

Acting effectively for biodiversity: a strategic framework for environmental non-governmental organisations

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Abstract Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) are major operators of conservation initiatives both in the political sphere and in the field. The context within which they operate can change rapidly and dramatically. As a result, they need to plan new strategies, and do so by taking up the challenges of strategic design like any institutionalised organization. However, the specific characteristics and situations of ENGOS call for new, relevant approaches to strategic analysis and design. Based on successive cycles of case studies and conceptual work drawing on the biodiversity and strategic management literatures, the present paper proposes a new framework to articulate four fundamental dimensions of ENGOS' strategy: the choice of goals in terms of ecological priorities; the choice of how to act and press for change; the development of capacity (i.e. organization, internal governance and resources); and finally, a strategy to manage an often ambivalent mix of competition and cooperation with other ENGOS. The value of the framework is illustrated here by a case study of the French NGO 'Humanité et Biodiversité' (mankind and biodiversity), with dramatic changes in strategy to match and major strategic organizational challenges to be identified and resolved.

Keywords Biodiversity · Strategic analysis · Environmental NGO · Ecological effectiveness

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Introduction

Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) are important stakeholders among those searching for innovative solutions to the environmental crisis (Charnovitz 2005; Le Prestre 2005). ENGOS are as well major operators of conservation initiatives both in the political sphere and in the field (Redford et al. 2003). Like all conservation operators they are confronted with great difficulties that challenge conservation action. If it is to overcome them, each ENGO has to formulate and implement a strategy that fits its specific goals and situation. This choice of strategy sums up a host of heterogeneous questions. What kind of biodiversity to aim for? Where? Through what sort of actions (creating protected areas? Lobbying governments? Engaging the public or local populations? Etc.) And what kinds of means can ENGOS muster for such action? Action indeed requires an organization with adequate resources: personnel and expertise, access to information, finances and logistics, etc. In short, to act effectively for biodiversity, ENGOS have to make strategic choices that range from the choice of biodiversity targets to the management of the organization itself.

For small ENGOS with limited resources, such questions take the form of immediate challenges and dilemmas for the small teams that choose and implement their strategy. For large ENGOS they may be felt as less immediate, since there are more ample resources for action. But they are no less fundamental because as larger organizations they have to plan more explicitly for the acquisition and deployment of their resources, usually through action plans. They are also usually submitted to internal and external (e.g. from funders) pressures to evaluate the implementation and the outcomes of their strategy.

We observed that many ENGOS use tools borrowed from business or project management (e.g. SWOT matrix, SMART method or logical framework project planning). Indeed, ENGOS do share some management problems with commercial firms of administrative organizations (e.g. personnel or budget management). As any organization, ENGOS need methods and tools to design, plan and manage their activities, human resources, budgets, etc. Funding constraints for instance are often a critical issue for ENGOS as these usually have neither comfortable core funding, nor steady incomes from sales. All such management issues that are common to all types of organisations have to be taken into account when designing or analysing ENGOS' strategies. Such tools, however, remain generic and place no special emphasis on the specific mission and challenges of ENGOS. For example, fundraising and budget management of ENGOS raise specific issues, as they have to be considered in view of the way they enable, hinder or influence the effectiveness of the kinds of ecological actions that are the *raison d'être* of the ENGO, and are in line with its non-profit profile. Therefore, the transposition of the firm model to study NGOs is not entirely relevant, at least, not sufficient (Hoarau and Laville 2008; Guillet and Leroy 2010). For ENGOS, achieving substantial biodiversity outcomes constitutes the organising axis, both for the design and for the evaluation of strategy (Mermet et al. 2010). ENGOS should indeed justify their strategic choices and allocation of means with reference to their overarching goal: achievement of their environmental mission. For this, they need strategic analysis tools that include organizational aspects but that also focus on the specific ecological mission the NGO is pursuing and on the strategic contexts of that mission.

ENGOS' strategies deserve to be guided by renewed and specific strategic analysis approaches that clarify and respond to the specific challenges of the biodiversity conservation aims. In this paper, we propose a strategic framework that links together

biodiversity goals, challenges of acting for environmental change and organizational management. Based on a succession of research projects and on collaboration with several ENGOs, the framework's purpose is (1) to guide the reflection of ENGO leaders and stakeholders as they strive to formulate and implement strategies to act successfully for conservation, and (2) to help researchers from disciplines as distant as conservation biology, policy analysis and management discuss how their work can connect in ways that contribute to conservation efforts from ENGOs.

The paper is organised in two main sections. The first one summarises the back and forth between theory and practice through which the framework has emerged and evolved, and lays down the framework itself. The second section puts it to the test of a recent case study: an action-research project with the French ENGO “Humanité et Biodiversité”. This case study closely fits the particulars of that organization. These also resonate, however, with the sort of dilemmas that are felt by ENGOs worldwide, as transformations of conservation issues and of the conservation field require constant strategic adaptation and initiative.

