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From Climate Advocacy to Public Engagement: An Exploration of the Roles of Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations

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Abstract: The capacity of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to encourage public engagement with climate protection is analysed through a conceptual framework focused on six advocacy functions: issue framing, knowledge generation and dissemination, attribution of responsibility, lobbying, public mobilisation and agenda setting. This framework is used to organise and interpret the results of a fieldwork study of environmental NGOs, conducted in France, Germany and the UK. Key findings include the importance of the cross-linkage of climate with other categories of issue, NGO stress on knowledge as a precursor to action, a 'politics of accountability' in which the attribution of responsibility paves the way for making political demands, a preference for multi-layered lobbying, where process can be as important as product, and the need to adjust NGO mobilisation and agenda setting strategies in the aftermath of the 2009 Copenhagen negotiations and the financial crisis.

Keywords: climate protection; non-governmental organisations; international civil society; citizen action; public engagement

1. Introduction

The need for climate protection was enshrined in the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have advocated stronger measures at each subsequent Conference of the Parties (CoP), and considerable literature exists analysing their roles and impacts at the level of global climate governance [1–13]. Most of this research relates to advocacy activities undertaken by NGOs within the context of global negotiations, often through state-centric lobbying. During the early development of climate policy, this

was because 'environmentalists virtually ignored (…) the general public' [14]. In the more recent period, NGO strategies to foster public engagement with climate protection in their domestic constituencies have developed more strongly [15,16], but scholarly attention has nevertheless been limited. This research article contributes toward filling that gap.

Its main research question is this: how does NGO climate advocacy encourage public engagement with climate protection? By 'climate advocacy' is understood processes of communication and persuasion to undertake measures that protect climate. 'Public engagement' is understood as all forms of involvement of a membership base—or of a wider public—in favour of a given objective, *inter alia* developing campaigns, circulating petitions, encouraging participation in the political and institutional system and changing personal behaviour. The article reviews how public engagement with climate issues is promoted by environmental NGOs and also explores the self-reflexive learning processes in which NGOs are involved.

The first section develops a conceptual framework for analysing climate advocacy, using a literature review to identify characteristic advocacy functions undertaken by NGOs. The second section uses the conceptual framework to organize and interpret the results of a fieldwork study of environmental NGOs conducted in France, Germany and the UK. It thereby investigates empirically the consequences of choosing particular forms of advocacy to engage various publics. Finally, key outcomes and future research orientations are drawn out.

2. Developing an Understanding of NGO Climate Advocacy

The NGO sector is acknowledged as playing an important advocacy role, even if the stress on advocacy varies across spheres of NGO intervention. Questions related to the environment, civil liberties or social justice lend themselves by nature to advocacy strategies and, indeed, to contentious politics. Brown, Ebrahim and Batliwala [17] identified two categories of advocacy strategies: 'Cooperative strategies include research and education to better inform policy makers or persuasion and incentives for particular policy alternatives. More adversarial strategies range from mobilizing public pressure ("naming and shaming"), litigation and contestation (including both legal and extra-legal pressure)'. Climate debates have generated a particularly high level of advocacy activity, due to the global impact of climate change itself, the need to explain complex issues, disseminate findings, recruit support (both among elites and the general public) and respond to sceptics and opponents of climate policy. Because advocacy is a rich, multi-dimensional topic, a conceptual framework will be developed in this first section on the basis of a literature review. Six key advocacy functions were identified in the literature: issue framing, knowledge generation and dissemination, attribution of responsibility, political lobbying, public mobilisation and agenda setting. Whilst the existence of these functions has long been recognised, the present conceptual framework is distinctive in aiming to provide a systematic presentation of NGO advocacy. In section two, this conceptual framework will be used to analyse the results of a fieldwork study of NGO strategies to secure public engagement with climate issues.

2.1. Advocacy and Issue Framing

The importance of issue framing for climate debates has been recognised by the research and NGO communities [18]. Benford and Snow [19] defined collective action frames as 'action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization'. The three main frames, which have subtended climate debates, relate to the environment, the economy and social justice.

