

WEEKLY

industry and society

REPRODUCTION AUTHORIZED

Brussels, 27 May 1975

No 21/75

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION
OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

A survey of non-governmental organizations active in the environmental field in the nine Community countries was carried out by Marc Pierini et Associés for the European Commission. The findings of this survey may be of interest to readers of "Industry and Society". The opinions expressed are, of course, those of the authors.

X/280/75-E

This bulletin is published by the

Commission of the European Communities
Directorate General of Information
Division for industrial information and consumers
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 - Brussels - Tel. 735 00 40

Further information is available from the Commission's press and information offices in the countries listed on the inside cover.

The information published in this bulletin covers the European Communities' activities in the fields of industrial development, protection of the environment and consumer welfare. It is therefore not limited to recording Commission decisions or opinions.

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INTRODUCTION

The survey was prompted by the European Commission's desire to cooperate more closely with non-governmental organizations active in the environmental field in the Member States of the Community.

The survey ran into two problems from the outset. The first difficulty was the enormous number of organizations of all kinds concerned in one way or another with the environment. At present the Community total is in the region of 20 000. But this total (a very rough estimate) includes no more than a few hundred non-governmental organizations which can be said to be live and which are active at a level high enough to attract the Commission's attention. Selection and assessment proved virtually impossible however because most of these organizations are of relatively recent date and extremely fluid.

The other difficulty was the different patterns in the nine Community countries. These are reflected in the number of "environmental NGOs", the length of time they have been operating, the existence of federations or umbrella organizations, their relations with NGOs in other countries, etc. These also affect the availability of censuses, directories or lists of organizations.

The questionnaire used for the survey was sent to over 300 organizations in mid-December 1974. An explanatory letter and a copy of "Industry and Society" were enclosed. A reminder was sent early in February 1975.

Response to the survey was as follows:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Questionnaires sent</u> (first issue)	<u>Replies received</u> (after second issue)
Belgium	41	21
Denmark	17	12
France	62	25
Germany	101	29
Great Britain	61	33
Ireland	12	3
Italy	27	6
Luxembourg	5	3
Netherlands	54	21
Total:	380	153 (or 40%)
	===	=====

I. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. A large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are active in the environmental field in the Community and their number is increasing rapidly.

The fact that they are so numerous reflects public concern at the way industrial society is developing and an awareness of the need to preserve the environment.

2. Environmental NGOs cover a wide spectrum of activity; many are highly specialized. The pattern varies considerably from country to country. NGOs in the United Kingdom are the oldest, the best organized and seem to have the most influence.
3. Although they represent a considerable body of public opinion, environmental NGOs as a whole have little influence on decisions affecting the environment. Individual NGOs do however depart from this general rule.
4. Environmental NGOs are not sufficiently well informed on Community policy in this field (limited means limit their contacts) but almost all show some interest. There is therefore a real need for NGOs to be informed about this policy.
5. A Community campaign to inform NGOs would be well-received and highly productive since these organizations are undoubtedly very active in focusing opinion and passing on information.
6. Environmental NGOs would like to be consulted as representatives of public opinion. They are also anxious to contribute their practical experience of the environment.
7. The larger NGOs are inundated with diffuse, general information. They would welcome information which could be used to influence public opinion.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS

1. General

Range of disciplines

Since "the environment" is a very broad concept requiring lengthy definitions, it was found that environmental NGOs presented a vast field of study. From the outset the survey was confined to organizations concerned with:

air pollution
water pollution
soil pollution (residues, waste)
noise and other nuisances
protection of natural resources and fauna
preservation of natural and/or architectural heritage
improvement of living and working conditions.

Even within these categories the activities of NGOs differ widely. Let us take one striking example: improvement of the quality of life can mean campaigning for parks in towns (as is the case with one German NGO) but it can also involve town planning and work on transport networks (as is the case with one British NGO).

Conclusion:

The range of environmental disciplines is reflected in an even wider range of environmental NGOs.

A recent awareness

It must be remembered that, at least as far as public opinion is concerned, the environment is something new: it is only in the last few years that people have become aware of it. The response to public concern is relatively new too: Ministries of the Environment (where they exist), specialized publications and non-governmental organizations are in their infancy: none are more than ten years old, the majority are five to six years old.

The differences in economic and industrial development in the various countries and regions of the Community are a factor too. Pollution levels vary correspondingly and with them the development of public opinion and the growth of environmental organizations.

Conclusion:

Environmental NGOs are still in their infancy; they are badly organized on the whole and have limited funds. The picture varies considerably from country to country.

