ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS – GROWTH TO STRONG NATION

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ABSTRACT

Studies of global environmental politics consistently point out differences in policy and practice between developed and developing nation-states. The former acknowledge both domestic and global problems of the environment and in recent decades have moved environmental issues toward the center of national action agendas. Changes in public attitudes on the environment constrain leaders, as grass roots organizations and in many states green parties and movements pressure governments. New political institutions, particularly environmental ministries, focus state attention on issues, and because these nations have high levels of economic development, they possess the means to mitigate environmental degradation and take steps toward a sustainable future. In contrast, developing nations tend to lack resources, capable institutions, and civic associations motivated by environmental goals.

1. 1972 Stockholm's Conference: World Leaders met in Stockholm, Sweden for the United Nations Conference on Human Environment. The Stockholm Conference led to the establishment of UNEP (United Nations Environmental Program) to negotiate environmental treaties among nations and to help implement them.

2. June 1992 Rio Conference on the Environment: the second United Nations Conference on the Human Environment - known as the Rio Earth Summit - was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. More than 100 heads of state and thousands of public officials and more than 1,400 accredited Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's) from 178 nations met to develop plans for addressing environmental issues.

3. 2002 Johannesburg's Conference on the Environment. The third International Conference on the environment was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in the summer of 2002.

The Politics of local environmental Issues often Conflict with that of International Politics on the Environment. a) In the less developed countries, illiteracy, poverty, hunger and internal conflicts influence and/or limit domestic perception of environmental problems. b) In the rich countries, private managers of corporations wield far-reaching powers over stakeholders and employees and therefore make decisions that affect the public without any clearly defined responsibility to the people. Corporate managers also wield a lot of influence on politicians and public policy by virtue of their ability to make political campaign contributions. Aside the campaign contributions, the powerful Corporate Managers lobby Congress and Senate to pass laws that favor Industry against the Environment.

KEYWORDS: *environment, politics, sustainable, resources, conservation, regeneration*

INTRODUCTION

The environment has been on the political agenda since the late 1960s. Much has happened in that time, but is the planet better off? According to one popular heuristic measure of the state of the environment – the ecological footprint – things are bad and getting steadily worse. It would be wrong, however, to draw the conclusion that nothing has changed over the last forty years; in practice, the picture is much more complicated, as is illustrated by the following examples. In April 1986 the Chernobyl nuclear reactor exploded, with catastrophic human and environmental consequences stretching from the Ukraine across much of the Northern Hemisphere. Chernobyl appeared to be the deathknell for the nuclear industry, as most governments stopped commissioning any new nuclear power-stations. Remarkably, twenty years later the nuclear industry is back in favour, with the first new nuclear reactor in the EU for over a decade being built in Finland, the French and British governments planning a new generation of nuclear reactors, and President Bush offering financial incentives to anyone willing to build the first nuclear power stations in the USA in a generation. Ironically, the contemporary justification Citizens have joined

environmental groups in their millions, signed petitions and marched on demonstrations. [1,2]

Source: www.desautelesq.com

The environmental lobby has become an important actor in national and international politics, while the dramatic stunts of eco-warriors have become a familiar part of the political repertoire. But entrenched business interests and technocratic elites continue to exercise far greater influence over most key policy decisions. Green parties are now an established feature of party politics in many European countries, and have even joined coalition governments in several countries, whilst established parties of all persuasions have adopted a greener rhetoric. However, electoral politics remain dominated by traditional materialist issues, such as the state of the economy, taxation, public order and welfare policy. Governments everywhere have introduced a wide range of environmental protection policies and regulations, and most countries are formally committed to the principles of sustainable development, but priority is still almost always given to economic growth over environmental protection.[3]

Any attempt to explore the political conditions of a sustainability transformation more deeply will have to consider at least the following dimensions of societal organisation: democracy as the means of deliberating options, articulating policies and making collective decisions; political economy as the underlying material structures of power; and culture broadly understood as the symbolic realm of meaning, from which norms, expectations, and beliefs emerge. The state is deeply enmeshed in all these dimensions and cannot be conceived as an independent entity. The liberal state, for example, is premised on the institutional and symbolic separation of the economy from the political sphere of collective decision-making. This construction of a specific political economy supporting (and enabling) the liberal state has far-reaching consequences for the model of democracy employed by the state and for the resulting liberal-democratic social imaginary that contains the symbolic representations of what citizens perceive as 'possible' or 'impossible', 'adequate' or 'inadequate' forms of change. [4]

