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The Ecological Movement and Internationalism

ABSTRACT

The ecological movement is a very prominent, popular and influential element of the new social movements. Among them, it also has the most global outlook since many of today's environmental problems have a global dimension and cannot be solved on a national, let alone a regional or even local level. As a consequence, the movement often takes up international, transnational and global issues; it organises its own international conferences and contributes to many others; it tries to coordinate its activities and can draw on its own international/global organisations. At the same time however, most of the activities take part on a local, regional and at the most national level. It is here, where most environmental organisations and especially political parties become well known and where they concentrate their energies. The same is true for environmental debates, which often have global dimensions but more importantly are shaped by national contexts and national or even local issues. At the same time, the best known global organisation, Green Peace, is organised hierarchically and run from a dominant centre leaving almost no autonomy to its national subsidiaries. Apart from this organisation, however, the ecological movement is characterised by its international and global outlook, but derives its strength from and has its base on national and especially local levels.

Keywords: new environmental movement, new social movements, internationalism, Germany, European Union, greenpeace

Introduction

The modern ecological movement provides interesting insights for the research on new social movements. It shares a number of their characteristics, can be regarded as a prototype and is seen as having been innovative in two respects: Firstly, it only started to gain significance in the 1970s and secondly, it took up a topic that apparently had not been dealt with before. In addition, the movement gives the impression of being rather unconventional, especially since it emerged "*nicht von oben nach unten, sondern von unten nach oben*", (not from above but from below) according to Erhard Eppler. He was one of the first German politicians who showed interest in this new social movement:

“Nicht die Vorstände der Parteien, nicht die Ministerialbürokratie, nicht die etablierte Wissenschaft, nicht die Bischöfe und Kirchenleitungen, nicht die Redaktionen der großen Zeitungen, natürlich auch nicht die Vorstände der Konzerne haben den Wandel angestoßen, sondern Hausfrauen, Winzer, Sozialarbeiter, Lehrerinnen, Ärztinnen, Pfarrer, Ökobauern und Tüftler.”¹

According to Erhard Eppler and many other observers it was these people who brought the environmental issues to the attention of the population and parliaments and forced the state to act.

This argument sounds convincing when we consider the intense disputes on nuclear power plants, the many demonstrations against new streets and airports or the rapid rise of the environmental movement and its many conflicts with established institutions, bureaucracies, parties and professional associations. Until today, the environmental movement is characterised by the idea that it developed not only without support, but in opposition to the existing order.²

It is also a widespread and long accepted opinion that the movement can only be understood in a global context, as topics like biodiversity, emissions or climate change are global in scope. Accordingly, ecological movements are of global nature (in varying degrees, of course) and some of them, for instance Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, are truly international in their orientation regarding aims and actions.

This characterisation of modern ecological and new social movements is accurate but incomplete. They emphasise single aspects but ignore others, and offer an oversimplified and sometimes even romanticised image of these movements. In part, this may be attributed to the fact that the most significant publications on the movement were and still are being written by people who were either activists themselves or sympathisers. Their contributions by and large reflect their self-understanding and neglect what has since become clear, namely that the ecological movement was not as new as it sees itself; that it not only emerged bottom-up, but also got support from the top; that the basic

- 1 Erhard Eppler: Vom Entstehen eines ökologischen Bewusstseins, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 11 May 2011, available online: <http://www.erhard-eppler.de/textarchiv.php#anfang> (accessed on 12 Oktober 2015), (engl.: The movement was not started by the heads of political parties, nor senior civil servants, nor the established scientists, nor Bishops and leading church authorities, nor by journalists and editors of influential newspapers, but by housewives, wine-farmers, social workers, teachers, doctors, ministers, ecological farmers and inventors).
- 2 Cordia Baumann/Sebastian Gehrig/Nicolas Büchse (eds.): Linksalternative Milieus und Neue Soziale Bewegungen in den 1970er Jahren, Heidelberg 2011; Ansgar Klein/Hans-Josef Legrand/Thomas Leif (eds.): Neue soziale Bewegungen: Impulse, Bilanzen Und Perspektiven, Opladen/Wiesbaden 1999; Roland Roth/Dieter Rucht (eds.): Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2008.

international orientation did not always reflect the actual priorities; or that attempts for global cooperation often resulted in conflicts between industrialised nations and less prosperous countries.

This paper focuses on these issues. Its aim is to analyse the international, transnational and global topics and organisations within the ecological movements, which were of great significance from the very beginning. However, this approach runs the risk of overvaluing these aspects. It is even more important to ask how great a role these aspects actually played on a local, regional or national level—an apparently simple question that is, however, hard to answer due to the lack of research. Even in countries like the United States or Germany, there is very little research on the new ecological movements, especially for the period after 1980.³ Mostly, internationalism is mentioned briefly but rarely discussed in detail. As a consequence, the following sections provide a first introduction.

Let us start by looking at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment 1971 in Stockholm since it was the first global conference of the United Nations dealing with the environment. It characterised the beginning of global environmental policy and showed some of the problems that have shaped and are still shaping both environmental policies and politics when dealing with ecological problems. Furthermore, it is a good example of the support the modern environmental movement has, since its very beginnings, been receiving from the top.

