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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Institutionalisation and distinctive competences of environmental NGOs: the expansion of French organisations

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ABSTRACT

In the early 2000s, within only a few years, French environmental non-governmental organisations came to use a larger array of skills, as well as more elaborated strategies of advocacy and fundraising. The evolution of five high-profile organisations is examined in order to question what drives their professionalisation. This empirical question justifies addressing a debate on institutionalisation that is often synonymous with this process of professionalisation. Building on the work of Philip Selznick, institutionalisation is considered to be a key concept to track change within organisations and beyond individual cases. In order to better capture the importance of organisational logics and margins for innovation, longitudinal analysis follows these organisations' distinctive competences over time when dealing with both external and internal pressures.

KEYWORDS Social movement theory; non-governmental organisations; interest groups; environmental politics; France; professionalisation

French environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOS) have been regarded as lagging behind their counterparts in Western Europe in the degree to which they have been institutionalised (Dalton 1994). However, during the 2000s, with extensive membership, new staff, but also an agenda expanded to global environmental issues, they seem to have reduced the differences between them and their European counterparts. Here, I examine this transformation in five major French ENGOS by drawing on Philip Selznick's work on institutionalisation.

Within a few years, the French chapters of international NGO networks, Greenpeace France (GPF) and WWF France (WWFF), experienced a dramatic increase in numbers of individual supporters and budget. Friends of the Earth France (FOEF) also expanded despite ongoing difficulties. The numbers of employees of France Nature Environnement (FNE), the federation of locally based organisations that emerged in the 1970s, and the League for the Protection of Birds (LPO), an initially ornithological

organisation and member of Birdlife international, have similarly grown significantly. Resulting professionalisation as well as the increase of 'cheque book' participation are usually seen as hallmarks of institutionalisation, a process that in social movement studies is often equated with a shift of strategies towards conventional politics, including cooperation with public authorities (Dalton 1994).

Philip Selznick's work (1949, 1957) offers a different view of institutionalisation that considers organisations' characteristics. This perspective is relevant in order to analyse thoroughly the dramatic change affecting the main environmental organisations in France. What is the scope of this process and its drivers? Does it reveal convergence in terms of modes of actions and strategic goals?

Paying attention to organisations' characteristics, my analysis focuses on *competences*, which, according to Selznick, are ways of responding to external and internal pressures that organisations develop in their course of action. In doing so, it restores institutionalisation as a key concept to track change within organisations and beyond individual cases. Institutionalisation processes give organisations their distinctiveness while making it possible to observe common challenges and constraints.

The perspective developed here shares the renewed interest of social movement studies in organisation theory, through a focus on organisational practices and forms (Andrews and Edwards 2004, Davis *et al.* 2005). The use of Selznick's terminology aims to open the 'black box' of organisations to see if and when *organisational logics* reveal convergence with practices in use elsewhere or a genuinely innovative adaptation to pursue collective goals. Comparative and longitudinal, this research examines national environmental organisations from their founding in the 1960s and 1970s until today. The distinctive competences on which organisations built themselves have in turn shaped their efforts to ensure their survival, which was still precarious in the 1990s. Analysis of the interplay between external and internal pressures, and of ensuing institutionalisation, does not reveal convergence in competences. The institutionalisation process actually contributed to NGOs' unequal capacity to adapt to a new, challenging political and economic conjuncture starting in 2010.

Institutionalisation as a distinctive process

The pragmatist perspective that Selznick (1949, 1957) represents in organisation studies is especially relevant to considering institutionalisation as a process characterising a given organisation. It suggests that the transformations of the five French organisations may, despite similar features, have different explanations: pressures from their environment, strategic decision-making or mimetic behaviour. All had in common a low public profile and little popular support, both of which were transformed at about the same time.

This pragmatist perspective explains why Selznick's approach to institutionalisation is still pertinent in social movement studies. It also justifies framing hypotheses in order to observe inductively organisational trajectories and their possible convergence, thus allowing competing explanations of change. Some theoretical considerations are necessary before presenting the cases and methodology.

What organisational forms and practices tell us about adaptation

Selznick, whose work inspired social movement studies, has had limited influence subsequently, when the field paid renewed attention to organisational logics.

Resource mobilisation theory, as synthesised by McCarthy and Zald, led the way in the study of organisations within social movement mobilisation. Drawing on Selznick's seminal study of the Tennessee Valley Authority (McAdam and Scott 2005, p. 6),¹ McCarthy and Zald underlined that institutionalisation results from internal and external pressures, respectively, from within the organisation and from its environment. This process explains further steps in favour of professionalisation and formalisation (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Institutionalisation thus came to equate with these two latter processes (Dalton 1994, Kriesi 1996). The focus on resources and their availability in SMOs' environment explains why this conception of institutionalisation has neglected the distinctiveness attached to a process that, for Selznick, organisations experience differently.

Since the 1990s, new research showed the diversity of organisational practices and forms and offered a more complicated picture than the prevalent Weberian view of organisations as a means of striving toward well-defined ends (Clemens and Minkoff 2004). The insights from organisation theory extended the analysis of organisations' external environment beyond the political arena, but also to internal logics, fostering debate on the capacity of organisations to adapt to their environment. The alternative between adaptation as repetition of practices in use outside or, by contrast, genuine innovation, sketchily summarised the research perspective between conformism or strategic behaviour.

