The Political Opportunity Structure for NGO Advocacy in Global Climate Politics

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Abstract:
This paper studies the political opportunity structure for NGO advocacy in global climate politics. In doing so, it argues that previous studies on the relationship between international institutions and civil society have not fully appreciated how consultation and participation mechanisms provide both opportunities as well as constraints to NGOs. In a first section, the paper reviews the literature on NGO politics with a special focus on the relationship between international institutions and NGOs. The second section discusses the political opportunities approach from political sociology and extends it in a way that makes it fruitful for the analysis of civil society advocacy in global climate politics. Thirdly, the paper maps the political environment, namely the empowered space of international negotiations and the public space of free deliberation, and identifies opportunities and constraints for advocacy. Concluding, it discusses the implications for the larger study of NGO advocacy.

Keywords: NGOs, advocacy, civil society, participation, international negotiations, UNFCCC


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Introduction

In global climate politics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a pivotal role: One the one hand, they have identified climate change as one of the most important issues on their agenda.\(^1\) On the other hand the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) “grants far reaching participation rights in the policy process” and is thus an example of an institution that is considered as particularly open toward civil society (Steffek & Nanz, 2008, p. 23). So far, the literature on NGO advocacy has focused on two questions: First, scholars have analyzed how influential civil society as such is in different international negotiations. Second, studies have examined why states as ‘gatekeepers’ allow for civil society participation and the functional and normative benefits that derive from such institutional arrangements.

One issue that has received only little systematic attention is how individual NGOs have reacted to this altered political opportunity structure: How do NGOs use the participation opportunities granted to them? Which constraints and incentives does the political opportunity structure impose? How do organizations balance consultation and participation with other - potentially more confrontational - advocacy activities? A closer examination of these questions holds the potential to improve our understanding of the emerging system of transnational environmental governance. To this end, this paper analyzes the political environment for NGOs advocacy in global climate politics. It uses the political opportunities approach to map two different spaces for advocacy, the empowered space and the public space. In doing so, it studies the different constraints and incentives these spaces provide with regard to access, allies and adversaries, and facilitation and repression. I use several sources of data to strengthen the analysis presented in this paper. Data was collected from (a) NGO and UN documents as well as media reports and secondary literature, (b) interviews with NGO representatives and state delegates, and (c) participant observation at COP-17 in Durban, South Africa.

In the context of this paper, advocacy activities of NGOs are those systematic efforts by groups to further specific policy goals. These policy goals translate either in the retention of an already existing policy or policy change (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, & Leech, 2009, chap. 1; Prakash & Gugerty, 2010, p. 1). I suggest this definition of advocacy is a middle way between very broad definitions that include even implementation work as

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1 While there is no agreed upon definition of the term NGO, it will be used here to refer to all those organizations that are “formal […] independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level” (Martens, 2002, p. 282). For an overview of the conceptual discussion see Martens (2002) and Götz (2008).
advocacy (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000) and other that are much more narrow focusing on direct interactions with decision-makers. The term ‘global climate politics’ refers here to all levels of world politics in which climate change is framed as an issue and in which states, business, and civil society deliberate about and implement solutions. ‘International climate politics’ is then a sub-category relating to the intra-state activities concerned with climate change.²

The paper is divided in three parts. The first section reviews the literature on NGO politics with a special focus on the relationship between international institutions and NGOs.³ In doing so, this paper proposes that the existing literature has side-tracked important questions with regard to the influence of the political environment on NGO advocacy. In the second section, the paper discusses the political opportunities approach from political sociology and extends it in a way that makes it fruitful for the analysis of NGO advocacy in global climate politics. Here, it is argued that the political environment is comprised of the empowered space of international negotiations and the public space of free and unrestricted deliberation. Thirdly, the paper will apply this analytical framework to global climate politics and identify opportunities and constraints for advocacy. Concluding, it discusses the implications for the larger study of NGO advocacy.

**NGOs and international institutions**

In the following paragraphs, I will examine the existing literature on the relationship between non-governmental organizations and international institutions. A review reveals two different research venues: (1) the larger body of literature on how NGOs have acted on the global level and have made use of the opportunities offered by international institutions and (2) the more recent stream of research trying to explain the increasing openness of international institutions toward civil society.

