how to butcher the « Spirit of Stockholm »

There are many ways to report on an international meeting. In this case the meeting was the first World Assembly of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) concerned with the Global Environment (Geneva, June 1973) – the follow up to NGO meetings in Stockholm (June 1972) and Geneva/New York (October 1972). The approach we have chosen is to identify the actors on the scene in Geneva, whether groups of NGOs or individuals in key positions, and to show below for each actor at the meeting, in three parallel columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left-hand column: What they wanted</th>
<th>Middle column: What they got</th>
<th>Right-hand Column: What this did to the « NGO-organizational ecosystem », in terms of which environment « control of resources » was probably affected</th>
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<tr>
<td>NGO Liaison Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>a)</strong> The organizations and people involved had many other responsibilities and were most anxious to discharge their extended mandate as soon as it was possible to ensure continuity of the « Spirit of Stockholm » through some properly constituted body. The Committee was most anxious not to pre-determine or pre-judge any matter beyond the simple mandate.</td>
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<td><strong>b)</strong> Because of the other tasks and the geographical separation of the Committee members, coordination in preparation for the Assembly was difficult. The Committee therefore relied heavily on the good offices of UNEP within which the responsible unit was the Public Information Section, by whom arrangements had been made to service the needs of the Assembly’s Organizing Secretary.</td>
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<td><strong>c)</strong> Since the Committee lacked both a detailed mandate and special funding, only minimal arrangements could be made for the Assembly agenda and documentation. No detailed directives on these points could be given to the Organizing Secretary who therefore was left open to other pressures to structure the agenda. The inadequacies of the Committee were the inadequacies in the NGO consensus both at Stockholm and in Geneva/New York.</td>
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| « Old guard » NGO’s |
| These are the NGOs which have had consultative status with ECOSOC, UNESCO, and possibly other UN Specialized Agencies for many years. They are the well-established « genuinely international » NGOs, who in many cases developed a regular procedure for relating to the institutions of the UN system, often via permanent representatives. They have for many years controlled the operations of the ECOSOC, UNESCO and other institution-oriented NGO conferences. Few of these organizations are either principally or specifically concerned with the environment but rather with the response of their (often very large) membership to each new major issue. |
| **a)** Lacking a specific competence with respect to the environment issue, these bodies were more concerned with procedural niceties which have been the subject of debate in other settings. An important concern was to ensure that « normal » UN-NGO procedures were not jeopardized by the institution of exceptional procedures on the part of UNEP or the Assembly of « NGOs » which would open the door to a « control of resources », as is |
| **b)** The old guard was successful in mulifying the impact of the North American NGO’s which were excluded from the new Liaison Board and in many cases discouraged from further attempts to involve themselves in UNEP-NGO action. They were also successful in ensuring that the old question of geographical representation triumphed whenever possible over « ability to act » or « control of resources », as is |
| **c)** The main consequences were the turning of the debate onto non-action-oriented procedural matters and the election of a committee with characteristics similar to those of the NGO Committees of the ECOSOC and UNESCO NGO Conferences. These bodies are not noted for their ability to act on matters of substance, other than through the generation of resolutions. This is totally unsatisfactory for those |

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multitude of NGO’s without any genuine international standing. Another concern was to ensure that no particular old guard NGO used the environment issue and the occasion of the Assembly to obtain a special advantage over other members of the old guard.

New International NGO’s

The environment issue has favoured the creation of new NGO’s on a variety of often highly specialized matters. These bodies are still finding their feet and battling for recognition in international meetings.

a) The main concern of these bodies was to ensure that their particular view, as represented by their NGO, obtained the most favourable status possible in any UNEP-NGO system. Such status would then reinforce their credibility to the constituency they hope to service.

