


10-1-2004

# Art and Democracy in Environmental Decision Making

Audrey Stewart  
*SIT Study Abroad*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection](http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection)

 Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), and the [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Stewart, Audrey, "Art and Democracy in Environmental Decision Making" (2004). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. Paper 516.

[http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp\\_collection/516](http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/516)

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at DigitalCollections@SIT. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of DigitalCollections@SIT. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

# **Art and Democracy in Environmental Decision Making**

**Audrey Stewart**

**Project Advisor: Miroslav Vaněk**

**Academic Directors: Luke Bouvier and Eva Valentová**

**SIT: Arts and Social Change**

**Fall 2004**

## Abstract

Global doctrines on sustainable development emphasize public participation as a tenet of environmentally responsible development. Given the Czech government's tepid stance towards implementing sustainability measures, much impetus for realizing them will have to come from other facets of Czech society, including the public. In spite of the nearly populist feel of a mounting environmental movement in the late 1980s, after the Velvet Revolution the Czech public remained relatively disengaged from environmental involvement. Traditional decision-making venues within the Czech Republic now actively exclude the public from participating, while other pressures stemming from history and present also diminish the public impetus for becoming involved. Four case studies of art are explored as potential, nontraditional methods to empower and engage the public in environmental dialogues. Findings suggest that art has the best potential to catalyze public engagement when that art is incorporated within a larger, bottom-up strategy aimed at promoting public participation.

## Introduction

Contemporary conditions in the Czech Republic present a number of obstacles to public participation in environmental decision making, yet more and more, an 'enlightened' group of Czechs cite a participatory decision-making process as necessary in order to find solutions to modern environmental problems. It is evident that a rift exists between the 'enlightened' crowd, and the general public who they seek to engage. The former group, consisting of a few formal decision-makers, academics and especially members of environmental NGOs, approach environmental issues as questions of, "How do we make our places more livable, and how do we stop the exploitation of the environment? If there is some kind of development, how would it happen so it would also not be detrimental to the environment and to the people who live there?" (Vailová) They envision a "civic society" which emphasizes "*process*," (Rynda, Zemanová, Vailová). "You are trying to communicate with a number of bodies involving NGOs, institutions like government and business... and you are trying to build and make the political decisions in a consensus." (Zemanová) They view this process as taking place on a number of levels ranging from small and local, to municipal, regional and national, although they recognize that the

current systems of governance on all levels differ drastically from their ideals. However, the very public who they hope to engage in this civic process seems to believe that people who care about environmental issues are opposed to economic development, or care more about trees than human well-being. Of particular importance, the perpetuated public conception of NGOs as radical “activist” organizations differs from the self-perception of many NGO employees, who see themselves as people “setting a *foundation*, trying to *prevent* conflicts.” (Vailová) While the enlightened bunch views the environment as “the context that we live in; everything comes from it or returns back to it” (Vailová) they can only guess at how the broader public defines the environment based upon criteria such as media presentation (which largely perpetuates the environment in a stereotypical dichotomy pitted against economic interests).

The large communication rift evidenced above contributes towards failures of traditional approaches to environmental decision-making in the Czech Republic to adequately engage the public. This suggests a need for alternative approaches. In the above context, this paper explores the extensive contemporary barriers to public participation in environmental dialogues, and evaluates the potential of art as an alternative, communicative force which may have actual impacts on public engagement and decision-making. The four different art examples investigated each have a different impact on environmental dialogue, which, unsurprisingly, results from the intent of the artist and the other circumstances within the approach to each art project. The most noticeable trend from these four case studies is that art has the greatest ability to increase public engagement in the environmental decision-making process when it is incorporated into larger, bottom-up strategies which explicitly seek to involve the public. In this context, art will likely emerge in the future as one component of an increasingly sophisticated attempt of Czech NGOs

to increase public engagement in environmental decision-making, although its actual potential for success will be limited by the power of the barriers it works against.

### **Contemporary Global and Political Impetus**

In current global discussions about environmental and social issues, the phrase “sustainable development” has come to symbolize an ultimate and desirable (if somewhat intangible) goal: to balance and “harmonize” three major aspects of civilization (the social and cultural aspects, the economic realm, and the ecological sphere or “envelope” in which the other two are carried out). International doctrines on sustainable development, such as Agenda 21, which was adopted at the 1992 global conference on Sustainable Development at Rio de Janeiro and also used as a basis in the 2002 global summit at Johannesburg, contain heavy emphasis on the importance of participatory, democratic decision-making processes as requisite for sustainable development. (Andrt)

The Czech government, aware of its position among some form of global community, sent delegates to these global summits. Slowly, through the 1990s, the government began to officially embrace these global values of sustainable development and public participation. The State Environmental Policy (SEP) published by the Ministry of Environment claims to be “a binding document for the preparation of detailed programs for...tackling environmental issues” and outlines the Czech Republic’s “interest in improving the quality of the environment and in realizing sustainable development.” The key objectives include “to develop closer and more permanent relationships between all participants in decision-making processes” and under a section called “Public Participation” the policy explicitly cites the need to build a “foundation for participation of the population.” Perhaps somewhat ironically, the document describes the

government's hopes to implement the global Agenda 21 process as a "bottom-up initiative."  
(Ministry, 1999)

The formal adoption of an environmental policy seeking sustainable development through participatory processes is significant because it represents both an evolution in the mentality of the Czech government as well as a formal document to which the government can be held accountable by outside forces. Throughout most of the 1990s, the government was reluctant to officially adopt the term "sustainable development" even in explicitly environmental policy (Rynda) in spite of the global acceptance of the phrase. Thus the new language represents an evolution on behalf of the mindset of governing bodies. It does not represent any sort of concrete change, but can be seen as a small opening which will contribute towards real outcomes only if acted upon by forces outside of the government. "Every [country] in the cultural world has a national strategy of sustainable development, so of *course*, we must have something like this, too. But it is not important for us," remarked Ivan Rynda, current Chief of the Department of Social and Cultural Ecology at Charles University as well as advisor to the Czech delegates at the Johannesburg summit. The EU could be considered one potential external factor which might hold the Czech government accountable to its official policies; but my informants claim that while the EU provided "pressure" for the Czech government to adopt this "legislative framework" in the first place, it has little impact in terms of realizing the ideals of that framework. (Andrt) "*We* would have to [do it]," claims one project coordinator of an environmental NGO, "there would [have to] be a lot of angry citizens who decided to make it heard that our government is not supporting" these international values. (Vailová) Given this recognition that government accountability regarding environmental protection necessitates an

engaged public, the next task is to explore the factors affecting public participation in the Czech Republic in specific relation to the environment.

### **National Historic Context**

The historic, Czech context for public participation and issues of environmental protection spans several centuries, having precedents that symbolically date to the pre-communist period. Czech cultural notions of democracy have roots in the “civic society” tradition during the inter-war period of 1918 to 1945, while historic notions of environmental protection or stewardship date even farther back to the Hapsburg tradition of parks from the 1800s. (Vaněk, Interview) However, given the historic realities of these precedents, including the Hapsburgs’ subordination of the Czech people and Masaryk’s cultivation of the dominance of individuals rather than the will of the people (Holy), these historic traditions serve in contemporary context only as symbols with which Czechs might identify modern discussions of these issues. The reality of the present situation is more immediately informed by Czech experiences under communism and in the fifteen years since the Velvet “Revolution.”

