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Environmental Organisations in New Forms of Political Participation: Ecological Modernisation and the Making of Voluntary Rules

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ABSTRACT

Environmental organisations have been active since the early 1960s in putting environmental issues on the political agenda and in strengthening the environmental consciousness of the public. The struggle has been successful in the sense that there is now a strong demand for practical solutions among all kinds of actors. It is, however, difficult for states and political actors to manage environmental problems by traditional forms and instruments, due to the complex character of the problems. Therefore, environmental organisations take their own initiatives to participate in policy-making by developing new forms, within new arenas, with the help of new instruments (voluntary rules or *standards*). Special attention is paid to the possibilities of identifying and developing constructive roles in relation to other actors and institutions as well as the capacity to organise standardisation projects and to mobilise and make use of power resources such as symbolic capital and knowledge. In order to interpret characteristics and implications (possibilities and limitations) of standardisation strategies, I draw on the *ecological modernisation* perspective. Empirically, I refer to the role of Swedish environmental organisations in standardisation projects such as eco-labelling.

KEY WORDS

Environmental organisation, eco-labelling, ecological modernisation, standardisation, political participation,

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental organisations have been active since the early 1960s in putting environmental issues on the political agenda, in problematising the relationship between nature and society, and in strengthening the environmental consciousness of the public (Jamison et al. 1990; Eder 1996). The struggle has been successful in the sense that there is now a strong demand for relevant knowledge and practical solutions among political actors, state agencies and enterprises, as well as consumers. In order to deal with environmental problems in a more anticipatory and systematic way – in contrast to top-down, ad hoc, and reactive 'end-of-pipe' strategies – state actors are now more inclined to use inclusive and interactive forms of policy making (Mol et al. 2000; van Tatenhove et al. 2000; Glasbergen 2001). Environmental organisations are often invited to express opinions and to give advice on how to improve practices. Some scholars interpret such examples as indications of an *ecological modernisation* process, which among other things implies new, more co-operative and less radical roles for environmental organisations (Hajer 1995; Mol 1997; Spaargaren 1997).

Moreover, environmental organisations are themselves engaged in searching for new forms of participation in policy processes. The contemporary situation in the environmental field, with a huge unsatisfied demand for relevant practical solutions, creates opportunities for initiatives. Private actors search for *new forms* of political participation within *new arenas*, using *new instruments*. Further on, *new alliances* emerge, including actors that had previously regarded each other as nothing but antagonists. In this article I focus on voluntary rule-making, or *standardisation* (for example eco-labelling), and especially on the roles of environmental organisations in such processes.

An important reason to focus on environmental organisations' engagement in voluntary rule-making – such as eco-labelling – is that it is a rather new kind of strategy for them. It is as yet quite unclear what they can do (or cannot do) in this kind of political participation. What possibilities and dilemmas appear? How do environmental organisations rely on other actors such as state agencies and enterprises? What kind of compromises do environmental organisations have to make, or how, in a more general sense, do they have to adjust their strategies in order to become credible and constructive participants in standardisation processes? What is their capacity to mobilise and make use of power resources as well as to develop organisational forms by which they can manage conflicts and develop constructive roles?

In order to discuss such questions I will refer to certain standardisation processes within the environmental field in Sweden, in which environmental organisations have been important actors.[1] The article is divided into five sections including this introduction. In the next section I introduce some important concepts, such as *ecological modernisation* and *standardisation*, which guide the analysis that follows. In this section I also discuss some different

kinds of standardisation processes. In the third section I analyse how environmental organisations rely on other actors in standardisation projects such as eco-labelling, and in the fourth section I analyse which specific organisational capacities and power resources environmental organisations can make use of. In the summarising and concluding section I discuss the possibilities and dilemmas of standardisation as a special form of policy participation, and I relate the findings to the concept ecological modernisation.

ECOLOGICAL MODERNISATION AND THE MAKING OF NEW RULES

Standardisation – which analytically denotes the issuing of explicit, written, and voluntary rules (see below) – is a rather new kind of strategy for environmental organisations, which implies the development of partly new kinds of relations between actors. The standardisation strategy corresponds to the ecological modernisation approach in several respects. Researchers using the concept ecological modernisation shed light on general changes in environmental policies from the mid 1980s and onwards. Their focus is mainly on an ideological/discursive shift, which influences practices in different degrees in different countries (e.g. Hajer 1995; Spaargaren 1997; Mol et al. 2000).

