

Volunteers on the political anvil: citizenship and volunteer biodiversity monitoring in three postcommunist countries

Sandra Bell

Department of Anthropology, Durham University, 43 Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HN, England; e-mail: sandra.bell@durham.ac.uk

Hugo Reinert

Estonian Institute of Humanities, University of Tallinn, Salme 12, 10413 Tallinn, Estonia; e-mail: hreinert@gmail.com

Joanna Cent, Malgorzata Grodzińska-Jurczak, Hanna Kobierska

Institute of Environmental Sciences, Jagiellonian University, Gronostajowa 7, 30-387 Krakow, Poland; e-mail: j.cent@uj.edu.pl, m.grodzinka-jurczak@uj.edu.pl, h.kobierska@uj.edu.pl

Dan Podjed

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, Aškerceva 2, 51-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; e-mail: dan.podjed@volja.net

Deivida Vandzinskaite

Department of Recreation and Tourism, Klaipeda University, H Manto 84, LT-5808 Klaipeda, Lithuania; e-mail: deivida@gmail.com

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Abstract. We present comparative ethnographic material on volunteer biodiversity monitoring from environmental organisations in three postcommunist countries: Poland, Slovenia, and Lithuania. We chart and discuss aspects of the heritage from socialism and communist rule in terms of their effect on the present-day running and operations of four case-study organisations in these countries, focusing particularly on challenges posed by the legacy of compulsory volunteering, inherited organisational cultures, economic reorganisation, and internationalisation of the volunteering sector. In closing we indicate certain key differences between our case-study organisations, focusing on factors that influenced their ability to operate in the postcommunist nongovernmental organisation sector, and offer some observations of more general relevance.

1 Introduction

Citizenship is a complex term with multiple genealogies, strongly rooted in a history of European political thought and practice that traces itself back to the Greeks, and the Aristotelian distinction between public and private. Taken in its broadest sense, the term denotes an open-ended assemblage of beliefs, values, practices, rights, entitlements, obligations, procedures, institutions, laws, social structures, and forms of belonging that together constitute individuals as participants in the public life of a collective. Generally, following the republican and liberal traditions of citizenship, this collective is the state—but in alternative readings the term is also increasingly coming into use for other collectives such as cities, places, political organisations, and even the planet (eg van Steenbergen, 1994). Kymlicka and Norman (1994) note that citizenship possesses at least two distinct aspects: understood as a ‘legal status’, the term refers to a technical, legally defined position within the framework of a particular social and political entity such as a state. As a ‘desirable activity’, on the other hand, it points to a loosely defined bundle of individual practices and activities to be fostered, desirable insofar as they are oriented towards furthering the good of a particular community (page 353). Here, ‘citizenship’ operates to: identify desirable values, behaviours, attitudes, associations, and practices; specify the terms and conditions of appropriate participation

in collective life; draw attention to present shortcomings; and relate these to ideal forms and levels. In this latter sense, the one that primarily interests us here, the concept also conveys a powerful moral or normative charge.

At least as far back as de Tocqueville, the practice of volunteering has been understood as a constitutive element of republican ‘active citizenship’ and of democratic civil society: crucial to the operation of a robust, well-functioning, and democratic civic sphere, as well as an important measure of the strength of traditionally democratic forms of political participation (Milligan and Fyfe, 2005). With the fall of communism and the subsequent political transitions in Eastern Europe, framed within the more general ‘problem’ of fostering democratic citizenship and ‘building’ a democratic civic sphere in the region (eg Kligman, 1990), the question of how to develop and strengthen volunteering became part of a wider social engineering agenda. In this context, volunteer and other forms of civic participation—understood as a ‘permanent attribute’ of democracy (Valkov, 2009, page 15)—were enmeshed in far-ranging and ambitious projects of social reform and transformation, to the point where some argued that “Western scholarship [on citizenship] ... has been absorbed by the project of establishing liberal democracies and market economies” (Kelley, 1997, page 120). Hand in hand with this, communist rule has been generally defined as “a world without participative [sic] traditions” (Voicu and Voicu, 2003, page 2), a sort of civic tabula rasa on which to inscribe forms and institutions of democratic life imported from the West. Low rates of volunteering and public associational life have been taken as indicators of an absence of citizenship and, by extension, of a more general absence of civic and community life in former communist countries.