- 3 Frank Zelko/Carolyn Brinkmann (eds.): *Green Parties: Reflections on the First Three Decades*, Washington 2006; Jens Ivo Engels: *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik: Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung 1950–1980*, Paderborn et al. 2006; Raymond Dominick: *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871–1971*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1992; Sandra Chaney: *Nature of the Miracle Years: Conservation in West Germany, 1945–1975*, New York/Oxford 2008; Christopher Rootes (ed.): *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, Oxford 2003; Andrew Jamison/Ron Eyerman/Jacqueline Cramer: *The Making of the New Environmental Consciousness: A Comparative Study of the Environmental Movements in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands*, Edinburgh 1990; Michael Bess: *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France: 1960–2000*, Chicago 2000; Kai F. Hünemörder: *Die Frühgeschichte der globalen Umweltkrise und die Formierung der deutschen Umweltpolitik (1950–1973)*, Stuttgart 2004; Silke Mende: *“Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn”: Eine Geschichte der Gründungsgrünen*, Munich 2011; Saskia Richter: *Die Aktivistin: Das Leben der Petra Kelly*, Munich 2010; Joachim Radkau: *Die Ära der Ökologie: Eine Weltgeschichte*, Munich 2011; Benjamin Kline: *First Along the River: A Brief History of the US Environmental Movement*, San Francisco 2000; Robert Gottlieb: *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, Washington 1993; Samuel Hays: *Beauty, Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States: 1955–1985*, Cambridge 1989; Hal K. Rothman: *The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945*, Fort Worth 1998.

Beginnings in the 1970s

In the run-up to the Stockholm conference, “Earth Day” took place for the first time in the United States on 22 April 1970. About 20 million people from schools, universities and communities participated in this event and they had one very prominent supporter: the then United States President Richard Nixon, who also advocated the foundation of the Environmental Protection Agency that was finally established in December of the same year. In addition, Nixon envisaged a role for environmental issues to promote international cooperation, including the involvement of the “North Atlantic Treaty Organization”. In this context he founded the “Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society” to deal with issues such as improving the quality of living and environmental protection. This initiative was not only met with a positive response. Critics feared military intervention or viewed Richard Nixon’s suggestions as a distraction from the Vietnam War. They were also concerned about the consequences the involvement of North Atlantic Treaty Organization could have on already established exchanges and organisations. At that time, there already existed lively cooperation on an international level, including countries of the Eastern bloc. The Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was an expression of these exchanges. Another was the adoption of an air pollution declaration by the Council of Europe in 1968 and the official proclamation of 1970 as the Year of Nature Conservation.⁴

Richard Nixon, however, remained undisturbed by all the sceptical responses and asked the Norwegian physician Gunnar Randers to pursue his project. Critics argued that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a military alliance was not suited to deal with environmental issues, but Gunnar Randers answered with a classic ecological argument: Everything was connected and it would be not *“ungewöhnlich, wenn ein Militärbündnis als Hüter von Natur, Urbanisierung und Industrialisierung agiere”*⁵ (it would not be “unusual if a military alliance acted as the protector of Nature, Urbanisation and Industrialisation”). Richard Nixon was driven by a pragmatic thought. He intended to promote the policy of Détente by using environmental issues—since they were both interesting and non-political—and therefore ideally suited to facilitate an East-West Dialogue.

Accordingly, he called for North Atlantic Treaty Organization to participate in the Stockholm conference. Finally, however, it was a traditional Cold War conflict that prevented the undertaking, namely the question of whether the German Democratic

- 4 Jan-Hendrik Meyer: L’européanisation de la politique environnementale dans les années 1970, in: *Vingtième Siècle* 113:1 (2012), pp. 117–126.
- 5 Jacob Darwin Hamblin: Environmentalism for the Atlantic Alliance: NATO’s Experiment With the “Challenges of Modern Society”, in: *Environmental History* 15:1 (2010), pp. 54–75, p. 57; Kai F. Hünemörder: Die Frühgeschichte der globalen Umweltkrise und die Formierung der deutschen Umweltpolitik (1950–1973), pp. 141–147.

Republic would be allowed to participate as an equal partner. Since in the eyes of the West the Federal Republic of Germany had the sole right of representation, the Western partners objected to the participation of the German Democratic Republic. As a result, the Eastern bloc countries boycotted the conference. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization also did not participate since Richard Nixon lacked sufficient support from the other member states. As a consequence his plan to engage the military alliance for environmental programmes failed.

In Germany, the preparations for Earth Day and other United States-environmental activities left deep marks on the government, as a meeting on 7 November 1969 demonstrated. At that time, the new social-liberal coalition was about to establish itself. Willy Brandt had not only announced his intention to improve animal welfare and nature protection, but also promised initiatives to establish “sufficient protection from air and water pollution and disturbances caused by noise” (*“ausreichenden Schutz vor Luft- und Wasserverunreinigung und vor Lärmbelästigung”*).⁶ When he made these announcements, the term “environment”, however, was not yet an expression used in public discourse.