Maarten Hajer (1995) views ecological modernisation as the new dominant approach to how environmental problems are conceptualised. Quite contrary to how the relation between society and nature was understood by environmental groups in the 1970s, and how it was expressed in important books and policy documents – such as *Limits to Growth* – a new policy strategy has emerged, which is based on a fundamental belief in progress and the problem-solving capacity of modern techniques and institutions. From the perspective of the ecological modernisation discourse, environmental problems can be calculated, solved, and anticipated. And that is possible without altering the foundations that modern institutions rest on. The previously conceived incompatibility between economic growth and ecological balance is no longer in the foreground. Instead, the potential *positive-sum game* between economic activities and environmental consideration is stressed.

This discursive shift opens up spaces for the development of new alliances and new roles for states, market actors, and the environmental movement (Spaargaren 1997; Mol 2000; Mol et al. 2000). In several industrialised countries the state had already begun to respond to the more environmentally sensitive public in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is often claimed, however, that this early command and control regulation, with ad hoc and 'end of pipe' solutions, submitted the protection of the environment to local technical and economic circumstances (see, for example, Lundqvist 1996; Gillberg 1999), and that it was unable to deal with diffuse, complex, and boundless environmental problems

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(Giddens 1990; Beck 1992; Mol 2000). The new approach, aiming at stimulating anticipation of environmental problems and systematic self-regulation, is much more oriented towards cooperation and consultation with those to be regulated (Mol et al. 2000; van Tatenhove et al. 2000). Several market actors nowadays share this confidence in self-regulation, and they are also prepared to go much further than legal requirements (see, for example, Gillberg 1999; Prakash 2000).

Through strategic engagement within this context, the environmental movement has been transformed and can no longer be viewed as a counter-movement that is challenging existing society and striving for a fundamental reorganisation of the social order. Its focus is not on capitalism or industrialism but on concrete economic activities. 'A radical farewell has been said to the small is beautiful ideology, and technological developments are seen as potentially very useful in regulating environmental problems' (Spaargaren and Mol 1997: 84). The radicalism of environmental organisations has been played down to the advantage of reformist policy-orientation, co-operative strategies, positive-sum game arguments, proposals for practical solutions, and for symbolic demonstrations of 'good examples' instead of bad (Boström 2001).

Voluntary rule-making, for example eco-labelling, is an example of a new strategy – or a kind of subpolitics to use Ulrich Beck's (1992, 1994) word – through which environmental organisations to some degree are trying to detach themselves from the state and traditional politics in order to search for new more effective policy arrangements (which does not necessarily mean that they ignore traditional politics and/or act in isolation from it; see below). Nils Brunsson and Bengt Jacobsson (2000) have observed that lack of state regulatory capacity, and tendencies towards privatisation and deregulation have not resulted in a general lack of rules but rather in a growth of alternative rules. Thus, our contemporary individualised and globalised society is not characterised by disorder in this sense. On the other hand, it is less obvious who the participants and initiative-takers are in rule-making processes, and a great number – or perhaps an overabundance – of rules arise, rules that sometimes stand in opposition to each other.

Brunsson and Jacobsson distinguish analytically between three kinds of rules: directives, norms, and standards. *Directives* are explicit rules, generally in written form. They are issued by organisations or persons to whom we have given, or haved been forced to give, the formal authority to create rules for us and for others. *Norms* are internalised rules that we can follow without having to reflect on them. They are unwritten and often taken for granted. *Standards* are explicit rules issued without reference to the kind of authority that the leaders of organisations enjoy. Like directives, standards are explicit, written, and have an evident source, but they are different in that they are claimed to be voluntary. The standardiser therefore has to convince that the potential adopter will benefit from following the standard.

The conventional understanding of standardisation is that it deals with technical objects or systems, but it has gradually been extended to social matters (Cochoy 2001). What an organisation should look like, how an education programme should be designed, or what we should eat, are possible topics for standardisation. Brunsson (2000) argues that the growth of standardisation in our contemporary society is connected to other tendencies such as individualisation and globalisation.[2] An aspect of individualisation is the development of new forms of political action. Citizens are nowadays more ready to use consumer power to fight for political rights (Micheletti 2000). To be able to use such consumer power, individuals have to be equipped with relevant knowledge and with standards that they can choose to follow.

