Emily Reaction Paper 3

Posted: Mar 1, 2005 12:31 AM

Politics Beyond the State: Environmental Activism & World Civic Politics (Wapner)

This article explores the role of NGOs as agents of societal change. Outside of their more direct impact on government, Wapner asserts that NGOs drive significant change in society by influencing multinational corporations and local communities, and gradually raising awareness throughout the population.

The article includes an interesting discussion of the latter point with statistics suggesting that individuals in Canada, the U.S., and several developing countries have become considerably more aware of and concerned with environmental issues over the past two decades (323-4). While survey results from Canada and the U.S. did not surprise me, the finding that, "71% of the people in 16 countries, including India, Mexico, South Korea, and Brazil, said they were willing to pay higher prices for products if it would help to protect their environment," seemed quite high.

From my experience working in developing countries, I would have guessed otherwise. In Peru, for example, recycling programs are practically nonexistent and much of the population (I would guess a strong majority) views forest resources simply as means of obtaining economic security. With so many individuals struggling just to get by, I can't imagine that over two-thirds of the population would be willing to pay more for eco-friendly products, as it appears they have done in neighboring Brazil.

Horizontal Politics: Transnational Environmental Activism and Global Cultural Change (Wapner)

This article explores the role of NGOs in influencing international policy development and monitoring, and in changing corporate behavior. As in the above article, Wapner attests that, "in addition to states and firms, NGOs try to persuade ordinary citizens throughout the world to care about, and take action to protect, environmental well-being" (46). He explores the ways in which NGOs directly work to secure public buy-in for advocacy efforts, in the process influencing generally accepted cultural beliefs. He refers to the process of assimilating environmental ideas into society as "incorporation" (55).

While I found this article very interesting, the picture of activist organizations winning businesses over through radical advocacy measures struck me as a bit too rosy. In the examples presented, Greenpeace convinces Shell not to sink the boat, Home Depot joins forces with the Rainforest Action Network, etc. The article doesn't reflect any of the potential problems that arise from radical advocacy efforts. For example, after years of frustration from activists in the Camisea gas lot of Peru, Shell decided to pull out. What initially appeared a victory is now being cast by many as an unfortunate loss because Shell was actually making considerable effort to mitigate environmental and social impact (caring a lot about its international reputation), and some reports indicate that the current Argentinean company cares less and is doing much less.

Environmental Organization: Changing Roles & Functions in Global Politics (Tamiotti & Finger)

This article tracks the evolution of ecological concerns from "conservation ecology" (1960s), to "political ecology" (1970s), to "global ecology" (1980s); a process that has largely moved environmental NGOs from a primary focus on species and habitats to, "planetary and long-term trends and phenomena, such as ozone depletion, deforestation, and climate change" (59). The "global ecology" phase (which continues today) emphasizes the links between conservation and development. Importantly, environmental organizations have assumed critical

	roles in international treaty development, implementation, and monitoring processes. The monitoring function is of particular interest to environmental NGOs, and particularly inaccessible to international policy makers.