'New Institutionalism', in particular, has widely influenced social movement studies (Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2008). In this perspective, institutionalisation does not reflect convergence of practices (from protest to conventional politics) in the same way as it does in Resource Mobilisation Theory (Lounsbury 2005). Instead, it suggests that organisational logics equate most often with institutional logics related to their external context (fields); debates about the resulting convergence between organisations have fostered new research amending more or less radically the initial approach (Lounsbury 2005, Fligstein and McAdam 2011, p. 5). Other

approaches, centred on organisations' characteristics, have argued in favour of a strategic component of organisational forms and practices, assuming NGOs' capacity to reinvent themselves when facing external challenges (Timmer 2009), and underlining the part played by leaders (Ganz 2000) or internal procedures (Andrews *et al.* 2010).

Selznick's view of institutionalisation usefully embraces these different meanings of adaptation by highlighting the characteristics of organisations in this process. Organisations that strive towards the same goal, such as political parties competing in elections, face similar challenges in different ways (Selznick 1957, p. 44). Similarly, the trajectories of environmental organisations as regards especially their 'competence' offer a basis for comparing the drivers, external and internal, of organisational change as well as its consequences within the organisation.

According to Selznick, organisations acquire a 'distinctive competence and character', i.e. ways of doing that reflect their actual commitments to given values. The *competence* includes the means and activities undertaken, while the *character* rests on the values attached to its mission. Competence and character result from an institutionalisation that depends on decisions taken as problems arise, sometimes 'unconsciously', without their consequences in view (Selznick 1957, p. 12). Rather than value statements and stories in use, the character of the organisation is captured by what it is doing, e.g. its competence (Selznick 1996, p. 275).

Selznick applies several postulates of American Pragmatist philosophy (Ansell 2011). Pragmatism tends to favour the study of processes, with actors adjusting means and ends in the course of their actions. Present situations that are problematic for actors' usual routines are also opportunities for innovation. Institutionalisation is thus a Janus-faced process, considering an organisation's capacity to adapt to its environment at one point in time as well its limitations at another time, when new circumstances or decisions challenge the *modus operandi* resulting from internal and external pressures.

This perspective on institutionalisation justifies studying organisations over time in order to analyse what really changed and why.

Hypotheses on the competences of environmental organisations

Adapting Selznick's perspective to ENGOs, my analysis will focus on the competence they develop rather than on their character. Only a few organisations actually end up with a cohesive character fitting the ideal type of an institution as defined by Selznick (Ansell *et al.* 2015). This is especially likely to be the case for French ENGOs that emerged first from the mobilisation of a few and evolved on a voluntary basis. The values attached to the character of organisations will be addressed through the internal tensions resulting

from the significant professionalisation they have undergone, a process that has profoundly transformed their activities and practices.

In accordance with Pragmatism, my purpose is to observe organisational trajectories and change as largely unplanned processes. The hypotheses below are 'exploratory' as they frame empirical observation (Crozier and Friedberg 1980) of the universe of possible choices for ENGOs. They offer new insights on internal/external dimensions and organisational trajectories, topics that in social movement studies have stimulated renewed interest in organisational logics.

Hypothesis 1 – *External pressures – The distinctive competence of an organisation is shaped by the expectations of its different publics.*

The outside environment is approached here through the publics with which each organisation interacts from two different angles. The categories of public may provide moral and material support to the organisation's maintenance; they also represent an opportunity for action in a given situation, such as a sequence of decision-making processes, or directly to remedy an environmental problem. Recent studies on environmental advocacy suggest that environmental organisations have diversified their strategies as new forms of governance emerge. Public authorities are no longer their only or main target. 'Private politics' (Lyon 2010) refers to the arrangements concluded between stakeholders without the mediation of legislation. Table 1, informed by the empirical study, illustrates different possible combinations in terms of publics. For instance, when environmental ENGOs mobilise the *general public* in *boycott* or *eco-responsible behaviour*, they target firms.

Choices regarding publics constrain ENGOs' trajectories over time. To appreciate the leeway of organisations in this respect, it is necessary to consider the part played by their members in their maintenance and activities (Table 1).

Hypothesis 2 – *Internal pressures – The distinctive competence of an organisation depends on its history, the identity of its members and their skills.*

This hypothesis pays attention to the history of the organisation and the identity of its members. The literature usually insists on the importance of the founding moment on the trajectories and values of any organisation (Carmin and Balser 2002); it is also necessary to consider the population shifts within these organisations, when new members join or existing ones accomplish new tasks.

Table 2 displays the different categories of organisation members. Their participation is analysed from two standpoints: the part they play in defining its daily objectives and the skills they bring for their realisation.

Table 1. Publics as support and targets.

		Resources provided to the organisation	Modes of action towards publics			
			General public	Public authorities	Firms	NGOs
Publics supporting the organisation	Organisation		Public awareness (topical publications, journals, events)	Legal action, lobbying; information exchange	Public awareness; legal action	Joint action
	General public	Donations; membership fees; volunteer activity; selling		Protest; petition	Boycott; promotion of eco-responsible behaviour	Donations; membership fees; volunteer work
	Public authorities	Public funding (general expenditures/ targeted actions); employment policies for the third sector	Public awareness, regulation;		Regulation; support to co-regulation	Public funding (general expenditures/ targeted actions)
	Firms	Sponsorship; partnership	Public awareness	Support to regulation, co-regulation		Sponsorship; partnership
	NGOs	Facilities, employed staff, funding support	Public awareness	Legal action, lobbying; information exchange	Public awareness (publication, events); legal action	

Table 2. Organisation members, skills and resources.

