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Polish Environmental Movement 1980–2017

(De)legitimization, Politics & Ecological Crises

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Abstract

Why has the Polish government decided to give in to environmental protesters in the widely publicised case of the Rospuda River (2006-2007) but chooses to ignore both EU pressure and domestic activism the ongoing protests against the logging of the Białowieża forest? It is difficult to understand the difference without an in-depth analysis of domestic political conditions and ways in which external stimuli and global processes are accommodated. That is why in this paper we go quite far back in history, to trace the roots, emergence and evolution of Polish political environmentalism – not restricted to protest groups, social movements, or green parties, but covering all forms of political engagement in the name of environmental protection. The paper begins with a brief reconstruction of the ideational and socio-political evolution of environmentalism in Poland, and the history of the rise and fall of the mass environmental protest movement between 1985 and 1990. The analysis that follows traces three levels of the movement's legitimacy: on the level of practices, breadth and discourse. Our analysis is structured chronologically, dividing the period until 2017 into historically significant phases. Each phase sees shifts on different levels of legitimacy, and each ends with a spectacular environmental protest or a decision linked to it: Żarnowiec in 1989, Czorsztyn in 1992, Mount St. Anne in 1998, Rospuda in 2007 and the ongoing campaigns around the issues of nuclear energy, smog and the Białowieża Forest. The results of these most spectacular and remembered protests had implications for the following phase, the trajectory of the movement or were a kind of litmus test for the legitimacy of political environmental protest at those points in time.

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1. Introduction

The surprising and perhaps even paradoxical demise of a mass environmental protest movement in Poland after its heyday in the late 1980s has already drawn significant scholarly attention (Gliński and Koziarek 2007; Szulecki *et al.* 2015; van Eeden 2018), even though their influence on post-1989 politics was belittled or forgotten (Corry 2014). A lot of research has also addressed the process of the “NGO-ization” of civil society in post-communist contexts (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2016), and the role of pre-accession EU conditionality and “Europeanization” in re-shaping Poland’s legislative and ideational landscape related to environmental protection (Börzel and Buzogány 2010; Szulecka and Szulecki 2013; Cent *et al.* 2014). This article is an attempt to put all those dispersed arguments together under one analytical narrative, tracing the evolution of Polish political environmentalism through the fall of communism, transformation, EU accession and the post-accession period. To understand that process we trace changes in legitimacy of environmentalism in Poland since the 1980s on three levels: of practice, organizations and discourse.

Over a decade since the EU’s Eastern Enlargement, it is evident that ‘conditionality’ is no longer a relevant mechanism for studying policy diffusion and political change in Central and Eastern Europe. While formal compliance with the EU *acquis* has been achieved, state-society relations and the way different political conflicts linked to environmental issues play out in Poland after 2004 is visibly related to domestic factors. These include both momentary political games, protest mobilization, and the way structural contexts unfold in a longer historical perspective, since the fall of Communism and even before that watershed moment. The difference between the outcome of the Rospuda river conflict in 2006-2007 and the ongoing protests against the logging of the Białowieża forest, where the incumbent government can afford to ignore both EU pressure and domestic activism, are a case in point – it is difficult to understand the difference without an in-depth analysis of domestic political conditions and ways in which external stimuli and global processes are accommodated.

That is why in this paper we go quite far back in history, to trace the roots, emergence and evolution of Polish political environmentalism – not restricted to protest groups, social movements, or green parties, but covering all forms of political engagement in the name of environmental protection.

The paper begins with a brief reconstruction of the ideational and socio-political evolution of environmentalism in Poland, and the history of the rise and fall of the mass environmental protest movement between 1985 and 1990. We argue that at communism’s end, Polish environmentalism boasted a strong legitimacy in all three dimensions – its practice of civil disobedience met wide societal support, its organizations had significant membership and power, and its rhetoric had broad appeal. We argue that an important split occurred at the time which later conditioned the evolution of the movement until the 2000s. The analysis that follows is structured chronologically, dividing the period until 2017 into historically significant phases. Each phase sees shifts on different levels of the movement’s legitimacy, and each ends with a spectacular environmental protest or a decision linked to it: Żarnowiec in 1989, Czorsztyn in 1992, Mount St. Anne in 1998, Rospuda in 2007 and the ongoing campaigns around the issues of nuclear energy, smog and the Białowieża Forest. The results of these most spectacular and remembered protests had implications for the following phase, the trajectory of the movement or were a kind of litmus test for the legitimacy of political environmental protest at those points in time.

2. Theory and method

In tracing the evolution of Polish environmentalist movement, we seek to overcome the fragmentation of its history and conceptual mismatches leading to divergent, even contradictory diagnoses. Three separate literatures have thus far touched upon the political significance of environmentalism in Poland: the one of social movements and dissent, the broad field of civil society studies and the political science literature on Europeanization. The first one, rooted in social history and sociology, was often preoccupied more with the period before 1989, and if it looked beyond that date, it was to analyse offshoots of the movement without a broader socio-political context. The second one, in turn, tended to focus on post-1989 developments and used different methods and indicators, favoring organized forms of social activism. Lastly, 'Europeanists' displayed a transnational gaze, putting a priori value on multi-level governance and the outside-in vector of political change. We draw on all three, in an attempt of grafting their findings and insights onto a common analytical narrative which seeks to describe the evolution of the environmental movement, understand the fluctuation of its politicization and explain why it appeared to be successful in some cases, while failed to make its political mark in others.

Our explanation builds on the concept of *legitimacy* as proposed by Weber and developed further by Jackson (2002). Legitimacy shapes social action by 'rendering some activities permissible while ruling others out of order' (Jackson 2002: 451). Importantly, legitimacy is a relational concept, and the limits of what bounds acceptable action depend on the particular situation. This means that what is deemed legitimate changes, and also that legitimacy is inherently non-normative (Jackson 2002: 449). As legitimacy is part of the realm of social context, it is a factor shaping actions indirectly by 'changing the contours of the social environment into which action arises' (Ibidem: 452).

Weber suggested that the position of political associations, as social actors, 'rests on the prestige bestowed on them' and the 'legitimacy of that social action which is ordered and regulated by them' (1968: 903-904). We propose a distinction between three types of legitimacy, or better – that legitimacy of social movements functions at three important levels. Firstly, a movement is seen as legitimate if it maintains a strong and visible link with a wider societal base – either through *membership or mobilizing capacity*. Secondly, its *instruments and methods* of action can be seen as acceptable and appropriate or not. The limits of what is acceptable are 'fixed by a specific type of legitimacy, and this can reduce the possibility of 'unacceptable' actions ... inasmuch as there is no legitimate way to justify them' (Jackson 2002: 452). Finally, on the level of discourse and ideas, the relationship between those which the movement represents and how it frames its main arguments can resonate or clash with the dominant discourses of the society. To be an actor means to have the capacity and authority to act, hence a social actor, e.g. a social movement is 'the result of a successful process of legitimation' (Jackson 2002: 455).

(De)legitimation, understood as the mechanism or process of 'drawing and (re)establishing boundaries, ruling some courses of action acceptable and others unacceptable' (Jackson 2011: 41 cited in Jackson 2002), can help us explain the actual outcome – which is the strength of the Polish environmental movement and its ability to influence policy and decisions on important issues. What factors influence legitimacy on these three levels? In this paper, we go quite far back to trace the changes in the political sphere as well as changes in dominant societal values. We see these as pools of dispositional factors which can be activated in different conjunctures. Within a modern indus-

trial society in 'Europe' there will always be a traceable tradition of protecting the environment, as well as important discourses which overwrite environmental concerns (see Szulecki 2011). There will always be a tradition of more confrontational resistance as well as legality or consensual decision-making. The question is rather why are these particular dispositions activated in particular moments and how do they influence socio-political orders.

In our analysis, we draw on a wide review of existing secondary literature of the Polish green movement and environmental protest, as well as that relating to the evolution of Poland's civil society after 1990. We also use archival (mostly media) sources to reconstruct some important events and the way they were reported at the time. For more in depth opinions on the evolution of the movement we rely on interviews. This is combined with an analysis of different public opinion surveys relating to environmental values and attitudes towards nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), politicians and levels of trust.

3. The roots of Polish political environmentalism

3.1 Communist environmentality and anti-communist environmentalism

A degree of ecological awareness in Poland is not a novelty or fashion that came from the West, but draws on a well-established tradition (Kozielecki 2016; Szulecki 2011). Gliński and Koziarek argue that "the tradition of nature protection in Poland goes back at least to the thirteenth century" (2007, p. 187), although environmentalism in its modern form appeared only in the mid-nineteenth century (Urban 2016: 411-2). That said, while conservationist ideas neither appeared only during the communist era nor were fully overwritten by that experience (Ziemińska 2008), the societal context in which Polish political environmentalism emerged was characterized and conditioned by a very special discursive structure – a *communist environmentality* (Šnajdr 2008).

Communism had two major roles for nature: as a resource and as a decoration. Its ultimate ideal was modernization and subjection of the world to human beings – a point in which it matched well with conservative instrumental views of nature as well (Topiński 1983; DeBardeleben 1985). That ideological and utilitarian attitude towards nature, building its relation with individuals as well as state power, constitutes the communist environmentality. Šnajdr notes that nature was not a political subject, and that the communist regimes considered their primary battle with culture, not nature (2008, p. 22), the latter additionally depoliticized through its recreational function and remoteness. In consequence, state-socialism displayed a complete disregard towards the natural environment as a separate system (of beings and values), and a far-reaching arrogance in remodeling it in an arbitrary manner. While grand engineering projects demolishing entire ecosystems also took place in the capitalist world, it is probable that never in history were they achieved in such scale as in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Siegelbaum *et al.* 2000).