Studies belong to the first group have been concerned with the question whether the activities of NGOs matter in global politics and in examining NGO influence have

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² This draws on a distinction between global politics and international politics upon made by Shaw (1994, p. 655).
³ The term ‘international institution’ is used here very narrowly to refer to formal state sponsored organizations such as international governmental organizations. This usage of the term differs significantly from broader conceptions identifying international institutions as patterned practices, shared beliefs, and widely recognized rules and norms (Holsti, 2004, pp. 20–23) or as “stable sets of related constitutive, regulative, and procedural norms and rules that pertain to the international system, the actors in the system […] and their activities” (Duffield, 2007, pp. 7–8). For a discussion of the different ways in which the term has been conceptualized see Duffield (2007). This discussion mirrors the larger debate about how to define institutions (Djelic, 2010, pp. 25–26).
elaborated on the ways in which civil society is enabled by international institutions. During the last two decades, it has been noticed that NGOs have become prominent players in global politics (Burgerman, 2001; Clark, 2001; Evangelista, 1999; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Mathews, 1997; Salamon, 1994). In this time, they have grown in numbers, have become more transnational and have extended the scope of their involvement to numerous issue-areas in international politics. Today, NGOs are exerting influence by raising awareness (Price, 1998), advancing the creation of new global norms (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998), and influencing state behavior by naming and shaming (Risse & Sikkink, 1999). In general, this strand of research has made bold claims with regard to the agency of civil society actors and described them as a “third force” (Florini & Simmons, 2000, p. 7) with the potential of “restructuring world politics” (Khagram, Riker, & Sikkink, 2002).

Two prime examples of how this literature has understood the interaction between international institutions and NGOs are the ‘boomerang model’ and the ‘coral reef’ metaphor: In trying to understand, how and why groups turn to the international level in the first place, Keck and Sikkink (1998) have developed the ‘boomerang model’. In this model, domestic political groups in one country that find their government unresponsive to their demands, approach international NGOs for help. These in turn try to influence their governments, lobby international organizations, and name and shame the state in question. The model thus develops, as Sikkink later recalled, “one type of alternative to the two-level game that we called ‘the boomerang effect,’ where non state actors, faced with repression and blockage at home, seek out state and non-state allies in the international arena, and in some cases are able to bring pressure to bear from above on their government to carry out domestic political change.” (Sikkink, 2005, p. 154)

Similarly, Sidney Tarrow (2005) has described the relationship between international institution and transnational actors with the metaphor of the “coral reef”. According to him, international institutions, regimes, and treaties constitute “coral reef[s]” for transnational activists “where they both lobby and protest, encounter others like themselves, identify friendly states, and, from time to time, put together successful global-national coalitions” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 219). In short, international institutions allow NGOs to flourish.

The second stream of research has – witnessing the increasing openness of international institutions toward actors from civil society – studied the political access of civil society to

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4 This argument has later been extended into the ‘spiral model' (Risse & Sikkink, 1999).
international organizations and negotiation rounds. This phenomenon, however, is hardly new since the first cooperation between international institutions and NGOs dates back as far as the nineteenth century (Charnovitz, 1997; Davies, 2008). What has boosted scholarly interest in the subject matter, though, is the assessment that these relations have intensified on an unprecedented scale since the end of the Cold War (Alger, 2002; Weiss & Gordenker, 1996). Hence, studies have examined why states as ‘gatekeepers’ allow for civil society participation and the functional and normative benefits that derive from such inclusive institutional arrangements (Sommerer & Tallberg, 2011; Steffek & Nanz, 2008; Tallberg, 2010).

The research agendas presented above has also been applied to the study of NGOs in global climate politics. Addressing the question of influence, several studies have found that NGOs have some, albeit limited, influence on the negotiations (Arts, 1998; Newell, 2000; Walk & Brunnengräber, 2000). Studies interested in the openness of international institutions, have highlighted that the UNFCCC provides the “focal point” for NGO participation in the larger climate change regime (Hoffmann, 2009).

Summarizing the arguments presented above, most of the literature dealing with the relationship of NGOs and international institutions have highlighted the positive effects that the participation in international institutions has on the ability of civil society to exert influence, effect social change, enhance the epistemic quality of decision-making, and infuse legitimacy in institutions that have frequently been described as suffering from a ‘democratic deficit.’ In highlighting the diverse functional and normative benefits that derive from more inclusive institutional arrangements, much of the literature has sidetracked three questions: First, how have individual NGOs in particular and civil society in general reacted to these opportunities? Second and connected to that, do individual NGOs take international institutions up on their offer and participate inside? Third, in how far are these participation mechanisms providing not only opportunities for NGOs but also impose constraints on them?