On the first frame, Gough and Shackley [20] observed that nature NGOs tended to construct climate change in terms of consequences for ecosystems, with severe impacts upon biodiversity and biogeochemical cycles, which will alter the life-situation of human populations. On the second frame, Corell and Betsill [18] noted that 'climate change was increasingly viewed as an economic issue requiring highly technical solutions, such as new energy technology'. The Kyoto Protocol promulgated 'flexible mechanisms'—economic instruments, including emissions trading—as the means to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). The economic frame has tended to highlight short-to-medium term economic costs arising from GHG emissions control, given the implications for energy sourcing and use. In contrast to this economic framing, a swathe of the NGO community has emphasised social justice. This third frame emphasises the injustices arising from global environmental change, given that the poorest countries will—in all probability—be exposed to the largest negative impacts of climate change, yet have contributed least to the causes. Because those countries lack the economic, logistic and institutional resources to manage those impacts, they have put pressure on rich nations to finance adaptation strategies in the developing world and thereby repay their 'climate debt' [21]. In the early 2000s, the question of the choice of frames led to splits within the NGO sector, with northern NGOs tending to stress environmental problems and economic solutions, whilst southern NGOs emphasised social justice and sustainable development [22]. However, by the late 2000s, northern NGOs were much more engaged in the 'global justice' movement [23–25].

In practice, all three frames have been interwoven into political and societal responses to the climate challenge. However, NGOs have needed to strike a delicate balance between the priorities attached to each. In consequence, whilst NGOs have often been credited with a capacity for ideational and moral leadership 26,27], translating this generic capacity into meaningful climate action has not proven to be straight-forward. Some of the practical dimensions of that translation process will be considered next.

2.2. Advocacy as Knowledge Construction and Dissemination

A capacity for knowledge construction and dissemination is widely associated with the NGO sector. NGOs provide learning materials to the public on a number of levels, ranging from educational and training programmes, to the facilitation of individual consumer decisions (what to buy, what to boycott), across to general consciousness-raising. Many NGOs engage with specialised practitioner groups by providing scientific research, technical expertise, legal consultancy and policy evaluation. Lisowski [9] pointed to their ability to improve the stringency of international agreements 'first, by increasing public awareness about the negotiations as they unfold, and second, by rectifying informational asymmetries between negotiators'. Information is often provided freely to governments, particularly of developing countries [1].

A key illustration of dissemination activity was provided by Wapner [26], who observed that Greenpeace International 'became expert at penetrating, synthesizing and publicizing contemporary environmental science and uses its action as a strategic form of public education'. More fundamentally, Greenpeace developed a strategy of 'bearing witness' inspired by the Quaker movement [28]. Greenpeace is highly distinctive in its application of the 'bearing witness' strategy—in terms of issue targets, action repertoire, media relations and membership recruitment. Nevertheless, some generic features of the 'bearing witness' strategy permeate the action of other advocacy NGOs. These include on-the-ground presence and front-line involvement, the intention to enlighten the public by revealing hidden causal relationships (such as the factors behind environmental degradation), the concern with ethics and social injustices, and the wish to emancipate. These features have led to the evolution of a distinctive form of pedagogy, which seeks to transcend either distributing factsheets or 'preaching from the pulpit'. In brief, NGO knowledge construction and dissemination practices build the ideational, emotional and moral bridges that enable public engagement.

2.3. Advocacy as Attribution of Responsibility

The core of 'bearing witness' is, arguably, the cementing of the link between knowledge and responsibility. In climate change contexts, the question of the attribution of responsibility is often fraught, although a measure of consensus has emerged from international negotiations:

> 'Acknowledging that the largest share of historical global emissions of greenhouse gases originated in developed countries and that, owing to this historical responsibility, developed country Parties must take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof.' [29]

Moving beyond this general prescription into the practicalities of GHG mitigation is known to be difficult, because of the deep embeddedness of carbon-based technologies. Thus, NGOs play a vital role in unravelling causal relationships and holding emitters to account. As summarised by Newell [25], 'the issue of climate change provides a fascinating basis for exploring the politics of accountability. (…) The strategies of groups (*aim*) to increase the answerability of key actors for their actions, as well as enforceability, where those actors fail to deliver on their obligations. (…) NGO strategies are conducted in public arenas through protest and media work aimed at driving state-based regulation and citizen action, all the while exposing state complicity'.

