



**POLITICS AND THE
ENVIRONMENT IN
EASTERN EUROPE**

EDITED BY ESZTER KRASZNAI KOVACS



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Eszter Krasznai Kovács (ed.), *Politics and the Environment in Eastern Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0244>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800641327

ISBN Hardback: 9781800641334

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800641341

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800641358

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781800641365

ISBN XML: 9781800641372

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0244

Cover image: 'People before coal' action (Warsaw, 18 November 2013). People from around the world gathered in front of Poland's Ministry of Economy in protest of the World Coal Association's International Coal and Climate Summit organised on the sidelines of the 19th UN climate change conference. Flickr, <https://bit.ly/3wumj1P>

Cover design by Anna Gatti

2. The Making of the Environmental and Climate Justice Movements in the Czech Republic

Arnošt Novák

Ever since the environmental movement formed and emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the USA and western Europe, it has been a significant social actor on the national and world stages. It has never been homogenous and monolithic, but has always been a conglomerate of various approaches and trends, tactics and strategies. Often these could be, and indeed were, in conflict with one another. A number of authors see environmentalism as having come in three waves: as a conservation movement from the late nineteenth century, a political environmentalism from the late 1960s and early 1970s, and finally as a form of radical environmentalism that appeared in the early 1990s (Doherty, 2002; Carter, 2007; Saunders, 2012).

The second wave politicised many environmental issues and brought them into general public discourse. Civil society organisations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth also started to use unconventional repertoires of action, such as non-violent and symbolic direct action, to draw attention to various issues such as industrial pollution, nuclear energy, economic growth, or the global dimension of environmental risks. But during the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, the mainstream environmental movement had been de-radicalised and institutionalised (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). Once 'alternative' seekers and critics of a system based on growth, environmentalists transitioned to become fixers of neoliberal systems with the worst excesses. Many dominant actors

within the environmental movement participated in the creation of a seemingly depoliticised environment, where the means of governance, based on a neoliberal consensus, foreclosed political negotiation and discussion through dissensus, different values, practices, and visions of other worlds. Erik Swyngedouw has termed this foreclosure of alternatives “post-politics”, where “[p]ost-politics reduces the political terrain of the sphere of consensual governing and policy-making, centred on the technical, managerial and consensual administration (policing) of environmental, social, economic or other domain, [where] they remain of course fully within the realm of the possible, of existing social relations” (Swyngedouw, 2011: 266).

Critically distancing itself from this development, the third ‘radical’ wave of environmentalism and environmentalists emerged at the beginning of the 1990s (Carter, 2007; Saunders, 2012), when ever-greater numbers of activists reported that organisations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth had limited the space for grassroots participation and decisions, and had become ‘chequebook organisations’ that asked people to contribute financially, on the understanding that organisations would then act on their behalf. This wave of radical environmental activism was characterised by a shared conviction and determination to confront and unmask those who were damaging the environment, as well as by an emphasis on participation in how environmental activities were designed and undertaken (Wall, 1999; Seel, Paterson, and Doherty, 2000).

Throughout heterogeneous Western environmental movements, these changes in environmentalism can be seen as cycles of radicalisation and de-radicalisation. Since 2009 similar cycles have affected the climate movement, and there have been recent shifts towards radicalisation as evidenced by the concept of “climate justice”, which aligns the fight against climate change with the fight for (local and global) justice issues (Cassegard et al., 2017).