Hans-Dietrich Genscher, new Interior Ministry, was responsible for the topics mentioned by Willy Brandt. After the coalition negotiations he was keen to extend his competences. The former *Abteilung III* (department III), part of the Ministry of Health, was reorganised under Hans-Dietrich Genscher’s responsibility as department for *“Gewässerschutz, Luftreinhaltung”* (Water Protection and Clean Air). He was highly interested in these topics, as they promised to attract new electoral groups, but he complained about the department’s complicated name. A civil servant suggested using the term *“Umwelt”* (environment) referring to the United States where it had become prominent in debates about nature and pollution. Hans-Dietrich Genscher appreciated this idea and decided to re-name the department to *“Umweltschutz”* (Environmental Protection). It was in this meeting that the term *“Umweltschutz”* was first introduced into the political debates of the Federal Republic of Germany—not as a consequence of public pressure or media reports but on the highest political level.⁷

A survey from September 1970 reveals how low public awareness about these topics actually was. About 60 per cent of the respondents indicated they had never heard of environmental protection. Citizens’ initiatives, which came to play such an important role, were only established a few years later. Their first national cooperation did not happen

6 Hans-Peter Vierhaus: *Umweltbewusstsein von oben: Zum Verfassungsgebot demokratischer Willensbildung*, Berlin 1994, p. 103; Kai F. Hünemörder: *Die Frühgeschichte der globalen Umweltkrise und die Formierung der deutschen Umweltpolitik (1950–1973)*, pp. 154ff.

7 Hans-Peter Vierhaus: *Umweltbewusstsein von oben: Zum Verfassungsgebot demokratischer Willensbildung*, pp. 104f.

until 1972 when the “*Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz*” (The Federal Union of Initiatives for the Protection of the Environment) was founded. Just like the Federal Government and the ministries, this movement followed the American model.⁸

Simultaneously, a conflict between the industrialised and less industrialised countries was erupting in Stockholm, which threatened the efforts for a joint approach. And this even despite the newly emerging and strongly symbolic images of the earth, taken by astronauts from outer space, which had underlined the fragility of the earth and the need to work together. After the Second World War both Russians and Americans had competed with each other as to who could send the first person into space. In doing so, one of mankind’s oldest dreams was realised and new, unknown territory was being explored. Their most important finding, however, was old: the earth. Its appearance was well-known, of course, since it could be found in many atlases and schoolbooks. But until the first images from outer space became available, nobody had seen the earth from a distance. From out of space, the earth looked fascinating, mysterious and vulnerable. It was a tiny globe floating near the “*dünne, sich bewegende, unglaublich verletzliche Hülle der Biosphäre*” (incredibly fragile shell of the Biosphere)—so the astronaut Loren Acton said.

The images had a fascinating effect. They showed the earth as one unit, evoking protective instincts that certainly boosted the environmental movement. The first images were published in 1966. United States Ambassador at the United Nations, Adlai Stephenson, spoke about the “Spaceship Earth” and the economist Kenneth Boulding published a pioneering paper entitled “The Economics of Coming Spaceship Earth”. He declared the present “cowboy economy” as exploitative and unrestrained as well as profit and consumer-oriented. In contrast he talked about the future “spaceman economy” that would make careful use of the earth’s natural resources.¹⁰ In 1972, the Barbara Ward from Britain and the American biologist René Dubos wrote the paper entitled “Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet” on behalf of the United Nations as preparation for the Stockholm conference.¹¹

- 8 Hans-Peter Vierhaus: *Umweltbewusstsein von oben: Zum Verfassungsgebot demokratischer Willensbildung*, pp. 151 ff.
- 9 Quoted in Kevin W. Kelley (eds.): *Der Heimatplanet*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 34, p. 38; see Wolfgang Sachs (eds.): *Der Planet als Patient: Über die Widersprüche globaler Umweltpolitik*, Berlin 1994.
- 10 Kenneth E. Boulding: *The Economics of Coming Spaceship Earth*, in: Harold Jarrett (eds.): *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy*, Baltimore 1966, pp. 3–14, p. 9; John McCormick: *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement*, Bloomington 1989, pp. 67f.
- 11 Barbara Ward/René Dubos: *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet*, Harmondsworth 1972.

The industrialised nations mainly supported both these claims and the “Spaceship Earth” image became very popular, whereas it became a subject of criticism by most of the poorer states. Looking at it from space the earth appeared to be as one, underlining the need to unite and work together. In reality, however, the earth consisted of many different regions, groups and interests, which raised the question of who was supposed to control this spaceship. This issue came to a head in Stockholm. The less industrialised countries rejected almost every resolution that might hinder their economic development. In doing so, they reacted directly to the report by the Club of Rome, which famously called for *Limits to Growth*.¹² The Brazilian delegate Miguek Ozo Rio de Almeida, representative of the poorer countries, declared such models of Northern scientists as “para-or-pseudo scientific” extrapolation “of a brain-washing kind”. Warnings lamenting the destruction of rain forests aroused his most explicit displeasure. It would not be Brazil’s responsibility to compensate for European and American excesses. He demanded “good old common-sense” instead of apocalyptic attitudes.¹³

The final declaration resulted in a classic compromise. The need to protect nature and the environment were repeatedly stated and former mistakes criticised. At the same time, the declaration also indicated that environmental problems in less industrialised countries were mainly caused by underdevelopment. Accordingly “social progress” was said to have a positive effect on the environment and the declaration also stressed the need of industrial production, sciences and technologies to develop and to grow. Accordingly, the declaration emphasised the importance of these factors that were regarded sceptically by Western environmentalists. The poorer countries objected to their arguments and insisted that economic growth was vital in order to allow people to engage in environmental protection.¹⁴