Under communism, concepts of both democracy and environmental protection were, in practice, obliterated by the totalitarian regime. Not only was communism antithetical to democratic governance; it also created a legacy of environmental destruction in the Czech lands. A link between social repression and ecological ruin became evident during communist rule. The policy of rapid, centralized industrialization led to severe pollution from industrial emissions, destroyed natural landscapes due to activities like mining, and these ecological problems negatively affected the physical and even psychological health of the Czech people. During the 1960s and 1970s, the “black triangle” region of Czechoslovakia which comprised North

Bohemia, Southern Saxony and lower Silesia was “considered to be the most polluted and ecologically devastated area in Europe.” Since the state monopolized power under communism, there was no question about who was to blame for the environmental devastation. These horrible conditions of the Czech environment provided glaring testament to the “disenfranchisement” created by the socialist system; as one Czech writer commented, “no where [was] the destructiveness of the communist system more evident than in nature.” (Vaněk, *Ecological Roots*)

Just as environmental destruction was largely associated with the undemocratic or repressive aspects of communism, efforts towards environmental *protection* had ties with populist sentiments and glimpses of democratic or “civic” engagement, even under communism. Although small groups of what I would call “ecological dissidents” emerged, and were subsequently repressed – often academics, such as Pavel Kovař who had scientific background to make detailed environmental criticisms of the government (Kovař) – two other main threads of ecological activity prevailed among the broader Czech public under communism.

First, small and personal engagement in environmental conservation activities became an “acceptably generic form of civic engagement” due to a perceived, “apolitical” quality of conservation work. Environmentally oriented civic associations existed under communism, such as TIS (Yew Tree), founded in 1958 and Brontosaurus, founded in the 1970s. Members of such communist-era environmental organizations have described the associations as encouraging “small-scale work to awaken people to [ecological] problems,” and remember being involved in activities like “repairing churches and roadside crosses.” The primary means for communists to deal with spontaneous creation of such organizations was to co-opt them through official party sponsorship. (Vaněk, *Transnational Moments*) While the organizations did not attempt to



influence political decision-making, they can still be understood as venues for voluntary, public engagement regarding environmental protection.

The second strain of public activity regarding ecologic protection under communism occurred in the late 1980s, when several large environmental demonstrations preceded the demonstrations of the Velvet Revolution. In 1988, “environmental concerns topped the agendas of mass demonstrations.” The rallies included protests against highway construction; in May 1989 the Prague Mothers environmental group sponsored an unofficial ecological demonstration during an important government summit; and one week before the massive, November 17 protests in Prague, thousands of people in the Northern Bohemian town of Teplice protested for clean air. The Teplice protests especially indicated that by the late 1980s, the environment had become a popular concern. Further, it meant that outspoken opposition to communism no longer arose only from the intellectual, so-called “dissidents” in Prague but also from the general public in smaller towns outside of Prague which had been previously disconnected from any of the dissident “elite.” (Vaněk, *Ecological Roots* and Interview) The emergence of spontaneous public activity in relation to environmental issues seems particularly important in its communist context, because it countered the general tendency of individual disengagement from the public sphere. However, equally important is the fact that, in the case of the popular demonstrations, public engagement regarding environmental issues only occurred when the ecological problems reached a magnitude that directly impacted people’s private lives.

### **Evolution of Public Participation in Environmental Decisions after 1989**

The inkling of a popular environmental “movement” evident in the late 1980s did not last long. After 1989, the public impetus for environmental improvement became significantly

altered and diluted. (Vaněk, Drhova, Kovař, etc) While opinion polls at the start of 1990 ranked ecological concerns in first place among the Czech public, by 1992, public opinion polls placed the environment at 7<sup>th</sup> place in a series of concerns (Holy) and at the end of the decade researchers reported that environmental protection had dropped well below 10<sup>th</sup> place in importance (Rynda).

A number of factors contributed to the reduced nature of public interest and engagement in environmental issues in the post-communist era. One major cause was undoubtedly the perseverance of disempowerment and public disengagement cultivated under communism. This factor was described by many of my informants; nearly all of them cited this legacy of communism as a serious cause for lack of modern public involvement. However, in light of the trends towards the popular nature of environmental activity in the late 1980s, other forces must have also significantly acted on the Czech public to alter their involvement after communism.

One force can be described as a brief period of general euphoria in the aftermath of 1989. Pavel Kovař, a Professor of Ecology and Dean of the Faculty of Sciences at Charles University, as well as a member of the communist-era “ecological dissident” group, recalled, “It seemed for sure that everything [would] be solved within the new democracy.” (Kovař) With that certainty of improvement, public attention could be turned towards other issues – which there were plenty of! A second factor affecting public interest regarding environment was just that – new realms of possibility opened up to the Czech people. Many informants expressed the opening of society as a force leading to public disengagement from environmental (or civic) interests, due to people’s continued absorption in their personal lives, claiming that “the world became much more colorful... people are able...to travel, to buy things,” (Rynda) or that “the public became more consumerist.” (Vaněk, interview)

Another cause of public disengagement was that a group of what I term, “environmental experts” emerged, and major environmental dialogues moved into the new spheres of those experts. The experts included people who had been most actively engaged in environmental issues before 1989. Immediately following the creation of a new government, those people ended up *in* the government, including in the newly created Ministry of Environment. While this posed “good conditions” for the government to write strong environmental policy in the early 1990s (Drhova, Rynda), it also led much of society to believe that the people in government were “so good they would do the job themselves.” (Vaněk, interview). Further, as “experts,” this group of people places heavy value on their own expertise, such that they lack impetus to seek public participation. Kovař, for example, believes that many environmental problems are “able to be solved by the ecology science” and draws a distinct line to “distinguish between environmental *public* movements, and *ecologists* in scientific discipline, regularly educated at our universities.” Another source who requested anonymity described the first Czech Minister of Environment as holding the personal opinion that, “because *he* is clever, *he* is capable, if *he* would be allowed to write policy [alone], it would be solution.”

Yet another crucial element affecting contemporary public participation in environmental decisions is the Czech government’s attitude towards public involvement. In the early 1990s the Civic Forum had high ideals regarding democratic methods of governance, but soon split into the now-defunct Civic Movement, which supported “open, liberal, civic society...built on liberal processes [within] society,” and the Civic Democratic Movement (ODS), which was the “conservative stream” of the political spectrum with less inclusive concepts of governance. When Vaclav Klaus of ODS became Prime Minister in 1992, he brought with him the following notions of public participation in government decision-making: “If you want to do something in

a political sense in society, you can establish political party, and [if] you are elected, you will have a formal mandate...to be allowed to do it. And then, all [voters], go home! To your private life! ... And after four years, in voting [booth], *there* will be accountability, once in election period.” (Rynda) This attitude is not unique to Klaus; Rynda also asserts that “about half the members of the Czech government [are] *formally* convinced about the necessity of public participation, but in *fact*, maybe one, two or three” would like to implement the ideas, in practice. (Rynda) In addition to the current President’s stance on public involvement, he also espouses a well-known environmental rhetoric that the Czech Republic must first worry about economics, and can later think about ecology. Combined these result in low prospects for the government to support public engagement in environmental issues.

