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Sustaining Environmental NGOs in Latin America and Eastern Europe: Considering the Experience of FARN and REC

Democratisation presents opportunities and threats to non-governmental organisations (NGO). Greater openness associated with democratic regimes provides opportunities for participation and influence not previously available. At the same time, increasing state capacity may threaten the continued relevance of NGOs. The article examines the Environment and Natural Resources Foundation (FARN) of Argentina and the Regional Environmental Center (REC) of Eastern Europe to assess environmental support organisations in post-authoritarian contexts. The aims of the article are to identify opportunities and threats to environmental support organisations, to examine the strategies they adopt to advance their interests and achieve their goals.

Introduction

Democratisation in Latin America during the 1980s and in Eastern Europe following the regime changes of 1989 opened the way for strengthening of environmental capacity. A connection between democracy and improved environmental capacity has been established previously, as the openness inherent in democratic regimes allows for the development of incremental progress through negative feedback mechanisms (Dryzek, 1988). The growth in awareness and concern over environmental issues at the global level has been accompanied by the emergence of environmentally focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These organisations have sought to exercise influence and shape the development of environmental policy at the regional, state, and local level, by working with governments and undertaking a direct role in the development and implementation of environmental projects. This article utilises literature on environmental NGOs in Eastern Europe (Carmin & Jehlicka, 2005; Cellarius & Staddon, 2002; Jancar-Webster, 1998; O'Brien, 2009a) and Latin America (Aguilar, 2002; Hochstetler, 2002; Price, 1994) in considering the role of these organisations during the democratisation process, and in identifying the role of capacity development in shaping opportunities and threats.

Environmental NGOs in post-authoritarian contexts are examined in this article through the cases of the *Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (FARN – Environment and Natural Resources Foundation) in Argentina, and the Regional Environmental Center for Central

and Eastern Europe (REC) in Hungary.[1] These two NGOs operate as support organisations seeking to strengthen environmental capacity in Argentina (and Latin America) and Eastern Europe, respectively. In both regions states underwent democratisation during the Third Wave, providing an opportunity for the emergence of civil society actors and greater participation. The rate of change and the external influence in each case presented very different opportunities and threats, with East European regimes having the most complex legacies to overcome, yet receiving substantial EU support. FARN and REC have played important roles in supporting environmental capacity development, providing information and channelling resources to organisations, although operating at different scales. They have also faced challenges that are common to NGOs such as securing funding, but have adopted different strategies to address these in response to the respective socio-political context they face.

The aims of the article are to identify opportunities and threats to these organisations and to examine the strategies they have adopted to advance their interests. The first section examines the relationship between environmental capacity, democratisation and NGOs, determining how democratisation can facilitate NGO participation and support environmental capacity development, in the context of Latin America and Eastern Europe. The second and third sections examine the contexts in which FARN and REC operate and identify the core features of these organisations. The final section examines the similarities and differences between the two organisations, to determine how the analysis of their operations and contexts can contribute to a broader understanding of opportunities and threats for environmental support organisations.

How do State Capacity and Democratisation Interact to Shape NGO Opportunities and Threats?

Important categories in determining the degree to which organisations are able to exert influence and contribute to environmental capacity include the degree of openness of the political system in which the organisations operate, legal and institutional constraints, funding opportunities, presence of allies and opponents, and the degree of political stability.[2] A predominance of threats would be expected to limit the ability of organisations

to fulfil their support role and level of contribution. This section considers the conceptual framework within which these concepts can be examined.

State capacity is essential for the development and implementation of environmental policies and practices. Considering the development of capacity during democratisation, Bäck and Hadenius (2008, p. 2) argue that although democratic states possess greater capacity, the democratisation process introduces complexity:

> At first, democratizing a state brings a cost: The administrative capacity of said state declines. Not until a fairly high level of democracy is reached can a successful convergence between the two traits [state capacity and democratization] take place.

Capacity building during democratisation relies on the "*simultaneous* establishment of democratic institutions and the development of vital political societal resources." (Bäck and Hadenius, 2008, p. 21) It is within this context that the development of environmental capacity during democratisation must be considered. Breaking down the ability of the state to address environmental issues, Jänicke (2002, p. 4) identifies five factors: actors, strategies, systemic framework conditions, situative context, and character of problem. The democratisation process involves change and redefinition of all of these factors. Systemic framework conditions are particularly important as these condition the relations between actors and strategies available. The removal of a non-democratic political system leads to changes in formal institutional structures, shaping the systemic framework conditions through the creation and/or reform of environmental agencies. During democratisation various actors compete and their relative success will establish the ability and desire of the regime to address environmental issues, by granting the power to alter the relevant framework.

