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The Czech Environmental Movement's Knowledge Interests in the 1990s: Compatibility of Western Influences with pre-1989 Perspectives

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ABSTRACT *The conventional interpretation of the Czech environmental movement in the political science literature contrasts its role as part of the revolution of 1989, which is seen as a spontaneous and local role, with a period of Westernisation in the 1990s. This paper argues, primarily on the basis of interviews with key movement intellectuals, that this interpretation neglects the earlier history of the movement. This earlier history gave the movement a distinctly Czech identity, albeit one that was compatible with many of the Western influences brought to bear in the 1990s. The result was a movement based principally on the assumptions of 'liberal environmentalism', with limited development of more politically radical analyses and arguments.*

Introduction

A number of scholars, especially political scientists, who have analysed the development of Central and Eastern European (CEE) environmental movements in the post-1989 period have identified a trend towards 'westernisation':

The environmental movement in CEE has undergone profound transformation: the movement has shifted from being a mobilising agent for populist protest against the *totalita* of the Communist regime and in its place has emerged pragmatic, goal-oriented professional organisations. Western aid agencies and environmental peer groups have had a strong influence on this transformation. The transformation has brought advantages to environmental NGOs. However, it has also resulted in a **loss of the local perspective**, with its distinct *modus operandi* and bottom-

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up input, and this has impoverished political discourse in the transition states. [Jancar-Webster, 1998: 69; our emphasis in bold.]

Similarly, Carmin and Hicks (2002: 317) conclude that in the 1990s '(t)he Czech and Polish environmental movements continued developing similar structures, with both more resembling Western and other transnationally-linked movements'. On the basis of manifest transformations of the organisational form and function of the movements, this literature also makes the assumption that Western involvement led to equally far-reaching changes in the substantive knowledge of activists (Hicks and Carmin, 2000). With few exceptions (e.g. Rinkevicius, 2000), the existing literature contains little insight into the worldviews, values, ideas and long-term goals of the environmental movement in CEE in the late 1990s.

A few authors (Tickle and Vavroušek, 1998; Jehlička, 2001) have attempted to put forward a more comprehensive history of the Czech environmental movement covering the period from the 1970s to the 1990s. Most of the recent accounts of the development of the Czech environmental movement have focused on the de-radicalisation of the movement in the mid-1990s (Fagin and Jehlička, 1998) and international influences on the movement (Carmin and Hicks, 2002; Fagin and Jehlicka, 2003). Conceptually, this literature is based for the most part on resource mobilisation theory and political opportunity structure approaches. However, it says comparatively little about the underlying beliefs and worldviews of the Czech environmental movement. Our goal is to fill this lacuna. Our experience of events in CEE and our geographical understanding of the way in which local differences have persisted (and should be conceptualised) under globalisation (Massey, 1999) suggest that such an enquiry needs to be guided by a broad sensitivity to cultural differences and an ability to link values and beliefs to political strategy and tactics. Such an approach is identified in the next section, following which our survey and results are presented.

Knowledge Interests and Movement Intellectuals

In carrying out this research, we have been influenced by the approach mapped out over more than a decade by Jamison and his collaborators, since this combines a broad interdisciplinary perspective with clear conceptual and methodological development. Starting from dissatisfaction with the unhelpful divisions of environmental social science, both between disciplines and between US empiricism and European grand theory, these authors have built an approach that overcomes the early division of social movement studies into 'resource mobilisation' and 'identity formation' schools. The key proposal, elaborated in Eyerman and Jamison (1991), is that social movements should be studied in historical and comparative context and with a focus on 'cognitive praxis' – ideas as manifested in action that is part of experimental or emergent countercultures engaged with, and trying to change, the dominant cultures.

Jamison *et al* (1990b) identify three kinds of 'knowledge interest' – cosmological, technical and organisational – and use them to demonstrate that the environmental movement emerged very differently in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. The 'cosmological' dimension consists of worldview assumptions and attitudes towards nature, society and their interrelationships. The 'technological' dimension refers to specific technological issues around which a movement develops, including the articulation of specific concerns in its practical activity. The 'organisational' dimension concerns the movement's organisational paradigm: its modes of organising the production and dissemination of knowledge.

When we designed this research, we had some concerns about applying an approach that had been developed to deal with events in the 1960s and 1970s to events in the 1990s, especially after a period that has been widely seen as one of globalisation. However, Jamison and Baark (1999) not only articulate the stages of development of the environmental movement towards ecological modernisation in the 1990s, but also show that the different geographies, histories, cultures, institutions and political styles of Denmark and Sweden had resulted in ecological modernisation being played out in significantly different forms in the two countries. Jamison (2001) reiterates and extends that argument, adding a discussion of the experience in the USA and pointing to different processes in India. He focuses on distinct national policy styles, cultural biases and movement legacies as constraints on, and resources for, environmental activists.