The attitude of elected members of government has translated into explicit, legislative attempts to curb public participation in environmental decision-making. Using more and more “sophisticated” means, the government tries, for example, to set new, specific criteria which NGOs must meet in order to contribute to political decisions regarding environment, or tries to pass legislation which claims that explicit business interests in an environmentally damaging project are actually “public” interests. (Rynda) Thus, the government conditions can be seen as not only discouraging but many times actively hostile towards the involvement of public in environmental decision-making.

Aside from politicians’ personal attitudes towards public participation, it is important to note that the official body for making decisions regarding the environment in the Czech Republic (the Ministry of Environment) is an agency full of appointed, and not elected, government officials. (Franc). From a perspective of public participation, this means that the Ministry of Environment is even less accountable to the public than are the elected officials.

Given the current attitudes of Czech politicians and government towards the public, combined with the Czech people's past experience with totalitarian rule, it is easy to understand why the bulk of the my informants cited a public distrust towards the political system as a main reason for lack of engagement.

Perhaps a final, critically important factor affecting modern, public participation in environmental issues is a changing or ill-defined notion of "the public," itself. From the perspective of municipal, regional or state-level governing bodies, NGOs are now considered to represent the public in a number of contexts. Ivan Rynda, Chief of the Department of Social and Cultural Ecology at Charles University, claims, "I am convinced that NGOs are critically important for public participation... These NGOs are representing *public* interest." (Rynda) This concept of public representation is granted to NGOs in their legal, state-granted status (Kocianova) and often reiterated in Czech NGOs' self-proclaimed mission statements. For example Environmental Law Service (EPS) is described as a "public interest law organization," (Franc), and one of Green Circle's major activities is to "influence legislation to maintain the ability for public to have input [in environmental decision-making]." (Drhova)

However, while environmental NGOs and the government both formally conceive of these organizations as representatives of public interest, this status has not necessarily been conferred to NGOs by the *public* itself, nor does the role of NGOs appear to be *understood* by the public. "To the general public, the environmental movement is people who are something like terrorists, very dangerous or very weird. We are told that *we* are an ecoterrorist organization, and we just influence *law*!" claims Pavel Franc, a lawyer for EPS. Renata Vailova of the Partnership for Public Spaces program similarly notes, "[The environment] is always presented in the mainstream media...like its some environmental *activist*...people who are *against*

something.” “If you’re [an] ‘activist,’ that’s negative,” adds Jan Bouchal (interviews). Nearly all members of environmental NGOs that I spoke with describe the same element of suspicion towards environmental NGOs from the public they supposedly represent. (Bouchal, Mourek, Vailova, Zemanova, Franc) My limited first-hand public investigation of the topic confirmed this perception. One friend remarked, for example, that environmental procedures for building construction always take too long, and rather than blame inefficient administrative procedures he blamed the “environmentalists” and in fact, the environment itself! However, with one exception (Franc) the NGO employees that I spoke with do not self-identify as activists nor even as “environmentalists;” the difference between NGO self-perception and public perception demonstrates a miscommunication that demands attention if the NGOs will be able to effectively carry out their goals of increasing actual public engagement.

These mounting pressures which currently limit public participation in environmental decision-making are significant to this discussion, not only as an explanation of the present, but because they represent an array of entrenched and powerful forces that must be *overcome* if the Czech Republic is to approach the concepts of sustainable development accepted in international agreements. The next section of the paper explores the role of specific examples of art as one possible source for overcoming these limitations; we now turn to the potential of art to engage and empower the Czech public to participate in environmental decision-making.

### **Why Art?**

Traditional venues for decision-making in the Czech Republic are shown (above) to be ineffective forums to adequately address public participation in environmental dialogues, so it makes sense to explore the role of non-traditional avenues for participation. As a creative

discipline that must be innovative if it is to be any good, visual art certainly has the potential to be one such alternative source. Further, the art forms explored below (film, photography, and environmental design) convey messages visually, thus having potential ability to transcend certain barriers (for example linguistic barriers) which may impede inclusive democracy.

An exciting prospect for art to contribute towards this change lies in “an art that acts...in possibilities, that seeks to examine and improve the conditions of coexistence.” This concept is put forth by WochenKlauser, an Austrian “arts” organization that explores art as a force for socio-political activism. “It would be wrong,” they continue, “to expect that something like art can make decisive changes... and yet, in the proper dose, art can achieve more than assumed.” (Zinggl, 2001)

The four case studies below attempt to map out whether art can, and in fact, has “achieved” more than “assumed” in the specific context of participatory environmental decision-making in the Czech Republic. In each example, the “assumptions” behind the artworks are explored by examining the influences and the intents of the artists, and the “achievements” are investigated by considering the tangible impacts of the art. The potential for each type of project to actively “improve the conditions of coexistence” is evaluated alone and in relationship to the other examples.

### **An Independent Filmmaker**

The first artist explored is Josef Císařovský, a 52 year old, free-lance filmmaker with a degree from FAMU, who directs films with explicitly environmental themes because “he likes this world.” (Císařovský) His films are explicit, well-made criticisms of environmental destruction due to social changes. Their symbolic content includes visual references to the beauty

of Czech “natural heritage” as well as spiritual references. The films are visually and aesthetically well-made and use a range of techniques to convey their messages. Many of them, as quasi-documentaries, capture important elements of environmental change that are extremely relevant and important for decision-making. Everything about the films themselves indicate that Cisarovsky has produced art that, in a strictly artistic sense, and in regard to its relevance to an environmental dialogue, is quite complex, thought-provoking, and true – and in those respects his films are highly successful and very pertinent to questions of environmental decision-making. In spite of their success in these ways, Cisarovsky’s films have limited impact on actual environmental change because his intents and approaches to art production leave the artist and the art in a relatively disempowered role which prevents engagement in environmental issues beyond the art production itself; the art becomes an end and not a means.

The bulk of his movies are documentaries, such as “Beastuary” (1992) and “Four Moments of Silence” (1995). He also produced at least one drama, “Something Lighter” (1992). The latter two visually explore explicit contrasts between the natural world and man’s impact on it. Something Lighter is a drama about a young man exploring his relationship to the destroyed Czech town of Most, an actual town which was leveled by the communist government for industrial purposes. Where the town once stood, now exists a barren “wasteland” where nothing will grow. The movie visually depicts the destroyed land where the town once stood, while also imbuing visual, spiritual elements such as basement caverns filled with lit candles that resemble the setting of a religious mass. The Four Moments of Silence also explores man’s spiritual and changing relationship with nature; it contrasts paintings of Czech landscapes from the 1800s, which often include people experiencing romance in nature, with film clips of those same landscapes in the 1990s, generally covered in litter, fragmented by roads and railroads, or with



large factories in the foreground or smokestacks along the horizon. This film offers historic visual understanding of man's affect on nature but also incorporates explicit spiritual references such as images and discussion of Mother Teresa and her role as a protector and care-giver. Similarly, "Beastuary" intersperses clips of animal testing in laboratories and shots of mass-production slaughterhouses with images of ancient people worshipping the animals and offering them as sacrifices, as commentary on man's newly mechanized approach to dealing with other forms of life. (Films) His films as described here contain a thought-provoking edge which might have potential to significantly contribute to environmental dialogue and decision-making, but the influences, intents and production processes behind his filmmaking really limit the ability of his art to significantly engage the public.

