22. Environmental movements and green parties in western and eastern Europe

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INTRODUCTION

What is an environmental movement? A vast range of phenomena have at one time or another been referred to as environmental movements or as part of the environmental movement. This imprecision reflects a general difficulty in the study of social movements as well as collective mobilization. "social movement" is a term which has been applied to phenomena as diverse as climates of opinion at one extreme to formally organized pressure groups and political parties at the other. Most attempts to impose restrictive definitions have, as we shall see, unfortunate consequences, but common sense dictates that limits must be set somewhere. For reasons which I hope will become clear, I am disinclined to include as social movements 'climates of opinion' where these are not accompanied by actual mobilization, but I include as part of the environmental movement a wide variety of organizations of varying degrees of formality as well as the 'movement parties' which have emerged from or accompanied the development of less formally organized environmental collective action. Consistent with this rather catholic approach, this chapter will, at least when considering the experience of a single country, avoid referring to competing environmental movements and instead refer to the environmental movement as a syndrome of movement activity embracing a wide range of often apparently disconnected forms of collective action focused upon environmental issues.¹

This chapter considers the nature and forms of environmental concern, its cross-national distribution, its relationship to the mobilization of environmental protest, the forms of collective action to which modern environmentalism has given rise, and the varying fates of those forms of action. It attempts both to map the landscape and also, especially, to offer explanations for the patterns of variation which this mapping reveals.

The empirical focus of this exercise is Europe. Although our understanding of the pattern in western Europe is more secure, by extending the discussion to embrace eastern Europe as well, it is hoped to raise questions which will advance our understanding of these phenomena globally. The European experience of environmental movements is, of course, unique as well as varied, but certain rather obvious differences between Europe and the 'new world' of North America and Australia, on the one hand, and 'Third World' countries, on the other, should not blind us to the fact that there are also similarities in the forms and conditions of environmental mobilizations and their outcomes. It would be instructive to reflect upon these similarities and differences, but that is a task for another occasion. Nor do I consider here the extremely important question of transnational environmental politics and the question of whether there is or can be a global environmental movement.²
FROM ANXIETY TO ACTION

Patterns of Environmental Consciousness and Action

Environmental consciousness in Europe appears divided about two intersecting axes, one running north-south, the other east-west. It is not, however, simply that people are more concerned about environmental issues in the north and west than in the east and south—environmental concern is nearly universal and at very high levels; where they differ is in the kinds of concern they voice, the priority they attach to environmental issues and the forms of action they are prepared to take in the expression of their environmental concerns.

If consciousness of environmental deterioration is a necessary condition of collective action of an environmentalist or ecological kind and/or support for environmental movements and Green parties, it is by no means a sufficient one; there is no simple correspondence between the state of environmental consciousness in a country and the level of development of its environmental movement or the electoral fortunes of its Green party. Of the countries where environmental consciousness has been most consistently high and where the environment has regularly ranked highly as a salient political issue, the Netherlands and Denmark have produced only tiny and poorly supported Green parties and, in the Netherlands, although environmental movement mobilizations have been significant in the past, the number of activists is now small even while the conscience constituency prepared to give money to environmental causes is vast and growing. Sweden, which does have a modestly successful Green Party, has virtually no autonomous environmental movement despite generally high levels of environmental awareness (Jamison et al., 1990). Yet in other countries where environmental awareness is less highly developed—such as Belgium and France—green parties have been relatively successful even though environmental movement activity is at relatively low levels by comparison with their northern neighbours. In Italy, where levels of both general concern about the national and global environment and personal complaint about the state of the citizen's own environment were higher even than in Germany (Hofrichter and Reif, 1990: 134), the environmental movement is relatively underdeveloped and Greens have made only very modest electoral progress. In the newly democratic countries of southern and eastern Europe, environmental degradation is often extreme and levels of concern and complaint are high, but the political salience of environmental issues is low, and environmental movements and Green parties, where they exist, have made little progress (Jehlicke and Kostecke, 1995; Demertzis, 1995).

In both southern and eastern Europe, although large majorities profess concern about the environment, their environmental consciousness is more likely than in northern Europe to take the form of personal complaint rather than global concern (Hofrichter and Reif, 1990). The distinction between personal complaint and global concern environmentalism parallels, albeit imperfectly, that made between concern with the brown issues of pollution and environmental hazards, on the one hand, and the green, even leafy green, concern with the preservation of what remains of relatively pristine natural environments, on the other. Crook and Pakulski (1995), examining the Australian survey evidence, found brown concerns to be more widespread, but much less likely than green concerns to be associated with environmental activism. The distinction also parallels that which Inglehart (1977) has proposed between materialism and post-materialism. Inglehart included the rise of environmentalism as one of the consequences of the increasing prevalence of post-materialist consciousness, but in fact the correlation between the environmental item in Inglehart’s battery and the index of post-materialism was weaker than for any other item. This suggests that the materialism-post-materialism distinction is especially problematic since environmental concerns embrace both the aesthetic and principled concern with environmental protection and the essentially materialist concerns with safety and security; even global environmental concern might be represented as an ultimately materialist concern. Nevertheless, it is post-materialism which is more highly correlated with activism.

It would clearly be wrong to assume that there was any very close correlation between the relative salience of environmental issues and people’s preparedness to take practical action which can be construed as environmentally friendly. In Britain, even as the relative salience of the environment as a political issue has declined dramatically (from the 35 per cent who ranked it as the most important issue in July 1989 to the 5 per cent who ranked it among the most important issues in 1995), the proportion preferring environmental protection even at the expense of the economy has risen (36 per cent in 1994 placed environmental protection above the economy, compared with 10 per cent who preferred the economy even at the expense of the environment). Even more remarkable is the rise in the proportion classified as environmental activists because they reported taking five or more environmentally friendly actions ‘in the last year or two’. 14 per cent in 1988, it rose to 20 per cent in 1989 and was 29 per cent in 1995.

Dimensions of Environmental Knowledge and Concern

Among the more important antecedents of concern and action is knowledge. The International Social Survey Programme in 1991–2 devised a battery of 12 (not particularly good) environmental knowledge questions which required simple true or false answers and a battery of six questions designed to measure perception of environmental threat. The results for the 1993 survey in Britain are presented by Witherspoon (1994). Levels of knowledge rose monotonically with educational qualifications, but levels of concern were more generally and interestingly, the most scientifically knowledgeable respondents appear, at first sight, to be less concerned than average about the threat to themselves and their families posed by environmental dangers and yet they were more likely to be politically active on environmental issues. The explanation lies in part in the fact that it is those whose perceptions of nature are most romantic and those whose views of the environment are most pessimistic who voice greatest concern about environmental threats to themselves, their families and the environment; yet romanticism about nature correlates only modestly with support for green policies; environmental pessimism does not correlate at all. When their lesser tendency to both romanticism and pessimism about the environment was discounted, the more knowledgeable actually appeared also to be more concerned about environmental hazards (Witherspoon, 1994: 122) as well as most supportive of environmental policies and most likely to be active in environmental movements. Moreover, green political activists seem to have a worldview or ideology that links their environmental activism with resistance to a preoccupation with economic growth and with sympathy for strong welfare provision. Thus ... green political activism is much more likely to be found among people who have a coherent ideology linking social and environmental problems and solutions (ibid. 128).

Support for green policies even at some personal cost ‘depends not only upon knowledge but upon social values’... Those who place a high value on the welfare of others and on a
collective approach to solving social problems are more likely to be willing to support environmental policies than those who do not (ibid.: 135). 8

Rüdig (1995a) reports cross-nationally comparative data for knowledge and concern about global warming. At first glance, the pattern of the results is paradoxical: in 1993, about one-third of southern Europeans had not even heard of global warming, yet their levels of concern were relatively high (all above EU average). In Denmark and the Netherlands, however, the pattern was reversed: levels of knowledge were high but concern was relatively low. This paradoxical finding fits British evidence of anxieties about various potential hazards.

Witherspoon and Martin (1993), analysing data from the 1991 British Social Attitudes Survey, distinguish three kinds of attitudes towards the environment: global green awareness, concern about pollution, and concern about nuclear power and hazardous wastes. Concern about pollution is spread quite evenly through the population, whereas it is especially the less well-educated and women who voice concern over nuclear power and hazardous wastes; in both cases, scientific, technical and medical professionals exhibit less concern than average. Global green awareness, which best approximates to an ecological world view, has a quite different social profile: scientific, technical and medical professionals are not underrepresented, while those most overrepresented are the middle-aged, the highly educated, women and people living in the south of England.