By contrast, environmentalism and environmental activities in the Czech Republic have a different historical trajectory from environmental movements in western Europe and the United States. Eastern European (EE) movements have always been inspired by and oriented in relation to Western environmental movements. When the former Czechoslovakia was governed by authoritarian state socialism, environmentalism

consisted essentially of only apolitical, state-sanctioned conservation organisations. These organisations tried, above all, to awaken an interest in the environment on an everyday level through educational activities and minor conservation works such as cleaning up streams and woods, collecting rubbish and scything meadows (Fagan, 2004). “Czech environmentalism in the late 1980s was a strange mixture of the officially-sanctioned moderate current of rational, technocratic and scientific thinking about environmental problems with an unofficial, romantic undercurrent that praised the beauty of untouched nature and individual freedom” (Jehlička et al., 2005: 75). This romantic undercurrent was cultivated mainly in leisure activities, such as tramping, which was a distinctive subculture of escaping into the woods and countryside. These lifestyle activities, tolerated by the regime, coexisted well with a conservation ecology that was based on rational, technocratic and scientific thinking. Both traditions shared a dualistic conception of nature and society and did not present a critique of modernity in the spirit of the Western New Left counterculture, thus preparing the ground for the onset of ecological modernisation in the 1990s (Jehlička and Smith, 2007).

The beginning of the 1990s witnessed in the Czech Republic the formation of two important environmental organisations: the Rainbow Movement and Children of the Earth. These organisations were inspired by the second, political wave of environmentalism led by Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, which made use of a repertoire of protest actions such as non-violent direct actions and blockades, and criticised the accelerated transformation of society towards capitalism at the expense of the environment. In contrast to previous, rather apolitical forms of conservation, these organisations tried to focus on the roots of environmental problems; they criticised excessive consumerism, economic growth, free markets, and connected local issues with global ones. However, since the mid-1990s, a gradual de-radicalisation, institutionalisation and professionalisation of environmental organisations took place, leaving aside more radical tactics and cosmologies (Novák, 2020). Instead of proffering a fundamental critique of consumerism, growth, capitalism and a search for alternatives, moderate changes within the legal system and corrections to the neoliberal model were sought by the same actors who had searched—a

decade previously—for alternative developmental pathways with less harmful environmental consequences. Thus, Czech environmental organisations transformed themselves from alternative seekers to system fixers. From the end of the 1990s until 2015, when the climate justice group *Limity jsme my* (We are limits) was founded, the origins of a third wave of domestic environmentalism took place, consisting of several small, professionalised ENGOs that operated on the basis of a transactional activism without any informal activities, confrontational repertoires or posed challenges to dominant powers, which are the supposed key characteristics of any social movement (cf. Doherty, 2002).

Why this process of de-radicalisation and institutionalisation over more than twenty years? What has caused the reversal of this process? Why can we now see not only the ‘third wave’ of radical environmentalism in the Czech Republic, but also the radicalisation of moderate ENGOs of the second wave? The following sections attempt to explore and find answers to these questions.

Methodology

The empirical basis for this chapter is based on in-depth formal and informal interviews, observations and analysis of documentary materials and written texts. Over the period 2010–2015, I carried out a total of twenty-five in-depth interviews with both present-day and former activists from Czech environmental organisations. I also drew on my past involvement in environmental protests: with this relatively extensive experience, I made it subject to analysis within the framework of memory work (Berg, 2008) and as a basis for further research, which enabled me to increase my theoretical sensibility towards research questions and interpretations. Although I have never been a member of any ecological or environmental organisation, since the early 1990s I have been associated with the counter-cultural anarchist scene that occasionally overlapped with ecological activities, especially during the blockades of the demolition of the village of Libkovice due to coal mining, and in protests against the completion of the Temelín nuclear power plant. I thus took part in a range of environmental protest actions from the beginning of the 1990s. Since 2014, my research has been based

primarily on ethnographic methods and participatory observations of meetings and protests, as well as informal interviews.

My experience as an activist allowed me to take a look at my research topic from an angle that is different from the more common approaches found in the Czech academic field. Moreover, it permitted me to ask questions that would not occur to an academic lacking an embedded, grounded experience. It also positioned me well to comprehend the context of information obtained from respondents and to analyse materials throughout the research. This work thus documents my position at the interface between two distinct worlds: first, the academic, as one with its inclination towards an objectification of knowledge and its requirement for researcher detachment from the object under investigation as well as from his values; second, the activist, where all actions are encumbered with values and emotions, who is much less concerned with describing the universe than with changing the world. I drew inspiration from British social geographer and Earth First! activist Paul Routledge who came up with the 'third space' approach that "implies inappropriate(d) encounters between academia and activism where neither side, role or representation hold sway, where one continually subverts the meaning of the other" (Routledge, 1995: 400).