Members	Skills related to	Resources
Sympathisers	● The organisation	Money
Donors	Accounting management	Information
Formal members	Staff management	Facilities
Elected officials	Volunteers and local groups coordination	Moral support
Volunteer staff	Internal communication	Time
Employees	● Environmental problems	Networks
Local groups	Facts and scientific data	
	Knowledge related to local situations	
	● Publics	
	Context of implementation of the legislation	
	Selling	
	Public communication	
	Legal issues	
	Lobbying	

Focussing on the skills they deploy offers a more comprehensive view of what an organisation actually does than the resources usually listed as used by social movement organisations (Cress and Snow 1996). Such skills involve ‘know-how’ knowledge (ibid. 1095–6): of the organisation itself, its publics and environmental issues. They rest on resources brought in by members, including local sections.

While column 3 rests on terminologies used in the literature, the first two derive from my empirical observation. The combination between categories of members, skills and resources reflects the specific logics of collective action in operation in different organisations.

Distinctions between these different skills are crucial in order to compare members’ contribution to the distinctive competence of an organisation and its evolution over time.

Hypothesis 3 – *The critical decisions cover choices regarding publics, activities to be undertaken, and relationships between members.*

This last hypothesis extends the two previous developments by assuming that the course of action shapes organisational trajectories. The realm of ‘critical decisions’ here corresponds with three aspects that Selznick (1957) considered crucial for leaders when they try to shape the organisational mission: the composition of the organisation, the choices of publics and the activities to be undertaken. Any related choices may disrupt the routines in operation.

The distinctions in Tables 1 and 2 do not aim to establish a typology of different organisational models, but pave the way for an analysis of critical decisions and pressures on ENGOs in order to observe the formation of distinctive competences. Institutionalisation here reflects what is specific to each, whilst also revealing the change affecting their wider environment.

This perspective thus justifies comparing organisations different in rules, size and strategies in order to interrogate possible convergence.

Methodology and case selection

The organisations under study – Greenpeace France (GPF), WWF France (WWFF), FNE, Ligue pour Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) and FOEF – are those ENGOs most institutionalised in the traditional sense of social movement studies. They have paid staff and interact with decision-makers in political and administrative circles. All have maintained themselves since their creation, which coincided with the first environmental legislation in France in the 1970s. As such, they often took part, separately or together, in emblematic battles of the French green movement, such as the defence of French Antarctic territory (Terre-Adélie) against an airport project in the mid-1980s and local protests for river Loire protection in the 1980-1990s.

Compared to other French environmental organisations, they share similar properties and have come to address an extensive range of environmental issues. While LPO, FNE and WWFF are usually regarded as conservationist, FOEF and GPF are classed as ecological (Dalton 1994). All belong to international NGO networks, have donors if not formal members and are supported by local sections (Cf. Table 3).

According to the above hypotheses, empirical investigation addressed three topics: activities undertaken, decision-making processes and bodies, and the origins of organisation members. It covered four decades of their history, combining documentary analysis (activity reports, value statements and status) and interviews with staff members and elected officials, active at different times ($n = 47$). The inquiry aimed to isolate the interaction between internal and external pressures, while identifying the critical decisions that triggered significant changes of trajectories.

To sum up, institutionalisation equates here to the development, deliberate or largely unplanned, of a distinctive competence and ultimately a character. I will analyse the distinctive competences, and their evolution over time, of five French ENGOs. By addressing what looks like a

Table 3. Organisations under study in figures (2012).

	Date of creation	Staff	Membership	Budget (million euros)
LPO	1966	166	46,089	13.5
WWFF	1973	107	187,000	17.5
GPF	1977	94	155,200	14.6
FNE	1968	39	67 organisations	3.8
FOEF ^a	1971	8	2100	0.5

^aFigures for 2011.

Source: annual reports.

convergence in terms of modes of action and goals, the comparison will identify the drivers for organisational change for each and thus determine when they succeeded in setting their agenda and tracing their own trajectory.

A stabilisation of distinctive competences during the 1990s

All five organisations were striving for survival during the 1990s. Professionalisation was promoted to expand activities that earlier involved only a few members. The process, matching their initial choice of publics and thus distinctiveness, has enhanced their capacity for advocacy on environmental issues as well as favouring mutual cooperation.

Choices of publics over time

Following [Table 1](#), *public authorities* are the main public of FNE, FOEF and LPO, first as a target then as a support group. This choice has been a cornerstone in the development of FNE. Its leading figures, mainly young academics in natural sciences or ecology, then lawyers in the 1980s, supported the first environmental laws with a view to ensuring their implementation once adopted. FNE thus became an objective ally of the Environment Ministry created in 1971, but came to neglect the general public and young people it had initially planned to target. The Federation has mainly relied on the involvement of a limited number of volunteers, elected officials based in Paris or from the federated associations. This early cooperation with the administration resulted in FNE's dependency on public funding since the late 1970s.

For FOEF, cooperation with public authorities has become the default choice. The group of journalists and lawyers, which later attracted students and scientists, considered the general public as the key point of leverage in addressing environmental issues. As with FNE, some FOEF members took part in the anti-nuclear movement and the foundation of green parties. FOEF's participation in local and national elections caused a schism in the 1980s. The association's activities were re-centred towards its local groups and international issues such as the protection of tropical forests in Africa. The public funding FOEF received, when one of its former leaders, Brice Lalonde, became Minister of the Environment in the early 1990s, did not compensate for the loss of both volunteers and local groups. Several times close to bankruptcy since then, FOEF has survived internal crises thanks to the involvement of former permanent staff or members, who tried to foster new ideas and participated in several campaigns of FOE International in the late 1990s.

LPO shares with FNE a narrow cooperation with the Environment Ministry. Several of the young ornithologists and members of the gentry who revived the national ornithological association in the 1960s took part in the

foundation of FNE as well. Once it left Paris for Charente-Maritime in 1977, LPO maintained itself through contracted expertise with state and local authorities, thus experiencing early professionalisation. The board explicitly chose to seek the support of the general public, and then of local ornithological and naturalist associations, respectively in the 1980s and 1990s. This diversification in terms of publics increased its income. Individual adherents and the board still express a wide range of interests in birds.