On the one hand, the liberal-democratic state's separation of the economic from the political sphere allows for a historically unique stability of democracy, in that large parts of social reality are 'depoliticised' by rendering them subject to the anonymous, impersonal, objectified mechanisms of the market. This allows for a cooling off and a disarmament of the political realm in that the scope of contention within democratic institutions is limited to clearly defined areas of social reality. On the other hand, the specific configuration of the political in the liberal-democratic state results in a specific demarcation of the fields of 'possible' interventions from 'impossible' ambitions of political creation and comprehensive change. While this separation has an important stabilizing function, it also disables not only forms of comprehensive change that might be necessary for a socio-metabolic transition, but also relevant discourses and deliberations about far-reaching changes. According to this logic, any specific configuration of the nexus between the political economy, democracy and the state results in a related configuration of the realm of the 'possible' and its delineation from the 'impossible'.[5]

This line of reasoning opens up some interesting pathways to be explored with regard to the political prospects of a purposive societal transformation: is the relationship between the state, political economy, and the democratic model as rigid as, for example, the Marxist tradition of state theory would have it (Marx and Engels 1970)? Or could institutional changes in the democratic model open up new trajectories of change that would ultimately also transform the political-economic structures? Can the delineation between the 'possible' and the 'impossible' be dislocated by means of a new configuration of the relationship between state and democracy? Could, for example, new democratic institutions be invented that locate some of the power of decision-making in the public sphere rather than limiting democracy to being a function of the state[6]

In what ways could a more deliberative model of democracy contribute to transformation? In what ways could a more agonistic one, placing stronger emphasis on the political as the realm of decision between incommensurable positions? How could democratic changes in the political economy of the state contribute to transformation without at the same time undermining past achievements of the welfare state and without rendering the entire structure unstable and crisis-prone? Knowing that many of these questions have been at the heart of democratic and state theory for many years, we believe that it is now time to reconsider them, with specific attention to their relevance for socio-ecological transformation. The historically specific functions of the environmental state cannot be extended at will to the task of a purposive societal transformation. Consequently, the search is on for ways of rendering state and democracy themselves more transformative in order to meet the challenges of what threatens to become a cataclysmic century.[7,8]

OBSERVATIONS

As we approach the end of the millennium we may be experiencing a transforming moment in the relationship between society and the environment. Awareness of an impending environmental crisis has been gathering for the last three decades. Evidence of environmental deterioration has been uncovered by scientists, analysed in expert publications and publicised in the media; it has also stimulated the growth of environmental movements lobbying for

environmental conservation. We have become familiar with such problems as depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer, the enhanced greenhouse effect, acid rain, the destruction of species and habitats, deforestation, desertification and resource depletion. From time to time the destructive power and environmental impact of modern technology are brought home by individual events such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill off Alaska in 1989, the explosion of the pesticide plant at Bhopal in 1984 and, most defining of all, the Chernobyl disaster of 1986.[9]

Growing awareness of environmental problems has been paralleled by increasing political and governmental activity at all levels to confront them. There have been major assessments of the scale of problems and potential solutions. Among them have been The Limits to Growth (10) and Beyond the Limits by substantially the same authors two decades later (11) analyses of specific issues such as the problem of pesticides in Silent Spring (11); as well as reports drawn up by global commissions, of which the Brundtland Report, Our Common Future (12), which focuses on the concept of 'sustainable development', is by far the most influential. Sustainable development has become a leitmotiv of environmental policy at the national level (for example, the Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan (13) or the UK environmental White Paper This Common Inheritance (14) and at the international level (the European Commission's Fifth Environment Action Programme, Towards Sustainability, 1992). The global interest reached an apotheosis in the panoply of reports, principles, conventions, programmes and policies generated by the UNCED Earth Summit at Rio in 1992 and it has continued through implementation plans and the Agenda 21 process. A point has been reached where sustainable development has become, at once, a goal, a strategy and a policy. [15]

Yet, for all its potency as a watchword, it remains an elusive, even enigmatic notion combining a scientific principle ('natural' standards and goals for sustainability), a moral guideline (an appeal to bring human behaviour within these 'natural' limits), a political goal (a starting point and final aim of a whole series of policy reports and measures) and a social practice (social development and change towards a more environmentally sound society).