The third space as critical engagement has allowed my role as an academic and my role as an activist to constantly disturb one another constructively, with one critiquing the other, cultivating criticism and greater or different understandings of the explored topic, and in a way rectifying the 'unfeeling' detachment of an academic on the one hand and the 'passionate' preoccupation of an activist on the other.

Czech Radicalisation from the Early 1990s

The beginning of the 1990s witnessed, in the Czech Republic, the formation of two important environmental organisations — *Hnutí Duha* (Rainbow Movement) and *Děti Země* (Children of the Earth). Traditional conservationists during late state socialism ascribed the cause of environmental devastation to central planning systems and directive state government, and looked with hope towards parliamentary democracy and the market. In contrast, new organisations were much

more critical of the latter and open to alternatives. *Děti Země* did not aim to form a common worldview—instead, the group was an open platform for meeting and seeking alternatives to societies actively destroying the environment and using up finite resources. People of different kinds gathered under its flag—from ecologists and counter-cultural people (mostly punk), to anarchists. On a political level the group was somehow moderated: it focused on local contested issues around, for example, transportation or extractivist companies without engaging in explicit systemic critique. The group was moderate but at least at the beginning of the 1990s, it occasionally made use of blockades and demonstrations:

We didn't want to change a system, but focused more on influencing politics of the environment. We wanted to change a system *attitude* but we did not care much what kind of system it was. Obviously, a dictatorial regime does not like even these politics, so there were limitations (an interview with one of the founders of *Děti Země*, 2011)

Děti Země represented a classical environmentalism of the second wave, which contained, as in the West in the 1970s and 1980s, rudiments of a radical environmentalism, wherein systemic alternatives are sought and proposed, for example as critiques of consumerism, industrialism or humans' domination of nature. Above all, the group wanted to play the role of 'watch dog'. This is where it differed from *Hnutí Duha*. Jakub Patočka, one of its founders, represented a charismatic authority with a certain vision that he tried to enforce through the movement. Because of him, *Hnutí Duha* brought a political dimension into the Czech conservation-dominated environmentalism. Arguments over ecological topics started to be politicised in the public and media sphere, instead of being grounded only in scientific and technocratic expertise (Lee, 1995).

For example, *Hnutí Duha's* journal *The Last Generation* published pieces about new topics and sometimes radical opinions: thematised repeatedly were the activities and the negative impact of huge financial institutions and trans-national corporations on local communities, nature and the environment. The journal also transmitted news and information from Western environmental magazines such as *Third World Resurgence*, *The Ecologist* and *The Resurgence*. *The Last Generation* therefore constituted an important source of new topics for discussion

within the Czech Republic, where economic growth, the rising power of global corporations, and consumer society were criticised along with party-political systems.

The Rainbow Movement introduced new repertoires of actions such as 'happenings', direct actions, blockades and demonstrations. Mainly because of these activities, the Rainbow Movement was labelled by the media as a 'radical organisation'. Inspired more by Greenpeace than radical ecologists from Earth First!, the Rainbow Movement and other Czech environmental activists operated with a liberal notion of direct action (Duckett, 2006). Duckett characterises liberal direct action with three features: first, it is understood to be the ultimate possibility at hand when all other 'accessible' options have failed. Second, it is an efficient form of lobbying and tactics through which one can bring media and public attention to issues, and thus create pressure and involve new actors in decision-making. Third, liberal direct action needs external, 'democratic' legitimation and should therefore be used when state offices or other institutions break laws or act irresponsibly (Duckett, 2006: 155). In addition, liberal direct action is strictly non-violent and to a certain extent symbolic, because "...direct action is not a solution, neither a goal on its own, but it is a unique instrument in how to bring attention to topics" (Monbiot, 1998: 185).