WWFF focuses on *firms* and the *general public* to support its action. Until the mid-1980s, it failed repeatedly to raise significant funds from citizens and firms, and so contributed little to the WWF network's conservation activities. The organisation has developed through two different missions – nature conservation and fundraising – which involved staff with different worldviews. Board members come from three different worlds: the natural sciences, media and corporate circles. In the 1980s, WWFF gained visibility by contracting conservation operations in wetlands in France to local associations. It also started targeting public authorities and firms' behaviour in the late 1990s, while following more explicitly the agenda of WWF International. This crucial change was parallel to the development of partnerships with firms, which in turn helped its fundraising capacity towards the general public.

The *general public* provides both the initial support and the public target of GPF. The aim of the network is to make visible the environmentally harmful behaviour of *firms* or *governments* in order to exert pressure. The Rainbow Warrior affair in 1985 resulted in a negative image of Greenpeace in France and internal conflicts in the GPF office. The new French office, re-opened in 1989, failed to achieve Greenpeace International's goal of mobilising donors. This was reversed when GPF was able to invest Greenpeace International money in street-marketing,² the first operations of this kind in France. Like WWFF, which used a considerable one-off donation, GPF was able to grow its competence in fundraising. Likewise, the choice was made to multiply Greenpeace International campaigns in France in order to show that GPF was the only NGO active in France in contentious politics and not only on nuclear issues.

These five organisations in different ways overcame the ongoing lack of popular support in order to achieve professionalisation: GPF and WWFF developed their fundraising capacity thanks to outside support; FOEF and LPO found advice within their international networks; FNE remained dependent on public funding as its local constituency vetoed a proposed higher contribution.

Common challenges and specific patterns

Their respective choices of publics influenced the forms of professionalisation each experienced in the 1990s, and thus their respective

competences. Their professionalisation covered different aspects along the divide between organisations whose work depends on elected officers' involvement, such as FNE and FOEF, and those where the board decides on general orientations and mid-term policies, such as WWFF and LPO. Only the board of GPF plays a minor part in decision-making.

Until the late 1980s, all these organisations had 10 employees or fewer. Volunteers animated both FNE and FOEF. Staff were recruited to support volunteers' work and not to participate in coordination, accounting or communication. By contrast, within LPO, GPF and WWFF, professionalisation has gone beyond the skills related to environmental issues. All three have expanded or restructured services responsible for relationships with individual and local constituencies, fundraising and corporate partnerships. All have consequently built internal competences resulting in additional incomes. Meanwhile, FNE and FOEF had limited resources from local groups and little enthusiasm for corporate funding; public funding was the obvious and prevailing option, which, as we shall see, entailed various constraints in the long run.

All five organisations tried to better mobilise their resources in terms of knowledge of environmental issues and policymaking processes. In 1995, FNE reformed and developed its 'topical networks' involving volunteers from its organisations, active on a wide range of issues. This model replicated those of the federation, given that well-disposed individuals are easier to mobilise than the association they belong to. FOEF expanded its activities to rediscover topics that members had abandoned in the 1980s, such as lead pollution, using these concrete actions to involve local groups and individual members. LPO in 1989 set up a network of local groups, suggesting, but not forcing, collective action on specific topics. WWFF launched its own conservation projects, employing a growing team of conservationists. Finally, Greenpeace recruited a significant number of campaigners on various topics, such as renewable energies and tropical forests.

Over a few years, all deployed employed staff across an increasingly wide range of environmental issues undertook joint actions or worked together within permanent alliances, for instance on GMOs and climate change. Their cooperation expanded as they were not competing for the same source of funding.

The distinctive competences of these organisations can be linked to their stories and the identities of their founding members, showing the relevance of our second hypothesis. Their cooperation at the end of the 1990s also favoured mutual understanding of different ways of fundraising and advocacy. Diversification of modes of action and issues in the next decade seems to have resulted in convergence on both aspects.

Loyalties and discourses: convergence over the 2000s?

Until the mid-2000s, the growth of their activities made ENGOs more permeable to the expectations of outside publics, their NGO partners, decision-makers and firms. This evolution eventually came to shape their distinctive competences, proving the importance of external pressures in their trajectory as suggested by our first hypothesis.

The diversity of issues addressed and publics targeted

Table 4 shows the growing breadth of environmental issues these organisations have addressed. Through a focus on bird protection, even LPO has been concerned with renewable energies and toxics, whilst experimenting with new modes of action, inspired by its international partners or cooperation with public authorities. These modes of action reflect the new relationships established with their former publics as well as others never targeted before.

LPO, FOEF and FNE have started working with firms, providing concrete advice to help them meet their legal requirements, respectively, in the field of nature restoration for the quarries sector, environmental certification and practices of sustainable development in public transport. Cooperation with firms is no longer the speciality of WWFF. From the late 1990s, WWFF participated in certification systems, for instance, in tropical forest exploitation, and also called on consumers to pressure sellers in France. Even GPF promoted industrial interests by advocating the development of renewable energy.

Table 4. Topics addressed by organisation without discontinuity (year of first mention).