Constant change

As a consequence, the situation with regard to environmental NGOs is constantly changing. Many organizations are set up to deal with a specific local problem and disappear when the problem has been solved (e.g., motorway plans which are abandoned in the face of public protests). Some NGOs disappear for other reasons (lack of funds, in-fighting between the founder organizations). Some NGOs break up into splinter groups, often for political reasons.

This applies in varying degrees to the nine countries. The gestation period has been completed in Britain and is almost over in Denmark and the Netherlands. But it is only just beginning in Italy and it is still running its course in France and Belgium.

Conclusion:

A "settling" period is needed before the NGOs which are representative at national level can be identified. These are usually fairly large and are concerned with issues broader than the attainment of specific local objectives.

Limited effectiveness

It follows that the overall effectiveness of environmental NGOs is limited. Indeed it must be admitted that, despite the number of people involved and the amount of energy expended (demonstrations, handouts, distribution of periodicals, etc.), environmental NGOs have very little political influence on the whole.

Conclusion:

Despite the fact that they represent a considerable body of public opinion, environmental NGOs have little or no influence on government decisions affecting the environment.

No single pattern

This applies in varying degrees to the nine countries. There is in fact a marked contrast between this overall picture and the success of individual NGOs. This is particularly true of the United Kingdom. However, the Commission's information service will not be approaching individual NGOs. What it needs is an overall impression; exceptions to the general rule are of little interest. A further point is that the absence of an umbrella organization makes it difficult to streamline relations between, and with, NGOs.

Conclusion:

There are exceptions to the general rule that NGOs carry little weight and any information policy must take this into account.

Cooperation is difficult

The mushrooming and high turnover of environmental NGOs (with consequent changes of address, disappearances and reappearances) combined with the impermanence of their structures

(changes in leadership, the high proportion of volunteer workers) impede the balanced development of relations with NGOs.

Once the situation stabilizes it should be possible to create an NGO "hierarchy" which would facilitate more systematic cooperation.

Conclusion:

For the moment cooperation between the Commission's information service and NGOs will run into practical difficulties which are a consequence of the relative newness of this field.

2. Activities

Motivations

Given the present proliferation of local groups actively concerned with protecting the environment, it seems only right to ask what public opinion expects from them.

As already stated, the number of environmental NGOs in the nine Community countries is put at a minimum of 20 000 reasonably permanent organizations. The figure would be far higher if the groups which sprout up every day of the week to oppose a specific road construction project or an office block were included. It would be difficult however to gauge their number since there are virtually no reliable statistics on these "grass root" organizations.

The French Ministry for the Quality of Life, for example, puts the total number of NGOs in France at 14 000 (end of December 1974) and estimates that local NGOs are being formed at the rate of about 100 a month.

This spontaneous proliferation of groups seems to be prompted by a real public need, an anxiety created by the rapid changes forced on us by the evolution of industrial society, a state which has been labelled "future shock" by Alvin Toffler.

This attitude seems to be behind the setting up of local movements; the realization that everyone has an interest in protecting the environment seems to be no more than "spin-off" from "future shock".

In the present proliferation of environmental NGOs there is a general tendency for local organizations or groups to concentrate more on "conservation", "defense" and "protection" (in other words, the negative approach) than to push for "development", "improvement", "studies" or "proposals" (the positive approach).

Indeed positive action seems, more often than not, to develop out of the activities of NGOs initially set up for defensive action.

As a result of this general emphasis - which does admittedly vary - progress in terms of concrete change and new decisions in environmental policy is painfully slow. This relative "ineffectiveness" of NGOs is in strong contrast to the large body of public opinion which they represent.

Main areas

The activities of NGOs are concentrated in two main areas:

nature conservation: this is the concern of the largest number of NGOs in Europe; it includes protection of the countryside and beauty spots (e.g. The National Trust in the United Kingdom); the creation of nature reserves (e.g. the Verein Naturschutzparke in Germany); conservation of water resources (numerous NGOs in all Member States, including fishing clubs which have now become active in this area); the protection of monuments (e.g. Italia Nostra) and the protection of fauna in general and birds in particular (e.g. Lega Nazionale Protezione Uccelli, Avifauna, etc.);

the anti-nuisance campaign: the most specialized NGOs are concentrated in this area; basically it involves combating waste (refuse, sewage, industrial waste, car dumps, etc.), protesting against noise (many NGOs can be found around major European airports), opposing power lines or other unwelcome manifestations of modern technology like nuclear plants or supersonic aircraft (e.g., the anti-Concorde project in the United Kingdom).