The first question reflects the general trajectory of the literature on NGO advocacy that has treated NGOs as independent variables and examined their subsequent influence on global politics. There are only few studies that have dealt explicitly with the ways in which NGOs themselves are changed by the international institutions they aim to influence (notable exceptions are: Joachim & Locher, 2009b; Martens, 2005). Thus, we still know

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5 For a discussion of this see also Joachim & Locher (2009a).
“rather little about states and IOs enabling and/or constraining TNA [transnational actor] activities” (Risse, 2002, p. 259).

The second question reflects the fact that the participation of NGOs in international institutions cannot be taken for granted but rather that it is “the result of two different dynamics” (Steffek, 2008, p. 3): While international institutions and the states that uphold them may grant NGOs consultation and participation rights and, thus, and may try to pull NGOs in at their own discretion, individual NGOs do not necessarily need to push in accordingly (Steffek, 2008). On the most basic level, NGOs have the choice between exit and voice (Hirschman, 1970) or inside and outside advocacy. Groups engaging in inside advocacy try to approach decision-makers directly, while NGOs pursuing an outside strategy strive to influence policy decisions indirectly through the larger public.6

The third question points to basic insight from neo-institutionalism that institutions create order by fashioning, enabling, and constraining political actors (March & Olsen, 2006; North, 1991). That is international institutions need to be understood both as resources NGOs can draw on, but also as exogenous constraints on them. Moreover these resources and constraints are relational, that is, “[i]nstitutions empower and constrain actors differently and make them more or less capable of acting according to prescriptive rules of appropriateness.” (March & Olsen, 2006, p. 3)

In order to allow for a systematic investigation of these questions, a more detailed study needs to analyze the political environment faced by NGOs engaged in global climate politics. As a first step in that direction, this paper will draw on the political opportunities approach to provide an analytical framework which allows for mapping this political opportunity structure and identifying the incentives and constraints provided to NGOs.

**Political opportunity structures**

In order to address the questions raised in this paper, we need a more sophisticated way in which we capture the effects the political environment has on the advocacy activities of NGOs in global climate politics. The literature on NGOs has recognized that their advocacy strategies are influenced by two different sets of variables reflecting structure and agency (Betsill, 2008, pp. 187–188; Corell & Betsill, 2008, p. 39). Structural variables highlight the importance of context and suggest that NGOs are enabled or constrained by

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6 For an investigation of ‘exit, voice, and loyalty’ as civil society strategies in the European Union see Liebert (2009).
the political environment they work in. Variables that highlight agency point to the internal characteristics, policy goals, and frames of NGOs and imply that they have enough leeway to follow through with their own choices. Of course, these two sets of variables are not completely independent from each other. Rather, advocacy involves as Busby (2010, p. 7) writes “a strategic interaction between agents and structures.” These sets of variables have been described with three concepts: Structural and institutional influence has been captured by the opportunity structure framework. Mobilizing resources and frames, on the other hand are reflecting the agency of NGOs (Joachim & Locher, 2009a, p. 7).

In order to make sense of the political environment NGOs are embedded in, the political opportunities framework provides a particularly useful analytical toolkit. To capture structural and institutional factors that have an influence on NGO advocacy, political scientists and sociologists have used the concept of political opportunity structure, a term that originated in social movement studies, where it has been discussed elaborately (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi, 2004; Tarrow, 1998). Used to compare the conditions for protest in different political systems, political opportunity structure has been defined as the “consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people’s expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1998, pp. 76–77). It is important to point out that structural constraints and incentives work by changing the expectations for success held by activists. That is opportunities and constraints must be perceived as such by the groups engaged in advocacy. In the context of national political systems the most central elements that effect expectations for success or failure are identified as institutional access, political alignments, influential allies, divided allies, and prospects of facilitation or repression of contentious politics (McAdam, 1996, p. 27; Tarrow, 1998, pp. 76–80). More recently, the concept has been expanded to also include “discursive opportunities” (Ferree, Gamson Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002).