The gradual elaboration of a strategic analysis framework for ENGOs

Specific challenges of strategic management research

As a preliminary step to presenting our approach, it may be necessary to underline some of the specific issues of strategy as a research field, and to indicate the perspective that guides our work. Whatever the type of organization concerned, discussing its strategy entails two choices of perspective. First, strategy can be seen as chosen and then implemented, or it can be seen as emerging gradually from multiples decision processes in the organization. The second choice of perspective is between two options. One tries to treat strategy as an object for positive knowledge: i.e. work to establish ex post or in itinere what factors caused organization *x* to adopt strategy *y* in situation *s*. The other one envisages strategy as normative: i.e. work to establish ex ante or in itinere what strategy is best in general for an organization like organization *x* in situation *s*. Obviously, different choices regarding these two alternatives lead to fundamentally different approaches to strategy (Mintzberg et al. 1998). Our own perspective is similar to the one defended by Mintzberg et al. in “The Strategy Process” (1995). Regarding the first alternative, it considers an organization's strategy to be at the same time emerging and deliberately formulated: “strategy-making walks on two feet, one deliberate, the other emergent” (Mintzberg et al. 1995, p. 118). This dual nature of strategy, as both an understanding of the overall behaviour of organizations and an effort to deliberately guide that behaviour, is precisely what we find fascinating in strategy as a field for study. It is also what we think is most useful to assist ENGOs in their effort to become more effective in conserving biodiversity.

As regards the second alternative (positive or normative knowledge), it suggests to observe and reflect on the organization's past and current strategic issues, while at the same time pondering on the concepts and principles that could best guide the organization's strategy for its next steps.

This choice of perspective entails significant consequences both for the content and for the methodology of strategic research. Content-wise, it calls for a combination of conceptual work (i.e. an effort to clarify concepts, guiding principles, etc.) and of case-based research (i.e. observing real cases that involve specific strategic behaviour and

formulation). Methodology-wise, it calls for flexible iterations between theory and practice through what Kemmis and McTaggart (2005, p. 563) call a “spiral of self-reflective cycles”. As an organization travels through that cycle of strategic evaluation and planning, the researcher accompanies it on parallel tracks of observation and conceptualization. He can use, according to content and circumstances, most tools from the qualitative research toolbox. The important point is that the research be conducted from a position where the researcher endeavours at the same time to understand the organization’s strategies, to contribute to them and to learn from them. Action research is the approach that best materializes and illustrates this position, even though it is in no way a prerequisite to it.

Having thus laid down the principles that guide our work on ENGO strategies, we may now present and discuss our proposals and results to the reader by asking him to follow us through three successive cycles of theory–practice iteration.

First cycle: from conservation biology to action strategies, from action strategies to organizational strategies

Researchers in conservation biology have from the start expressed a need that their work be useful and lead to relevant action in favour of biodiversity conservation (Soulé 1985). Acting in favour of biodiversity, however, amounts to acting for change in a social, economic, legal, political world. Any organization wishing to act successfully for environmentally-motivated change has to choose and implement a strategy that is relevant to its capacities, to the situation, importantly, to the opposition to which it may be confronted. Since the 1980s, our research group has concentrated on research on, and for, such environmental action strategies, through a strategic environmental management analysis approach (SEMA) (Mermet 2011). A major theme of SEMA is that conservation is but one of societies many contradictory concerns, so that the key role in acting for conservation is played by organizations of which conservation is the primary concern or mission, such as grassroots environmentalist groups, scientists concerned by conservation, public agencies of which conservation is the main mandate and, of course, ENGOs. Studying ENGO strategies was a logical step of developing SEMA and we rapidly realized the importance of including not only the environmental action strategies of ENGOs, but also their organizational management strategies into the equation. This led us to conduct the first cycle of our research on this issue (Gaudefroy de Mombynes and Mermet 2003). Its field leg was an exploratory study on the case of the American ENGO Conservation International. During six month, T. Gaudefroy de Mombynes conducted a qualitative survey at the organization headquarter in Washington DC and in its regional agencies in Bolivia and Cambodia. Its conceptual leg was a scanning of the business management literature, looking for concepts that would be particularly relevant to fill-in the analysis of ENGO strategies. This first study identified the necessity to cover and link together four distinct strategic issues: choosing relevant biodiversity conservation targets, deploying an appropriate strategy to push for environmentally-motivated change, formulating and implementing a relevant strategy for the organization’s own development, and adopting a viable strategic position amongst the other organization that co-exist in the biodiversity NGO “industry”.

