

# Images of Nature as Designs for Czech Post-Socialist Society

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The environmental conflict about the construction of a large cement factory in Tmaň, a small town South of Prague, bordering the nature protected area of the Český Kras, embodies some of the central features of post-socialist society: the privatisation of state-owned firms by foreign capital, the emergence of citizen initiatives, the formation of new democratic structures on the local level, and the creation of a public sphere through independent media. The projected construction of a large cement factory and the intensification of quarrying close to a nature-protected area intensified a public debate about the projects for post-socialist Czech society. Discourses about nature became the projection plane for expressing different visions of the world. The images of nature were thus not only tools to think with, but also points of reference for action (Geertz 1975). Nature conservation and limited resource use entered as new elements into the debates that had opposed concepts of planned and market economy. Differences of worldviews and projects for society that went beyond the divide into capitalist or socialist ideas took shape and became visible. The environmental conflict on the local level made somewhat diffuse political views held privately by the citizens more radical and also more articulate as they entered the public realm.

The landscape around Tmaň was not only a lived-in space; it also became a medium, in which projections were made visible, for the development of Czech society after the big changes of 1989. The issue at stake in the debates about the intensification of quarrying and the construction of a large cement factory, became a normative one. The question was ultimately, what role should man play in his/her (natural and social) environment after the end of real-existing socialism. What has been achieved during the years of centrally planned industrialisation and raw material extraction? What choices should be made for the future? How should citizens be able to influence them through the new democratic structures?

I will analyse the arguments of the proponents and opponents of the project and examine what ideas about society the images of nature recreated and nature preserved evoke. I will then show in what larger historical and political context these ideas inscribe themselves and how they are negotiated and transformed in the local political context.

## Preservation and Creation: the landscape

Approaching Tmaň from Beroun climbing up the hills of the Český Kras one is suddenly struck by the sight of a majestic hill cut in half by an imposing quarry. In front of it a dust covered limestone factory stands in stark contrast to the lush meadows and fields. The air over Tmaň is heavy on certain days as dust from the quarry and limestone factory settles on houses and gardens. The wind carries the noise of lorries, rock crushers and conveyor belts. In the valley to the right, Tmaň has grown into a small socialist town. Prefabricated housing blocks have risen in the midst of family houses and farm-yards. Some of them have been built to accommodate the workers and employees of the projected cement factory. Now the workers and engineers of the quarry and limestone factory live here. In the 1970s, when the project of the cement factory was first sketched out, it was to become the biggest in Czechoslovakia and to stand on top of the hills to be visible for twenty kilometres around.

In 1992 the limestone quarry and the adjoining limestone factory were sold to a consortium of a large German firm Heidelberger Zement and a Belgium multinational Lhoist. Heidelberger Zement proposed from the beginning to build a large cement factory, which would transform low quality limestone into cement. The foreign investors reduced the socialist project somewhat and projected to build it on a less prominent place next to the limestone factory. The project went ahead at first without arising the interest of the public. The conflict was sparked off when the owner of a weekend house in the area heard about the project. He launched a campaign against the German investors (Souček, letter of September 1993). A citizen initiative emerged in the villages surrounding the quarry and opponents to the project of the cement factory were elected there in 1994 as mayors. Regional and national media, national and international environmental organisations, politicians and lawyers followed the case with great interest, as it became the testing

stone for the new environmental impact assessment, that had become a law in 1992 (Law 244/92 Sb).

For the workers in the quarry and limestone factory who settled in the area in the 1960s and 1970s and members of families that had practised limestone burning on an artisan basis for generations the project of the cement factory was a late accomplishment of plans that had been cherished in socialist times and had never been completed because of lack of finances. For the families that have worked for generations with limestone, mining it in small quarries and burning it in wood and coal fired ovens at the back of their houses, the sites of the now disaffected quarries were part of their points of reference. They knew about the quality of the stones, the different locations where coloured stones could be found and the buildings in Prague and Beroun that have been decorated with them. The big quarry Čertovy Schody and the limestone factory have been their main employer throughout most of their lives. Devoting their attention to the selection of different layers and qualities of limestone, finding places where to safely dynamite rocks, transporting lorries full of crashed rock they had a deep attachment to the quarry, where they made their living. They underlined that limestone extraction and burning was an old tradition in the area. Limestone was their economic past and future, the source of wealth that had made these villages more prosperous than many other villages in the Czech Republic. To limit quarrying and to renounce the project of a big cement factory seemed absurd. It meant for them going back behind the beginnings of this industry, to return “under the thatched roof and in the black kitchen”.

Their view was expressed by Jaroslav Horaček the official chronicler of Tmaň, one of the inhabitants whose lives have been closely enmeshed with the factory and the quarry. He worked in the factory as an engineer for over 25 years. When he showed us the quarry and the factory, he remembered the different stages of its installation and pointed full of pride to the technological improvements made by the multinational company. He evoked the image of a space covered in deep dust, factory chimneys spitting out clouds of smoke and people moving stones and gravel like ants with shovels, scrapers and brooms.

