Introduction

Since a handful of environmental activists courageously lambasted the communist regime’s appalling ecological record in the late 1980s, the realm of environmental politics in the Czech Republic has acted as a barometer of political change and the development of civil society in this new democracy.

This study traces the development of the Czech environmental movement, from an embryonic array of dissident activists opposing the communist regime in the late 1980s to a diversified and politically prominent social movement comprising an eclectic mix of organizations, ideologies and action strategies. The book represents the culmination of a decade of research during which time the activities, organization and interactions of environmental movement organizations (EMOs) have been explored from a variety of theoretical and empirical perspectives. At its heart lies an interest in the Czech environmental movement for what it reveals about the multifaceted process of regime change from authoritarian rule to political democracy.

A relatively high degree of environmental consciousness in Czechoslovakia during the late 1980s, as well as appalling levels of air and water pollution, propelled the environmental movement to political prominence at the time of the revolution (Albrecht, 1987; Jancar-Webster, 1993; Waller and Millard, 1992). During the 1990s foreign donors were keen to support nascent green organizations, often over and above other issues or interest groups. As the decade progressed, the EC/EU became increasingly involved in Czech environmental politics largely to ensure harmonization of laws and adaptation to western norms. Nearly a generation after the ‘velvet revolution’, and with the Czech Republic set to be admitted to the EU in May 2004, the perspective retains a capacity to reflect the interaction between political, social and economic processes, as well as the interplay between national and supranational agendas. Today, EMOs in the Czech Republic represent one of the most established and diverse sectors of associational activity. Their political fortunes are inextricably linked to the fundamental political issues of the reform agenda. As ever, not only are they affected by the turmoil of post-communist politics, but their status and interactions actually reflect its contradictions and shortcomings.

The primary academic interest here is thus the process of regime change. To a large extent, the use of the environmental movement is instrumental. It is
employed as a means for considering associational development in the context of concurrent political democratization and neoliberal economic restructuring. As a consequence of its relative size and development as an organized and prominent social movement, the environmental movement has offered the political scientist a valuable lens through which to consider the evolution of civil society in the Czech Republic and the various constraints on associational activity in a new democracy. A central objective of this book is to identify the impact of democratization on the environmental movement and to illustrate the extent to which legacies of the communist period have shaped the evolution of social movements in the so-called ‘democratic’ era.

However, the research takes issue with a number of commonly held assumptions. Firstly, the notion that the process of democratization has been entirely enabling for social movements is challenged. It is argued that the process of adaptation for EMOs and the need to redefine both their strategies and their ideology politically paralysed the movement during a critical period of the transition process. Yet the analysis also challenges the assumption that the problems faced by EMOs can be explained solely in terms of the authoritarian legacy. It is argued that change and fluctuation during the post-communist era have exerted a critical impact on civil society associations and shaped their evolution. Rather than assuming that greater access for social movements and the development of civil society are issues that can be dealt with at a later stage, the argument here is that power relationships established in the early stages of transition set a precedent in terms of social movement access and interaction with elites. The issue of resources as a determinant of EMO efficacy is another main theme of the book. What is argued here is that it is not simply a question of the availability of resources, but of who is providing the funding and the extent to which the agendas of donor agencies are being transmitted to recipient EMOs.

This enquiry into the Czech movement also seeks to add to the broader theoretical discussion regarding environmental organizations in post-industrial societies. The behaviour and development of Czech EMOs under what amount to unique political and economic conditions raise some fundamental questions regarding the relationship between movements, states and capital. Insofar as our current understanding of the motivation, strategic choices and rationale of environmental activism is almost entirely informed by western experience and the developmental trajectory of German, Scandinavian and French EMOs over the past three decades,1 this study will, from the perspective of a new democracy, challenge some theoretical certainties regarding the influence of resources and the impact of the political process on organizational behaviour.
THE ‘ENVIRONMENTAL LENS’: A WINDOW ON DEMOCRATISATION AND TRANSITION

In what sense has the environmental movement acted as a window on political change? The eclectic mix of scientists, citizens, intellectuals and young students who comprised what can broadly be termed the environmental movement of the late 1980s represented the most visible expression of an emergent, or immanent, civil society. The prominent position of environmentalists within the broader dissident community in Czechoslovakia raised questions amongst western scholars regarding the extent to which such nascent environmental organisations represented an embryonic and radical civil society, or whether their apparent political influence and agency in the aftermath of the revolution was merely a temporary phenomena contingent upon the dynamics of the ‘velvet revolution’. For dissident intellectuals such as Václav Havel, their prominence reflected the potential for a truly alternative political and economic model based on social movement politics. The prominence of green activists in Czechoslovakia at this time must also be seen in historical context.

