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Nancy's reaction paper

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Reaction Paper – May 2, 2005

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11.363

Carmin et al. (2003) discuss the nexus between political opportunity structures and local action. The authors underscore three key strategies often used by NGOs to push forward their agenda: communication, leverage, and community development. The paper makes a subtle, but very important point: the very strategies that NGOs select to focus on are a function of the political opportunities that they are faced with. This implies that if one is familiar with the political environment in a given situation then one can most likely deduce what types of strategies and tactics might be employed. Figure 1 in the article is particularly helpful in mapping out the continuum from low access to high access political opportunities and attributing various NGO tactics along this continuum. This article is key to scholars that choose study national contexts in which more limited political opportunities dominate. Interestingly, this study also contends that there is another interaction that exists between transnational and local activism, besides the "boomerang effect".

Coban (2004) provides a very interesting overview of one particular movement in Turkey. The particular case looks at a community resisting a mining initiative. Coban hones in on the duality of movements: there is one set of actions against the state which endorsed the mining activity while there was another set of actions against the corporation to force it to stop its mining activity. Coban pays close attention to the array of resources that the community members made use of, such as, "production tools, livestock and mostly their bodies – when holding demonstration" (Coban, 2004). Another critical facet of this community's efforts was that it was a suite of inter-organizational connections that enable the local conflict to escalate to a national and international issue.

Shaw (2004) argues that much of the discourse around environmental politics remains framed by the assumption of sovereignty. Shaw uses the case of the Great Bear Rainforest Campaign to illuminate the complex set of interactions that underpin campaigns that permeate local, national, and international contexts. Shaw makes a number of pointed comments about the broader implications of this campaign on contemporary environmental politics: (i) the extent to which the campaign was a truly global regime (ii) the absence of democracy of campaigns (iii) the problems associated with the identification of a political authority of a campaign (iv) the difficulty with sustaining interest in a campaign and (v) the reality that sovereign states are sometimes incapable or unwilling to fulfill the role of insisting upon justice, equality, or sustainability?

Fisher and Green (2004) put forth a conceptual model for understanding the degree of political engagement of developing countries and civil society actors in global governance for sustainable development. The model centers on the notion of disenfranchisement and Fisher and Green (2004) specifically identify and analyze three dimensions of disenfranchisement: endogenous resources, transnational connectivity, and geopolitical status. The authors call for further research to test their theory of disenfranchisement. They suggest a two-pronged approach to such future inquiry: (i) an exploration of ways that disenfranchisement varies across nation-states or civil society and (ii) an examination of the dynamics within developing countries and civil society actors.

Questions:

How would Carmin et al.'s continuum of political opportunities (figure 1 in the article) accommodate for sudden shifts/changes in political context? Would NGOs become irrelevant or would they play an even more prominent role?

What should we make of Shaw's determinant of successful campaigns (page 388)? How should campaigns be evaluated or effectiveness, if at all?