The attribution of responsibility is a matter of considerable sensitivity, and NGOs weigh up their choice of strategies carefully: should they target governments, corporations or citizens? The core dilemma was nicely put by Gough and Shackley [20], who pointed out that 'history suggests that identifying a small number of powerful forces that can be portrayed as acting out of selfish motivation, such as large multinational firms or politically corrupt administrations, is a far more successful storyline for NGOs to promote, than a "we are all to blame" message'. NGOs have been reluctant to stigmatise the behaviour of the general public as a significant contributor to carbon emissions. They prefer to treat citizens as victims rather than perpetrators, with the aim of recruiting the public in the struggle to reform governments and corporations.

2.4. Advocacy as Policy Lobbying

NGOs who engage with climate debates almost always have a policy-oriented dimension to their activities. They aim for active participation in policy-making, criticising current arrangements and sometimes proposing creative solutions. The lobbying of national governments is perhaps their principle conduit, but pressuring corporate decision-makers and seeking access to international negotiations are important channels too. As pointed out by Wapner [26], 'the predominant way to think about NGOs in world affairs is as transnational interest groups'. A number of commentators have taken as self-evident that the defence of established interests is a key NGO role [9,30]. In contrast, Beyers [31] characterised a range of NGOs, including environmental groups, consumer groups and solidarity associations, as examples of 'public interest groups' who sought to protect 'broad and general segments of society'.

In lobbying on climate issues, NGOs have followed a three-pronged strategy of making proposals, seeking influence in negotiations and checking on policy implementation. They have tried to identify constructive solutions, sometimes in partnership with states or firms, although disagreements among NGOs have arisen *inter alia* over the Clean Development Mechanism, emissions trading and use of forests as carbon sinks [32–34]. They seek to influence negotiating outcomes by preparing reports and position papers, by direct contacts with more receptive delegates and proposing amendments to official documents [3,7,10]. Gullberg [35] noted that the Climate Action Network, which federates the positions of mostly environmental NGOs during CoP talks, has pushed for emission reduction targets for the industrialised nations of 60–80% by 2050, whilst recognising that developing countries needed to increase their emissions, at least in the short-term. Subsequent to national or international agreements, NGOs have sought to improve policing of outcomes and expose non-compliance. Conventional means include the development of investigation and reporting systems to check whether statutory environmental measures were implemented, followed up with legal challenges and litigation, if they were not. Alternatively, pressure is applied by confrontational strategies of 'naming and shaming', *inter alia* by pickets, stunts and public ridicule, often aimed at attracting mass media coverage. These tactics allow groups to apply implementation and enforcement pressure. In the process, groups also reinforce their own legitimacy, influence and *raison d'être*.

2.5. Advocacy and Public Mobilisation

Surveys of action repertoires have found that public mobilisation is at the heart of NGO strategies to make themselves heard and attract support for their causes [36,37]. Mobilisation takes many forms, ranging from information distribution on policy negotiations (dates, venues, issues, with commentary on their importance), developing campaigns (whether promotional or adversarial), organising demonstrations, protests, petitions and/or consumer boycotts, attracting media coverage, providing platforms for membership recruitment and, for the most radical, inciting direct action. Mobilising more sympathisers increases NGO visibility and exerts pressure on policy subsystems. As explained by Yamin [5]: 'the generation of public pressure is widely regarded by NGOs themselves and a significant number of researchers studying their influences, as probably the most significant role that NGOs play

in international affairs'. For advocacy NGOs, public mobilisation and lobbying are often two sides of the same coin: one is essential for the other.

2.6. Agenda Setting

Agenda setting is a 'holy grail' for NGOs in that it constitutes the ideal scenario to which they aspire, but which they seldom attain. NGOs are rarely in a position to impose an agenda in the way that governments of powerful nations or multinational corporations can. However, they do enjoy the capacity to influence agendas at different levels. Lisowski [9] observed that NGOs 'help set the negotiating agenda by manipulating public expectations regarding the negotiations and potential outcomes'. Not only does this insight illuminate the twinning of mobilisation and lobbying, but it points to distinct phases of agenda setting. State actors typically take the lead in organising policy consultations and international negotiations: they decide on the event and the issues to be addressed. NGOs mostly react to the opportunities arising from a choice of event, be it the next CoP, G20 or world summit. NGOs seek involvement in preparatory processes, demanding accreditation to be present in the negotiating hall whenever possible. During the event, they pressure negotiators to take meaningful measures, whilst seeking to co-define what those measures should be.