The end of the 1980s witnessed a pan-European interest in environmental protection focusing on issues of ozone depletion and so-called ‘greenhouse’ gas emissions. The support for the UK Green Party at the 1989 European Parliament elections is often cited as evidence of a heightened consciousness of pollution that was sweeping the developed world and happened to coincide with political change in Eastern Europe. This was indeed the year in which Margaret Thatcher declared that the British Conservatives were ‘the true friends of the Earth’ (Rose, 1990: 6). The shock of Chernobyl and a host of scientific reports and enquiries into the health effects of water pollution propelled environmental agendas to the political forefront. The fact that, amongst the peace campaigners, human rights activists and workers of Eastern Europe protesting against the communist order, there were also environmentalists seemed to endorse notions of a new global environmental consciousness.

The important, though often exaggerated, role played by protesters in the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe also served to revive intellectual interest in the concept of civil society and democratic participation (Keane, 1988). The conceptual fusion of environment, democracy and civil society is perhaps one of the most significant and enduring legacies of the East European revolutions. Rightly or wrongly, the events of 1989 have been portrayed as people’s revolutions and the triumph of civil society over the communist state.

For the political scientist interested in citizen–state relations during regime change, the Czechoslovak environmental sector provided the perfect empirical setting for research on the extent to which civil society, war actually...
developing and democracy was being consolidated. Having emerged prior to the collapse of the communist regime to help erode the legitimacy of the old order, the labyrinth of nascent environmental organisations appeared to be flourishing immediately after the revolution and, in 1990, they were by far the most numerous and visible expression of post-communist civil society (Fagin and Jehlička, 1998). The environmental movement that was emerging seemed to be dominated by amorphous organisations advocating radical strategies and solutions with a global political focus. There were also non-political conservation groups and a host of other commercial and recreational aggregations with an ecological focus. As a whole the movement appeared to represent and encapsulate the euphoric atmosphere of the time and momentarily offered a glimpse of an alternative, participatory and movement-based democratic politics.

Yet, in focusing on the role of environmental activists and their adaptation to the newly established democratic order, the political scientist was offered a unique insight into the complexities of democratic consolidation. The constraints of the authoritarian legacy, path dependency and lack of political experience were all reflected in the early experiences of environmental organisations. In particular, the perspective provided a lens on the tensions evoked by the external assistance being offered to Czechoslovakia at this time. Perhaps more than any other issue, the environmental clean-up was attracting international attention and legislative advice, the transfer of resources and tutelage were being promised and delivered by, amongst others, the UN, the EC and various European and US philanthropic organisations. Over time the environmental perspective has enabled a critical evaluation of such intervention and provided an insight into the way tutelage can evolve into dependency and disempowerment. As the decade progressed, it became evident that, not only did the lens of the environmental movement and its interaction with the new political elite have the capacity to reflect the unfolding relationship between the state and civil society in the new democracy, but the issue of pollution and its amelioration also encapsulated so many of the issues and dilemmas of the post-communist decade. For example, notions of opening up the country to foreign assistance, the ‘return to Europe’ sentiment, citizen participation and the efficacy of civil society, and technological change are as intrinsic to the clean-up process as they are fundamental to the entire reform process. Discussions regarding the environment and democracy almost merged as citizens, politicians, external organisations and advisers were united, so it seemed, in their concern about pollution levels in Europe’s newly discovered centre.

However, by the mid-1990s the utopianism and radicalism of Czech EMOs had given way to a desire to be accepted as professional and institutionalised organisations unwilling to challenge the ideological hegemony of the new...
Introduction

consensus. Generally, the era of movement-based politics was over and had been replaced by professional adversarial politics. This altered political climate found expression in the attitude and strategic choices of environmental activists. During the Klaus period (1992–7), the environmental movement was politically marginalized and castigated as an anti-market relic of the socialist era that sought to usurp the liberal individualist agenda on which Klaus’s centre–right Civic Democratic Party (ODS) had gained their mandate. Again the environmental ‘lens’ offered a valuable insight into the politics of this period. The attitude of the government towards civil society and associations and the logic of the new adversarial policy-making culture that dominated the mid-1990s were bitterly reflected in the treatment of EMOs by the Klaus administration. At times during this period the environmental movement seemed to be the main target of Klaus’s antipathy towards the notion of advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) exercising their political voice. What is remarkable is how quickly the political prominence of environmentalists waned. Activists changed from partners of the elite to politically ostracised pariahs in the space of a few months.