There have been myriad attempts to define sustainable development. The concept is fully discussed in [16] of this series and the same ground will not be covered here. However, for the purposes of the following analysis, it is appropriate to provide a definition. This is taken from a Report of the Town and Country Planning Association of the UK and is essentially an elaboration of the Brundtland definition. Sustainable development is 'development that enhances the natural and built environment in ways that are compatible with:

- The requirement to conserve the stock of natural assets, wherever possible offsetting any unavoidable reduction by a compensating increase so that the total is left undiminished
- The need to avoid damaging the regenerative capacity of the world's natural ecosystems
- The need to achieve greater social equality
- The avoidance of the imposition of added costs or risks on succeeding generations (Blowers, ed., 1993).

DISCUSSION

Environmental issues, in recent years, have been at the forefront of the political agenda. Issues such as climate change, plastic waste and air pollution among others have been prominent features of policy making and political debate.
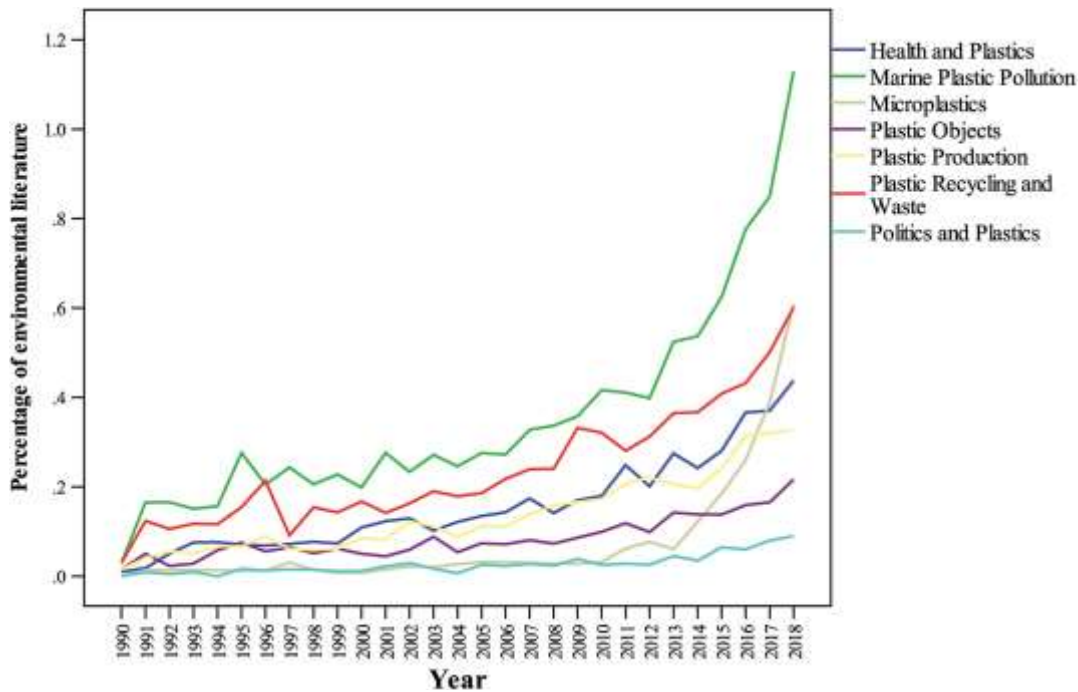
In a 2014 survey by Eurobarometer, they found that more than 95% of Europeans thought that protecting the environment was important. The study also found that more than half of those surveyed worry about air and water pollution, while waste and the depletion of natural resources were additionally top-ranking concerns.[17]

This awareness and support for the environment have been growing for many years, becoming an ever more mainstream issue. However, environmentalism came into existence in the early 1800s. The movement became increasingly prominent during the 1970s, a time when the first Earth Day and the UN's first environmental conference were held.