What this suggests is that there is an inverse relationship between knowledge and anxiety: people who are most confident in the knowledge that they understand an environmental problem are less likely to be so diffusely and disingenuously worried about it that they feel unable to do anything practical to contribute to its mitigation. The confidence of the scientifically and technologically educated may be misplaced, but this finding is nevertheless entirely consistent with the long-standing political sociological finding that knowledge is positively correlated with a sense of personal efficacy, and it may help explain why those countries where environmental problems are objectively greatest and ‘personal complaint’ environmental concern is predominant are not places in which either scientific knowledge about or action to redress such problems is widespread. 9

But perhaps the relationship is more indirect, with knowledge about environmental issues a product of higher levels of education and/or social status, and relative lack of anxiety about environmental problems a side-effect of the generally enhanced levels of personal efficacy that flow from higher levels of education and/or social status. 10 It seems reasonable to suppose that there is a fairly close association between ‘post-materialism’ and ‘global green awareness’, on the one hand, and between ‘materialism’ and ‘personal complaint’ and fear of environmental hazards, on the other. The connection would seem to be education and, presumably, the more highly educated have an enhanced cognitive capacity to comprehend complex environmental issues, to assess risks in relation thereto and to conceive of practical remedial action, either individual or collective. The British data (Witherspoon and Martin, 1993) confirm this: the simpler and less sophisticated forms of environmental concern were most likely to be found among the less well-educated, whereas attitudes approximating to an ecological world view were more likely to be found among the higher educated (cf. Jelicic, 1994). 11

However, that still leaves us with the problem of explaining the cross-national variation, both in levels of knowledge and in the incidence and forms of collective action on environmental issues. Levels of education are, broadly, higher in northern than in southern Europe (although the differences for younger generations are now relatively small), but they are arguably at least as high in eastern Europe as in the north and west. Clearly the differences in levels of formal education do not suffice to explain the patterns of cross-national variation in knowledge and action. The kinds of education may have more to do with it. 12 The upshot, however, is that whatever we are able to say about the antecedents and correlations of the environmental consciousness of individuals does not help very much in explaining the pattern of cross-national variation. This suggests that the determinants of both consciousness and, especially, action may be highly contingent upon situation and circumstance. 13

Knowledge and Environmental Movements

Knowledge and concern are not simply antecedents of environmental activism. Touraine et al. (1983: 4) described the anti-nuclear movement as ‘the spearhead of the ecology movement’ which transformed ‘a scientific and cultural apprehension into a specifically social conflict’, a movement which began as a defensive reaction was transformed in the course of its confrontations with technocracy and ended by challenging the ‘dominant image of modernity’ and proposing an alternative model of development. Similarly, Bluhdorn (1995) argues that a comparable shift has occurred in the course of the development of the German environmental movement, away from an alarmist and romantic concern to protect ‘nature’ and towards a practical and constructive ecologism.

There is a considerable body of evidence that most people do not have, and probably do not have the means to develop, systematic world views such as ecologicalism (Converse, 1964; Klingemann, 1979; Rohrschneider, 1993). However, it suggests that, where the issue domain is clear and where active environmental movements maintain the visibility of the issues, mass publics are quite capable of developing consistent ecological attitudes. Rohrschneider interprets 1980s Eurobarometer data as showing that mass publics exhibit more consistent and internally coherent ecological beliefs and attitudes in Germany and the Netherlands than they do in Britain and France. The reason, he suggests, is that in Germany and the Netherlands active and visible movements and parties have kept environmental issues high on political agenda, whereas the more moderate British environmental movement and, especially, the smaller and less visible French movement have failed to exercise a comparable constraining effect upon public opinion.

Eyerman and Jamison (1991: 66) identify three dimensions of knowledge interests: cosmological, technological and organizational. These three dimensions of the knowledge interests of the environmental movement – an ecological world view, a small-scale alternative technology and a democratic ‘science for the people’ – were developed separately in the 1960s and were promulgated by conservation societies, critical scientists and science students in more or less established ways. It was, however, only when the three dimensions were combined, in the early 1970s, in a new set of organizations by particular ‘movement intellectuals’ that environmentalism could grow into a social movement.

Modern environmentalism is seen by Eyerman and Jamison as a set of knowledge interests around which a social movement might be mobilized, but whether that potential is realized depends upon the interplay of knowledge interests, the political strategies of activists and their opponents, and the cultural and institutional milieu within which the interaction takes place. If, as it seems reasonable to suppose, at least at elite level, the separate constituents of the ‘knowledge interests’ of environmentalism have by now been diffused,
albeit unevenly, across Europe, why is it that they have been diffused beyond those elites to such different degrees, and why have the forms of environmental action and its degree of success varied so much from one country to another and over time?

Eyerman and Jamison distinguish sharply between traditional conservationism and modern environmentalism. This is legitimate at the level of world views but is more problematic at the level of movement organizations, their members and supporters. As Dalton (1994: 31) discovered, even by the mid-1980s the differences in the strategies, tactics and styles of action between organizational forms were surprisingly muted. Clearly, a process of convergence was under way within the broad environmental movement sector, and it was by no means simply a product of the progressive institutionalization and incorporation of more radical organizations such as Friends of the Earth (FoE) and Greenpeace; if FoE and Greenpeace were learning the etiquette necessary to smooth dealings with the powerful, so more traditional conservationist organizations were becoming more ecological in their world views and more radical in their tactics.

What Dalton found, contrary to his expectations, was that, although there was evidence of the effects of environmental movement organizations’ values upon their strategy and tactics, there was more and apparently increasing evidence of the effects of the pattern of opportunities and constraints inherent in the structures and constraints of the various national political systems within which those organizations operated (cf. Rootes, 1997a).

WHAT IS ‘THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT’?

Brief consideration of the concept of social movement is necessary at this point, because there is a tension and hence room for confusion between the very precise and delimited use Eyerman and Jamison make of the term and its more usual employment in the discussion of environmental movements. Eyerman and Jamison (1991: 103–8) conceive of the modern environmental movement as that relatively brief period between the constitution of the ‘knowledge interests’ which define the movement and their institutionalization in university departments of environmental studies, the environmental departments of industrial organizations, law and journalism, professionalized campaigning organizations and in professionalized environmental pressure groups such as Greenpeace and political parties, including Green parties. The emergence of the movement is possible when a new public space which allows the autonomous development of such a movement is created (in this case as a result of the new form of cognitive praxis developed in the course and as a consequence of the student revolts of the late 1960s); the movement has all but ceased to exist as a relatively autonomous public space when ‘its movement intellectuals have grown into new kinds of established intellectuals’.

Eyerman and Jamison (ibid.: 59–60) explicitly caution against identifying a social movement with its organizations. A social movement is, by definition, impersonal:

it withers away as its cognitive project disintegrates into its various component parts and they become either adopted or discarded… And although movements usually involve the creation of organisations or the reorganization of institutions, it is important not to mistake the one for the other. Organizations can be thought of as vehicles or instruments for carrying or transporting or even producing the movement’s meaning, but the meaning… should not be reduced to the medium. The meaning, or core identity, is… the cognitive space that the movement develops.

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For Jamison et al. (1990: 197–8), ‘to be a social movement, a collection of organizations, groups and individual activists must develop and attempt to realize a collective project, based on specific knowledge interests. It is this which gives identity to a movement and which makes it a potential force for fundamental social change’. The fragmentation of the movement into specialized groups with problematical relationships one to another raises the question of whether it is any longer possible to refer to it as a social movement (ibid.: 10), as does the tendency to the incorporation of movement intellectuals and concerns. Clearly, for Eyerman and Jamison, the notion of the institutionalization of a social movement, even in the form of a political party, is a contradiction in terms.

It is here that their conception of social movements parts company with that of Diiani (1992), for whom social movements need not embody anti-institutional styles of action or attitudes, while political parties may themselves be part of a social movement. What appears most to divide Diani from Eyerman and Jamison is the latter’s radical insistence on the preservation of the movement’s autonomy: movements must resist incorporation, not merely in order to safeguard their status as social movements, but ‘to remain an alternative source of knowledge and a force for fundamental social change’ (Jamison et al., 1990: 198). One suspects, however, that their characterization of even Green parties as a form of incorporation is the result of a perspective heavily influenced by their long residence in Sweden, a country whose Green Party has been unusually moderate (Bennulf, 1995a); by contrast, however, the German Greens, the disputes and defections of recent years notwithstanding, still appear to preserve something of the radical movement character to defy thorough incorporation.