Second cycle: an action research project with ENGO “La Tour du Valat” (France)

A second cycle of our research consisted in investigating these four strategic issues, how they play out, how they are linked together, and how they can be illuminated by strategic

organizational management research. This was done through a 3-year action research project on—and with—the French NGO ‘Tour du Valat’. Founded in 1954 by Luc Hoffman, this NGO manages its large conservation estate in Camargue (2600 ha), plays a major role in promoting conservation throughout Camargue, and deploys action with a much larger scope as it promotes the conservation of wetlands in the Mediterranean. The ENGO’s strategy was investigated in depth as the researcher was immersed in the organization for over 2 years (Guillet 2011). The organization was at a stage where it was working on the revision of its 5-year strategic plan and also reflecting on substantial changes in its strategy. Three salient issues were (1) the way research-centred and conservation-centred activities were linked together in the organisation of Tour du Valat (at the time, an object of recurring tensions and inefficiencies), (2) a critical review of Tour du Valat’s earlier adoption of “integrated management” as its leading principle for conservation strategies, and (3) the way the 5-year strategic plans laid out for the governance bodies the links between the overarching conservation goals of Tour du Valat and the management of the research activities that are its main contributions towards that goal. Overall, the organisation was in favourable conditions to take time for strategic reflection.

Based on an action research agreement with the NGO’s management, the researcher studied some important projects through which the organization deploys its action in favour of Mediterranean wetlands (Guillet 2015). She also focused on, and participated in the NGO’s work on its overall strategy, as Tour du Valat evaluated the implementation of its 6th 5 years action plan (2006–2010) and prepared its 7th (2011–2015). As is usual with action research, she used a combination of qualitative research methods (Olivier de Sardan 1995). More than a hundred interviews with organization members provided insights into how the formulation and implementation of the action plans played out at all levels of the organization, and how it influenced (or not) field action. Participating as an observer in meetings, in specific work sessions and in the day-to-day activities of the organization also provided important opportunities for understanding strategy at play. The research also involved advisory dialogue with the organization’s managers, testing ideas, contributing to and benefiting from the “self-reflective cycle” that was being played out both in the organization’s actual strategy, and in our process of research on ENGOs’ strategies. In sum, the strategic analysis progressed by articulating study of the implementation of specific projects and of the ongoing strategic planning activity of the organization as a whole. It enabled us to identify leverage for reinforcing the ENGO’s effectiveness. Our action-research intervention accompanied a major organisational change that eliminated the organisational separation between “research” and “conservation” teams, a change that has improved very significantly the organisation’s operation and performance. Our case studies on projects also showed the limits of the “integrated management” template of Tour du Valat’s intervention strategies, not only because of the general limitations of integrated management for conservation (Billé 2007), but also because of negative synergies between “integrated management” theories of action and managerial constraints in “integrated management” projects (Guillet 2015). In terms of strategic planning, our analysis inspired modification in the organisation’s template for program planning, for instance by making more explicit the different levels of objectives. The template now invites project manager to explicit: (i) the ecological objectives (e.g. increase the population of migrating fish), (ii) the operational objectives (e.g. remove physical obstacles to migration and increase the physicochemical quality of the water), (iii) the pathway from operational objectives to result (e.g. expertise and lobbying in the water management comity and work with farmers to reduce pesticides use). The improved strategic planning

template supports more productive exchange between the staff, top management and the governance boards of the ONG.

Beyond such case-specific results, this second cycle of our research confirmed our initial hypothesis on the parallel importance of, and on the tight links between, conservation goals of an NGO, its intervention strategies, its organizational management strategies and its positioning within the conservation sector. It led us to propose the following framework for strategic analysis of ENGOs. It is intended both to guide analysts in their observation and interpretation of an NGO's strategy, and to guide NGO management in formulating and assessing their organization's strategy.

A strategic analysis framework for ENGOs

The framework posits that formulation or analysis of an ENGO's strategy should follow in parallel and carefully link together four different lines of strategic thought and action (Fig. 1).

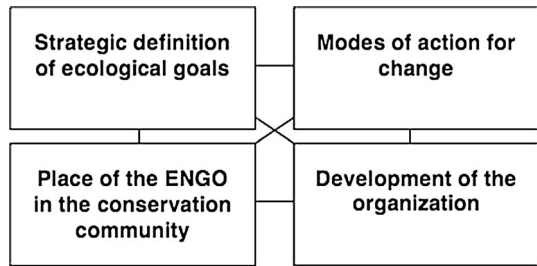
The choice of preferred modes of action for change

First, achieving tangible outcomes for biodiversity conservation requires the ENGO to choose and implement actions with sufficient impact to attain changes in practices or projects impacting biodiversity (Mermet 1991). A great variety of such actions are possible, from activist field actions, to ENGO participation in local, national or international policy committees, from ENGO-business partnerships to raising awareness amongst schoolchildren and others. Three points are key here: (1) ENGOs cannot develop any strategic reflection that would not rest seriously considering their elected set of modes of intervention; (2) an action aiming at change will inevitably generate resistance from other stakeholders. In consequence, action for biodiversity is strategic in the fullest sense of the term (i.e. involves the need to overcome antagonisms) (Mermet 2011); (3) the choice of one mode of action constrains other modes of action and has consequences for other aspects of the organization's strategy.