NGOs are not necessarily successful in these aims. Nevertheless, the agenda setting function pulls together the other advocacy functions—issue framing, knowledge generation and dissemination, attribution of responsibility, lobbying and mobilisation—and organises them into a complex whole. It provides a capstone for the other functions. This conceptual framework for understanding NGO climate advocacy will next be applied to fieldwork findings to exemplify and deepen the analysis.

3. Probing NGO Climate Advocacy in the Field

To explore how NGOs encourage public engagement with climate issues, fieldwork research was undertaken to identify and analyse current practices. By consulting NGO websites to ascertain their remit, a target sample was chosen that allowed for both comparability and coverage. To achieve comparability, NGOs were selected on the basis of two characteristics: that they had an environmental component to their work and that they were engaging at least some section of the public on climate issues. To achieve coverage and identify a diverse range of approaches, a cross-section was assembled to include large and small groups, with roughly equal numbers from France, Germany and the UK. Approximately 100 groups were contacted, from which 30 respondents agreed to in-depth interviews, of which all of bar two were face-to-face. Whilst the interview sample included some of the largest and well-known environmental NGOs, most of the groups were relatively small, worked in particular niches and were little known beyond their remit. Semi-structured interviews, mostly lasting between 45–60 minutes, were conducted in several phases between September 2008 and January 2011 and covered questions of NGO strategic orientations, as well as political and policy contexts. The major landmark in the period was the 2009 CoP-15 negotiations in Copenhagen, in which a number of the participants had campaign involvement. The interviews were transcribed and analysed. Each interview was given a number, to which quotations are ascribed, in order to preserve anonymity. The conceptual framework developed in the first section was then used to present and interpret the fieldwork interviews.

3.1. Issue Framing

The earlier discussion identified three rival framings of climate issues, namely in terms of the environment, the economy or social justice. The fieldwork interviews confirmed the relevance of each. Moreover, a fourth category of framing also emerged.

Nature conservation NGOs leaned towards the environmental frame. One respondent commented: 'we didn't want to construct a contradiction between climate policies and nature conservation policies, but wanted to strengthen the argument that if we wanted to deal successfully with climate change, we had to protect biodiversity and ecosystems' (source: NGO19). Elsewhere, the economy-energy axis was in evidence, as illustrated by the following comment: 'climate protection is dominating more than energy efficiency, although energy efficiency is becoming more and more important because of possible energy shortages' (source: NGO18). However, the danger of economic reductionism was flagged by an NGO with a strong social justice remit: 'journalists only talk about finance, figures (…) and how much money is required. Consequently, we have enormous difficulty in raising the real climate issues, such as adaptation, forestry (…) and get media coverage that isn't just about finance' (source: NGO22). Another respondent insisted: 'the whole of society needs to be involved, and for that to happen, you need to present the issues in a social justice perspective, social justice within northern countries and social justice between the North and the South' (source: NGO20).

A fourth category of framing also emerged from the fieldwork, based on issue linkage. A number of groups made crosslinks between issues of pollution, energy, transport or food, on the one hand, and climate, on the other, sometimes bringing in critiques of consumerism. It appeared that the stress placed on a particular cross-linkage of issues resulted from the intersection between their broader mission and specific campaign aims. Here, it is important to recall that many of the NGOs had incorporated climate questions into a pre-existing and sometimes longstanding remit. These factors help explain the propensity to 'hybrid framing'. The following quotations illustrate these points:

> 'There is also the question of noise and pollution, because we have pollutant problems especially in big cities... diesel engines for example (…) one of our arguments for the railways is that noise protection is also climate protection because if we enhance the potential for railways, we enhance the possibility of modal shift.' (source: NGO18)

> 'I would say that in general public support is wobbly because it is hard for people to identify with issues when they are presented in a climate frame, when they are presented in a sort of, the cost of fuel or the cost of food, then they may not make the link, but you might get more action.' (source: NGO30)