The approach Eyerman and Jamison recommend appears better at dealing with the emergence and early development of a movement – the stage at which the paramount question is what distinguishes it from other pre-existing arrangements – than with its subsequent development and outcomes. Since we are no less concerned with the latter, the more inclusive conception advocated by Diani is to be preferred. There remains a complication, however: Diani is no less insistent than Eyerman and Jamison that collective identity is a necessary condition of the existence of a social movement. In the case of the environmental movement, however, the groups which comprise the network are too diverse in their understandings of environmental, social and political matters that there is little that is common in their outlooks and which might, therefore, be recognized by them as constituting their collective identity as a movement. There may be – and frequently are – conflicts among groups and individuals concerned to draw tight boundaries around themselves and to define rivals as being outside the movement but whom a social scientific observer might nevertheless regard as part of the same movement. Diani’s insistence upon the importance of shared identity appears to assume or to require a degree of consensus which is unusual in the fractious milieu of movement politics. It seems; then, that unless we accept a much more relaxed conceptualization of its collective identity (‘knowledge interests’) than Eyerman and Jamison – and Diani – insist upon, and focus instead upon the network’s links, we should be compelled by definition to abolish the present-day environmental movement.

Efforts to define social movements restrictively sit uncomfortably alongside commonsense understandings of what the ‘environmental movement’ is. A social movement is not, however, a natural object but a social construct. For the social scientist, a social movement is a theoretical construct whose purpose is to aid explanation. According to Weber, an ideal type is an abstraction from or approximation to social reality; its relation to that social reality is
necessarily not one of precise identity. Diani suggests that there are many environmental protests which are not part of a social movement because the protesters do not recognize their shared identity with other such protesters; there may, as Touraine (1981) puts it, be many luttes (struggles) but not yet a movement. Yet the social scientist observer might detect the latent connections and the potential which the actors themselves at any point in time do not.

Diani’s insistence upon the centrality of networks is, at first glance, less problematic. But Diani insists that social movements are networks. Where networks have disappeared leaving only organizations, Diani argues, there is no social movement. The problem with this essentialist approach is that organizations and networks are generally symbiotic. The fact that there may be periods of latency or quiescence in which mass mobilization is slight or absent and only the organizations are visible does not ipso facto signify the death of the movement; the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament survived for 15 years as a formal organization and virtually the only visible legacy of the peace movement, but its existence was crucial in providing a focus for the revival of peace movement activity in Britain from the late 1970s. Our definition should be flexible enough to accommodate such periods of latency.

Rather than adopt a very restrictive definition, it is probably more fruitful to accept that the environmental movement is a (very loose) non-institutionalized network which includes, as well as individuals and groups who have no organizational affiliation, organizations of varying degrees of formality and even parties, especially Green parties, and which is engaged in collective action motivated by shared environmental concern, but that the forms and intensity of both action and concern may vary considerably from place to place and from time to time (cf. Rootes, 1997b).

To have concealed the role of environmental movements in the construction of environmental knowledge and concern is not, of course, to have explained the pattern of variation in the incidence and development of those movements. It is to that problem that we now turn.

THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT: ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS AND GREEN PARTIES IN WESTERN EUROPE

It has been estimated that, in terms of the proportion of population who are members of environmental organizations, the Netherlands and Denmark lead the way (17 per cent and 10.9 per cent, respectively) from West Germany (7.5 per cent), Britain (4.7 per cent) and Belgium (3.4 per cent) with the other western European countries some way behind (van der Heijden et al., 1992: 18). The number and kinds of environmental organizations vary considerably from one country to another, but in most countries long-established conservation organizations exist alongside newer organizations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, which began as bearers of a more radical and wide-ranging environmental and ecological critique (Rucht, 1989; Pinger, 1992). If these newer organizations today look less dramatically different from the older ones than they did (Dalton, 1994), it is both because, as they have grown in numbers and influence, the new organizations have become at least semi-institutionalized, and because the old have learned something in both world view and, especially, tactics from the new.

Towards the Institutionalization of the Environmental Movement?

The degree to which environmental movement organizations have become institutionalized varies a great deal, both according to the degree to which authorities perceive and take seriously mass public concern about environmental issues and according to the ways in which movement activists respond to the patterns of opportunities and constraints which confront them in their efforts to pursue their objectives. Activists’ values may appear to influence the patterns of their actions rather less than the prevailing pattern of opportunities and constraints. The degree to which environmental movements are ‘domesticated’ and behave with moderation depends principally upon the extent to which they are incorporated into the process of official decision making, by consultation or by formal representation, and upon the availability or absence of alternative avenues of effective political prosecution of the environmentalist cause.

The British case represents one extreme in its combination of formal and informal administrative access and de facto political exclusion. Institutional arrangements in Britain have generally favoured the ‘bureaucratic accommodation’ of environmental interests (Jordan and Richardson, 1987) and environmentalist organizations have tended to adopt a posture of negotiation and consultation with officials rather than protest and confrontation. Even Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace now enjoy the status of expert witnesses, consulted by government departments and agencies on matters of mutual concern (McCormick, 1991; Doherty and Rawcliffe, 1995). However, ‘bureaucratic accommodation’ may be a two-edged sword: if it implies consultation, on the one hand, it may also characterize a process whereby bureaucrats ‘cool out’ environmental campaigners by merely appearing to take their concerns seriously.

Access to administrative decision makers has been the main route by which British environmentalists have sought to influence policy; they have found the mainstream political parties less accessible and less responsive. Environmental campaigners, reeling from the triumph of executive policies and most environmental issues rendered party political divisions, see no advantage in attaching themselves to any one party and prefer to deal with the holders of decision-making power rather than with the contenders for political office (McCormick, 1991: 41). The greater activism in traditional environmental organizations in recent years may have balanced this strategy somewhat, but British environmentalists have quickly adapted to more conventional modes of activity when the opportunity arises (Rüdig, 1995b). Ironically, only the Green Party, itself effectively excluded from serious political contention by a peculiarly unresponsive electoral system (Rootes, 1995b), has a strong value commitment to democratic mass participation; the rest of the British environmental movement is more narrowly success-oriented.

Thus, in striking contrast to Germany where the electoral successes of the Greens have been one of the principal levers with which the institutions of government have been pressed open to an environmental movement which grew up outside and in opposition to them, in Britain environmental activism has tended to be restricted to the conservationist and environmental reformist end of the spectrum by the institutional framework within which it operates. This is in striking contrast to Germany, where the electoral successes of the Greens have been one of the principal levers with which the institutions of government have been pressed open to an environmental movement which grew up outside and in opposition to them. In Britain, on the other hand, radical ecology has been left to a Green Party whose comparative weakness is in
part both the product and a reinforcement of the tendency of an historically well institutionalized environmental movement to seek alternative means of access to decision makers and to cultivate relationships with bureaucrats rather than politicians. 20

This ‘institutionalization’ of ‘the environmental movement’ is, however, neither complete nor without anomalous consequences. Recent events have highlighted the changing character of environmental protest in Britain and elsewhere in western Europe. Organizations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace which have generally been regarded as the radical, activist end of the environmental movement have, as a result of their past successes, increasingly been admitted to policy-making circles, but maintaining the expertise necessary to produce informed criticism and constructive alternatives is expensive and requires an ever-increasing flow of funds, and both FoE and Greenpeace have become large and cumbersome organizations. Each has in the mid-1990s suffered stagnation or decline in the numbers of its members/supporters (albeit from very high levels) and each has sought to address the problem of how to involve rank-and-file supporters in campaigns which are centrally directed. However, because of their dependence upon access to policy makers and to funding, and their vulnerability to legal action, each has been increasingly concerned to demonstrate that it is ‘responsible’.

This has resulted in both FoE and Greenpeace being outflanked by more radical ad hoc groupings composed of local objects, national campaigners of various affiliations and what might rather loosely be described as ‘green anarchists’. Several campaigns initiated or coordinated by FoE or Greenpeace have, in effect, been taken over by these more radical, with the result that FoE and Greenpeace are left in the uncomfortable position of having publicly to distance themselves from actions of which many of their supporters at least privately approve. The irony of this is that FoE and Greenpeace are increasingly put in a compromising position analogous to that in which their own rise had earlier placed older environmental organizations. There are three particularly interesting dimensions to these developments:

1. the rise of a new generation of environmental protesters with no loyalty to established environmental movement organizations (in Britain, this is most obvious in the case of anti-roads protests – see Doherty, 1996);
2. the difficulties of hitherto radical campaigning organizations such as FoE and Greenpeace in coming to terms with such developments and balancing their own interests in deepening constructive links with governments and businesses with the need to retain the support of an environmental constituency at least some elements of which are increasingly disposed to activism;
3. the uncertainties these developments create for environmental policy makers who fear they can no longer rely on organizations such as FoE and Greenpeace either to act as barometers of activist environmental sentiment or as negotiators on behalf of environmental interests.