It was precisely this 'liberal' concept that was implemented in the Czech environmental movement and systematically developed in trainings, movement materials, everyday praxis and in the biggest environmental campaigns of the 1990s, where the identity and public image of the environmental movement was formed. Here, I refer specifically to campaigns such as those to save Libkovice village from destruction owing to coal mining at the turn of 1992 and 1993, or those against the end-phase of the construction of the Temelín nuclear power-plant between 1995 and 1997. In both campaigns, and especially in the case of Temelín, many different worldviews such as ecological, subcultural (mostly punk), and anarchist merged as people met during blockades. However during these actions, the instrumental use of politics in the form of the liberal concept of direct action clashed with the anarchistic concept of direct action, which has also been one of the characteristics of third wave radical environmentalism. The blockades at the construction site of Temelín were organised by the leadership of

Hnutí Duha, which used direct action as a form of lobbying, and as a way to bring media and public attention to the issue. However, the blockade was organised hierarchically, and people were left feeling that they were an “infantry under command” (an interview with one of the former activists of *Hnutí Duha* and a later activist of *Nesehnutí*, 2011), without possibilities to participate in decision-making. Moreover, the leadership of *Hnutí Duha* wanted not only to dominate the blockades but also to be hegemon of the anti-nuclear movement. This instrumentalisation of direct actions, and generally the battle between environmental groups for dominance and power, created tensions with more anarchistic segments of the anti-nuclear blockades.

With regard to the conservation-focused environmentalism from before 1989, *Hnutí Duha* and to a lesser extent *Děti Země* became Czech versions of ‘radical environmentalisms’. In this context, these groups used a non-conventional repertoire of actions such as blockades anchored in the liberal notion of direct action (no matter how conventional these actions were in the West as part of a moderated second wave), because under the previous authoritarian state socialist regime, this kind of action—and even common street demonstrations—was banned.

This environmentalism brought to a rapidly transforming post-socialist society a strong critique of consumerist society, of trans-national corporations, and economic growth, as well as questions and new ideas about the valuation of nature itself. Precisely in this context the activities of these groups, and especially of *Hnutí Duha* in the first half of the 1990s, could be understood as radical. In a society under transition and intent on ‘catching up’ with the West, these environmental actors sought to carefully seek alternatives—not openly and directly to capitalism, but rather to consumer society. ‘Catching up’ in this time applied not only to the economy and governance, but to environmental thought, critique and practice.

De-Radicalisation

As mentioned above, during big ecological campaigns such as those at Libkovice or Temelín, many different kinds of people merged, including anarchists and punk rockers. Even though it was common at the beginning of the 1990s for environmentalists and anarchists to co-operate,

from the end of 1993 onwards, Jakub Patočka, the charismatic founder of *Hnutí Duha*, started to strongly disagree with coalitions formed with anarchists because he disagreed with their ideas, alternative cultures (he considered punk to be an electronic noise) and their “unclear relation to violence” (Patočka, 1993). There was also a very practical reason for this refusal to cooperate: anarchists were much stronger in numbers than *Hnutí Duha*, and they could conceivably have overtaken the movement as an ecological flagship for their own anarchism and taken it in an anarchist direction, thus changing the entire remit and objective of environmentalism. This threat was likely the real reason to “recall certain distance and differences” (Patočka, 1999: 20): from the mid-1990s, Patočka started to build strong boundaries between the Rainbow Movement (and thus the entire environmental movement, in which the *Hnutí Duha* was about to play a hegemonic role), and the anarchist movement. In the 1990s, anarchists were one of the few opponents of skinhead youths’ racist violence and were willing to confront them violently in the streets. It was mainly due to these clashes, portrayed by the media as clashes between two gangs, that they were called violent. In addition, together with their criticism of the state and capitalism, they were labelled as left-wing extremists by police and the media, but also by some of the environmental NGOs.