Not surprisingly, the demise of Klaus’s centre–right coalition in 1997 and the ensuing changes in the political opportunity structure proved immediately enabling for the EMOs who had been politically excluded and ostracised. The period since 1997 is seen as the dawn of a new era, in which EMOs are consulted as part of a reinvigorated policy process and a ‘westernisation’ of relations between the movement and the state has taken place. However, such a conclusion should be drawn with a great deal of caution. Whilst the interaction between EMOs and the state may appear to resemble relationships in established democracies, the role and function of Czech EMOs is distinctly path-dependent. At a superficial level the situation may reflect western norms, but the specific context in which EMOs operate and obtain funding is a critical determinant of their capacity and function.

Indeed, reflecting back on the post-communist decade from the vantage point of the environmental movement, the impact on EMOs of external involvement appears far more contentious than it did in 1990. Though few would dispute the benefits of foreign donations and assistance at a time when there was little indigenous funding for non-profit organisations, the true effect of such involvement is now more readily discernible. The dominance of ecological modernisation as the ideological basis of environmental policy, the demise of radical protest strategies and ideas amongst the established EMOs and the partnership between business, political elites and environmental organisations that foreign agencies have encouraged and fostered through their funding regimes and agendas are of critical concern not just in the Czech Republic, but elsewhere in the region (Cellarius and Staddon, 2002; McMahon, 2001). The extent to which EU accession was to shape the
environmental policy agenda as well as the activities and function of the environmental movement was largely underestimated. On the threshold of EU entry, the environmental perspective retains its capacity as a valuable vantage point for identifying and assessing the impact of the accession process and prospective membership, and the perils of opening up the Czech economy to an influx of foreign direct investment more generally. The contradictions and paradoxes of the EU’s agenda are nowhere more evident: the Commission promotes growth and infrastructure expansion while simultaneously funding environmental organisations to oppose such schemes. The EU pressures the Czech government to make further cuts in public expenditure and to scale down public administration, simultaneously urging more effective regulation and implementation of environmental standards.

The perspective of the environmental movement has also provided a valuable lens through which to consider the rather vaguely defined stage of the democratisation process referred to by theorists as ‘consolidation’ or ‘habituation’ (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1996). During this stage, it is assumed that societal organisations become enmeshed within the rules of democratic decision making. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that the larger EMOs have indeed become part of the formal decision-making process, this does not necessarily validate the process as democratic, fair or inclusive, nor can it be taken as evidence of consolidation. The later chapters of the present book illustrate the extent to which community-based activists and more radical EMOs are excluded from formal decision-making processes.

The environmental ‘lens’ raises more fundamental questions regarding the theoretical logic and practical relevance of the transition/democratisation discourse for Central and East European (CEE) states. Democratisation theory is based on the consolidation of political institutions and procedures derived from and specific to the experience of liberal capitalism in western Europe. The failings of these procedures and institutions in existing democracies over recent decades, and the political challenges to them made by new social movements and radical ideologies, are conveniently ignored by transition theorists, who, like their development theorist predecessors of the 1950s, paint an especially rosy picture of political democracy for the purposes of export. The structure of power in which EMOs operate, the institutions and procedures of political democracy – the ‘rules of the game’ according to Larry Diamond (1996) – appear incapable of effectively contesting and challenging the supreme power exercised by transnational corporations (TNCs) and the multilateral agencies that defend their interests within ‘democratic’ decision-making fora. That such power is both impervious to the electoral process and beyond the contestation of ‘democratic’ political institutions is reflected in the realm of environmental politics. The more radical elements of the movement stand in direct ideological opposition to the consumption-based dogma of
neoliberal capitalism, yet their marginalisation and the cooption of more moderate EMOs within the hegemonic discourse of ecological modernisation is illustrative of the extent to which the arena of political contestation does not correlate with the true exercise of power in capitalist society and the limitations of liberal constitutional settings for containing aggressive neoliberal capitalism (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Chomsky, 1999).