These developments have parallels in a number of other western European countries, including Spain and France, and they await systematic social scientific investigation. Their outcome is a matter for speculation, but it seems probable that what we are now witnessing is a phenomenon well established in the traditionally more activist polity of the USA: local, informal action gives rise to new formal organizations which are in turn challenged by new

local, informal action, and so on ad infinitum. If there is an iron law of oligarchy which dictates that organizations become increasingly cumbersome and hierarchical, there appears also, as Alvin Gouldner (1955) suggested, to be a correlative iron law of democracy which dictates that cumbersome bureaucratic organizations are sooner or later – or perennially – challenged by new, uninstitutionalized forms of collective action.

If the rise of informal environmental radicalism is a recent development deserving of more attention, the conditions of the institutionalization of environmental political action nevertheless bear closer consideration. In particular, we need to consider the circumstances which have led, in some countries but not in others, to the development of Green parties as the political vanguard of the environmental movement.

Anti-nuclear Movements

Although in some countries environmental movements and Green parties have been able not merely to coexist, but to reinforce one another’s activities, Green parties have not usually begun simply as party political translations of less directly political environmental social movements. One reason is that political ecology, which is the political philosophy which guides Green parties, is a more radical and inclusive world view than environmentalism.

Where Green parties have grown directly out of social movements, it is more often out of specifically anti-nuclear movements than from more diffuse environmental movements.

Environmental movement organizations often have long histories, are well institutionalized and well embedded in relationships with official conservation agencies and may involve a wide range of constructive and reformist practical activities that only rarely spill over into direct political confrontation and mass mobilization. Anti-nuclear movements, on the other hand, are more novel and their concerns more urgent. 21 Because they are usually organized around attempts to prevent the construction of new nuclear installations, the timescale for possible success is relatively short, so intense but relatively short-lived mass mobilization seems more appropriate. Moreover, because anti-nuclear movements are usually conceived as single-issue campaigns, they are typically organized as broad coalitions 22 of pre-existing groups, very often including small left-wing parties whose members are attracted not merely by the opportunity to proselytize, but by the fact that the anti-nuclear issue involves considerations of international relations and a critique of the forms of the state.

Thus the way the anti-nuclear issue combines environmental concern with issues of concern to other political groupings builds in the likelihood that anti-nuclear movements will be broad coalitions of environmentalists, ecologists, political radicals generally and the radical left in particular. Under the right conditions, the contacts forged in such movements may, as they did in West Germany, evolve into Green parties. Both the Austrian (Haerpfer, 1989: 23) and Swedish Green parties had their origins in referendum campaigns against nuclear power, and anti-nuclear movements made important contributions to the early development of Green parties in Finland (Pasule, 1989: 81), Luxembourg (Koeber, 1989: 131) and France (Pondidnis, 1994).

Movements, Parties and Structural Opportunities

In many countries, Green parties exist alongside and in uneasy alliance with more organizationally diffuse green movements. In Belgium, Agalev drifted into the status of a political party and coexists with a movement of the same name. In France, where political ecology
emerged as early as anywhere, Greens, sharply critical of the prevailing political order and forms of organization, resisted the lures of party status more than anywhere else. Even at the height of their popularity, neither Les Verts nor Génération Ecologie was a conventional party comme les autres.

Similar reservations were famously prominent in the early development of the German Greens, and continued throughout the first decade of their existence as a party. The very formation of the party was essentially an opportunistic response to the possibilities for publicity presented by the European elections of 1979 and to the prospect of gaining from the funding provided by the Federal Republic to registered political parties. In an unusually clear-cut way, the existence of laws and procedures governing the registration of political parties was both a constraint upon the political organization of the Greens and a spur to their reconstitution as a political party.

Institutional structures have enabled French ecologists to make some electoral impact despite the weakness of the French environmental movement. Elections for the National Assembly are, like parliamentary elections in Britain, conducted on the basis of single member constituencies. Unlike the British system, however, a two-ballot arrangement means that French voters are, in the first round, offered a relatively riskless opportunity to cast a symbolic vote. Moreover, the personalized contests of presidential elections often unusually favourable conditions for a movement better known for its personalities than for its organization. Nevertheless, it is especially at local level and, since the decentralizing reforms of the last decade, at regional level, that the Greens have enjoyed most electoral success. Their great leap forward came when the Socialist government introduced proportional representation for the 1983 local elections; ecologists gained over 750 council seats, despite attracting rather fewer voters than in 1977, when they had captured just 30 seats. The translation of those successes and their good results in the 1989 European elections (also under conditions of proportional representation) into votes and seats in national elections was thwarted by the majoritarian system and the quite different conditions of political competition which that system dictates. Indeed, the absence of realistic prospects of national political representation has been one of several factors discouraging stable party formation among French ecologists.

The Belgian case offers an instructive contrast. Even before the recent adoption of a federal constitution, Belgium was a quasi-federal state in which elections were conducted by an unusually permissive system of proportional representation. The linguistic divisions of the country, reflected in the existence of separate Green parties based in the Flemish and French-speaking populations, are substantially institutionalized in the structure of regional government, with the result that the separate political arenas are small. Thus it was relatively easy for Ecolo and Agalev to move from modest local and regional successes to representation in the national parliament.

The importance of political institutions in opening or foreclosing opportunities for the development of Green parties can be emphasized by contrasting the cases of two countries with reputations as pioneers in environmental awareness and reform, Sweden and Switzerland. In Sweden, a relatively centralized unitary state, elections are conducted by proportional representation with the whole country voting as a single electorate, and a 4 per cent threshold discourages voters from experimenting with small new parties. As a result, despite some success at local level, the Swedish Green Party struggled for nearly a decade to translate its opinion poll rating into votes sufficient to enable it to surmount the 4 per cent threshold in national parliamentary elections.

If, in centralized states, even moderately successful Green parties have difficulty in surmounting thresholds of visibility and credibility to gain seats in national parliaments, it is not surprising that Greens should have done relatively well in that most decentralized of European states, Switzerland. There a predominantly ecological 'dark' Green Party enjoys a measure of electoral success in a federalist system in which the national parliament is unusually marginalized both by regional autonomy and by frequent recourse to referendum. In both countries electoral success in a radically decentralized system has its frustrations too. As Church (1995) indicates, a Green party still too small to have broken into the 'cartel of power' of national governments formed from the 'magic circle' of more established parties finds it difficult to influence decisions, to agree to the compromises required by a peculiarly consensual political culture and to garner the resources necessary successfully to initiate referendum campaigns.

The fact that Green parties have usually done better at local, regional and European levels (Harrison, 1993) can, in part, be explained by the relatively relaxed attitudes of voters to 'second order' elections in which lower turnouts amplify the voices of agitated minorities. For Green parties which have already established local or regional bastions, direct elections to the European parliament have provided stimuli to national-level organization and are, in effect, national second order elections conducted (except in Britain) by proportional representation. The Green group's use of the resources of the European parliament has assisted wider diffusion of the Green message in a more systematic way than did the earlier 'diffusion by example' of the German model.

Nevertheless, even the impact of European Union institutions and the examples of successful Green parties elsewhere are mediated by national political structures. In countries with federal constitutions and proportional representation electoral systems, the institutional matrix is much more favourable for the development and success of Green parties, and for the development of mutually beneficial relationships between Green parties and the environmental movement, than it is in centralized unitary states with majoritarian electoral systems. But such relatively temporally invariant factors as institutional structures fail to explain why Green parties sometimes do surprisingly well even in the least hospitable systems; or why Green parties are more successful in some countries with facilitative political systems than in others with similar political structures.

Political Competition and the Development of Green Parties

In both Denmark and the Netherlands, despite high levels of environmental consciousness, well-developed environmental movements and low-threshold electoral systems, Green parties have failed to flourish. The explanation lies in the state of political competition. In both countries, fragmented party systems produced by highly proportional electoral systems have made mainstream parties, especially those of the left, relatively inaccessible to environmental movements and so have defused some of the momentum which Green parties might otherwise have channelled.

In both countries, New Left parties which emerged out of the political upheavals of the 1960s survived to occupy political space which in other countries has been captured by Greens. In Denmark, the Socialist People's Party has proved both responsive to new issues and electorally successful, leaving little room for a Green party (Jamison et al., 1990: 115). The strict proportionality of the Dutch electoral system presents even fewer barriers to
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political innovation than does the Danish one but, because it imposes fewer constraints toward the aggregation of interests, it has produced an even more fragmented and intensely competitive party system in which minor parties find it difficult to attract or retain the attention of the electorate. The Greens emerged belatedly on a political stage already crowded with bit players hungry for larger roles. The relative success of the German Greens in due course encouraged the environmentally conscious "small left" parties of the Netherlands to cooperate and, after campaigning together under a 'Green Left' banner in the 1989 election and producing a modest gain overall, they formed a stable center-left coalition in the 1993 election. The Greens were formalized as a unified party in 1990.