For environmental organisations, standardisation implies new channels for political participation and influence. Reflections on the insufficiency of existing instruments for environmental protection have stimulated environmental organisations and other actors to search for new complementary instruments, such as standards.[3] There are however different kinds of standards, with different contents, and these differences are the subject for debates and conflicts in standardisation processes, as well as a main factor in favour of or against participation. Here I distinguish between 1) standards of principles; 2) standards of procedures; and 3) standards of levels.

Standards of principles stipulate principle, abstract requirements. These standards have to be concretised and 'filled' – with both local knowledge and often more concrete standards of levels (see below) – in order to interpret and guide certain cases.

Principles are often the outcome of international negotiations and expressed in international conventions or agreements. Some principles, like the 'polluter pays principle' or the 'precautionary principle', have acquired substantial legitimacy in environmental practices, since they are expressed in documents such as the Rio Declaration. Global principles are important to international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) since they can translate them to national contexts in order to influence states (Boli and Thomas 1999). For example, the precautionary principle helps Greenpeace to identify and pay attention to risky projects and also makes it legitimate to outline the worst scenario that one can imagine.

Principles facilitate the communication between actors, thus being tools for the forming of discourse coalitions (Hajer 1995), but they are often too vague to guide specific cases, due to their multi-interpretable character. In specific juridical and political cases, which often involve resourceful opponents, it is not sufficient to refer to principles. Environmental organisations therefore need to include other strategies and argumentative techniques in order to influence decision-making processes (Boström 2001).

Environmental organisations also often work for the adoption of new political goals and promises in official documents. Even though such rules have

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a voluntary character, they can be quite effective. One reason is that environmental organisations get a hold on political actors who have earlier formulated goals and promises, and can remind them about their responsibility to be true to themselves. Another reason is that such standards also are useful in sub-political arenas, in the dialogue with enterprises. The standards may signal what political actors see as appropriate behaviour, and may therefore be interpreted as serious (cf. Prakash 2000).

During the last part of the 1990s *standards of procedures* have been developed and extensively used in the environmental field. Standards of procedures stipulate that an organisation must adopt and follow certain routines in order to improve its practice. Researchers (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000, Power 1997) claim that it is a strikingly widespread phenomenon today that organisations follow standards for administrative procedures and presentations rather than for production processes, products, and their effects. Within the environmental field it has become common that organisations use environmental management systems such as the ISO 14,000 family. This family of standards stipulates, among other things, that an organisation must follow the law, have a policy for environmental practice, and follow routines to map, supervise and measure environmental effects.

Environmental management systems, however, completely ignore local variations, contexts and prerequisites. To Michael Power (1997) they are examples of second-order control systems, abstract forms of control. The consequences of implementation are therefore difficult to predict. One reason why many organisations adopt such standards may be that they do not believe that the effects of adoption will actually change their practice.

Although activists within environmental organisations admit that these standards can simplify and improve environmental practices, they also express critical viewpoints. They suspect that some enterprises try to hide themselves behind these standards. And because of that, the real environmental problems threaten to become less visible, and old 'environmental villains' have opportunities to market their own 'green' products. However, the activists are not categorical opponents of environmental management systems, and they are positive towards them within sub-fields that lack better alternatives. In practice, some environmental organisations, such as the Natural Step, actually promote this trend in that they consult enterprises to make environmentally friendly implementations of the systems.

Nevertheless, it has been an important practice for environmental organisations in Sweden to contrast standards of procedures with *standards of levels*, and speak in favour of the latter. Systems of eco-labelling are examples of standards of levels. These standards stipulate certain requirements – rather than, or as an important complement to, requirements of principle or procedure – that must be fulfilled if a product or a production process is to be classified as good for the environment. Especially in countries like Germany and Sweden, eco-labels have

become quite common (Gillberg 1998; Jordan et al. 2001, Rubik and Scholl 2002). In Sweden, different eco-labelling systems, such as 'Good Environmental Choice' (issued by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation [SSNC]), KRAV (an eco-label as well as the name of an organisation that primarily deals with provisions), and the Nordic semi-official eco-label the 'Swan', were introduced by the end of the 1980s or in the beginning of the 1990s. The establishment of these systems was made possible by deepened public anxieties about certain environmental problems – for example discharges of chlorine from paper-mills – and by an increased propensity among both individual consumers and more resourceful purchasing organisations (often retailers and public organisations) to demand environmentally friendly products. Before the introduction of eco-labelling systems, the demand for environmentally friendly products had been met by a huge number of new trademarks with varied promises about the qualities of products, and with diverse nature-symbols flourishing on the packages. The diversity of green symbols threatened to cause nothing but confusion.