These arguments and controversies are also significant for the current environmental debate. They did not only develop bottom-up, but were promoted by high-level personalities and organisations; in addition, bureaucrats and scientists played a decisive role from the very beginning, since they not only offered support but were often involved in the social movements directly. They still are a significant element. At the same time, international influences were of great importance, especially the attempts from within the United States to regard the earth as one, to seek to unite the international community and to act together. These attempts led to conflicts right from the beginning and created

- 12 Donella H. Meadows/Dennis L. Meadows: *The Limits to Growth: A Report for The Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, New York 1972.
- 13 Jacob Darwin Hamblin: *Environmentalism for the Atlantic Alliance: NATO’s Experiment With the “Challenges of Modern Society”*, pp. 68f.; Sitzung der Vereinten Nationen am 29. November 1971.
- 14 Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, § 5, Stockholm, 2 June 1972, available online: <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=97&ArticleID=1503&l=en> (accessed on 12 October 2015)

heterogeneous expressions differing from region to region. Accordingly, the measures to be taken were heterogeneous as well. Individual states experienced different phases of industrialisation and accordingly, their scope for action differed. It had to be seen how international and global perspectives could be related to direct on-site acting in the individual nations.

Beginnings and Precursors

In Germany, the *Bund Heimatschutz* (Movement for Home Protection) founded in 1904, from the beginning showed significant characteristics of the new social movements. It is regarded as the precursor of the current ecological movement and since 1998 it is called *Bund Heimat und Umwelt in Deutschland*. (The Movement for Home and Environment in Germany). From the start this organisation expressed civic engagement and the educated middle-classes were the main actors. Many members were employed in state organisations as bureaucrats or scientists, which explains its close relation to the state.

The *Bund Heimatschutz* was engaged in national but even more so in regional topics and traditions and had no international network. Its objectives included the preservation of indigenous flora and fauna and of monuments, the protection of the landscape and the fight against modern architecture. Preserving traditional habits and customs as well as feasts and folk costumes¹⁵ was just as important as strengthening folk art. These environmentalists did not intend to protect an abstract nature but the concrete cultural landscape that existed in Germany, for instance a “*Heimat*” (homeland) that was shaped by traditional habits, customs, traditions and buildings. They regarded German culture and nature as well as the nation and the people as one. At the same time, they distinguished between the prevailing regions (Westphalia, Saxony, Bavaria). Emphasising each region’s sovereignty and traditions indicated the Bund’s reservations about attempts of centralisation.¹⁶

There were comparable national and regional movements in other European countries as well, but the idea of “*völkisch*” became more prominent in Germany. However, this did not keep the early German and other European environmentalists from organising

15 *Mitteilungen des Bundes Heimatschutz* 1904, p. 7.

16 Edeltraud Klueping (eds.): *Antimodernismus und Reform: Zur Geschichte der deutschen Heimatbewegung*, Darmstadt 1991; Willi Oberkrome: “Deutsche Heimat”: Nationale Konzeption und regionale Praxis von Naturschutz, Landschaftsgestaltung und Kulturpolitik in Westfalen-Lippe und Thüringen (1900–1960), Paderborn/Munich 2004; William H. Rollins: *A Greener Vision of Home: Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in the German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904–1918*, Ann Arbor 1997; Andreas Knaut: *Zurück zur Natur!: Die Wurzeln der Ökologiebewegung*, Greven 1993.

international congresses, for instance 1909 in Paris or 1912 in Stuttgart. There existed no contradiction between national conviction and international cooperation, as the leading representative of the *Heimatschutz*, Carl Johann Fuchs, said in 1912. All modern “culture states” had to face the same problem. They were united by their common fight against ruthless capitalism. Only people who loved their home country and its manners could “*Heimat und Eigenart einander achten*” (revere the homeland and its particularities).¹⁷ However, *völkisch* and chauvinist tendencies were also part of the German *Heimatbund* right from the beginning complicating international cooperation significantly.

There was one exception though, namely the fate of birds, especially the fate of migrating birds. Environmental and animal activists from northern European countries were shocked to learn that these birds were regarded as a delicacy in many southern European countries. The 19th Century trend to wear hats with feathers of exotic birds also played a role. As a reaction, an International Bird Protection Agreement was adapted in Paris in 1902. In the following year, various nature conservation associations met to jointly discuss the relevant questions. In the context of these discussions, in 1912 the Swiss Paul Benedikt Sarasin demanded “global nature protection”. In 1913, the “International Conference for the Global Protection of Nature” took place and as result, Paul Benedikt Sarasin intended to declare Spitzbergen a nature reserve to protect whales and seals.¹⁸

The outbreak of World War I made these plans obsolete. After the war, international plans to protect nature and the environment faced great difficulties. There were initiatives within the League of Nations, but the global tensions between winners and losers of the war made international cooperation difficult. The United States, for instance, did not participate at all in these attempts and Germany only joined the League of Nations in 1926—and left again on order from Adolf Hitler in 1933. At the same time, however, it had become clear that environmental problems were global and could only be solved through international cooperation. Wrecked ships from the war had led to increasing oil waste in the sea, which polluted the coastlines and the harbours, endangered birds and even affected the drinking water supply, leading to protests in many countries. Nations could not “*das Öl in die Mitte des Ozeans schütten und es dort lassen*” (could not simply pour their oil into the middle of the ocean and leave it there), the British bird protection association claimed.¹⁹