	FOEF	FNE	GPF	LPO	WWFF
<i>Agriculture</i>	1999	1983		1982	2006
<i>Climate change</i>	1997	1998	1999	2003	2002
<i>Waste management</i>	1999	1980			
<i>Freshwater</i>		1996		1986	1986
<i>Renewable energy</i>		1998	1999	2006	
<i>Species</i>		1972		1977	1985
<i>Forests</i>	1998	1985	2002		1997
<i>Firms (eco-management, CSR)</i>	1995		2008		
<i>Economy</i>	1996				
<i>Nuclear energy</i>	2001		1991		2011
<i>Oceans/seas</i>		1995	2003	2009	1997
<i>GMO</i>	1998	1997	1996		
<i>Overseas territories</i>				1995	1989
<i>Nature (Habitats/Bird directives)</i>		1995		1985	1998
<i>Toxics</i>			1999	2004	
<i>Transports</i>	1998	1997			2008
Number of topics	9	11	8	9	10

Source: as mentioned in annual reports to 2012.

The participative and problem-solving approach, underpinning discourses on sustainable development (Dryzek 2013), has pervaded NGOs' discourses towards their members and the general public. LPO now claims to be engaged in "participative science", by extending bird watching and counting operations to urban audiences, invited to take parts in those activities where they live. GPF and WWFF have valued the participation of citizens in their campaigns, asking them to monitor firms' practices regarding certification and the spread of GMOs in France. All the NGOs invested in publishing guides to enlighten consumers about lifestyle choices: GPF's pioneering campaign was followed by similar campaigns led by FOEF and WWFF, who tried to convince local authorities to improve the quality of food supplied in primary schools.

Despite not having individual membership, FNE in 2005 launched a website dedicated to raising citizen awareness on waste generated in daily life. Meanwhile, WWFF and GPF, following FNE and LPO, developed more elaborate strategies towards public authorities, becoming more familiar with Environment Ministry services. WWFF started to apply for research contracts, not as a constrained choice but as a way to diversify its income. WWFF also resorted to legal action, more widely used by FNE and LPO. Thus, the evolution of these NGOs' modes of action shows real convergence rather than the imposition of a new repertoire of action.

Why such similarities?

The mix of incentives and pressures from their international partners and the public authorities explained, to a large extent, the convergence of these organisations' activities and agenda. As they increased their capacity for action, deploying knowledge over an extensive range of environmental issues or *modus operandi*, they also became more sensitive to the expectations of outside publics, at a time of raising environmental awareness. Firms, for instance, became keener to cooperate with NGOs to improve their reputation in a context where environmental issues gained saliency.

We had a lot of proposals from firms to work with them in the 1990s. But we were not sure how to deal with them. (FOEF – member of the bureau 1999-2003)

These growing expectations converged in the pervading discourse on governance, suggesting that the environment is a shared responsibility and that firms as well citizens should change their behaviours via consultation and collaborative arrangements. This new approach resulted in public funding opportunities for NGOs acting as facilitators of such arrangements. The European Union LIFE (Nature & Environment) programme favoured the involvement of NGOs and European collaboration in the implementation of EU legislation. LPO and WWFF participated in programmes, set up by their partners, promoting public

participation, as with the Water Framework directive in the 1980s and the 1990s. Both were later able to lead such schemes.

French ENGOs' agendas have become more open to international issues. Besides funding opportunities, EU environmental policies have fostered cooperation within European or international NGO networks. French NGOs were often asked to relay the position and sometimes the campaigns of those networks. FOEF benefited from FOE Europe campaigns on GMOs and financial institutions, because the position of the French state was crucial at the EU level. The originally conservationist organisations have embraced new topics such as climate change (WWF) and biodiversity (Birdlife international), whilst WWF and Greenpeace launched cooperation with firms after the mid-1990s (Davis 2010)

The idea of governance has affected policies in France as in other European countries (Gaudin 1999). It provided additional positive arguments for corporate funding of non-profit organisations, especially at a time when the French government started to withdraw its support. The beginning of the 2000s was testing for environmental organisations in this respect. All except WWFF benefited between 1997 and 2002 from employment policies of the socialist (Jospin) government that favoured non-profit organisations. Its 'emploi-jeunes' policy was a first step and partly explains the increase of staff on the payrolls of organisations under study. But the right-wing government that came to power in 2002 planned the progressive termination of the program.

WWFF and GPF, which had increased efforts to raise numbers of donors since the late 1990s, were not affected by this governmental change. GPF multiplied campaigns with subsidised campaigner positions in order to regain its autonomy vis-à-vis public funding and the international network. FOEF and FNE turned progressively to foundations and corporate funding. LPO's budget was a mix of contracted research, subsidies and private money.

Figure 1 portrays the ongoing growth of staff numbers until 2011 for at least three organisations. The significant increase of employed staff

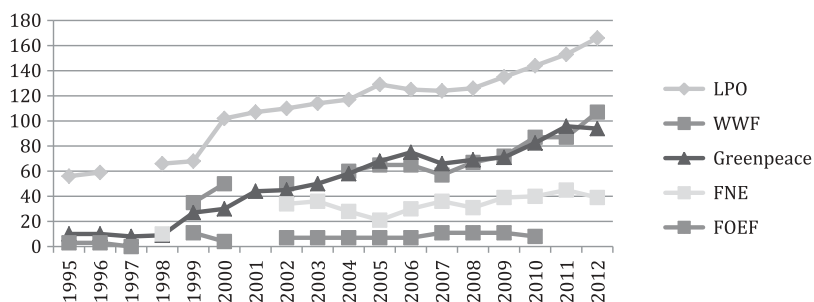


Figure 1. Evolution of staff numbers (1995–2012).

Source: annual reports.

responded to the shift of loyalties to external publics described earlier, suggesting a convergence of discourse and modes of action. The dramatic increase of hired staff in the late 1990s especially affected the value commitments of these organisations, while raising specific organisational needs.

Examining the interaction between external and internal pressures following this increase permits a more comprehensive picture of the change affecting organisations' distinctive competences.