Although the state may possess the formal capacity to address environmental issues, it will not necessarily do so in the absence of sufficient incentives. This is particularly difficult in a period of democratisation where the fluidity of the context presents many competing claims from actors for influence and pressure to prioritise issues.[2] With regard to Eastern Europe Carmin and VanDeveer (2005, p. 12) argue:

> While capacity development requires well-trained and well-equipped personnel, it is also essential to have effective and efficient governmental and non-governmental organisations

> to establish appropriate institutional environments in which these organisations can operate.

Reform of institutional structures alone is not sufficient to lead to improvements in environmental capacity. Barry (1999, p. 209) argues that institutional change "must be understood as part of a deeper process of cultural transformation." Capacity in this area therefore moves beyond the state and must take into account the role and influence exercised by non-governmental actors, as well as competing internal interests. Democratisation provides an opportunity for greater participation to overcome domination by special interests, as Lidskog and Elander (2007, p. 90) argue, "[d]eliberation among a small circle of powerful actors may…run the risk of strengthening values and interests that are contrary to green thought". Examining areas of weakness in the levels of access and influence of key actors can provide a way to understand the broader problems in environmental politics at a national level.

Environmental NGOs play a key role in this context, placing issues of wider societal concern on the political agenda. Mercer (2002, p. 6) distinguishes between NGOs and grassroots organisations within civil society, arguing that the former "are officially established, run by employed staff…[and] often relatively large and well-resourced". Grassroots organisations by contrast tend to be small, voluntary, issue-based, and temporary (Mercer, 2002). In this context NGOs are therefore more able to adopt a flexible and adaptable structure, responding to perceived needs within society. The state also plays an important role in directing civil society, in establishing the legal and political setting in which organisations operate (Chandhoke, 2001). As the remit of the state is wider than that of the NGO, NGOs must compete with other interests in order to influence the political agenda. This difference is also reflected in the unequal power relationship, with Clark (1995) arguing that a healthy relationship is only possible where there are common objectives. In the absence of shared objectives or opportunities for meaningful influence NGOs can adopt a more confrontational stance, seeking to challenge the state through protest and direct action, although Dalton et al (2003) suggest that participation is the most common approach. Cooperation between the state and the NGO sector introduces additional challenges to be overcome in NGOs' pursuit of their goals. Atack (1999) argues that NGOs must guard against simply becoming contractors for the state and must instead seek to be

treated as partners.

The development of NGOs is shaped by the context in which they operate. Examining the operation of NGOs during democratisation in Europe and Latin America, Pickvance (1999) noted that there was a decline in the level of public support as formal direct mechanisms for participation in state decision-making processes are opened. Waller & Millard (1992) also noted that the apolitical character of environmental issues in Eastern Europe meant that they were used as a cover for broader critiques of the actions of the non-democratic regimes across the region prior to democratisation. As state-sanctioned mechanisms for direct participation become feasible NGOs may lose some of their previous support, if people utilise the new opportunities. Faced with a decline in support there has been a move towards greater professionalisation within the environmental movement, as organisations seek to stabilise income and formalise participation (Berny, 2009; van der Heijden, 1999). Foreign aid has been played a key role in increasing the number of NGOs, although the effects have not been universally positive (Zinnes & Bell, 2003). In moving towards an increasingly professionalised structure and greater reliance on external support, NGOs have paid more attention to the maintenance of organisational structure and legitimacy (O'Brien, 2010). While NGOs are required to meet the needs of funding bodies, it is also important that they satisfy the stakeholders that rely on their services, requiring them to establish a balance between competing demands (LeRoux, 2009). In addition, NGOs have internal goals and are shaped by the drive of those who run them, including the desire to maintain organisational integrity.

When considering the activities of FARN and REC it is important to note their role as support organisations, i.e. NGOs that support other groups by "span[ning] the gaps among diverse constituencies" (Brown 1991, p. 808). Brown and Kalegaonkar (2002, p. 256) identify the five functions undertaken by support organisations as:

> (a) strengthening human and organizational capacities, (b) mobilizing material resources, (c) providing information and intellectual resources, (d) building alliances for mutual support, and (e) bridging to other sectors.