Strategic definition of ecological goals in conservation action

As suggested in ecological studies on priorities (in term of species, area of intervention, etc.) for biodiversity conservation (Redford et al. 2003), the precise definition and formulation of an ENGO's ecological mission is an important foundation of its strategy. A well-known example is the 'hotspots' concept that guided the first years of Conservation International (Gaudefroy de Mombynes and Mermet 2003; Mittermeyer et al. 1998). This formulation of central goals requires the mobilisation of available knowledge stemming from conservation biology. However, the choice of priorities itself, even if presented based on science and expressed in terms taken from conservation biology, is at the same time the ENGO's choice of strategic positioning on the public scene. In other words, in the context of acting for conservation, choosing conservation goals and priorities is a decision with two quite distinct but not separable faces: one looking towards conservation biology, the other, towards politics and organizations' strategies.

Fig. 1 Framework for the strategic analysis of ENGOs. *source* Guillet (2011)



Development of the organization itself and its resources

Having a clear set of preferred modes of action and well-formulated and relevant goals for biodiversity conservation is essential but not sufficient. To implement actions and reach goals, ENGOs must build and develop their capacity for action. Such development involves human resources (critical mass and skills), financial resources, informational resources, governance (bodies of orientation and decision-making), reputational capital, etc. It is worth noting that if ecological, field management, advocacy (etc.) skills are central to develop actions for biodiversity conservation, skills relative to organisational management, to project drafting and to fundraising are also essential to support those actions. Since effectiveness in conservation action is conditioned by the organization's capacities, it is essential to analyse in depth such organizational aspects, tapping into the large body of literature on general strategic management, but also taking into account the specificities of ENGOs' performance goals and modes of action.

Competing and collaborating: the place of an ENGO in the conservation community

To understand, design or evaluate the strategy of an ENGO, it is also important to consider its place in the "industry" within which it operates, i.e. the rapidly changing conservation community. The rise of the biodiversity sector opens new opportunities for ENGOs but also intensifies competition between them. Competitive and cooperative relationships are at play in the modes of action for conservation chosen by ENGOs. For instance, by choosing strategies that rely more on activist interventions, or on partnerships, or on high levels of scientific expertise, etc., each NGO defines for itself specific roles in the biodiversity conservation community. This differentiation of roles not only helps each NGO find a niche where it can prosper, but can also be very useful for conservation as a whole, when their coming together to work on the same issue is much more efficient than the actions of each organization separately (Mermet 2011).

Application of the strategic analysis framework for ENGOs

Each of these four broad issues is instrumental in the degree of success for strategies, and they present three features: (1) They are inescapable. If one of these issues is inadequately dealt with, the overall strategy of the NGO—and thus its conservation action—is likely to fail. (2) They are irreducible to one another, each of them referring to different types of knowledge, capacities, contexts and actions. (3) They are interdependent. Any strategic choice affecting one of the four issues will constrain or reinforce other choices regarding

the remaining three issues. Therefore, the success of a strategy will depend both on the relevance of choices and actions to take up each issue independently, and on how relevantly these choices and actions are linked together into a coherent, synergistic strategy. To sum up, each of these dimensions must have a sound strategy and adapt and link to one another so that they become synergistic (Fig. 1).

Of course, such a framework is not in itself in any way a strategy for the organization. Its role is to highlight general aspects that have to be included in analysis or in strategic reflection, and help ensure that a relevant set of fundamental aspects of the strategy of an organization are taken into account. Much more detailed specific or transversal elements of the strategy have to be identified for each case study. Depending on issues faced by ENGO, one process or another will deserve a special attention. Starting from the broad questions made explicit by the framework, it is important when applying it also to mobilise analytical resources more specifically relevant for the case at hand, searching management theories, or sociological (e.g. collective action) and political (e.g. advocacy) theories that fit its more specific situation and issues.

It is worth underlining that time is an essential parameter in any strategy, and the category of strategic problems we are discussing here—dealing with change to enhance environmental effectiveness of an ENGO—is no exception. The strategic analysis framework should not be misunderstood as a static picture of an ENGO's strategy. As it posits and links together the fundamental strategic choices ENGOs have to make, it serves two kinds of purposes: it helps produce pictures of the organization's strategy at different points in time; it helps keeping focus simultaneously on the various key strategic issues as their respective transformations influence each other in a dynamic fashion. The case study in the second part of the paper will illustrate these two contributions of the framework.

A last feature of the framework has to be discussed here. Its area of application extends to ENGOs of all sorts and sizes, as long as acting effectively in favour of biodiversity is their core mission. In the present paper, the application of the framework is illustrated through the example of a small ENGO. However, the framework has also been mobilized to study larger ENGOs such as Conservation International (CI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) or Greenpeace (Guillet and Leménager 2016).