Within this context, societal practices towards the environment were shaped, differently in public and in private. The former was marked by a habituated disregard for both urban space and natural environment. This was mirrored by an absolutely opposite attitude towards all private space, including privatized natural elements, such as the small sub-urban garden plots and the countryside vacation cabins (Polish: *działka*, roughly the equivalent of Russian *dacha*) (Bren 2002). These retreats gave socialist ur-

ban populations an experience of “nature” in its recreational role. Many were not interested in moving beyond that and noticing any further value of the environment. They were, however, very interested in the quality of the environment in general, if it had a direct connection to their health. That was the minimal understanding of environmentalism that the opposition movements would build on.

3.2 Motivations for protecting the environment and for green protest

Gliński and Koziarek (2007) discuss the different motivations for nature protection, which inform Polish environmental discourse: *economic, utilitarian* and *pragmatic* (motivated by the threat to human health), *philosophical, aesthetic, religious*, and last but not least – *patriotic*. All of these understandings of the environment are visible in the protest movements of the late 1980s. The former activist Ewa Charkiewicz emphasizes two axes within the movement. One saw a continuum of motivation stretching from a very anthropocentric perspective on the environment as a source of comfort and health to a deeply ecological position valuing nature in itself. The other was a distinction between anti-communist and anti-systemic activism, depending on how the blame for environmental degradation was assigned: “for some people the guilt for destroying the environment lay first and foremost in the “*komuna*” and the industrialization identified with the People’s Republic. Others were looking for the causes of the environmental crisis in culture, in the relations of violence between people and between humans and nature, taking various forms, and finally in the functioning of the economy” (Charkiewicz 2008, p. 37). This last line would later prove the main division within the movement itself (Urban 2016, 413). Political environmentalism for many also offered a feeling of value-driven engagement, ‘a sense of mission, ideology and honesty’ (Karaczun 2014).

The appeal of environmental issues was their seemingly apolitical character – at least that was how it was initially perceived by both the environmentalists and the authorities. Environmental protest never directly challenged the communist regime on ideological grounds and yet proved to be lethal for the totalitarian *system*, because it got people together, made them ask difficult questions and demand explanations, created situations of visible non-conformity and enhanced civic activity in ways difficult to mute. Szerzyński points to that characteristic of environmental protest when he claims that “while being a highly culturalized form of politics, it cannot easily be categorized under many of the theoretical labels used to understand such politics” (Szerzyński 1999, p. 221).

3.3 Environmentalist organizations: Formal, semi-formal, youth, & dissident

The first modern nature protection organization was established in 1873 to protect the Tatra Mountains and regained national independence regained in 1918 quickly spawned a proto-ministerial Temporary State Commission for Nature Protection in 1919, replaced by a State Council for Nature Protection in 1925. Already in 1928 the first nationwide general conservationist organization emerged – the *League for Nature Protection* (LOP), bringing together members from all over Poland (Kozielecki 2016). The post-war communist authorities limited the competences of the State Council. Poland’s numerous national parks and reserves, despite formal protection, were sites of extensive resource extraction and mass tourism (Hicks 1996). Nevertheless, LOP’s wide membership (ex-

ceeding one million) made it a significant force in shaping the society's environmental discourse. From this emerged a dissonance between the preached "love of nature" and the visible factual state of the environment. That said, in the eyes of the ruling power, the educational activities of LOP and the *Nature Protection Watch* (SOP) – a volunteer-based organization set up in 1957 to enforce and control environmental protection measures – did not pose a direct threat to the regime (Gliński and Koziarek 2007: 191). Yet as the emphasis of the authorities was on economic efficiency and development, ecologists often encountered hostility and ostracism on the part of the state.

As a result of the loosening control during the 1980-81 liberalization caused by the wave of strikes and the emergence of the "Solidarity" trade union, LOP regained some of its independence, while other ecological organizations entered the scene. The most important was the expert *Polish Ecological Club* (PKE) established in 1980, the first independent and non-governmental organization of ecological character in Poland in Eastern Europe (Kozielecki 2016).

The evolution of political environmentalism in Poland was similar to the West, though delayed by about a decade. Official ecological institutions and associations of natural scientists were step-wisely transformed and enriched with wider movements grouped around certain environmental concerns or acting in accordance with the spirit of deep ecology (Kozielecki 2016). Some campaigns that may be portrayed as the early signals of a nascent movement took place in the late 1970s: mobilization against brown coal reserves development close to the Greater Poland National Park or the campaign around the Poznan Rift gathered a broader network, including academics as well as local activists (Piotrowski 2015: 245)

Poland visibly lagged behind the other Central European countries as far as dissident involvement in environmental issues is concerned. The 'old' opposition was reluctant to take such issues up, more concerned with keeping the underground 'Solidarity' trade union alive (Szulecki 2012: 145). The planned construction of the Żarnowiec nuclear plant (first steps were made already in the 1970s) became the first unifying problem in the Gdansk area on the Baltic coast, in the birthplace of the Solidarity, with first protest actions led by the anarchists and punks forming the *Alternative Society Movement* (RSA). The year 1984 saw the emergence of a semi-official youth organization *I prefer to be (Wolę być)*, set up around the scouting periodical "Na przełaj" (*Cross-country*) (Żwawa 2005; Charkiewicz 2008; Kenney 2002).

In 1985, the *Freedom and Peace* (WiP) movement was established. Though it started out as a movement of conscientious objectors to military service, WiP quickly picked up environmental questions as well, and soon became the main engine of Polish political environmentalism. Its ideational eclecticism was not unusual in Central Europe of the time – WiP mastered quite well the skill of articulating its postulates in the universally acknowledged language of human rights, making their struggle resonate well at home and abroad, across the political spectrum (Szulecki 2011; 2012).

The year 1985 also saw the establishment of the first animal rights organization, *Gaja*. There were also certain local activists groups and initiatives facing environmental threats emerging in their area, as well as counter-cultural movements promoting an ecological lifestyle such as the Living Architecture Workshop (Kozuchowska 2007). Although officially registered in the 1990, the Workshop for All Beings (*Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot*), was already functioning in 1988/1989. Its members organized local protests in Southern Poland over the Wapienica Valley, against urban forestry cuttings in Bielsko-Biala, against a coke plant in the neighboring Czech Stonava and against the Żarnowiec Nuclear Power Plant. In sum, by the second half of the 1980s, Poland boasted a full spectrum of environmental organizations, from official ones linked to the state,

through independent elite and expert groups, semi-official youth associations to unofficial and openly political dissident movements.

4. Triple Legitimacy: Polish political environmentalism 1984-1989

In the mid-1980s a number of factors converged in Poland leading to the politicization of environmental issues. Firstly, the state of the environment was alarming. Due to the rapid growth of heavy industry and urbanization, pollution indicators sky-rocketed. Cole and Clark suggest that while 'communism may have been the dirtiest social order ever constructed, and People's Poland was perhaps the dirtiest of communist countries' (1998).

In 1980, 43% of the Poles declared that they were dissatisfied with the state of the natural environment (Kimla 2016: 465). One third of the population lived in areas where all permissible air or water pollution standards were violated. Only 11% of the forests were healthy and all municipal waste was thrown into landfills. By the 1990s, there was not a single industrial plant reducing emissions of sulfur dioxide or nitrogen oxides. The state behaved like a profit-oriented entrepreneur, and environmental equipment was referred to as "non-productive", i.e. generating only costs. Moreover, it was hard even to prove the level of pollution. Centers for Environmental Research and Control existed, but their inspectors only had manual equipment that was difficult to use for measurement (Józefiak 2014). In 1988 75.8% of the rivers were classified as excessively polluted (GUS 1990 in: Millard 1998). Similarly, soil pollution was severe, some areas were designated as zones of 'environmental catastrophe' (Millard 1998: 146).

The environment was in dire state, but the issue at stake was also quite visibly public health. Another factor was the growing societal unrest de-legitimization of the communist regime, following the backlash on 'Solidarity' and coupled with a collapsing economy. Environmental protest was not emerging in institutional vacuum. Instead, experience and organizational structures of earlier opposition could easily be used.

The environmental movement in Poland managed to mobilize different cohorts of the society compared to the mainstream opposition, introduced novel repertoire of contention and brought issues that were not within the mainstream public discourse. The activists, especially those linked to more clearly environmentalist groups, practitioners of deep ecology, were usually young, less than 25, students and members of subcultures with a holistic vision of nature (Piotrowski 2015: 243-4).

The Chernobyl catastrophe, and the early protests that followed, made the mobilizing potential of environmental protests obvious – and showed how awkward the situation of the police and the authorities was to suppress such activity, as the regime itself claimed environmental problems were not political. After the 1986 catastrophe, RSA quickly made a link between Chernobyl and the potential threat of Żarnowiec (Piotrowski 2015: 247). Besides Żarnowiec, the protest targeted another planned NPP at Klempicz, as well as the waste storage site at Międzyrzecz, (see Szulecki *et al.* 2015). Other significant fields were air and water quality.

The period between 1985 and 1989 fits Tarrow's (2011) model of a 'cycle of contention'. After the protest movement emerged, it gradually broadened its base and scale, leading to "widespread contention [that] produces externalities, which give[s] challengers at least a temporary advantage and allows them to overcome the weaknesses in their resource base" (2011: 199).

In that initial phase, the environmental movement boasted a triple legitimacy, making it a very strong challenger to the regime and an important representative of societal dissatisfaction. It had a firm societal base and both the number of environmental groups and their membership flourished in the 1980s. Estimates vary between 135 to about 200 groups and organizations – formal, informal and independent, but sharing environmentalist goals (Gliński 1998b; Millard 1998: 152). The PKE alone boasted a membership of some 2000-4500 thousand (Ostolski 2009: 403). Furthermore, the protest actions drew much larger crowds, exceeding actual organizational membership manifold. The usual mechanism was that WiP or some other organization would advertise and organize a demonstration – be it sit-in or a march – and onlookers would spontaneously join it, increasing the numbers. A protest march in Wrocław in September 1988 gathered ten thousand protesters, making it the largest street demonstration in the city since the “Solidarity” May Day march and riots in 1982. The “social referendum” in the Gdansk administrative region, perhaps the largest independently organized popular vote in the world, gathered over one million people to cast their ballot, 86% of whom voted against the construction of a nuclear power plant at Żarnowiec. The vote was organized in one week, through a loose and informal network of sympathizers and local NGOs (Borewicz *et al.* 2018).