Extending these arguments to the global level, studies have used the political opportunities approach to show how favorable conditions have enabled the rise of global civil society. In this way, Tarrow (2005) has introduced the notion of ‘complex internationalism.’ He defines internationalism as “a dense, triangular structure of relations among states, nonstate actors, and international institutions, and the opportunities this produces for actors to engage in collective action at different levels of this system” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 25). Complex internationalism is marked by three independent, albeit interconnected, developments: First, the horizontal density of relations among states, bureaucrats, and non-
state actors increases. Second, there are increasing vertical links between the different levels of politics, that is, subnational, national, and international. Third, this results in an “enhanced formal and informal structure” which allows for the formation of networks between different actors and thereby enables transnational activism (Tarrow, 2005, pp. 7–8). Thus, these developments produce an opportunity structure that focuses resistance to globalization on sets of international institutions, organizations, and regimes and facilitates the formation of global social movements and transnational coalitions. In a similar way, Reimann (2006) has argued that the rise of global activism can be attributed, at least in part, to increases in funding, improved technological capacities, and the spread of a ‘pro-NGO norm’.

Moving away from these studies of the macro-level environment and to the specifics of the political environment in global climate politics requires a more detailed discussion of how to apply opportunity structures framework. The political opportunity approach has been criticized for its “vagueness” (Reising 1998: 2) and for being “a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the […] environment” (Gamson/Meyer 1996: 275). Therefore, it is particularly important to clearly specify which elements are supposed to be captured and which not. In addition, conventional conceptions of political opportunities have overly emphasized the structural conditions that relate to states (Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Goldstone, 2004). Particularly in climate politics, an issue area which is marked by a fragmentation of civil society (Unmüßig, 2011) and in which business groups play an important role, however, one has to pay attention towards the interaction between different NGOs, civil society networks, business associations, and other actors besides states.

In order to map the political opportunity structure in global climate politics, this paper analytically distinguishes two different arenas or spaces in which NGOs can engage in advocacy: the empowered space and the public space. This distinction derives from the study of deliberative systems which has analytically separated different entities that make up such systems (Dryzek, 2009, 2010; see also Dryzek & Stevenson, 2011). The empowered space is understood as the institutional place dedicated to deliberation and collective decision-making. While the institutions that make up the empowered space do not need to be “formally constituted and empowered,” they often are (Dryzek, 2010, p. 11). The public space in contrast is “ideally” the realm of “free-ranging and wide-ranging communication, with no barriers limiting who can communicate, and few legal restrictions on what they can say.” (Dryzek, 2010, p. 11)
Furthermore, in order to distinguish these two spaces more carefully and in order to allow mapping out the incentives and constraints provided by each space, I suggest looking at three dimensions: (1) access, (2) influential allies and adversaries, and (3) limited repression and facilitation. *Access* determines how open or closed a space is and whether and how easily groups can enter it and seek responses to their demands. *Influential allies and adversaries* can shift the power balance and are thus crucial for any group involved in advocacy. *Limited repression and facilitation* refers to the activities of states or governmental agencies to restrain or foster the political participation of NGOs.

In the next section, I will apply this analytical framework to global climate politics. In doing so, I will focus on the empowered space and the public space constituted at the time around the annual conferences of parties of the UNFCCC. A more complete conceptualization that also takes into account the political environment as it presents itself throughout the year is desirable, but beyond the scope of this paper.

**Political opportunity structure in global climate politics**

In global climate politics, the empowered space is dominated by the set of climate negotiations institutionalized by the UNFCCC. While the political responses to global climate change have been “fragmented or polycentric” (Abbott, 2011; Biermann, Pattberg, van Asselt, & Zelli, 2009), the UNFCCC arguably forms the institutional backbone of a larger “regime complex” (Keohane & Victor, 2011). Similar to other multilateral environmental agreements, the UNFCCC is following a framework approach rather than a more substantive approach (Desai, 2010, chap. 3). This means that the convention does not stipulate highly specific targets and detailed implementation mechanisms. Rather, the UNFCCC lays down general goals and principles, obligations with regard to scientific research and exchange of information as well as a “skeletal legal and institutional framework” for further negotiations (Bodansky, 1993, p. 494). What is important here is that the framework approach sets up an institutionalized process of continuous decision-making in which the Conferences of Parties assume an influential law-making role (Brunnée, 2002).