Within a particular national context, a social movement has to relate to these national styles even while it is engaged in trying to change them. In so doing, 'movement intellectuals' (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 98) articulate the knowledge interests and cognitive identity of the movement in ways that are designed to mobilise activists and appeal to a wider public. Movement intellectuals are distinguished from 'established intellectuals', who – while taking some part in the formation of the movement – are based in official institutions and thus tend to articulate more 'establishment' views (Jamison *et al*, 1990a). Recently, Western European environmentalism has been seen as characterised by a tendency towards ecological modernisation, supplemented by a radical countercurrent of more oppositional groups such as the anti-road protest movement (van der Heijden, 1999); and ecological modernisation itself is seen as varying from weak to strong, depending on the ability of the environmental movement to argue for more critical viewpoints (Christoff, 1996). In such circumstances a higher proportion of environmental experts are likely to be incorporated into business and the state, so the 'movement intellectuals' associated with NGOs face different challenges from those of their predecessors in earlier decades – in particular, a dilemma between the pursuit of greater incorporation and engagement with direct action (Rootes, 1999). This was especially the case in CEE, where the transition was influenced by strong international pressures to move towards sustainable development and the new international norm characterised by Bernstein (2000) as 'liberal environmentalism'.

Investigating the Cognitive Praxis of the Czech Environmental Movement

Although many Czech environmental groups have published their own periodicals at some point in their existence, these have often been irregular, as they usually depended on the availability of grant funding. In the latter half of the 1990s, the withdrawal of grant funding not only terminated *Děti Země*'s (Children of the Earth) magazine *Alternativy* but also temporarily suspended the publication of *Nika*, a bimonthly of the Prague branch of *Český svaz ochránců přírody* (ČSOP: Czech Union of Nature Conservationists) that had played a historic role in the late 1980s. The only periodical that systematically discussed, and deliberately sought to shape, knowledge interests was *Hnutí DUHA*'s (Rainbow Movement) monthly *Sedmá generace* (Seventh Generation). While our research was informed by this and by other existing printed and electronic materials, such as the magazines *Veronica* and *Hnutí Brontosaurus*'s (the Brontosaurus Movement) *Ekolist*, in our quest to identify the contours of the Czech environmental movement's knowledge interests we had to rely primarily on interviews with movement intellectuals.

21 in-depth interviews with leading movement intellectuals were conducted in the winter of 1998/9. Although the main criterion for selecting respondents was their personal saliency within the movement, we are also convinced that (with the possible exception of the Brno-based group *NESEHNUTÍ*,¹ which represents a more radical current) the information and opinions provided by then 21 respondents captures the breadth of the Czech environmental movement in the late 1990s. We spoke to people from a traditional conservation organisation; people from the campaigning groups that form the backbone of the environmental movement at present; people whose activity can be best described as consultancy; the director of an organisation that serves as an intermediary between environmental groups and state central authorities; and a veteran activist whose work at this time could be characterised as applied ecology research, but who was also the presenter of a public TV environmental programme. Our research covered all important centres of Czech environmental activism. The interviews took place in Brno, České Budějovice, Liberec, Olomouc, Plzeň, Prague and Ústí nad Labem. We interviewed people representing 13 different environmental groups.

Although we would not claim that we spoke to all movement intellectuals, we are confident that we managed to interview the majority of the most salient personalities of the Czech environmental movement. The respondents were people who were known nationally (at least within the environmental movement's circles), and who contributed to the periodicals listed above.² In fact, several of them were publicly-known personalities who were regularly present in the electronic and printed media. We did not include those intellectuals who fell into the category of established rather than movement intellectuals, according to the distinction made by Eyerman and Jamison (1991). This function is primarily performed in the Czech context by several university professors. We refer briefly to their works and their influence on the

Czech environmental movement in the section on formative experience (see below).

Our contention that interviewing the Czech movement intellectuals about their knowledge interests would be a pioneering work was confirmed on a number of occasions by respondents. Apart from four interviewees based in Prague, who complained about being approached with requests for an interview rather too often, the majority of our respondents living outside Prague had never been interviewed except by local journalists on topical issues. After the interview, many respondents commented that this was the first time that somebody had shown interest in their worldviews, beliefs and past formative experience.

14 respondents were men and seven were women. 12 respondents were full-time employees of their environmental organisations. The majority of the interviewees turned out to be veteran activists who had joined the movement in the pre-1989 period. The average age of the respondents was 33, and only three were below 25 at the time of the interview. 15 respondents were past members of one or both of the two conservationist groups that existed legally in the 1970s and 1980s: ČSOP (eight) and Brontosaurus (nine).