Used to dissident street action and civil disobedience, the Polish society at the time accepted environmentalist protest and its flamboyance. There was absolutely no question about the movement’s methods. In fact, much of the innovation in protest repertoire during the last years of communism came from WiP and other organizations involved in environmental protest (Kenney 2002). Bystanders would often protect individual protest leaders or lone oppositionists, not allowing the police to arrest them.¹ It is safe to say that until the end of the 1980s, environmental protest based on civil disobedience was also seen as a highly legitimate form of dealing with the official authorities (Ostolski 2008: 404).

All of this was possible mostly because the protest movement boasted strong legitimacy on the level of its discourse – environmentalist message resonated very widely. Clear references to health, especially of children, made this much easier. Environmental protest was widely publicized by exilic and Western-based media, like Radio Free Europe, as well as Poland’s massive ‘second circulation’ (*samizdat*) press, further legitimizing the cause, and perhaps blowing the scale of their efforts slightly out of proportion.² Support from the Catholic Church, and the emergence of Franciscan environmental groups as well as engagement of eco-activists in Catholic meetings also played a role.³

An additional factor was that while many supporters used environmental protest means to achieve anti-communist ends, environmental activism transcended the Manichean division between the evil regime – *komuna* – and the “nation” (Ostolski 2008: 407). At numerous demonstrations and on relatively rare occasions when the police intervened, the protesters were shouting “the police is drinking the same water”.⁴ This added to the awkwardness of the situation in which the intervening police were – and influenced the relatively light treatment of the green opposition. On a deeper level, political environmentalism offered some ideas for democratization that went beyond bringing down Communism – even if these were soon largely muted. In spite of this, the dissident environmental movement, with its unique mixture of ecology, human rights, peace

¹ Interview with Radosław Gawlik in: Kenney (2007), p. 162.

² Personal communication with Radosław Gawlik, Wrocław, 13 November 2017; see also: interview with Leszek Budrewicz in: Kenney (2007), p. 124.

³ Interview with Jerzy Żurko in: Kenney (2007), p. 144-7. Also: Kimla (2016), p. 470.

⁴ Interview with Radosław Gawlik in Olszewski (2011).

activism and anti-political politics, was perhaps more important for the later trajectory of Central European civil society than any other strand of dissent (Corry 2014: 318).

5. Żarnowiec, the Round table, and Czorsztyn: Radicals and pragmatics part ways, 1989-92

The Chernobyl catastrophe and the way it was handled by the communist authorities was an additional element of the regime's de-legitimization in the eyes of the society. The environmental movement was instrumental in achieving this – and it is notable that when it came to negotiating a handover of power and regime transformation with the communists at the symbolic Round Table, environmental issues constituted one of the issue areas.

The climax of the Żarnowiec campaign occurred in the years 1989-90, when WiP – torn apart by internal ideational and political differences – was in agony.⁵ Although at the turn of 1988 and 1989 the final steps of regime transition were still ahead, the nation-wide protest cycle was entering the phase of exhaustion. This phase, according to Tarrow (2011: 206-7), is driven mostly by a complimentary pair of mechanisms: *radicalization* and *institutionalization*. These two mechanisms are clearly discernable in the Polish environmental movement at the end of the 1980s, and account for a split with lasting consequences (compare Piotrowski 2015: 256). While a large part of environmental activists looked for political and career opportunities on the democratized political scene, in public administration, formal organizations and business, the radicals contested the conciliatory path, demanding more 'democracy'. From the perspective of the emerging new political system, which was cast around the idea of representation rather than participation as the core of democracy, this was interpreted as 'refusing to take part in politics' (Gliński 1994). This last claim is highly problematic, as one can convincingly argue that the more 'fundamentalist', radical and often deeply ecological part of the movement was the one that refused to allow environmental protest to be de-politicized. As we will see in the remainder of this section, both the radical strategy and the expansion of more moderate conservationists in mainstream (non)governmental institutions led to important successes but had limits (Compare: Gliński 1998).

5.1 The 'Fundis' last victory – Żarnowiec

As the entire "Solidarity" constellation was cracking, and the division between the radicalizing young activists and the conciliatory union core, as well as between the anti-communist right and the pro-democratic left and center, were apparent. A new generation of activists dubbed the '1988 generation' (Gliński 1994, Kenney 2002) took over what was left of WiP and the wider environmental protest movement – not shying away from confrontational tactics.

From 1989 onwards, the environmental protest movement (with the anti-nuclear theme at its heart), was driven by growing radicalization. This mechanism set it in stark opposition towards the communist authorities – a fact that for most of the late 1980s allowed the protest movement to attract both the anti-communist right and the anti-

⁵ WiP would cease to exist completely by 1992-1993, as did *I prefer to be*, symbolically marking the end of Poland's 'dissident' civil society.

systemic, counter-cultural left. More importantly for the Żarnowiec campaign, however, it set the protesters in stark opposition to the institutionalizing core of the “Solidarity” and the Civic Committee government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Radicalization allowed the anti-nuclear campaign to maintain its momentum through the time of political transition (1989-90), which saw the re-stabilization of society and the suppression of most other areas of contention (like union activity) (Ost 2005). It also shaped the protest tactics, marked by unseen degrees of desperation when the activists were treated with unprecedented violence, already after the shift towards a new regime.

Plans for constructing the NPP were upheld after the 1989 Roundtable talks and the semi-free elections, citing sunk costs and with significant lobbying from the French nuclear industry. In late 1989 and early 1990, some very desperate measures were needed, including a long hunger strike and siege of the site, plus a large dose of transnational campaigning to actually force the new government to resign from the idea of developing domestic nuclear capacity (Szulecki *et al.* 2015: 42-43). In the Żarnowiec campaign, especially when physically blocking the ongoing NPP construction, protesters used frames of democracy and democratization for perpetrating their environmental agenda and linking it to the ongoing political process (Piotrowski 2015: 236)

While the construction of Żarnowiec was stopped and the nuclear program abandoned, this did not have a direct societal impact on the perception of nuclear power. It was becoming evident that a large part of the support that the green protesters enjoyed in the second half of the 1980s was momentary, not well rooted and to a great extent aimed at “the reds” rather than resulting from actual environmental awareness. “Chernobyl” became a symbol of risk but it was from the start associated with the communist regime and a dysfunctional unsovereign state. As economic transition led to closing down large parts of the heavy industry, including most polluting plants, the quality of the environment – especially air and later water – improved visibly, removing some of the pressure to act and rationale to support the environmental movement (Ostolski 2008: 416).

5.2 The ‘Realos’: greening the state administration

In late 1988, the Civic Committee was formed, affiliated to the ‘Solidarity’ leader Lech Walesa, and soon the Commission for the Protection of the Environment and Natural Resources emerged, headed by Stefan Kozłowski, environmentalist and member of PKE. During the Round Table talks, the ‘opposition’ side at the environmental sub-table was represented by delegates of the ‘Solidarity’, the Gdansk Environmental Forum, PKE (3 delegates), WiP, Green Alternative, Green Cross, Silesian Environmental Movement, as well as university and research institute representatives, supported by a team of experts. Though the negotiation team was eclectic and represented different perspectives the majority were professionals – with Radosław Gawlik of WiP and Wojciech Kłosowski of the Green Alternative representing protest movements. The sub-table debated on twenty eight environmental issues and after fairly quick negotiations (less than a month in February-March 1989), the opposition and regime side managed to reach agreement on all but one – nuclear energy.

According to Kozłowski, the negotiations ‘opened a new era in Poland’s environmental policy’.⁶ New regulations meant overthrowing the socialist production paradigm and replacing it with one acknowledging sustainable development (*eko-rozwoj*) and the

⁶ Quoted in *Okrągły Stół. Podstolik Ekologiczny po 15 latach*, Instytut na Rzecz Ekorozwoju, Warszawa 2004.

intrinsic value of nature, which was to be integrated into all public policy areas. After the first democratic elections and in the process of refurbishing the legal and administrative system, many important environmental solutions were introduced, some visibly innovative. Poland established a unique eco-investment financing system – the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management – until today serving as an internationally important model (Grabowski 2014). Another element was the establishment of a state-owned Bank of Environmental Protection, whose mission is to finance environmental investments (Józefiak 2014). The expert community successfully lobbied the government to put forth the idea of a debt-for-environment swap. When in 1991 half of Poland's international debt was annulled, the government proposed that 20% of the remainder be spent on environmental protection. Six creditors agreed to this idea and the EcoFund Foundation was set up. During its operation, by 2010, it spent \$600 million on 1500 investments (Józefiak 2014). The environmental expert community soon populated newly formed or democratized administrative and political institutions, and the first three environmental ministers were experienced professionals affiliated with the opposition and the environmental movement.

Already in 1991 four important new laws were introduced, regulating environmental protection, state environmental inspection, national parks and forestry. The newly established State Inspectorate for Environmental Protection received very large control competence, and the first loan of \$18 million received from the World Bank was spent on new controlling equipment. Furthermore, a system of environmental charges was introduced, feeding money into national and regional environmental funds – a unique solution in the region where such funds were financed from the budget and thus had significantly smaller resources. Environmental 'danger zones' were mapped, and a list of Poland's eighty 'main polluters' prepared, with the polluter pays principle institutionalized. Thus emerged the three elements necessary for effective policy: good law, effective enforcement, and funding mechanisms (Józefiak 2014).