Two key features have been identified as central to an understanding of the ability of support organisations survive and prosper. The first is that they are located at the centre

of several constituencies: local groups, national bodies, and international institutions (Sanyal, 2006). Being located at the intersection of groups operating on multiple levels provides the support organisation with a unique perspective, which can be used to its advantage. Where such an organisation is seen as effective in its own right it will be increasingly relied upon to act as a conduit, potentially allowing it to manage the setting to ensure its longevity. Secondly, the core task of the support organisation is to build capacity and develop networks (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002), meaning that they are important actors in democratizing states, where they are able to provide advice and expertise to both state and civil society actors.

Environment and Natural Resources Foundation (FARN – *Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales*)

Democratisation in Argentina following the end of the military regime in 1983 created a political opening within which civil society actors were able to emerge (Caravozzi, 1986; Pion-Berlin, 1985). Examining civil society in Argentina Jacobs and Maldonado (2005, p. 152) argue that:

> [t]he period from 1955 to 1983 was marked by state terrorism, economic default and social indifference combined with fear of the political sphere...Organised civil society was forced to tread a narrow path between subversive war and military discipline, something which caused the dissolution of thousands of associations.

Regime change led to the introduction of formal institutions that facilitated greater public participation and led to the re-emergence of NGOs. However, Davis (1999, p. 600) notes that "although Latin American states replicate the centralization of modern European states, they lack the formal democratic structures and institutions that have characterized post-World War II European societies." It is important to recognise the role of non-democratic legacies in this situation. Hite and Morlino (2004) argue that behavioural and normative prescriptions will continue to influence actions long after the non-democratic regime has been removed, as democratic practices must be learned. The strength of the legacy is reflected in the fact that "most members of important NGOs are, or have been, members of the Argentine administration at some stage", indicating the continuation of elite dominated practices from the non-democratic period (Aguilar, 2002, p. 232).

Coinciding with domestic changes were significant developments at the international level, that aided environmentally-oriented actors. Environmental issues were high on the international agenda following the 1986 elaboration of the principles of sustainable development (Bernstein, 2001). Of greater significance in the context of Argentina was the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Aguilar, 2002). The UNCED was important in raising public awareness concerning environmental issues due to its regional proximity. Argentina has also benefited from membership of Mercosur, through greater economic integration within Latin America. In spite of opportunities for increased cooperation on environmental issues at the regional level, progress has been limited. Jacobs and Maldonado (2005, p. 148) note that "Mercosur has few institutional structures to address environmental impacts, and in most cases member states lack the institutional capacity and financial resources for enforcement of the environmental protection clauses of the Asunción Treaty."[3] These factors indicate the importance of external events but show limited external support for environmental capacity development in Argentina at the regional level.

Although environmental issues remain relatively low on the domestic political agenda, formal changes to the administrative system have taken place. More than 4000 policies addressing environmental issues at the national and provincial level had been introduced by the late 1980s, although the application of these regulations has been restricted by lack of specific provisions and state capacity to ensure compliance (Reboratti, 2008). An important shift came with the introduction of the 1994 Constitution. Article 41 of the Constitution provides for a right to a healthy and balanced environment and requires the state to protect this right by preventing and repairing damage, while also providing information and education (Constitution of the Argentine Nation, 1994). By introducing this right, the state was acting in accordance with Perrault's (2008, p. 1373) identified form of Latin American "environmental activism [which] is most commonly associated with concerns over livelihood, political rights, and health". This focus on material well-being was reinforced by the government of Carlos Menem (1989-1999), which sought to achieve "environmental protection through market mechanisms." (Hochstetler, 2002, p. 42)[4] The approach has been questioned, as Reboratti (2008, p. 118) notes that the ineffective policies of the state have led to an increase in "spontaneous social movements" that are

playing an important role in raising awareness. Despite this shift, support for environmental issues remains low within the general population and the state lacks the effective capacity to implement the policies it has developed.