- 17 Carl Johann Fuchs: Begrüßungsansprache, in: *Heimatschutz* 8 (1912), pp. 58–60, p. 59.
- 18 Anna-Katharina Wöbse: Der Schutz der Natur im Völkerbund: Anfänge einer Weltumweltpolitik, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 43 (2003), pp. 177–90, p. 179ff.
- 19 Im 32. Jahresbericht, cited in: Anna-Katharina Wöbse: Der Schutz der Natur im Völkerbund: Anfänge einer Weltumweltpolitik, p. 186; Anna-Katharin Wöbse: *Weltnaturschutz: Umweltdiplomatie in Völkerbund und Vereinten Nationen 1920–1950*, Frankfurt am Main 2012.

Non-governmental organisations were already involved in these debates. Among them, bird protection associations were gaining importance and in the following years and up until today they have played a key role in international environmental politics. In the inter-war period, they succeeded in drawing the League of Nation's attention to these topics, but their efforts, however, had ambivalent effects. It was certainly an achievement that a global organisation picked up an environmental issue and started doing something. However, they did not achieve much. The League of Nations set up a commission and consulted experts but they could not agree on an effective approach since shipping lines complained about the high costs any measures would cause. They put great pressure on their governments which in turn opposed the initiatives of the League of Nations.

Critical Debates and the New Environmental Movement in the 1970s

After World War II international attempts to protect nature continued, but the Cold War let them temporarily slide into the background. The 1968 conference "Man and the Biosphere" in Paris, organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, must be regarded as a significant new beginning. Three hundred people from sixty different countries participated, mainly scientists who discussed topics such as the use and protection of resources and the biosphere. They described the biosphere as a combination of different ecosystems, which normally would be in natural balance. Human interventions, however, were regarded to have significantly endangered this balance. In addition to these debates, the conference functioned as a precursor of the Stockholm conference in 1972 that resulted in the conceptualisation of the United Nations Environment Programme. Up until today, it is the only United Nations institution that has its headquarters in an African country (Nairobi, Kenya).

Simultaneously, the report to the Club of Rome was published and it was explicitly aimed at an international audience, just like other publications of that time, among them Paul Ehrlich's "The Population Bomb" from 1968, which was published in Germany as "*Die Bevölkerungsbombe*", predicting global starvation for hundreds of millions of people. Only one year later, Gordon Taylor published his "*Das Selbstmordprogramm*" with the subtitle "*Zukunft oder Untergang der Menschheit.*" (The Suicide Programme. Can the world survive?) The German translation had a fifth edition within the first year and more than 50.000 books were sold.²⁰ Gordon Taylor also predicted a global population

20 Paul R. Ehrlich: *The Population Bomb*, New York 1968; Gordon Rattray Taylor: *Das Selbstmordprogramm: Zukunft oder Untergang der Menschheit*, Frankfurt am Main 1971, English version: *The Doomsday Book: Can the World Survive?*, New York 1970.

explosion and he warned about increasing radioactivity, asbestos contamination, dichlorodiphenyl-trichloroethane and lead pollution. He conjured up the image of an ecological catastrophe. In 1970, Konrad Lorenz spoke about the deadly sins of civilisation on the *Bayrischer Rundfunk*, referring to over-population, the destruction of our natural living environment and genetic decline.²¹

Such publications and their international and global perspective follow a long tradition reaching back until the 19th Century. They also had an impact on the new environmental movements from the 1970s, shaping their perception of global dangers. However, when we look at the concrete actions and organisational set-up of these movements, a different picture emerges. Their actions were predominantly motivated and directed by local and regional issues. In 1970, the first citizens' initiatives were founded on a regional level, among them the "*Rhein-Main-Aktion*", the "*Rhein-Ruhr-Aktion*", the "*Bürgeraktion Umweltschutz Rhein-Neckar*" or the "*Oberrheinische Aktionskomitee gegen Umweltgefährdung durch Kernkraftwerke*";²² (The Oberrhein Actions Committee against the dangers caused by Atomic Power Stations), all of them along the river Rhine and covering different areas of it.

In 1972, the "*Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz*" (The Federal Movement of Citizens Initiatives for the Protection of the Environment) was founded, which, however, did not function as a centralised organisation. Neither did it dictate the general direction nor did it coordinate activities. It was rather an umbrella organisation—just like the *Heimatbund* back in 1904—consisting of around a thousand organisations with 500.000 members who were predominantly involved in individual, local or regional matters. While the *Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz* provided them with information and helped with coordination and cooperation, the sovereignty of each organisation was not questioned. Such strong local roots became significant and they were closely connected to a new type of local patriotism.

These tendencies became especially manifest in the protest against the plan to build a new nuclear power plant in Wyhl, a village close to Freiburg, which became a milestone in German environmental movement. In Wyhl, residents were worried that radioactive radiation from the power plant would harm their viticulture, heat the waters of the Rhine and jeopardise their health. However, at the beginning they did not reject nuclear energy in principle. Accordingly, the government assumed it was facing the usual reservations about industrial projects and decided to stick to its plans.

