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Nancy's reaction

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11.363 Reaction Paper

These four articles provide an interesting range of perspectives on the evolution and current status of social movements. Hallstrom provides a window on the European Union, Peter Ho discusses China, Sara Singleton provides a US perspective on collaborative environmental policy-making, and Herbert Kitschelt examines political opportunity structures in the US, West Germany, France, and Sweden.

Kitschelt defines political opportunity structures on page 58 and then goes on to say that in addition to political opportunity structures, "system-wide political properties and national 'policy styles' also play key roles in determining the dynamics of social movements" (Kitschelt, 1986). Kitschelt lists four factors that determine the "openness" of political regimes to new demands on the "input" side: the number of political parties and factions; capacity of legislatures to act independently; intermediation between interest groups and the executive branch; and a mechanism in place to aggregate demands. It wasn't particularly clear how Kitschelt defined and interpreted "political output structures", which is, in effect, the other side of the political opportunity structure coin (political input structures is the other side).

Hallstrom is concerned with three inter-related questions related to NGO participation in European environmental policy: who participates, who allows them to participate, and what are the reasons. Hallstrom raises a number of underlying themes that relate to NGOs and environmental policy-making the European Union: the role of "informal decision-making", the NGO-government client relationship, "eurocracy" versus greater political Union, and democratic deficit.

Peter Ho offers a comprehensive analysis of environmentalism in China. The section that pertains to features of Chinese green organizations (Page 907-911) is perhaps the most telling in that it articulates why a general statement about the nature and configuration about environmental social organizations remains an elusive task. It strikes me that his analysis as to why this is the case, is probably relevant to other regions of the world that have yet to experience a vibrant and substantial environmental social movement, such as, West and Central Asia. The explanation of Chinese NGO/GONGO hybrids might also resonate with other countries that have a similarly large, dominating, government structure.

Singleton looks at the strengths and weaknesses of collaborative environmental policy-making. Her conclusion about the future of collaborative "place-based" natural resource management seems both simplistic and fairly obvious – namely, that "while the process is local, many of the sources of the problem it seeks to address and the constituencies it must respond to are not" (Singleton, 2002). There is little in the way of alternatives or recommendations for improving collaborative environmental planning.