The transferring of State Forests from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of the Environment was also a fundamental shift, since some 28% of Poland's territory fell under a different management philosophy (Gawlik in Tygodnik Powszechny 2014; see also Szulecka *et al.* 2014). A further improvement in the state of the environment was a side effect of the transition to a market economy: the collapse of many inefficient industrial plants brought about a significant improvement in air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

5.3 The painful lesson of Czorsztyn

The environmental movement in Poland, which throughout the 1980s boasted a triple legitimacy and appeared strong and dynamic, by 1992 became visibly split. The radical wing of the movement, growing out of the independent youth protest of the late 1980s, achieved an important success in blocking the country's nuclear ambitions, but paid a significant price and would suffer a painful defeat in the Czorsztyn campaign. As the negotiated transition from communism to liberal democracy unfolded between 1988 and 1990, the core of "Solidarity" political elites was seeking to build a pragmatic platform for negotiating with the reformist wing of the communist party. For that, they needed to tame and delegitimize radical anti-systemic protest. By 1989 and further into the 1990s, contentious forms of politics – especially strikes, civil disobedience and mass demonstrations – were increasingly delegitimized by the elite and new mainstream media as a counterproductive activity undermining the democratization efforts (Ost 2005: 103),

and claiming that ‘democracy of protest turns into a dictatorship’ (Kołodziejczyk 2000: 3). Thus, in this new emerging order in the public sphere, ‘societal protest became symbolically illegitimate’ (Ostolski 2008: 414), even though a survey from 1992 had shown that 94% of respondents still supported strikes and contentious politics (Kołodziejczyk 2000: 8). The green radicals found their protests increasingly scorned, and their societal base dwindling. Public understanding of the implications of environmental degradation remained low despite the fact that the polls were showing large support for environmental values (Gliński 1996 in: Millard 1998).

This proved to be true and decisive in the first important series of protest events in the ‘transition era’ that occurred in the summers of 1990-92 around the dam near Czorsztyn. Protests against an artificial lake that necessitated large expropriations and raised questions about water pollution were organized by the remnants of WiP and the Green Federation with local gatherings and blockades. Although the cause was also supported by experts and green-leaning politicians, it soon became obvious that the radical environmentalists have become politically alienated (Ostolski 2008: 409; Gliński 1998b: 6). Local police and courts could pressure the activists (134 *criminal* cases against them only in 1991) and resort to violence understanding that as a group building on conviction not interest, they lack a broader societal base.

Even though a large body of Western scholarship was devoted to the study of Polish dissent and opposition activity as an example of ‘civil society’ par excellence, for some reason it was concluded that after the transition to democracy that same civil society was very weak and had to be built. We show that this was clearly not the case, and agree that ‘while Poland did not inherit a full fledged civil society from the previous regime, it “inherited a comprehensive and solidly institutionalized association sphere” (Ekiert and Kubik 2014: 4 in Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017: 7).

It would also be untrue to interpret the Czorsztyn defeat as a general defeat and decline of the environmental movement. ‘If anything, a real movement had only started after 1989, prior to that we had dispersed protests led by a small number of activists’.⁷ The years 1991-92 saw an explosion of institutionalized environmentalism – leading to 700 new organizations (Gliński 1998b: 3; Gliński and Koziarek 2008: 195-6; see also Ekiert and Kubik 2017: 41). Important think tanks, like the Institute for Sustainable Development, were formed, together with a ‘Service Office’ acting as a general secretariat of the entire movement, and annual meetings of all interested environmental organizations would be held throughout the 1990s (Gliński 1998a: 199). The ‘Green Brigades’ – a deep ecological magazine began to appear in 1989 and would later become the much needed glue holding the dispersed radicals together. Experts and political pragmatics achieved important advances in environmental policy integration, but their societal base was by definition small. Overall, the only element, which remained fully legitimate, was the environmental discourse – as even the mainstream media questioned not the content but the form of environmental protest (Gliński 1998b: 7). Direct protests and confrontation were increasingly replaced with milder campaigns as environmental issues became gradually depoliticized in the new democratic realities (compare Gliński and Koziarek 2007).

6. Institutionalized NGOs, ephemeral Green parties, and protest margins: The short 1990s

⁷ Personal communication with Radosław Gawlik, Wrocław, 13 November 2017.

After the regime transition, many people concluded that in an open society functioning along the prescriptions of liberal democracy environmental issues would somehow fix themselves automatically and rationally. As the considerable successes of the 'pragmatic' wing of the Polish political environmentalism show, that partly true. With more and more industrial plants either closed down or moved abroad, the state of the environment gradually and visibly improved, while an increasing number of domestic businesses introduced voluntary corporate environmental protection measures (Kudłak 2017). The movement split again. Some of the former radicals retreated into counter-culture or pockets of anti-systemic contention (*involution* in Tarrow's typology) while the institutionalization of a growing number of environmental groups led to the professionalization of the green movement (Gliński and Koziarek 2007).

In the 1990s, some of the organizations established earlier were unable to continue to function for structural reasons, i.e. lack of financial and human resources (Kozuchowska 2007). Professionalization of many environmental groups had two reasons. One was that long-term civil society engagement was unsustainable on a voluntary basis – especially with the economic transition, which put stronger pressures on individuals to seek employment – in the 1980s lower living standards, universal welfare and Western support made activism relatively 'cheap'.⁸ Additionally, in the 1990s the expertise and sophistication in environmental debates increased significantly, which meant that if one was serious about her or his engagement in environmental protection, joining an official institution or a 'professional' NGO were two realistic options.

The professionalization of environmentalism in Poland detached its organizations from the societal base. Most organizations would no longer rely on expanding membership, but instead concentrate on fundraising (Gliński and Koziarek 2007: 204). Dominated by urban *intelligentsia*, professional but without societal base and resonance, the environmentalists became growingly dependent on external funding, moving from *bottom-up* to *outside-in*, according to Waller (2010).

Again, the overall evaluation of these changes varies depending on the indicators selected and the ideological standpoint of the beholder. One of the most prominent researchers of Polish environmentalism, Piotr Gliński, contrast the 1990s with the low level of organization before 1989 and sees professionalization as 'maturation' leading to a well-organized movement. He emphasizes the effectiveness of environmental NGOs (Gliński 1998a: 199), increasing capacity and coherence through self-education (1998b: 3), and in consequence – the growing visibility of nature protection organizations (Gliński and Koziarek 2007: 193). In 1995, there were some 100 periodicals and zines appearing across the country (Ostolski 2008: 411). Furthermore, Western influence is also seen as assistance leading to increased capacity, a stronger position of the 'third sector' vis-à-vis state administration, and building an increasingly positive image of new forms of 'volunteerism'. It was also supposed to open new channels for pressuring the government with a 'boomerang' effect, through mobilizing transnational networks and foreign governmental and private partners (Gliński and Koziarek 2007: 194, drawing implicitly on Keck and Sikkink 1998). That last option was, however, used already before 1989 (Szulecki 2011; Szulecki *et al.* 2015).

The main line of political engagement was no longer contentious politics, but educational campaigns, policy advice and attempts at influencing the different stages of policymaking (Piotrowski 2015: 255). Top-level experts populated most prominent environmental NGOs and this meant that their reports were often of visibly higher quality

⁸ Many oppositionists used day jobs more as a cover and legal prerequisite than a source of income, while even very small support from Western and exilic sources could replace regular employment – interview with Eugeniusz Smolar, Warsaw, 30 March 2010.

than those presented by governmental agencies. This concerned all areas of interest to environmentalists: nature conservation, renewable energy development, transport, energy efficiency, water protection or waste management (Karaczun 2014). While it made environmental think-tanks and NGOs important actors in environmental policymaking in Poland and Central Europe broadly, it also created a new line of tension with the government and public administration (Börzel and Buzogány 2010: 710). Throughout the decade, the center of environmental policymaking – the Ministry of the Environment – was very technocratic in orientation (Millard 1998: 160). It was also politically weak in negotiations with other ministries, had little resources, and saw many of its functions transferred to local governments, which lacked expertise.

A new form of engagement and a natural evolution of political environmentalism in a newborn liberal democracy was through political party institutionalization. That has proven to be very weak, although two green parties (*Polska Partia Zielonych*, *Polska Partia Ekologiczna - Zieloni*) remained in the background for some time, noting some successes in local level elections. The first green political party was established in Poland already in late 1988 as the Polish Party of Greens (PPZ), becoming Eastern Europe's first such party (Parkin 1989). Its electoral result was a disaster and in the early 1990s, the party only managed to secure some seats in local councils. Its leader, Janusz Bryczkowski became a member of the city council in Olsztyn, Jerzy Rościszewski served as the president of Krakow for three months in 1990, while Wiesław Kossakowski won a seat in the council of Plock. Political divisions soon lead to the party's implosion – while Bryczkowski, excluded from PZZ in 1992, joined nationalist and populist parties in his later career, Kossakowski became an MP on the electoral lists of the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL), and led PZZ into the post-communist dominated Democratic Left Alliance. The year 1991 saw the emergence of a center-right green party, initially named the Polish Environmental Party – Greens (PPE-Z). In 1991 it managed to win a parliamentary mandate for its leader, Jerzy Beer (even though the party got only 0,82% of the national vote) through a coalition with the right-wing Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN). In 1993, the next leader, Grzegorz Kaczmarzyk, also won a seat through KPN's lists. In 1996, the party joined the right-wing Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) – only to change affiliations and join ranks with radical extra-parliamentary left (including the Polish Communist Party) in the early 2000s.

