faced by ENGOs. Beyond the different cases and research questions addressed in this volume, the focus on organisations offers converging conclusions about the factors determining choices concerning means and/or ends of ENGOs.

Taken together, the contributors cover controversies specific to social movement studies, public policy, political theory or management studies. The focus, alternatively on a given ENGO or on ENGOs interacting together, is the departure point for the contributions. Stefan Bargheer contends that the new social movement theory developed by Ulrich Beck only embraced a particular moment in the development of German environmentalism. If conservation organisations, here represented by the League for Bird Protection, embraced the same dramaturgy as the anti-nuclear movement in the 1980s, later ecology organisations addressed similar topics. Neil Carter and Mike Childs analyse how an NGO became the policy entrepreneur promoting an ambitious piece of climate legislation in the UK. They identify the conditions of successful agenda-setting by the Big Ask campaign launched by Friends of the Earth England Wales and Northern Ireland (FoE EWNI). At the other end of the policy decisional process, Martin Goodman and James Connelly shed light on the part played by ENGOs in the implementation of law, highlighting the outcomes of the advent of ENGOs specialising in litigation designed to exploit opportunities offered by environmental legislation in the US and then in Europe. The story of Client Earth in Europe shows that organisational entrepreneurship does not merely depend on legal opportunities, but can itself create them. Finally, Nathalie Berny

compares five high-profile ENGOs in France, analysing the apparent convergence of their priorities and modes of action.

The second set of contributions addresses ENGOs when interacting together to gain in capacity to change behaviour, be it of political authorities, firms, the general public or global trends. Brian Doherty and Timothy Doyle's analysis of Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) goes beyond the case of a single organisation. FOEI includes member ENGOs from both North and South that do not share the same understanding of priorities and the means to achieve them. FOEI has only recently adopted a binding common value statement and strategy. Arguing that deliberative theses are not relevant to explain this outcome, Doherty and Doyle underscore the need to consider politics as agonistic and, however, possibly conducive to *modus vivendi*. Similarly incompatible perceptions of what are the priority and conditions for success divided the climate change movement on the eve of the 2015 Paris Summit. Joost de Moor explains why and how they nevertheless succeeded in cooperating, making the Paris COP, against all expectations, better attended by NGOs than any of its predecessors. Sarah Stroup and Wendy Wong also shed light on the dilemma of cooperation and participation but in the context of private governance initiatives. They focus on leading international ENGOs that concentrate resources and authorities and power relations with other ENGOs in order to assess how much they can be critical to this kind of arrangement. Jenny Pickerill addresses the ongoing challenge of cooperation between NGOs and Indigenous people, in Australia. She reviews the narratives promoted by different organisations, underscoring that mutual understanding is both possible and needed. Beyond one single case, Laurent Mermet reviews a number of situations where ENGOs' strategic choices are constrained. From the management studies perspective that Mermet outlines, the starting point for analysis is not a given organisation but a situation that is problematic for the environment.

### ***Why organisations matter***

Despite their variety, the contributions offer similar conclusions regarding: the significance of ENGOs' organisational lives; organisational change; coalition-building; and cooperation and its pitfalls. Their convergence proves the relevance of an organisation-centred approach.

A number of contributions acknowledge that organisations are "inhabited" (Hallet and Ventresca 2006), showing how real people and their interactions matter in the decisions made, as well as in innovation or inertia. It sometimes takes a few people to successfully test a good idea, as illustrated by the Big Ask campaign (Carter and Childs) or the creation of Client Earth (Goodman and Connelly). The various contributions also reveal an organisational life replete with conflicts over priorities, strategies and values. They thus enrich the usual understanding of organisational maintenance. Organisational maintenance is not only about resources, but also values. It depends on respect showed to people and their different views. The debate around the common identity of Friends of the Earth (Doherty and Doyle) or the appraisal of tensions between staff in French organisations (Berny) did not resolve all of the divergence expressed by different organisations, representatives or members, but enabled collective action. The shift in terms of

public communication experienced by NABU (Bargheer) over several decades confirms that internal politics also matters sometimes regardless of external constraints. Finally, debates between organisations within the climate movement before the Paris conference helped to build a provisional common ground for action (De Moor). Discussion about the rules is also a key issue in organisational life. Active members or staff have tried to have their say in what they perceive as significant, unwanted change. What is perceived as a success by the outside public may create tensions in the organisation. Because the Big Ask Campaign drained a very significant part of FoE's resources, campaigners were keen to work on other topics (Carter and Childs). Interestingly, the conclusion reached by Doherty and Doyle that FOEI and its members changed in the course of interactions could apply to other contributions: 'Organisations were also changed, by the joint endeavour to find new common grounds' (Doherty and Doyle: 18).