Contradicting this view somewhat, communist regimes frequently did give rise to complex and extensive forms of collective, nonstate community life—though these were often ‘subterranean’ or ‘invisible’, organised through informal networks, extended ‘families’, systems of favour, and patronage (Dallago, 1990; Wedel, 1986). Along with other forms of ‘soft sociability’ (Pérez-Díaz, 2002), such backstage arenas and networks formed an important part of collective life and what one might well term a form of ‘civil society’ under communism: frequently, as in the case of Poland (Hicks, 1996), they were instrumental in preparing and organising resistance to the communist regimes. The subterranean character of these informal networks, institutions and forms of participation has tended to make them invisible within the framework of state-oriented citizenship models focused on recognised public institutions, and forms of activity (Heinen, 1997; Howard, 2002). Seen one way, this is a lacuna which obscures their possible significance and value as potential soil, and substance, for the development of locally rooted forms of participatory political practice—as opposed, for example, to a civil sector composed of professional organisations largely dependent on foreign aid (Fagan, 2005).

Understanding the trajectories of citizenship in the postcommunist context in the light of this, then, requires not only that the notion of citizenship be extended to encompass “a sociology of relationships among public spheres, community associational life, and patterns of political culture” (Somers, 1993 page 587)—but also an attunement to forms of collective life, participatory organisation, and belonging that may be complex, informal, opaque, and not necessarily visible, at least not immediately, at the level of statistics or political analysis. This ‘opening up’ of citizenship as a concept, in the encounter with the social and historical realities of the region, is in line with more general trends in the study of citizenship. In recent years, theorists have proposed a plethora of new or emergent versions of the concept, complementing or even replacing existing versions: these include terms such as transnational, cosmopolitan, European, global, ecological, environmental, and postcolonial citizenship

(Isin and Wood, 1999; van Steenberg, 1994). What most of these have in common is that they perform a double disarticulation: first, decoupling the traditionally close link between citizenship and the apparatus of specific states; and, second, reconceptualising the assumed complementarity between citizenship as practice and citizenship as legal status, reorienting citizenship studies both towards topics such as practice, performance, or process (Parker, 2002) and towards participatory communities and registers of belonging (Gordon and Lenhardt, 2006) not necessarily associated primarily with the state apparatus.

On the basis of these preliminary reflections we present some factors that affected voluntary participation in environmental monitoring organisations across the three postcommunist countries of our case studies (Poland, Slovenia, and Lithuania) and discuss these in relation to concepts of participatory citizenship. A comparative argument such as this is necessarily awkwardly scaled, positioned somewhere between an ‘anthropology of democracy’ (Paley, 2002) and the ‘transitological’ literature that focuses on large-scale and statistical analyses of political institutions and regime shifts. Possible objections arise concerning the marked differences in organisational profiles among the organisations we studied and the extent to which these differences restrict the effectiveness of a comparative methodology. We have addressed this problem by focusing discussion on four specific areas of comparison that emerge most clearly from our analysis of the ethnographic material. The juxtaposition we present here is also substantiated through conversation with other comparative analyses of postcommunist civil society (eg Howard, 2002). By these means our material does shed useful light on conditions and processes that are relevant for the future of environmental volunteering in the region, at both the individual and organisational levels, and which have implications also for the practitioner and policy communities.

2 Methods

The paper is based on literature reviews and ethnographic case studies of volunteer environmental monitoring organisations in three postcommunist countries: Poland, Slovenia, and Lithuania. Material for these case studies was collected, between 2004 and 2007, by a team of international researchers working within Work Package 1 (WPI) of EuMon, a broad interdisciplinary EU initiative aimed at developing the tools, infrastructure, and databases necessary for meeting the 2010 EU biodiversity targets (<http://eumon.ckff.si>). Under the umbrella of this initiative, the WPI researchers examined the involvement of volunteers in the environmental monitoring sector across several European countries (EuMon, 2007). Following an initial overall survey-based assessment of the volunteer biodiversity monitoring sector in Europe, researchers selected nine volunteer environmental organisations (participatory monitoring networks) from the 291 organisations that responded. Of these nine, we draw here on material for further in-depth study from the four organisations that were based in postcommunist countries: two of them in Poland, one in Slovenia, and one in Lithuania. The Slovenian organisation [Društvo za opazovanje in proučevanje ptic Slovenije (DOPPS)] was studied in depth, as was the Lithuanian one [Lietuvos Ornitologu Draugija (LOD)]. Of the two Polish organisations, one was studied in depth (Akcja Carpatica) while the other (Stowarzyszenie dla Natury WILK) was studied more briefly, using so-called ‘rapid assessment’. Both the in-depth research and the rapid assessments were conducted using participant observation, interviews, and literature analysis. As table 1 illustrates, the two Polish organisations were both relatively small, local-scale operations, founded in the postcommunist period, while the Slovenian and Lithuanian organisations were both large, national bodies dating back to the communist era.