It is in this context of growth in environmental awareness and action that FARN was created. The organisation was formed in 1985 to "generate independent informed opinions on legal-environmental issues, promote the acquisition of knowledge by decision-makers in the field, and influence public policy and legislation." (FARN official, Personal communication, 30 September, 2009). The goal in forming the organisation was clearly to contribute to the capacity of the state to address environmental issues, through the focus on influencing public policy. Since formation, the organisation has moved away from a think tank orientation taking "a more active role in litigation and the leadership of independent project initiatives." (FARN official, Personal communication, 30 September, 2009). The work of FARN is divided into four work areas: research and training, public participation, trade and sustainable development, and information and publication, all of which are focused on raising awareness and providing informational resources (FARN, 2009). Aguilar (2002, p. 230) notes that "FARN has worked with local authorities in the design of public participation schemes, the drafting of regulations, and worked with citizens on finding ways to use the new opportunities to participate in decisions taken at the local level." These activities place FARN directly in the category of support organisation, providing advice and support to both state and civil society actors.

Funding is an important issue for any NGO, as it determines the activities that can be undertaken and the extent of involvement in participation and claim-making. FARN has relied on a number of sources over time, but the stability of these sources has remained problematic. The majority of the organisations funds are obtained from international foundations (particularly in the US); these include the World Bank, the InterAmerican Foundation (IAF), the Ford Foundation, Avina Foundation and Hewlett Packard, as well as Buenos Aires embassies of a number of countries (FARN official, Personal communication, 30 September 2009). A former FARN official noted that approximately 80 percent of funding comes from foreign sources, while government and domestic sources (private and business donations) count for approximately 10 percent each (FARN official, Interview, 16

September 2009). Froelich (1999) notes that reliance on foundations for funding can create problems, due to uncertain levels of income and mediating between organisation and donor needs. The reliance on external funds has also resulted in a trend towards professionalization within the broader sector in order to win funding (Aguilar, 2002), potentially limiting the opportunities for broader civil society involvement.

Since its formation, FARN has cooperated extensively with NGOs in Argentina and South America more broadly. The importance of these connections was noted by a FARN official (Personal communication, 30 September 2009), who argued that:

> Without a strong network of linkages with national and international ENGOs, FARN would not be able to operate as it currently does and would run a serious risk of not fulfilling its institutional mission. Other ENGOs, in addition to providing important information, also take the leadership on many issues where the FARN provides a "background" or "support" role.

The network approach has seen FARN participate in domestic and regional environmental activities. Much of this work has been in producing information to support environmental campaigns, such as on the environmental impact of infrastructural projects in border areas between Mercosur states (Former FARN official, Interview, 16 September 2009). At the domestic level the organisation has also established strong working relationships with international ENGOs, such as Greenpeace, which "openly accedes that 'FARN produces the content and we install it in the public/media agenda.'" (FARN official, Personal communication, 30 September 2009).

Despite its role in shaping environmental policy and practice in Argentina, the future of FARN is far from secure. Much of this uncertainty comes from the reliance on external (foreign) sources of income and an inability to establish a stable domestic source of income. Aguilar (2002, p. 232) notes that:

> Competition for an audience in the public sphere...is intense, making it difficult for those trying to convey a message... [and that] most environmental activities in Argentina...tend to be non-contentious and tend to concentrate on education and conciliation rather than on direct opposition to strong industrial interests.

This difficulty in generating public support for environmental issues is echoed by Waisbord and Peruzotti (2009) in their examination of protests over two pulp and paper plants on the Uruguay River (the border between Argentina and Uruguay). Although the projects potentially had significant environmental impacts, the framing of the protest shifted from a focus on the environment to issues of national identity, as this was more acceptable to the administration. The increase in the level of contention around significant environmental issues (Reboratti, 2008) may present new opportunities to environmental organisations such as FARN, as public awareness increases.

Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)

The wave of democratisation that swept across Eastern Europe in 1989 provided an opportunity for the emergence of new organisations and claims. Under the prior communist regimes there had been limited tolerance of dissent, although some non-political environmental organisations (Danube Circle in Hungary and Ekoglasnost in Bulgaria) were able to emerge in a restricted form (Waller & Millard, 1992). Following the regime changes opportunities emerged for NGOs to participate, as they sought to publicise the environmental challenges they faced. Carmin (2010) notes the focus by external actors on supporting environmental NGOs during this period, as a means of developing environmental capacity. As in the case of Argentina, civil society participation in Eastern Europe continued to be restricted by the legacy of non-democratic rule, as the implementation of formal institutional mechanisms for participation were not enforced or managed effectively (Cellarius & Staddon, 2002; O'Brien, 2009a).