Although the 'course of action' (Berny, Mermet) does shape organisations by challenging their ways of doing, observing change and appraising its significance is a key issues for analysis. The longitudinal approach privileged by several authors shows that some organisations changed significantly over time, while the brand name and the membership remained the same. The agendas of BUND in Germany and FoE in Britain underwent radical transformation. By changing its name in 1990, BUND embraced nature protection issues beyond the cause of birds (Bargheer), but it kept local groups involved in traditional and on-the-ground activities related to bird protection. The Big Ask campaign resulted in an increase in the numbers of local groups backing up the initiative at the local level but the organisation was not sustained as FoE turned again towards nature protection issues (Carter and Childs). Stroup and Wong offer additional insight into this issue of organisations' agenda-setting, considering that it is shaped by competition between ENGOs over the authority some enjoy among different audiences. NGOs' initiatives are thus building boundaries between different sectors, and so requiring the analyst to pay attention to change behind what appears to be stable. Mermet argues that elaborating a strategy and thus sustaining collective action implies sometimes going beyond the boundaries of existing organisations in order to achieve their goals. Creating a platform for common action may result in mutual learning, as collective action challenges routines or, on the contrary, comfort an organisational identity.

Coalition-building is thus a key driver for change. The contributors offer insights into both overt and informal cooperation between ENGOs as well as the calculation involved in these interactions. Collective action engages ENGOs' public image towards their members and wider publics, enabling a given initiative to reach a wider support base but possibly at the expense of another ENGO taking credit for success. By giving up the FoE brand name, the Big Ask alienated supporters from FoE's further actions (Carter and Childs), just as the broad NGO coalition, Stop Climate Chaos, foundered soon after its formation in 2005 because many of the co-operating NGOs feared the loss of their corporate identities from sustained action in a coalition that did not prominently bear their names. Similarly, the broad OneWorld alliance of NGOs, formed in the first flush of enthusiasm after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which also extended beyond ENGOs to include aid and development NGOs, soon faded as most organisations preferred to maintain their distinct brand identities (Rootes 2006).

Divisions over values and priorities are found within organisations but also between them and, similarly, they do not necessarily prevent collective action on agreed and short-term objectives. Case studies reveal that, for strategic and well-understood reasons, values and action are not necessarily aligned. The climate movement succeeded in coordinating before the Paris conference and developed a compatible agenda, but this was riven again in the aftermath of the COP when several groups celebrated its results (de Moor). The desirability of a single movement, suggesting a consensus about discourses and modes of action, has long been disputed. Whether it is a problem or not still divides analysts. The lack of cohesiveness of the movement is problematic for De Moor, but less so for Doherty and Doyle. There is consensus about the fragmentation of the movement, although some leading ENGOs capture the attention of decision-makers and the general public (Stroup and Wong). This fragmentation does not prevent organisations from cooperating but, on the contrary, may create opportunities for mutual learning and internal change (Berny). Indeed, 'fragmentation' may be a less appropriate descriptor than 'internal differentiation'.