For example, CI first built its strategy by basing its choice of ecological goal on the concept of “hotspots”. This target led CI to developing countries where most hotspots are located. The ENGO thus opened agencies in some 30 countries and financed local ENGOs, partly as a way to occupy the field and avoid competition from other big ENGOs (competing and collaborating issue of the framework). By experimenting conditions of action in developing countries (mode of action issue of the framework) and trying to increase the funding it receives from aid donors (Guillet and Leménager 2016), CI in 2011 changed its priority target and reformulated its mission in favour of conservation for poverty alleviation. This change in the formulation of the ecological goal has consequences on the development of the organization itself as it may induce end of support from certain foundation more interested in the hotspot target (CI member, com. pers., 2012). It creates needs for the integration of different skills one of the consequences being the strong turnover that occurred in the last 5 years. This example showcases that the four issues of the framework are interlinked and any movement inside one domain will impact the others, whatever kind of ENGO is under consideration, as long as it has to take up the dual challenge of successfully running an organization, with all this involves (governance, human resources, funding and budgeting, communication, competition, etc.) and of deploying successful interventions strategies in the field and in public arenas, in favour of biodiversity.

Results: the case study of the French NGO ‘Humanité et Biodiversité’

The case study on French NGO “Humanité et Biodiversité” (mankind and biodiversity) that we now move on to present is part of the third cycle in the theory–practice iteration “spiral” of our research, i.e. experimenting with the possibility for other managers or observers to use the framework to guide their strategic analysis for NGOs acting for conservation. This study lasted 7 months (Roulot 2011). The investigator was at the same time a junior member of the NGO’s staff and a student of environmental strategies, collaborating with the other two authors of the paper. This action research setup, combined documentary investigation (past records, current management, communication or governance documents), interviews with members of the organization and external stakeholders, participation in day-to-day management and meetings in which strategy was assessed and formulated, as well as regular dialogue with the upper management of the NGO (i.e. the director and board members) who had agreed to be involved in the strategic analysis. The analysis of documents, the observation as a participant, the interviews and dialogues were mainly guided by the strategic analysis framework presented above, so as to encompass and link the different crucial dimensions of the NGO’s strategy, and also involved an effort to investigate the organization’s past, in order to place its current strategic issues in the context of its longer term dynamics.

Introduction to the NGO and the rationale for its change of strategy

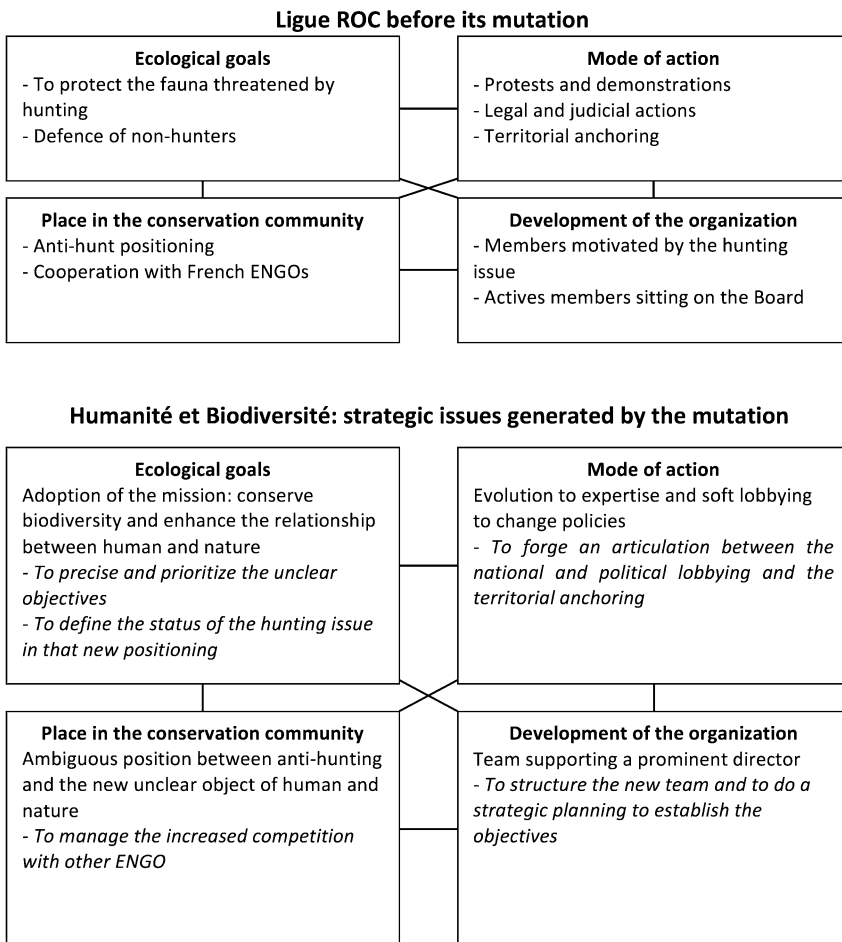
In 1976, a group of naturalists and journalists created the ‘Rassemblement des Opposants à la Chasse’ (ROC) (Collective of Opponents to Hunting), an NGO aimed at defending wildlife against excessive hunting. ROC acted through awareness-raising and communication campaigns and through appeals before administrative courts so as to quash decisions unfavourable to hunted species such as migratory birds or small predators. The organizational structure of ROC was quite simple, with a director and a board of directors in which sat the most active volunteers, among 2000 members.