Adopted in 1992, the UNFCCC makes provisions for the engagement of observer organizations that are in line with earlier multilateral environmental agreements.⁷ According

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⁷ For an overview of different environmental agreements or regimes and their openness toward NGOs see Oberthür et al. (2002).
to Article 7.6 of the convention any organization which is “qualified in matters covered by the Convention,” “has informed the secretariat of its wish to be represented […] as an observer” can be admitted “unless at least one third of the Parties present object.” In addition, the UNFCCC secretariat has established three criteria by which to assess potential observer organizations (Depledge, 2005, pp. 212–213): (i) Observers must be ‘qualified in matters covered by the convention, (ii) must confirm that they are independent of any national government, and (iii) must prove that they are classified as a non-profit or enjoy a tax-exempt status in their country. After COP 15 in Copenhagen, the secretariat has introduced a quota system because the conference venue was overwhelmed by the number of delegates (Fisher, 2010). The quota system regulates the number of delegates each observer can send to the negotiations. The final quotas are being communicated online only about a month before the negotiations start, which makes it difficult for NGOs to plan ahead. This is particularly problematic for smaller and less affluent NGOs that rely on inexpensive air travel and accommodation.

Within the official delegation process, NGOs are formally allowed to participate in a number of different ways including observing the negotiations and access official documents, address plenary sessions and intervene during debates, and distribute information and material to negotiators (Depledge, 2005, pp. 217–226). These formal ways to engage negotiators are however severely limited by time and space constraints. As one NGO delegate remarks, there is “window of opportunity” for NGOs to influence the negotiations in the first week, before ministers arrive in the second week and most of the negotiations move to ‘informal-informals’. Furthermore, there exist various ways for state parties and chairs of working groups to shut civil society out, for instance, by informal closed-door meetings or by providing information not as official documents but rather as unofficial non-papers (Depledge, 2005, p. 218).

Being accredited as an observer organization, have three main venues NGOs can also organize side events and exhibits at the conference venue and in this way reach out to state delegates as well as other civil society groups. They serve as a forum to test new ideas, help build institutional capacity and legitimacy, and facilitate networking between different civil society groups especially those from the global South. Many NGOs that host side events rank negotiators and UN personnel as the most important target audiences (Hjerpe & Linnér, 2010; Schroeder & Lovell, 2011). This is used by large NGOs sometimes also in collaboration with companies, international organizations, or other civil society groups. The large number makes it necessary that NGOs apply with the secretariat for slots. All
activities have to be applied for with the secretariat which then makes a selection based on several criteria including a quota for different types of actors (parties, UN, IGOs, and NGOs), balance among different observer groups and among topics, as well as geographical balance.

Another way for NGO activists to attend the conference is by becoming members of state delegations. This is not uncommon and from 1995 to 2004 roughly 25 percent of the national delegations in the climate change negotiations incorporated NGO activists (Böhmelt, 2010). Being part of state delegations allows activists to get access to intergovernmental discussions held behind-closed doors that they otherwise are excluded from and can provide them with crucial information. This direct access, therefore, significantly improves the ability of NGOs penetrating official decision-making (Humphreys, 2004, p. 56; Mathews, 1997, p. 55). In addition, it improves NGOs chances to engage in ‘corridor politics,’ that is, the face-to-face lobbying of decision-makers in the coffee lounges and hallways as well as the distribution of memoranda during session breaks (Cook, 1996, pp. 186–187).

In global climate politics, the public space is constituted by a wide range of physical and virtual spaces. Some of the most visible and regular instances, albeit not the only ones, are those spaces that are self-organized and hosted by civil society and that run parallel to the official negotiations. In particular, parallel or alternative summits that address the same fundamental issues have become a regular feature in global climate politics since the first COP in Berlin in 1995 was accompanied by several such events. At all of the last three COPs such alternative summits were organized: In Durban, for instance, an ‘Alternative People’s Space’ was set-up by a broad coalition of South-African NGOs at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Similar efforts were made in Copenhagen and Cancún. The Klimaforum09 in Copenhagen served, according to the organizers, as “an open space where people could let their voices be heard, ask essential questions, exchange experiences, and find common ground,” thus, being able – unlike the official negotiations – “to give civil society a focus, purpose and a voice” (Eriksen, Samuelsen, Monobay, & Timpte, 2010, p. 3). The alternative people’s space in Durban was, while being organized by a broad coalition of NGOs, used most frequently by NGOs that emphasized movement building.