The importance of pre-1989 formative experience was suggested by the finding that nine out of our 21 respondents completed their full-time education (including university education) prior to 1989. As Kundrata pointed out at the beginning of the 1990s, 'one has to take into consideration the fact that since the 1950s, at least 90 per cent of university graduates has received a highly specialised education not based on a holistic or global approach' (Kundrata, 1992: 32). Moreover, during the Communist period the structure of university education was heavily biased in favour of technical and scientific disciplines. Graduates in these disciplines (if we include medicine) made up about 80 per cent of all university graduates. Of the 19 respondents to our survey who held a university degree or were currently studying for it, seven had a background in scientific disciplines, including four who studied biology or ecology. Of the others, seven were graduates of polytechnics or agricultural universities, two were lawyers, two studied linguistics and one studied sociology.

However, while the availability of social sciences, arts and humanities programmes was growing during the 1990s, only a small minority of students were enrolled in these programmes even in the second half of the decade (the proportion of Czech university students studying humanities and social sciences increased from 2.5 per cent in 1989 to 11.6 per cent in 1997). The 1990s brought little change to this educational experience of Czech environmental movement intellectuals. Only two respondents whose first degree was in either science or agricultural studies felt that they needed to extend their education beyond scientific ecological expertise and were thus completing a second degree in social and political sciences:

I felt that biology or ecology was not enough, that what was needed was to have a background in social science, to understand the political system

for example, because an environmental activist is not only an expert ecologist, but also a citizen who needs to have a knowledge of law... (Interview 12/2/99)

Czech Environmental Knowledge Interests in the Late 1990s: Summary of Research Findings

The Czech environmental movement knowledge interests, as set out below, are a collection of features shared by the majority of our respondents rather than an exhaustive list of elements to which all respondents would subscribe. We do not deny that, as everywhere else, a large variety of ideas and beliefs can be found in the Czech environmental movement. However, at the same time we believe that it makes sense to attempt to identify the dominant knowledge interests of the Czech environmental movement. On the basis of a detailed scrutiny of the transcripts of the in-depth interviews with the environmental movement intellectuals, we tried to determine the fundamental beliefs and ideas with which the Czech environmental movement as a whole could be identified. Organising our findings in a similar way to Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) approach, we interpret the Czech environmental movement's knowledge interests in the late 1990s as follows:

Cosmological dimension: Environmental degradation is usually seen as arising from business activities that are supported by local or national politicians, but this almost never amounts to the identification of certain structural features of liberal capitalism as the causes of these problems. Nature is perceived through a clearly anthropocentric perspective in which it is subordinated to human well-being. One of the main perceived reasons why it is important to fight for better environmental protection is the potential of health risks to current and future human generations arising from industrial pollution or other types of environmental degradation:

The most important thing for us is that we want to make sure that the generation of our children and our grandchildren can live here. (Interview 20/1/99)

Nature itself is seen as being robust within limits: the environment will tolerate a certain degree of damage.³ Scientific evidence and expert knowledge are considered the main criteria according to which environmental disputes should be resolved. Liberal democracy and the market economy are taken to be the preconditions for effective solutions to environmental problems. It is assumed that conversion at the individual level will trigger social change:

There is a coalition of teachers in this town who teach ecological education. I think that everything is in children. I don't think that one

can have big goals in this. The only way forward is to disseminate doubts. (Interview 17/2/99)

A striking feature of the Czech environmental movement's cosmology is that it almost completely ignores social, political and economic structures more nuanced than 'state' and 'market'. Systemic change as a precondition for the resolution of environmental problems is often explicitly rejected:

We do not see the solution in the change of the social system because other systems would also cause [environmental] problems. (Interview 30/9/98).

Technological dimension: Czech environmental movement intellectuals do not demonise technology (with the partial exception of nuclear power), but rather see it as a means by which problems can be either created or solved – thus it is up to people to choose how they will use technology. It can be a partial solution to current problems, along with the employment of market-based and flexible instruments of environmental policy. Small-scale technology is preferred. Technology is seen as being able to play a particularly positive role in the shift towards increased efficiency through the use of renewable resources:

(C)ars consuming less petrol, better insulation of houses – it's not a solution in itself, but it's a partial solution. (Interview 29/3/99)

Organisational dimension: Apart from 'civil society', very few collective actors are recognised. The central components of 'civil society' are taken to be activist groups such as the environmental ones. The members of environmental groups are expected to create a community of friends who can trust each other:

We have had long debates about how to recruit new members. I am a sceptic by nature and hence I have always argued that when people who we do not know want to join us, we should be cautious. We do not know how they behaved during the previous regime and we cannot know what they would do as members of our group. (Interview 20/1/99)