The international context played an important role in the development of environmental politics in Eastern Europe. Democratisation across the region coincided with a period of peak interest and enthusiasm for environmental protection and management. The EU was a significant actor in this setting, ensuring that environmental issues were placed on the political agenda of the democratising states, as well as providing support and guidance of policies and institutions necessary to strengthen environmental capacity (Inglis, 2004). Although the EU played an active role in supporting state capacity, pressure to implement the prescribed regulations and practices has the potential to undermine domestic capacity, as guidelines may crowd out domestic actors and interests. This has led Inglis (2004, p.151)

to note "[w]hether or not the *acquis* is appropriate to the new [East European] Members no longer seems to be a relevant question." The result is that although the states have adopted the formal institutional mechanisms required, informal rules and practices have been slow to adapt (Dimitrova, 2010).

The founders of REC (the United States, the EU, and Hungary) worked within this framework to create a regional organisation that could support their respective agendas.[5] This is reflected in the organisational mission (REC, 2007a):

> to assist in solving environmental problems in Central and Eastern Europe...by promoting cooperation among non-governmental organizations, governments, businesses and other environmental stakeholders, and by supporting the free exchange of information and public participation in environmental decision making.

During the initial democratisation period REC supported emerging civil society actors and the administrative institutions tasked with addressing environmental issues across Eastern Europe. This primarily involved providing financial and administrative support, without rigid preconditions (Jancar-Webster, 1998). These activities located REC as a key support organisation in the region.

The need to secure funding for the continued operation of REC played an important role in shaping the direction of the organisation. The shift from guaranteed core funding "towards project-based support on a yearly basis" (REC, 1999, p. 9) entailed a shift in the nature of operations and a need to focus on more short-term targets.[6] As Edwards and Hulme (1996, p. 969) note, stable funding can "provide stability and predictability in the long term, and timeliness and flexibility in the short term." Change in the funding structure coincided with the early stages of consolidation of democracy and the opening of EU accession negotiations, resulting in the need for more specialised and targeted expert support. The influence of the EU in Central and Eastern Europe has been important in shaping the direction of REC, leading to a closer alignment with EU goals over time. It was noted by a REC official (Interview, June 6, 2007) that the goal is to become an accepted European institution, while also maintaining the independence to act as an external advisor. In pursuit of this aim, REC has attempted to move away from project-based work and instead act as an international advisor on sustainability. An example of is the Czech office, in its

development of specialised skills in Environmental Impact Assessment procedures (REC official, Interview, May 2, 2007).

At the time of its founding in 1990, REC had six country offices (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia), adding offices in the Baltic States and Albania in 1992. These offices were initially funded directly from head office in Hungary, but were encouraged to obtain alternative funding to undertake local projects and expand their activities. Independence of these country offices created tensions as there was limited turnover of country office directors, leading to the development of "fiefdoms" (REC official, Interview, May 2, 2007). The country offices gave the organisation local representation and were responsible for proposing, drafting, and implementing independent projects (REC official, Interview, May 9, 2007a). The majority of these projects entailed earmarked grants to support NGO projects (such as an *Action Plan for Bat Protection in Bulgaria* by Green Balkans in Bulgaria (REC, 1994)) and grants to support local projects. The effect of the shift to project-based funding is reflected in the nature of the support provided by REC. Support shifted from grants to NGOs to the implementation of externally funded projects funded in partnership with local and international organisations (REC, 1999). An example of the new approach was an environmental education pack (Green Pack) that was developed in partnership with Toyota and adapted for introduction across the region (REC official, Interview, May 9, 2007b).

The threat faced by REC from increasing domestic capacity can be illustrated with the case of Bulgaria When Bulgaria began the democratisation process in 1989, it had a weak civil society and a legacy of environmental degradation from the communist period (Baker & Baumgartl, 1998). During the 1990s the state developed and introduced a range of legislative tools to address environmental concerns and developed the formal capacity to address these, although it continued to be hampered by the legacies of the communist period (O'Brien, 2009b). At the same time, the environmental NGO sector continued to develop and strengthen as a result of increasing opportunities for participation (Cellarius & Staddon, 2002). The pressure to meet the guidelines laid down by the EU also led to a strengthening of domestic capacity as funding was provided to ensure that accession could proceed smoothly (Soverski, 2004). This increasing domestic capacity has led to questions

regarding the continued purpose of REC, with a Bulgarian NGO representative noting that REC had shifted from supporting local organisations to competing with them for income (Interview, May 21, 2007).