He defines the purpose of his films broadly, describing his intent to show "how our relationship to everything living, all living creatures, is changing" but denies that changing people's opinions or behavior is part of his intent; rather, his motives include "just telling people, just informing, just showing... just for them to think." (Cisarovsky) Other comments he made also suggest that Cisarovsky approaches life (and thus his films) with great personal intention, and highly values an individual's ability to better him or herself. For example, he described one of the "best films [he] had ever seen," about a small boy who waters a dead tree every day, and explained that the movie was important to him because "it's very important to do things that are stored in you...if you do them with a purpose. [The boy] is just working on himself, on these openings." His involvement in environmental activities other than film-making is self described as, "just pruning trees, planting trees...a small, private involvement." (Cisarovsky) His approach to film-production is also a very traditional or market-based approach based purely on monetary transactions. The films are generally funded by Czech Television. When Cisarovsky has an idea

for a film, he must “present it in such a way that [he] persuades the producers and the people who have the money that this subject is really powerful.” His films are funded primarily by Czech Television, the Ministry of Environment, and once, by an organization “who makes their living on porno!” However, once created, “he doesn’t have a word in who the viewer, who the audience, will be. It’s just the sponsors or customers who [choose who] the films will be shown to.” In making the films, Cisarovsky primarily works independently; while he collaborates with other artists on the films he rarely works with environmental organizations; once he worked with an NGO that “somehow spread knowledge and information...but don’t focus on a specific issue.” (Cisarovsky)

Cisarovsky’s approach to filmmaking, as described above, can be characterized as personally, privately and perhaps spiritually motivated; while he criticizes environmental destruction through his films he does not actively try to improve the environment in any public or organized sense. The influences on his behavior must stem at least partially from his experiences as an environmental filmmaker under communism, but his art now functions in contemporary context. The result is that his films have an impact similar to the themes behind their creation: small, personal influences. When asked about media attention on his films he admits to getting “not really much publicity.” Describing the impacts of the films, he recounted two stories of individual change. After watching *Beastuary*, one young girl told him, “I became a vegetarian!” and another man once claimed, “*The Four Moments of Silence*...changed my life!” (Cisarovsky)

It would be incorrect to claim that Cisarovsky’s films are unsuccessful as art, and in fact, he has received many awards for his films, for example, from various ecological film festivals. (Cisarovsky) However, in terms of their ability to create contemporary environmental change,

and specifically to affect the democratic quality of environmental decisions in the Czech Republic, his films have the ability to impact change on only an individual level, which is very limited and largely out of Cisarovsky's control. His impact is a direct result of his intent and approach – the approach of working primarily independently rather than collaborating with organizations, his emphasis on small, personal involvement, his choice to operate in the context of traditional business-client production methods, the artist's removal from post-production involvement, choosing to tackle broad themes rather than tangible problems, and of course, his intent to just “show people.” These factors place Cisarovsky and his films, as well as members of Czech public who might be inspired by their message, in a relatively powerless role to engage in affecting actual, democratic, environmental change.

### **Government-Sponsored EKOFilm Festival**

In contrast to Císařovský as a single filmmaker who is relatively disconnected from any form of organized approach to environmental issues, the EKOFilm festival is an example of a government-run, collaborative event which formally and publicly blends the environmental decision-making process with art by linking the Ministry of Environment directly with film. It is an annual event organized by a special office of the Ministry of Environment and has historic roots in the communist era. Each year it shows over 100 films chosen by a selective screening process; the topics of the films shown in 2004 include “issues of nature and landscape protection, natural and cultural heritage,...changes in production and consumption patterns and healthy lifestyles leading to sustainable development.” The goal of the festival is to “introduce and award new films...which inform and shape the platform for the environmental perception and for the relation to natural and cultural heritage both on the local and global bases.” (Ministry, 2004)

Estimates on public attendance range from about 300 annually (Radová) to “thousands” each year (Kovař). The intended audience is “wide public,” according to 2004 Festival President Pavel Kovař, and the festival markets itself as providing “an opportunity for the interested public to meet film-makers, experts and representatives from the state.” (Ministry, 2004) After the festival, winning films are screened at a number of other film-festivals which do not necessarily focus only on environmental issues (Radová, Kovař, Ministry 2004); for example they were recently shown at a Czech and Slovak film festival at Kino Mat film club in Prague. (personal observation) Given the formal mission and content of the festival, as well as its potential to link members of the public to official bodies of environmental decision making, the festival appears seated in a position to provide catalyst for broad public engagement in environmental decision making. However, its ability to actually do so is strongly limited by a number of factors which primarily reflect and cultivate the festival’s top-down approach to environmental issues, from a government body that has little interest in creating a shift in power balance which would give more decision-making power to the public itself.

The international festival, held annually in Český Krumlov, shows films whose topics range from being entirely apolitical to containing a strong element of political critique. An example of the former is one winning film from 2004, “Hastrman Haberman (Water Sprite Haberman)” a biographical film about a Czech filmmaker who dives in freshwater and creates underwater movies. (Adler) A more politically-natured winning film such as “V Kruhu Znovuzrození (In the Circle of Rebirth)” depicts the people of Tibet, whose culture is directly tied with a Tibetan mountain ridge that is threatened by road construction, while the people themselves are threatened by Chinese imperialism. (Poltikovič) Still other winning films, like “Don’t Give Up – Chamonix in Pošumaví,” directly criticize government and corporate actions

in the Czech Republic which have led to environmental problems. (Slunečko) About half the films are Czech while the other half are international. (Ministry, 2004) This breadth of film content indicates that the Ministry has no qualms about screening movies which are directly critical of the government itself, a potentially positive aspect from the perspective of creating honest dialogue.

The festival itself has a unique history and proclaims itself as the oldest environmental film festival in Europe and, perhaps, the world. (Ministry, 2004) Established in 1974 as communist propaganda, the festival sought to show the rest of Europe that then-Czechoslovakia was deeply concerned with environmental issues. In effect, this festival became a nucleus within which environmental discussions occurred, because it brought together a range of ecologists, artists and others who actually were concerned with the environment. (Kovař, Císařovský) Although the festival was officially sponsored by communists, Císařovský even recalls receiving the grand prize for a film which radically criticized and exposed the communist government. (Císařovský) In spite of, and likely because of, the apparent threat that this festival posed to the communist regime, the government continued to hold it and after a few years it became “politically impossible to cease it.” (Kovař) In 1989, the newly created Ministry of Environment assumed the role of festival organizer, and during the 1990s a major shift occurred in the nature of the festival. “In old EKOFilm, [there were] many meetings around ecology. Now [there are less] discussion about ecology, and more discussion with director about film, films are now big program.” As venues for discussions of environmental issues moved elsewhere under the new democracy, the festival thus took on more of a purely artistic character. (Radová) EKOFilm continues to be held by the government even today, because it “represents something prestigious in [Czech] context and recent history.” (Kovař)

In spite of EKOFilm's historic role as a force for cultivating ideas about ecologic improvement, as well as the content of its films, its connections to the official decision-making body, and even its self-stated intent to provide a forum for public engagement, which may seem to create space for public involvement, its actual contributions to increasing public engagement are indirect and limited. On one hand, the festival serves to inspire people already associated with environmental decision-making. The festival "is frequently visited by intellectuals...many students," (Kovař) "directors," "ecologists," and "teachers." (Radová) This year's President described one of its most important functions as "a kind of feast-holiday for environmentalists." Further, he expressed a belief that, "When some of [the films] obtain the prize, it helps to increase its importance for the society, and impact[s society's] values." (Kovař) However, while the festival may serve in some senses to contribute towards a symbolic social value system, as well as to inspire people already working on environmental issues, both of these functions act upon levels of society – "ecologists," politicians etc – which are removed from the realm of the general public. Conversations with Jitka Radová, the festival organizer, gave me the impression that providing tangible forums for public participation or engagement was not a part of the festival program. (Radová) Zuzana Drhová, director of the Green Circle NGO, remarked that "the festival is not for public" and further, "NGOs do not usually go there." She claimed that it was a "small but important event" although reiterated the lack of public involvement. (Drhová)