The role desired for environmental groups is that of a mediator between individual citizens, or (preferably) locally-based informal groups of citizens, and the central state authorities. Environmental groups should, it is thought, be consulted by central authorities and treated as partners. Rational arguments and behaviour are preferred to emotionally motivated behaviour:

At the beginning we were those who stand somewhere with a protest banner and at the same time have a few arguments. There was a lot of enthusiasm in it then, but I think that over the years we have managed to

change the image of our organisation in the eyes of the public, state officials and investors so that they are now accepting us as partners. (*Interview 17/2/99*)

The main agents, according to this view, are human subjects. More specifically, the end product of environmental groups' activities at the local level is an individual who, through a conscious value-based lifestyle change, helps to create a more harmonious relationship between society and the environment:

The common denominator of all those things I am involved in is to try to help to formulate and disseminate different values and to identify how these values can influence our way of thinking. (*Interview 11/02/99*)

In the long-term perspective, the solution is in ecological education leading to changed individuals' consciousness. (*Interview 30/9/98*)

According to the emphasis placed on the market economy and the individual, an important role is ascribed to green consumerism guided by self-interest:

We definitely aim to influence individuals. For instance, by disseminating information about washing powder without phosphate. We enclose it to consumers' magazines and newspaper supplements... Consumers should demand washing powder without phosphate. (*Interview 19/1/99*)

Administrative regulation and infinite economic growth are stigmatised. However, the state is seen to have a part to play: it should guarantee that individuals have a choice between environmentally harmful and environmentally friendly consumption. The latter is seen as being economically more beneficial:

Ecofriendly behaviour is also economically sound. It's been proved many times that people respond to economic stimuli very quickly. (*Interview 12/2/99*)

Summary: Overall, the positive view of the market and the emphasis on individual behaviour among movement intellectuals fits well with what Bernstein (2000) calls 'liberal environmentalism'. In our view, Czech environmental movement intellectuals are less prone to radical critique of capitalist society than is the case among Western European environmentalists. There were a small number of individuals in our sample, associated with local protest or with more radical groups like *Hnutí DUHA*, who had more interest in changing social structures; but they seemed to us less radical than their Western counterparts. Some of our respondents indicated that they had beliefs of this kind for decades. These influences, persisting from a relatively distant past, prompted us to look at the earlier experiences of our respondents.

Formative Experience of Environmental Movement Intellectuals

As the above interview material shows, the Czech environmental movement is still largely led by people who rose to prominence in the movement around 1989. They joined and later started to shape a movement that, inevitably, grew out of a much narrower range of influences and inspirations than its Western counterparts. Environmentalism was not allowed to develop as a social and political critique of, or as a visionary alternative to, the existing social order. The most visionary perspective was probably that advanced by Josef Vavroušek, a key movement intellectual both before and immediately after 1989, who placed a strong emphasis on value and lifestyle conversions at the individual level as a precondition of a more harmonious relationship between the environment and society. But other sources, such as the women's rights, radical participatory, anti-nuclear and animal rights movements – as well as various spiritual and Eastern philosophical currents – were not part of the Czech environmental movement's experience.

The influences that were reported as significant included some surprises. When asked to identify influences (other than education and family) that they thought had had a formative effect on their environmental views, five of our interviewees mentioned their 'tramping' experience⁴ (see the next section) and four their membership in the boy scout movement.⁵ Four interviewees mentioned as their childhood formative experience romantic books by authors such as Karl May (a nineteenth-century German writer of books about the US Wild West), Ernst Thompson Seton and Jaroslav Foglar (a Czech writer of books on boy-scouting).⁶

These findings are a reminder that the pre-1989 Czech environmental movement developed in virtual intellectual isolation from the Western environmentalist thought of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. During the Communist period, communication of Czech environmentalists with their Western counterparts and Western academics was non-existent, and Western environmentalist literature was not available. In the early 1990s, Kundrata (1992: 34) noticed that 'even within the [Czech] environmental movement there are few people who have a deep knowledge of the works of the Club of Rome; the names of E. F. Schumacher, A. Toffler, F. Capra and others are almost unknown'.⁷

The 1990s brought only a marginal improvement in this area. Very few classic books of Western environmentalism were published in Czech during that decade. The consequence was that many Czech environmental movement intellectuals were only cursorily acquainted with Western literature on the social and political analysis of environmental problems. This was confirmed during our interviews. The most frequently mentioned foreign environmentalist authors were Erich Fromm (three), Robert Jungk (three), Al Gore (three) and Konrad Lorenz (two). *The Ecologist* magazine was mentioned twice, and *Resurgence* magazine once. James Lovelock, E. F. Schumacher, Peter Singer and Herbert Marcuse were each mentioned once, along with the books *The*

Limits to Growth and *Factor 4*. The only three Czech authors who gained recognition among the respondents were Jan Keller (four) and Hana Librová (four) (both of whom were teaching sociology at Brno University at the time of the interviews) and Erazim Kohák (two), a professor of philosophy in the United States who had returned for his retirement to the Czech Republic. The strong representation of philosophy and psychology correlates with the belief of many of these activists in the decisive role of individual consciousness. The main thrust of Librová's influential book (Librová, 1994) can be interpreted as reaffirming the belief within the Czech environmental movement that changes within individuals are important for the development of an environmentally less damaging lifestyle based on voluntary modesty in consumption.