- 21 The book was extremely popular since 300.000 volumes were sold only in the first year. In 2009, the 34th edition was printed.
- 22 Franz-Josef Brüggemeier: *Tschernobyl*, 26. April 1986: Die ökologische Herausforderung, Munich 1998, pp. 218f.; Jens Ivo Engels: *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik: Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung 1950–1980*, ch. 8/9.

Soon, however, the complaints intensified and became more and more critical of nuclear energy—mainly because of the support by both scientists and students from nearby Freiburg, a university town. The involvement of these groups was important because they provided well-founded knowledge and arguments against nuclear energy and strengthened the protest significantly. Bit by bit, an exceptionally broad alliance was formed, reaching across the border with France into Alsace, which made the protest transnational and at the same time attractive to the national media. In 1975, the *Spiegel* reported on the conflict in detail for the first time, almost two years after its outset. By this time, Wyhl had become not only a national but also an international symbol of protest, drawing great attention to the West German environmental movement—while the actual conflict stayed deeply rooted in the local region. From the very beginning, winemakers, farmers and housewives were strongly involved in the conflict that is people who were not usually involved in such disputes. Their claims focussed on regional aspects and they were fighting for their local environment, which made the conflict special and added to its appeal.²³

This mix of local, regional, national and international elements was found again in later conflicts. The importance of the single elements varied, but all in all, the national, regional and local aspects were predominant. The catastrophe of Chernobyl is a good case in point. The radiation released by the accident caused European, if not global risks so that from the start protest movements in many countries cooperated. In the end, however, the reactions turned out to be quite different and were mainly shaped by national particularities of the individual countries. It is tempting to explain these differences by “national characteristics” that are repeatedly conjured up. These characteristics, however, are abstract fiction while the specific reactions were shaped by national and regional political, societal, cultural and media contexts. In the German case, for instance, it was significant that the Federal Government was seen as playing down possible risks of the explosion while the *Landesregierungen* (regional state governments) highlighted them, especially in those regional states where the Green Party was part of a coalition government. In addition, in Germany there existed a very well-organised anti-nuclear movement which attracted even more support since it could claim that its warnings were proven correct by the Chernobyl accident.

The importance of national contexts for specific debates became particularly clear in the discussions on air pollution causing the Death of the Forests (*Waldsterben*). Since air-borne emissions travel beyond national borders the phenomenon of dying trees

23 Uli Borchers: *Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv*, Hamburg 2011; Jens Ivo Engels: *Geschichte und Heimat: der Widerstand gegen das Kernkraftwerk Wyhl*, in: Kerstin Kretschmer/Norman Fuchsloch (eds.): *Wahrnehmung, Bewusstsein, Identifikation: Umweltprobleme und Umweltschutz als Triebfedern regionaler Entwicklung*, Freiburg 2003, pp. 103–130; Sebastian Joosten: “Nai hämmer g’sait!”: *der Protest gegen das Akw Wyhl im Spiegel populärer Medien*, Magisterarbeit, Würzburg 2006.

was discussed all over Europe, even though the quantity and quality of the protests varied considerably. In Germany, protests were comparably strong and the German term “*Waldsterben*” began its international career. It is hard to explain why this was the case and why large parts of society became involved. One reason could be the fatalistic predictions of scientists who alerted the public to an almost total disappearance of forests. This argument, however, rather shifts the question instead of providing answers since it has to be explained why such dramatic and apocalyptic predictions were made and why they became a consensus among scientists. Why was the media so eager not only to report but also to back these predictions and why were so many people persuaded by them? Convincing answers are still to be found. However, one claim can be made: no matter how important international connections were for the debates on *Waldsterben*, the debates taking place in different countries were shaped by the nation-specific contexts.²⁴

Influence of the European Union

At first glance, the European Union seems to be a counter-project of new social movements: bureaucratic, centralistic and anonymous. This characterisation is clearly excessive and reproduces stereotypes. However, even an impartial judgement cannot deny the contrast between Brussels’ bureaucracies on the one hand and grass-roots based, democratic, and spontaneous movements on the other hand. Still, there are closer connections between both, including the environmental movement, than is often assumed and this is due to several factors. From very early on, Brussels’ institutions were interested in environmental issues since they offered new areas of activities and influence. As already was argued in the case of the United Nations, for the European Union, too, environmental politics offered new chances for international cooperation, surpassing established controversies and conflicts and providing additional legitimation for Brussels’ institutions and policies.²⁵

- 24 Roland Schäfer: “Lamettasyndrom” und “Säuresteppe”: Das Waldsterben und die Forstwissenschaften 1979–2007, Freiburg 2012; Laurent Schmit: Le “Waldsterben”: Convergences et divergences franco-allemandes face à un problème écologique, in: Matthieu Osmont et al. (eds.): *Européanisation au XXe siècle: Un regard historique*, Brussels 2012, pp. 169–184; Roderich von Detten (eds.): *Das Waldsterben: Rückblick auf einen Ausnahmezustand*, Munich 2013.
- 25 Pamela M. Barnes/Ian G. Barnes: *Environmental Policy in the European Union*, Cheltenham 1999; Andrew Jordan (eds.): *Environmental Policy in the European Union: Actors, Institutions and Processes*, 2nd ed., London 2005; Christoph Knill/Duncan Liefferink: *Environmental Politics in the European Union: Policy-Making, Implementation and Patterns of Multi-Level Governance*, Manchester 2007.