Since the public does not directly become involved nor do many environmental NGOs, and since the nature of the festival has moved away from actual discussions of environment to more emphasis on discussing and rewarding films, it appears that the film festival primarily serves to symbolically cultivate an *image* that the environmental "experts," (such as the Ministry of Environment) as well as the monetary sponsors of the festival (notably the Škoda auto

company who's logo plasters the promotional materials) are concerned with and working towards improvement of the environment. The result is that the festival not only tangibly prevents public participation in environmental issues by failing to provide an outlet for engaged participation, but it may even symbolically reinforce the idea that the public need not become involved in environmental issues, because a concerned, higher power is already actively involved. In this interpretation, the festival plays a similar role in 2004 as it did under communism: to create a public image of concern by institutions that may or may not actually be concerned with environmental issues.

In comparison to Čísařovský, the independent filmmaker, the EKOFilm festival obviously operates on a different scale, and therefore has a different starting potential to affect and engage the public in environmental issues. While Čísařovský fails to reach the public largely because it is not a main, personal objective of his and he operates independently, the EKOFilm festival likely fails to reach them because it is a top-down, organized event which is sponsored by government and corporate institutions who, on the whole, also have no interest, or in fact, active disinterest, in increasing public participation.

### **Photographer Partners with NGOs**

Ibra Ibrahimovič, an award-winning documentary photographer, shoots landscapes of areas destroyed by industry and takes portraits of the people whose lives are simultaneously being ruined. The subject of his photography would be called, in western terms, environmental justice. Like Čísařovský, he approaches art with personal, private intentions, like the EKOFilm festival, he receives funding through mutually beneficial “partnerships” rather than strictly traditional business interactions, and, like both, has become involved in a government-sponsored

awards system that praises art which specifically criticizes government actions. The major differences in Ibra's approach to art from the above examples are that he works in partnership with NGOs, and his art addresses specific issues. With Ibra's conscious participation, the NGOs incorporate his art in their strategies of actively seeking to influence policy and create tangible outcomes that would both benefit the subjects of his photos and also give "the public" a voice in decision-making. Of the three examples discussed thus far, Ibra's art comes closest to serving as an actual force for engaging the public in environmental decision-making. A number of factors again limit its effectiveness, including the strategies of the NGOs he works with, and the power of the institutions the NGOs work against. Other factors, especially his choice of specific, local environmental issues for subjects, his choice to collaborate with environmental NGOs and remain engaged even after producing the art, and the use of his art to explicitly challenge power structures which currently act against public participation, allow his photos to contribute to a platform for public engagement in a seemingly more meaningful and effective way than Císařovský's films or the EKOFilm festival.

Ibra is involved in a number of photo projects which document environmental and social changes, many of which are part of his long-term "Shards of Bohemia" project that specifically documents North Bohemia. (Zemanová) Two projects which specifically became involved with environmental activity of NGOs include his work in the village of Libkovice, which culminated in the book, Libkovice: Zdař Bůh, and his documentation of the Rajter family which resulted in the exhibition, "The Rajter Story." On the first project, during the 1990s, he collaborated with the NGO Friends of the Earth (FoE) during their campaign to prevent the destruction of the village, Libkovice, and the relocation of its inhabitants due to a mining company's claims on the coal under the village. In the second project, in partnership with EPS, Ibra documented the



situation of a tri-generational farming family, the Rajters. Through EPS, the family is now suing a multinational corporation, NEMAK, which threatens their farm and livelihood. In both cases, his partnership with NGOs allowed him to receive money for the projects that he was ineligible for as an individual artist and also gave him access to situations that he may not have had as an individual. (Franc, Zemanová) The earlier project was also exhibited in Prague galleries in 1996, and the latter won the Czech Press Photo grand prize in 2003 and was exhibited in the Czech Senate before beginning a tour of various large Czech towns including Brno, Plzn, Český Budějovice.

Ibra's black and white photographs (Gockeler, 1997) are generally dark in both composition and in subject; they have a surrealistic element to them which comes both from his stylistic approach as well as the absurdity of the situations he often documents. In the Libkovice project, for example, his photographs depict protestors sitting in cranes to, presumably, prevent the crane from operating, or two men riding bicycles down a debris-free street that is lined to the curb on both sides by the bricks, wood and other material from the demolition of the rows of houses on either side. Many of his still-lives and portraits include close-ups, which provide an intimate feeling with the subjects; others are action shots; some pictures which combine action and close-up are especially powerful. Most of his action shots depict scenes of interrogation or physical conflict, which seem to imply an explicit good guy and bad guy (such as direct conflict between police and members of the village, in which the police would be the "bad" guys as instigators of violence against presumably peaceful citizens).

Ibra's motivations for producing his art seem to be largely personal, in some ways similar to Císařovský's. As his girlfriend, Lenka Zemanová, who was involved in both projects, describes his motivation for these projects, "it's a combination of his personal history connected

to the landscape...it's a way of coping with the problem in a very personal, artistic way, [and] also, Ibra is very much focused on the social documentary...like social aspects of landscape decay.” (Zemanová) However, in choice of subject, Ibra differs from Císařovský on one very important point: while the filmmaker chooses to document environmental and social problems arising from man's relationship with nature, Ibra chooses to document *people actively responding* to environmental and social problems. In doing so, he captures both the essence of the problem as well as the efforts to overcome it and in this perspective the art has potential to convey an *active* message. While Ibra does not see himself in any way as an activist, and in fact chooses to distance himself in subtle ways from the concept of activism – for example, by choosing a publishing company that focuses on art rather than social issues (Zemanová) – he knowingly chooses to work with NGOs that the public would likely describe as activist organizations. In some ways, this may be motivated by his ability to receive funding by working with the NGOs; Zemanová describes that in the early '90s “It was not possible for the [Environmental Partnership] Foundation to give the funding directly to the artist, so it was the NGO to which we gave money” for Ibra's early work in Libkovice. (Zemanová) In the case of the more recent Rajter project, Ibra had another motivation for partnering with an NGO. As Pavel Franc, the Rajter's lawyer, described the situation, “Ibra contacted Mr. Rajter before, in 1993, but the family didn't want to take photos, [they even] said ‘If you come again, we take gun and we shoot you!’ ...[Ibra] needed me because the family trusted me; without me persuading the family to let Ibra take pictures it would never have happened.” (Franc)

In spite of the artist's personal intentions for working with NGOs, these partnerships resulted in the direct involvement of his art in the environmental and social campaigns of the NGOs. Through this involvement, the collected images had several real, tangible effects on the

evolution of each issue; although neither issue resulted in the desired outcome from the NGO's perspective, the effects of the art increased the democratic nature of the campaign by empowering several subsets of the involved public.