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8 As mentioned above, this paper focuses on the opportunity structure for NGO advocacy in and around the annual COPs. Throughout the year they are more opportunities to influence the UNFCCC process as well as engage in the larger public space.

9 Parallel summits are also a common feature of global environmental politics, since the issue first entered the international agenda at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (Caldwell, 1990, pp. 58–59), and more broadly in global politics (Pianta, 2001).
as an important part of their tactical repertoire. These parallel summits serve this purpose in two ways: First, they allow the engagement of transnational NGOs with local groups and thus connect the local with the global. In the words of one of the organizers, the space allows to create links between different causes and serve to “consolidate and strengthen those solidarity links.” (Hallowes, Reddy, & Reyes, 2012) Second, they bring together NGO activists from around the world to meet personally, exchange information, develop common platforms, plan activities inside the negotiations, and deliberate about future strategies. However, these spaces are fragile in a number of ways: On the one hand, their organization requires a level of coordination that regularly stretches civil society to its limit. In addition, it is often difficult, particularly in countries where NGOs cannot draw on a large number of permanent staff and sufficient funding, to organize such events well ahead. On the other hand, not all NGO representatives are easily convinced to spend some of their time in alternative spaces, engage in movement building, and connect with local group, when what some consider the ‘real action’, happens elsewhere. Hence, it remains challenging to connect the highly technical negotiations inside with the grassroots activity outside and vice versa.

At COP 17, a new feature emerged in the space outside the negotiations: OccupyCOP. Relating to the larger Occupy movement protesting in favor of social and economic justice, it brought together more radical voices, mostly from NGOs focusing on climate justice, with grassroots movements such as the Rural Women’s Movement. The Occupy space was situated in sight of the conference venue and served, in the words of one of its organizers, to “bring the Occupy dynamic and space into the conversation.” It is questionable, however, whether or not OccupyCOP succeeded in this respect: Since it was located away both from the official venue and the alternative people’s space it further dispersed civil society and had a difficult time attracting people from either space.

Another prominent event is the Global Day of Action, which is traditionally a large march of civil society held on the first Saturday of each COP. It brings together almost a broad coalition of voices from civil society for a day of demonstrations and events. The Global Day of Action provides a picture of a cohesive civil society demonstrating against the inability of politicians to tackle climate change. In Durban the march consisted of about 10,000 people. The global day of action held during COP 15 in Copenhagen brought together 60,000 to 100,000 participants and was accompanied by protests all around the world. In general, the march is shaped particularly by larger NGO networks such as Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, which either have a lot of members or can rely on an
extensive grassroots network, and on local groups that are able to mobilize larger number of people. The more research oriented research organizations, think tanks, and conservation NGOs are less visible.

Concluding, it can be said that both the empowered space as well as the public space offer ample opportunities for NGOs to engage in advocacy. With regard to access, the UNFCCC is a fairly open treaty process granting observer status to a large number of NGOs and offering several access points for NGO engagement. In recent years, however, the implementation of a quota system has made the accreditation process less predictable. In addition, while accreditation might be easy, meaningful participation is not always as easy and regularly requires diligent planning, manpower, and at least some financial resources. In this way, it seems that the UNFCCC process has similar to other international institutions put NGOs under pressure to institutionalize and professionalize their engagement.\textsuperscript{10} On the other hand, access to the various instances of the public space is virtually unrestricted. Here, it ironically rather seems to be the problem that the number of different spaces leads to a dispersion of civil society in smaller groups which diminishes the usefulness of these events both as a platform of protest targeted at decision-makers and the larger public as well as a meeting place to engage in movement building.

With regard to influential allies or adversaries, four types of actors appear to be of particular importance: (1) individual states, groups of states, and negotiation blocs, such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) or the European Union (EU); (2) intergovernmental organizations working on climate change mitigation and adaptation or on one of the many issues related to that; (3) the media and individual journalists; (4) other non-state actors such as business associations, NGOs, individual companies, research institutes, and think tanks. The first two groups of potential allies are almost exclusively found inside the empowered space. It happens only very rarely, but is not unheard off, that state representatives come outside to engage with civil society. Since the UNFCCC process rests on intergovernmental negotiation, getting the attention of states or negotiating groups is particularly important for those groups that want to engage in inside advocacy. With regard to the media, the empowered and the public space offer quite different opportunities. Most mainstream journalists focus closely on the negotiations and thus working exclusively inside the conference venue. NGOs need to find ways of catching media attention either by directly interacting with journalists, providing them with insight