Our central finding here is that relatively little happened within the movement during the 1990s to compensate for those traditions and influences that shaped Western environmentalism in the past and that were missing in the Czech case. It was quite revealing that many respondents regarded with great suspicion, sometimes bordering on outright rejection, the ideas of *Hnutí DUHA*, the only major Czech environmentalist group that explicitly links environmental issues with the social and political dimension. The current attitudes of the majority of our respondents seem strongly linked to ideas from the 1980s; thus we thought it necessary to go back to their earlier influences in order to find out whether their recollections pointed to significant past events.

Tramps, Brontosauri and Pollution Monitoring: Czech Environmental Knowledge Interests in the late 1980s

Drawing on our own memories of pre-1989 Czechoslovak environmentalism and on historical literature (Vaněk, 1996 and 2002; Kundera, 1992), we have formed an interpretation of the knowledge interests of Czech environmental in the late 1980s in relation to the social and political context of the time. The pre-1989 traditions of the current Czech environmental movement are mainly related to the activities of three officially recognised organisations – *ČSOP*, *Hnutí Brontosaurus* and *Ekologická sekce Biologické společnosti Československé akademie věd* (Ecological Section of the Biological Society of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences) – and to an unofficial movement that was nevertheless tolerated by the Communist authorities: tramping.

Tramping is a loose movement whose origin dates back to the period after the First World War. Its origin is linked to the spread of American values and culture as communicated through literature and films about the nineteenth-century American West (Waic and Koessl, 1992). Tramping has gone through several major phases. Associated initially with the process of modernisation of Czech society, tramping provided a temporary escape from the constraints of the urban, bureaucratic and industrial society. Thus in the 1920s and 1930s it was a moderate protest movement and an alternative lifestyle to bourgeois society. During the decades of Communism, tramping enabled people to find

refuge from oppressive everyday reality with a group of like-minded friends in their log cabins or camp sites.

The culture of tramping, while nurturing positive attitudes towards nature, portrayed nature as being a refuge from society and thus in oppositional contrast to it. Tramping thus separated the social from the environmental. Tramping experience also taught its adherents that it was possible to lead a modest lifestyle with very limited means, at least for several summer days or weeks. Despite the universal familiarity of Czechs with tramping's cultural dimension (music, jargon and romantic literature), its social base was always somewhat limited. Tramping appealed mainly to urban dwellers with a technical orientation in terms of education and employment. It is estimated that up to 50,000 people were part of the movement in the 1980s.

Brontosaurus started in 1973 as a programme of the Socialist Union of Youth, aimed at ecological education; it organised summer camps in which volunteers were engaged in practical conservation work. *ČSOP*, established in 1979 as the successor to a similar organisation called *Tis* (Yew) that was forced by the authorities to disband, had a similar range of activities to *Brontosaurus*. Although some local branches of these two organisations had a more political agenda – in particular if they had links to *Ekologická sekce* or the dissident *Ekologická společnost* (Ecological Society) – the majority of their members were engaged in non-political activities that were known as ‘small ecology’. These activities included cleaning streams of rubbish, looking after protected areas, disseminating knowledge on the functioning of ecosystems and educating young people in the scientific basis of ecology.

The only legal environmental organisation that perceived and discussed ‘big ecology’ issues (decisions on strategic and politically charged issues) was *Ekologická sekce*. This elitist expert organisation (which had 400 members at its peak in 1989) evolved from a group of friends and colleagues, most of whom held jobs in various institutes of the Academy of Sciences. Employment in the Academy meant that they enjoyed privileged access to environmental data, most of which were treated by the regime as secret information. Scientific expertise, access to data and the links of some of the Section's members to the dissident Charta ‘77⁸ made it the most influential and respected group in the Czech environmentalist movement prior to 1989. *Ekologická sekce*'s interpretation of environmental issues was, by and large, confined to domestic issues: the local industrial pollution that was deemed to have a detrimental effect on human health. The international dimension of environmental problems was recognised only in the form of the transboundary effects of air and water pollution, while the global dimension was almost absent.