In Italy, as in Denmark and the Netherlands, high levels of environmental concern and a permissive electoral system produced only modest gains for the Greens. The relative weakness of the Italian environmental movement, despite Italians' professed support for it (Fuchs and Rucht, 1994; Ashford and Halman, 1994), suggest that in Italy it may be especially difficult to convert diffuse goodwill into mobilized allegiance. Until recently, domination of the political landscape by parties of the Catholic and Communist subcultures and the fragmentation of the centre and radical left confined the Greens to a minor supporting role. The fact that the Greens were able to make any impact at all, despite their own fragmentation, owes much to the decentralized character of the Italian political system and the fact that, although national elections were conducted by an exceptionally permissive form of proportional representation, the country was divided for the purpose into regional constituencies. It was thus possible for Greens to organize on a purely local and regional level and yet still to secure the election of deputies to the national parliament.

If the collapse of traditional political subcultures can be argued to be potentially beneficial for the Italian Greens, it is, paradoxically, the persistence of traditional political subcultures which Riboux (1995) suggests has created opportunities for the Greens in Belgium. Because the traditional Belgian parties are so tightly bound to their "pillars," it has been difficult for them to respond to new issues. Despite the dissimilarities of their origins, the changing balance of political competition in Belgian national politics has encouraged increasingly close cooperation between Agalev and Ecolo and, until very recently, rewarded them with increasing shares of the vote.

The conditions of political competition in West Germany were uniquely propitious for the development of a Green Party. The socialist and Marxist left was marginalized by the deliberate centrist of the SPD, with the result that there was, especially in the wake of the early "green parties" of the mid-1960s, a relatively large majority of leftists unattached to any of the parties represented in the Bundestag. Largely independently, the "Citizens' Initiative" of the 1970s developed a substantial pool of environmental activists. The conjunction of these two forces was encouraged by an electoral system which financially rewards parties in proportion to the votes cast for them but which restricts parliamentary representation to parties which attract at least 5 per cent of the vote. Such a system in effect offers financial inducements to party formation and electoral participation, but also presents an unusual incentive to cooperation among interest groups and parties which separately could not hope to surpass the 5 per cent threshold. Furthermore, the federal constitution means that modest success in the smallest state was sufficient to propel the Greens into parliamentary politics. Thus it was that the Greens, despite being a loose and fractious coalition of environmentalists, ecologists, Marxists and anarchists, took the form of a political party and in 1979 entered the parliamentary arena by its least defended gate, the city-state of Bremen, and went on to secure representation in the federal and other state parliaments.

Their subsequent progress has not been monotonous, but both their greatest setback (their failure in the 1990 "unification" election) and their triumphs in state and European elections since 1992, can be explained by prevailing conditions of political competition. In response to the shock of losing their Bundestag representation in 1990, and after completing the merger with the East German Bündnis 90, the Greens emerged as a new Politics party of a more moderate and pragmatic kind with an ambivalent aspiration towards government (Fuchs and Schmitt-Beck, 1994: 110); their reward was a spectacular recovery of their standing in the opinion polls and a record nationwide vote (10.1 per cent) in the 1994 European elections.

The effects of political competition are still evident. The spectacular recovery of the Greens, both at national level and in most state elections, has been in the West, whereas in 1994 they fell below the 2.5 per cent threshold in all but one of the new eastern states and, in the federal election, in all five (Jesinghausen, 1995: 111). One factor in this disparity was that in the East, but not in the West, the Greens faced competition for protest votes from the ex-Communist PDS. However, the fact that the PDS succeeded in almost doubling its representation in the federal parliament in 1994 had the effect of making the resurgent Greens more acceptable, even as coalition partners, to the established parties (Jesinghausen, 1995: 113; Scharf, 1995: 178).

Political competition again worked to the advantage of the Greens in the March 1996 state elections; an opportunistic campaign in Baden-Württemberg by the SPD, which opposed both European monetary union and further immigration, is credited with having fueled the further rise of the Greens among voters disgusted by the SPD's tactics.

The French case is quite different. Although political ecology emerged as a national political phenomenon in France even earlier than in West Germany, a less favourable electoral system and quite different conditions of political competition have prevented ecologists from translating diffuse local support into national parliamentary representation. The successes of Les Verts in the European elections of 1989, and of both Les Verts and Génération Écologie in the 1993 regional elections, owed much to proportional representation but at least as much to a state of political competition in which the left and the traditional right appeared equally disgraced at a time when a resurgence Front National demonstrated that there were prospects of success beyond the confines of mainstream politics. Local and regional successes combined with the unpopularity of the Socialist government encouraged Les Verts and Génération Écologie to join forces in an attempt to overcome the effects of the majoritarian electoral system in the 1993 National Assembly elections. In the event, the renovation of the traditional right, the deepened unpopularity of the Socialists and the opportunistic intervention of six other purportedly ecological "parties" (Holliday, 1994) so changed the balance of political competition that the Greens' results were disappointing. Internal wrangling and the failure to revive the electoral alliance between Les Verts and Génération Écologie, resulted in the collapse of their vote (to a combined total of just less than 5 per cent) in the European elections of 1994.

Nor was the balance of party political competition favourable for the development of a Green party in Sweden. In the 1970s, the one environmental issue of great contention, the opposition to nuclear power, found advocates within the established party system in the shape of the Centre Party and a Communist Party which had so successfully transformed itself into a new Left Party that its electorate was more solidly anchored among the better educated than among the working class.
The Milijuparitet de Gröna was formed in 1981 in reaction to the disappointing outcome of the 1980 nuclear energy referendum and out of disillusionment with the performance of the Centre Party while in office (1976–8). The anxiety of other, better established parties, especially the Social Democrats, to recruit environmental activists and to proclaim their environmentalist credentials left little room for the Greens (Jamison et al., 1990: 59–60). Nevertheless, in 1988, because the impact of Chernobyl and a summer of media bombardment about pollution problems combined to raise the profile of environmental issues upon which the Greens were uniquely well placed to capitalize, the party succeeded in surmounting the 4 per cent threshold to secure parliamentary representation. By contrast, in 1991, the Greens succumbed to political competition transformed by the intervention of a new centre-right party and lost their place in the Riksdag. They regained it in 1994 because, of the more established parties, only the Left Party embraced opposition to Sweden’s membership of the European Union (Bennulf, 1995b). The Greens, who had long opposed Swedish membership, were thus able to increase their support sufficiently to surpass the 4 per cent threshold in the 1995 European elections to achieve a spectacular 17.5 per cent.

In most cases, Green party members and voters alike incline towards the left of the conventional political spectrum and Green parties have often made progress where established left parties have been in government or have been otherwise disabled from performing effectively as an opposition. Yet, as the French Greens’ failure in 1993 shows, the existence of a vacuum of effective opposition on the left has not always advantaged the Greens. Clearly, the Greens are not inevitable beneficiaries of the decay of traditional party alignments. The nationalist right may appeal to a different and less well educated constituency, but other new parties might, by appealing especially to the young, divert voters from the Greens, as Rossm did from Agalev in Belgium in 1991. If novelty was an asset for the Greens, it is clearly now a wasteful one.

From Palazzo to Piazza?

If there has been a general tendency for the entry of ecologists into party politics to be the predominant direction of development for ecological collective action, it may be that the period in which it was a nearly universal strategy is now drawing to a close. There is evidence that environmental activists in those countries in which opportunities to advance the cause by electoral means appear most limited are considering reorienting their energies upon direct action. Thus the Italian Greens, forced into the Progressive Alliance by the recognition that they could not by themselves hope to maintain their parliamentary presence under the new, primarily majoritarian, electoral system introduced in 1994, frustrated by their subordinate position within the Alliance and dismayed by their declining electoral fortunes, are divided about abandoning the palazzo of parliamentary politics in favour of a return to the protest politics of the piazza (Rhodes, 1995).

Similarly, it has been suggested (Dobert and Rawcliffe, 1995: 246) that the British Greens, in reaction to continuing electoral marginality and declining membership, are likely in future to concentrate on extraparliamentary protest activity. Such a shift of focus would, however, be a radical departure for a party which has never sought to confine itself to electoral politics. Green Party members have been active in recent protests against new roads and the export of live animals, and there are signs that Green Party membership has, as a result, begun to increase. However, despite calls for the party to abandon fruitless electoral contests, its 1996 conference committed it to fielding candidates in the next parliamentary election. It is part of the flexibility of the ‘movement party’ that it can redirect its energies from one arena to another in response to changing opportunities, and it would be surprising if British Greens did not adjust the balance of their efforts in light of their experience and assessment of their prospects of affecting results.

