

Stanisław Otok

THE SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS IN POLAND*

THE DEFINITION OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

A social movement is a group activity aiming at attaining of a definite goal, usually connected with satisfaction of the essential needs of a social group or of a society in whose name a given social group is acting. The statement that the subject encompasses non-governmental actors means that considerations do not concern, in this case, the governmental institutions, and that the movements ought in principle not be controlled by the state authorities, these movements being independent actions which emerged in order to promote the purposes which are "proper" for a given social group.

The essence of emergence of social groups and of the social movements related to them is quite succinctly formulated by J.Eyles, in whose opinion individuals get associated for various purposes in groups, these groups being formed by the purposes themselves.

In our case we are considering the social ecological movements in Poland.

Polish ecological movements which, just as had before been the case in some other countries of Europe, started as a typical protest activity, is presently aiming at triggering of definite social changes. Most of the organizations and social groups of the ecological movements in Poland appeared in the 1980s.

The essential impulses for the development of the mass social ecological movement in Poland were, first — the general national protest aimed against the political-economic system in force in this country, controlled by the Marxist party, this system not being accepted by the nation, and, second — the growth of the universal, and in particular of the European ecological movements which put forward, besides the fight for clean sky and water and healthy food, also the struggle for social justice.

* The subject of the paper are non-governmental agents in the social ecological movement, taken into consideration in the research programme of the Division of Social Geography.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

In the Polish social ecological movement one can distinguish, on the basis of a historical criterion, the following main streams:

a) the oldest one, having a traditional nature protection attitude, with origins dating back to 19th century (love of home nature was promoted among young people by Wincenty Pol, (1807-1972, a poet and a geographer), although the League for Nature Protection was formally founded in 1924;

b) the groups seeking new cultural values, aiming at changes in the civilizational paradigm of our society, and which therefore reject the values of consumerism and economism, emphasising the unity of man and nature; these new pro-ecological organizations emerge in the 1970s and later (e.g the Nature Engineering and Protection Club active since 1972 in Szczecin, the Ecologico-Pacifist Movement "I Prefer To Be", The Living Architecture Workshop and some other); the process of appearance of such groups can be partly attributed to the effect of the Stockholm appeal and to the reports of the Rome Club;

c) there is an important upsurge in the development of the social ecological movement, starting with the second half of the 1980s; as mentioned already before, this wave of the social ecological movement had a broader political aspect — it was related to the social protest against the politico-economic system in Poland which had been in the eyes of Polish population responsible, for instance, for the devastation of the natural environment and for the worsening conditions of living; the upsurge mentioned resulted in creation of numerous ecological political parties, such as the Polish Green Party, the Green Union, the Ecological Union of Democrats and other. This stream of activities and groups can also be said to encompass some older organizations whose programmes were in principle social and political, but whose declarations explicitly accounted for ecological problems; these latter organizations may be of various ideological orientations;

d) home and foreign ecological funds as well as enterprises of various productive and investment profiles, which try to implement pro-ecological technologies in energy, agriculture and waste utilization (say — Ecological Education Fund, 1988, A.Frycz-Modrzewski Foundation, Polish Home and Emigré Ecological Fund "Pol-Eko", the Foundation for Contact Between Environmental Groups in Eastern European Countries and in the Netherlands, the Canadian Executive Service Organization and some other).

It is difficult to determine precisely the number of social organizations of the ecological movement in Poland. The social movement is namely, as stated by Gliński (1990), in constant motion, which is true both for the number of organizations and for the number of members. All the quantities given in press publications and in statistical report are of approximate character. Even the leader of the Green Union was not able to give the number of the party members when asked by the author of this article.

The names of ecological organizations also indicate that the interest in the movement is partly a result of a fashion for ecological problems, and fashions have various histories. It is often so that ecological interests are declared by units and institutions which do not undertake any activity in this respect.

That is why one can very carefully assume that there are in Poland some 107 ecological organizations, groups and clubs, 9 political parties with ecological programmes, as well as 144 scientific associations and societies whose activity programmes include ecological problems as well.

Besides this all the political parties and trade unions include in their programme declarations the ecological questions, and some of them even have special chapters with permanent staff, devoted to pro-ecological activity.

There are also in Poland 26 home and foreign foundations participating in ecological movement (out of the total of some 1000 foundations existing in Poland).

PROGRAMMES AND SCOPES OF ACTIVITY

For a majority of social ecological movements in Poland the subject of interest is the whole of natural environment only as a basis for constructing a broader social — but most often political — activity, these problems serve as a fashionable catchword, effective for gaining a broader social support during parliamentary or local elections.

In connection with this the particular organizations of the social ecological movement differ by their goals and methods of proceeding. Still, there are several goals which can be said to be common for all of them. These goals are:

1. Knowledge of the problems of natural environment.
2. Ecological education of the society and popularization of ecological problem.
3. Activities conducted for the benefit of nature protection and engineering, such as:
 - a. participation in taking of location decisions and presentation of one's own ecological assessments to decision makers;
 - b. care extended over certain areas as well as animal and plant species which are under particular protection in view of their ecological value;
 - c. interventions in cases of environmental devastation, both regarding the whole of the environment and its elements;
 - d. initiation of social actions supporting these institutions which act for the sake of preservation or restoration of ecological equilibrium through promotion of changes in the attitude of men towards nature: popularization of new architectural designs, production of healthy food, introduction of new low-waste or zero-waste technologies in industry, and the like.

4. Exerting pressure upon local and central authorities through mass protests (demonstrations, appeals, resolutions) calling for actions conforming to ecological requirements and to social interest;

5. Participation in the international (global) ecological movement following the motto "we are all inhabitants of one earth".

Some participants of the social ecological movement display interest in ecological problems of national and global dimensions. There are, however, numerous groups and organizations which are first of all interested in solving of local and regional problems, according to the principle: "think globally, act locally".

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

A vast majority of organizations accounting for ecological problems in their activity is controlled by the state through financial dependence taking the form of subsidies.

There exist, though, social ecological movements, the so-called independent pro-ecological initiatives, which are entirely supported from their own resources and from incidental donations offered by home and foreign sponsors.

Then, there are also pro-ecological activities which are financed by a variety of foundations, most often economic or scientific and cultural, both Polish and foreign.

PERSPECTIVES OF DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

These perspectives shall depend upon the successes in the process of political, social and economic transformations of the state. The transformations create real possibilities for activity of the independent ecological movements. Numerous pro-environmental groups and organizations appear, but also vanish. It has been a significant tendency of the recent years that multiple initiatives emerged of forming pro-environmental political parties or federations of communities and organizations having political ambitions. The birth of this political ecological movement in Poland is accompanied by internal divisions, resulting both from personal and ambitious conflicts and from quite natural causes, i.e. programme differences related to various value systems and activity concepts proper for particular communities.

There are, however, numerous organizations participating in the social ecological movement, whose effectiveness has been tested. Their experiences will be the indication for the other ones.

The way to success in the ecological movements is lengthy and difficult. Many people and organizations will be eliminated with the course of time. The movement in question should not only be perceived, but also listened to and helped along in its socially justified pro-environmental activities.