The belief expressed by some that the changed relationship between citizen and state as a consequence of ‘globalization’ has enabled the opening up of new supranational arenas of contestation is also challenged by the experience of the Czech environmental movement. The capacity of EMOs, whether in CEE states or in established democracies in western Europe, to make use of protest opportunities that have occurred as a consequence of, and in response to, globalization is entirely contingent upon activists having access to resources. For EMOs to contest and challenge the activities of TNCs and to pursue effective protest campaigns on a global scale is an extremely costly business (Newell, 2000). Many have argued that changes in global communications have augmented the capacity of EMOs to challenge the increasingly diffuse and globalised exercise of power (Castells, 1996). Yet, whilst access to the Internet may well provide EMOs with knowledge about campaigns taking place elsewhere and the global activities of TNCs, it does not necessarily enable them to take effective action against decisions that have an impact upon their ‘local’ environment. EMOs who wish to pursue TNCs and multilateral agencies on the global stage require the professional skills of lawyers, accountants, PR agencies and media specialists. Even local branches of international EMOs such as Greenpeace are unable to participate in the ‘global’ events of the parent organisation if they lack the resources to do so.2

The global capacity of the more radical or grass-roots EMOs in the Czech Republic is constrained by the peripheral status of their own government as well as by their weak and non-institutionalised status at home. It is the relatively established political status of western environmental movements that enables activists to be propelled onto the ‘global’ stage of civic politics. In essence, EMOs from powerful states can use their influence over their own national governments and over the TNCs whose headquarters are located within their states as a gateway to exerting influence at the global level. For CEE activists the national context acts as a constraint on their capacity to contest the ecological impact of foreign investment within supranational arenas. The demonstrations occurring in Prague during September 2000 against the World Bank and IMF summit countered the more heady and optimistic claims about the emergence of a ‘global civic politics’ (Wapner, 1996; Lipschutz, 1996). It was western activists with access to far greater levels of resources and experience that dominated and controlled the events. Czech activists, including long-standing campaigners with substantial protest...
experience, were sidelined and quickly forgotten once the World Bank and its anti-globalisation cortege moved on.

At the core of this study is the belief that the perspective of environmental politics retains its capacity to provide a powerful and in many respects unique insight into contemporary political, economic and social developments in the Czech Republic. Indeed, the somewhat contingent link between the pro-consumption and foreign investment agenda of the government, unquestioningly endorsed by all the major political parties, and evidence of a growing culture of activism amongst sections of Czech society concerned about the political disempowerment of communities suggests that the environment as a critical lens will retain its value in the coming decade.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The most immediate task of a study of a national environmental movement is to offer an inclusive and workable definition of an environmental movement. This is not as easy a task as perhaps imagined in the sense that there is a high level of disagreement regarding the inclusion of certain forms of environmental activism within the broad notion of a movement, and whether more institutionalised organisations should inhabit the same movement space as radical non-institutionalised activists employing direct action and unconventional protest strategies. The first chapter of the book will consider such issues in detail, as well as distinguishing different environmental movement types. One of the key points raised within the chapter is that diversity is an important feature of a social movement and the key to its adaptability and campaign fluidity.

The second chapter will consider the dominant theoretical approaches to the study of social movements. It will offer a critical examination of the political opportunity structure approach and resource mobilisation theory, both of which dominate theoretical studies of western social movements and their organisations. This chapter will raise a key theme of this book, namely that the application of theoretical approaches borrowed from western studies to the Czech case must be approached with caution.

The remainder of the book will provide a detailed account and analysis of the Czech environmental movement, tracing its evolution and development from the nineteenth century through to the post-communist period. Chapter 3 will start by tracing the earliest expression of the movement during the latter years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, through the tramping movement of the 1920s and 1930s, to illegal and clandestine political opposition during the final years of the communist period.
The fourth chapter offers a detailed analysis of the environmental movement during the first decade of post-communist politics. It charts the adaptation of EMOs to the new institutional and political context, as well as illustrating the impact of political change on the movement during the 1990s. A number of themes and issues arise and are followed throughout the analysis. These include radicalism versus institutionalisation, submerged networks versus professional hierarchic organisations, global versus local focus, and the impact of resources and foreign donations on strategies and ideology. These issues have shaped the present movement, but also reflect more fundamental dilemmas within post-communist politics. The chapter illustrates the extent to which the movement has altered profoundly since 1990. The main tenor of the argument here is that such change has as much to do with the events and decisions of the post-communist period as it does with the legacy of authoritarianism. The 1990s set precedents and established patterns of interaction between EMOs and the state that have subsequently become institutionalised.

