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NIELSEN Reaction Paper

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11.363: Civil Society and Environment
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Politics Beyond the State: Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics
In this essay Wapner argues that transnational (environmental) actors (a particular type of NGO) shape conditions that influence how their particular cause is addressed. Wapner presents evidence (ozone, Antarctic, nuclear policy) of how transnational groups, through the use of various strategies and tactics, are increasingly affecting social behaviour and governmental policy-making over environmental affairs, particularly since the 1970s. He asserts that although TEAGs direct significant effort toward state policies and behaviour, their political activity does not stop there. On the contrary, Wapner argues that TEAGs actively utilize a 'fluid approach' whereby they seek to address lifestyle, consumer habits and public orientation; essentially extending their reach into a 'global civil society' that includes not only the State apparatus, but extends to shape individuals, corporations and communities as well. TEAGs work to define "boundaries of good conduct" within this wide array of actors to think and act in reference to the environment. I believe, however, his arguments would have been strengthened, or perhaps altered, if he drew on additional examples from the developing world and how TEAG interact with non-democratic states. Many of his examples (tuna, seals, McDonalds, etc.) were Western in nature.

Horizontal Politics

In this essay, Wapner reviews how there has been a 'virtual explosion' in the interest of NGOs and the growing acknowledgement, particularly by students of International Relations, that NGOs do in fact influence world political affairs. Wapner specifically explores, what he refers to as the "under-appreciated" dimension of NGO politics, the cultural aspect of their work. He argues that the work of NGOs, in this case environmental NGOs, is more than just simply influencing the action of a State, but includes influencing broader 'cultural' frames of reference. For example, Amnesty International, pressures not only States to change their actions and behavior over human rights, but closely works with the media and a variety of other actors throughout the world to alter the way people fundamentally "conceptualize human beings". Wapner asserts that NGOs work to focus on the 'political dimensions of culture' and the 'cultural dimensions of politics'. In this article Wapner specifically focuses on the work of environmental NGOs and argues they seek to influence not only State and private firm behaviour over environmental management practices, but also seek to persuade ordinary citizens located around the world to "care about" and adopt "environmentalist values."

Environmental Organizations

I did not get a chance to read this article as I was preparing for my presentation. Apologies. I will attempt to read it before class tomorrow.