Deciding on trajectories: the interaction between new publics' expectations and existing skills (1999–2006)

The rapid growth of employed staff caused tensions within all organisations. Indeed, it became at one point more endured than chosen. These internal conflicts are revealing of each organisation's competence – what it does and how it does it – as well as of their similar need to gain greater capacity to set their own agenda. The skills related to the organisation, environmental problems and publics (cf. Table 2) radically changed over a few years. I will consider them in turn, as well as the reforms achieved in each organisation, in order to examine possible further institutionalisation.

Skills related to the organisation: a rationalisation process

The dramatic increase of staff since the late 1990s created a need for collective direction, and raised significant conflicts within the staff in all organisations.

Try to figure out a structure developing with a new hired staff every three or two months for 3–4 years. You had four departments with their own logics. This evolution could only upset a mainly young team. (WWFF 26 November 2013)

Even in FOEFF, positions increased from 2 to 11 between 1998 and 2001. Better coordination between staff, and between the board and staff, was perceived as more or less crucial by the promoters of internal reforms.

Within FNE and FOEF, the rationalisation process consisted initially in improving internal auditing controls. Heavy dependence on public funding (FNE), or foundations (FOEF), resulted in financial difficulties in 2000 and 2004, respectively. Both recruited a number of '*emploi-jeunes*' in positions that they could not maintain when state funding was withdrawn, leading to an internal crisis between some employees and members of the board.

Moreover, the various services on which the organisations built up and stabilised in the late 1990s gained in size over time, but each developed independently rather than in an integrated way. At GPF, fundraising developed alongside the campaign service. Similarly, LPO's 'community life' service started specialising in relationships with donors, local groups

and bystander publics in the mid-1980. In WWFF, the newly established partnership section reinforced the development department and its marketing services in their quest for money, while the conservation department was also asked to apply for public funding, notably from the EU.

For GPF, LPO and WWFF, close collaboration between two officials in charge respectively of organisational growth and advocacy (a director and a programme/campaign director) has ensured the coordination between competences based on different activities. In contrast with the evolution in LPO and Greenpeace, the WWFF board refused to make the head of the conservation department deputy head of the office, despite the insistence of two different directors. Moreover, any attempt by the staff to report to the board, except via the WWFF director, was discouraged.

In all ENGOs, several decisions were made to rationalise relationships within the staff as well between staff and board members, reflecting co-existing priorities implicitly set by organisation members, whether from the board or the staff. The increased formalisation of services with mid-range managers in GPF and LPO resulted in limiting the margins of autonomy of the staff, thus shaking up former routines.

Now a campaigner has to spend his energy in lobbying his own organisation. There are a lot more procedures. He must ensure that all the services are involved, that the legal issues are settled, and when it comes to launch the action he had in mind, well the core of the job, all the material details, still have to be fixed. This is exhausting. (GPF April 2014)

The part some board members played in daily activities came to be perceived as problematic. This happened both at FOEF and at FNE and to a lesser extent at LPO, where a few board members interfered with the work of employees on given subjects. WWFF and GPF had no such problems: the role of the board and staff is clear, with power being on the board side for the former, and on that of the employed staff for the latter. However, board members of both ENGOs tried to build alliances with employees when debating their view on the future of the organisation.

The need for coordination emerged in expanding organisations, also revealing different views on collective objectives. The new skills developed at that time triggered conflicts over the activities to be undertaken and the organisation members to be involved.

Skills related to environmental advocacy: a competition process

During the 1990s, each organisation strengthened its reputation vis-à-vis public authorities and/or their membership because they developed knowledge about a large array of environmental issues. This recognition rested on expertise built up by employees, sometimes assisted by volunteers. FOEF

and Greenpeace campaigners as well as the policy officers of FNE, LPO and WWFF, composed a team that became crucial in what the organisation was doing. They learned to be multi-skilled, in charge of institutional communication, interacting with local groups and, Greenpeace excepted, applying for public funding. Gradually, these tasks were explicitly devolved to specialised services.

This new apportionment of skills varied between organisations, but for all five the section in charge of environmental issues became less central in defining priorities and undertaking actions. In FOEF and FNE, communication as well as the coordination of local groups has taken priority in recruitment since 2002. FNE now has a section responsible for corporate partnership. Unlike in the 1990s, specialisation has converged in the same direction but at a different pace. The need for a public image and thus improved communication is understandable for organisations which had to diversify their sources of funding, especially for FOEF and FNE which relied little on individual donors or membership money. WWFF and GPF have become close competitors in this, as they now address the same range of issues. Renewed efforts towards communication triggered tensions by creating new responsibilities and affecting the ways of doing environmental advocacy. GPF campaigners and WWFF policy officers protested against the priority given to recruitment, and in favour of the communication department and its influence over environmental advocacy.

Integration between fundraising, communication and advocacy differs in each organisation. French ENGOs had built themselves on a variety of competences, with people having different views of what the organisation should be doing. Institutionalisation, once achieved, implies that concrete goals and activities are aligned in the defence of a shared mission; the competence – what the organisation is doing – is then subordinated to the character – its values (Selznick 1957). The conflicts of the early 2000s revealed a weak institutionalisation, which carried a risk of fragmentation as coexisting competences were initiated by several members with the support of different external publics.

Although French ENGOs have experienced comparable challenges and some convergence in methods, the effects of the early 2000s reforms tell a different story from mere adaptation to the outside environment with more opportunities to interact with diverse publics in a context of decreased public funding. Actually, different degrees of institutionalisation proved crucial in ENGOs' capacity to subsequently set their own agenda.