Over time, two waves of change gradually altered this strategy. After a first move from an anti-hunting to a pro-wildlife position in 2001, the second wave of change—which was the main object of our study—came in 2011, when the Ligue ROC became Humanité et Biodiversité (mankind and biodiversity), finalising and amplifying the evolution that had taken place throughout the 2000s. The reasons for this second change of strategy, which led to a complete modification of the organization’s name and purpose, were twofold.

On the one hand, considerable progress in hunting regulations and practices had gradually been made, whereas the pressures of other forces on wildlife and their habitat had continued to become more serious. As a consequence, the organization broadened the scope of its conservation goals to include a wider set of challenges to biodiversity (i.e. urbanisation, agricultural intensification, and so on). On the other hand, some of the directors of the NGO were in favour of adopting less activist and adversarial modes of actions. They saw more potential in soft, concerted modes of lobbying legislative and administrative authorities. It is important to note that this change in strategy followed a more general movement of French ENGOs over the past 15 years to gradually assume a participative rather than critical role (Canabate 2011). According to the new legal statute of the association, its purpose is now to reinforce the perception and public awareness of biodiversity, and the synergies and inextricable links between humans and wildlife, based on mutual respect between humans and all the other lifeforms.

Strategic issues raised by the change

Our strategic analysis was carried out in 2011 in order to gain a better understanding of the issues and challenges raised by the ongoing changes and help the NGO's management, staff and governing bodies to formulate more explicitly and coherently the various aspects of the new strategy. Our ENGO strategic analysis framework was consistently used as a basis for collective reflection by ourselves and by the NGO's management members. However, since the links between the four dimensions of the NGO's strategy are crucial and multiform, we shall not try to lock our analysis into four rigidly posited steps, but instead present it in a more fluid manner before subsequently summing up our findings using the four-boxes form of the framework for an overview (Fig. 2).



Text in italic resumes the strategic challenges that emerge from the mutation of the ENGO and that have to be solved.

Fig. 2 Strategic analysis of the evolution of Ligue ROC into Humanité et Biodiversité adapted from Roulot (2011)

In our view, the main trigger for the sequence of changes lay in the gradual but far-reaching transformation in the NGO's preferred modes of action for change from activist campaigning in the 1970s, to litigation in the 1980s and 1990s, and to lobbying of policy-makers in the 2000s. The change was quite gradual, with campaigning and litigation continuing, albeit at a slower pace, as lobbying activities steadily developed. This raised increasing problems with the consistency of the NGO's forms of action. Campaigning and litigation work together fine, since they share an adversarial posture and are complementary in terms of generating and utilising pressure and power in favour of conservation. They can, however, weaken an NGO's position with respect to lobbying. The lobbying tactics used by Humanité et Biodiversité rest mainly on a high level of expertise in biodiversity and hunting issues, and on a close, essentially cooperative, relationship with relevant policy-making institutions and organizations, including positive and constructive personal relationships with key officials. Suing the same organizations, and especially publicly campaigning against them, can damage the very basis of this soft form of lobbying.

This has become all the more crucial since 2007, when the Ministry of the Environment modified its policy-making procedures by creating stakeholder committees and giving them a key role in the preparation of environmental policies. A limited number of seats on these committees are reserved for ENGOs. For a French ENGO active at the national level, securing one of these seats is essential if it is to preserve its influence, even more so if its main mode of action consists in lobbying the administration. For Humanité et Biodiversité, keeping its seat on the main stakeholder committees has become a key strategic issue.

The overall result of these changes is that, at the turn of the year 2010, it had become necessary to clarify and strengthen constructive lobbying of policy-makers as being henceforth the preferred mode of action and to review other aspects of the ENGO's strategy that could undermine it. This triggered the cascade of challenges that our strategic analysis helped understand and take up.

- (1) The biodiversity conservation objectives centred on impacts of hunting were now clearly too narrow. The decreasing technical relevance of pursuing them separately from other issues such as habitat destruction became a handicap in lobbying and expert discussions that adopted increasingly wider frames of reference for dealing with biodiversity issues. Also, being focused on such a narrow issue jeopardised the legitimacy of the NGO as one of the few with a seat in key national biodiversity stakeholder committees.
- (2) This in turn created a major problem in the membership, organization and resources of the organization. Many of its members and contributors were indeed motivated mostly by hunting conflicts. The official change of goals and the resulting drop in campaigning resulted in a crisis of membership, as well as clashes in the main governing body, where historical, anti-hunting-motivated members opposed the changes. Beyond the threat to the NGO's resources, this became even more of a problem because the new rules governing the stakeholder committees created in 2007, which are so crucial for its influence on policy, included a provision that bars from membership NGOs with less than 2000 yearly contributing members. Since Humanité et Biodiversité had only just over 2000 members, this resulted in a major strategic dilemma, with the organization being caught between the need to change its mission to be more relevant as a committee member, and maintaining its membership that was partly dependant on its previous, historic mission.