The impact of recent electoral failures is likely to be less dramatic upon the strategies of committed Green Party members than upon the wider constituency of the environmental movement whose members will be increasingly difficult to persuade of the practical relevance of Green parties to the pursuit of their goals. Whether they turn their backs upon electoral politics altogether, or whether they transfer their allegiances to other, more electorally successful parties will depend largely upon the policy commitments of these parties; if other parties do offer credible policies on the environment, then in countries like Britain and Italy the prospects for Green parties are bleak.

ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN EASTERN EUROPE

It is clear that the objective severity of environmental degradation is not highly correlated with the incidence of environmental protests, the formation of environmental movements or the successful development of Green parties. Rudig (1990: 21) suggests that we need 'to look at the issue-making process and the emergence and course of protest movements dealing with the new issues'. Nowhere is this process more intriguing than in eastern Europe.

The failure of environmental movements to remain prominent or to issue in successful Green parties after the collapse of communism in eastern Europe is especially puzzling in view of the widespread environmental degradation in the east and the prominence of environmental protests in the development of movements of opposition to state socialist regimes. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that such protests enjoyed a unique degree of licence under state socialism; green became a protective colouring for all manner of opponents and critics (Jehlicka, 1994) and environmental protests became, as well as vehicles by which reformists within the regimes could test the political water, training grounds for activists. Either because they were never devoutly green, or because they saw the problems of the construction of democracy and the reconstruction of economic and social life in the wake of the collapse of state socialism as requiring other political priorities, many such activists soon became prominent in more mainstream political parties or were absorbed into the ministries (Waller and Millard, 1992: 170–71).

It is important, however, not to overstate the role which environmental protest played in the final years of state socialism; the fact that it was by 1989 an almost universal theme of the critique of communist power does not mean that it was everywhere central or that it ran very deep. Of the opposition movements which developed from the late 1970s in Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Poland, 'only the GDR's Evangelical churches included environmental issues in their early appeals' (ibid.: 165). Nevertheless, by 1989 the main opposition movements in all three countries embraced defence of the environment, along with peace and human rights. This inclusion of environmental defence may have owed more to the desire to maintain the broadest possible front of critique of and opposition to the regime than to any profound commitment to environmentalism; for instance, in Poland environmentalists were
marginalized within Solidarity, despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that, by the late 1980s, there was a well-developed pluralistic and independent environmental movement (Gliniski, 1994), ranging across the spectrum from dissident, through autonomous, to government-sponsored organizations (Waller and Millard, 1992: 167).

However, in Hungary, where no single movement emerged with a comparable overall aggregating function, dissent clustered around the Dunabogdai Circle, a single-issue movement with the limited environmental aims of opposing the proposed construction of the Nagymaros dam on the Danube.23 Only in Bulgaria did the principal challenge to the regime take the form of an environmental protest, and only then was it an environmental movement which stimulated the development of an aggregative movement capable of challenging the communist monopoly of power (ibid.: 165–6; Baumgartl, 1995).

The failure of Green parties in the first free elections was not always attributable simply to the defection of environmentalists to other parties. Ježíková and Kostelček (1995) describe the curious case of the Czech Green Party. The Czech party, unlike its Slovak counterpart, was started by people who were neither environmentalists themselves nor had any substantial contact with environmentalists. The party drew its electoral support chiefly from a cross-section of the population in the most environmentally devastated lignite-burning industrial region of northern Bohemia and, in an attempt to outmanoeuvre the 5 per cent electoral threshold required for parliamentary representation, entered a formal union with a party which represented the interests of the collective farmers widely blamed for the devastation of the Czech countryside. The Czech case, however, is unusual in that it demonstrates the perils confronting Green parties which attempt to survive by aggregating their interests with those of erstwhile political competitors. More usually, as in Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria, the story of Green parties in the post-transition period is one of fusion but of fission.

Green parties, starved of the political skills of experienced activists and competing in an arena dominated by the agenda of economic reconstruction and democratic consolidation, generally did badly in the first free elections, and even worse in the second. Scuriously, the voters of central and eastern Europe are more concerned with the achievements of a measure of economic security than they are with the effects of global warming (Doktorov et al., 1993); even where environmentalists do secure election (as they have in various parts of Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Estonia and the Ukraine), it is usually in response to very localized and essentially materialist grievances about the direct and immediate threats environmental degradation and, especially, industrial pollution pose to the health of local populations.

Given that, it might be thought surprising that environmental movements have become so much less visible since the collapse of state socialism. Even anti-nuclear movements, which were (weakly) stimulated by the revelations following the Chernobyl explosion of 1986 and enjoyed a brief flowering during glasnost, have collapsed as the break-up of the Soviet Union has deprived environmentalism of the reinforcement of nationalism (Dawson, 1995)

What sense can we make of this? It is clear that movements flourished under state socialism to the extent that their existence was tolerated whilst that of opposition parties was not. Pickvance (1996) argues that, in general, the democratisation of authoritarian regimes has a depressing effect upon levels of social movement mobilisation; the peak of mobilisation appears to be in the early stages of democratisation, but as political opportunities increase, so grievances decline or become disentangled from critique of the regime and activists are drawn into more institutionalised forms of political activity.

Environmental movements and green parties in western and eastern Europe

This account appears to make sense of the experience of countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, but it can scarcely suffice to explain the decline of environmental mobilization in Russia because there the process of democratization has barely begun. This suggests that, for social movements to flourish, there is an optimal degree of regime openness and responsiveness; more or less fully liberal democratic regimes offer too many opportunities for conventional participation and normally generate too few political grievances, but regimes which are consistently unresponsive but only moderately repressive, as the Russian one is, offer too little incentive for collective action (since the prospects of securing favourable results are so low) and generate only moderate levels of political grievance.

Russia

The weakness of movements (and parties) in Russia in part reflects the implosion of political authority which accompanied the collapse of state socialism. Yanitsky (1994) suggests that, in the reform period, the state created instability in order to preserve its monopoly of power; subsequent chronic instability has produced conflicts which are mostly ‘a cruel struggle for power’ or resources.27 Whether or not chaos is deliberately created, it clearly has consequences for movements. Where the state is coherent, there is some point to movement activity. Where, however, the state appears chaotic and where state agencies lack the necessary authority, will, motivation and/or means to act effectively in response to the demands of protesters, activists will, as they did in Russia, channel their energies into highly localized exercises in self-organization and community organization which make demands at the level of the municipality or industrial enterprise, both because protests at this level are more manageable, and because these are the least ambiguous acts of whatever power remains in an apparently fragmented system.

In Russia before glasnost, the ecological movement was represented principally by student nature protection teams whose contacts with the wider population were discouraged by their scientific ideology, their small numbers and their purely conservationist orientation. Neither conservationists nor ecopatriots opposed the regime: ‘In their struggle against the corresponding ministries and departments they rested upon (and thereby defended themselves from the latter) a doctrine of “planned and careful use of nature” officially declared by the CPSU’ (Khalil, 1994: 2).

Even at the start of glasnost, the orientation of conservationists was still the protection of nature rather than human interests in the environment. Yet ‘hundreds of thousands of people could be mobilized to take part in mass [environmental] protest campaigns’; this mobilization was, however, mainly a result of the heightened popular disposition to protest in general, and of the mobilizing effort of the mass media which, in turn, resorted to the authority and charisma of leaders of the ecological movement. The period 1987–91 saw the emergence of a totally new — and entirely separate — mass movement based on local initiative groups and urban committees for public self-government (Yanitsky, 1994: 10).

Conservationists, who had no urban experience, were at first wrong-footed by this development but soon drew on their organizational experience and put themselves forward as candidates or advisors to ecologically oriented candidates in the elections of 1989 and 1990. Khalil (1994: 3–4) is probably exaggerating when she claims that, in the 1989 elections to the parliament of the USSR, ‘all 40 well-known leaders of the ecological movement became
people's deputies ... while the total number of ecologically oriented deputies elected to this highest representative body amounted to 200. To the extent that this is true, it almost certainly reflects the fact that the ecological movement was at the time almost the only organized grouping relatively untainted by previous tenure of power.

Thus contact was made between the two movements, but conservationists failed to understand the social demands of the mass civil initiatives protest movement; local ecologists lost leaders to the democratic movement and were left with neither leaders nor a programme for future action. In the years immediately following 1990, conditions worsened and links between the environmental movement and the population weakened: 'democratic' politicians forgot their promises and openly embraced the pro-nuclear lobby; privatization removed much of the material resource base for environmental organizations (Yanitsky, 1994: 10–11).