Today, he affirmed, “they just sit in front of the computer, in front of the TV screen and that’s it. They have transmitters and that’s it and glass fiber cables and today you won’t see anyone here” (Horaček, interview 19.6. 2000). Exhalations have been reduced to a large extent. The sky over Tmaň was clearer than he used to be ten years before. For Horaček the landscape dominated by the quarry was a space turned to the future, to improvement and progress that was man-made.

Those opposing the construction, on the contrary, evoked with nostalgia the past when the quarry was not yet functioning and the landscape around Tmaň intact.

“The middle generation remembers the time, when in this place the factory of the big quarry was not yet built. It used to be a lovely place, just as if it was created specially for nature lovers. And what has remained of that used to be romantic spot? Dust and gas hovering over the landscape, discarded machine equipment from the factory, left to its rusty fate, tires from the heavy trucks Belaz under the embankments on the plain of Kotys, dying pine-forest in the areas under embankments and scattered heaps.

Nature whether animated or inanimate should not be devastated without reason. The negative impact of the quarry and the limestone processing could be certainly diminished. We cannot afford to keep destroying the nature anymore. However we also have to resign ourselves to the fact, that we will never be able to return the spot of erstwhile beautiful nature that I described to its original state. This is unfortunately the reality.” (Zach, in *Obzor* December 1992: 9-12)

František Zach, the editor of the *Obzor*, the local newspaper of Tmaň, depicted the landscape he had lost, when the big quarry was opened and the limestone factory built, as a place full of memories of living people. The pensioner Zach, who spent his time digging through local archives to reconstruct the local history and loved to go for walks in the forests surrounding Tmaň, remembered the pub Podskali where people used to meet and the hunters’ hut of the Tmaň hunting grounds. Local industry there was small-scale and idyllic, a mill, and a fishpond. The beautiful rock formations attracted people from the cities. He remembered the times that have passed since the Nazi occupation in 1939, as a flow of destruction that carried away first the people, then the beauty of the landscape. First the Gestapo deported the miller because he had been hiding a Jew on

the premises and was discovered. Then the communist times brought with them the closure of the mill in 1948. When the quarry was opened the old pub was pulled down and the water of the fishpond used to build the new factory building.

As hard as the destruction of the idyllic place, the beautiful rock formation, the flowers in spring and the woods, was for Zach the loss of historical reference that went with it was just as hard. He was in fact not opposed to the activity of quarrying as such. Part of the pride he took in the landscape was in fact also linked to the precious stones extracted from it. When put to good and reasonable use he even welcomed the quarrying to a certain extent. He repeatedly mentioned that a stone taken from the hill above Tmaň, where the quarry now is, the *Zlatý Kůň* (golden horse) was chosen together with stones from all over the Czech and Moravian lands to form the symbolic foundation in 1868 of the National Theatre (*národní divadlo*), the symbol of Czech nationhood. For decorating the reconstruction of the national theatre more stones from near Suchomasty, the red stones from the Červený Lom (red quarry) were used. This area is now part of the land assigned to future limestone quarrying.

For Zach the landscape around Tmaň was a “living process” (Ingold 2000:1998) of which he was a part with his memories and actions. When he spoke about it he remembered himself as part of it. He told of walking with his future wife through the lush valley that was later to become the centre of the quarrying activity. He explained how he became an active member of the initiatives struggling to prevent the building of a cement factory next to the quarry (Zach, interview 25.11.1999). His engagement with the landscape was multifaceted: emotional, political, esthetical and also physical. The air that he breathed, the dust that settled on his skin, the noise of excavators, grinders and lorries affected him physically.

Other inhabitants of Tmaň could identify with Zach’s perception of the landscape. He became the spokesperson for the environmental citizen initiative *Zlatý Kůň* (Golden Horse named after the hill that was to be removed through quarrying). The other opponents to the cement factory and quarry came mostly from old peasant families whose land had been forcibly integrated into agricultural co-operatives in communist times and that was now restituted. Opposed were also the owners of weekend houses and commuters working in Prague and Beroun who had come to settle in the area because of low prices of houses and land and because they appreciated the beauty of the landscape. This group claimed that with the building of the cement factory real estate would lose value in the area. The amount of quarrying would increase even further and the landscape would suffer irreparable damages and would be lost for future generations. There were serious health hazards involved for the population, the project was over-dimensioned and led to the squandering of Czech resources. In short, the German investors were exporting a dirty technology and destroying the beautiful landscape in a way that they would never dream of doing at home (Souček, letter September 1993).

