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Nielsen April 12th Reaction Paper

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April 12th Summary Paper

Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies (Kitschelt)

In this article Kitschelt compares the anti-nuclear movement in four democratic states: France, Sweden, the United States and West Germany (article written in 1986). Each country experienced some form of conflict over nuclear technology, but each the anti-nuclear movements in each nation pursued varying strategies, which subsequently led to a different impact on domestic energy policy. Overall the author argues that the most useful 'variable' for explaining these difference was a particular nation's political opportunity structure, including, but likely not limited to, specific arrangement of resource configurations, institutional arrangements, and the historical precedents for social mobilization. The author's research demonstrates that the political opportunity structure in each nation functioned as 'filters' "between the mobilization of the movement and its choice of strategies and its capacity to change the social environment." In each country the overall foundation was similar: movements wanted to prevent the completion of nuclear power plants; nuclear power conflicts grew from localized disputes into national movements; and the objective 'threat' of nuclear power in each country was more or less equal. The author then reviews the key factors that determine the political openness of a regime and the operational dimensions that characterize the capacity of a given political system to implement policies. In conclusion, the author argues that "mobilization strategies and impacts of social movement can, to a significant degree, be explained by the general characteristics of domestic political opportunity structures." For example, in states where political input structures were more open (responsive?) to mobilization, such as in Sweden, and to a lesser extent the United States, a search for new policy options was triggered. And where nations were (more) closed, as in France and West Germany, governments tended to follow predetermined courses of action. I find this somewhat surprising given the constitutional arrangements of the United States and Germany. The US presidential system is vulnerable to frequently divided executive-legislative governments – as was the case during Reagan's time (when I assume nuclear energy policy was fervently pursued due to the oil crisis). In this case, some interest groups' policy preferences could be satisfied simply by preventing their opponents from gaining ground, therefore no effort necessary to reach any accommodation among disputants. Often there are polarized power centers that seek to displace one another in the policy-making center by ousting the political party controlling the national executive and legislative branches. Whereas in Germany (likely a different constitution from when it was divided?), a parliamentary systems exists that almost forces the development of political coalitions and many 'interest' groups would then likely enjoy special access to specific political parties – so I am somewhat surprised that Germany was classified as a 'closed' system that followed a pre-determined course of action given that the policy-making process is heavily influenced by political coalition building.

Greening without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China (Ho)

Ho argues that due to specific features present within the Chinese political context, environmentalism has emerged in a gradual way, incorporating various elements of 'green' NGOs outside of China, but unable to openly challenge the

state. Environmentalism in China has found a 'base' and it will likely continue to grow as domestic and international awareness of environmental degradation becomes more evident. Green civil society organizations are rapidly growing throughout China (although they remain heavily situated in large urban centers such as Beijing), and despite a number of challenges facing the sector (human resources, state registration, etc.) the sector appears to have constructed a solid base and will likely flourish. Ho's fundamental point is the paradoxical situation the Chinese state finds itself faced with: maintaining total social control, but being unable to provide services that the state historically was exclusively responsible for. So in some respects the state seeks to control the activities of the non-state sector, but simultaneously requiring its services and actions. If the actions of a particular organization are considered non-confrontational, then this organizations tends to enjoy considerable latitude, however, if a particularly organizations begins to place demands (policy reform for example) on the state or test the boundaries of 'advocacy' this may unleash an all together different response. The social stability of the state is the paramount concerns of the Chinese leadership and at the current pace of evolution the state is demonstrating a level of 'concern' over where the environmental 'base' may shift. Again a paradox exists – the state wants to maintain social control, but while relaxing its grip over society.

Collaborative Environmental Planning in the American West: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Singleton)

The author examines collaborative, place-based environmental policy-making. She asserts that this approach has been broadly embraced by elected officials, policy-makers and academics and these constituents argue that this approach offers a new model for democratic practice. Singleton argues that collaborative environmental policy-making is a concept 'whose time has come', although I am not certain this has been as whole-heartedly embraced as the author asserts; although the language of many planning processes exude multi-stakeholder processes and avoid 'top-down' directives, I am not convinced that collaborative approaches have truly been incorporated – consultation is certainly not synonymous with collaboration. Singleton's research seeks to "test the claims made for collaborative, place-based natural resource management" by exploring three different cases of watershed management in the US Pacific Northwest. Some of her key findings include: 1) collaborative environmental processes are often locally situated, however, many of the sources of the problems (e.g. policy design) are located elsewhere; 2) often the management of environmental problems is heavily affected (and constrained) by jurisdictional issues; 3) devolution is not always a good thing as many tend to believe – devolution can empower local groups or elites that are not necessary able, willing to capable of managing a particular event or process (what she terms the darker side of devolution) – this is particularly complex and relevant in developing countries and less so in developed nations I believe; 4) the complex issue of knowledge generation – essentially she refers to the difference between tacit and explicit forms of know and whether that is individual or social, and the conflict among those quadrants. She raises the very important issue of 'who's' knowledge and for what question – however, I tend to think this issue can be overplayed by social scientists sometimes. For my perspective this discussion is relevant to debates that are rooted in informational conflicts, but what about environmental conflicts rooted in value or structural frameworks?; and 5) and finally she discusses the role of leadership in a collaborative process; she asserts the 'skills' of leadership may be less relevant and perhaps issues such as trust and legitimacy are just as, or more, relevant to leadership.