At the same time, the European Union has no political infrastructure in the individual countries to implement its policies. Rather, it depends on national and regional institutions and on allies exerting pressure on these institutions. These allies, on the other hand, also benefit from their cooperation with Europe, especially in the field of environmental politics, which in many countries only developed slowly. Instead of representing two different or even antagonistic political spheres, therefore, Europe and the environmental movements developed a symbiotic relationship from which both sides profited. Bird protection is only one of many examples.

Since the end of the 19th Century, debates about bird protection took place all over Europe, especially in its northern countries, which condemned the hunting of migrating birds in Southern Europe. These debates could be quite fierce, but in the end achieved very little since in the south bird hunting was seen as ancient and very popular tradition. The opponents of this practice gained new hope, when in 1979 the European Economic Community adopted a directive to designate protected areas for birds and to impose prohibitions on hunting them. To pass this directive, however, required a compromise, which allowed individual states to make exceptions. Since these states were also responsible for the implementation of the directive, at first sight not much changed. But the directive gave bird protection organisations a new legitimation and provided them with additional arguments. In order to exert pressure, they could invoke Brussels so that the directive slowly but surely offered a more efficient protection for birds after all.²⁶

This pattern can be observed in other cases as well. Even if the European Union only adopts directives with hesitation and after complex compromises, they offer new opportunities for both national and regional organisations and movements. When it comes to the environment in the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia played a pioneering role. They had passed much stricter environmental laws and pushed other countries and European Union institutions to follow their example—thereby also strengthening environmental movements as they could refer to their example. To give just one example: In the debates about Waldsterben, environmental organisations in France, Italy or Great Britain explicitly referred to Brussels' initiatives and debates taking place in Germany when they demanded the introduction of catalytic converters for cars.²⁷

26 Jan-Henrik Meyer: Green Activism: The European Parliament's Environmental Committee Promoting a European Environmental Policy in the 1970s, in: *Journal of European Integration History* 17:1 (2011), pp. 73–85.

27 John McCormick: Environmental Policy in the European Union, Basingstoke 2001; Philippe Roqueplo: *Pluies acides: Menaces pour l'Europe*, Paris 1988; Rudolf Petersen: Autoabgase als Gegenstand staatlicher Regulierung in der EG und in den USA: Ein Vergleich, in: *Zeitschrift für Umweltpolitik* 93:4 (1993), pp. 375–406; Christopher Neumaier: Die Einführung des "umweltfreundlichen Autos" in den 1980er-Jahren im Spannungsverhältnis von Wirtschaft, Politik und Konsum, in: *Themenportal Europäische*

In other fields, German politicians and authorities were putting on the brakes. In the case of nature conservation, for instance, the German environmental movement needed Brussels' support and strongly welcomed the "Habitats Directive" of 1992 aiming at preserving national living space and wildlife species. They regarded the directive as an improvement against German regulations. However, they could not accomplish much until the directive was officially adopted in their country. Even then, it took some time and official warnings by Brussels until the directive was finally implemented.²⁸

A similar interaction between local, national and regional factors can be observed on a global level as well, most prominently in the case of the United Nations Climate Change conferences. Of these conferences 19 have taken place so far, the last one in Poland in November 2013. These conferences are organised by a supranational institution, the United Nations, and besides many leading politicians, scientists and state organisations non-governmental organisations and new social movements also participate. In fact, they constitute the largest part of the several tens of thousands of participants and are of crucial importance, not only for the conference, but also for the many ideas and debates prior to the conferences. They show that the lines between new social movements, well-established bureaucracies, leading political authorities and scientific institutions are blurred. Many persons and institutions cannot be allocated clearly to a field but belong to several of them.²⁹

This does not mean that these different groups work together in harmony. Quite the contrary is the case. Conflicts are rather constitutive for climate conferences and are a major factor why many of the declarations passed have had little practical effect. There are many reasons for this disappointing result, not the least the refusal of the United States to sign binding treaties concerning the reduction of CO₂ emissions. In addition, India, China and other "developing countries" have also been uncooperative and put forward more or less the same arguments as 1972 in Stockholm. They point to the prosperity industrial countries enjoy and to the huge quantities of emissions they already have set and still are setting free. These arguments are justified, but in terms of absolute data, China and India by now are the world's greatest emitters. Politically accusations may make sense, but they are not very useful when it comes to finding compromises. And they are not at all helpful when we look at the situation in African, Latin American and Asian states, which are often too poor to make commitments.

Geschichte (2012), available online: <http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2012/Article=564> (accessed on 16 October 2015).

- 28 Fabian Mainzer: "Retten, was zu retten ist!": Grundzüge des Nordrheinwestfälischen Naturschutzes 1970–1995, Marburg 2013.
- 29 Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen/Aynsley Kellow: *International Environmental Policy: Interests and the Failure of the Kyoto Process*, Cheltenham 2002; Sebastian Oberthür/Hermann E. Ott: *Das Kyoto-Protokoll: Internationale Klimapolitik für das 21. Jahrhundert*, Opladen 2000.