Blue Planet II had a huge impact, with around 78% of those that watched the program saying they try and buy fewer single-use plastics. The programme exposed the public to the harsh realities of what their litter can potentially do to marine life.[18]

Since the show aired, the UK government have signed up to the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, whilst also having brought together the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance and Global Plastics Action Partnership. The targets include eliminating unnecessary plastic packaging, transitioning to a reusable packaging model and ensuring plastic packaging is 100% reused, recycled or composted by 2025. The government has also been consulting on introducing a deposit-return scheme and placing a ban on the sale of straws, plastic-stemmed cotton buds and stirrers.

The rise of interest has led to widespread campaigning for governments to act in regards to these environmental issues, ultimately forcing it into the political sphere. The most notable recent example is the school climate strikes taking place across the globe, that were started by Greta Thunberg.

Recent IPCC reports detailing the extent of action needed over the coming years to limit temperature rises to between 1.5 and 2C, show the importance of governments acting to mitigate the potential effects of climate change. Thus, the environment is a vital component of modern-day politics, being an area, which requires urgent action.[19]

This action often requires national and international cooperation between governments, with agreements needing to be reached, in order to come to a decision on the best way to pursue environmental issues. These decisions must consider the world globally, as it is hard to place borders on these environmental problems; for instance, emissions can be produced in one area but will affect the rest of the world. Additionally, to achieve positive outcomes all countries must act in working towards changes to improve these problems, otherwise, it is hard for these issues to be resolved as they are often large in scale.

Significant changes to these issues often require government interventions, examples such as the 5p bag charge have decreased the use of disposable bags by 86% while also drawing peoples attention to the issue of plastic waste.[20]

The environment does, however, present challenges in the political domain as there are many vested interests in oil companies, differences in development levels on a global scale and generally, economic growth is viewed as being superior to the environment.

RESULTS

Brazil, Russia, India, and China (known as the "BRIC" nations) are rapidly industrializing, and are increasingly responsible for global carbon emissions and the associated climate change. Other forms of environmental degradation have also accompanied the economic growth in these nations. Environmental degradation tends to motivate action more than the threat of global warming does, since air and water pollution cause immediate health problems, and because pollutants can damage natural resources, hampering economic potential.

With rising incomes, environmental degradation tends to decrease in industrializing nations, as depicted in the Environmental Kuznets Curve . Citizens demand better air and water quality, and technology becomes more efficient and clean when incomes increase. The level of income per capita needed to reverse the trend of environmental degradation in industrializing nations varies with the environmental impact indicator. More developed nations can facilitate eco-friendly transitions in emerging economies by investing in the development of clean technologies. Laws implemented in response to environmental concerns vary by nation.[21]

The Environmental Kuznets Curve
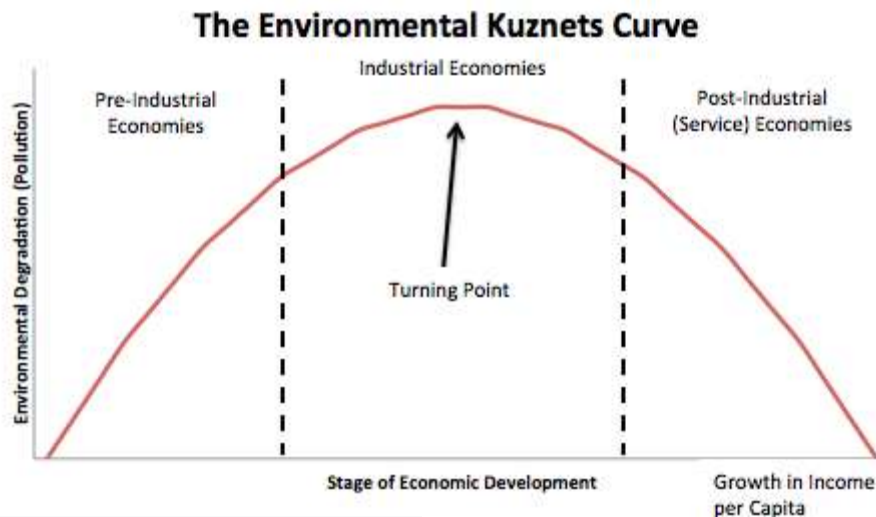
The Kuznets curve is a hypothetical curve representing the trajectory of environmental degradation in developing nations as a function of per capita income.