Faced with the accession of beneficiary states to the EU and shifts in the demands placed on it, the organisation has sought to expand its geographical scope. In 2004 REC opened a country office in Turkey with funding from the EU, to support environmental capacity in that country (Serban, 2004). The legacy of communist and semi-democratic post-communist regimes across the Caucasus and Central Asia has provided further opportunities for expansion as there is demand for support to strengthen environmental capacity in these countries. It was argued that, by moving into Central Asia, the REC is following the rush to "hotspots" requiring development aid (REC official, Interview, May 2, 2007). By undertaking projects with the NewRECs[7] and other development agencies, REC has sought to take advantage of new funding streams to ensure its continued existence. These activities raise questions regarding its ongoing purpose, now that the states of its original focus have developed sufficient capacity to no longer need REC support.

Comparing Opportunities and Threats to FARN and REC

The experience of FARN and REC raise questions about the ability of environmental support organisations to manage opportunities and threats during times of political change. Both organisations developed positions as leading organisations in the geographical spheres in which they operated (Argentina and Eastern Europe). Central to their continued relevance has been the ability to adapt, to ensure viability in the face of changing opportunity structures. Although there are important differences in the scale of the organisations, the pressures they have faced have similarities that enable their comparison. This section considers how the two organisations have managed the opportunities and threats identified above. It also explores the broader lessons from these findings, for environmental support organisations more generally.

It has been argued that democratisation is expected to lead to increased state capacity and this has implications for support organisations. In the case of REC, increased state capacity in Eastern Europe has led to a search for opportunities in states outside its core region. In

contrast, the lack of state capacity in Argentina has provided new opportunities for FARN to expand its operations. The documented increase in contentious activities concerning environmental issues in Argentina (Reboratti, 2008) presents new opportunities to the organisation. The failure of the state to address environmental concerns has led to growing awareness of the threat of environmental issues, providing an opportunity for organisations such as FARN to play a more important role in policy development. Eastern Europe has also seen an increase in environmental capacity during the democratisation period. This initially provided opportunities for REC, but as domestic awareness has grown the organisation has found itself increasingly in competition with local organisations and groups. This illustrates the point that shifts in the political stability and levels of democratisation are of clear importance to the support organisations, however the effect is determined by the level at which they operate and the presence of competitors.

The different paths of the two organisations can also be traced to the initial factors that led to their formation and have influenced their development. FARN was established and continues to be operated by domestic civil society actors. This has partially precluded the development of a more extensive organisation, as it has been circumscribed in the range of areas in which it is able to operate. In contrast, REC was established by international donors to support capacity development in civil society and state administrations across Eastern Europe. This allowed the consolidation of the organisational structure, but limited its flexibility due to the need to generate sufficient income to maintain relatively high levels of staff. The result is that REC has become increasingly tied to the needs of its donors and has been required to operate between EU and domestic demands. FARN has operated in a more open field, due to limited action from Mercosur on environmental issues and weak domestic capacity, managing to maintain independence through a flexible organisational structure that can grow and contract as resources allow.

An important constraint faced by both organisations was the securing of sufficient funding to guarantee their operations. As van der Heijden (1999) has noted, there is a clear pressure on organisations to adopt more professionalised approaches to generate continued funding streams. While this does not preclude mass membership, it does limit the opportunities to move in this direction and develop a local support base. Despite the

common pressure to generate income, the organisations have adopted differing approaches. FARN remained relatively flexible, adapting its organisational structure in response to changes in funding opportunities. The growing awareness and increased level of contention surrounding environmental issues in Argentina suggest potential opportunities to move away from external sources of funding. In contrast, REC has developed a more extensive organisational structure, requiring higher levels of continued funding. This can be seen as both a response to the greater levels of funding available in the region, and the broader constituency served by the organisation. As the political situation has stabilised in Eastern Europe, beneficiary states have developed increased domestic capacity in both institutional structures and civil society. REC, in turn, has had to reform itself to ensure continued relevance.