Mainstream political parties, however, paid little attention to environmental issues and public concerns were dedicated mostly to economic issues (Millard 1998). A small exception and perhaps the most significant party-political initiative was the Ecological Faction of the center-liberal Democratic Union (UD), which later evolved into the Ecological Forum of the Freedom Union (UW). The most important achievement of this political environmental faction and the expert milieu linked to it was the initiative "Ecology in the Constitution", which succeeded in integrating important environmental elements into the newly drafted Polish Constitution of 1997, including 'sustainable development' as a foundational principle of the Republic. At the time, laws on animal protection were enforced and an exceptional funding system consisting of national and provincial environmental funds created.⁹

Following that success and increasingly seeing that remaining environmental problems can only be effectively addressed with further policy changes at the national level, was beyond the reach of NGO influence, the Electoral Coalition of Environmentalist Leaders was set up to run in the 1997 elections from UW party lists (Gliński and Koziarek 2007: 197; Ostolski 2008: 417). That decision, however, led to a deep split within the environmental movement, with some of the radical and deep ecological groups treating

⁹ Radosław Gawlik in Tygodnik Powszechny (2014).

it as an unforgivable mistake. The Coalition failed to obtain seats in the parliament, and the Ecological Forum had very little influence on the policy of the party, let alone the coalition government in which UW was a junior partner. However, they monopolized environmental issues to the extent that when the new cabinet was formed, Radosław Gawlik was appointed as deputy to the conservative Solidarity Electoral Alliance environmental minister Jan Szyszko (Van Eeden 2018).

The split over strategies for environmental political action became clearly visible after the elections, as radical groups began a protest campaign at Mount St. Anne (Fałkowski *et al.* 2008). The campaign targeted a motorway planned to cut through the Mount St. Anne Landscape Park near Opole – a site of both natural and historical significance. The Mt. St Anne Defense Coalition was a loose network of individuals affiliated with deep ecological groups, and calling for ‘direct action’ to stop the motorway construction. After a month of camping in tree houses, chaining to trees and monkey wrenching, the police forcefully removed the environmentalists, after the construction workers beat them up several times. At a later attempt, they were violently dispersed by a private security company hired to protect the site.

The time between the 1997 electoral defeat and the end of the Mt. St. Anne campaign is perhaps the darkest hour of Polish political environmentalism. Several things became apparent. The movement was deeply divided – radical protesters would not talk to the ‘liberal environmentalists’ from the Ministry that came to visit Mt. St. Anne, while professional ENGOs were reluctant to support the protest, seeing it as futile and misguided. The *ad hoc* protest coalition was weak, sometimes struggling to have at any activists on site maintaining the blockade.¹⁰ The use of private security firm against the activists, despite media presence, has shown that public support for such ecological ‘direct actions’ was minimal. In fact, the local population was visibly hostile. So were the national, even liberal and left-wing media, calling the protesters ‘ecomaniacs’ and for the first time scaremongering about the rise of ‘ecoterrorism’ (Grzeszak 1998). With the distinction between democratic and populist forms and causes of protest blurred, the environmental movement clearly reached the bottom in terms of de-legitimization of its protest strategies as well as political involvement. Environmental issues remained important only to some one-third of the society, mostly highly educated, reasonably affluent urban dwellers, environmental concerns were less developed among rural dwellers, the least educated, the oldest and youngest (Burger and Sadowski 1994 in Millard 1998)

7. Before and after EU Accession: 1999-2009

Processes of professionalization, accelerating in late 1990s, visibly transformed ‘civil society’ organizations into hierarchical, corporate, specialized and centralized entities (Börzel and Buzogány 2010: 718; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2016: 6), capable of managing support in the form of project grants (Hicks 2004). This helped to establish a common paradigm and increased consistency, even after the annual meetings of environmental organizations were no longer held (Gliński 1998b:4), but important negative features were clear. Donor support dependency (mockingly dubbed ‘grantosis’ in Polish) were apparent, including competition between like-minded groups and following agendas where finding was easier to obtain. It is argued that co-opted NGOs follow the priorities of grant-givers rather than responding to societal problems (*Ibidem*: 7).

¹⁰ Olaf Swolkień cited in Fałkowski *et al.* 2008, fn 13.

The conventional view held that Polish 'civil society' was weak and passive, with participation figures among the lowest in the EU (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017: 14). Reasons given were low social capital and trust levels, weakness of civic education, low interest in the democratic culture of participation, and "learned helplessness" linked to economic problems. The Social Diagnosis Report states that 86% of Poles do not belong to any organizations (GUS 2013 in: Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). The apparent apathy and weak activism among Poles after 1990 did not stem only from economic realities, but also from the political elite's efforts to discourage mass mobilization and channel social activism into NGOs, marginalizing other forms of political engagement (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017: 13). They replaced the social movements, associated with contentious politics of the communist era, bringing and reproducing a new model of activism but also a new vocabulary, transplanting Western terminology and a certain mindset from a different cultural and economic order (Giza-Poleszczuk 2017).

Mass petitions have become an important tool for environmental organizations, allowing to reach out to a broader constituency with limited, volunteer-based resources. The European Social Survey 2010 data (quoted in Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2016: 4-5) show only 2.1% of Poles have taken part in lawful public demonstration, and only 0.2% in an illegal protest, while protest magnitude visibly fell in the 2000s (Ekiert and Kubik 2017: 52). At the same time, 11.1% of Poles have signed petitions, which are seen as an efficient tool for protest and a first step towards civic legislative initiatives. The Polish animal rights movement used this institutional mechanism to amend the Animal Protection Act (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2016:13)

Elite NGOs represented by think tanks maintained a strong voice, possessed resources and were oriented at influencing the policy process (Jeziarska 2017: 107). A new development was the increasing power and visibility of branches of foreign and international organizations (e.g. WWF, Greenpeace, and Heinrich Boell Foundation). This arguably led to 'persistence of weak public and political support' and fragmentation of efforts on the NGO scene, alongside increased EU influence and strengthening of some existing NGOs – something of a survival of the fittest (Gliński and Koziarek 2007: 199).

The institutionalized NGO scene was visibly captured by the educated middle class, while 2% of the most powerful NGOs dominated the entire 'third sector', in the late 1990s controlling 60% of resources (Kolankiewicz 2006). The entire spectrum of political environmentalism was going through a crisis in the 1990s, losing legitimacy both in societal base and in methods. Then as well as in the 2000s, main domestic NGOs were led by people involved in the environmental movement already in the 1980s, which speaks volumes about their charisma, but also the lack of able 'fresh blood' (Kozuchowska 2007). However, the focus on NGOs, dominant in both public debate and civil society research, does not record popular local 'self-organized' civic activism, collective action without the involvement of any organization (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017: 7), which was also becoming more widespread, in environmental issues as well as parallel and cross-sectoral issue areas such as urban activism. That 'invisible' social activism flows from to post-communist public distrust of voluntary organizations, aversion to formal membership in organizations, is also linked to the lack of trust in the state institutions (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2016:8). The internet has been used as a tool for mobilization, organizational and information sharing – and environmentalists were among the pioneers of its use.

On the way to EU membership, Poland's compliance and determination to adhere to both the legal and the normative landscape of the EU was visible, however, this only translated into environmental policy integration. The impetus to join the EU provided a benchmark for setting high standards already in the 1990s (Millard 1998: 160). The

funding of environmental projects after 1989 came from many external sources, including the EU, but also from the US, Sweden (before it joined the EU) and elsewhere. This visibly led to a very high emphasis on transnational, and even external priorities such as river and sea water quality and air pollution (Millard 1998: 149). Some authors, however, criticize donor dependency research, pointing out that with time the culture of Polish NGOs changed and more international and domestic sources became available. Gumkowska et al. (2008) have found that only a small fraction of Polish organizations listed EU money as an important source of income.

However, an equally important and relatively understudied area of EU influence is in pushing for more participatory governance procedures, unlocking the communicative channels between civil society organizations and public administration, lowering the threshold of expertise and thus allowing broader and more representative groups to take part in policymaking (Cianciara 2015). This helped to target the most frequently imposed barrier for NGOs impact on policy – ‘the politicians’ and authorities’ dislike for public consultations’ (Gliński and Koziarek 2007: 207).

The first decade of the 2000s saw the creation of the Greens 2004 (now simply Greens) – Poland’s first party identifying and affiliated with the international Green political movement, seeking to overcome the fragmentation of the movement and bridge the radical-mainstream divide and overcoming the anti-social image that environmentalism developed in the 1990s (Ostolski 2008: 422). Its activities are not widely identified as typically environmentalist, rather left-liberal with a strong focus on urban activism and cultural liberalism. Though it has not directly influenced national politics (Kozuchowska 2007; Kassenberg 2014), it has since its establishment become a feature of the political landscape and a visible element of extra parliamentary opposition.

The failure of environmental parties in Poland is, however, clearly linked to the fact that environmental issues have fallen in the hierarchy of voter priorities and therefore do not attract to much political attention. Contrary to most assumptions, as the Polish society was becoming growingly (though unevenly) wealthier, it was also becoming more materialist. The post-materialist values that seemed strong in the 1980s and 1990s, including environmentalism, now fell down popular priority lists. Although public support for the development of national parks and reserves, for recreation but also biodiversity conservation was strong (Millard 1998: 147), after 1989 public concern focused more on socio-economic issues, job insecurity, unemployment, crime vision of the consumer society became attractive. Environmental issues got most support when related to health.

An important blow to environmentalism, threatening its complete political delegitimization, was the emergence of the ‘eco-terrorist’ label. Europeanization of Polish environmental law resulted in the diffusion of environmental impact assessments and public consultations. For years, exploiting the EIA procedures, a handful of organizations, hiding behind the green idea, have used a strategy of blocking investments – especially in the building sector – to practice ‘eco-extortion’ (*eko-haracz*). Blackmailing investors with postponing the construction permit procedure almost indefinitely, they were able to make money on settlements (Kozuchowska 2007; Kassenberg 2014). Even though NGOs were quick to act, developing an ‘ethical charter of environmentalists’ and reporting such malpractice to the police,¹¹ these groups have influenced the reputation of the entire environmental movement. The ‘eco-terrorist’ label, denoting uncooperative protest against the interest of the wider public (see Kołodziejczyk 2000), had

¹¹ Personal communication with Radosław Gawlik, Wrocław, 3 November 2017.

delegitimizing effects on the level of discourse – on top of the shifts in values and priorities already discussed.