The key feature of the pre-1989 environmental debate was that ‘environmental problems were primarily viewed through the twin lenses of science and technology’ (Tickle and Welsh, 1998: 157). If the environmental movement wished to enter into a dialogue with the authorities, it had to comply with the given scientific, technical, ‘rational’, ‘apolitical’ and ‘value-free’ interpretation of environmental issues. This type of reasoning did not contradict the official

ideology of social advancement based on scientific and technological progress. The key battle was then to gain access to the data that would enable the environmental movement to mount more effective scientific arguments in communication with the authorities.

However, the only causes of environmental problems that could be voiced were temporary and asystemic failures of Communist economic management. The solution to environmental problems relied (according to this view) on better scientific understanding and required better monitoring and application of a less damaging technology. This line of argument was supposed eventually to persuade the authorities to enforce the already existing regulations based on the emissions reduction principle, and to install end-of-pipe devices. In the understanding of many Czech environmentalists, this was an approach that had resolved problems of environmental pollution in Western European countries in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The Czech environmentalism of the late 1980s was a curious blend of the officially sanctioned moderate current of rational, technocratic and scientific (ecological) thinking on environmental issues with the unofficial romantic undercurrent extolling virtues such as the beauty of pristine nature and individual freedom. In the specific social and political context of the Communist period, this intellectual amalgam amounted to a mildly rebellious protest current; but from a Western environmentalist viewpoint it represented a politically and socially conservative shade of environmentalism. Whereas Western environmentalism emerged at least partly as a 'New Left'-related counterculture, Czech environmentalism represented a moderate counterculture to the existing 'socialist' culture, and leaned politically to the right or the centre rather than the left. As Vaněk (2002: 250) concludes, '(f)ears of repression and dislike for leftwing views gave rise to a particular type of the Czech environmentalist: a cautious person with the ideal of tolerance and democracy and of mild and placid nature'.

In his socio-anthropological analysis of post-1989 Czech society, Holy (1996: 5) argues that the discourses that emerged in the situation of dramatic social change brought about by the post-Communist transformation of society have either explicitly invoked discourses current in pre-Communist Czech society or have been constructed in conscious opposition to the official discourses current during the Communist period. It should be added that both types of discourse had already been constructed before 1989. Furthermore, part of the oppositional discourse was based on juxtaposing the experience of the Communist period with perceptions of the Western liberal democracies. As Vaněk (2002: 250) reminds us, 'ecological damage in Czechoslovakia was perceived as a consequence of the centrally planned socialist system. Czech environmentalists saw the capitalist system and market economy as their hope'. Not surprisingly, therefore, a number of movement intellectuals found it initially difficult to comprehend that the arrival of the market and liberal democracy did not automatically lead to the reversal of detrimental approaches to the environment.

I was really taken by surprise when after the revolution, politicians and economists were attacking the ecological movement, in particular Václav Klaus in 1992 and 1993. It became a sort of dichotomy, in fact economic arguments were used against the nature protectionists. (*Interview 11/2/99*)

(I)n 1990, we did nothing against (the construction of the nuclear power plant at) Temelín. We thought: There is a new government, the government of our heart, democratic, and they will certainly close Temelín down. But a year passed and nothing happened, so we got a bit angry and decided to do something against it. (*Interview 20/1/99*)

The Continuity of Czech Environmental Knowledge Interests

What makes the Czech environmental knowledge interests of the late 1990s distinctly different from those in the West is not something that the Czech movement has in addition to the latter, but precisely what is missing from it in comparison with Western environmentalism. Not only did the environmental movement under state socialism have a shorter tradition, as Herrschel and Forsyth (2001) point out, but it developed under constraints that were not experienced by its Western counterparts. As a consequence, important pre-1990s influences informing the environmental movement's knowledge interests in the West were not part of the Czech movement's experience.

Our central argument in this section is that the interaction of the Czech environmental movement with Western agencies during the 1990s had relatively little effect in terms of compensating for these missing formative experiences. As opposed to the changes at the practical organisational level, such as professionalisation and fundraising techniques, the changes at the deeper cognitive level were relatively minor; and as a consequence, the Czech environmental movement has retained many features of the pre-1989 'Czech local perspective'. We support this claim with two arguments. First, we argue that Western involvement in the transformation of the Czech environmental movement did not significantly enrich the deeper cognitive dimension of the movement, as it generally did not become involved at that level. Second, we argue that there were considerable barriers preventing Czech environmental movement intellectuals from broadening and deepening the movement's cognitive dimension by catching up with the past sources of Western environmentalism. As well as the specific formative experience of the movement intellectuals described earlier in this article, one major barrier was the transitional domestic political context during much of the 1990s.