Table 1. Organisations studied (data as of the time of research).

Organisation	Country	Scale	Date founded	Membership	Taxonomy	Method	Website
Stowarzyszenie dla Natury WILK	Poland	Carpathian Mountains	1997	small active core; 50 volunteers per year	large mammals	rapid appraisal	http://www.polishwolf.org.pl/
Akcja Carpatica	Poland	Carpathian Mountains	1998	core of 15 members; 300 volunteers	birds	in depth	http://www.carpatica.org/
Društvo za opazovanje in proučevanje ptic Slovenije	Slovenia	national	1979	18 paid staff, 750 members	birds	in depth	http://www.ptice.si/
Lietuvos Ornitologu Draugija	Lithuania	national	1984	6 paid staff; 1200 members	birds	in depth	http://www.birdlife.lt/

The methods and broader findings of the project are discussed in further detail in the EuMon WPI deliverables, particularly the final report (Bell et al, 2008; EuMon, 2007). The remainder of the present paper is divided into three main parts. First, in section 3 we offer a historical outline (necessarily brief) of the national background for each of the three countries. With reference to ethnographic material from our case studies, in the following four sections we discuss some of the legacy effects of communism, as this became evident in the day-to-day management and running of the organisations we studied. Finally, in section 8 we return to the subject of citizenship and examine some of the more specific implications of our argument for the practice of environmental volunteering.

3 Background

As a general rule, during the period of communist rule in Poland only nature conservation organisations that did not undermine official conservation policies were permitted to exist. There were no large independent environmental organisations (Duijvelaar, 1996; Glinski, 1996). In 1980 the Polish political landscape was seismically altered by the emergence of Solidarity, the first noncommunist trade union in the Eastern bloc—an event that had a profound impact on the subsequent development of the civil sector and environmental movements in the country. The establishment of a strong, well-defined opposition to the government created a political space within which a range of small, independent, often informal networks and movements could emerge (Glinski, 1994; 1996; Regulaska, 1999). These minor actors were not necessarily aligned, either with Solidarity or with a critical antigovernment agenda, but their emergence still served the purposes of the opposition: by creating a political heterogeneity that eroded the centralised control the regime had established over the public sphere (Hicks, 1996).

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, formal restrictions on civil rights were abolished. This led to a dramatic increase in certain forms of public and civic activity—including the formation of environmental conservation movements, particularly small-scale operations (Glinski, 1996; Verdery and Burawoy, 1999). At the same time the Round Table agreements established a shared environmental protocol and defined the goals of the new nature protection system (Turnock, 2001). A wide range

of foreign funding sources also became available for nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) working in biodiversity conservation (Duijvelaar, 1996; Regulaska, 1999). With access to such funding, Polish NGOs rapidly began to rely more on international than on national structures. This enabled them to operate, at least in part, independently of and outside state structures—strengthening their position relative to the national government and making them, at least potentially, equal partners (Láng, 2003; Siegel and Yancey, 1993; WWF, 2006). This has, however, been a double-edged sword: subsequent political and economic changes have created serious financial and personnel problems for Polish NGOs that are unable to secure funding at the national level and to tap domestic resources (Siegel and Yancey, 1992). In 1994 Poland was accepted—along with Slovenia—for the first phase of EU enlargement, after agreeing to the implementation of EU environmental standards and protocols in nature conservation (Johnson and Corcelle, 1995). The EU Commission does not usually provide small grants or financial support, and this has been a significant problem for the Polish NGO sector—due in no small part to its persistently fragmented structure and the large number of minor operators, a legacy from the days of Solidarity (Grodzińska-Jurczak, 2006).