Two different approaches can be adopted. One approach is negative and involves opposing undesirable new developments (preventing a motorway going through a given area or the construction of a nuclear power station). The other is positive and involves concrete action to change an undesirable situation (creation of parks or a regional nature reserve, getting volunteers to work to restore ancient monuments or clear out a forest).

Environmental NGOs achieve their aims through five main courses of action. In descending order of importance, these are:

- . mobilization of public opinion to bring indirect pressure to bear on the decision-makers. The environmental NGOs have a vast armoury at their disposal here - mass demonstrations, meetings, debates, newspapers, posters, handouts, photographs, etc.;

- . direct pressure on the decision-makers through interviews, manifestos, briefs, etc.;
- . voluntary work by NGO members on specific environmental projects;
- . educating and informing the public (and young people in particular) to foster concern for the environment;
- . study and research leading to the formulation of concrete proposals.

3. Europe's leading environmental NGOs

The survey did not set out to produce an exhaustive list of environmental NGOs in the Community but rather to assess their influence, examine their lines of action and give detailed information on the main organizations.

Detailed information was compiled from existing documents (lists, directories, surveys) and from answers to a questionnaire sent to 300 of the main NGOs. The quality of the information thus compiled depends heavily on replies to the questionnaire. The main environmental NGOs in each country are listed below.

(a) National organizations (26 March 1975)

1. Germany

1 302 organizations, the main ones being:

Aktionszentrum Umweltschutz Berlin (AZU)
Bund Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz
Aktion Saubere Landschaft
Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Umweltfragen (AGU)
Verein Naturschutzparke
Deutscher Naturschutzring (DNR)

2. Belgium

733 organizations, the main ones being:

Inter-Environnement
Entente Nationale pour la Protection de la Nature
Arbeidertoeristenbond (ATB)
Gents Aktiecomité Leefmilieu
Nationale Werkgroep Leefmilieu
Cebedeau-Becewa (Water Research and Documentation Centre)

3. Denmark

128 organizations, the main ones being:

NOAH (an ecological movement with 100 autonomous local groups)
Danmarks Naturfredningsforening (nature conservation association)
Friluftsradet (Open Air Council)

4. France

246 organizations, the main ones being:

FNASSEM (Fédération Nationale de Sauvegarde des Sites et Ensembles Monumentaux)
FNSSN (Fédération des Sociétés de Sciences Naturelles)
FFSPN (Fédération des Sociétés de Protection de la Nature)
Civilisation et Environnement
Progrès et Environnement
Centre Français de Documentation sur l'Environnement
Association pour la Prévention de la Pollution Atmosphérique
Association des Journalistes de l'Environnement
Aménagement et Nature

5. United Kingdom

449 organizations, the main ones being:

Committee for Environmental Conservation (Co.En.Co.), (coordinating body)
Civic Trust
Council on Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Conservation Society
Council for Nature
Council for Environmental Studies
Field Studies Council
Keep Britain Tidy Group
National Trust
WWF-British National Appeal
South Western Marine Pollution Group (research centre)

6. Ireland

51 organizations, the main ones being:

An Taisce (National Trust)
An Foras Forbartha (National Institute for Physical Planning and Research)
Institute for Industrial Research and Standards
Keep Ireland Beautiful
Inland Waterways Association of Ireland

7. Italy

110 organizations, the main ones being:

Italia Nostra
Federazione Nazionale Pro Natura (FEDERNATURA)
WWF Italia
Movimento Ecologico
Federazione delle Associazioni Scientifiche e Tecniche (FAST)
Club Alpino Italiano (Commissione per la Conservazione della Natura Alpina)

8. Luxembourg

24 organizations, the main ones being:

Ligue Luxembourgeoise pour la Protection de la Nature (NATURA)
Jeunes et Environnement
WWF Luxembourg

9. Netherlands

260 organizations, the main ones being:

Stichting Natuur en Milieu (federation of four national associations)
Contactkommissie voor Natuur- en Landschapsbescherming
Nederlandse Vereniging tegen Water, Bodem en Luchtverontreiniging
Stichting Centrum Milieuzorg
Vereniging tot Behoud van Natuurmonumenten in Nederland

(b) NGOs which operate outside the national framework

Three types of organization fall into this category: international federations, organizations common to a number of countries, and umbrella organizations with members in several countries.

1. The first group includes the International Council for Bird Preservation (London), the International Council of Monuments and Sites (Paris) and the International Union of Air Pollution Prevention Associations.

One of the organizations best represented in Community countries is the International Youth Federation for Environmental Studies and Conservation (based in Switzerland) whose member organizations represented 16 countries, including seven Community countries, in September 1974.

In all there are about 50 NGOs which are federations of associations or private organizations.