The opponents of the quarry presented themselves as idealistic and altruistic, with a disinterested concern for safe-guarding nature. Thus the spokesperson of the citizen initiative Suchomasty, Vratislav Bina noted:

“What I got as a base, when I was young, when I went into nature, when I went to Šarka (a recreational area close to Prague) to look at the little flowers, when I collected the wounded little birds and took them home and went to the breeding station to have them healed, I caught something important and this is why I want nature to stay for my kids.” (Bina, interview 27. 8. 2000)

Bina offered a sentimental view of nature as a moral space that taught man to behave in a responsible and compassionate way toward his natural and social environment. He posed nature as primary to man. Man as originating from nature owed it a certain humility. He saw himself as a sort of Don Quichote defending nature against its enemies be they communist or capitalist. The communist project of industrialisation – so he claimed - continued in an unbroken fashion in market economy to “conquer nature”. This meant, the capitalists operated on a short time basis enriching themselves at the expense of future generations. Bina complained that the speed of exploitation and depletion was faster than in Communist times although the immediate effects of pollution were less as the foreign companies were able to invest in air filters and noise reduction.

The two images of “nature recreated” and “nature preserved” that the advocates and opponents of quarrying expressed, match up with the convictions they hold about what aims should be pursued for the best of the village. Both factions in the village claimed to get involved

collectively for what was best for the villagers and for the environment but disagreed intensely about the objectives they wanted to achieve. To sum up the two positions: those who encouraged the building of the cement factory and further quarrying were convinced that it would help develop the rural economy, provide the villages with financial resources and lead ultimately to the creation of a new beautiful man-made nature. On the other hand those who opposed the project regarded it as a “white elephant” that would destroy for ever the beauty of the landscape and its precious natural resources. Both visions had their roots in Czech history and in relationships between man and nature that go back even before socialist times.

## **Nature in Socialism and After**

To assume a unity of man and nature was the foundation of Marx’ historical materialism. Marx maintained that the history of man was always also a natural history and that nature was shaped historically through the creative actions of mankind (Marx 1978:43). Through work man regulates and controls his physical metabolism and acts as a natural force on the substances that he transforms for his livelihood (Marx 1977:192). The preservation of nature in a state untouched by human action was not part of Marx’s thinking. Marx was thus not worried about the transformation of nature through human agency, as change in the state of nature was constant in the process of natural evolution. Nature is changed through the action of man but man himself changes thereby his own nature and develops his potentials. The way in which man uses the natural resources depends on the manner in which production is organised socially. Capitalist production according to Marx develops the techniques and the processes of production by destroying at the same time the sources of wealth: the land and the worker (Marx 1977: 529). The Marxian approach to nature or to society has no moral connotation (Marx 1993: 236). Socialist orthodoxy equated historical materialism with hard science (Wright quoted in Ojeili 7) and in these terms the relationship between man and nature was determined by necessity not by morality.

Socialist ideologues maintained after Marx that environmental problems were only a problem of capitalist society. As Richta, an influential Czech ideologue stated in the 1970s “socialism in contrast to capitalism creates the conditions for altering the natural environment in a purposeful and planned way, because the central leadership and the planned economic and social development make it possible to realise the interests of the whole society and to prevent the destruction of the natural environment” (Richta quoted in Vanek, 1996:22-23). The advocates of socialist industrialisation fell back onto the dichotomy between society and nature. They shared two concepts of nature that were both contradictory and complementary. The first one regards nature as a resource to be used and exploited by man for the well being of human society. The second concept represents nature as animated by a vital force, that perpetuates nature even against and in spite of human action. The two concepts were complementary as the exploitative attitude to nature enshrined in the first concept was reinforced by the belief in the self-healing force of nature included in the second. Only if one assumed that nature would be ultimately capable of regenerating itself was one justified in continuing its destruction.

The first approach, to use nature as a resource or predatory naturalism (Descola 1996:97), was linked to human fascination for technology, to the mechanisation of the world. It acquired its full expression with the forced industrialisation of the primarily rural Soviet Union. The driving forces of socialist industrialisation seemed to emanate no longer from nature but from human inventiveness, used to transform the substances that nature offered, according to man’s interests. In short, nature was used for production. Nature came to be valued mainly by its ability to satisfy human needs and by providing the raw material and energy necessary for producing goods to be sold and bought. The growth of production and the ever increasing acceleration of turnover from the naturally existing raw material to the object fit for human consumption to the rubbish heaps of discarded objects and leftovers came to be seen as synonymous with the idea of progress.

After the Second World War, the Czech Republic was following the model of the Soviet economy that took it for granted that the growing domination of nature by man was the very measure of humanity’s advance. It put the emphasis on heavy industry, raw material extraction and high-energy production and consumption. In the ideal of a rationally planned economy, nature was a resource that had to be exploited in an optimal fashion through the development of the means of production. The resources had a cost, but the destruction that the depletion of these resources occasioned was not accounted for. The socialist planners acknowledged the relative scarcity of available resources only because the means of production to exploit them were not

sufficient, but they took for granted their ultimate availability. Industrialisation in the socialist countries was for this reason particularly blind to the ecological consequences of its massive construction of a rather archaic industrial system based on iron and smoke (Hobsbawn, 1994:261). To realise the project of socialism the destruction of whole landscapes was justified by it serving a higher political goal. The socialist planners seemed to have harboured in their majority a magical belief in their own boundless capacity of creation – as independent from natural limitations (Verbeek 1998: 99). One result of this “high growth at all costs” strategy was enormous ecological damage (Moldan 1997: 108-113). By the 1980s, Czechoslovakia was left with one of the most degraded environments in all of Europe with severe air and water pollution, acid rain, inadequate water treatment, dying forests and expanding open cast mining.