The final factor in the comparison of FARN and REC is the presence of allies and opponents. Both organisations worked to support institutional and civil society capacity, through education and other means. This has led to a divergence in their experiences. Operating at the regional level, REC has seen its stakeholders develop make significant progress in developing their capacity, largely as a result of EU accession requirements and associated support. This has resulted in a situation where it is seen as obstructing the work of domestic environmental organisations, limiting their access to the state by 'crowding them out'. This has led to some resentment and questioning of its role (O'Brien, 2010). Evidence from the examination of FARN suggests that it has managed to establish a reasonably strong position, being seen by the state as a useful contributor and working with other environmental groups through the provision of advice and information. Increasing levels of awareness around environmental issues in Argentina are also opening new opportunities to influence the state, by providing support for the issues in which FARN is involved.

Both organisations have adopted increasingly professionalised organisational structures, in order to attract continued funding streams. The nature of their operations precludes the development of mass membership bases, although this point sees a divergence in opportunities. Operating on a domestic level FARN has been able to establish strong working relationships with other environmental groups that do have broad support bases and greater public exposure, in particular, Greenpeace. With increased awareness of

environmental issues among the population, this presents opportunities for the future. Operating at the regional level REC has been unable to draw on a stable constituency and has faced pressure from organisations developing at the domestic level, which see it as a competitor. This difference illustrates the bounded nature of such organisations; where they do not represent a particular constituency they may come into conflict with local actors.

Conclusion

This article has examined the role of opportunities and threats in the operation of environmental support organisations, by exploring the cases of FARN (Latin America) and REC (Eastern Europe). An important difference between the two organisations was the issue of scale. The effect of increasing domestic capacity was different in both cases, presenting an opportunity for FARN and threat to REC. The presence or absence of allies and opponents was also essential to the organisations being able to sustain their activities. This was illustrated by the ability of FARN to establish cooperative relationships with domestic environmental organisations to increase its effectiveness by focusing on its strengths. The final threat that both FARN and REC faced was the need to generate funding, this was also important in shaping their actions and organisational structure.

The opportunities and threats become more pronounced, and less stable, during and following democratisation. The inherent fluidity of the situation at these times requires actors to compete, in order to establish their respective positions. The article has demonstrated that increased state capacity can limit opportunities for support organisations, as they may no longer be seen as necessary. Increasing domestic capacity in Eastern Europe led to a situation where the activities of REC were replaced by actions undertaken at the domestic level, leading to a search for new purpose. However, a lack of capacity does not necessarily guarantee a strong opportunity structure for environmental support organisations. Despite developing a strong reputation in the environmental field (particularly with technical support), FARN has been unable to generate a consistent level of support and has relied heavily on foreign sources of income. Democratisation has also increased opportunities for participation in both cases, but the focus on economic development has placed limitations on the effect of this involvement.

Limited institutional support and low public awareness of environmental issues resulted in slow development of FARN. At the same time, this allowed the development of a more stable and sustainable base for the organisation with potential for a greater future role. In contrast, rapid growth in response to peak awareness of environmental issues and significant external support characterises the emergence of REC. This trajectory has led to a situation where the organisation is increasingly searching for a role as previous opportunities dry up. These cases illustrate the manner in which strategies adopted by environmental support organisations are heavily shaped by the opportunities they encounter, and the threats they face.

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[1] The research used to analyse the Regional Environmental Center (REC) was obtained through five interviews conducted with staff at the head office in Szentendre, Hungary in May and June 2007. Information on the *Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (FARN) draws on a semi-structured interview with a former senior official and written answers to the same questions provided by a current staff member in September 2009.

[2] Scruggs (1999) notes that the ability of a regime to introduce reform is determined by factors as diverse as electoral rules, separation of executive and legislative accountability, ideology of the governing party, federal complexity, and consensual or majoritarian political institutions.

[3] The Treaty of Asunción states "economic development of the region should be accompanied by environmental preservation." (Jacobs and Maldonado, 2005, p. 148)

[4] On coming to power President Nestor "Kirchner [2003] focused government policy on rebuilding Argentina's industrial base, public works and public services" indicating a desire to strengthen state capacity and move away from the adherence to the Washington Consensus (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2007, p. 97).

[5] A REC official argued that the US was interested in building a friendly civil society, while the EU was looking towards future enlargement (REC official, Interview, May 2, 2007).

[6] For a more detailed examination of the organisational development of REC see O'Brien, 2010.

[7] The NewRECs are operationally independent of REC, but have a similar organisational structure. NewRECs were established in Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine in 1998, with the Caucasus REC (Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia) and the Central Asia REC (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) established in 2000.

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