Changes in the external political environment created problems within the movement: nationally, Greens wished to keep their distance from communists, whom they regarded as apologists for the old order, but locally, environmental groups were obliged to deal with local holders of power, while at the same time being influenced by the perspectives of their international sponsors. As ecological groups were increasingly drawn into collaboration with the local holders of power, so they became increasingly professionalized and bureaucratized, with the result that a movement which originally had its base in the local initiative groups has become increasingly organized from the top, and has lost its grassroots base. Western aid exacerbates the process because it is inevitably channelled through the leaderships of existing organizations, and because it increases bureaucratization and hierarchy as recipients become distributors of aid; moreover, because aid donors only finance "constructive" projects, the movement is drawn further away from mass protest. All this enhances the tendency to think and act locally: to "think globally" becomes too great a luxury (Yanitsky, 1996a: 75). Environmentalism in Russia today is isolated from other social movements, demoralized by the absence of the solidarity which comes from mass protests, suffers a growing resource deficit and is totally alienated from its social environment in a political climate in which ecologism is aggressively attacked (Yanitsky, 1994: 13–14; 1996b).

In Russia, in the brief period of turmoil which followed the collapse of the USSR, the absence of stable, legitimate institutional structures was paralleled by the absence of stable organizations capable of the aggregation and mediation of interests. The result was the proliferation of informal associations which were as unstable as they were conflictual. But, to draw on the distinction Touraine (1981) makes between luttes and movements, although there were many struggles, there was little that attained even the modest degree of cohesion required of a social movement. Thus the collapse of environmental movements which had begun to develop in the Gorbachev era was succeeded by the proliferation of local environmental protest and housing "movements" (Pickvance, 1994). Social movements which extended beyond the neighbourhood scarcely existed because the institutional structure was either too fluid or too inhospitable and because the habits and skills of interest aggregation were too little developed.

Recognizable social movements were hard to identify for the same reasons that real political parties did not exist. The Soviet regime encouraged collectivist sentiment while discouraging collective action, not least (and especially in those states where state socialist regimes were Soviet-imposed) by atomizing society as to destroy the bases of interper-sonal trust among citizens (Marody, 1994; Seligman, 1994; Yanitsky, 1991). The collapse of the Soviet regime into a condition that veered between chaos and confusion thus stimulated a whole range of actions, from individualistic bribery to local collective action, but little that extended beyond the block or the neighbourhood.

If pre-transition social movements were characterized by a higher level of aggregation (if not of organization), it is because the state and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) provided a coherent object for protest. In other words, the aggregation of interests in social movements was paradoxically, encouraged by the cohesiveness of state power. In the pre-transition Soviet era, environmental protests were usually at a general and symbolic level that often appealed to the protection of the national patrimony in terms that were not intrinsically offensive to the regime's rulers and which attracted activists, often scientists, who were by no means root-and-branch opponents of the regime (the Baikal protests in the USSR and the movement against the Danube dams project in Hungary are just two examples). Since the collapse of state socialist regimes, symbolic, even "post-materialist," environmental protests have mostly yielded to altogether more practical and essentially materialist local environmental protests and housing movements.

If the fate of the environmental movement in Russia stands at one extreme, that of Poland and, especially, Hungary is quite different. The chief difference is in the institutional context within which environmentalists must contend.

Poland

The early development of the Polish environmental movement was, if anything, less auspicious than that of its Russian counterpart. Although a well-developed, autonomous and pluralistic environmentalist movement emerged in Poland during the 1980s, it was not an active participant in the new, post-communist political institutions and it had no connection with the self-styled "Green" parties which contested the first free elections. A major factor in the rejection of the opportunities presented by the regime change was the movement's commitment to values intrinsic to institutionalized, bureaucratic politics. Another was the habit of protest rather than constructive political action developed in the decade of opposition to the state socialist regime; as the costs of mobilization and resistance fell after 1989, so protest appeared even more attractive.

But if the values and habits of environmentalists led them to decline political opportunities, it is important not to exaggerate how great these opportunities actually were. Solidarity, which dominated the anti-communist opposition in Poland to an extent unparalleled elsewhere in central and eastern Europe, expressed virtually no interest in environmentalism, and so the environmentalist movement, marginalized within the anti-communist opposition, continued to be marginalized after the regime change, even to the extent that environmental protests were repressed in much the same ways as they had been under the former regime. As a result, the movement's alienation from institutionalized politics was etched yet deeper.

The political vacuum that existed during the 1991 parliamentary election presented opportunities that ecologists, because of the internal structural weaknesses of their movement, could not exploit. The Polish Green Party - faction-ridden, opportunistic and tainted by its embrace of former communists - did not attract ecologists. Nor did the pseudo-parties, invented as vehicles for the political ambitions of their candidates, which adopted 'green' names and slogans. Nevertheless, even the formal institutionalization of free and autonomous social and
political activity marked a transformation of the context for movement activity, as did the decentralization introduced by the reform of local government and, at a more informal level, increasingly stable social conditions. In the early 1990s, in the course of two major and sustained campaigns — against the construction of a nuclear power station and a dam — the movement developed diverse and sophisticated campaign methods, including an unprecedented willingness to lobby officials and to mobilize experts. Such pressures, and favourable changes of personnel at the ministry, led to an intensification of contact and ultimately to the institutionalization of consultation "intended to lead to permanent forms of participation by nongovernmental organizations in the ecological decision-making process" (Glinki, 1994b: 8).

But if the development of ecological action is shaped by its social and political context, Glinki's account makes it clear that such action may itself contribute to the transformation of that context. The environmental movement in Poland has, as an increasingly mature interest group, contributed to the development of civil society by introducing substance to the formal shell of democratic politics. In its practice, the movement has increasingly demonstrated the civic virtues of tolerance, cooperation and responsibility as well as helping to fill the void of middle-level social organization between state and individual left by decades of state socialist domination (Glinki, 1994b: 9; Glinki, 1996). The movement thus performs a dual educational function, tutoring its supporters in the practices of responsible and effective interest group politics and setting an example to the rest of Polish society, and so contributes to the self-reinforcing spiral of civic virtue necessary to the consolidation of participatory liberal democratic politics.

Hungary

Even more than in Poland, the environmental movement in Hungary has enjoyed considerable success: it has won many of its battles, succeeded in spreading awareness of environmental issues, achieved political influence at local level and continuous access to the mass media, and is courted by politicians eager to ensure their own re-election by being seen to be attentive to environmental issues or who see the movement as a useful ally in their own pursuit of environmental reforms (Pickavance, 1997). This is in stark contrast to the situation in Russia where the environmental movement is divided and demoralized by its failure to achieve any but the most local political influence. The fact that Russian environmentalists are, unlike their Hungarian counterparts, united in a national federation is less a source of strength than a response to their isolation, fragmentation and powerlessness.

The reasons lie less in any disparity of material resources or organizational entrepreneurialism between the Hungarian and Russian movements than in the political environments in which they operate. In Hungary a measure of pluralism long predated the final collapse of state socialism, and the subsequent development of new parliamentary liberal democratic institutions and practices has been relatively smooth. Stable democratic political parties have developed, and social movements have been able to remain outside party politics, in the realm of civil society, even to the extent that there are no significant links between green parties and the environmental movement. Thus the environmental movement has been able to achieve success in interaction with actors in a party political realm it has not sought — and does not need — to enter.

In Russia, on the other hand, the flowering of 'independent associations' in the brief era of glasnost has been replaced by an increasing centralization of power in the hands of an erratic executive presidency whose counterpart is a weak parliament in which stable democratic political parties have yet to develop, and which permits the persistence of power in the hands of bureaucratic apparatchiks better able to obstruct than to act constructively. Moreover, the distinction between social movements and political parties is relatively weak, and there are links between parts of the environmental movement and the left-wing Green Party. As a result, elected politicians, who are themselves largely powerless, are apt to see movement activists as actual or potential rivals rather than as partners in a political transaction, and environmentalists are divided between those who choose to fight on the terrain of civil society and those who, by forming political parties or standing for elected office, seek to enter the party political realm.

In Russia before glasnost, environmentalism took the form of protests rather than a social movement, partly because of the scientific, nature-focused character of Russian conservationism, and because the repressive character of the regime could not countenance a genuine social movement. Now, however, despite the fact that repression is only moderate, and despite the freedom of association which permits environmentalist organizations to function, popular environmentalism still takes the form of protest rather than a social movement. The principal reason is that the institutional environment and conjunctural context remains inhospitable to sustained collective action, and to the successful environmental action which would encourage more such action. The level of social movement activity in Hungary may be low, but Hungary, by contrast with Russia, presents a picture of a remarkably normal liberal democracy.