Developing Country NGO’s

a) Ensure that the Assembly draw attention to their perspective, special difficulties and problems in formulating any resolution, programme or coordinating structure.

b) Wherever appropriate the wording of the NGO statement incorporated references to their special difficulties. They were systematically voted onto the Nomination Committee. The need to represent developing country views effectively was a strong argument for those who wished only «universal» NGO’s to be represented on the liaison committee. No developing country NGO’s were elected onto the final Committee. No solution to their problems emerged.

c) Sensitivity to the views of this group of bodies is important to ensure that the Assembly does not appear to become merely another vehicle for the Western perspective. As it is NGO’s are considered to be primarily a Western phenomenon. This group was only represented by » international NGO’s.

Socialist Country NGO’s

a) Ensure that the Assembly recognize » national » NGO’s for what they were, particularly national NGO’s from the USA. Ensure that only UN «recognized » NGO’s could participate fully. Ensure that the Liaison Board was made up of organizations and not specific, known individuals. Ensure that nothing was put to a formal vote in which national and international bodies voted equally. Ensure that the socialist country perspective was represented on any contributing committee.

b) These bodies were entirely successful in their aims.

c) For lack of any alternative mechanism or rules of procedure, the Assembly was obliged to make use of the procedural precedents in other UN-oriented NGO conferences. This helped to push the Assembly into an all-too-well established pattern which in 20 years has not resulted in any concerted action other than the formulation of well-intentioned resolutions.

Youth NGO’s

a) Youth NGO’s, although represented at the Assembly, seem to have decided amongst themselves to take no special stand. It could be that the preponderance of middle age NGO’s which want to «act», but very satisfactory for those bodies which seek recommendation as « action».

b) Their passive strategy had no direct consequences.

c) The absence of the youth »enclique» permitted the debate to drift on to procedural non-essentials. No pressure for action oriented decisions emerged.

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North American NGO's

a) Primarily interested in getting action programmes organized immediately in support of UNEP. Wanted to see results of their action and not have their efforts diluted by a maze of intellectual paper committees.

b) Were maneuvered out of direct representation as a result of a ruling of unclear origin and validity that only international NGO's in consultative status with ECOSOC be permitted on the Liaison Board. Their participation in the meeting was strangled by an anti-American sentiment which made their interventions appear inappropriate. Failed to form a North American NGO Environment Committee to help interrelate their efforts for UNEP. Were obliged to meet on the Palais des Nations lawn to form the committee, because of obstructionism over room allocations.

c) Participants believe that a large percentage of these enthusiastic organizations are disillusioned and have now been alienated from the Assembly as represented by the Liaison Board, and from direct support for UNEP through the channels currently available to them. It is known that some at least are already planning alternative forms of action independent of any UNEP relationship. The new blood has been lost to the international NGO system, at least in part.

Technical / Specialist NGO's

a) This group was intent on ensuring that, where possible, lines of communication with UNEP could be opened in relation to their special field of interest. In some cases there was also an interest in establishing lines of communication and collaboration with other NGO's with related interests.

b) This group achieved none of the things it set out to achieve and was stilled by the creation of yet another « temporary » Liaison Board. They assumed that there was a simple, rational way of organizing the NGO's on the basis of particular national experiences. They were frustrated by the lack of time available for inter-NGO interaction in technical groups for specific topics. As a result groupings of NGO's on such topics could not effectively form or plan much action, although in some exceptional cases the groupings were so powerful that they decided to act independently in the future whether or not the UNEP-NGO system resulted in anything.

c) Their strengths were lost or turned into other channels (some had even come with large cheques to fund an NGO Secretariat). Their failure turned the NGO-environment system into a duplicate of ECOSOC and UNESCO NGO Conferences whose inadequacies have frequently emerged over the past 20 years.

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In the absence of prior experience of the international NGO scene, he sought information from all immediately available sources which could help in this task.

NGO's for "Openness and Flexibility"

a) Wanted to create some open, dynamic, creative setting in which new activities and patterns of organization could emerge as appropriate, whether in relation to, or independently of, UNEP. The concern was to avoid excessive organization and «commitification» and facilitate inter-organization interaction.

b) The group (appears to have) successfully blocked a maneuver to legitimate only four working groups which would have pre-structured all inter-NGO approaches to the environment issue in relation to UNEP, in favour of an open formula which permitted the constitution of such groups whenever sufficient common interest emerged on a given topic.

c) The group failed to catalyze the emergence of any pattern of organization which could prevent the ossification of the UNEP-NGO system and ensure the continuing emergence of new initiatives. The attempt was even counter-productive in that it further confused the debate and took up valuable time.