2. The second group includes the Europa Nostra movement which is based in London and the World Wildlife Fund, based in Switzerland, which organizes "national appeals" in virtually every country in the world (including eight of the nine Community countries).

This group also includes the NGO members of the Keep Europe Beautiful movement, which in turn is part of a world-wide organization (Keep America/Canada/Australia/New Zealand/the Bermudas etc. Beautiful). This movement can be found in ten European countries, five non-Community countries (Austria, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland) and five Community countries:

Germany: Aktion Saubere Landschaft, in 11 German towns;

Belgium: Inter-Environnement, Brussels;

France: Progrès et Environnement, Paris;

United Kingdom: Keep Britain Tidy Group, London;

Ireland: Keep Ireland Beautiful, Dublin.

3. The third group boasts only one member at present: the Bureau Européen d'Environnement (BEE) was set up in December 1974 by 22 environmental NGOs in the nine Community countries to lobby the Community's institutions.

This is the only group of environmental NGOs concerned solely with relations with the Community's institutions with the declared aim of influencing Community policy in this area.

It seems however that this organization has already run into the difficulties which inevitably occur when organizations jealous of their independence and their right to represent a given country are brought under one umbrella.

The result is a rather unbalanced representation of environmental NGOs. Although the United Kingdom and Italy are well represented, the same does not apply to Denmark and France, far from it in fact.

Member organizations of the BEE are as follows:

Germany: Bund Bürgerinitiativen für Umweltschutz

Belgium: Inter-Environnement
Fonds de Sauvegarde pour la nature
Gents Aktiecomite Leefmilieu

Denmark: Frilufsradet

France: Les Amis de la Terre
Jeunes et Nature
Nature et Progrès

United Kingdom: Co.En.Co.
Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
Conservation Society
Civic Trust
Friends of the Earth

Ireland: Italia Nostra
WWF
Kronos 1991

Luxembourg: Natura
Jeunes et Environnement

Netherlands: Stichting Natuur en Milieu
Waddenzeevereniging
Vereniging Milieudefensie

4. Environmental NGOs and their external relations

Relations between NGOs

Relations between environmental NGOs within a given country vary a great deal, depending on how long the NGOs have been operating and the precise nature of their activities.

For example, an organized federation - like the Bund Bürgerinitiativen für Umweltschutz in Germany or Italia Nostra in Italy - helps to create and maintain a stable network of NGOs in all parts of the country, a network which encourages the development of local groups and provides them with advice and support.

Coordination between environmental NGOs is most developed in the United Kingdom, thanks mainly to the existence of a single umbrella organization - the Co.En.Co. (Committee for Environmental Conservation). In France, by way of contrast, there are several NGO federations but no single umbrella organization.

Generally speaking, relations between NGOs within a given country, whether through federations or coordinating organizations, are hampered by the volatile nature of NGOs. NGOs come and go, unite and divide, are subject to political influence, and above all tend to see themselves as the sole representatives of public opinion - a typical feature of protest movements which fosters a blinkered attitude.

It follows that it is even more difficult to establish permanent relations at international level. The establishment of the Bureau Européen d'Environnement (BEE), which groups 22 NGOs in the nine Community countries but cannot claim to represent all NGOs by any means, was delayed until December 1974.

Other international movements are Europa Nostra, Keep Europe Beautiful and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Relations with national authorities

The nature and scope of these vary considerably from country to country. In Italy for example relations are very difficult because the Environment Ministry has no proper central administration and decisions affecting the environment are taken by a number of Ministries. In the United Kingdom on the other hand, the Department of the Environment (DoE) attaches great importance to consultation with the main NGOs and these play a positive role in the formulation of policy.

In Belgium Inter-Environnement seems to be the only organization to play a significant role in environmental policy; it maintains close contact with the State Secretariat for the Environment.

In Germany the recent (April 1974) decision to create a Federal Office for the Environment in Berlin (Umweltbundesamt) has changed the picture at federal level at least (the Ministry of the Interior used to have responsibility for environmental policy). At the end of 1974, however, there was hardly any permanent contact between the Office and NGOs, other than those on the spot in Berlin.

In France contact between NGOs and the authorities is limited to an exchange of information through a specialized service of the Ministry for the Quality of Life (State Secretariat for the Environment). This service carried out a survey of all French environmental NGOs between September 1974 and May 1975.

Relations with industry

Only research centres come into contact with industry, either to study pollution or to test new anti-pollution devices.

NGOs, proper, protest movements and pressure groups have virtually no contact with industry. Although industry in general and certain industries in particular (the paper industry for example) are the NGOs main target, they are usually attacked through the authorities.