One major point cited by both Zemanová and Franc was the increased media attention which they believed to substantially increase public awareness of the issues; Franc recalled that Ibra's involvement, and especially winning the Czech photo prize, "raised media coverage...very, very big articles were written about the case and we were able to do a huge ad about [the exhibit] for free." (Franc) Zemanová also remarked that the Libkovice case "got a lot of media attention, and the photos really helped document for the media." (Zemanová) In both these cases the collaboration between the artist and NGOs seems to have somehow affected media presentation of the stories in a generally positive light (according to Franc he read only one negative article out of hundreds about the Rajter case). This contrasts with the typical complaint of NGOs that the media always portrays the environmental interest as "oppositional" or "against" something. One possible cause of the change in media approach is that, through Ibra's photos, the environmental interest was also clearly, visually shown as a human interest. This notion would correspond with the fact that visually presenting the stories of concrete individuals was cited as another important outcome. "I think it was very important for the people, that there was finally some record of what they went through. For example, for Mr. Krejčí, it was very important that the book was out." (Zemanová) According to Franc, Ibra's photos also "really helped [the Rajter family] in the community" where they lived; "before, they were really not respected, but now they are respected in the community." (Franc) The ability of the photo projects to give voice to people who would not normally be "heard" by broader society is another way in which Ibra's photos have had actual democratizing power. This differs from

the potential of documentary art at the EKOFilm festival, for example, because by collaborating with NGOs, Ibra worked with organized representatives of the public who had specific interests in making the stories as publicly known as possible. At the EKOFilm festival, the purpose of the art is used to cultivate an “image” of concern but in the Libkovice campaign, the concern was very real and immediate to the people presenting art.

One of the most blatant examples of Ibra’s art in playing an empowering role for public in the case of Libkovice was itself photographed. The campaign included public rallies and demonstrations to prevent the destruction of the village, which continually grew as time went on. (Zemanová) At some of these rallies, Ibra’s photographs were used to visually represent the injustice occurring to the villagers. One photograph from the documentary book depicts a rally at the top of Wenceslas Square in which at least five of the participants are carrying large, framed prints of Ibra’s photos from Libkovice. (Gockeler, p. 127) According to Zemanová a substantial number of people at the rally were not people from Libkovice. While the demonstration itself appears from the picture to be modest in size, the photographs provide a more powerful visual message than would thirty or forty people just standing around holding signs or chanting; the images themselves are testament to the actual conditions that people in Libkovice were facing. In this sense the art not only gives voice to the individuals who were directly affected, as described above, but also provides an empowering tool for other people engaged in the campaign such as those at the rally; their personal presence (i.e. involvement in the campaign even though they are not directly affected by the issues) is both reinforced and enhanced by the visual messages they carry.

Perhaps the most important element of Ibra’s choice to partner with NGOs and allow his art to be used in these two campaigns was that the NGOs actively tried to create space for the

public to not only observe but to engage. In the case of Libkovice, the public was encouraged to engage in dialogue with the government and the mining company to prevent destruction of the village, while with the Rajter case one member of the public became strongly, personally engaged in a legal battle to stop the construction of a factory which would directly impact his ability to farm. While the element of art in both campaigns clearly worked in tandem with many non-art forces, the functions of art to magnify the voices of those affected and provide awareness amongst a larger audience contributed towards the ability of each case to involve the public in directly challenging power structures which sought to subordinate input in decisions which will directly affect them. Given the definition of democracy outlined earlier in this paper, which values inclusive decision-making processes, this example of art comes far closer to acting as a democratizing force than the two above.

In spite of this actualization of democratic engagement in environmental decisions, a number of factors also limit the effectiveness of this engagement. In this case, the powers opposing public involvement, and the strategies of the NGOs (which are often informed by the nature of the opposing powers), limit the ability of public or its “representatives” to truly engage in decision making. In this case the strongest powers opposing public involvement include government and business that have specific interests in seeing each project take place (village destruction and factory construction). Thus they have disincentive for public involvement, because as Franc remarked, “If you have public there, then you have control.” The nature of the problems led the bottom-up public reactions to take on a character of opposition in both cases. In the Libkovice campaign the public carried out its opposition, most notably, in the streets via rallies, demonstrations, and physically blocking demolition by sitting in cranes or handcuffing people to buildings. In the Rajter case the opposition was carried out through legal procedures in

the courts. While these approaches certainly foster public engagement to an extent, the oppositional character of that engagement limits the ability of the voices to actually be incorporated into decision-making, because it puts the powerful institution on the defensive and therefore encourages them to adopt defensive strategies to maintain their positions of power. This evaluation is not meant to criticize the approaches taken in each campaign, because in fact the issues were oppositional from the outset, but rather to recognize a limit to public participation in such circumstances. Given the context of the situation that art was acting within, the potential for Ibra's art to engage public in this case was limited by the realities of the issues themselves.

### **Participatory Planning of a Public Square**

The revitalization project at Budějovicka Square, spearheaded by the Partnership for Public Spaces program of the Environmental Partnership Foundation, offers a fourth and final case study of intersections between art, environmental decision-making, and potential for catalyzing public participation. This project differs from the first two art examples in the same major ways as the photography projects of Ibra Ibrahimovič differed from them, yet it also differs from Ibra's involvement in at least two instrumental ways. Unlike the collaborations between Ibra and environmental NGOs, the Budějovicka project places less importance to the *artistic* quality of the art and more on the *production process* of the art. And while the campaigns utilized Ibra's art in ways which engaged the public in *opposition* to other institutes of power, the Budějovicka project seeks in all ways possible to create *partnerships* between disparate groups who would be affected by the outcome of the decision. These factors each affect the actual impact and the potential for public involvement in different ways, and the process allowed this

project to give public a real voice in decision-making process that translated into shaping the actual implementation of those decisions.

Until about a year ago, Budějovicka Square was a large and foreboding, concrete complex with multiple ground levels, where a metro stop, bus station, a few major roads, several major businesses, a hypermarket and other large buildings of unknown function all intersect. As of May, 2004, it still has all those features, but revitalization efforts at the square have also culminated in the addition of a cluster of wooden benches with trellises for climbing plants, several small, raised, circular plots of grass about 4 meters in diameter, and about a dozen small planters containing what are presumably shrubs although in winter look like nothing of the sort. The apparent crowning, artistic glory of the revitalization efforts include a “sculpture” consisting of four posts of different colors, each about 3 meters high and 30 centimeters in diameter, placed on four corners of an imaginary square and connected two each other by four horizontal wooden beams. The tiny inscription near the bottom of one post reads, “Jaro, Léto, Podzim, Zima (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter)” although it is difficult to determine if this label is the name of the piece or just a poetic scribble of graffiti. On one cold but sunny winter day, the number of people utilizing the sitting space totaled one, and he appeared homeless. (Personal observations)

Those additions were the result of efforts by a number of stakeholders to revitalize the area. Each party involved had varying interests in seeing the space improve and varying ideas about how they could contribute. The Environmental Partnership Foundation (Nadace Partnerství, herein EPF) acted as the coordinating institution for the project; EPF is “the largest independent source of financial support for environmental projects in Czech communities” and its mission is “to assist NGOs, communities and other partners in care of the environment, and stimulate sustainable development, cross-sector cooperation and public participation in civil

society.” (Nadace Partnerství) The impetus for revitalization came from a member of a bank, whose headquarter building lines one edge of the square. The bank is “headed by an American” who was willing to provide some funding for revitalization efforts, and the specific idea came from “a woman there in high places [who was] very interested in doing something with the space.” (Vailová) Renata Vailová, now in charge of the Partnership for Public Spaces program, was not certain about the details, but suggested that this woman from the bank approached EPF asking for help in revitalization efforts because the space was “pitiful!” and it needed “to live.” The goal of the project thus became, “to create something that goes beyond utility for the owners, that somehow [adds] value for the people who live in the area.” (Vailová) The NGO then spearheaded efforts to forge cooperation and exchange of ideas between various groups who would have an interest in revitalizing the square (as well as people who might “sabotage us or be unhappy” with the outcomes). The inclusive nature of the process is indicated by the breadth of institutions involved: private business institutions that owned property in and near the square, a local school, NGOs, artists and local residents; and a failed attempt to involve the Prague 4 government was cited as a disappointment. (Vailová) The description of the outcomes, above, facetiously characterizes the results of the revitalization efforts as quite modest in their ability to engage a public or truly “revitalize” the space (albeit the criticism might be somewhat unfair due to the time of year of observation), but based upon less tangible outcomes resulting from the *process* behind the physical art implementation, the project had relative success in engaging the public. As a model for future engagement, it may have even more potential.