Jakub Patočka defined on behalf of *Hnutí Duha* and the ecological movement in general why it was unacceptable to cooperate with anarchists — the main reason was that anarchists had an unclear relationship to violence, whereas the ecological movement was strictly non-violent. There were also other kinds of arguments apart from the violence question, but the friction was seen to focus mainly around practical issues. When anarchists took part in *Hnutí* actions, no matter if they acted violently or not — and I do not remember where they were violent — they were put on notice that their participation was not welcomed (interview with activists from *Hnutí Duha*, 2011).

Another tension was produced by the internal hierarchy and non-democratic structure of the movement, combined with its authoritarian leadership. This became evident in the hierarchically organised blockades of Temelín. Patočka’s rejection of anarchists led to a reaction from the anarchists, who started to distance themselves in turn from *Hnutí Duha*, and the whole NGO sector. In the mid-1990s, a dogmatic version of

social anarchism became stronger and stronger and contributed to firm boundaries between environmentalists and anarchists. Groups such as the Federation of Social Anarchists started to promote an opinion that refused any cooperation with environmental and non-governmental organisations and labelled them, together with anarchists willing to cooperate, “collaborators”: “The task, [...] is foremost to untie every relation with democratic, ‘green’ collaborators, because it is precisely these organisations that bring anarchists to the edge of a cliff” (PW, 1998: 3).

Structural factors strengthened these boundaries as well. After the victory of Václav Klaus in the parliamentary election of 1992, environmental organisations started to be perceived as a brake that was slowing down, or preventing, the country from catching up with the West. The winners of the Velvet Revolution were gradually grouped on the side of losers: this process culminated in 1995, when these groups were put on the Ministry of Interior’s list of extremist organisations (Fagan, 2004).

It was important for non-governmental environmental organisations, to start to prove their non-extremist positions by stressing their modesty, as their reputations were fragile and problematic considering that they had previously—albeit briefly—partnered and linked up with, through donors and media image orientations, anarchists officially labelled as extremists. Environmentalists actively distanced themselves by emphasising their non-violence and their constructive approach from within the system. Greenpeace Czech Republic decided for example to follow a strategy that emphasised scientific argumentation and expert knowledge at the expense of emotional presentations (Jehlička, 2009) from this time on:

Hnutí Duha started in those times to advance lobbying methods as well as a strategy of cooperation with some parties. The movement published recommendations around which party to vote for and which to avoid. During lobbying for laws, personal ties emerged. And the common argument was that when we cooperate with anarchists, there is no chance to advance lobbying (interview with an activist from *Hnutí Duha*, 2011).

Distancing from the anarchists and a refusal to cooperate with them became part of the self-disciplining that environmental organisations

undertook during the consolidation of liberal capitalism in the country. Even though placing such groups on the extremist list actually helped to normalise their existence, as they did not perceive themselves (nor act) as challengers of the status quo, it did not prevent a discourse of environmentalism as a threat to freedoms and economic development from emerging (Klaus, 2007; 2009).

One can trace the shift within the *Hnutí Duha* agenda from more radical alternative seekers to 'system fixers' to between the years 1997 and 1998. In 1997, the movement stopped organising blockades of Temelín and direct actions generally. Their self-presentation in annual reports changed as well. Between 1995 and 1997 one could read that industrial civilisation was unsustainable, that economic growth was an undertaking to be criticised together with a particular vision of 'progress', and that non-violent direct actions were legitimate. The goal of *Hnutí Duha* at this time was not to give rise to shallow, inconsequential changes, but to highlight and withdraw from the roots of systemic problems, to challenge and change societal values away from consumption to frugality, and to enable societal change through the promotion of localised, deliberative decision-making processes closer to people affected by interventions and decisions, wherein local communities should be empowered and the importance of economic aspects mitigated by other relevant considerations.