Public goods are non-rivalrous—a natural resource enjoyed by one person can still be enjoyed by others—and non-excludable—it is impossible to prevent someone consuming the good (such as breathing). Public goods are recognized as beneficial and therefore have value. The notion of a global public good thus emerges, with a slight distinction: it covers necessities that must not be destroyed by one person or state.

The non-rivalrous character of such goods calls for a management approach that restricts public and private actors from damaging them. One approach is to attribute an economic value to the resource. Water is an example of this type of good.[11]

The main multilateral conventions, also known as Rio Conventions, are as follows:

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992–1993): aims to conserve biodiversity. Related agreements include the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) (1992–1994): aims to stabilize concentrations of greenhouse gases at a level that would stabilize the climate system without threatening food production, and enabling the pursuit of sustainable economic development; it incorporates the Kyoto Protocol.[12]

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) (1994–1996): aims to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought and desertification, in developing countries (Though initially the convention was primarily meant for Africa).

Further Conventions
- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (1971–1975)
- UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972–1975)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) (1973–1975)
- Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (1979–1983)
- Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) (1992–1996)
- Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989–1992)
- Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedures for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (COP) (2001–2004)[13]

The Rio Conventions are characterized by
- obligatory execution by signatory states
- involvement in a sector of global environmental governance
- focus on the fighting poverty and the development of sustainable living conditions;
- funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for countries with few financial resources;
- inclusion of a for assessing ecosystem status[14]

Environmental conventions are regularly criticized for their:
- Rigidity and verticality: they are too descriptive, homogenous and top down, not reflecting the diversity and complexity of environmental issues. Signatory countries struggle to translate objectives into concrete form and incorporate them consistently;
- Duplicate structures and aid: the sector-specific format of the conventions produced duplicate structures and procedures. Inadequate cooperation between government ministries;
- Contradictions and incompatibility: e.g., "if reforestation projects to reduce CO_2 give preference to monocultures of exotic species, this can have a negative impact on biodiversity (whereas natural regeneration can strengthen both biodiversity and the conditions needed for life)." [15]

Until now, the formulation of environmental policies at the international level has been divided by theme, sector or territory, resulting in treaties that overlap or clash. International attempts to coordinate environment

institutions, include the Inter-Agency Coordination Committee and the Commission for Sustainable Development, but these institutions are not powerful enough to effectively incorporate the three aspects of sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The rationale for governmental involvement in the environment is often attributed to market failure in the form of forces beyond the control of one person, including the free rider problem and the tragedy of the commons. An example of an externality is when a factory produces waste pollution which may be discharged into a river, ultimately contaminating water. The cost of such action is paid by society-at-large when they must clean the water before drinking it and is external to the costs of the polluter. The free rider problem occurs when the private marginal cost of taking action to protect the environment is greater than the private marginal benefit, but the social marginal cost is less than the social marginal benefit. The tragedy of the commons is the condition that, because no one person owns the commons, each individual has an incentive to utilize common resources as much as possible. Without governmental involvement, the commons is overused. Examples of tragedies of the commons are overfishing and overgrazing.[16]

Non-Governmental organizations have the greatest influence on environmental policies. These days, many countries are facing huge environmental, social, and economic impacts of rapid population growth, development, and natural resource constraints. As NGOs try to help countries to tackle these issues more successfully, a lack of understanding about their role in civil society and the public perception that the government alone is responsible for the well-being of its citizens and residents makes NGOs tasks more difficult to achieve. NGOs such as Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund can help tackling issues by conducting research to facilitate policy development, building institutional capacity, and facilitating independent dialogue with civil society to help people live more sustainable lifestyles. The need for a legal framework to recognize NGOs and enable them to access more diverse funding sources, high-level support/endorsement from local figureheads, and engaging NGOs in policy development and implementation is more important as environmental issues continue to increase.[21]

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