Chapter 5 will consider specific environmental organisations as case studies. The aim here is to illustrate some of the more general observations regarding professionalism, radicalism, the involvement of external organisations, and the impact of funding made in the previous chapter. The final chapter is in a sense an extended postscript, the objective of which is to provide an overview of the environmental movement as of 2003. The bulk of the research for this book was undertaken between 1993 and 2000 and although many of the issues and themes identified and discussed from the perspective of the late 1990s remain pertinent or have in fact become more salient, other aspects of EMO activity have changed. This is particularly true in light of the 2002 election and the Czech Republic’s planned entry to the EU in May 2004. This chapter also paves the way for a more informed conclusion, able to link the historic development and legacies of the movement with the current context of political and economic transformation, and able to reflect on the relevance of theoretical approaches to the study of environmental movements to the Czech case.

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THE CZECH ENVIRONMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF CHANGING ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND AGENDAS

An attempt to understand how the Czech environmental movement has evolved, why specific organisations campaign on certain issues and have altered their behaviour over time, requires a preliminary knowledge of the environmental problems and issues, and the extent to which these have altered...
Environment and democracy in the Czech Republic

since the collapse of communism. Although the link between issues and the
behaviour of social movements is complex, there is a correlation (Della Porta
and Diani, 1999; Doherty, 2002). It is fair to say that environmental
movements – their strategies, internal organisation, relationship with the
public and the state – are shaped by and respond to changing types and
incidents of pollution.

It therefore seems appropriate at this stage of the book to include an
overview of the environmental problems of both the communist era and the
present period, and to consider in particular how economic change since 1990
has affected the physical environment and given rise to new issues while also
ameliorating others. Such information is absolutely critical for a study such as
this that aims to use environmental politics as a lens through which to measure
the impact of political as well as social and economic transformation. Only
with such knowledge can we begin to appreciate the true extent to which
political and economic change has shaped the agendas and ideologies of
environmental organisations in the Czech Republic and fashioned their
strategic choices. Such detail is also, perhaps, worth including here because an
extensive analysis of the changing nature of environmental problems in the
Czech Republic has yet to be published.

COMMUNISM AND POLLUTION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The environmental decay of communist Eastern Europe has been widely
documented by academics since the late 1980s (Slocock, 1992; Waller and
Beyond academia and in the general media, images of polluted villages
choked by sulphur emissions from neighbouring power plants and billowing
factory chimneys bore witness to over 40 years of communist-style
industrialisation. From the aluminium plants of Ziar nad Hronom in Slovakia,
to the polluted towns of northern Bohemia in the Czech Republic, the
ecological cost of communist industrialisation in Czechoslovakia appeared
great (Albrecht, 1987).

Whereas West European states had restructured their economies away from
heavy industry in favour of information-based technology, and by the late
1980s had transferred a substantial amount of manufacturing to the developing
world, the centrally planned economies were unable to make such a shift
largely, though not entirely, because western capitalist states were in control
of the required technology and innovation and were able to restrict access to
the Warsaw Pact countries. The East European states were thus forced to
retain their vast, antiquated industrial plants and energy-intensive production
methods (Dienes, 1974).
In Czechoslovakia, as in Poland and East Germany, the main environmental problem of the communist era was air pollution and sulphur dioxide emissions in particular. Various studies conducted in the early 1990s suggested that the situation regarding air pollution was at crisis point, with figures on sulphur dioxide emissions suggesting that the country was the most seriously polluted in Europe (Slocock, 1992: 32). Such high concentrations of sulphur dioxide were basically derived from industrial production and, to a lesser extent, domestic consumption. Heavily subsidised energy, inefficient production and reliance on brown coal, or lignite, with a low calorific value constituted a disastrous combination that exacerbated levels of ambient air pollution. Various statistics are available that endorse the link between energy-intensive industrial production and air pollution. For example, it was claimed that the ten largest brown coal power stations accounted for over a third of SO$_2$ emissions. Other figures suggested that 87 per cent of total SO$_2$ emissions and 76 per cent of NO$_x$ emissions were derived from 2500 major industrial installations (Slocock, 1992).