The project’s concern with the process behind art production, rather than focusing entirely on the quality of art produced, led to mixed results in terms of public participation. In production phases, public input was incorporated in a number of ways. “At the beginning...the



public was engaged more...when they were trying to find out, ‘What do you want to have here? What do you want to do?’” One outcome of public feedback was a request to reduce graffiti in the area, and so an artist created an “anti-graffiti design” which “students from a nearby high-school [helped] paint.” (Vailová) Of course the process did not involve public participation at every step; for example the ideas initially generated by the public were for the most part translated into real plans by the architect working for EPF, who was “the only person who was really working on it for a long time.” (Vailová) But in terms of engaging members of the public, this project did provide an opportunity that would allow the public to give specific input and then see tangible results, even if their input was strongly molded by the ideas of just one artist before being implemented. On the other hand, by emphasizing process, perhaps at the *expense* of product, the artwork ended up being mediocre and lacking strong ability to engage public after implementation. For example, regarding the result of public request for added green space, Vailová comments, “You can’t do anything there, it’s just circles of grass; it’s not a place where kids can play, it’s not large enough.” The main “art” piece, the sculpture (described above) is especially not engaging, at least from the perspective of an American observer. The modest success of the art products can be seen to have implications for the process. Although the public was involved in the decision-making process, the implementation of the decisions lacked much substantial, transformative power; therefore it can be said that both the process and the product are largely symbolic. The physical art products, although modest, can be seen as standing testament to the fact that, as Vailová points out, “people who don’t *have* to have anything to do with each other, and could just do as they want [such as members of the public and representatives of private businesses]...at least are willing to talk with each other, even if it’s through [EPF]. There *is* some interest in that kind of interaction.”

As a participatory process seeking partnership rather than opposition, the process had other affects on public engagement in decision-making. EPF's partnership-based approach was described as Vailová as "a perfect study about cooperation and about power." As described early in this paper, a number of powerful institutions (notably business and the government) have incentives to block public participation in decision-making. In contrast to the threatening and oppositional approach taken by the Ibrahimovič partnerships, the EPF partnership approach, seeks power in a manner much less obviously threatening to the status quo. Vailová recounts that when she approaches institutions like local businesses about contributing towards the revitalization efforts, "I am thinking as if this was a client and I am trying to sell something... I know they have absolutely no reason to [be involved] unless there is something in it for them. So far [that approach] has been working." (Vailová) The importance of this approach for public involvement is that it creates an audience who is more receptive to the public input from the start. This is not to say that the campaigns Ibra became involved with approached the situations in inappropriate ways; the vastly differing nature of these two art projects obviously demanded very different responses. In many real situations partnership is neither easy nor possible. These differing examples instead point out how the difference in motivation for each project affects the difference in results.

The on-going Budějovicka project has been described by Vailová as "not optimal... but by no means has there been a worsening. Maybe [change] has just not happened as fast as our program anticipated." Although "optimal" results were not achieved, the project had tangible outcomes that are significant as platforms from which future engagement can occur. The most important outcome of the project included its ability to establish real relationships between the public and other groups within the local community (including, importantly, the NGO itself). It

also created concrete results which stand as testament to those relationships, and it provided experience on which to base future collaborative projects.

## **Conclusions**

The differences in actual impact of the four art case studies obviously stem from their alternate approaches to art and, as described above, each approach had its own very real limitations. However, each of the four examples offers very positive aspects which imply that future environmental art may be significant to an evolving environmental dialogue which includes public participation. First, the films of Čiřařovský utilized a high quality of art to create spiritual and personal appeals to its viewers to contemplate their role within the natural environment. His films resulted in noticeable, concrete changes on an individual basis, which likely resulted from the quality of their production. The EKOFilm festival's most important role in relation to public involvement may be largely symbolic; in the same way that enunciating values of "sustainable development" and "public participation" creates an opening for accountability in the State Environmental Policy, the enunciation of ecological values by awarding prizes to these films is important for public only if they force the government to recognize and act upon its stated values. It creates a handle for leverage of public power but does not actively seek to engage that power. Ibrahimovič, in partnership with two NGOs, has a very real impact of helping to magnify the voices of people experiencing environmental injustice; his high artistic quality played an important role in launching those voices to levels of national recognition. Finally, the Budějovicka Square project employed art as a creative and collaborative process to forge partnerships between disparate social entities. Each project also contains elements which make up for the shortcomings of others: the primary shortcomings of the first

two examples lie in their failure to seek strategies of active public engagement, the third case study approaches powerful institutions in a threateningly oppositional manner which limits potential for a dialogue, while the fourth project, in its emphasis on process, fails to employ high artistic quality which results in an unsuccessful post-production art object.

These findings suggest, first, that art does certainly play a small role in engaging the public in environmental dialogues. Next, they indicate that both artist quality as well as creative and post-creative process are important aspects of art's ability to actually engage a public. Further, they imply that art has the most potential to engage public when it operates in tandem with a larger strategy of public engagement which stems from facets of the public, itself. The most important implication of these findings, in terms of environmental decision-making, is that art has some potential to act as a counter-force to the massive barriers to public participation that were outlined in the beginning of the paper. The realization of that potential will likely evolve slowly, as has the NGO sector itself and the broader Czech dialogue regarding environmental issues.

Areas for further research are numerous; the following suggestions are a small sample. The impact of art on public perception of NGOs and/or the environment as a whole, through first-hand interaction with the public, is one area needing more research. The affects of art in forming relationships between NGOs, business and the government through interaction with business executives and members of government and NGOs would be another avenue for exploration. Also and importantly the specific impacts of affecting relationships between the public and NGOs would be useful. Non-art experiments striving for public participation in environmental decision-making would be a third important avenue for study; this would provide

a comparison to see whether art could potentially enhance non-artists methods for increasing public engagement.

### **Research Evaluation**

In terms of my method and approach, I explored a number of varied sources including first-hand interviews and art observations as well as secondary sources when appropriate. I was hoping I could find a pattern or trend regarding the impact of art on the public, but realized that by studying such a disparate collection of projects any trends would likely be superficial; each case was in many ways unique and conclusions about each type of approach were generalized from one example of each. It resulted in becoming generally a survey which could be a basis for a more focused research project in the future.