The change in reports come from 1998—the first year that *Hnutí Duha* did not organise or take part in the Temelín blockades, and instead adopted a lobbying strategy. The first sentence from the report modified and made clear the new aims of the organisation, stating that its goal was to advance nature's recovery, to change people's values from narrow-minded consumerism towards a democracy of engaged citizens. *Hnutí Duha's* efforts came to be concentrated around everybody living well on Earth. Another year later, aims to change values of people and society were replaced with aims to make efficient and realistic acquisitions that would enable limitations on and decreases to pollution. One can still read about system arrangements, but no longer in the context of unsustainable society and civilisation trends, and rather in the context of reforms of mineral mining charges, reforms required to a packaging law, or as part of the liberalisation of the electricity market (Binka, 2008: 136–37). Thus, the Czech environmental 'movement' through *Hnutí Duha* as

hegemon definitively moved away from a politically-supported basis of negotiation, discussion and dissensus to consensual post-politics within a post-socialist version of neoliberalism. This trajectory was similar to their inspirational patterns of second wave environmentalism, but it lasted for a shorter time.

The Czech environmental movement thus went through a similar cycle to western movements in the '90s, albeit with a delay: from radicalisation to introducing nature into politics, to institutionalisation, de-radicalisation and co-optation of the movement by the capitalist status quo. The difference was that no 'third wave' radical environmentalism subsequently replaced it, and instead of a multi-dimensional social movement, several mainstream, professional advocacy ENGOs focused on lobbying and negotiating with the state administration and the commercial sphere became dominant after 2000. This consensual depoliticisation was enhanced in 2004 when the Czech Republic joined the EU, as the EU urged a particularly technical approach to the environmental agenda. Thus, laws to protect nature were not an outcome of compromise as a result of mobilisation and pressure from below, but from above, predominantly from Brussels by means of bureaucratic directives.

'New Wave' Radicalisation Post-2015

This state of affairs changed around 2015, when the *Limity jsme my* (LJM) movement was formed. This began with campaigns and protests against coal mining, and in 2017 the LJM organised the first climate camp through mass direct action to occupy a coal mine. LJM was predominantly formed as a result of activists' experiences in German climate camps organised by Ende Gelände. They represent an example of radical climate movement activism, by which I understand the struggles for "System Change, not Climate Change" as referring to the need to overhaul the political and economic system that fundamentally gives rise to climate change (Temper, 2019).

The climate camps and activities of LJM not only emphasised non-hierarchical horizontality and a repertoire of activities that focused on mass direct actions, but also the adoption of a system-level critique that tried to politicise environmental issues and the climate crisis by aiming



Fig. 1. Direct action of LJM in 2017 (occupying the mine). Photograph by Majda Slámová (2017).

at the systemic nature of the effects of climate change and the ways in which it was connected with political power and the fossil fuel industry. The movement began to reunite people from different backgrounds, including anarchist and counter-cultural ones as in the first half of the 1990s. In contrast to the previous era, much more effort was put into capacity-building to create a non-hierarchical grassroots movement. An important role in the intermingling of different milieus was played by *Klinika*, the autonomous social centre in Prague, which at the time of the formation of *Limit jsme* served not only as an inspiration for radical activism, but as an important space for encountering these different milieus (Novák and Kuřík, 2020; Novák, 2021).

In their manifesto they wrote:

We are part of a global movement [...] We feel solidarity with people mostly affected by climate change and ecological problems. We are aware that ecological problems cannot be separated from social and economic issues [...] We work non-hierarchically, we do not have bosses, we are independent of political parties. [...] We stand for direct action. Radical politics, which intends to solve deeper causes of social problems, has never been successful without direct action [...] Direct action is our main,

although not exclusive, means of changing and mobilising society [...] We want to change the system, not the climate!" (Manifesto LJM, 2017)

To a much greater extent, the new environmentalism is aligned with the anarchist concept of direct action, however, it is not understood instrumentally. An anarchist direct action is not primarily instrumental, but a goal and a value in itself:

Direct action is not only a tactic; it is an effort of people to enforce control over one's life and to participate in social life without the need of mediation or control from the side of bureaucrats and professional politicians. Direct action places a moral commitment over a positive law. Direct action is not the ultimate possibility, when all other possibilities fail, but it is a preferred way of action (Doherty, Plows, Wall, 2003: 670).