Institutionalisation and capacity for adaptation (2007–2012)

Conflicts linked to different coexisting worldviews and priorities were part of the lives of all the ENGOs under study. They created an opportunity for

enhanced institutionalisation. However, debates over the goals of organisational development and the competences did not involve the same categories of organisation members. This process proved crucial in the next phase, when successive changes in the political and economic conjuncture once more jeopardized these organisations' ability to set their own priorities.

Leaders and prevailing organisational logics

Reformers were reacting to critical situations when the meaning of collective action was raised in a context of growth (WWFF, GPF, LPO) or financial crisis (FNE, FOEF). For Selznick (1957), the task of leadership does not consist in setting a collective goal, but in taking into account the diversity of aspirations and activities. Indeed, divergences also offer possibilities for future innovation.

In FNE and Greenpeace, actors familiar with the universe of each organisation nevertheless imported concerns that were not previously central to it. Professionals from waste consultancy and forest exploitation, who joined the board during the funding crisis, paved the way for corporate partnerships and communication. The new director of GPF in 2006, before joining Greenpeace International, came from the financial sector. In FOEF and LPO, reforms were led by older members of the board.

The new directions given to GPF and WWF in the mid-2000s were accelerated by personnel changes in their staff. The director and deputy of Greenpeace insisted on rewarding employees' competence rather than their moral commitment. As a result, half the staff, mainly campaigners, left the French office. Meanwhile, local groups rebelled against what they perceived as a denial of the added value they brought in terms of activism. In 2001 and 2009, WWFF staff complained to the board, and demanded a change of governance, unsuccessfully. Most of the staff recruited in the late 1990s, from all the services, have since left.

In FNE, the efforts in communication and professionalisation were perceived as representing values contradictory to the volunteer work historically prevailing at the federal level. Some founding members of the board were those most opposed to the changes. Reformers gained the support of elected officials of local groups facing similar management problems. Coordination between the staff and local groups aimed at shaping a cohesive federal policy.

FOEF leaders, using the capacity-building programme of their European counterparts, started campaigns of street marketing that resulted in an increased number of donors, but also in some reluctance on the part of the board and of local groups. LPO focused first on relationships between staff and board members, before starting more ambitious work on the priorities to be pursued.

Planning activities – what to do, changing the rules or how to work together – led to internal consultation more or less open to the different categories of organisation members. In the organisations where staff were consulted on the direction of change, the new methodologies have been better accommodated to internal logics. The external pressures of the next phase shed light on the different ensuing institutionalisation processes.

The Grenelle process as a political test

During autumn 2007, newly elected President Nicolas Sarkozy launched a consultation with ENGOs and other stakeholders (trade unions, leading professional organisations, local authorities and state administration), at a time when environmental issues were highly salient in public opinion. After 50 meetings, involving 350 people over a few weeks around issues such as Biodiversity and Climate Change, the Grenelle discussions resulted in 269 policy measures to be debated by parliament (Whiteside *et al.* 2010). Then followed a three-year preparation for legislation, associating environmental organisations and stakeholders.

The Grenelle process gave ENGOs unprecedented attention from decision-makers, and not only from the Environment minister. When considering the issues addressed and the ENGOs entitled to participate, this consultative moment also resulted from their recent efforts in terms of more strategic advocacy. The five organisations took part collectively and individually in the political campaign preceding the presidential election. WWF and GPF set up an alliance in order to involve environmental groups, but also fair-trade NGOs or trade unions wishing to work together on common policy proposals. FNE and the foundation of Nicolas Hulot (FNH) – a TV anchor who was to play an influential in the political debates – initially joined the coalition. WWF, FNE and LPO also sent the various candidates a platform of policy proposals from their different realm of expertise.

When the Grenelle consultation came, all had the capacity for substantial inputs, including the smaller FOEF, which had initiated work on energy-saving and building renovation. The formal Grenelle process recognized their early investment. Indeed, all organisations, but FOEF, obtained a direct access to consultation. They coordinated the participation of other ENGOs in the task forces established on specific subjects.

Whilst the Grenelle process put the spotlight on these organisations, it also challenged their internal logics, reactivating tensions. First, the tight calendar and dense agenda of the meetings unsettled their daily work. Except in LPO, policy officers assisted the top officials in framing positions and negotiating with other stakeholders between the meetings. Second, the Grenelle encouraged them to borrow from each other their respective

prevailing modes of action. FNE, LPO and FOEF benefited from unprecedented public exposure, even if their recent efforts towards communication could not compete in terms of media appearance with the well-staffed teams of WWF and GPF, which strove for public recognition from state authorities, a goal originally shared by LPO and FNE.

Finally, fear of being used for electoral purposes was widely shared across organisations. Participating in the Grenelle was a 'critical decision', as defined in our third hypothesis, affecting their core competence. In 2011, FNE launched a provocative wave of posters in the Paris metro, focussing on the deficiencies of public authorities on problems such as GMOs and pollution from agriculture. Its leaders' renewed efforts at communication were criticized for oversimplifying messages, while the head of GPF and his deputy were accused of mainstreaming the communication and political strategy of the organisation after the Grenelle.

The risk of being captured by the internal logics of the media or public authorities fostered more discontent within these organisations as President Sarkozy started paying less attention to environmental problems in 2009.

Distinctive competences and survival

The choices made by the five organisations as they pursued rationalisation in the early 2000s related to the targeted publics. They still felt an acute need for a better capacity to set their own priorities after the adoption of the Grenelle legislation in 2010. In this respect, the actual integration of different competences in a shared understanding of the organisation's mission made the difference.