The second concept of nature evokes a clearly non-human dimension. It is tied up with the notion of an almost metaphysical force of nature that inhabits mystical forests and can be evoked in animistic rituals. In Central European romanticism, nature mystically mirrors the social world that draws its energy from it if it is to survive. Nature has autonomy of its own. A force drives it that has its own inherent morality, apart from human artifice (Berglund, 1998:103). The idea of the force of nature is present throughout the history of industrialisation, when it is depicted either as a danger to human society or and often simultaneously as a source of energy. Productive activity becomes a fight with the forces of nature that have to be tamed, outwitted and that constantly attempt to escape human control – be it through global warming, mutations or disease. There is also the conviction that the exploitation of nature will be palliated by its own self-healing capacities. The assumption of the boundless force of nature liberates man from the responsibility for his own deeds: whatever man does to nature, nature will repair it. The belief in the force of nature becomes thus an argument for both the advocates and the opponents of industrialism. Whereas the advocates of unlimited growth of industrial production take for granted the capacity of nature to absorb the consequences of human interventions, the opponents fear that the destruction of wild nature might ultimately lead to the destruction of vital natural energy and ultimately of human society itself.

For the opponents of the productivist socialist regime to withdraw into nature meant also to remove oneself from the control of the omnipresent socialist state. The Czech tramping movement that existed all through the Socialist period as a counterculture to the dominant socialist one, developed an almost religious attitude to nature in stark contrast to the dominant materialist culture. Tramps returned to nature as to the sources of pure humanity unadulterated by urban civilisation. Nature was seen as a force more powerful and creative than human designs. In the manifesto of tramping that one of the founders of the movement, Bob Hurikan, published in 1940 and that was republished immediately after the Velvet Revolution in 1990; he lays down its foundations:

“Tramping distinguishes itself from these “admirers of nature”... To the young, tramping showed the way of coming back to nature, and thus to pure humanity. This was often a way out of the bars and pubs full of smoke. To the old ones it gave again new happiness in life. Without hesitation I claim and repeat that the one who understands the true nature of tramping becomes an important factor in our national life, our beautiful land. Because to raise healthy, noble diligent youth is the most important question of our nation. (Hurikan 1990:11)

Prevalent was a tradition of seeing nature as a vital force that gives back strength to man who has been tired out by urban civilisation. The social world obtains its life energy from the natural world. Return to primordial values such as courage, honesty, generosity were strong currents of the tramping movement from the beginning of the 20th century, that continued during the communist times in unsupervised communities in the depth of the forest.

From there the much more conventional fashion emerged, to build small, in the beginning mostly wooden, huts (chatas) in beautiful nature spots and to spend much of ones time and energy in improving and embellishing them. “Nature” was here a tamed and orderly second nature for civilised man. This attitude is found in the environmental current of social ecology, which claims that human beings have already created second nature out of nature and they have thus a moral responsibility for what they have created. “Our capacity for compassion obliges us to intervene in the evolutionary process of first and second nature and to render them a rational and ethical development. To become human is to become Nature rendered self-conscious.” (Bookchin quoted

in Humphrey 2000:260). Many of the local environmental conflicts were sparked off in the 1990s by the owners of these secondary residences, sometimes against the interests of the local population. Their desire to protect took the guise of an ideology which extended to wild species and natural landscapes the type of sensibility and behaviours already experienced in relation to certain domestic animals and in the development of pleasure gardens (Descola 1996: 97)

Open criticism of socialist industrialism became louder in the 1980s. Critics pointed out the ecological consequences of a system of economic planning that in order to achieve its aims pretended to control the lives of people, to exploit their workforce and health as it exploited the natural resources and destroyed the landscapes. At the end of the 1980s mass protests broke out in North Bohemia against the destruction of landscapes and villages in the coal districts and the heavy pollution in the industrial towns. The protests could not be easily classified as anticommunist or pro-capitalist, although they put into question the rationale behind the paradigm of central planning. Their subversive potential lay in the fact that they radically claimed the right to show things as they are and to point to problems of pollution and destruction that the communist regime systematically embellished. The large support that these protests enjoyed in public and the relative indulgence of the political authorities led in 1988 to the creation of the first two independent environmental organisations, *Hnutí Duha* (Rainbow Movement), and *Děti Země* (Children of the Earth) by very young activists — some of them were still in their teens. As they had been before the Velvet Revolution among the most outspoken critics of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia they were awarded a high degree of popularity in the first years after the system changed. The high degree of popular support has diminished since, but ecological conflicts still receive a lot of attention in the media, quite in contrast to the small numbers of people they involve.