Albeit for different reasons, the present situation of NGOs in Slovenia is also defined by a history of decentralisation. In the first Yugoslavian constitution of 1946, which was based directly on the Soviet Constitution of 1936, political power was strongly centralised. By 1948, following a rift between Stalin and the Yugoslavian leader Tito, the country moved away from this model to become, instead, “a field of political, economic and social engineering” (Vučković, 1998, page 362). In 1950 the National Assembly ratified the adoption of the ‘self-management’ system, or *samoupravljanje*—a key element of Titoist ideology. As a political, economic, and social system, this was intended to be a compromise between a Western market economy and political pluralism, on the one hand, and a Soviet-style one-party system with central planning, on the other. Its basic premise was that “workers should simultaneously become employers and employees, producers and managers” (Fischer et al, 2005, page 1002). Over the following decades, the principles of the system were reworked and elaborated, in the constitutions of 1963 and 1974, and adopted by a wide range of institutions, including volunteer organisations. Briefly summarised, the aim of self-management was to provide a basis for “a different kind of democracy” (Howard, 2001, page 308)—a nonparty, classless society of individuals empowered to act and express initiative in a ‘bottom-up’ manner. Following the death of Tito in 1980, social and political problems escalated and a political consensus emerged that the system was in a state of crisis (Vučković, 1998, page 372)—a crisis which culminated, in early 1990, with the disintegration of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, and the first Slovenian elections which were held later the same year. Perhaps the key legacy of self-management, in the early years of transition, was a social and organisational culture where individuals were empowered to legitimately oppose leaders and other figures of authority (Fischer et al, 2005, pages 1101–1102): a legacy which, as we shall see, had significant effects for the Slovenian NGO and environmental volunteering sectors.

While under communist rule, both Poland and Slovenia were still nominally sovereign independent states—or part of such states—within the Eastern European ‘buffer zone’ of the Soviet Union. Lithuania, on the other hand, was not: the country was occupied by the Soviet military in 1945 and became, from 1945 to 1990, part of the Soviet Union. This period left an enormously powerful imprint on the country—socially, economically, culturally, and politically—and the brief history of the Lithuanian environmental movement is inseparably tied to it. In the period from the mid-1980s

to the early 1990s, between *perestroika* and national independence, the environmental movement was a key focus for critiques of the Soviet system: the critical discourse of environmental activism provided a language for members of the public to articulate discontent, and the language of the movement found wide purchase. Rallies organised by environmentalists drew crowds of hundreds of thousands (Rinkevičius, 2000). In the aftermath of independence, this “characteristic fusion of anti-Soviet nationalism and environmentalism” dissolved (Ignatow, 2007, page 98) and the environmental movement lost much of its previous standing and momentum. This combined with economic difficulties, exacerbated by an economic and political blockade from Moscow. For many Lithuanians the years after independence were particularly difficult—the economy was fragile, with rapidly rising prices and widespread shortages of food and electricity. In hindsight, the radical critiques and interventions of the environmental movement made it a convenient ‘scapegoat’, engendering a negative backlash among the broader public towards lay participation in environmental and economic policies (Rinkevičius, 2001). Founded in 1984, the LOD was perfectly positioned to capitalise on the ascendancy and rising popularity of the environmental movement in the years leading up to independence. Similarly, many of the problems confronted by the organisation in recent years are intertwined with the general decline of environmentalism, in the aftermath of the Soviet occupation.

As this outline indicates, in each of our three countries the transition period presented a complex, distinctive, and differentiated field within which the volunteering and environmental NGO sectors could develop. At the same time there were also a number of marked similarities between the different country case studies: similarities produced, at least in part, by a shared legacy of Communist rule, as inflected in each national context. In the next part of the paper we present the most significant of these, as they appeared across our case studies.

4 State volunteerism

Across Eastern Europe, communist regimes systematically coopted voluntary activity, establishing it as a collective, compulsory, rigidly organised, and centrally directed form of unpaid labour. The legacy of this involuntary, state-sponsored ‘volunteering’ has played a determining role in the development of postcommunist volunteering sectors at the national level. With the fall of the communist states as coercive agents, volunteer numbers generally dropped sharply, only to rise again very slowly: due, in large part, to a widespread atmosphere of resentment, distaste, and public disaffection engendered by this system (Jucknevičius and Savicka, 2003, pages 129–134). Today, the memory of state-driven volunteerism continues to exercise a powerful negative influence on volunteer motivation and recruitment efforts in postcommunist countries. As one middle-aged member of DOPPS told us, who still remembered communist practices of coerced ‘quasi-voluntarism’ :

“They hustled us ... We had to be some kind of member all the time. And when all this stopped, nobody wanted to deal with it any more.”