The Nature of Western Involvement

The demise of the Communist system in CEE broadly coincided with the culmination of the most significant shift in Western environmental governance over the last 30 years, characterised by Bernstein (2000) as a convergence of

environmental and economic norms towards 'liberal environmentalism'. As Bernstein further argues, the 1992 Earth Summit institutionalised these norms in the form of the concept of sustainable development, which predicates environmental protection on the promotion and maintenance of the liberal economic order. This was the approach that Western agencies, whether governmental or non-governmental, started to promote in CEE following the initial meeting of the 'Environment for Europe' process in the Dobříš castle near Prague in June 1991. This was further strengthened later on by the harmonisation of policies and laws in the countries applying for membership of the European Union (EU).

Since the beginning, Western management of transitions in the environmental field (Sloccock, 1999: 155) and Western environmental assistance have relied for their implementation on the involvement of environmental NGOs. The argument usually invoked was that strengthening the environmental NGOs brings a double benefit: as well as enhancing environmental protection, it strengthens democracy through the development of the prime actor of civil society. However, as Pearce (1998) explains in relation to the process of capitalist modernisation in Central America in the 1990s, democracy was not perceived by external assistance actors as an outcome so much as a means of achieving economic development. It was the Eastern European revolutions that gave the concept of civil society a greater respectability and pitched it against the authoritarian and interventionist state. Civil society became a concept that linked the strategy of marketisation with political liberalisation. The attractiveness of this concept lies in the notion that it mirrors in the political realm the principles of self-regulation understood to be the source of economic well-being and growth (Pearce, 1998: 184). Civil society is supposed to be a means of reconciling problems arising from the introduction of the market economy. In this context, the role of environmental NGOs as actors of civil society is to mediate in conflicts arising from the impact of economic development on the environment.

In the Czech Republic, as elsewhere in CEE, the emphasis of Western assistance was initially placed on providing training programmes for environmental activists with the objective of transferring knowledge and practice from the West to CEE. As Lipschutz (1996: 156–7) found in the Hungarian case, the training programmes of US agencies (whether Government or private and non-profit), did not primarily aim to teach environmental groups about ecology, but rather concentrated on transferring the organisational culture of US civil society and the US environmental community in particular. Later, the focus of foreign assistance shifted to the grant funding of NGOs' projects. Partly as a result of foreign assistance, the Czech environmental movement failed to develop its own membership base and became almost fully dependent on external funding. Funders – whether private foundations, Western governments or various EU intermediaries – wanted to see tangible results from their assistance. Thus they typically funded:

- public ecological libraries and their networking;
- ecological advice for the public;
- participation of environmentalist groups in environmental decision-making processes, in particular the EIA process;
- strengthening the co-operation of environmental groups with state authorities and local governments;
- collecting information (e.g. mapping installations of renewable energy in a region);
- publication of information brochures and leaflets (rarely publication of books, either original or translated);
- drafting policy proposals;
- nature conservation (applied ecology) projects.

In short these are activities that can be best described, in the terms used by Waller (1998: 41–2), as ‘integrative’ and ‘issue-raising’ rather than as broadening the movement’s worldview, substantive knowledge or analytical skills.⁹

Many concepts promoted in the Czech Republic by Western agencies in the 1990s conformed to practices to which the Czech environmental movement had become accustomed in its pre-1989 experience. The importance of scientific competence and expertise, for which the availability of data was crucial, was deeply familiar. The consultative, moderate and rational behaviour of the environmental movement in its co-operative relationship with other agencies was also reminiscent of past practices. Similarly entrenched in the Czech environmentalists’ conscience was the belief in education, the dissemination of information and consequent changes in lifestyle as the most effective means of achieving a more harmonious relationship between society and nature. The message of Western actors that positive change can be achieved through changes at the individual level, without the need for a major structural change, resonated with the views held by Czech environmentalists. The earlier association with environmental reform predicated on systemic change should not be seen as a contradiction. The belief that replacing Communism with liberal capitalism was a precondition for the improvement of the environment was not based on a deep structural analysis of the two social systems, but on the perception of the former as ‘unnatural’ and the latter as ‘natural’.¹⁰

The Transitional Political Context

After the short phase of revolutionary ‘movement politics’ in 1990–1991, the major Czech political parties started to pursue the goal of the ‘stabilisation’ of democracy. This effectively meant an attempt to close the political system to all political agents other than the large political parties. This policy particularly targeted environmental groups – which, despite their embrace of the market economy and their belief in the role of individual consumers in achieving their goals, were deemed by the major political parties to represent the biggest threat

to the doctrine of unfettered economic growth stimulated by the introduction of the free market and privatisation. Furthermore, the attempts of some environmental groups to open the environmental policy-making sector to civil society, though still mostly based on scientific and rational argument, were at odds with the tendency to perceive this policy sector as technical and the domain of experts.