After 1990, the utopian communist project of perpetual social and economic progress toward the well-being of all members of society was reinterpreted as egoistic and destructive. Pollution and the destruction of landscapes by socialist industries became synonymous of the destructive nature of the regime itself. With the defeat of the communist regime, communist ideology lost its place as an element of the publicly accepted discourse. The discourse of market liberalism, free ranging competition and democratic transparency took its place. In the Czech Republic, the performances of the economy in transformation and the new democratic state institutions disappointed many of the expectations that had been set for them. The frustrations about increasing unemployment, corruption of state bodies and private appropriation of formerly state owned assets, however, rarely manifested themselves in open conflicts. They took the form of a pathology of the life worlds (Habermas 1995: 566), a continued withdrawal into the private realm and a manifest disinterest in state politics and distrust in state institutions. The generally acceptable political language, espoused also by former communists became the seemingly neutral scientific or technocratic language that excluded all ideological or normative elements.

Scientists and planners of natural protected areas began to play an important role. Most influential, and close to the political circles that took power in the first years after the Velvet Revolution, were two environmental societies founded by intellectuals and scientists: the STUZ and the Czech Society for the Environment. They favored an attitude to the environment that, as one of their leading members put it, was “based on reason and not on action” (Velek, interview 6.5. 1999). In the 1990s they functioned like discussion circles that organised open meetings where controversial opinions could be discussed in public. They analysed legal texts and translated European directives and laws for the larger public, exchanged information and tried to get a dialogue going that was unemotional and rational. The meetings of STUZ held once a month were sometimes of a highly informative value but often tedious and not engaging. The audience consisted mainly of old people who rarely raised their voice.

On the local level these groups were not present. It was the new activist organisations such as *Hnutí Duha* and *Děti Země* that offered technical assistance and legal advice for local citizen initiatives. Their political perspective broke away from or transcended the old division between right and left. As one of the leaders of the Czech environmental movement *Hnutí Duha* put it: “The discussions between the left-wing and the right-wing political tendencies about economics is about how to distribute the cake society bites from, but their consensus is, ‘the bigger the cake the better’. For us the crucial question is, how big should this cake be?” (Patočka, *Hnutí Duha*, interview 8.4.1999) *Hnutí Duha* claimed that the similarities between the established ideologies of communism and capitalism were more significant than their differences and that their belief in technological progress was self-legitimising. *Duha*’s members were convinced that the

technological standard and the standard of consumption reached would ultimately be paid for by ecological devastation (Patočka, *Hnutí Duha* interview 8.4.1999).

### **For the Best of the Village? Pragmatism versus Conservationism**

On the local level arguments in favour and against the construction of a cement factory in the Česky Kras were messier and more emotional but sometimes also more pragmatic than the more formalised debates in academic discussion circles, on the readers' pages of the national newspapers or in Parliament. It is these messy debates about safe-guarding or recreating the historically grown landscape, the scope and intensity of the exploitation of limestone resources and the financial and emotional value of the landscape that animated the village councils.

Two discourses about how to shape the society of the future stood opposed at the village level. A pragmatist materialism acquired under real-existing socialism met with the idealist discourse of nature protection and self-limitation. Both discourses had an authoritarian component. While the first defended the material needs of the village against "sentimental nonsense", the second claimed nature protection and conservation to be an absolute priority to be defended against boundless productivism. How were these polar opposites acted out on the village level and how did negotiation and compromise become possible?

After the political changes of the Velvet Revolution the flow of centrally distributed funds to the villages ebbed to become an almost imperceptible trickle. The communist members of the village council re-elected after 1990 co-operated with the newly elected members of the Civil Forum (*Občanské Forum*) to secure as before through informal channels some of the scarce financial resources for the village. In the absence of state funding to solve even such small material problems of village life, as to buy pedagogical materials for the school, they turned for help to the foreign investors who had bought the local quarry and the limestone factory.

In communist times, doing something for the village meant mobilising networks and resources and using relations that one could establish at the workplace to solve some of the burning practical problems the community faced. As former members of the socialist village council (*místní národní úřad*) explained: "doing something for the village then was without a political connotation." Officially, however, each collective activity was coined in terms of participation in socialist society. Influencing the political and economic decision making on the regional and national level, and thus securing some of the centrally distributed resources for the village, was a complex procedure that involved only those who co-operated with the political system and excluded all the others. The quarry and limestone factory were a resource that did not provide direct income to the surrounding villages but they provided material support for investment projects the villages were attempting to undertake. They lent heavy earth moving machinery and lorries and provided the help of technicians and engineers. The only direct form of payment that could be expected from the factory and quarry in socialist times were compensation payments when it was established that levels of air pollution were going largely beyond the already quite lax legal limits. The limestone factory then had to pay a fine to the state that was then redistributed in part to the villages affected by air pollution.