Cooperation beyond the environmental movement illustrates even more how much the environment is still a divisive issue, including for organisations representing local interests (Pickerill 2018 - this volume). It has led ENGOs to compromise with actors whose behaviours have great impact in terms of environmental damage. Stroup and Wong argue that sharp condemnation of private governance by firms is not an option for some leading ENGOs, as that would discredit the similar arrangements they promote and sometimes initiated. The collaborative turn of the 1990s, partly advocated by the environmental mobilisation, has backfired on the strategies of organisations. Indeed, as Mermet explains, ENGOs face actors who play the participative game in order to avoid shame and blame strategies, while controlling the stakes. As a matter of fact, ENGOs often develop two different discourses: within the organisation to decide on strategies, and outside to deal with possible allies. What might be seen as a compromising attitude aims at keeping pressure on governments and firms keen on greening their discourses. The ENGOs that stated that 'Paris changes everything' in December 2015 actually had few expectations of the outcome but wanted to keep some leeway in the hope of retaining influence. Trying to get support from beyond the movement remains perceived as a necessary condition to make a difference, even if ENGOs understand that their allies are mainly opportunistic (Carter and Childs).

Because ENGOs' strategies deal with ambivalent actors, the case study approach adopted in this volume is particularly relevant to observing what these organisations actually do and achieve. As Mermet suggests, analysing environmental conflicts requires looking closely at the goals actually pursued by the various actors involved. The analysis will thus determine inductively which is the 'environmental actor'. This caveat is also useful to unveil the strategies of self-definition of the different parties involved, for instance in a landuse dispute (Pickerill 2018) or decision-making process. Taken together, the contributions assembled here offer inspiring stories of success, without prejudging the conservative character of ENGO strategies and priorities.

## **Conclusion**

Over time, ENGOs have unquestionably gained influence on policies and collective choices. They put pressure on governments, firms, and at international conferences, by mobilizing both public opinion and expertise. The template for action that enabled organisations and their sector to grow has, however, become more precarious. Although environmental discourses have become mainstream, decisive change of behaviours or policies has not always followed. The harshest condemnation of ENGOs' activities is the conclusion that they participated in the collective failure to address the most pressing and global environmental problems, trapped as they were by their own accommodating discourses which were often products of a strategic decision reached because they were aware of the ambivalence of their allies, politicians or firms.

The perspective developed here privileges observation of ENGOs' strategies and the range of their choices over *a priori* normative statements on the organisational fact itself. The (growing) criticism of institutionalised environmental movements, among their activists and academics, is rather a subject for analysis than its starting point. Studies that account for ENGOs' decisions and strategies are a promising basis on which to consider their added value. In order to reply to this criticism, counterfactual analysis could draw on two different scenarios. What if environmentalism became a revolutionary force, able to constrain other actors' behaviour? Conversely, what if ENGOs did not battle to enforce rules aiming at correcting environmentally damaging behaviours? This crossroads seems purely theoretical but it actually questions the character of social movements. For Touraine, institutionalisation is the inevitable outcome of any social movement: either it becomes part of the system by trying to shape it, or it replaces those in power at the head of the state (1973: 427). In other words, social movements have to take power or compromise. Since taking power seems to be a vanishingly remote possibility, compromise is the order of the day.

The compromise that characterises the strategies ENGOs developed in institutional politics reminds us that they remain actors among others. The failure to address pressing environmental problems and inequalities between countries and populations is a collective responsibility. ENGOs' history is made of battles won and losses conceded. Analysing the strategies employed, their goals and actual results, is crucial if we are to avoid a quick and collective condemnation of the whole movement. ENGOs do and did many times represent the only pro-environmental force on the battleground.

Nevertheless, now, when even transnational energy corporations such as Shell propose urgent action to address climate change, the action context is different from that even a decade ago. Even as ENGOs chafe at their inability to compel more rapid progress in the struggle against destructive global climate change, the accumulation of evidence of its likely impacts, especially for the poorest people on the planet, so the somewhat fickle alliances of ENGOs with NGOs and other actors beyond the environment movement (narrowly conceived) have been transformed into something more substantial. Humanitarian, aid and development NGOs such as Oxfam are now fully committed to the fight to mitigate climate change, which they see as exacerbating the human misery they exist to alleviate, and as undermining their best efforts to make the poor self-sufficient; in the UK, Stop Climate Chaos has been transformed into the even more inclusive Climate Coalition, a cross-sectoral

coalition of more than 130 member organisations (<https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/our-members> . Accessed 8.10.2018). Moreover, organisations normally considered outside the NGO sector, such as trade unions, are often now prominent allies, in public and in private.

The dilemmas for ENGOs remain, but they can now have greater confidence that they are not alone.

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