A part of the response to the membership crisis was to look for forms of action that would provide alternatives to campaigning, while keeping the membership busy and recruiting new-interested members. The main initiative here was the launch of 'oasis

- nature’—a program for the creation by individual members of small-scale, private, protected areas.
- (3) From an organizational management point of view, the adoption of lobbying as the preferred mode of action creates new challenges because lobbying national level decision-makers requires specialised skills. As the NGO embarked on its strategic change, much of its capital—in terms of expertise and institutional and personal acquaintances—resided with its director. However, as activities developed further, the need to transfer part of the workload—and thus, part of the skills and immaterial capital—became increasingly clear. Two main steps were taken to support the NGO’s strategy. The first was to create a board of experts to support the NGO with collective expertise. The second was to hire junior staff with the potential to become competent lobbyists. This generated (1) the need for deep changes in team management (developing a team of expert lobbyists is quite different from running a mainly volunteer-based militant and litigation-based organization), (2) issues in governance related to the scientific board gathering more weight and influence relative to the NGO’s board and its militant volunteers, and (3) a budgetary problem, since the necessity to hire staff to implement the new mode of action induces a problem of financial resources, a problem that is made more acute by the difficulty in keeping and recruiting members. Four people were hired in 2010–2011 and the question has become acute of how to finance a new (in a French context) and immaterial activity such as lobbying. The organization experienced an adaptation period during which it worked to diversify its financial resources, essentially by applying for grants from government and agencies. Before being recognized for its expertise and lobbying capacity, the organization experienced 2 years of financial difficulties that led to the dismissal of one new employee at the end of 2012. Its legitimacy and added value has however been increasingly recognized. The part of public funding increased from 11 % in 2010 to 40 % in 2014.
 - (4) The dramatic redefinition of the NGO’s goals also raised strategic issues in its relations with other NGOs in the French biodiversity-policy scene. As long as Ligue ROC specialised in hunting issues, it had a clearly defined niche in that scene, a mission that was easy to explain and generated very little competition. The change to Humanité et Biodiversité came with a double disadvantage: it was quite difficult to communicate the organization’s specific contribution (especially since its mode action, i.e. soft administrative lobbying, was hard to convey to a wide audience), and its mission overlapped broadly with those of other major NGOs in the field. This latter challenge required complex, mixed ‘cooperation’ strategies (i.e. strategies that are at the same time competitive and cooperative (Brandenburger and Nalebuff 1996). Humanité et Biodiversité developed alliances with other NGOs on some topics—e.g. by jointly hiring a junior expert with another NGO (Fondation Nicolas Hulot) to work on business and biodiversity issues—but at the same time it had to vie for room amongst a handful of NGOs with now rather similar goals.

Discussion

We would like to start the discussion by making three points regarding the use of the framework to guide ENGO strategies, as illustrated by the case study.

First, a short summary of a strategic action-research intervention can cover only some aspects of a case. A framework is not in itself a strategic analysis, but only one conceptual tool to support a strategic analysis. There is no shortcut or substitute for the skills and intellectual tools that are required to analyse in-depth an organization's strategic situations, issues and choices, and help the organisation "conduct (its) business on a higher level of awareness" (a phrase proposed by Zartman and Behrman 1977, p. 12). But clear, explicit, shared, conceptual framing does contribute significantly to the conduct, the quality and the public discussion of such strategic interventions and analyses.

Second, changing its main mode of action (from activism to policy lobbying) is a critical choice for an ENGO. To the point when it made it, the organization had a rather implicit way of making its strategic decisions under the largely informal leadership of its director. But the new, more ambitious choices, needed to be argued more formally in order to ensure support from all bodies of the organization (governance, members, staff). Even for a small organization with a charismatic director, there are moments (major changes in strategy, a change of scale, turn over of key players in governance bodies, etc.) when laying down explicit strategic reasoning becomes necessary. The framework supports this by helping make strategic reasoning more explicit and systematic, and shedding light on the consequences of proposed choices for all strategic aspects of the organization. In the case of Humanité et Biodiversité—similar, we suspect, to many small ENGOs that are growing—the main challenge strategic analysis helped tackle was to make explicit strategies that were largely allowed to remain implicit or informal within a very small team. For other organisations, the challenges requesting fresh strategic analysis may be very different, but in our view, they will always require a careful, explicit, joint articulation—as laid out in the framework proposed here—of considerations about running the organisation and about how to intervene effectively in favour of biodiversity.