In the 1990s, the Environmental Impact Assessment Procedures that became obligatory in 1992 became a tool with which to establish a new clientelist relationship with the foreign investors. Before obtaining a permit for building a cement factory or even to extend or deepen the area quarried a permit was needed. The quarrying companies needed the consent of the village councils if they wanted the assessment procedure to run smoothly through the evaluation committee. To demonstrate a certain level of environmental concern became thus a possibility to put pressure on the investors and was therefore expressed even by former communists and members of the town council that were employed by the limestone factory. The directors of the company knew that they had to keep a good atmosphere in the village to be able to pursue their projects.

"We want to have a good atmosphere in the villages because we know what it means to have a quarry next to the village. [...] although the villages are not completely without funds they need our support for all the supplementary investment projects: gas pipes, water systems, equipment for the school, computers for the village administration. We borrow our lorries and we even

send in some of our technical personnel if some documentation or application has to be prepared by the village administration. (Fuchs chief engineer of the lime stone factory, interview 20.1. 2000)

The foreign company and its local Czech representatives followed the paternalist pattern that had established itself in the Socialist period. They offered direct help to the village communities in exchange for their unbiased support of their enterprise.

The opponents to the factory project and the quarry resented it bitterly when the foreign investors attempted to strike a deal with the local communist politicians, who had been re-elected in the 1990 elections. The Velvet Revolution, however, had aroused in some inhabitants, who had suffered under the communist regime, an urgent desire to control the economic and political decisions on the local level and make the motivations of the decision-makers transparent. They were determined not to cede the political space left by the socialist regime in the local political landscape to the foreign investors. Bina, in particular, who had initiated the citizen initiative *Suchomasty (Občanská Iniciativá Suchomasty)* to safe-guard the Český Kras, was enraged about the manipulative manoeuvres of the foreign companies together with their allies in the villages. He claimed that pure greed determined their choices

“It is a nature protected area here. For us as citizens who live here, it makes no sense, - if it is true that we live in a democratic society – that the same people should still dictate over us who have dictated here for 40 years over everything. Over nature, over life, over absolutely everything.... Black remains black, and I don't like to say so, but communists remain communists. They can start to wear a different coat, but not different ideas. For them it goes always only about their own and private benefit. And nature is their least concern.” (Bina, interview 27. 11. 1999)

He felt that in the transition from communism to capitalism he had been deprived of the opportunity to shape the economic future of his society. The ecological fight he led was for him a struggle for democratic control over the large economic decisions that concerned the whole society. As he was now allowed to voice his objections and to make his ideas and opinions heard, he did it against all odds using his entire free time. He studied legal provisions, filed complaints and filled up his sitting room with documents, newspaper clippings and dozens of cassettes recording public meetings and meetings of the village council. Many of his fellow villagers regarded Bina as an extremist, who by his radical behaviour created animosities and distrust in the community. Others regarded him as the only one who consistently continued a fight that most of them have already given up in exchange for their peace of mind and for harmony inside the village community.

The citizen initiative established its own electoral lists in 1994 in all the three villages surrounding the quarry and they effectively won the majority of seats in the local councils for a while. These villages initiated together with other villages affected by the quarrying in the Český Kras an association of villages to safe-guard the Český Kras (*Sdružení obcí za zachranu Českého Krasu*). It attempted to have an impact directly on the national level of decision making, by sending petitions to Parliament, by monitoring the application of new environmental laws etc. The environmental movement *Děť Země* and the citizen initiative against the cement factory *Občanská Iniciativá Suchomasty* became associate members of the association. The local citizen initiatives doubted the capacity of the regional administration to regulate the use and protection of natural resources and wanted to gain direct control through citizen participation on the local and national level. They in fact saw the administrators in the regional administration in Beroun as in close co-operation with foreign investors. They felt that they had to defend their interest in the face of the two tides, business and state administration, ready to submerge them. The open conflict around the construction of the cement factory led them to explore the new organisational forms of the democratic regime and to engage more actively in village politics.

In response to this new political force the company directors developed a discourse that became more and more environment friendly. The promise they advanced was: “To make it here like in Germany!”. Germany and in particular Bavaria, represented in the Czech imaginary the image of wealth, neat and tidy landscapes and rigorous and efficient environmental standards. The company Lhoist, that had bought the limestone factory, indeed, in the first years after taking it



over, improved the quality of the air considerably, by introducing air filters, modernised limestone burners and by closing down old inefficient furnaces. The new cement factory, so the German investor Heidelberger Zement promised, would have the most recent advanced technology and correspond to the highest environmental quality standards. Such factories so the investors assured, were built in Bavaria even next to pretty little towns.