However, the EIA procedures were also an important new channel for ENGO involvement in policy making. The St. Anne campaign was lost, among other things, because the protesters were late in joining the formal consultations, lacked experience and capacity to wage a legal battle. The professional NGO sector, with international support (e.g. ClientEarth) and an influx of green-minded lawyers soon managed to overcome these weaknesses.

Europeanization of policies and governance cultures met in the process of drawing up Natura 2000 areas (see Börzel and Buzogány 2010; Blicharska *et al.* 2011). There was a gradual increase in participation (Cent *et al.* 2014: 97). This sometimes led to ‘empty rituals’, but also to information sharing and more transparent decision-making. Only in some cases, however, real participatory decision-making took place. Initially, the environmental ministry largely ignored the procedure and tried to minimize the cost of designing new protection sites as well as their size (Börzel and Buzogány 2010: 717). Only faced with looming EU sanctions the ministry reached out to the environmentalists and used their Shadow List to design the Natura 2000 site network (Ibidem: 722; Cent *et al.* 2013). The overall process can be summarized as a ‘mixture of strictly top-down and emerging deliberative decision-making’ (Cent *et al.* 2014: 98).

The implementation and enforcement of Natura 2000 protection led to a spectacular protest campaign – the largest since Żarnowiec and similarly successful. Opposing the construction of a motorway through the protected Rospuda river valley environmental groups, both radical and expert, international and local, launched a nation-wide campaign in its defense in 2006-2007 (Szulecka and Szulecki 2013). Unlike the earlier, unsuccessful protests, it combined local, national and transnational components, with the unprecedented involvement of international NGOs and European Union representatives, as well as the continued support of nation-wide media. Long blockade of the site was supported by demonstrations in Warsaw and other major cities, a petition signed by over 150 000 people leading to a momentary protest hype.

The controversy signaled some new characteristics of political environmentalism emerging, as the conservative government pushed forward a pro-developmental and visibly anti-environmental agenda, with open support of the environmental minister Szyszko (2nd term). That provoked a broad protest coalition to form on an anti-governmental platform, which framed environmental protection in terms of European identity, societal progress, liberty and democracy. The role of environmental values dominating political debate and delegitimizing other viewpoints, and the transnational coalition of local activists with international NGOs and European (also EU) politicians was certainly important (as argued in Ziemińska and Szulecki 2010). However, it soon became clear that the pivotal moment was the 2007 snap elections, won by the liberal Civic Platform and bringing the environmentalist veteran Maciej Nowicki to the ministry of environment (Szulecka and Szulecki 2013). Notwithstanding, civil disobedience, direct action and societal protest were suddenly re-legitimized, when the liberal elites found themselves in opposition to a conservative-populist government. Environmentalism was empowered by regained triple legitimacy – in growing popular support, acceptance of the message and once again, the full spectrum of methods. However, re-politicization of the environment also encountered a growing political cleavage within the Polish society, and as the split grew larger, legitimation appeared as limited to only the liberal part of the society.

8. Political environmentalism in a divided society: 2010-17

The last decade marked a new phase in the evolution of civil society in Poland and other 'post communist' societies in Central Europe, characterized by a revival of grass-root movements and activism (mainly noticeable in the form of urban activism). This new form of activity transcends NGO-ization, characteristic for the earlier period of political and economic transformation (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017: 6). Recent civil society capacity and governance indicators suggest that Poland's civil society has changed from perceived weakness to levels above EU average (Ekiert and Kubik 2017: 46). The undeniable strength of Polish civil society lies in myriad individual initiatives and efforts, overcoming impersonal and institutional relationships, with members, volunteers, organizations, political actors (Jacobsson 2017: 101). This can be better understood as recombining "new" and "old" organizational forms and types of engagement (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017).

Meanwhile, the 2010 plane crash near Smolensk, which took the life of the president Lech Kaczyński and 95 other people on board, mostly political and military elite, initiated a process of increased politicization of all aspects of public life. The party system, highly volatile throughout the 1990s, finally reached visible stability and institutionalized into the struggle of two dominant parties – the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO) and nationalist-populist Law and Justice (PiS). PO's record eight-year tenure between 2007 and 2015 was a time of growing political entrenchment and the development of parallel public spheres with 'media bubbles' and divergent value systems. By 2014, sociological research began to show that this split in also influencing perceptions of environmental issues,¹² with environmental concerns associated with left and liberal mindsets, while conservative and nationalist voters growingly sceptical of problems such as climate change, air quality and biodiversity. At the same time, value and public opinion surveys consistently show that overall, environmental issues are becoming less important for a majority of Poles (TNS 2015). Western influence in terms of diffusing post-materialist values and emulating life-styles experienced abroad has also become an important factor shaping the agendas and practices of some milieus, including environmental activists – a feature lamented by a green veteran as previously 'unimaginable' for the locally rooted Polish environmentalism (Ostolski 2008: 421; Van Eeden 2018).

Ekiert and Kubik argue that contention, previously marginalized, has become a constant feature of civil society activity (2018). It is then no surprise that the remainder of this section discusses three case studies of new environmental campaigns, signalling re-legitimization of the green movement on all three levels, and the politicization of three important issues: energy, air quality/public health and biodiversity protection.

8.1 Nuclear again: regaining grassroots outreach

Despite the 1990 moratorium, already in 2005 PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński signaled an interest in bringing nuclear energy back on the agenda. His successor in power, PO's Donald Tusk, moved towards more concrete measures, inscribing nuclear power into Poland's 2030 energy strategy and launching a government-backed program led by the state-owned energy champion PGE. Understanding the controversial nature of nuclear Energy, the government focused much resources on the public relations campaign and

¹² Interview with Szymon Malinowski and Adrian Wójcik in Hajdasz (2017).

the project's 'security' (see Szulecki and Kuszniir 2017: 135-6). A wide media campaign was prepared to persuade the relevant societal groups to support the project and accept the national security and modernisation rationality (Stankiewicz 2014). Some far-reaching exceptional measures were taken against the project's potential political opponents. In a strategic document about the project public communication, the relevant audiences were divided into "friends" and "enemies". A dialogue with "the enemies" was deemed impossible, as they had "contradictory interests and goals". Particularly dangerous "enemies" were environmental organisations, as well as nuclear-sceptic academics and journalists, yet boasting expert authority and good media contacts. Open debates were to be avoided, so as not to "give platform to ardent nuclear-sceptics". In 2012, new powers were granted to the Agency of Internal Security, including the possibility of monitoring potential opponents of the nuclear project, to "protect" it (Czarkowski 2012).

Fears of anti-nuclear campaigners mobilizing were not unfounded. Only a couple of days after the Ministry of Economy launched its information website *poznajatom.pl* ('know the atom'), a website called *poznajatom.org* appeared, mimicking the former's layout but providing alternative figures, correcting data and adding unaddressed issues about nuclear risks. Already in 2010, representatives of 71 organizations and environmental movements issues a joint memo criticising the direction of Polish energy strategy and calling for 'abandoning the plans of introducing nuclear energy and public spending on its promotion'.¹³ Nation-wide as well as international NGOs like Greenpeace became very active in different protest and contestation activities. Interestingly, the ultra-conservative outlets like the Catholic TV Trwam and Radio Maryja were also instrumental in disseminating anti-nuclear messages, allowing the campaigners to reach new audiences.¹⁴

Governmental administration visibly feared the Żarnowiec scenario: "the most fundamental risk is political. The risk of stopping the nuclear project at a very advanced stage, the way we've seen it in Żarnowiec, where large sums of money was spent and the local population was left disappointed."¹⁵

Whether local populations were indeed waiting for a nuclear power plant in their neighbourhood was in itself highly debatable. Societal mobilisation was strongest on the local level, around the proposed localization of future plants: Choczewo, Gąski, and... Żarnowiec, all on the Baltic coast. The inhabitants of these communities were not consulted before their towns were put on the list of proposed localizations in 2011, and learned about it only from the media. One of the leaders of later protest campaigns in Mielno (Gąski) recalls that he had learned about from a news scroll of a national TV channel, while there was 'no prior information before that'.¹⁶ Sceptical locals began to self-organize, and soon emerged the Civic Committee "Bezatomu.pl" in Mielno, CC "No to Atom in Lubiato" in Choczewo, and CC "No to Atom in Krokowa" at Żarnowiec, while the three united in July 2012, forming the civic coalition "Pomerania without Nuclear" (Borewicz *et al.* 2018).

The most visible action against the top-down technocratic logic of governmental energy policymaking was the 'social referendum', held in February 2012 at Mielno. The result was 94% against the plant or any other nuclear-related infrastructure in their locality (with a 57% turnout) (IAR 2012). Though not legally binding, the result influenced the decision of the Ministry of Transportation, Building and Maritime Affairs to cancel the localization decision approved earlier by the West Pomeranian voivode. The voi-

¹³ Stanowisko pozarządowych organizacji ekologicznych w sprawie rządowego planu wprowadzenia energetyki jądrowej w Polsce, www.ekounia.org.pl.

¹⁴ Personal communication with Tomasz Borewicz, Gdańsk, December 2014.

¹⁵ Interview with two Ministry of Economy energy experts in Szulecki and Kuszniir (2017), p. 137.

