

***Nature Protests: The End of Ecology in Slovakia.* By Edward Snajdr. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008. xiii, 242 pp. Notes.**

References. Index. Paper.

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Drawing on both ethnographic and archival research, Edward Snajdr gives a fascinating account of environmental activism in Slovakia from the last decade of the communist period through the mid-1990s. He explores how nature activists united diverse people and interests in challenging the communist regime, and traces these same activists' inability to adapt their message to the rapidly changing conditions of post-socialism. In examining the wide variety of newly emerging environmental groups in Slovakia, he concludes that in an era of image politics it may no longer be possible for ecology to unify diverse groups. This valuable contribution to the growing scholarship on the environment in post-socialist East Europe will appeal not only to scholars of this region but to anyone interested in the changing dynamics of environmental activism.

The first half of the book examines how Slovak nature activists shaped environmentalism into a message challenging socialism, in the process becoming key actors in the Velvet Revolution. Snajdr uses Arun Agrawal's concept of environmentality to describe the socialist regime's control of both nature and citizens through the politics of normalization. While the regime both hid environmental problems from the public and restricted the activities of most groups, it ironically allowed conservation organizations to exist and eventually thrive. By 1972, these conservation groups had formed the Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protection (SZOPK), the only organization in Slovakia that maintained independence from the Communist Party. Drawing extensively on firsthand interviews with activists, Snajdr details the shift within SZOPK from activities such as bird watching and mushroom picking to the renovation of traditional buildings in rural areas. With this shift, Snajdr argues, conservationists expanded their focus to include not only the protection of nature but the protection of Slovak identity. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, SZOPK membership grew in both number and diversity, attracting dissident writers with its encouragement of open debate. In 1987, the group published an extensive, well-researched report detailing environmental problems in Bratislava. While the

regime tried to discredit the report, the citizens of Bratislava recognized the environmental problems as real, and SZOPK became both an enemy of the state and an advocate for the people. The group gave rise to the Public Against Violence civic movement, which took power from the regime in 1989.

The second half of the book focuses on environmentalism after 1989, in particular the rapid decline of support for SZOPK and the emergence of new environmental groups. Snajdr explains the former in part as the failure of the group to change its message to fit the rapidly changing, and increasingly nationalist, political landscape. For example, SZOPK's fight against the Gabčíkovo dam illustrates their failure to recognize that the dam was no longer a symbol of socialism but a symbol of Slovak identity. Moreover, with concerns such as the split from the Czech Republic taking center stage, environmental concerns seemed less urgent to many. Such difficulties led to splintering within both SZOPK and the newly formed Green Party. Next, using ethnographic evidence from his 1993-1995 fieldwork among new environmental NGOs, including anarchist and nationalist groups, Snajdr explains that without the communist state as a clear target, environmentalism has become plural and fragmented. In Slovakia and elsewhere, he argues, ecology has been professionalized, disconnected from local practices, and even exploited to serve capitalist or nationalist ends, rendering it incapable of uniting diverse groups. The emergence of image politics and a tendency to focus on single issues such as nuclear testing and animal rights have prevented the emergence of a coherent environmental message since 1989, leading Snajdr to purport that a post-ecological age has arrived.

One of the strengths of Snajdr's work involves his use of environmentality to describe the changing relationships between government power and local cultural and political practices in the context of environmental concerns. While Agrawal (*Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*, 2005) focuses on how northern Indian forest councils used technologies of government to make citizens into environmental subjects, Snajdr's application of environmentality to socialist as well as post-socialist Slovakia uses the

concept in a richer, more dynamic way. By focusing on environmental activists, Snajdr draws explicit attention to the ways that government practices can be resisted, most successfully in the case of SZOPK and the removal of the communist regime. Moreover, by examining environmental politics in a rapidly changing society, he shows what happens when environmentalities fluctuate. Additional research could push this approach even further by examining in more depth, for example, the relationship between environmental policies, activists, and the non-activist Slovaks whose lives and villages are affected by the construction of dams and other projects.

Snajdr persuasively argues that Slovakia's shift from a communist environmentality to multiple post-socialist environmentalities has led to a post-ecological condition in Slovakia. While he offers a few examples of similar shifts elsewhere in East Europe and beyond, additional comparative research would help to assess his suggestion that the post-

ecological age is a global phenomenon and that 1989 marks its beginning. Snajdr's work gives other researchers a productive framework for continuing to examine the dynamics of environmental activism in different contexts. As Slovakia represents the clearest example of environmentalism's role in the downfall of communism, further comparison with the dynamics of environmentalism in post-socialist countries in which environmental activists played a lesser role, if any, in these events would be especially compelling.

By weaving together historical and ethnographic data and examining environmental activism in its larger social and political context, Snajdr gives a compelling account of environmentalism in Slovakia both during communism and in the first years of post-socialism. The book gives readers not only an understanding of the changing face of environmental activism in Slovakia, but a starting point for thinking about such shifts worldwide.