Therefore, retailers and others demanded systems of auditing and third-party certification in order to gain credibility. To exemplify, the eco-label 'Good Environmental Choice' was implemented in close cooperation between SSNC and the largest retailers of everyday commodities in Sweden. Due to the engagement of resourceful retailers and buyers, it is today quite difficult even to find non-labelled goods for some products such as detergents.

Besides general eco-labelling systems, environmental organisations have also taken initiatives to issue standards of levels within certain fields. A pioneer field was the standardisation project for a sustainable forestry, which environmental organisations conducted together with companies and other actors within the forest industry. That standardisation project has its organisational basis within the international organisation the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Today almost half of the Swedish forest is certified according to the FSC-standard, but there is also one other growing competing standard within the Swedish forest sector (within the framework of the Pan European Forest Certification scheme).[4]

In the analysis that follows attention is especially paid to this last version of standardisation, while the political struggle about the shape of the 'best' standard also is emphasised.

RELATIONS TO OTHER ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS IN STANDARDISATION PROCESSES

Environmental organisations have the potential to become central actors in standardisation processes, but that also means that they have to build fruitful relations with other actors and institutions. A 'standardisation organisation'

strengthens its own authority and power through the building of network relations (Tamm Hallström 2000). In the following subsections I will discuss some important categories of actors or institutions, with which environmental organisations identify roles and build relations.

Relations to research: intermediary link

The relation to expert knowledge and research is central. An important characteristic of late globalised modernity is the growth of abstract mechanisms, especially expert systems (Giddens 1990). People and organisations need disembedded formulae, or codes (Melucci 1996), to interpret information, to manage life-situations, and to make decisions in complex situations. People and organisations are therefore also dependent on experts, and on interpreters of expert systems. Environmental organisations, consultants and journalists are examples of actors that function as intermediary links between science and practice (Lidskog 1996, Jamison 1996, Sverrisson 2001, Boström 2001). They translate abstract scientific products to make it easier for practitioners to know what to do, and how to do it. A standard can be viewed as a special kind of expert system. Standardisation is a way to store expert knowledge (Jacobsson 2000), or to transform knowledge into rules that guide action.

However, to apply scientific knowledge in order to produce standards is not an automatic or unproblematic process. Knowledge is always uncertain, in particular knowledge about environmental problems, since such problems concern complex chains of causes, stretched over time and space, and often are not directly perceivable by our senses (Beck 1992). So on the one hand, in order to handle environmental issues, scientific research and experts need to be involved. On the other hand, genuine knowledge uncertainty simultaneously creates spaces for anyone to produce, mediate and question knowledge about environmental issues (Eder 1996; Lidskog 1996).

This relativity is problematic for environmental organisations (Yearley 1991, 1996). The opponents in risk definition struggles can always find expert knowledge, or story-lines (Hajer 1995) that suit their arguments. However, environmental organisations can manage the situation through their symbolic capital (see below) and cognitive practice. Cognitive practice is about trying to persuade other actors by communicating knowledge, meaning and rules so that new conceptual spaces are created (Boström 2003; cf. Eyerman and Jamison 1991). Knowledge, meaning and rules are structured and brought together into frames (Snow et al. 1986), which help actors to interpret situations and circumstances, and which guide their action. Frame bridging – the linking of a frame to the knowledge, interests, and experiences of other actors – is done with the purpose of making possible frame resonance among those the environmental organisation are trying to influence and/or mobilise (Snow and Benford 1988). An example of frame bridging is to draw attention to the positive-sum game of

environmental consideration (see also next sub-section). More and more, people and organisations internalise their care for the environment, but they are often confused by the over-abundance of contradictory information. Frames that environmental organisations construct and disseminate can therefore be helpful in guiding concrete action.

A standard, with its stored expert knowledge, is a special kind of frame (and can also be included in more general frames). In principle, scientists can work for the issuing of standards, but environmental organisations, due to their form as social movement organisations, have special possibilities. Normally, scientists are much more reluctant to give concrete advice or recommendations for practice. A certain level may be regarded as arbitrary from a scientific point of view. Scientists do often have rigid criteria for the demonstration of proof, and are circumscribed by procedures, methods, and theories that may produce risk-blindness (Beck 1992). If scientific procedures are unable to prove causal connections, scientists may be too inclined to falsify hypotheses.