Greenpeace: an Example

While the big climate conferences found it difficult to pass resolutions because of the sheer number of participants, one international environmental organisation proved to be very successful: Greenpeace. This organisation was founded in 1971, became widespread across many countries and calls itself a “*internationale Umweltorganisation, die mit gewaltfreien Aktionen für den Schutz der Lebensgrundlagen kämpft*”³⁰ (an international environmental organisation fighting with non-violent means for the protection of our livelihood). The organisation has about 500.000 members in Germany alone and they provide considerable financial support for the many well-known spectacular actions. Greenpeace operates on a global scale and offers an alternative that attracts people who are disappointed by established parties, institutions and policies. This organisation embodies the close connection between the ecological movement and internationalism so that it would seem to serve as a perfect example of such cooperation—however, only at first glance.³¹

A more detailed analysis shows that Greenpeace must not only be regarded as an exceptional version of the new social movements, but it also rejects central elements crucial to their self-understanding. Greenpeace is a hierarchically structured organisation, which grants great power to the centre and leaves the individual countries and local groups only limited scope of action. It was not always like that. Initially, Greenpeace was structured like other alternative groups of the 1970s, experiencing similar problems concerning excessive debates and difficult decision-making processes. Soon those people within Greenpeace who argued for the need of a streamlined organisational structure asserted themselves. For them this structure offered the only possibility to organise and accomplish the spectacular actions for which Greenpeace has become so well-known.³²

When Greenpeace adapted this organisational structure in Germany in the 1980s, it led to many conflicts. This approach went against the grain of the fundamental self-understanding of both the environmental and other social movements, which rejected centralised decision-making and hierarchies. They rather valued variety, de-centralisation and grass-root democracy. Greenpeace International, however, was not willing to compromise, neither in Germany nor in other countries. As a consequence, national groups do enjoy some space to work independently, but this space is strictly limited and

30 Homepage von Greenpeace, available online: http://www.greenpeace.de/ueber_uns/ (accessed on 16 October 2015).

31 Frank S. Zelko: *Make it a Green Peace!: The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism*, New York 2013.

32 Frank S. Zelko: *Greenpeace and the Development of International Environmental Activism in the 1970s*, in: Ursula Lehmkuhl/Hermann Wellenreuther (eds.): *Historians and Nature: Comparative Approaches to Environmental History*, Oxford 2007, pp. 296–318.

they are not allowed to contradict or act against the policies and concepts of the central leadership. To put it pointedly, Greenpeace is more like a franchise company that is shaped by the guidelines coming from the central headquarters. This approach ensures a uniform appearance and, through its streamlined organisational structure, reaches a high degree of effectiveness. To put it differently, the international dimension of Greenpeace is not based on equal cooperation between the individual national groups, allowing them to express prevailing particularities. The opposite is the case: national particularities remain restricted for the benefit of centralised actions coordinated by the centre.

Conclusion

Greenpeace might be a special case, but it shows the different varieties of environmental movements and how local, national and regional interactions may differ. The movements can be bottom-up and grass-root democratic, but from the very beginning they have also been supported by well-established or even high-level institutions. The lines are blurred between well-established bureaucracies, traditional institutions and, last but not least, the science sector. Often it is hard to clearly classify individual actors or groups, since most of them belong to more than one field. To make a clear cut distinction even more difficult, the various agents have been able to benefit from each other. It can even be argued that the German environmental movement was so successful because the forms of cooperation and overlaps between the different actors and fields were particularly strong. It was successful precisely because it did not always focus on being a bottom-up movement only.³³

It is also difficult to determine the importance and contribution of international, transnational and global aspects. From the beginning, they played a major role, but it remains difficult to accurately determine their relevance for the local, national and regional contexts. In addition, these factors were perceived differently in their respective contexts, as the case of *Waldsterben* shows. Even if international cooperation is frequent, it is still difficult to assess its meaning. The case of the Green Party shows that major themes of recent election campaigns were shaped by national aspects and that leading politicians have distinguished themselves on the federal and regional as opposed to a European or even global level. In fact, Green Party representatives in Brussels are hardly known to the public. Furthermore, only insiders know that a European Green Party established in 2004 exists, bringing together 36 Green Parties from 33 European states. The environmental movements did not bring forth an organisation like the Socialist

33 Dieter Rucht/Barbara Blattert/Dieter Rink (eds.): *Soziale Bewegungen auf dem Weg zur Institutionalisierung: Zum Strukturwandel "alternativer" Gruppen in beiden Teilen Deutschlands*, Frankfurt am Main 1997.

International, coordinating activities and possessing real influence. The most successful international group (Greenpeace) is characterised by its top-down hierarchy, and neither did it just arise from national initiatives nor does it see them as equal partner.

In summary, the picture is complex and contradictory in many ways, regarding both the specific character of the environmental movement as well as the new social movements in general. The relationship between local, regional, national and international orientations also remains unclear. Since the research on these questions is still unsatisfactory, the arguments presented in this paper can only function as a first introduction. Empirical research is necessary to obtain verified results. There still remains a lot to be done.

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