What was particularly detrimental to the environmental movement's reputation in the eyes of both the media and the political elite, whether on the left or the right of the political spectrum, was the association of their activities and arguments with 'emotions' and with the 'unnatural'.

Holy (1996: 181–2) observes that in Czech conceptualisation, the word 'emotion' connotes an unsuitable or inappropriate expression of feelings. Its meaning is taken to be in opposition to 'reason', particularly with reference to political rhetoric. Politicians, political commentators and ordinary people alike, commenting on political events and decisions, condemn as irresponsible the appeal to 'emotions' by extremists (whether ultra-left-wing or ultra-right-wing), and negatively evaluate 'emotional solutions to problems' and 'emotional answers to complex questions'.

However moderate the Czech environmental groups were in their behaviour during the 1990s, their goals and arguments were still questioning the dominant social paradigm of the transitional period: development, economic growth and catching up with Western countries in terms of levels of consumption. Thus they were seen as questioning the 'natural'. This experience strengthened the apolitical character of most Czech environmental movement intellectuals, and their increased use of scientific rationality and technical expertise. Czech environmental groups were making a considerable effort to present themselves as not only being independent of political parties, but also as consciously avoiding any possible association with any vested political, economic and ideological interests.

Conclusion

Although we have discovered a great deal of affinity between the knowledge interests of Czech environmental movement intellectuals and those of 1990s liberal environmentalism, we argue that this is not solely due to Western influences shaping the thought of the Czech movement intellectuals. Rather than the Western ideational paradigm replacing the local perspective, a more complex combination of domestic and imported ideas has occurred in the course of the 1990s. With its emphasis on civil society, access to information and the role of lifestyle changes, Western knowledge transfer in the 1990s was largely compatible with oppositional Czech environmental discourse before 1989.

By stressing the importance of influences that originated during the Communist period to the cognitive dimension of Czech environmentalism in the late 1990s, we wish to contribute to the growing body of literature that

interprets the post-Communist transformation as a ‘mix of inherited experiences of socialism and Western-inspired aspirations’ (Herrschel, 2001). This literature (e.g. Herrschel and Forsyth, 2001; Pavlínek and Pickles, 2000) argues that post-Communism is in many respects a unique condition, and that the impact of Western ideas was less far-reaching than has been previously thought.

Czech attitudes consistent with liberal environmentalism did not originate in 1990s Western influence, but in predispositions with a much longer history. This seems to us a vindication of Jamison’s (2000) approach, with its sensitivity to local specificities and political styles (even in the context of close international and even global linkages). The fact that Czech movement intellectuals display exactly the tension that Jamison identifies – between a dominant positivist instrumental rationality and a weaker cultural and hermeneutic rationality – suggests that they, like us, need to pay more attention to oppositional voices if environmentalism is not to become merely the voice of green business.

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Endnotes

- 1 Czech acronym for Independent Social-Ecological Movement.
- 2 To identify our respondents, we used the ‘purposeful sample’ technique (Overton and van Diermen, 2003).
- 3 More than three-quarters of the respondents took this position.
- 4 The English word ‘tramping’ is actually used in the Czech language to describe this distinctively Czech cultural form.
- 5 Given the age of our respondents, only a few of them could actually have been members of the boy scouts, as during the Communist period scouting was legally allowed only between 1968 and 1970.
- 6 Foglar’s books were removed from public libraries during the Communist regime, except between 1968 and 1970.
- 7 A telling story concerns the publication of a semi-official Czech translation of *The Limits to Growth* shortly after its publication in the West. Bedřich Moldan, a leading figure of *Ekologická sekce* and later the first Czech Republic’s post-Communist environment minister, was mainly responsible for this. He recalled bitterly, in an interview for the monthly magazine *Nová přítomnost* at the beginning of the 1990s, that this effort had no impact on Czech environmental discourse as it met with no response.
- 8 Politically, the most controversial act of *Ekologická sekce* was the leaking of the government-commissioned Report on the State of the Environment in Czechoslovakia to the dissident group Charta ‘77 and its publication in the Western media in 1984.

- 9 An example of foreign assistance that was partly intended to extend the knowledge and ideas of the CEE environmental movements is the activity of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation (for details see Carmin *et al.*, 2003).
- 10 Holy (1996) offers an insightful explanation of the superior status of capitalism relative to Communism in Czech perception in the early 1990s. According to Holy, in the Czech conceptualisation, things are perceived either as having emerged naturally or as being the result of deliberate human design. The evolution of human society and its specific institutions is seen as 'natural' in the sense that these institutions cannot be attributed to particular human agents as conscious or deliberate creations. The market economy is thus seen as 'natural' because 'nobody created it' (Holy, 1996: 180). The market economy is seen as being superior to the planned Communist economy, since 'natural' things are generally of more value than those deliberately created.

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