\textsuperscript{10} For an in-depth study of how the involvement of NGOs in the United Nations has changed these organizations themselves see Martens (2005).
in the negotiations, or by engaging in media stunts inside or outside of the conference venue. Press conferences held by civil society are, with the exception of those organized by the Climate Action Network (CAN), attended mostly by other NGO delegates and activist media but not by the mainstream media. Local media and more importantly activist media organizations such as Democracy Now! or the Global Justice Ecology Project provide coverage of civil society activities in the public space, but their circulation and reach is only limited. In forming alliances with other groups from civil society, NGOs need to take into account the venue choices of other actors. Research organizations and think tanks, for example, often focus primarily on the empowered space and do not engage outside the formal UNFCCC process.

Repression or facilitation increase or decrease the costs for collective action. While interviewing NGO representatives in Durban, I noticed that many argue that the UNFCCC has become more restrictive in the last years. In particular, several interviewees have criticized that the participation procedures established by the UNFCCC, while to a certain degree necessary to organize such big conferences, have worked to curtail rather than empower civil society. In this way several activists, particularly those working extensively on climate justice topics, have pointed out that they felt marginalized in the official venue. With regard to the application process for activities and side-events one participant pointed out: “[...] last year we tried to apply for a side event, which was very direct, very in your face. We did not get approved, but now for this year we got approved, because of a lot of techno speak, a lot of jargons. Over at the people’s space [the alternative summit], you just say things as they are and it's accepted.” In this way, NGOs that want to influence decision-makers directly are “forced to conform to the rules and styles of its bureaucracy.” (Ottaway, 2001, p. 277) In addition, diplomatic norms prescribe a level of civility and courtesy thereby limiting the level of open contention possible. In this way, the UNFCCC secretariat has established guidelines for the participation of NGOs aimed at promoting a “harmonious atmosphere” and establishing basic rules governing the conduct of observers (UNFCCC, 2003). This sometimes leads to conflict as in the case when NGOs do observe these rules and resort to more contentious activities. In Durban, for instance, some 100 activists peacefully demonstrated inside the conference center demanding a breakthrough in the negotiation. The risk for delegates participating in these activities is that they are being de-badged, removed from the conference site and their accreditations revoked. This is a risk not every NGO wants to take, particularly not those that are very engaged in direct lobbying. As one WWF delegate remembers: “We think we can be quite critical to the UNFCCC process now, but we do think that we should not be thrown out of the process and that is actually a
serious risk you take if you engage in those kinds of demonstrations. Which might sound ridiculous, but we have had our dealings with the UNFCCC in terms of these kinds of things, in actions that we have done.”

**Conclusion**

The motivation to write this paper stems from two deficits of the current literature: studies of international institutions have one-sidedly paid attention only to states as ‘gatekeepers’ and studies on NGO-politics have mostly focused on the successes of larger advocacy campaigns.

By investigating the political opportunity structure in global climate politics, this paper has argued that a more nuanced understanding of the political environment can enhance our understanding of what shapes NGO advocacy. In particular, the analytical framework that distinguishes, first, between two different venues, the empowered space and the public space, and, second, between three different dimensions of these venues, namely access, allies and adversaries, and facilitation and repression, has proven to be a useful lens for the study of advocacy. As this study suggests, consultation and participation mechanisms provided by international institutions need to be understood both as a resource on which NGOs can draw on as well as exogenous constraints on them. As a result, NGOs have to draw an intricate balance between their engagement in different spaces and their use of strategies to engage with them.

Beyond the context of global climate politics, this paper proposes that future studies on the relationship between international institutions and NGOs need to take into account two lessons: First, while international institutions serve as focal points for NGOs, the study of advocacy should go beyond formal participation and consultation mechanisms. Otherwise it draws a skewed picture focusing on face-to-face lobbying with decision-makers and misses out on more contentious activities and complex advocacy strategies involving both inside and outside work. Second, the political opportunity structure needs to be conceptualized as providing both incentives and constraints to fully understand the political environment activists are working in.

A more thorough understanding of the political environment NGOs are embedded, as developed here for the realm of climate change, enhances our understanding of the role of civil society advocacy in global environmental politics.


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