The value of 'hybrid framing' is that it brings issues home to people and helps overcome the well-known problem that climate risks are often conceived as distant in space, time and relevance. Cross-linkage of issues make climate protection more hands-on and perhaps more urgent. It integrates the climate question into the 'here and now' issues that people face in their everyday life: the need for healthy and nourishing food, the need for non-polluting transport systems, the need for secure and sustainable energy supplies. It gives opportunities for politicians and citizens alike to see the necessity to take practical climate measures, achieve short-term benefits and make progress to longer term goals. 'Hybrid framing' provides NGOs with more levers to pull and fits well with activist, multi-issue

networks. However, it may also confuse matters for the public—or even distract from climate *per se*—precisely because it results in a composite, rather than a single, frame. Interestingly, its existence seems to have gone largely unnoticed in the academic literature. Whilst the identification of 'hybrid framing' constitutes a significant finding, further research is required to understand its consequences at the cognitive and practical levels.

3.2. Knowledge Generation and Dissemination

The respondents frequently reported that knowledge generation and dissemination was a key task in their organisation. However, modes of enactment varied considerably. The competence to undertake original research and provide scientific expertise was claimed by several NGOs, whereas others frankly admitted that they relied on outside experts for technical matters. The educational aspect of this function was enacted in the form of pedagogic materials for children in some groups, whilst in others, it took the form of advice for consumers. Yet, 'information' tended to be used as a foundation on which to build a more ambitious project: '(*the*) principal aim is to engage people in active citizenship, and so, we have produced citizenship education materials for teachers and run conversations on topics of public interest' (source: NGO29). A frequent leitmotif in the interviews was this stress *not* on information sharing *per se*, but on raising awareness. A few respondents reflected in detail on the advantages and pitfalls of each.

One of those reflections concerned the capacity of citizens at large to relate to climate challenges: 'talking to them about climate is rather abstract… (*People think*) in any case, it won't be my house that suffers the consequences of a tornado' (source: NGO21). Another respondent raised the fundamental question of whether public understanding of climate science mattered: 'the issue of whether people need to understand the climate side, does it matter, if you encourage them to make the decisions to do something differently, then does it matter? I tend to think, maybe not. It would be nice if people did understand it, and I think it important that we do explain it, in a simple way that is very well-founded' (source: NGO18). Clearly, the respondent was prudent in acknowledging the responsibility to provide explanations based on 'sound science'. However, the emphasis on action capacity over intellectual comprehension is important: it is arguably a key characteristic of how environmental NGOs tackle climate (and other) issues and points to the value of their work.

The stress on knowledge as a precursor to action is further illustrated by the following: 'we were looking for fields where we could say, OK, we are doing nature conservation, but also contributing to climate change mitigation. One issue where we could do that was where we protect carbon sinks, like peat lands. This was really important; not only energy companies who build new facilities are part of the solution, but to say "you are also part of that solution". That was very important for the whole climate change issue. You have to break it down, because it is so large' (source: NGO19). Positioning the membership base and, by extension, the wider public, as part of the solution, rather than as part of the problem, indicates the capacity of NGOs to both motivate and empower. It also reveals the marshalling of particular assets to achieve engagement.

One key asset is found in NGO communicational style, which were labelled by a French respondent as a '*communication de connivence*' (source: NGO10), by which was understood a language of complicity based on common reference points and a universe of shared values within a given NGO

constituency. These factors provide a basis for involvement and action. However, whereas longstanding membership NGOs already have that basis—and can build on it in relation to climate— newer groups need to develop their capacity for public engagement. In other words, knowledge and communication are not enough: organisational and social resources are required to translate cognitive and attitudinal dispositions into collective action. These observations point to the scope for further research on resource mobilisation—already an important strand of NGO research—but with a specific focus on which assets, and what deployment of assets, are needed to engage the public on climate issues.

