Citizenship and the Environment

A Proposal for an ECPR workshop (Uppsala 2004) by

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and

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Much attention has been given in recent years to the ‘macro’ level issues involved in bringing about the widely endorsed objective of making societies more sustainable, but very little attention has been paid to what citizens themselves might, or should, do in this regard. Citizenship has been very much on the agenda in recent years as a decline in ‘social capital’ has been alleged, at the same time as its critical importance has been recognised. Sustainability as a goal cannot be brought about by governments alone, and citizenship looks promising as a way of articulating what individuals might do to help realise this goal. Very little sustained work on environmental citizenship has been done to date, so there is no doubt that there is a gap to be filled here.

If successful with this proposal we shall be looking for papers in the following broad areas:

1. Clarification of what environmental citizenship might mean. Where, in other words, does the idea of environmental citizenship fit in the tradition of citizenship? What are the similarities and differences between liberal and republican citizenships and environmental citizenship, for example? It might be that environmental citizenship is a new type of citizenship entirely, or it might be that it is a closely related cousin of liberal or republican forms, or, again, parasitic on the still developing notion of cosmopolitan citizenship. Is environmental citizenship necessarily an international citizenship, and if so can it be regarded as a citizenship at all, given the usual linkage between citizenship and the state?

We need to know if the ‘grammar’ of citizenship can be applied in the environmental context. What are the relevant rights and responsibilities, for example? Does the idea of virtue have role to play? What is the locus of political authority against which rights may be claimed? Can responsibilities towards future generations be articulated in terms of citizenship? It might even be that there are different types of environmental citizenship. Then we need to know what the environmental citizen might actually do: what might the practice of environmental citizenship entail? Is it simply a matter of lifestyle choices, or is it about more systematic and engaged political activity?

The aim, in sum, of this part of the workshop will be to explore the nature of environmental citizenship by testing the idea against the conceptual apparatus developed over 2000 years of citizenship theory and practice.
2. The relationship between citizenship and sustainability. Is there any evidence that environmental citizens can make a difference? Here we would welcome papers offering comment based on empirical research. Such papers might explore local attempts to attain sustainability objectives through mobilising the idea of environmental citizenship. Others might examine the extent to which actors feel that the idea of environmental citizenship makes sense in the first place. Methodological papers would be welcome too: what are the most appropriate ways of finding out whether environmental citizenship is functional for sustainability? We would also expect to explore here what the obstacles to environmental citizenship are – either subjective (lack of knowledge, the individual’s sense that s/he can’t make a difference, for example), or objective (the structural conditions within which individual decisions are made).

3. We will also welcome papers exploring any government-inspired attempts to articulate/instil environmental citizenship. We want the majority of papers in the workshop to reflect the experience of so-called advanced industrial countries, so comparative papers on this topic will be especially important. Is there any evidence that governments feel that fomenting environmental citizenship is a good idea? What kinds of programmes are there? What do governments understand by environmental citizenship?

4. The final broad area we wish to explore concerns ways of encouraging environmental citizenship. Papers here are likely to be a mixture of the theoretical and the empirical. Programmes for encouraging citizenship might, for example, be virtue-based, appealing to people’s moral sensibilities. Are there any past precedents for this kind of approach in connection with other types of citizenship? What are the conditions for success or failure of such approaches? Do our contemporary advanced industrial societies contain the right conditions? Alternatively, environmental citizenship might be encouraged through more direct incentives, such as reducing local tax burdens for citizens who comply with recycling programmes. Again, is there any past or present evidence that incentive schemes actually work? Are they ‘citizenly’ in the first place? Can the common good be achieved through appealing to people’s self-interest in this way?

We would also expect the critical issue of environmental citizenship education in the formal school system to be broached here. A number of countries have citizenship or ‘civics’ classes on the curriculum nowadays. What is our comparative experience here? For one, do countries’ citizenship curricula have an environmental component? If so, what is taught on it? How do these curricula shape up in the light of themes covered in area 1, above – the nature of environmental citizenship? Environmental literacy is one thing, but familiarity with the normative issues at stake in discussing environmental sustainability (sustainability of what? For whom? For how long?) is another. Second, where there is environmental citizenship in the curriculum, is there any evidence that it affects students’ behaviour? In other words, does it work? Third, how confident can self-proclaimed liberal societies be that they can embrace the normative challenges associated with teaching environmental citizenship? Sustainability quickly raises questions concerning the ‘good life’. Might liberal societies struggle with this in the same way that they struggle with multi-faith education?
a workshop with a balance of papers covering these four areas would go a long way to filling a major gap in our environmental political science/theory knowledge, as well as giving us a better idea than we have at present of whether environmental citizenship, in theory and in practice, can contribute to the widely endorsed goal of environmental sustainability.

The directors

Andrew Dobson is Professor of Politics at the Open University, UK. He was co-director (with Paul Lucardie of the Netherlands) of the first ECPR environmental political theory workshop, at Essex University in 1990, and has been a regular attendee of similar workshops ever since. His best-known publications in this area are the three editions of Green Political Thought (Routledge, 1990, 1995, 2000), The Green Reader (ed.) (André Deutsch, 1991), Justice and the Environment (Oxford University Press, 1998), and Fairness and Futurity (ed.) (Oxford University Press, 1999). He is also Chair of the editorial board of the journal Environmental Politics.

Angel Valencia is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Valencia, Spain, and is formally associated with the Centre for Research on Political Theory at the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid. He is a key figure in the development of environmental political theory in Spain, and he has published widely on issues in this field, most recently his ‘Ciudadanía y teoría política verde: hacia una arquitectura conceptual propia’, in Alcántara Sáez, M. (ed), Política en América Latina (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2002).

Publicity

As well as publicising the workshop through normal ECPR channels, we shall make use of the well-established Green Politics newsletter which reaches academics and researchers throughout the world. We are aware of, and fully support, the ECPR requirement that the younger research community be well represented at workshops, and with this in mind we will draw on the network built up in recent years through Keele University’s nomination as an EU Marie Curie doctoral student training site in environmental politics and policy. (Keele University was Professor Dobson’s place of employment until 31.12.2001). This workshop proposal is endorsed by the active ECPR Green Politics standing group.

We have initial indication that the following would like to attend the workshop:

John Barry (Queen’s, Belfast), Derek Bell, (Newcastle University), Susan Martens (Wageningen Agricultural University), Paul Leroy (Nijmegen University), Mark Charlesworth (Keele University), Joaquin Valdivielso (Universidad de Mallorca), Lovisa Hagberg (Umeå University), Clare Saunders (Kent University), Sverker Carlsson (Gothenburg University), Rosemary Francis (Keele University), Isabelle de Lovinfosse (Brussels), Marcel Wissenburg (Nijmegen University), Tim O’Riordan (University of East Anglia), Mick Smith (Abertay University), Yvonne Rydin (LSE), Ian Welsh (Cardiff), Mat Paterson (Keele University), Graham Smith (Southampton University), Piers Stephens (Manchester University), David Schlosberg (Arizona
Publication and dissemination

Proceedings of ECPR Green Politics workshops have an outstanding track record of publication, and there is no reason to think that ‘Citizenship and the Environment’ will be any different. Professor Dobson already has a contract with Oxford University Press to publish a book on the topic in 2003, and considerable interest was shown in the project by a number of other publishers. This indicates the level of interest in the subject, and we are confident of finding a publisher for the best and most coherent set of papers that the workshop produces. If this proposal is accepted, indeed, we aim to approach potential publishers once workshop participants and their topics are finalised towards the end of this year (2003).

Professor Andrew Dobson
Dr Angel Valencia

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