Organizing Secretary of the Assembly

a) The Organizing Secretary was a person who sought very enthusiastic support to make the whole Assembly «go», and to make it possible for an action-oriented consensus to emerge. In the absence of prior experience of the Assembly, he sought information from all immediately available sources which could help in this task.

b) In the absence of firm directives from NGO Liaison Committee, the Organizing Secretary was forced to depend mainly upon the UNEP Public Information Section's perspective on how the Assembly should be organized - particularly since all Assembly facilities were provided through its good offices. There was an excellent attendance of 153 NGO's and many (contrary to this writer's expectation) were not part of the «old guard» of regular participants, the stage was well set for an exciting meeting. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the agenda (excessively devoted to UNEP PR), the documentation (odd items of uncertain origin not related to the immediate problems of the meeting), the meeting room (underground in the near UN building without ventilation on a very hot weekend), the facilities (coffee and food were 100 yards away on the first day and 500 yards away on the second day).

c) The lack of independence and firm directives effectively placed the Organizing Secretary under the control of the UNEP Public Information Section whilst making the NGO Liaison Committee responsible for all the consequences.

Assembly Consultant : Lady Jackson

Lady Jackson is seen to personify, notably because of her dedication, the «Spirit of Stockholm». As such her actions and views are held by consensus to be beyond criticism. Various procedural devices, such as the consultant formula, are used to associate her with critical phases of the Assembly's action. The Assembly gave her responsibility for orchestrating the work of its Declaration Drafting Committee.

a) Lady Jackson's main goal was to ensure a wording for the Declaration which would satisfactorily reflect the views of the consensus in order that

b) The Drafting Committee produced a text which was duly corrected and approved by the Assembly. It was read to the UNEP Governing Board.

c) The Declaration exercise consumed further valuable time during the two day meeting. It is questionable whether the new NGODecla-
these might be conveyed to the UNEP Governing Council to show governmental delegates the extent to which NGO's felt a commitment in support of UNEP.

Council but gave rise to no further comment or discussion. UNEP produced a press release containing the Declaration.

A number of NGO representatives appear to have direct and personal contact with Maurice Strong. This gives them the impression that their NGO's may have some special advantages in the future UNEP-NGO system.

Maurice Strong's friends

- These people felt a duty to move the NGO Assembly to produce results directly useful to Maurice Strong and to avoid issues which he felt should be considered on some other occasion or could be satisfactorily dealt with on a bilateral basis.
- To the extent that these key people represent the potential leadership of an independent, critical NGO stance in relation to UNEP, the personal loyalty they felt to Maurice Strong effectively nullified any moves to adopt such a critical stance. Their passivity on this point ensured that the Assembly as a whole reflected the rather minimal and incoherent desires of the UNEP Secretariat for an indication of "NGO support.

Environment Committee
(Conference of ECOSOC NGO's)

- The committee's views were not represented so it is unclear what it wanted.
- The aims of this group were largely achieved.
- This development is symptomatic of the breakdown between the ECOSOC oriented NGO's and the UNEP oriented NGO's over the environment issue - it reflects a similar breakdown, evident at Stockholm, between the NGO Section of ECOSOC and the NGO liaison office of UNEP. The same is true in the case of UNESCO and UNESCO oriented NGO's, who have had a working group on the Man and Biosphere environmental programme.

UNEP Governing Council

- It is completely unclear whether the Governing Council delegates have the slightest concern or interest in NGO's in general. All pronouncements have come from the Executive Director. A new information programme is expected to use them to mobilize public opinion (see accompanying article on Mobilization vs. Alienation, page 407). Other than this, there is no basis for expecting that UNEP will perform any differently from other Specialized Agencies, or that the government delegates support more of NGO's or that UNEP should be more open to them.
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- It is the Governing Council of the UN Environment Programme which will set and formalize the style of UNEP-NGO relations for the future.