Unlike the 1990s, the contemporary movement's organisers are not burdened with the dogmatic reasoning of a 'pure' radical politics and are able to think much more strategically. For this reason, they are able to cooperate with mainstream ENGOs even if they disagree on broader issues or tactics. When the government set up a coal commission (to talk about the end to and transition away from coal), where the commission's composition favoured the fossil industry, ENGO representatives decided to accept the invitation. LJM criticised this decision, but at the same time accepted their own invitation as they reasoned that it was a route to putting even more pressure on the commission from below (which is a common strategy with moderate ENGOs).

Through capacity-building (often with the cooperation of moderate second-wave organisations such as Czech Greenpeace or *Hnutí Duha*, as they use their infrastructures), LJM have also mobilised more people, with a growing number participating at the 2018 and 2019 climate camps. In March 2019 Czech high school students took part, for the first time, in a large number of strikes that helped bring the issue of climate change into the public sphere. Several founders of the Czech 'Friday for the Future' strike had previous experiences with LJM's climate camps.

The year 2019 was important because, as in Great Britain, the Extinction Rebellion (XR) movement originated and organised several civil disobedience actions. Unlike LJM, which focuses on blockades of fossil fuel infrastructure and system-based critiques of economic growth or occasionally fossil capitalism, XR have chosen a different

strategy. Specifically, they have focused on blockades around individual transport aimed at disrupting people's regular daily routines and thus forcing them to take an interest in the climate crisis, particularly as XR target the effects and influence of fossil corporations and their associated infrastructure (mines, powerplants). XR have also chosen a different communication line. Their moralising arguments mention consumerism more and focus on rousing and motivating individuals into action and participation. This corresponds with their tactics of blockading car and bus traffic in Prague. This differing strategy has stirred up frictions within the climate activism movement in the Czech Republic and provoked disputes about tactics and strategy. In contrast to the '90s, this has not led to exclusionary disagreement and differing trajectories between groups.

Thus, in 2019 a climate movement that is more than just environmental has emerged. It is not only centred around a few NGOs that function according to the principle of transactional activism. Besides climate camps and movements trying to articulate a radical system critique and re-figure society for climatic equality, new organisations are emerging. Secondary school strikes such as Fridays for Future (FFF), which appeal to and target the government and key decision-makers on the issue of climate change, or the Czech branch of XR, combine a moralising tone with an occasional apocalyptic undertone. Together with NGOs like *Hnutí Duha* or Greenpeace, these are beginning to constitute a movement that is diverse in terms of climate change causes, analysis and potential response strategy. LJM are striving to break post-political conditions and to re-politicise the topic of climate change and instigate mobilisation from below: their grassroots political activism mobilises predominantly younger people without previous activist experience. XR, through their deliberate depoliticisation and lack of engagement with 'left' or 'right' politics, and their adoption of moralistic and apocalyptic argumentation, are able to mobilise people of diverse ages as well as those without any prior experience of activism.

All environmental groups share an inspiration by and continuation of the practice of environmentalism and protest tactics from abroad. LJM were inspired by the German Ende Gelände as they try to re-shape the inspiration to fit the Czech context. They use tactics such as mass direct actions in white overalls and adopt a strategy that focuses on