¹⁶ Interview with Piotr Laskowski in Borewicz *et al.* 2018.

vode, in turn, re-confirmed his decision, thus blocking e.g. the land rights of the inhabitants of Gąski for a period of 5 years. The investor, PGE, was also unimpressed, suggesting that the vote was based on 'incomplete information' and that the local community as inadequately active in the dialogue process organized by the company (Borewicz *et al.* 2018).

In the end, however, the government pulled back and only Żarnowiec was left on the list of potential localities, as the interest in constructing a nuclear power plant has risen and fallen again several times until it was picked up again in 2017. The networks of protest mobilization, combined with transnational pressure, however, have made the Żarnowiec 2.0 scenario increasingly probably should the authorities move forward with the construction, and it seems that the environmental movement has regained vital grassroots structures with the 2011-2012 mobilization campaign. Similar patterns of collaboration between local inhabitants, environmental activists and NGOs from Poland and abroad occurred in campaigns against shale gas exploration, leading e.g. to blocking a site operated by Chevron (Lis and Stankiewicz 2017). Bringing together legal expertise, readiness to mobilize locally and nationally, and grassroots support proved very effective in stopping governmental plans for expanding lignite surface mining in several localities, leading a governmental representative to conclude that no new strip mines can be build in the face of such organized opposition.¹⁷

8.2 Smog: public health back on the agenda

While air quality in Poland had improved once large industrial plants were closed after 1989 and new regulations introduced, there were also new sources of pollution growing since the 1990s – most importantly individual car ownership and household heating based on lignite, bad quality coal and their derivatives, as well as wood biomass. A nation-wide air pollution monitoring scheme was introduced in 2001, implementing the EU 96/62 Directive (Bogucka *et al.* 2004). Though air quality awareness was one of the least explored public opinion areas (TNS 2015), monitoring led to increased awareness as the situation deteriorated. Poland now has the worst air quality levels in the EU, the European Commission estimates that some 43 000 people die prematurely due to air pollution (Holland 2014: 48), many cities see alarming pollution levels for more than half the days per year, and norms were continuously broken for the past decade. The reaction of the ministry of Environment in 2012 was to... increase the alarm level for particles from 200 to 300 µg/m³.

The inaction of the authorities at all governance levels, and at times their motivation to deny that the problem even exists, provided the spark that ignited a wave of societal mobilization in areas and scales unseen since the 1980s. In December 2012 the Krakow Smog Alarm (KAS) was established after years of dispersed protests against the scandalous levels of air quality in Poland's historic capital. 'We decided to take matters into our own hands and begin to raise awareness among the inhabitants. We knew that only civic pressure would force the city and regional authorities to take action' (KAS 2017). Awareness was indeed key for making this issue a nation-wide problem, as KAS estimates showed that 65% of the citizens felt they did not have enough information and 70% would like to have direct access to air quality data (KAS 2015: 5). In June 2014 a meeting of citizens, NGO representatives, businessmen, academics and experts at the Ekocentrum in Wrocław resulted in the establishment of the Lower Silesian Smog Alarm

¹⁷ Personal communication with Radosław Gawlik, Wrocław, 13 November 2017.

(DAS), an 'apolitical civic initiative' interested in improving air quality in the entire Lower Silesian voivodeship (south-western Poland) (DAS 2017). Both initiatives became institutionalized as associations. Other regional and municipal Smog Alarms emerged in Jeleni Góra, Opole, Silesia, Podhale and Warsaw, together forming the Polish Smog Alarm in February 2015 (Jakubowski 2015).

Awareness raising actions began to bear fruit, especially once they were combined with mass access to air pollution data through smartphone apps and websites. The problem dominated media outlets especially in the winter times between 2015 and 2017. Bottom-up pressure began to have visible results. In September 2015 the outgoing parliament novelized the Environmental Law with an anti-smog bill, giving local and regional governments concrete tools for fighting air pollution, but also visibly pushing the issue down the governance ladder. The bill does not force local authorities to act, only gives them space to do so and decide on municipal and regional emission limits, reduction targets and fuel bans. The municipal authorities in Krakow used that opportunity to introduce a very ambitious plan, including a ban on all coal and biomass individual heating in the city by 2019. The number of polluting furnaces fell from 23,854 in 2015 to 14,991 in 2017 (Ogórek 2017). In Wroclaw, the city started working together with the National Fund for Nature Protection and Water Resources to spend PLN 20 million, but that meant only replacing some 1000 old furnaces, while the estimated number of those needing replacing is 40-50,000. Additionally, the Voivodship council proposed a ban on coal fired furnaces from 2014, while the president of Wroclaw suggested that this was too radical and wanted to see the period extended to 2028. Gawlik, now a leader of DAS, pointed out that the proposed legislation was 'anything but radical', and if the authorities wanted to imitate the pace of reform seen in Krakow the phase out should occur by 2021 and include biomass (quoted in *Gazeta Wroclawska* 2017). In October 2017 the Masovian Voivodship parliament, passed an anti-smog bill for the region including Warsaw, imposing a ban on worst quality fuels by 2018 and a gradual phase out of old and polluting furnaces from 2022 to 2027.

The central government in Warsaw remained reluctant to act, however. The health minister belittled the problem of air pollution, claiming that unhealthy lifestyles and cigarettes had a greater effect on public health (Makowski 2017). While Polish air quality norms are incredibly permissive (200 as compared to 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in Finland or 80 in France), the environment ministry rejected a plea of experts and doctors to decrease alarm levels, suggesting that 'it would mean the need to signal the alarm very often' (Fejfer 2017). A ministerial committee issued a set of recommendations in January 2017, aiming at containing the problem of smog but in fact very vague, and not banning the sales of lowest quality fuels. 'Let us not fool the public, these regulations change nothing. The government does not want new norms because they protect the coal industry at the cost of air quality. They want to maintain the status quo while appearing to fight for clean air' - said a KAS representative (quoted in Fejfer 2017). A similar attempt at regulating fuels was derailed by the coal industry already in 2014-2015. In 2017 the government stopped the funding program for replacing furnaces. While it managed to finance some 34,000 new installations since 2015, that only added up to 1% of furnaces needing replacing.

The anti-smog campaigns were able to mobilize new sections of the society, politicize the problem of air quality and disseminate environmental awareness. An important link was made to both energy and climate policy, which are increasingly becoming a top political issue in the country, as economic and security factors converge with EU and global climate policy pressures on the Polish coal sector (Szulecki 2017). The problem of smog, however, is a public health issue similar to those that drove the campaigns of the

late 1980s. Additionally, the potential for mobilization critically depends on framing and policy focus. As an environmental journalist pointed out, the wealthy urban middle class is happy to support anti-smog campaigns when they target furnaces in tenement houses, but might quickly become sceptical when attention is turned to the need of limiting individual car ownership in big cities (Jędrak 2017). That problem was signalled earlier by surveys on environmental awareness (Urban 2016: 415), however, the ongoing campaign to save the Białowieża forest is an indicator of increased mobilization also in non-anthropocentric issues.

8.3 Białowieża: a symbolic struggle

The Białowieża Forest (Puszcza Białowieska), shared between Belarus and Poland, is a large forest area containing the last remains of Europe's primeval lowland forest. The origins of the Białowieski National Park are in 1921, though the value and need for protecting the nature of this area has been recognized since early-modern times. The park is also the first area where the European bison was reintroduced to live in the wild.

Despite some expansion, however, only 16% of the actual Białowieża Forest is covered by the National Park and under strict protection.¹⁸ The dispute over the Forest's management, degree and scope of protection and the governance regime is perhaps the longest lasting environmental conflict in Poland, dating back to the early independence years after World War I (Niedziałkowski 2016). Environmentalists and academics have for over 20 years argued for the need of expanding that area, countered by the forest sector interest group, including the State Forests holding and local inhabitants (Blicharska and van Herzele 2015; Blicharska and Angelstam 2010; Niedziałkowski *et al.* 2014; Chudy *et al.* 2016). The bone of contention has continuously been the divergent interpretation of what the Forest is and how it should be treated – a regular forested area subject to normal silvicultural practices, also for economic benefits (the 'managerial' and 'livelihood' discourse in Blicharska and van Herzele 2015, compare the productive 'industrial' paradigm in Szulecka *et al.* 2014) or a unique site in need of strict protection ('primalaeval' discourse or 'protective' paradigm). Importantly for the local inhabitants, the expansion of the Park was associated with visible economic losses – the Park's 1996 enlargement from 4716 to 10,506 ha 'caused a 50% reduction in municipal tax income' (Logmani *et al.* 2017: 87).

In 1998 minister Szyszko put forth a plan to extend the Park to cover the entire Forest, and proposed a "Contract" to support the affected communities with funding. However, policy change in 2001, requiring local community agreement for National Park expansion resulted in an effective grid-lock of any further expansion nation-wide. In 2009 minister Nowicki made attempts to engage the population of communities bordering the Park and increasing the attractiveness of eco-tourism and again offering governmental support (Niedziałkowski *et al.* 2012; Logmani *et al.* 2017). This comprehensive effort to map and address some of the fears fuelling foresters' opposition to the parks expansion (see Niedziałkowski 2016) was rejected by the local authorities and cut short by Nowicki's resignation.

Independently, the Park was inscribed on the UNESCO heritage site list in 1979, in 2014 extended to the entire Forest, introducing elements of an international protection regime on top of different nationally recognized land use forms – although a majori-

¹⁸ Henceforth we use 'Forest' to denote the entire area, and 'Park' for the strictly protected fraction under the National Park.

ty of locals were opposed to that (Niedziałkowski *et al.* 2014). A UNESCO report notes that since then, State Forests have managed to forge close ties with the local community, while the Park authorities was in contact with the environmentalists and researchers, while 'little or no exchange of information and knowledge seems to take place between the two "camps"' (Lethier and Avramoski 2017: 17; see also Blicharska and Angelstam 2010), even though both parties sit on the World Heritage property Steering Committee.