Through framing and codification, environmental organisations do not necessarily mediate knowledge that is unknown for other actors. They can co-ordinate dispersed and divided experiences and recommendations to a common framework. When environmental organisations took initiatives to create a standard for a sustainable forestry in Sweden (FSC), they considered arguments that scientists had presented before, and concrete methods that had been introduced here and there within forestry. The FSC standard managed to co-ordinate the new ideas and methods in a coherent frame.

Relations to enterprises and groups of customers: co-operation and resistance

The building of alliances with enterprises is central, and a key-aspect, in standardisation. If environmental organisations want to take initiatives they have to find partners to co-operate with and they have to build alliances with 'good examples'. These good examples get opportunities to invest goodwill and to develop market opportunities and new niches in relation to their competitors. Thus, eco-labelling has the strength to give economic advantages to (some) enterprises. To adopt an eco-label is to signal to other actors that an independent third party, perhaps an environmental organisation with a huge symbolic capital, has checked the environmental agenda. To follow voluntary rules can also be a way for enterprises to anticipate legislation and state interventions that they believe will come in the future (Prakash 2000). In that way, environmental organisations build alliances with the 'risk-winners' in the struggle against the 'risk-losers' (Beck 1992).

A dilemma for environmental organisations is that they have to appeal to the interest for potential profits and markets. Story-lines about the conditions of life for future generations do not give so much resonance to enterprises, since they

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have to produce something here and now. The time–space perspective differs between the parties involved in the dialogue. To attain frame-resonance, the initiative-taker must find enterprises with the economic and technical potential to reach the green criteria, and that requires readiness for compromise. Environmental organisations have to use, and build on, knowledge that enterprises already have, and standardisation presupposes a workable technological alternative. It is not possible to propose 'green electricity' before one can refer to something like that – for example bio-energy – which actually has been introduced to the market (besides which, whether or not an alternative really is 'green' is probably always a contested issue).

A condition for eco-labelling is also the (perceived) existence of customers who either are willing to buy environmentally-friendly products or have a latent propensity to boycott products that might be targeted by environmental organisations. Therefore, in various standardisation projects, it has been important for environmental organisations to carry out campaigns to influence public opinion, and to organise groups of customers in such a way as to demonstrate a potential demand. For example, an important argument for the implementation of FSC-certification in Sweden was the demand from foreign buyers and retailers. WWF was successful in organising groups of buyers from the Netherlands, England and Germany, who expressed certain requirements of the raw material. That was important, since the Swedish enterprises in the forest industry export a large amount of their products to these countries.

Different standardisation projects show that there are spaces for durable co-operation between the environmental movement and business actors. However, the presence of co-operation, common interests and shared definitions do not imply a total absence of conflicts and power struggles. Obviously, not all enterprises see the point of eco-labelling. Because of that, it has been important for environmental organisations to co-operate with resourceful retailers and other purchasing organisations, which have forced or provoked other business actors to adopt eco-labels.

Even if large enterprises decide to work for the adoption of standards there are still considerable spaces for conflicts and counter-strategies. First, in response to introductions of certain standards, actors may compete by issuing their own standards or by using other standards in the field, for example environmental management systems. For example, within the forest sector and the agriculture/food sector competing standards have been introduced as reactions to existing standards. The implementation of a Swedish PEFC-standard (the Pan European Forest Certification Scheme), brought about first and foremost by trade associations for private forest owners and sawmills, was a direct response to the implementation of FSC. Such counter-strategies at least show that it has become harder to completely ignore the existence of new rules.

Second, conflicts can also be tackled internally through negotiations about the character and criteria of specific standards. Dividing lines between environ-

mental organisations and enterprises are usually first about how precisely the criteria should be formulated (for example if one should use qualitative expressions, such as 'more old and big trees should be preserved at clear-cutting', or quantitative, such as 'ten old and big trees per hectare …'), and second, about the levels of specific criteria.