However, the problem was not simply the quantity of sulphur dioxide that was produced (though considering the size of the country this was substantial), but the absence of adequate filters and other ‘clean air’ strategies to mediate the social and physical impact of such emissions. While most industrial plants were fitted with electrostatic dust filters, most of these were fitted in the mid-1970s and were no longer operating effectively. Most factories and power stations had no capacity for desulphurisation of flue gases. By the mid-1980s, Czechoslovak citizens were being exposed to an estimated 3 million tonnes of sulphur dioxide per annum, a substantial proportion of which was coming from neighbouring Poland (Russell, 1990: 8–9). Though this was roughly equal to amounts produced in the UK, measures taken in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s to improve air quality, plus the different geographic context, meant that the impact on human health and the visibility of such pollution was far less.

The social, economic and political impact of such high concentrations of sulphur dioxide in Czechoslovakia became increasingly serious for the regime. The main issue became, towards the late 1980s at least, the effects on human health. The increase in respiratory diseases amongst children and adults in densely populated industrial areas aroused considerable concern (as discussed in Chapter 3). There was also the economic impact of illness-related absenteeism, infant mortality, reduced life expectancy and increased medical expenditure. Emissions also had a negative effect on animal health, the built environment (damage to historic buildings), forests and agriculture in general. The exact costs of pollution relating to all of these remain anecdotal as the communist authorities, largely for political reasons, did not gather or make available scientific documentation of this kind. What is available was largely...
gathered by western organisations and academics. Studies and surveys conducted in the late 1980s estimated that between 50 and 60 per cent of forests in Czechoslovakia were dying or severely damaged (ibid.: 12). Rates of respiratory illness amongst adults and children in north Bohemian towns were estimated to be between two and 12 times higher than in less industrially developed areas of the country (IUCN, 1990: 40).

High levels of other ambient pollutants also posed a threat, including nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, ammonia, fluorine, chlorine, volatile hydrocarbons, phenol, hydrogen sulphide, arsenic and lead aerosols. Most of these originated from industrial production, though nitrogen oxide emissions also came from cars, as did lead emissions.

The other major issue by the end of the communist period was water pollution. The problems largely stemmed from poor regulation and inadequate technology, and by the late 1980s the quality of Czech water was deteriorating. The proportion of water deemed unfit for human consumption rose from 47 per cent in 1970 to nearly 60 per cent in 1989 (ibid.: 56). In Czechoslovakia water supplies were polluted by the excessive use of fertilisers in agriculture as well as by emissions from coal mines and other industrial sources. Water pollution was obviously a major health issue. A survey conducted in 1984 and leaked to environmentalists found that only 50 per cent of all tap water in the Bohemia consistently met health standards.4

Soil pollution and, post Chernobyl, the issue of nuclear safety and waste were additional environmental issues of public concern by the end of the communist era. However, generally speaking, it was air pollution that was singled out as the key issue and concern. This was due largely to its blatant visibility (though stagnant rivers and dying forests were hard for the regime to conceal) but also to the fact that it was seen as the direct consequence of poor economic management, underinvestment and excessive production of heavy industrial goods, a large proportion of which were for export to other Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) states, or were produced for Soviet military needs.

THE CZECH ENVIRONMENT SINCE 1990: A DECADE OF ABATEMENT?

The importance of placing any assessment of environmental protection in the context of broader political, economic and social processes is immediately apparent with regard to trends in air and water pollution and waste disposal over the past decade.

Whilst political reforms (democratic political process, more open policy process, independent environmental associations, freedom of information,
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liberalisation of the media) have played a part in ameliorating the environmental devastation of the late 1980s, much of the improvement in air and water pollution can be attributed to the decline in industrial and manufacturing production rather than investment in conservation measures, or the successful implementation of progressive legislation. Some quite extensive new environmental legislation has been introduced, but, as discussed in Chapter 3, its development was stalled during the mid-1990s and implementation has been slow. Indeed, what this study of the environmental movement during the 1990s will demonstrate is that, whilst there exists a plethora of quite diverse environmental organisations that in many respects function in the same way as their western counterparts, political access was heavily restricted throughout the 1992–7 period and it is only recently that EMOs have been involved within the reinvigorated policy process. In a climate of economic austerity it is perhaps unsurprising that there has not been a major investment in environmentally sustainable technologies and alternative energy sources. In some cases foreign direct investment has brought cleaner production, but generally the older polluting industries remain under state ownership.