PiS accession to power in 2015 and the appointment of Szyszko as environment minister for the third time signalled a sway of balance in favour of the forestry interest and State Forests holding (Logmani *et al.* 2017). The minister amended the Forest Management Plan for the Białowieża district in March 2016, substantially increasing the volume of logging allowed in the Forest threefold (Lethier and Avramoski 2017). The justification, on which the ministry and State Forests based a public relations campaign to counter the media and NGO outcry, was the apparent plague of the bark beetle. The decision was supported by the state institutions, but immediately challenged by nature protection organizations, ENGOs and the Polish Academy of Science. The environmentalists notified UNESCO, and brought a complaint before the European Commission in April 2016 (*Ibidem*).

In June 2016, the logging sites were visited by a UNESCO delegation, which called for the Polish authorities to halt the logging. This did not happen, in fact, the clear cutting increased in 2017 and in April 2017, the European Commission issued a reasoned opinion urging Poland to refrain from logging within one month. To no avail, as by that time the government of Beata Szydło was in conflict with several European institution (including both EU and Council of Europe).

In May, Greenpeace and Wild Poland activists started a blockade on site, later followed by a Camp for the Forest and cyclical "Civic Walks" on tourist trails in the area, where activists and guests from across Poland and abroad could witness and document the scale of logging. In June, "March for the Forest" was organized by, among others Greenpeace and the dynamic Action Democracy network, gathering over 3000 people who walked through the streets of Warsaw and organized a sit-in in front of the Ministry of Environment, demanding that Poland obeys EC and UNESCO decisions (Karpieszuk 2017). Some 180,000 people signed a petition calling for the Forest's protection.

The issue of Białowieża became intimately linked with PiS' broader assault on the rule of law and constitutional order in Poland, and raised during the wave of mass street protests in July 2017. As such, however, the issue was entangled in partisan politics, with the right-wing media and PiS voters expressing support for the government and its defiant position. The conflict has symbolic qualities, and does not necessarily translate to increased support for biodiversity protection, as biodiversity loss awareness is very low across all sections of society (TNS 2015)

Indeed, the prime minister issued a response to the Commission, informing that the logging activities were not violating EU bird nor habitat directive, while bark beetle is a threat that has to be addressed. The statement also mentioned the 'continued pressure of naturalists – radical environmentalists' and attached the Commission for relying on 'imprecise data' (TVN24 2017). In July, the prime minister has also announced that Poland does not recognize UNESCO's call for halting the logging as a valid decision (Gazeta Wyborcza 2017).

The EC reacted by launching an infringement procedure against Poland and taking the case to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in July. Environmentalist blockades were repeated several times, and the largest protest in August, gathering over 70 environmentalists from 12 countries, who chained themselves to harvesters and claimed trees, was met with a violent response from the State Forest Watch (Chołodowski 2017).

On other occasions, the protesters met with violence from loggers, police, foresters as well as government's supporters, while pro-governmental media denounced them as 'eco-terrorists'. In September, the Commission asked the ECJ to impose financial penalties on Poland if logging was not stopped, and minister Szyszko travelled to Strasbourg in person to ask for more time and defend the government's position, claiming that the logging was for 'sanitary reasons', not 'economic' as the EC and environmentalists claimed (Sollety 2017). The Council of Europe reports that "more than 90% of the logged trees are sold on the market afterwards" (Logmani *et al.* 2017: 88).

As logging continued, so did the environmentalists' direct action, with several blockades at different sites held simultaneously. In early October, blocking log transport from the Forest continued for over a week, while another protest was broken by the Forest Watch and three activists were transported to a nearby hospital with stab wounds (Kruszewski 2017).

The conflict escalated beyond any environmental controversy since Żarnowiec, and the protesters became aware that protests in the Forest are ineffective and increasingly put the activists life in danger. In November, a surprise blockade of the State Forest holding headquarters in Warsaw was held and after several hours the police detained 22 protesters (Kościńska 2017). Later reports suggested that while they remained under arrest, the police conducted unlawful searches of their apartments looking for additional evidence (Nazaruk 2017).

The ongoing showdown over Białowieża became a symbolic clash of two visions of the role of nature and two broader political mindsets. Just like in the case of Rospuda, PiS government is emphasizing economic local interests, though dressed in quasi-environmental rhetoric, and underlining Polish sovereignty, while the nation-wide environmental campaign is gathering protesters at all levels and mobilizing international support, also from the EU and international organizations. However, the government's boldness and willingness to confront both international and domestic pressure does not seem to fade.

9. Conclusions: A new ecological crisis?

The ecological movement in Poland has visibly evolved since the symbolic threshold of 1989. Professionalization created visible problems, but at the same time, it also unlocked new opportunities. The potential of ecological organizations grows in terms of their scope. International organizations such as WWF and Greenpeace, which organized large-scale events in Poland and transnationally, had great impact on other organizations. On the other hand, the heritage of the ecological movement of the 1980s, its leaders and their charisma is still of great importance (Kozuchowska 2007).

What we are witnessing now is a movement in two directions, with the results still to be seen. On the one hand, an eruption of grassroots activism in the last decade (especially following the Rospuda campaign, though not visibly linked to it), most clearly exemplified by new urban activism, expands the societal base for non-professional civil society organizations. This also influences the strengthening of environmental movements regaining that form of legitimacy. Contentious actions and civil disobedience as well as mass mobilization again seen as a sign of civil society's vitality, which is a peculiar heritage of the first and second Law and Justice government), which can translate to a new opportunity for political environmentalism.

On the other hand, with Polish politics polarizing strongly after 2010 on the conservative-liberal axis, the challenge to environmental discourse from conservative milieus is unprecedented. This has been further enabled by the spread and establishment of the eco-terrorist label, as well as a general weakening of pro-environmental attitudes in large sections of the society.

The 1980s environmental mobilization was a foundation for the NGO sector that emerged in the transition (Piotrowski 2015: 255). The scale of environmental policy integration in the early 1990s and the way a number of important issues were handled by the expert community shows clearly that EU 'conditionality' was only an additional factor, while important domestic political and societal powers were driving the process of change, even if that did not translate into electoral successes of green political parties. The issues at stake were important (usually relating to commons), but often below the radar of public opinion and not as spectacular as those in the 1980s or the mass mobilizing protest actions – which is not to say that they were unimportant. The NGO sector on the one hand de-radicalized the movement, on the other created a stable source of environmental expertise.

Our research indicates that it is domestic political factors and societal legitimization which empower or mute environmental claims to a much greater extent than external, European influence. As the last section has shown, Polish politics is characterized by a deep split, which increasingly influences all issue areas. Ideological and partisan differences can overlap with economic interests, like in the Białowieża case, where 'given the observed exceptional strengths of the Polish forestry sector and its clear economic orientation, a strong turn towards favoring nature conservation issues is not expected in the near future' (Logmani et al. 2017: 89).

Despite the relative strength of the environmental movement, its maturity, levels of organization and undoubted expertise, its influence on policymaking and individual administrative and governmental decisions remains limited because of a general feature of Polish political culture, where public participation is often dismissed as unnecessary by hostile policymakers and civil servants. The Environmental Protection Law foresees public consultations with civil society organizations. This law, however, is constantly being narrowed down and, instead of streamlining the ecological policy in the country, affects the deterioration of the atmosphere between the MoE and its social partners (Cyglicki 2014). A public hearing organized in 2014 around the proposed amendments to the Renewable Energy Bill gathered a record turnout of 129 participants, mostly from environmental organizations. However, after 2015 the number of such hearings and the general levels of participation in policymaking fell dramatically again (Szulecki 2017). As one of the veterans of the movement points out:

'the Polish environmental movement has enormous potential, which can be exploited to the best of Polish society and economy. Whether or not this happens does not depend solely on the members of the movement's organizations. If Polish politics, both at central and local level, will remain dominated by the belief that 'the winner takes it all' and that the meaning of public debate is to support the opinion of the ruling majority, we will be haunted by the conflict between political elites and the environmental movement' (Karaczun 2014)

Another causal element is societal legitimacy, which is linked to momentary shifts in the public debate and wider, more long-term structural-discursive changes of dominant 'values' (compare Szulecka and Szulecki 2013).

This is not to say that the European union, its legal and governance framework and transnational processes do not play a role. However, the stubborn position of the PiS government in all conflicts with 'Europe' – including Białowieża and climate policy – indicate that the supranational institutions might in fact lack the power, instruments

and political will to enforce some of the regulations that were previously regarded as binding simply because they were in place (for example by Börzel and Buzogány 2010: 724). At the same time, more horizontal 'Europeanization' through funding and learning, cultural diffusion, life-style socialization is certainly very important, though in less direct fashion.

An important 'exogenous' factor that is rarely addressed in the research on CEE environmentalism is the actual state of the environment and the idea of an environmental *crisis*. While scholars studying environmental movements of the 1980s have repeated after natural science experts and the activists themselves that their political action was a response to an ecological crisis, the environment later seems absent from analyses of the further development of the movement. Pepijn Van Eeden draws on Latour to suggest that once 'the environment' was integrated into policy by the new democratic governments, it effectively ceased to be the environment (2017: 18). That might be true in the discursive sense, but the lesson to be drawn from Latour could be very different. 'Political ecology emerged not so much from a crisis of ecological objects as the constitutive crisis touch all things' (Latour 2009: 42). He rather calls to look at the practices of environmental movements to understand the conditions in which waging political environmentalism is set, and to draw conclusions from the fact that we do not confront an unchangeable nature existing 'out there' but rather a blend of human and non-human factors. Through this lens, we might see the ongoing politicization of air pollution, energy/climate and the growing split over interpretations of biodiversity as indicators of a new, very powerful ecological crisis which will lead to levels and forms of mobilization yet unseen.

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