The power struggle is a great deal about competition between different standards and/or the design of standards. To environmental organisations it is important to have fixed, concrete, precise and often quantitatively expressed requirements. Moreover, if the standards are relatively demanding yet also possible to follow in practice, they are effective in symbolically differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' enterprises. This differentiation is dynamic, though it triggers latecomers to improve their environmental agenda, and if they do so the bar can be raised even more. Logically, the same position also criticises standards that only regulate procedures and make it possible for any enterprise to certificate itself. Such standards of procedures are especially appealing to trade associations which have an interest in including all their members (enterprises) instead of disqualifying 90% of them. They do not want differentiation, but homogenisation, and they prefer that their members should have equal opportunities for competition.

Relations to the state: complementary roles

The strategies of environmental organisations within standardisation processes are related to the state and to politics in several ways. First, initiatives to issue standards are often motivated by the absence, incapacity and inertia of policy processes and state intervention. Hence, rule-making can be viewed as a kind of subpolitics (Beck 1994), which makes it possible to open up spaces for new issues to be debated and handled.

Second, though the lack of state capacity motivates voluntary initiatives, state actors can support the initiatives by 1) co-operating and developing forms in which different parties can meet, communicate and negotiate, which is the case regarding new forms of policy-making such as Joint Environmental Policy-Making (Mol et al. 2000), voluntary agreements, and also eco-labelling such as the Swan (see also Hofer 2000); 2) constructing rules, programmes, or so called 'soft-laws' which function as 'safety-belts' or as points of departure for the issuing of more precise and stricter voluntary rules (Gillberg 1999, Prakash 2000); 3) legitimising and expressing support for standardisation initiatives, which, for example, Swedish political and state actors often do; and 4) supplying resources and providing knowledge and relevant information (for example, information about existing state directives, so that standard-criteria do not clash in some way with them).

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Subpolitical initiatives are therefore seldom, if ever, independent of state regulation. Indeed, due to different kinds of co-operation or complementary relations with state agencies, the voluntary character of standardisation ceases to be evident. It can actually be an effective strategy for standardisation organisations to co-operate with state agencies, while simultaneously preserving the rhetoric of voluntarism (see Tamm Hallström 2000; cf. Mol et al. 2000: chapter 1).

Third, voluntary initiatives have a (potential) relation to the state, in that they can function as prototypes. To issue standards is a possible first step in a campaign for strengthened legislation. Environmental organisations can label products and in that way demonstrate green alternatives, green practicable solutions, which in turn make it easier to introduce new laws to eliminate the bad alternatives, or at least to make legislation stronger. However, it appears that this scenario is not so common. The relationship – regarding environmental rule-making in the 'deregulation context' of the 1990s – is often the opposite. The potential state capacity – its capacity to provide a general and binding regulatory framework that reduces free-riding – is not activated 'enough'. Representatives from environmental organisations claim that politicians, instead of actively utilising the voluntary initiatives in their own rule-making activities, are inclined to be passively satisfied with the voluntary engagement in such issues.

ORGANISING STANDARDISATION PROJECTS

Environmental organisations have to identify and construct roles in relation to scientific research, to enterprises, to groups of customers, and to state agencies in standardisation processes. However, the building of network relations in standardisation projects is not unproblematic, and the opportunities are unevenly distributed among environmental organisations. Here I discuss access to resources and the way the standardisation process is organised, which influences the capacity to carry through it.

Voluntary organisations, or social movement organisations, normally have less material resources than enterprises and state agencies. Many social movement organisations are heavily dependent on voluntary labour, and such labour cannot easily be organised to do the routine and professional work that standardisation projects require (see below). For that reason, this organisational form seems to be unsuitable for the conducting of standardisation. In Sweden however, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) and WWF are quite large – they have about 150,000 members each – which gives them substantial financial resources. The Swedish section of Friends of the Earth (FoE) has only 2,000 members, hence the role of FoE, within the Swan's eco-labelling practice, is somewhat restricted. FoE reacts to others' initiatives, on some selected issues, but does not have enough resources to put forward its own

agenda within the Swan. For SSNC – which conducts the label 'Good Environmental Choice' – its resource base has been crucial for the possibility of organising and conducting eco-labelling in a routinised and self-sufficient way, with a paid professional staff. SSNC continuously develops criteria for new products and takes initiatives to contact experts and other relevant actors. And its labelling work is included in a general strategy for stimulating green consumerism (which also includes campaigning – see below).