The case of air pollution illustrates the impact of industrial decline on pollution trends. Though emission levels of sulphur dioxide remain higher than the OECD average, the decline in the country’s heavy industrial output (largely as a consequence of the opening up of the Czech Republic to the global economy and the severing of economic ties with the former USSR) has reduced emissions by approximately 50 per cent, and of particulate matter by approximately 71 per cent (see Table 1). The bulk of emissions during the communist period emanated from brown coal-powered energy plants and heavy industrial production. The decline in heavy industrial manufacturing had an almost immediate impact on levels of sulphur dioxide emissions. However, it ought to be noted that the 25 per cent decrease in emissions of sulphur dioxide between 1990 and 1993 was less than the corresponding 33 per cent decrease in industrial production for the same period (Fagin and Jehlička, 1998: 116; Fagin, 2001). This dispels notions that the reduction has been caused by increased energy efficiency or the introduction of new, cleaner technologies. Indeed, pollution per unit of industrial output remains high and may even have worsened. It also implies that such a reduction is potentially temporary and the trend may be reversed as economic growth increases, as is predicted. Energy consumption per unit of production in the Czech Republic remains significantly higher than the EU average.

The environmental dividend from economic restructuring must also be offset against the deleterious impact on the environment of the growth in consumerism and, in particular, increased car ownership. The number of cars, including vans, in the Czech Republic increased by over 30 per cent to nearly
1 million between 1991 and 1997 (MZP ČR, 1997a: 34; Moldan and Klarer, 1997: 118). Though aggregate data suggest a significant overall decline in emissions of nitrogen oxides from 920,000 tonnes per annum in 1989 to 432,000 tonnes per annum in 1996 (MZP ČR, 1997a: 8), this conceals the true extent of the problem. Levels of nitrogen oxides in urban areas such as Prague, where the increase in car ownership and use is most acute, actually increased between 1991 and 1995, and remain significantly higher than the level for 1989 (MZP ČR, 1997b: 17). The reduction in annual average emission levels for nitrogen oxide can be explained by the regulation of stationary sources and has occurred largely as a result of industrial decline during the early 1990s. Also aggregate data for nitrogen oxides emissions (see Table 1) do not distinguish between stationary sources and mobile sources and, thus, the true extent of the increase in emissions from cars is hidden. Indeed, the impact of the increase in private transport on ambient air quality is perhaps the most serious environmental problem facing the Czech Republic today. The long-term forecast issued by the Ministry of Environment is that there will be a gradual increase in the frequency of occurrence of above-limit concentrations of ozone at ground level and a continued rise in levels of nitrogen oxides despite the increased use of catalytic converters and obligatory vehicle emission tests (MZP ČR, 1997b: 15).

Emission trends for carbon dioxide (Table 1) tell a similar story. Though there has been an overall reduction in emissions since 1990, it is interesting to note that the level for 1996, 886,000 tonnes per annum, was similar to the level for 1985, 889,000 tonnes. There was in fact an increase in emissions in 1991, 1994 and 1996 (MZP ČR, 1997b: 8). The data suggest that there is by no means a significant declining trend with regard to carbon dioxide emissions. With regard to the data on nitrogen oxides, the decrease in emissions is largely a consequence of climatic conditions and industrial decline rather than the

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success of regulatory measures or the introduction of new technologies and strategies since 1989. The case of water pollution reinforces the view that where improvement has occurred this is due to changes in industrial and agricultural production (as a result of marketisation and the opening up of these sectors to foreign competition) rather than substantial investment or policy implementation. Whilst overall surface water pollution decreased significantly between 1989 and 1994 and the proportion of water discharged into public sewers that receives some form of treatment has increased by 16 per cent since 1990 and now equals 90 per cent of the total discharged, such apparent improvements are offset by the fact that despite a reduction in the use of manufactured fertilisers, there was not a parallel decrease in concentrations of nitrates and phosphates, and over a third of water flows remained severely polluted (Moldan and Klarer, 1997: 112). This is particularly alarming in the sense that it suggests that the ecological benefits of industrial decline must not be permitted to obscure the fact that levels of pollution per unit of production remain high or may even have increased (Moldan, 1993; Fagin and Jehlička, 1998: 116; Fagin, 2001).