From a managerial point of view, this form of volunteerism meant, for one thing, that volunteers were readily available: they did not have to be recruited, motivated, or retained, as would have been the case without state coercion. With the fall of the communist state, this created a serious deficit of administrative competence in the area of volunteer management. Simply put, the newly independent states emerging from communist rule generally lacked a class of professionals equipped with the skills required to manage NGOs; NGOs, in turn, lacked leaders and staff with the skills, training and experience required to recruit volunteers, motivate them, maintain their level of enthusiasm and ensure long-term retention. Such skills are presently becoming more widely

disseminated, as more and more NGOs develop increasing professional and administrative experience, but they are still in great demand: at one point, the director of one of the organisations we studied asked our researchers for help in finding and recruiting volunteers.

Organisations in each country experienced this problem to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the existing culture of leadership and management. The problem was particularly marked in Lithuania, where the drop in volunteer numbers after the initial ‘honeymoon’ of transition remained a pressing problem at the time of our study: in the words of one LOD member,

“There are people and LOD could motivate and involve them, but if they are not motivated and they are unsatisfied, it means [the management] doesn’t know how to do it.”

In the absence of specialised leadership, positions of power and authority within the post-independence Lithuanian NGO sector have been populated, almost by default, by government officials, professors, and other senior figures migrating from other sectors—people whose management skills were tailored to the parameters of communist rule. Professors, in particular, many of whom suffered prestige loss and economic hardship under the new regime, migrated to managerial positions. This created a range of problems; as the director of the Danish Ornithological Society argued, for example, following an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to collaborate with the Lithuanian organisation:

“the problem ... was that these ex-professors did not have their roots in civil society, so they established neither real NGOs nor consultant companies. Moreover, most of them are not very concerned about their members, they are more anxious about research. This is how they were trained and educated. They misunderstand what an NGO is [and] mess up their role.”

The problem of volunteer management was more marked in the Lithuanian organisation than in the other organisations we studied. In Slovenia, DOPPS possessed skilled, motivated, and charismatic leaders from its inception (Bell et al, 2010). Similarly, the leadership of the two Polish organisations—both of them small-scale operations, compared with DOPPS and LOD—was generally capable and well equipped, possessed of the ‘people skills’ required to manage volunteers. As one volunteer with Akcja Carpatica explained:

“[the organisers] are very warm persons. They keep talking to us, they’re glad when people sit together in the evening and talk ... That’s why it’s so cool here ... It’s all about making bonds between people.”

That said, the Lithuanian case does illustrate how transition-related problems with ensuring skilled professional leadership compounded the problem of ensuring volunteer motivation, at a juncture when such motivation was particularly vital: that is, with the passage to new, competitive organisations of the labour market, and the attendant transformation of socioeconomic conditions for volunteering at the individual level. We discuss this further in the next section.

5 Economic shifts

In all three countries, the period following the fall of communism was, for many, a time of trial, difficulty, and economic hardship. Many of the participants in our study reiterated the same point: that, faced with the necessity of providing for basic needs and securing a baseline standard of living, the average citizen was simply not interested in ‘working for free’ in environmental monitoring. One prominent older member of DOPPS remarked, wryly, that “if you merely feed yourself, you will not buy sunflower

seeds [to feed birds]”. Jobs themselves also became more time consuming than under socialist rule. One member of LOD explained:

“When you have a quiet and gainful job, when you have leisure time, naturally, you want to use it meaningfully ... [N]ow, when you have to work at five workplaces, the real rest is when you fall down somewhere by the lake, fall asleep, then go for a swim ... How can you think about volunteering in this situation?”

In Slovenia the president of DOPPS presented the situation in similar terms, drawing a comparison with conditions under socialism:

“In socialism people worked eight hours, then they got back home and they had time for themselves ... Today it is different. The working day is not 8 hours, it is 12 hours. If you want to be successful in your field of work, you stay at the job in the evening, and you work at home. You have to be at maximum capacity all the time. The competition is much tougher than it was before.”

In Poland the volunteers we interviewed argued—drawing on comparisons with Western Europe—that citizens should be responsible for environmental protection, but that people first had to reach a certain standard of living. One member of Akcja Carpatica made the point quite succinctly:

“If the economic level were raised, things would be the same here as in Sweden or England. In England there are at least ten times more people interested in birds.”