In Greenpeace, the tensions between staff were solved by a more collective approach – the so-called 'project approach' – which gathers a member of each service (campaigns, fundraising, communication, action) in order to jointly decide on strategy. LPO refined its initial 2001 attempt at a multi-year strategic plan with open discussions on the objectives to be set and the resource needed to reach them. FNE started mobilising its staff, topical networks and local groups in a new, transversal fashion, in order to link a limited number of priorities and concrete actions to be collectively defended. Opposition to the way of doing communication (FNE, Greenpeace) or marketing (LPO) could be expressed, leading to better integration of different competences.

By contrast, resistance to new directions in WWF and FOEF led to a period of deep crisis in both. Both ENGOs illustrate the fact that organisational survival is not a mere question of material maintenance (Selznick 1996). The internal crisis started in 2010, in a situation of financial fragility for FOEF, whereas WWF enjoyed unprecedented donor support and media attention. These instances offer a contrasting picture regarding the

management of different views about the choice of publics – respectively donors and concrete activities – and the skills to be developed in accordance therewith. The widespread debate within FOEF fails to provide the organisation with decision-making capacity. Conversely, there is no room for internal debate in WWF and decision-making is in the hands of the board. After internal disputes within the staff and the board, in both organisations, the conflict was solved by the departure of members who played a crucial part in their core competences, thus hampering any further institutionalisation.

By contrast, in a context where both public aid and donor support decreased, the exploration of new modes of action strengthened the core competences of the other three organisations: protest for Greenpeace, the protection of birds and biodiversity for LPO, and close cooperation with the public authorities for FNE. In 2012, the newly appointed director of GPF disapproved GPF's participation in the Grenelle,³ the shift reflecting a division of labour in a context where corporate funding as well as support from citizens demanded renewed efforts by all. With GPF, LPO and WWF resorting more systematically to private individual donations, their income decreased in 2011–2012 following the financial crisis, while FNE was developing a team dedicated to solicit private donations. Clarifying their differences was thus a positive argument to mobilise different member and donor constituencies.

The Grenelle process gave momentum to the collaborative turn in environmental public policies, ultimately testing the actual convergence of modes of action and discourses observed in the early 2000s. Three organisations duly returned to their core competence, but in renewed ways, after exploring possibilities of expansion regarding the support of their various publics.

Conclusion

The analysis of the recent and dramatic increase of staff and activities experienced by five high-profile environmental organisations in France addresses the phenomenon of convergence of organisational practices and forms. The topic has stimulated the renewed interest of social movement studies in organisation theory. The pragmatist perspective on institutionalisation adopted here aimed to question similar trends affecting French organisations, regarding, for instance, fundraising and advocacy. In accordance with pragmatism, the three hypotheses that draw on Selznick's work were used to pave the way for empirical observation rather than to discriminate between explanations *a priori*; using the concept of competence, which encapsulates existing organisational

practices, they were designed to capture both organisational logics and margins for innovation.

The hypotheses underpinning the analysis were, respectively, related to publics, members and critical decisions. Although their relative importance varied over time and with the organisation studied, the comparison shows that interaction between external and internal pressures followed a similar temporal pattern for each. But NGOs were not all equally able to channel conflicts into further institutionalisation.

The 1990s were favourable to the differentiation of their activities and publics. During the next decade, when their activities were driven by the expectations of public authorities and allies, all experienced intense internal disagreements about the future of the organisation. These conflicts also revealed weak institutionalisation, competences involving different staff and publics co-existing within one organisation. Internal tensions enhanced institutionalisation when they resulted in wide consultations that helped improve the coordination for which all five organisations strove in the early 2000s.

The part played by critical decisions on new activities or internal procedures, changing existing practices, confirmed that organisational trajectories do not merely result from internal and external pressures. Beyond organisational logics, the 'creativity' of the present as postulated by pragmatism (Joas 1993), matters. After a difficult start, solutions tested elsewhere, such as fundraising or public communication, were sometimes adapted successfully to organisations' activities. The need for collective meaning and understanding proved crucial when the attention of the media or public authorities waned, putting more pressure on the quest for support from the public.

This longitudinal analysis is also relevant to considering in a new light the concepts of institutionalisation, capacity and adaptation. Institutionalisation usually accompanies the stabilisation of an organisation over time, resulting from the accumulation of resources as per resource mobilisation theory, or from complying with institutional logics as per 'new institutionalism'. Institutionalisation here goes beyond mere material maintenance or organisational survival, as the attachment of the members to their organisation proves to be an equally important variable. The expression of different values existing within an organisation is key to its 'resilience' (Boin 2001). Institutionalisation thus does not necessarily mean that all members shared the same vision of the organisation, but rather that they agreed to support it. As Selznick pointed out, organisational life often consists of factions with competing views, offering opportunities for change and innovation. By giving them a way to express views and then make a decision, leaders were able to promote change, while characterizing the organisation by a core competence. In the same vein, adaptation does not equate with conforming to external pressures. If not

mediated by internal logics, external pressures are likely to threaten ENGOS' capacity to set their agenda and *modus operandi*. Finally, the link between capacity and resources deserves questioning. Resource mobilisation theory contributed to portraying the social movement organisation as a configuration of resources at the disposal of cause entrepreneurs and activists. Organisational logics, e.g. members' views and ways of doing, are also crucial in their own right to the capacity of an organisation to follow-up with its activities and address new problems.

Notes

1. McCarthy and Zald (1977) also quote their former mentor, Arthur Stinchcombe.
2. For NGOs, street-marketing consists in recruiting new members or donors by fostering information exchange between hired teams and people randomly met in the street.
3. Jade Lindgaard, "Greenpeace: 'Tous les signaux envoyés par le gouvernement sont négatifs'", *Mediapart*, 24 August 2012.

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