NGO enactment of the knowledge dissemination function contrasts with public propaganda as exercised by governmental bodies. The latter, typically, either provide information for mental digestion (e.g., factsheets on domestic energy consumption) or seek an emotional impact (e.g., campaigns to reduce deaths from road accidents or smoking). They rarely appeal to solidarity of constituency, have little capacity to empower and lack the reflective turn that characterises NGO interventions. The fact that NGOs can draw on these capabilities makes them valuable partners in engaging the public on climate protection. Yet NGOs often have a critical edge that unsettles both public and private sector actors (even when not actively targeting them). Indeed, some of the NGOs in the study aimed not only to go beyond information provision by raising awareness, but also sought to develop political activism. This dynamic will be explored in the following sections.

3.3. Attribution of Responsibility

NGOs are not shy about 'naming and shaming'. A representative of a climate justice NGO affirmed: 'responsibility for climate change is flagrant, since the countries of the Southern hemisphere clearly are not responsible (…) Up till now, northern countries have provided development aid for different reasons—compassion, support, solidarity—but all of a sudden, the question of their responsibility has emerged' (source: NGO22). A militant respondent commented 'politicians today in the democratic system, such as it is, can only gesticulate. Our role is to make them face up to their responsibilities' (source: NGO21). Another interviewee (who confirmed that her organisation had a systematically 'radical' stance) explained that 'this campaign is specifically about the climate impact of banks, and we prefer to inform the public about the harmful policies of the banks in relation to climate and, in the process, encourage them to change banks, rather than tell them to fit low energy bulbs at home. We achieve greater citizen engagement through this type of advocacy' (source: NGO23). This commentary links the theme of attributing political responsibility with that of raising political awareness, whilst recommending a practical action (a boycott). In pouring scorn on minor energy efficiency measures, it counters the tendency to depoliticise climate issues in public propaganda materials (whether on low energy light bulbs, appliances left on stand-by or household insulation).

Each of these examples converges on a 'politics of accountability' in which the attribution of responsibility paves the way for making political demands. Clearly, the ways in which an individual NGO pursues the 'politics of accountability' reflects its positioning on the 'radicalism *versus* reformism' spectrum. Whilst some of the NGOs interviewed engaged in political militancy, the policy of others was to work in partnership with public and private sector actors. Nevertheless, the study

confirmed the importance of the attribution of responsibility theme, even if groups came to it from differing perspectives and implemented contrasting strategies.

3.4. Policy Lobbying

A number of the NGOs in the study presented themselves as political actors who wished to contribute to the policy process, with lobbying being a favoured means:

'We believe that one of our aims and mandate is to influence the policy process, which requires a political agenda.' (source: NGO14)

'I'm convinced that you have to walk using both legs, to take political actions and at the same time, be present in society, in social movements.' (source: NGO20)

Yet, while almost all of the NGOs surveyed undertook some form of lobbying, many avoided an overt political stance, with the more reformist being characterised by a precise 'mission' and near-technocratic focus on desired objectives.

In addition, a disabused attitude to the value of lobbying emerged in several interviews, with an emphatic statement coming from NGO20: 'NGOs have understood the limits of lobbying and that you have to move on to something else'. However, this should not be misinterpreted to mean abandoning lobby work. As clarified by NGO23: 'the effectiveness of an action depends on the objective of the action. Generally, there are several objectives: to get some change from the policy maker, whom we've targeted, increase the visibility of (*our NGO*) and get citizens involved'. NGO lobbying is multi-layered and multi-directional: it pressures decision makers on a number of fronts, including through the mobilisation of the public. Value is created not only through the lobbying outcome, but also through the process itself, since the process raises awareness and contributes to emancipation.

3.5. Public Mobilisation

To say that public mobilisation lies at the heart of NGO activity may seem a pleonasm. However, reality is often different to stereotype. A popular characterisation of NGOs is of groups that favour large-scale mobilisation, through vectors such as membership recruitment or street demonstrations. In practice, many NGOs do not get involved in demonstrations, nor have individuals as members. Further, public mobilisation may or may not have an overt political dimension. Large numbers of associations are in the sport and leisure sectors, where the tendency is to avoid politicisation. Humanitarian and emergency aid organisations often need to walk a line of political neutrality. However, for environmental NGOs that target national and global climate policy-making, political involvement is more or less unavoidable, although the intensity of their politicisation varies. A number of the NGOs in the study favoured campaigns and petitions, sometimes on a large-scale basis. However, smaller NGOs (perhaps by necessity) tended to have a narrow remit, such as food or transport, and focused their efforts on a limited 'client' base.