A third point of discussion about practical ENGO strategy is that any choice made for internal reasons in one strategic domain produces constraints in the others and a renewed need to find coherence in the new configuration. As for external pressures, they also amount to constraints that lead the organization to make new choices that will trigger new constraints. This illustrates the tension between the deliberate and the emergent character of strategy, as discussed in this paper's introduction. Choices are intertwined with new constraints and new constraints with new choices (at least, if there is any strategic initiative at all). Moreover, constraints come in an interdependent but also fragmented manner, as they emerge from internal choices but also from the environment of the organization. A strategic analysis framework like the one we propose here helps to identify, prioritize and manage the set of choices and constraints that have to be taken into consideration and combined to lead the organization into a new coherent configuration.

Beyond discussion of the case study, our claim is that clearly laying out and constantly keeping in sight the four main dimensions of an ENGO's strategies is a useful guide for analysis and reflection, both for the practical management of conservation NGOs and for conservation research. As we have concentrated so far on the former (the practice of conservation strategy), through the case study on Humanité et Biodiversité, we shall now turn to the contributions to conservation research of the strategic analysis framework presented here.

They mostly revolve around interdisciplinary dialogue. In-depth consideration of conservation strategies requires collaboration between natural scientists and researchers and experts from various disciplines of social sciences (Mascia et al. 2003). In this context, the main usefulness of the framework is to focus discussion and interdisciplinary

investigations on those strategic issues that are most relevant for improving the operation and conservation effectiveness of real-world ENGOs.

The strategic analysis framework stresses that action for conservation does not occur in an organizational vacuum, but can only be carried out by real-world organizations, which have to cope with their intrinsic issues and constraints in the same way that all organizations must. We advocate that interdisciplinary conservation research should now concentrate on studying and discussing conservation strategies that realistically take into account the strategic management issues of the organizations that could implement such strategies. We believe the framework proposed here can help guide collaboration of ecology-based research for conservation strategies and of the social science disciplines that participate in conservation research. Indeed, each dimension of the framework calls for interface with, and can guide mobilization of, different disciplines involved in conservation research. The mode of action, for instance, may need, depending on cases, perspective from sociology of organization, public policy or social movements analysis.

We would like to underline that the framework resonates with the concerns of conservation biologists and other natural scientists that reflect on the conservation goals and priorities they propose based on their research, to improve conservation action. The actual relevance of such proposals in terms of conservation effectiveness cannot be assessed as if they were destined to be implemented just as they are proposed, based on science, disregarding the complex organisational and political conditions and difficulties of real-world implementation (Reyers et al. 2010). The relevance of each specific goal or priority will largely depend on the feasibility and effectiveness of the strategies through which the actual operators of conservation action will be able to implement each specific proposal. In other words, formulating new natural-science-based conservation goals amounts to proposing new management strategies for such organisations—especially ENGOs—that will be the promoters or implementers of these goals. Thus, beyond their natural-science-based merits, the design of such proposals has to imply some consideration of their strategic significance for the real-world organisations that may implement them. In our view, the framework proposed here provides useful guidance for that effort.

When they formulate proposals about conservation goals and priorities, natural scientists also position themselves in strategic synergy, partnership, competition or antagonism with ENGOs and other conservation operators. They might ask themselves some of the strategic questions laid out in the framework as, by making proposals with strategic significance, they enter de facto the domain of strategizing for conservation, which is the main business of conservation NGOs.

This should encourage conservation research to mobilise actively strategic management, a discipline that to this point has been all but absent from the conservation scene. Because the interdependences between conservation goals and organizational means are highly intricate—as the example of *Humanité et Biodiversité*, as well as our other case studies, have shown—there is a need for, and room for, specific in-depth involvement of conservation research in strategic management research. Moving forward in that direction will be an ambitious and diversified endeavour. It will have to rest on continued cycles of iteration between in-depth case studies about NGO strategies and more conceptual work for strategic design and strategic management research when both organised action and ecology are at stake.

Finally, neither for strategic management (Martinet 2001) nor for conservation science (Soulé 1985) should research be cut from action. In both cases, the ability of research to guide action is both a condition of its meaningfulness, and a crucial test for the relevance of its content. As a discipline, strategic management has developed over time a well-stocked

panoply of methodological and theoretical resources for operating this combined research-action activity (Eden and Huxham 1996; Avenier and Schmitt 2007). The common quest for research that leads to and supports actual, effective action on the ground, should be a powerful factor in favour of building cooperation between conservation science and strategic management. This requires, reciprocally, new developments in strategic management. Such developments must abstain from transposing directly approaches rooted in and intended for business and the economic world. They must focus instead—as we have done here—on the specific needs and dynamics of organizations that have biodiversity conservation as their core mission and as the organizing axis of their strategy.

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