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- The postponement of a decision on UNEP-NGO relations may be either a poor precedent or a healthy pause for consideration. It would be a poor precedent if the Council did so because NGO's were a low priority matter. It would be a healthy sign if it had been done on the suggestion of Bradford Morse, U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs. His office is currently investigating the general problem of UN-NGO relations and will report on the matter when the issue is at press (see page 423).
Maurice Strong is the key figure, since he has attempted to set a style for UNEP-NGO relationships before any directives could be provided by the UNEP Governing Council.

b) Despite his expressed wishes, the UNEP Secretariat failed to give anything but the conventional sto- ries meaning to the UNEP-NGO system possibilities. No Secretariat document was produced out- lining the possibilities in the light of past failures. In addition, the question of the relation of NGOs to UNEP was postponed until the 1974 Governing Council meeting, thus suspending and freezing many possibilities for action initia- tives.

c) The contrast between the glowing pep talks and the sterile adminis- trative reality placed NGOs at a disadvantage. The whole approach - often superficially hailed as a golden future or to react vigorously to the after-all-known existing relationship. This introduced a further block to action and conven- ience.

It is the responsibility of the individuals within the Secretariat to give operation- al meaning to the participative style available in UNEP-NGO relations, so frequently formulated by Maurice Strong, and to seek out and make use of NGO inputs and capabilities.

b) The meagre results of the Assembly, namely one Liaison Board, several working groups (with no immediate output) and one statement, probably reinforced satisfactorily the existing views of Secretariat members.

Indifference and apathy with respect to NGO's on the part of the Secre- tariat is built into the wording of documents and consequently into the thinking of government dele- gates to UNEP. It smother NGO creativity and enthusiasm and regresses meaningless participation to a minimal administrative response.

This unit is responsible for mobilizing public opinion in support of the environ- ment issue and UNEP programmes in particular. All the time of organizing the Assembly it was the unit responsible for liaison with NGO's.

b) Appears to have influenced the ela- boration of the Assembly agenda to the extent that the first day (of a two-day meeting) was entirely de- voted to “broadcasting” the UNEP message in what amounted to an extended press conference. Most of the information had been supplied (often by the same speakers) at the preceding session in October 1972. All useful information was available in UNEP reports. The Public Information unit seems to have sought to justify its effort on the Assembly by this PR activity without, being concerned that this approach corresponds to that criticized in an accompanying article on « Mobiliza- tion for Alienation ». see page 407.

c) The strategy used completely wast- ed one whole day. In itself this would not necessarily be serious but it placed the agenda of the sec- ond day under great pressure without in any useful way prepar- ing for it. It also started the process by which many participants who came to discussion were alienat- ed from UNEP/NGO approach. The selfish desire to repeat a known message was completely un- justified and irresponsible under the circumstances. It has certainly built up an image of what the future UNEP/NGO relation edge may well be, and this image will have been transmitted to NGO's which attracted NGOs to the As- sembly, it is on UNEP that blame for the results should be placed.

The above interpretation conveys a note of despair - for the inter-organizational dynamics seen in Geneva are typical of inter-organizational interactions in any conference of NGO’s — and yet no conscious effort could be made to avoid such sterility. The question is, how objective is this despair?

What did other NGO representatives think ? Some private comments reflected the above view; some in plenary were even tougher: "set back Spirit of Stockholm", "intellectually barren", "economically wasteful", "spiritually depressing", "all
A UNEP Consultative Status? The UNEP Governing Council has not yet pronounced on the form of UNEP-NGO relations. The Assembly produced nothing to guide it in its deliberations. However, the Secretariat did try out in a briefing the notion of a « special » status for the major environmental NGOs, ICSU and IUCN. This was not pursued, however, after some protest.