The following comment, coming from a mass campaign organisation, highlights the links between lobbying, public mobilisation and consciousness-raising: 'Our principle activity for involving citizens is to engage them in the action of advocacy; one advantage, I don't know if it changes the policy maker, but it changes the citizens, they get a foot in the door of political action; it's a lot more

rewarding than sorting your rubbish for recycling' (source: NGO23). Here, advocacy activity is taken to be intrinsically fulfilling, because it emancipates the practitioner, regardless of whether the desired policy impact is achieved. The ensuing personal transformation is contrasted with the physical action of recycling, which is positioned as mundane and self-limiting. This provides further illustration of the process-oriented perspective referred to above.

Another interviewee approached public mobilisation in terms of the impact on policy-makers: 'you have to rally public opinion to the cause and then apply pressure; that's a good definition of what we would like to do, (…) galvanise people who work in NGOs and are in the frontline making strong demands and then say: you see how the lines are shifting; you see how public opinion is opposed to this or to that' (source: NGO26). The two comments taken together reinforce the connections between lobbying and mobilisation and reveal the bridging nature of NGO advocacy.

During the interview, respondents would rapidly shift from generic features of their practice to actual examples, from drawing lessons from experience to improving strategies in the future. Because the interviews took place in the period from 2008 to 2011, the recurring point of reference for large-scale mobilisation was the CoP-15 discussions held in Copenhagen in December 2009. Many of the respondents commented on the perceived importance of the event and the scale of the mobilisation effort mounted in relation to it. The following quotations give the flavour:

> 'We invested really heavily in the preparations for Copenhagen with about a hundred meetings in France.' (source: NGO20)

> 'We had the idea of chartering a train from Paris to Copenhagen (…) for us it was pretty massive, and we took 400 activists.' (source: NGO23)

> 'We ran a campaign together with the other NGOs called Climate Ultimatum, a really big campaign; we had 500,000 signatures.' (source: NGO24)

Not only was Copenhagen seen as a defining event for global climate policy, but it was flagged as a milestone for the evolution of the NGO sector: 'I think that Copenhagen was an extremely important moment (…) because it was the meeting point between the established environmental groups (WWF, Greenpeace, *etc*.) and the anti-globalisation movement' (source: NGO20).

However, disappointment over the outcome at Copenhagen led to an internal crisis in a number of NGOs:

> 'We said it was the last chance meeting, so what do we do when we get nothing?' (source: NGO24)

> 'Copenhagen was worse than a failure; we had our arms chopped off; we didn't know what to do, whether we should continue to mobilise.' (source: NGO26)

After Copenhagen, many NGOs found that they had to regroup and rethink their mobilisation strategies. One of the underlying questions related to their capacity to set an agenda.

3.6. Agenda Setting

NGOs are sometimes accredited with a strong agenda-setting capacity. The survey findings, however, suggest that the reality is complex and nuanced. According to one of the interviewees, the

NGO sector operates in a reactive and opportunistic mode: 'we knew very well that after Copenhagen (…) it would be quite hard to pick up again, given that setting the agenda, creating events, is something that we don't know how to do (…) we can react, but we find it hard to initiate (…) A big problem that we need to sort out is how to communicate on a particular subject without being tied by the political or legislative calendar' (source: NGO26). The impact of the financial and sovereign debt crises was also considered to be a blockage to an agenda-setting capacity: 'then the crisis comes along and puts everything into question again; it revives that old antagonism between environment and development—how can you protect the climate when the priority is to save jobs? With building motorways, the primary justification is that is creates employment' (source: NGO21).

Post-Copenhagen and in the midst of economic crisis, the question then becomes whether the NGO sector will bounce back: what lessons need to be learned, and how can strategy be revised? It transpired in several of the 2010 interviews that internal debate and soul-searching was going on behind the scenes, as illustrated by the following: 'I am getting more and more careful about our position, because I don't want to raise such high expectations, as happened ahead of Copenhagen, because I think the frustration afterward is much more dangerous than saying, OK, we haven't demanded the 100% right thing. There is a discussion between the NGOs on the role of the NGOs in climate mitigation; is it really up to us to figure out what the deal should look like? (…) We really changed our communication after Copenhagen (…) the lack of a deal must not be an excuse for not doing anything on climate change' (source: NGO19). This self-critique acknowledges that NGOs had room for manoeuvring in their strategies towards CoP-15, both going into the negotiations and in their aftermath.