Art observations were very helpful and in fact crucial to my data analysis because I could compare the physical artworks with their creators' comments about them. My first-hand art observations included about 5 films from EKOFilm Festival (borrowed from the Ministry of Environment) as well as attending a post-festival screening of the winning films at a film-club in Prague, I watched 3 films by Josef Cisarovsky (borrowed from the artist), observed Ibra Ibrahimovic's photography on the internet and in a book and saw several prints at EPS in Brno, and visited Budejovicka Square where Nadace Partnerstvi did the revitalization project. Some of the other examples I explored were not directly used in the paper although elements of them probably affected the analysis of the examples given.

In some senses much of my interview data is still "second hand," especially the data regarding each artist's process and the art's affect on public participation in environmental decision-making. I spoke with only a limited number of the broader Czech public (people who

are currently unengaged in environmental issues) about issues covered in this project. An interesting and pertinent alternative approach, had I started early enough, could have been to follow two or three “environmental” artworks in the process of production and tried to gauge the actual reactions and impacts of those pieces; if timing and language ability had allowed it would have made sense to attend a planning meeting for an art project such as Budejovicka Square or even a municipal-level environmental planning meeting. This sort of approach would have given me better first-hand data about all aspects of my project but would have required more time because I would have had to establish a different type of relationship with the artists and organizers. More interaction with “the public,” in specific relation to my topic, would have been helpful, as well. Finally it may have been helpful to speak more with traditional decision-makers, a few members of parliament or employees at the current Ministry of Environment for example.

The major barriers that prevented me from taking a more thorough approach (aside from the obvious time constraint and personal laziness, neither of which should not be underestimated), were inhibition early in the project, an uncertain thesis (my thesis did not solidify until the paper was written), and a language and cultural barrier described below.

The research project contains many biases and error of which I am fully aware, and probably some more that I have not identified. From my perspective my major bias is that I chose to study a topic about which I already have an opinion; I think public participation in environmental decision-making is vitally important to democracy and I already have opinions about how it can be successfully approached in US context. Thus I noticed that my intended “objective analysis,” at least in my mind and probably in my paper, often turned into judgments which may not always be fair. My American brain might especially be more likely to ignore the Czech context; however a positive aspect of my association with similar issues in the US may be

that I have a better ability to recognize similarities and differences between Czech and US context which could potentially help me to describe the Czech situation better than an insider who would have their own biases.

Errors may have arisen from a language barrier – for example, I noticed when first analyzing the data that one informant appeared to be very concerned with the fact that receiving awards for his art didn't provide him with any money. Only later did I realize that a word in my question, "importance," may have been translated either by our translator or the artist's mind, into something like a Czech equivalent of "value" which can explicitly imply money. I realized then that case I couldn't use the data in the way I intended and treated it like a scientist would treat a contaminated sample (i.e. quarantine and throw out). So, language is not only a barrier because the informant may not *know* certain words, but may associate them with different *connotations* than they have in English. This sets up the interviews to have a potential number of misunderstandings in communication and therefore my questions and my interpretation of given answers are ripe ground for a number of errors. I tried to minimize this by removing specific words that I knew would have negative connotation (for example, "activist") if I was asking a question where that might affect the answer. But I surely wasn't 100% successful. While this is important especially in a foreign culture it is an error which can occur in any communication, even between people within a very similar culture.

Another error arises because I did not speak with many artists personally, but rather with people who collaborated with the artists; therefore my information about the artists' intents is often secondhand as described above. Also, people who I did speak with have invested a lot in their personal work, and so may tend to be either overly defensive about the project's worth and success, or overly critical about its flaws. All information I received was already biased coming

from the informant. Sometimes, if a response seemed reasonable, I treated informants' comments like facts because they were easier to analyze, rather than considering everything that each informant said as biased and reflecting only one opinion. Thus it became a hybrid sociological-cultural-anthropological-quasi-fact-based-history-art project with many weavings between the multiple disciplines covered, which may result in confused analysis, presentation and of course author.



## Sources Cited

- Adler, Rudolf. "Hastrman Habrman (Cyklus náš Venkov)." ČT Praha: Czech Republic, 2004.
- Andrt, Miroslav. Personal Communication. Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic, Communication Committee of Sustainable Advisory Council. December 7, 2004.
- Bouchal, Jan. Personal Communication. Bohemian Greenways (Oživení). November 30, 2004.
- Císařovský, Josef. "Beastuary." Czech Television: Czech Republic, 1992.
- Císařovský, Josef. "Four Moments of Silence." Czech Television: Czech Republic, 1998.
- Císařovský, Josef. Personal Communication. Freelance filmmaker and previous director of EKOFilm Festival. November 30, 2004.
- Císařovský, Josef. "Something Lighter." Czech Republic, 1992.
- Drhová, Zuzana. Personal Communication. Director, Green Circle (Zeleny Kruh). November 4, 2004.
- "Farmer Rajter's Story – From Collectivization to Globalization." Online. Accessed October 19, 2004. <http://www.sedlakjan.cz>
- Franc, Pavel. Personal Communication. Lawyer, Environmental Law Services, Brno. November 19, 2004.
- Gockeler, Susan and Reeve, Hester. Libkovice: Zdař Bůh. Divus: Prague, 1997.
- Holy, Ladislav. The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. Cambridge University Press: New York, 1996.
- Kocianová, Katka. Personal Communication. Runs website, media campaign and Information Center at Green Circle (Zeleny Kruh). November 25, 2004.
- Kovař, Pavel. Personal Communication. Dean of Faculty of Sciences, Charles University and current President of EKOFilm Festival. November 30, 2004.
- Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic. EKOFilm Promotional Materials. 2004.
- Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic. State Environmental Policy. Prague, 1999.
- Mourek, Daniel. Personal Communication. Leads International Greenways program of Environmental Partnership Foundation for Central Europe (Nadace Partnerství). November 30 and December 6, 2004.

- Nadace Partnerství. *The Czech Non-profit Sector before Entering the European Union: Development, Capacity, Needs and Future of Czech Environmental NGOs*. 2004.
- Poltikovič, Viliam. "V Kruhu Znovuzrození." Czech Television: Czech Republic, 2004.
- Radová, Jitka. Personal Communication. Organizes EKOFilm Festival, Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic. December 3, 2004.
- Rynda, Ivan. Personal Communication. Chief of Department of Social and Cultural Ecology, Charles University. November 30, 2004.
- Slunečko, Martin. "Nedej se – Chamonix v Pošumaví." VARA ČR a Global entertainment a Media s.r.o.: Czech Republic, 2004.
- Vailová, Renata. Personal Communication. Partnership for Public Spaces, Environmental Partnership Foundation (Nadace Partnerství). December 6, 2004.
- Vaněk, Miroslav. *The Development of a Green Opposition in Czechoslovakia and the Role of International Contacts. Transnational Moments of Change*. Gerd Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney, eds. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc: Maryland, 2004.
- Vaněk, Miroslav and Kilburn, Michael. *The Ecological Roots of a Democracy Movement*. Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs: New York, Spring 2004.
- Vaněk, Miroslav. Personal Communication. Director of Center for Oral History, Center of Contemporary History, Academy of Sciences, Prague. November 4, 2004.
- Zemanová, Lenka. Personal Communication. Academy of Fine Arts, Prague. December 1, 2004.
- Zinggl, Wolfgang, ed. WochenKlauser: Sociopolitical Activism in Art. Spring-Verlag Wien: New York, 2001.