The reference to Germany however awoke the fear that the opening of the borders would mean the exploitation and appropriation of the natural resources of the small Czech lands. Already in his first letter distributed to the inhabitants of the villages surrounding the quarry Jiri Souček evoked the image of Germany as the colonial power. Profiting from the low cost of raw materials, the low cost of labour, and weak environmental standards, its goal was to extract high quality resources with total disregard for their intrinsic value (Souček, letter September 1993). They were going to squander “precious limestone, unique in the world” for making cement. The rock formations in the Český Kras were indeed classified by the geologists of Charles University as particularly pure (Chlupač, interview 18. 2. 2000). The limestone quarry was at the spot of an ancient coral reef with special “irreplaceable rock formations”, that included thousands of fossils of prehistoric animals and plants and had a limestone so pure that it occurred in only a few places in the world. The extraction of limestone from this area, which had in communist times aroused the concern of only a few geologists passionately interested in the rock formations, started to be of concern to larger parts of the population.

Engineer Vladimír Korběl, the director of the limestone factory, responded publicly to these worries by presenting the nuisances of quarrying as temporary and envisioning the future of the area as an idyll.

“The quarry will turn into a geological park that will on a non-commercial basis serve for scientific and touristic purposes. We have already started to work on it and we are planning to finish it in the year 2016 .... The final shape of the geological park Čertový Schodý counts with preserving the current state of important geological paleo-ontological and karstic localities, that have been uncovered thanks to the mining for future scientific and educational purposes. Some parts of the flanks of the quarry will be brought in such a shape that mud could be brought to it and it will become possible to grow some trees, bushes and other plants on it typical for the surrounding environment. The surrounding wild flora and fauna will start to grow into the area of the park, so that it will organically merge into this landscape so that the conditions will be created for the spreading of the fauna. The project of the geological park is trying to avoid such interventions that would result in the creation of so-called green desert, that is to say areas that are unconnected with the surrounding nature. Some parts of the quarry will stay even after the transformation into a geological park inaccessible and these will serve for example as breeding places for birds on the rocks. On the bottom of the quarry will be a lake, probably with accessible banks and islands scattered on it.” (Korběl quoted in *Mláda Fronta Dnes* 8.8. 2000)

Korběl explained in public hearings how beautiful the big quarry would look once the stones were extracted and everything was re-cultivated and he underlined the beneficial nature of the mining which—so he claimed—had uncovered the true geological and paleo-ontological treasures hidden around the quarry. Thanks to the mining they could now become accessible to the public. Taking up the discourse of environmental protection agencies, Korběl insisted that the investors did not intend to create “a green desert” but a natural space where local vegetation was allowed to take over.

Members of the citizen initiative however doubted, whether the interest the mining companies took in the landscape of the Český Kras was genuine. As one of the more active members put it, the discourse of the mining company, to give the quarry back to nature was just a factor in the negotiations. “There is no conviction behind it, just greed” (Holeček, interview 15.1.2000). Members of the citizen initiative were convinced that the limestone excavated in Čertový Schodý was leaving the country and that it was their duty to protect the natural riches of the Czech lands against the greedy assault of neighbouring countries. The foreign company Lhoist and Heidelberger Zement were indeed making large profits because their had secure markets and

extremely low costs. However, the high demand for limestone extracted in the Česky Kras was due for the most part to domestic demand. It was used in large amounts for air filters in brown coal power stations in North Bohemia that had to comply with the European environmental legislation.

Other than the fear of losing precious natural resources the opposition to the building of the cement factory and to an extension of quarrying was motivated at least in part by the concern of the property owners that their property might lose in value as the landscape was degrading further because of air and noise pollution. Under socialism no private property owner could cry out against the loss of value of his/her property. The private owners of weekend houses had often built them half legally and could not complain. The old inhabitants of the villages had lost any claim on a larger stretch of land to collectivisation. After the institutional changes of 1990 villagers could finally speak up again in the name of their property. They had market value to defend. Claiming the defence of private property rights they touched one of the cornerstones of the new regime. As concerned inhabitants they were allowed to voice their opinion in the hearings of the environmental impact assessment once they had organised themselves as a citizen initiative.

When the opponents ultimately won the case against the construction of the cement factory in 1996 the two sides had come closer to one another not only in their arguments but also in their ways of behaving in the political realm. The environmentalists argued their case with materialist arguments of resource use and property protection while the defenders of the productivist model used environmental arguments to re-enforce their claims towards the investors and weaken the arguments of their opponents. Finally the claim that order and cleanliness was on their side came from both fractions in the conflict. Nice nature was for both sides cultivated, cleaned and harmonious nature.

The model that became dominant in the environmentally protected area (CHKO) Česky Kras was the creation of natural reserves with a high bio-diversity that were linked through bio-corridors with other such areas. Locally re-created natural idylls in former quarries were to fuse ultimately into regional bio-centres. For this purpose the managers of the nature reserve sat down at the roundtable with managers of quarries, majors and members of citizen initiatives to plan the nature that was supposed to evolve. They together determined the most valuable natural areas, established maps of "nature monuments" from where nature should then extend. Monetary interests were weighed in such negotiations against the interest of preserving particularly beautiful nature spots. The different actors evaluated nature protection and exploitation by referring to a scientific knowledge that appeared unbiased and objective. "Care for nature" meant here to create nature according to an order that was scientifically planned and appealing to man. Nature as a recreational force would then accomplish the task of repairing itself in a way wanted by man.