A longer term perspective does, however, allow identification of examples of NGOs setting an agenda. In the UK, the 'Big Ask' campaign spear-headed by Friends of the Earth [38] created pressure for legislation, which led to New Labour's 2008 Climate Change Act [39]. In 2006, the French NGO, Fondation Hulot, launched its Pacte écologique, which invited the candidates for the 2007 French presidential elections to sign up to a number of environmental measures [40]. To mobilise the public and increase pressure on the presidential candidates, a web-based petition was drawn up, which gathered some 750,000 signatures. All of the main candidates signed up. Once elected President, Nicolas Sarkozy, in 2007, organised a national consultation entitled the Grenelle de l'environnement, as he had pledged to do during the mediatisation of the Pacte écologique. The idea of holding the Grenelle consultation was originated by a small NGO called Ecologie sans frontière [41], and the NGO sector played an important part in taking it forward [42].

However, the 2012 French presidential campaign produced nothing comparable to either the Pacte écologique or the Grenelle de l'environnement. In the UK, Tory discourse on the 'Big Society' has provided no clear avenue for enhanced NGO influence since the change of government in 2010. In consequence, whilst analysis of broad political opportunity structures can map the landscape for NGO action, contingent factors explain the timing of successful initiatives. NGOs seem to enjoy some (limited) scope for agenda setting, dependent on the availability of original ideas and the capability to seize a propitious moment.

4. Conclusions

The capacity of environmental NGOs to encourage public engagement with climate protection has been analysed through a conceptual framework which treated advocacy as consisting of six functions: issue framing, knowledge generation and dissemination, attribution of responsibility, lobbying, public mobilisation and agenda setting. This framework was used to organise and interpret the results of a fieldwork study conducted in France, Germany and the UK. Key findings emerged in relation to each of the six functions. The investigation revealed a new category of issue framing, based on the cross-linkage of climate with other issues. The value of 'hybrid framing' is that it increases the scope for hands-on action. Likewise, the knowledge generation and dissemination function, as handled by NGOs, seems to be much more about building bridges to action than developing intellectual understanding (which is more the work of scientists and educationalists). Further, a stress on accountability paves the way for making political demands. Hence, the attribution of responsibility and lobbying functions involve 'naming and shaming' targeted actors and changing their behaviour, but the survey revealed that they also encourage the politicisation of climate. However, the way in which politicisation is played out depends on where an NGO is situated on the 'radicalism *vs*. reformism' spectrum. NGO lobbying is multi-layered in that it pressures decision makers on a number of fronts. Moreover, value is created not only through the outcome of lobbying, but also by the process itself, given that individual and collective engagement is often held to be a source of emancipation and intrinsically fulfilling. The performance of the public mobilisation function appears to be conditioned by organisational trajectory: big membership NGOs with a campaigning background have gravitated to large-scale mobilisation on international climate negotiations, whereas small groups in the study with a discrete remit (e.g., food, transport) engaged with a limited 'client' base for more local purposes. However, the outcome of the 2009 Copenhagen negotiations undermined the immediate scope for mass campaigns and left a question mark over the medium-term potential for greater public engagement. This adverse context is aggravated by economic crisis and the spread of climate scepticism. These developments increase the uncertainties over NGO ability to set a climate agenda.

Finally, it is important to stress that the findings from this study relate to the strategies of environmental NGOs in three European countries during 2008–2011. In consequence, their general applicability must remain tentative. This is partly because the general landscape appears to be changing rapidly, partly because of the need to follow up with a larger research sample. Humanitarian, aid and development organisations are playing an increasing role in climate affairs: future research projects would benefit from their inclusion, on as wide a geographical basis as possible. A broader survey would allow development of the conceptual framework related to climate advocacy. It could also improve the understanding of the nature and deployment of the resources available to NGOs to achieve public engagement with climate, as well as provide a larger evidence base for assessing the effectiveness of NGO climate strategies.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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