An exception to this rule are the NGOs supported or set up by industrial groups as a manifestation of industry's concern to set its house in order or in an attempt to reverse ecological trends. The organization whose intentions are clearest is the Keep Europe Beautiful movement, most of whose members are connected with industry: thus Keep Ireland Beautiful is supported and financed by the Confederation of Irish Industries and Progrès et Environnement (France) emanates from the BSN industrial group.

Relations with international organizations

Environmental NGOs in the Community have regular contact (in descending order of importance) with the Council of Europe, the Commission (or other institutions) of the European Communities, and the United Nations Environment Programme.

Most NGOs in Europe have relations with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and more especially with its European Information Centre for Nature Conservation (EICNC).

Although the Council of Europe is less active in the environmental field than the Communities (it has of course produced the European Convention for the Protection of International Watercourses against Pollution), the EICNC is extremely active in the information field.

Replies to the questionnaire revealed that its main activity - publication of the (irregular) periodical NATUROPA in French and English - is well known to European NGOs. It publishes a "list of organizations concerned with the environment" which unfortunately includes only a limited number of NGOs.

It might be mentioned here that the leaders of environmental NGOs - like the general public - tend to confuse the Council of Europe with the European Community, and indeed with other international organizations, like the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, concerned with the environment in Europe.

The United Nations Environment Programme set up in 1973 has been increasingly involved in informing environmental NGOs in all UN countries. A large number of environmental NGOs attend Governing Councils of the UNEP in Nairobi as observers and the organization has a special department to handle relations with NGOs.

An NGO Environment Service Centre which promotes relations between non-governmental organizations and supports their activities is also located in Nairobi.

Relations with the European Communities

National consumer associations apart, there is little contact between the European Community and NGOs at present, unless individual NGO representatives have personal contacts with specific Commission departments or are members of the Economic and Social Committee, for example.

Replies to the questionnaire highlighted a number of features:

- . NGO leaders tend to confuse the institutions of the Community (Council, Commission, Parliament, Economic and Social Committee) and other institutions (especially the Council of Europe). This problem is far from being peculiar to environmental organizations.
- . Most of the large NGOs know that the Community has an environment policy; they regret however that they are not informed of decisions in advance and that they have no opportunity of voicing their opinions. There is in fact a strong body of opinion in favour of the main NGOs being consulted before any decision is taken.
- . Since the questionnaire was being sent to NGOs which had not previously appeared on the mailing list for "Industry and Society", it was decided to test their reactions to this publication. Replies received indicated that information of this kind from the Commission was very welcome. Indeed many requests for information on the Community's environmental policy followed.

Replies to the questionnaire prove that:

there is considerable interest in the Community's environmental policy;

there is considerable demand for information about this policy.

This is no doubt that the NGOs look to the Commission for information and that this demand should be satisfied as soon as possible.

A number of NGOs have specified that they want to be informed of Community decisions; ideally they would like to participate in these decisions. They complained of being "inundated with general information which serves no useful purpose".

Summary

Because they are poorly organized and short of funds, environmental NGOs have few contacts and rarely approach international organizations or NGOs in other countries. Environmental NGOs, are, however, constantly canvassed by national governments and a number of international organizations (notably the Council of Europe and the UNEP). But the information supplied is very general and has no concrete, measurable effect.

There is therefore room for sound cooperation between the European Commission and the NGOs, particularly if some kind of provision can be made for taking the views of the leading NGOs into account.

III. INFORMATION NEEDS AND HOW TO MEET THEM

The information needs of environmental NGOs can be classified under two main headings:

- . the addition of a European dimension;
- . familiarization with Community policy.

The addition of a European dimension means that NGOs want to extend discussion and decisions on the environment beyond the national level. They are well aware that problems cannot be examined in isolation, that solutions are often complementary. For this reason they would like to know much more about pollution levels, environmental policies, solutions adopted, etc. in neighbouring countries.

Naturally enough, environmental NGOs turn to the European Commission for this information. Many of them have already asked the Commission for comparative environment and pollution statistics, information on national policies, a comparative analysis of these policies, information on environmental problems in frontier regions, and so on.

Familiarization with Community policy is the main factor behind requests for information presented by environmental NGOs: they want information on the institutions (the Commission, the Council, departments concerned with the environment), on decision-making processes, on issues discussed, on regulations in the making, on work programmes.

What is needed in our opinion is a clear, concise presentation of the European Community's role as a force for change on the environmental scene. This would meet the very real needs of the environmental NGOs and the more environmentally conscious and instructed members of the public whose views they represent.