Of further concern is the fact that, despite an overall reduction in consumption and waste water discharge, evidence suggests that the quality of drinking water has in fact worsened in some regions since 1990 (Moldan and Klarer, 1997: 112). The water system of the Czech Republic requires significant improvement: over 70 per cent of the country’s drinking water comes from surface sources and there has been no substantial improvement in the quality of ground water during the past decade (MŽP ČR, 1997b: 6–8). Most of the waste water treatment facilities still lack the technology to filter nitrogen and phosphorus. Nearly a fifth of the population continue to rely on individual wells for their water supply, the water from which in most cases contains unacceptably high levels of nitrates and bacterial pollution (ibid.: 9).

In sum, any improvement in levels of organic pollution, petroleum products and apparent acidity/alkalinity can be attributed to a combination of industrial decline (particularly sugar mills), a reduction in the use of agricultural fertilisers, and greater precipitation in recent years rather than an improvement in water treatment.

However, it is with regard to the issue of waste management that the impact on the environment of marketisation is most blatantly illustrated. Whilst the successful regulation of hazardous waste emissions from inefficient state enterprises must be acknowledged (tighter regulations and steeper fines have been gradually implemented), the reduction in industrial waste has occurred largely as a result of recession within the heavy industrial manufacturing sector. Moreover, the reduction has been somewhat overshadowed by the substantial increase in municipal waste emanating from public sources and from private households. Despite its various inefficiencies, the supply-led
command economy did not generate the amounts of consumer waste seen in western market economies; there tended to be less packaging and the shortage of consumer goods was a deterrent to the unnecessary disposal of items. However, increased consumerism since 1990 has led to a sustained rise in all kinds of waste. Since 1995 the amount of total waste produced in the country has increased considerably. In 1995, 74 million tonnes of waste were produced (according to OECD methodology) compared with 93 million tonnes the following year, representing an increase of nearly 25 per cent (MŽP ČR, 1997b: 9). This trend has subsequently been maintained. It should be noted that the steep rise between 1995 and 1996 could be explained in part by the introduction of more stringent regulation and registration of waste (ibid.: 55). The bulk of all waste, 56 per cent of which is hazardous waste, is still disposed of in landfills. Though the total number of landfills in operation has declined quite dramatically since 1991, from 10,000 to 380 in 1996 (ibid.), the estimated 7000 waste dumps and landfills, including those no longer used, pose a serious environmental hazard in terms of water and soil contamination (Moldan and Klarer, 1997: 112).

Throughout much of the 1990s, studies of the environment in the Czech Republic, or indeed anywhere in Central and Eastern Europe, focused exclusively on the legacy of communism. The environmental impact of excessive industrialisation, inefficiency, lack of investment and a host of other deleterious aspects of communist economic management and political organisation were seen as the logical starting point for understanding environmental issues and politics. However, nearly a generation since the collapse of communism in 1989, the legacies of neoliberal capitalism on the Czech environment are now the logical and realistic starting point of any analysis of environmental politics. Though the communist legacy continues to exert a profound impact, the new political elite had sufficient time to deal with the environmental issues and put into effect policies and regulatory structures. Moreover, the environmental impact of profound economic restructuring has been substantial and has given rise to a whole series of new issues.

It is with such considerations in mind – the nature of current environmental problems, the extent to which issues and problems have altered since 1989, and the inextricable link between environmental politics and neoliberal economic reform and political democratisation – that this study of the Czech environmental movement is framed.

NOTES

1. See in particular studies by Kriesi et al. (1995).
2. An internal document published by Greenpeace in 2000 outlined the need to rationalise resources within the international organisation on the basis that some local chapters lacked
the capacity to participate in global campaigns.

3. When referring to the pre-1989 period, this is the environment of Czechoslovakia, largely because studies and information related to the federation as a whole. Thereafter my focus is on the environment of what became the Czech Republic in 1993.

4. The survey was conducted by scientists within the Biological section of the Czech Academy of Sciences. They were commissioned to conduct various research into the state of the environment during the mid-1980s, much of which ended up being leaked to activists and foreign journalists.

5. Emissions of sulphur dioxide in the Czech Republic in 1996 equalled 92kg/person p.a., compared with the European OECD average of 36kg/person p.a. (MZP ČR, 1997b: 8).

6. In this five-year period BOD₅ was reduced by 55 per cent, insoluble substances by 43 per cent, crude oil substances by 64 per cent, inorganic salts by 25 per cent, acidity/alkalinity by 72% per cent (Moldan and Klarer, 1997: 112).