fossil infrastructures, combined with systemic criticism, and as a result of its post-socialist context, without strong or explicit critique of capitalism. Secondary school students are picking up the threads and example of Greta Thunberg and FFF abroad, as are Czech XR from their UK founders. Some XR participants label themselves as a branch of the English founders; others find re-shaping XR's concept from the English to the Czech context quite schematic and unproblematic. Nevertheless, this orientation to foreign environmentalism helps us realise the extent to which these differing strands of the present climate movement relate to politics. While LJM represents activism that is not state-oriented (as they are beyond the state) as they try to formulate alternative political visions by their actions (degrowth, democratisation of power engineering and climate justice), FFF and XR are much more state-oriented as they target, address, and invite governments to act. This approach arguably threatens to keep solutions to the climate crisis within the boundaries of the present capitalist status quo. As FFF also argue that we should abide by the assertions of scientists, they contribute to the further depoliticisation of the climate crisis as they reify and re-frame it as a technical problem. Like XR, the depoliticisation of knowledge-making systems and proffered scientific 'solutions' displaces alternative visions of social organisation as they emphasise and elicit fear, apocalypticism and moralising around individuals' behaviour.

In any case, 2019 has brought remarkable activity and change to within the environmental and climate movement, which is becoming a major social player once again. These developments have given rise to a space in which debates and conflicts around environmental futures may be newly, differently, and deliberately negotiated. One might say that in 2019, the environmental movement and the climate movement have become a social movement (Doherty, 2002). It has a consciously collective identity, with activists acting partly outside political institutions, using protest as one of its forms of action, and is characterised by un-institutionalised networks of interaction as mainstream institutions are rejected by large parts of the movement so as to better challenge dominant forms of power.

It is currently a movement with great momentum and potential. Despite their confrontational repertoire of action (which has not previously been very popular within Czech society) such as the



Fig. 2. Blockade of main roads in the centre of Prague, action of XR in 2019. Photograph by Petr Zewlakk Vrabec (2019).

occupations of mines, strikes and blockades, climate groups have garnered public support. According to a survey from December 2019, sympathy for high school climate strikes in the Czech Republic slightly outweighed those who disliked them (36% vs. 33%); sympathy for the *Limity jsme my* initiative was significantly more positive than negative (37% vs. 28%); and only in the case of Czech Extinction Rebellion were respondents significantly more unsympathetic (49%) than sympathetic (28%) (MEDIAN, 2019).

Conclusion

Based on these insights and review, it is possible to say that the composition of environmental activism has changed from a narrow, topic-based, and rather apolitical conservation approach during the era of state-socialism, to a brief, politically-inclusive upswing that examined the possibilities of a consumerist-free market society at the beginning of the 1990s, to its deradicalisation towards the end of the '90s when environmentalists became 'system fixers' of the post-socialist version of capitalism. Subsequent activism around climate change re-opened what could be debated, negotiated and done, and has today brought about

radical critique. Debate about systemic change is conducted increasingly in the public sphere together with a non-conventional repertoire of civil disobedience and direct action, as both these approaches embrace a more participative activism.

There are several possible reasons to explain why this long-term process of de-radicalisation, institutionalisation and de-politicisation has been reversed by a cycle of radicalisation and politicisation. There are some external structural reasons, including a question of agency and also the interplay between these factors. Climate change is increasingly understood not only as an ecological, but also as a social, problem. The contemporary third wave of environmentalism in the Czech Republic is more akin to a social-ecological movement that refuses and disputes depoliticised environments that originate from technical, managerial and consensual administrations and experts (cf. Swyngedouw, 2011). Second, after the failure of the Copenhagen COP in 2009, some moderate organisations radicalised and shifted their focus towards the concept of climate justice. The Czech Greenpeace and *Hnutí Duha* (as part of Friends of the Earth International) were part of this international debate and shift. Third, neoliberal hegemony collapsed in the country after the financial crisis of 2008–2009. The protests against the austerity politics of the right-wing government in 2011 and 2012 in the Czech Republic were a manifestation of this collapse. Subsequently, a new generation of young people, especially at universities, has been brought to politics through these protests. After the 2013 fall of the government, many became politicised and continued their protest activities within the environmental and climate justice movement.

These factors and events together mean that radicalisation and politicisation of the movement is not only due to political opportunities and windows, but is also a result of the agency of individuals and groups and their perceptions and strategies to communicate the existential threat and urgency of modern environmental crises and challenges. These have culminated in the intentional creation of a different kind and way of doing politics.

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