Voluntary organisations do not rely only on their financial resources. An important collective resource for an environmental organisation is its symbolic capital, which is embedded in its name and logotype. A large membership base not only brings the organisation money, but also symbolic power. Access to symbolic capital implies that an environmental organisation, such as Greenpeace, has the potential capacity to triumph over much better resourced enterprises, such as Shell (Tsoukas 1999). A large number of members functions as a signal to other actors that many people support the values that the organisation strive for. Decision-makers have to take into account an important group of customers and of concerned public opinion. However, since the environmental movement is generally appreciated, smaller environmental organisations also have some possibilities. Even if the role of the FoE Sweden within the Swan is restricted, as mentioned above, FoE still has some symbolic advantages, which the other parties are quite aware of. The possible threat to leave the Swan is a latent power resource, since the system's credibility depends on the participation of at least one environmental organisation.

The capacity to control the standardisation procedure by a relevant organisational form is also a critical point. On the one hand, SSNC has to rely on other actors in its eco-labelling practice, by making relevant compromises and by using appealing frame-bridging arguments as discussed earlier. On the other hand, SSNC can control its standardisation agenda, with the help of its internal democratic procedures for decision making, and that serves as an antidote to dubious standardisation projects. The role of FoE within the Swan is more restricted, due to the Swan's organisational form in which no particular interest group has a majority position. FoE can make reservations against certain proposals but cannot control the decision-making procedure. KRAV and FSC are also constituted by different interest groups, in which the environmental interest has a significant influence but no formal majority. On the one hand, this form requires an extra preparedness for all parties involved to make compromises, in comparison to SSNC's form. On the other hand, since all parties are given formal rights to vote, it is more difficult to ignore certain proposals and viewpoints than it is within other arrangements of policy participation such as hearings (cf. Hannigan 1995: 103–107) or traditional state-centred corporative arrangements for dialogue of interest groups (which sometimes only serve the interests of well-resourced business groups and unions; see Christiansen and Lundqvist 1996; Lundqvist 1996).

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In contrast to state agencies – i.e. organisations that by tradition have the responsibility for dealing with rule-making activities – environmental organisations have the potential to engage in a specific kind of cognitive practice (see discussion earlier) and in campaigning that is run in parallel with standardisation. Environmental organisations have successfully introduced eco-labels and thus contributed to the supply of environmentally friendly products at the same time as they have stimulated the demand for such products through local, national and international campaign-work. To a voluntary organisation, or a social movement organisation, it is perfectly normal to be engaged in cognitive practice and campaigning. It is a traditional role for such an organisation. Through their cognitive practices, environmental organisations place themselves in a position to define, interpret and attribute meaning to issues and situations without having to hide behind disguises of neutrality rhetoric. But that is not as straightforward for a state agency, which aims to implement politics as well as the directives that politicians formulate. State agencies work for the dissemination of information but should in principle be restrained with activities such as influencing the public opinion (Premfors 2000: 213–218).

If cognitive practice and campaigning are traditional roles for social movement organisations, rule-making is not. But that is a traditional role for politicians and state agencies. It is not evident why, if and how social movement organisations should be engaged in standardisation. Standardisation is an example of a co-operative strategy – in contrast to the confrontation strategy – which becomes more frequently used by environmental organisations. More cooperative strategy implies more integration and less autonomy. How environmental organisations organise such co-operative processes, and how they simultaneously try to influence processes and preserve critical distance, become critical issues. Within Swedish environmental organisations there are continually internal discussions, reflections and debates about their roles and identities, and how far they can compromise on different issues (Boström 2001). In order to preserve a critical distance, environmental organisations sometimes have to refrain from taking part in possible projects, for example demands from enterprises for labelling their own products. Still, when they adopt standardisation strategies it is no longer possible, to the same degree, to protest openly against the same enterprises they co-operate with. Moreover, systems of eco-labelling also include internal complaint procedures. Environmental organisations are expected to use these procedures before signalling disputes through the mass media channel. Even if they do not drop the media strategy in principle and in every case, they have to consider carefully before using such tactics. On the other hand, not all environmental organisations need to participate in standardisation projects and these organisations (for example, Greenpeace) can still use conventional confrontation strategies, and perhaps look at certain standardisation projects with a critical eye.