Environmentalism in Eastern Europe Reconsidered

The variety of eastern European experience and especially the contrasting fates of environmentalism in Poland, Hungary and Russia clearly show the impact of changing political structures, but also indicate that the effects of such changes are still mediated by political conjunctures and the strategies of actors. Pickavance (1995: 138) suggests that social movements in eastern Europe have followed a three-stage pattern of development similar to that seen in transitions from authoritarianism in southern Europe and Latin America: (a) a period of quiescence with sporadic and quickly repressed movement activity; followed by (b) the rapid upsurge of social movements in the period prior to free elections, followed by (c) a decline as political parties form. This may be true of protest activity generally, but the picture is, in respect of environmental movements, more complicated, both because of the special character of the environmental movement which gave it an unusual degree of licence under state socialism and because the nature of environmentalism's practical claims means that it needs to find a modus vivendi in the new order. But the extent to which there is order, and the accessibility of authorities varies considerably.

What is most striking about eastern Europe before 1989 is that environmental issues were almost never raised in pure form but instead came packaged with human rights, peace and nationalist concerns, the mix, and the priority of environmental claims within it, varying from case to case. The opposition movements were, in effect, coalitions and, as Diani (1992) points out, coalitions are not social movements because, in the interests of achieving the limited shared goal and minimizing conflict within the coalition, coalition partners refrain from the strident articulation of those elements of their own programme which are not shared by the other partners; as a result, they fail to develop the collective identity which
Diani regards as the *sine qua non* of a social movement. Environmentalists seldom had the autonomy under state socialism fully to develop an ecological movement, and the precipitate collapse of the communist regimes and the urgency of the new agenda of democratic stabilization and economic reconstruction almost everywhere pushed environmentalism to the sidelines. There was never the opportunity to develop the "knowledge interests" of modern environmentalism and, with them, a potent environmental movement.

Thus, although environmental concerns contributed to the formulation of a list of grievances which were believed to be beyond the capacity of state socialist regimes to redress, environmental issues were only ever part of those grievances and environmentalism never attained the status of the "master frame" which might, as the perspective of political ecology in principle could, put those other grievances into a political package other than the conventional liberal democratic market economic model presented to eastern Europeans by their West. Thus, in the circumstances of a thoroughly political and economic transformation, failure to achieve the hegemony of green philosophy in the crepuscular opposition to the old regimes condemned environmentalists to marginality in the new. Of course, given what we know about both the conditions of environmental awareness of east European populations and the generally precarious status of environmentalists within the opposition coalitions, it was never realistic to expect otherwise.

Environmental concerns in Eastern Europe before 1989, where they were not straightforward materialist protests against pollution dangerous to human health, were largely assimilated to human rights concerns or suffused with nationalist/patriotic protests against the degradation of the national patrimony. Certainly, there was little if any evidence of a global environmental concern. If ecologism had only a limited independent existence since the advent of liberal democracy, it is because the kinds of concerns most common in the east were those most easily accommodated (or converted) by parties other than Green parties.

**STRUCTURES, CONTEXTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The diversity of experiences of environmental movements and Green parties in Europe is such that generalization is difficult. A fairly advanced level of economic development appears to be a condition of the development of heightened environmental awareness, and particularly of global environmental consciousness, but the remarkable thing is that the levels of environmental concern as revealed by surveys are very high for all the European countries for which we have data. However, the salience of the environment as a political issue and the priority citizens are prepared to accord it vary considerably. It is not merely the level of economic development and standard of living which influence citizens' political priorities, but also the perceived stability or otherwise of democratic institutions and, among other considerations of political culture, questions of identity, cultural, regional and national.

Even where citizens accord high priority to ecological issues, whether that priority is translated into activism in an environmental movement, support for one or another established political party, or votes for a Green party will be greatly influenced by the impact, actual and perceived, of the pattern of opportunities constituted by social and political institutional arrangements, and by the altogether more contingent balance of political competition and competition among parties for votes and for the allegiance of activists, and competition over issues, to capitalize upon ascendant issues, to turn issues of broad popular concern to partisan political advantage, to dominate a particular "issue space".

Despite the great differences which exist between the histories and levels of economic development and theories of the countries of western and eastern Europe, the same apparatus of concepts and theories serves to make sense of the diversity of environmental movement development across Europe. Environmental action, wherever it is attempted, is obliged to negotiate a complex environment of institutions peopled by other, often rival, actors. The impact of particular contexts of action is etched upon the movements and parties which result. If theorizing and prediction is difficult it is because, although one can point to the ways in which social, economic and political institutional considerations create the framework for political competition and hence for political action – the outcomes of the complex processes of political competition ultimately depend, as the contrasting fortunes of the French and German Green parties clearly demonstrate, upon the actions and reactions of environmentalists themselves.

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**NOTES**

1. For a more developed justification of this approach, see Roots (1997a).
2. That is, however, a question we have beginning to address elsewhere (Roots, 1996b; 1997c).
3. I am grateful to Bert Klanderman for pointing this out to me. Bluhm (1995: 168) reports a similar phenomenon in Germany.
4. The data in the next two paragraphs are all drawn from CEE (1995). The interpretations are my own.
5. The decline was rapid: it fell to under 10 per cent by November 1990 and has stayed there since.
6. The same questions have been administered in a variety of other countries (unfortunately not the same ones in both surveys) at the behest of WWF in 1990–3 and Greenpeace in 1994. Among the European countries included in 1991–3, 64 per cent of the Dutch claimed to have taken part in more of the list of environmental friendly actions, followed by Sweden 55 per cent, Germany 50 per cent, Britain 49 per cent, Swiss 35 per cent, and Austrians 17 per cent. French 15 per cent, Italian and Polish 8 per cent, and Spaniards 5 per cent. In 1994, the Scandinavian countries ranked highest (Sweden 26 per cent, Denmark 23 per cent, Finland 20 per cent, Norway 26 per cent), followed by Britain 26 per cent, France 21 per cent, Belgium 21 per cent, Italy 19 per cent, Ireland 12 per cent, Spain 8 per cent, with three east European countries (the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Romania) at 6 per cent.
7. Cf. this finding in the USA by Ladd and Laura (1990).
8. This, incidentally, was counter to arguments (see, for example, Riggs, 1990) that there is a new "ecological cleavage" in mass public. It is not necessary to designate the seriousness or novelty of environmental issues to suggest that they appear to add a new dimension to the old collective-welfare versus individualist cleavage.
9. Cf. Wuthnow (1984: 135): "Scientific knowledge probably leads people to adopt a less apocalyptic view of nature, but it is positively associated with environmental concern and activism."
10. In the case of the minority, usually highly educated, who become environmental activists, the activity itself may generate, or at least enhance, the sense of efficacy. Tomaino et al. (1983: 35), discussing the antinuclear movement in France, observe that, while fear of a world out of control was frequently articulated by
new recruits to the movement, fear as a motive was increasingly fiercely rejected as these activists became more involved in the movement. This, Toman et al. suggest, is because there were no significant differences in psychological and reactive development, as they became more involved in the movement, a sense of personal and collective political efficacy that transcended their original motivations and led to the search for a social definition of their actions. No longer content to merely exercise a social reformist function, activists developed an aspiration towards an alternative form of social organization.

11. The correlation between post-materialism and social movements is generally explained by Soderstrom and Riddig (1991, 1995) amongst others who argue that post-materialist movements were more likely to appeal to social movements as they become more involved in the movement, a sense of social and political efficacy that transcended their initial motivations and led to the search for a social definition of their actions. No longer content to merely exercise a social reformist function, activists developed an aspiration towards an alternative form of social organization.

12. We have deliberately sidestepped the question of the deep-seated cultural differences among European peoples, not because of a belief that they do not exist, but rather because explanations in terms of culture are apt to be indeterminate, and it would be preferable to leave recourse to them only as a last resort.

13. The post-materialist movement is not, as a matter of rational choice, some people focus their environmental concern upon matters of personal complaint rather than other global issues. It is not, for example, a result of rational choice that factory workers prefer employers and employers of the poor to clean the air and an uncontrolled environment so much that the overridingly practical concerns to find the best employment that underpins the environmental movement crowds out concern with the environment.

14. Eyerman and Jamison accept that social movements are networks but operate with a restrictive conception of the network as a ‘collective identity’ to exist. It is sufficient that actors define themselves as part of a broader movement and, at the same time, be perceived as such, by those within the same movement, and by opponents and observers. (Diani, 1992: 8–9).

15. For a discussion of the environmental movement in Britain, see A. S. D. and M. C. (eds), Environmental Politics: A Reader, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.


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