The Assembly accepted without discussion a distinction between NGOs, those with ECOSOC consultative status and those without. This distinction, mentioned for no apparent reason by the UNEP Secretariat, gave rise to the concept of « consultative » NGOs and « supporting » NGOs (i.e., the « national » NGOs). In effect we have here the tentative outlines of a fully fledged, three level consultative status system according to the ECOSOC and UNESCO formulae, e.g., ICUS and IUCN, Category I; collaborating, Category II; supporting, Category III; supporting Register.


Speaking well but to different problems, « did not have key element to bring NGO's together », etc. The same people were not to go to Nairobi in 1974, and then later relied on this resolve with « maybe we will try once more — we won't give up yet ». Others were already making plans for independent parallel activities, rating the emerging UNEP system as « worthless ». The blind resolve of others, to support UNEP at all costs, remained unshaken, despite disappointment at the Assembly results. And yet others felt « reasonably satisfied » at the results. The representative of one major NGO noted that it did not matter what was achieved; it was only important that a significant number of NGO's came together and were seen to shout « Hurrah for Environment ».

For those who were « reasonably satisfied » with the performance we note the following:

1. The first day (of the two day meeting) was devoted entirely to a form of extended press briefing by UNEP Secretariat officials and others — information supplied was either almost entirely irrelevant or existed already in printed documents.

2. The declaration (only a « draft — declaration » is merely supportive of UNEP recommendations) a few newspaper which can be safely ignored by UNEP if any delegation objects. It goes the way of all such texts.

3. A NGO Environment Liaison Board was set up by distinctively peculiar procedures. (1) A Nominating Committee of eleven was arbitrarily selected (two of its members came from the same organization which did not have consultative status with ECOSOC, and one became the chairman of the committee). (2) The time for the Committee's deliberations was severely limited. (3) The Committee took it upon itself to define what consultative status qualifications an NGO should have to be a member of the Board. (4) The Committee took it upon itself to define the functioning of the Liaison Board (including that the Board should hold office for the next two Assembly). (5) Of the eleven organizations it nominated for the Board, six were represented on the Committee in one way or another. (6) Only two of the eleven bodies proposed had any extensive worldwide record of activity and technical expertise on the environment issue, and one of those played no part in the Assembly's proceedings. (7) A motion from the Assembly floor to reject the Committee's report for many of the above reasons was rejected with arguments such as there was no time to reconsider the matter, and that any continuing structure was better than none. (8) Two extra names were added from the floor to the end of the list, making thirteen, from which the Assembly was asked to select eleven. (9) The Assembly's voting procedure was undefined and by show of hands (some NGO's were represented by four people; no control was made on the number voting). (10) When it was objected that the last two bodies were discriminated against by the voting procedure they were co-opted onto the Board without debate to save time. (11) The Assembly had no time to debate the functions or programme of the Liaison Board which had materialized from the last ten minutes of the deliberations of the Nominating Committee. (12) The question of how the activities of the Liaison Board on the second Assembly (Nairobi, March 1974) would be funded was carefully avoided to save time. (13) The Assembly agreed that Working Groups could be considered constituted if a sufficient number of NGO's had a desire to work together and that the chairman of such Groups should have the right to sit on the Liaison Board (with undefined voting rights) — in the Liaison Board's final report five un-named Groups are considered to have been « established » by the Assembly, although the final press release named ten.

4. A representative of at least one of the Working Groups planned to function irrespective of the future of Assembly or Board.

5. Some North American NGO's excluded from effective participation in the Assembly, or from representation on the Board, were obliged to create a North American Environment Committee to contribute to UNEP activities, to the extent possible, to the work of the Board in preparation for the Nairobi Assembly.

6. No time was available to discuss three possibilities for action (as opposed to the formulation of declarations and the creation of yet another « liaison » body to arrange for yet another future meeting): the action plan resulting from the reports of the previous meetings (document distributed), the establishment of a liaison secretariat (document distributed); and the form of UNEP-NGO relationships (on agenda, but no document).

How are we to assess the inter-organizational effectiveness of the above results are considered to be worth the costs estimated by us to be in the region of (?) **: S 108,600 (or 293,400 SF, 3,521,000 BF; £ 37,000). How many lives in...