CONCLUSIONS: ECOLOGICAL MODERNISATION, PARTICIPATION AND THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF NEW RULE-MAKING ACTIVITIES

Environmental organisations in Sweden and elsewhere are engaged in several different standardisation projects. They issue their own standards, negotiate with other actors about specific criteria and how to design standards, communicate and lobby with the help of legitimate standards, and advise other actors on making fruitful implementations of already existing standards. I have exemplified this with different kinds of standards (standards of principles, standards of procedures, and standards of levels), the different characteristics of which can be the subjects of political and sub-political conflicts.

Environmental organisations have identified opportunities for taking their own initiatives to participate in policy processes. They have, through standardisation, developed roles as intermediary links between science and practice. An important part of that role is the transformation and codification of dispersed, diffuse and contested knowledge into standards, and the including of standards in more general frames. Through standardisation, environmental organisations also have the capacity to differentiate symbolically between risk-winners and risk-losers. They build alliances with the former and give these 'good examples' some competitive advantages, which provoke other enterprises to follow. Further on, their strategies are in several ways related to the state: motivated by its perceived weakness as well as oriented in a complementary way to its rules and resources.

The use of such co-operative strategies reflects a way of interpreting the complexity of environmental problems – captured by the concept ecological modernisation – that emerged during the 1980s and is still prevalent. The ecological modernisation approach highlights the perceived positive-sum game of environmental consideration. The discourse is reformist-oriented, policy-oriented and solution-oriented. It is permeated by the belief in progress, and by confidence in natural science and (not only small-scale) technology.

Standardisation can be viewed as an example of ecological modernisation. A condition for standardisation is the institutionalisation of environmental practice, a phase of ecological modernisation in the history of environmental politics. Standardisation is dependent on the (at least perceived) existence of a concerned public, and on the ambition of different actors to search for practicable solutions. Standardisation also furthers the ecological modernisation process. When environmental organisations adopt standardisation strategies, they also have to develop certain patterns in their relations with other actors. They can no longer be too confrontational, or unreservedly use disclosing media strategies in their action towards the practice of business actors. Standardisation also demands a readiness to compromise, and a readiness to frame issues in ways that appeal to actors that previously were regarded solely as antagonists.

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Standardisation thus implies certain dilemmas for environmental organisations. It both delimits the environmental organisations' repertoire of actions and shapes what it is possible to include in frames. On the other hand, it enables individuals and organisations to change practices in a concrete manner. Moreover, standardisation does not imply the end of power struggles within the environmental field. Instead, it creates new forms, arenas and instruments for new more diffuse power struggles where competition and co-operation merge. In this article it is concluded that environmental organisations, in spite of a generally weak power position, nevertheless have potential to carry through substantial rule-making, very much thanks to factors such as their symbolic capital, cognitive practice and capacity to engage in campaigning. Their capacity is also dependent on other organisational factors such as their ability to engage professional staff and to develop effective participatory forms. How they organise standardisation projects, how they internally discuss and reflect upon self-identity, critical distance and self-sufficiency, and which interest groups they co-operate with concerning issues such as financing, researching, negotiation and decision-making, will be important factors in their capacity to continue working for substantial standardisation.

NOTES

[1] The material is mainly from Boström 2001. In this book, the general political agenda of the Swedish environmental movement in the 1990s is analysed, as well as the movement's internal and external network relations. Five Swedish environmental organisations – Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Friends of the Earth (FoE), Greenpeace, and the Natural Step (TNS) – are described and compared from different angles. The study is based on interviews with key persons in the organisations and on analyses of different kinds of documents.

[2] Individualisation is favourable to standardisation because it makes it harder to control people by directives or by common norms. If people see themselves as free and independent, they can be expected to be more receptive to standards, which they are free to follow, and which are also said to be in their own interests. Individualisation is also favourable to standardisation because the liberated individuals – liberated from traditional social structures – desperately need new points of reference to manage their life biographies (see Beck 1992: chapter 5). Globalisation – which among other aspects implies more, tighter and more intensive interaction between different kinds of actors with residence far away from each other (or between trans-national actors) – furthers standardisation because it creates a demand for co-ordination. And this demand cannot

be supplied in other ways since there is a lack of a strong hierarchy or strong norms at the global level.

[3] Standards are often regarded as belonging to the category of informational instruments along with, for example, administrative and economic instruments (taxes, charges). In this context, standards are regarded as a kind of rules, which nevertheless have informational (but also other) functions.

[4] For details about FSC and its competitor, see Elliot 1999 and Boström 2002.

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