## Conclusion

The opponents of the intense quarrying who, incidentally, had also been opposed to the communist system of total state control over the economy and the society, claimed their newly acquired right of participating in decision-making processes that concerned projects that had a severe impact on their environment. Their opposition concerned as much the new forms of clientelism that emerged in the villages, as the environmental destruction as such. They thus led an incessant campaign for transparency of decision-making processes, access to documentation and scientific evaluation. Their difficulty in making an impact on the continued exploitation and instrumentalization of nature made them, however, doubt in the new political system itself.

Their struggle, nevertheless, brought environmental concerns into the public debate in the village. Their active participation in environmental impact assessments improved the negotiating position of the village council towards the investor and obliged the investor to change his attitude towards the inhabitants, seeking a dialogue instead of ignoring them. Engineer Korbel's elaborate discourses about a beautiful recreated nature after quarrying shows this new concern about an active and critical public. Ultimately, the discussions that ensued in the village in spite of their emotional and often polemical nature made the new democratic system evolve in practice.

The new awareness that growth of industrialisation and accelerated exploitation of resources had their limit did not lead the villagers to envisage those problems on a global scale though. In the imaginary of the villagers the Czech Republic still seemed to be shielded from the concerns of the rest of the world. The activists remained in a national NIMBY attitude, ready to defend the Czech lands from the dangerous influences of foreign investors and to claim a say in local affairs,

but without assuming yet that they were a part of, and had a part in the global environmental system.

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### **Abstract**

The environmental conflict about the construction of a large cement factory in Tmaň, a small town South of Prague, bordering the nature protected area of the Český Kras, embodies some of the central features of post-socialist society: the privatisation of state-owned firms by foreign capital, the emergence of citizen initiatives, the formation of new democratic structures on the local level, and the creation of a public sphere through independent media. Nature conservation and limited resource use entered as new elements into the debates of opposing political fractions that had previously turned around concepts of planned and market economy. Differences of worldviews and projects for society that went beyond the divide into capitalist or socialist ideas took shape and became visible. The article analyses the arguments of the proponents and opponents of the project and examine what ideas about society the images of nature recreated and nature preserved evoke. It then shows in what larger historical and political context these ideas inscribe themselves and how they are negotiated and transformed in the current local political context.

**Key words:** post-socialist society, privatization, conservation of nature, images of nature, local politics, Czech Republic.

### **Résumé**

Le conflit environnemental autour de la construction d'une large usine de ciment à Tmaň, une petite ville au sud de Prague qui jouxte la zone de protection naturelle du Český Kras met en action des traits prépondérants de la société post-socialiste : la privatisation des firmes d'état par des compagnies étrangères, l'émergence d'initiatives de citoyens, la formation de nouvelles structures démocratiques au niveau local et la création d'un espace public par des médias indépendants. La conservation de la nature et la limite des ressources naturelles font nouvellement partie des débats qui opposent des fractions politiques qui s'étaient disputées auparavant seulement sur les concepts de société du plan et du marché. À partir des visions de la nature des idées sur le monde et la société émergent qui vont au-delà des divisions idéologiques entre capitalistes et socialistes. Cet article analyse les arguments des protagonistes et des opposants au projet et examine quelles idées de société les visions d'une nature recréée par l'homme ou préservée de l'action de l'homme évoquent. Il montre dans quel contexte historique et politique de telles idées s'inscrivent et comment elles sont négociées et transformées dans le contexte politique local.

**Mots clefs:** la société post-socialiste, la privatisation, la conservation de la nature, visions de la nature, la politique locale, La République Tchèque.

### **Resumen**

El conflicto medioambiental generado por la construcción de una extensa fábrica de cemento en Tmaň, una pequeña ciudad en el sur de Praga, colindando con la reserva natural de Český Kras, refleja algunas de las características distintivas de las sociedades post-socialistas: la privatización de empresas del Estado por mano de capitales privados, la emergencia de iniciativas ciudadanas, la formación de nuevas estructuras democráticas a nivel local, y la creación de un espacio público a través de mediática independiente. La conservación de la naturaleza y el uso racional de los recursos ingresó como un nuevo elemento en la arena de discusión de los partidos políticos contrincantes que con anterioridad habían dado vuelta conceptos tales como planificación económica y economía de mercado. Diferencias en visiones de mundo y proyectos de sociedad que fueron más allá de la división entre una sociedad con ideas capitalistas o socialistas, tomaron cuerpo y se tornaron visibles. El artículo reviza los argumentos de los proponentes y oponentes del proyecto y examina qué ideas sobre la sociedad y qué imágenes de la naturaleza son recreadas y evocadas por la idea de una naturaleza conservada. Luego muestra en que contextos históricos y políticos más amplios se inscriben estas ideas y como son negociadas y transformadas en los contextos políticos vigentes.

**Palabras claves:** sociedad post-socialista, privatización, conservación de la naturaleza, imágenes de la naturaleza, política local, República Checa.