The last comment exemplifies how many of our participants shared the faith of Western analysts and social theorists: that, in time, individual participation in the new job market would raise wealth and create affluence, leading to increased levels of volunteering. At the same time, however, many of them also pointed out that it was precisely the values of this new job market—the emphasis on individual accumulation and material wealth, for example—that were undermining the volunteering sector itself, creating new demands and expectations that were incompatible with an ethos of volunteering: as a member of DOPPS explained,

“Today people have to work more. Today there is a discipline at work, and we became slaves in a way, didn’t we? People have neither the interest, nor the will—and will should be emphasised—nor the money to spend for societal activities.”

One of our Lithuanian volunteers remarked that, as a result of this novel emphasis on individual accumulation,

“The feeling of citizenship is very weak ... Nowadays, everyone wants to become financially independent as soon as possible. Moreover, one may feel a kind of pressure to become rich... So, people try to save their time for doing things which are beneficial for them.”

The new environment of competitiveness also made its mark at the organisational level, by affecting relations within and between NGOs, as well as between NGOs and the public administration (eg Regulska, 1999). Precarious financial situations and a general shortage of funds frequently created tensions and rivalry between organisations working in the same sector. In Lithuania, our informants complained that this had reached the point where some NGOs began to treat each other not only as competitors but as enemies—a tense situation that in itself sometimes deterred potential recruits from joining: as one member complained,

“[t]he atmosphere is very bad; other organisations are treated as competitors or enemies ... During the LOD council meetings people often comment: ‘Oh, those greens said something bad about us, so we need to fight them.’”

At the same time, with the growth of organisations and the NGO sector as a whole, factors such as the expanding scale of activities and increasing professionalisation—with the attendant creation of new relations of authority, prestige, and power between participants—also increased potential for tension within individual organisations.

Increased access to funds also sometimes created problems; in Slovenia a member of DOPPS summarised the problems of the changed financial situation this way:

“As long as there are five poor men and they look for bread crumbs for survival, they stay fellows. But when they get the sack of money, every one demands his share.”

To counteract these problems, and to ensure the role of the organisations themselves as places of refuge and ‘alternative’ social spaces (EuMon, 2007), both the Slovenian and Polish organisations emphasised strongly the need to create and maintain a relaxed and egalitarian atmosphere—as discussed here by a member of a local DOPPS branch:

“Well, we have a deal that women bake something, a cake or biscuits, and somebody brings tea or wine. Then we eat and drink and we talk. There is a very informal atmosphere at our meetings.”

In the case of our Lithuanian organisation, the situation was far more complex—and problematic.

6 Organisational cultures

On the one hand, attempts by the management of LOD to establish a convivial atmosphere had limited success: staff and volunteer members alike were unmotivated, and complained about the ‘bad atmosphere’ within the organisation. Administration blamed the culture and attitudes of volunteers, such as in the case of this project coordinator:

“When you speak with a member of the Royal Society, he understands that the mission of membership is to help the Society Such attitudes—‘what can I give or how can I be useful to the organisation?’—have not appeared in Lithuania so far. Most volunteers think the other way around: what can the organisation give to them?”

At the same time, the relative success of measures to improve the situation was also harshly criticised—particularly by trained scientists and former members of the organisation, who resented the new organisational structure and its populist orientation. In the words of one former member:

“Everything is organised for amateurs: simple monitoring activities, camps, informal events. Until independence, LOD was more scientific, more scientific conferences and so on. Maybe in the first years of independence the society was still more scientific, until LOD established contact with Danish ornithologists, who were oriented towards the mass membership According to EU standards, the society transformed into a society that is more agreeable to the wide public So there was no place for people of science any more.”

By this interpretation, contact with Danish ornithologists—and incorporation of the organisational ethos that they advocated—had compromised the scientific standards of the society, leading to the loss of both ‘scientific direction’ and scientists, who left the organisation.

At the same time, other members of LOD criticised this stance, associating it with the ‘old regime’. One volunteer, for example, mapped the structure of scientific authority directly onto the old ‘Soviet order’—associating the enthusiasm of amateurs with the free use of leisure time, and contrasting these to the attitude of scientists:

“You need to differentiate ornithologists from birdwatchers. Amateurs are more professional than ornithologists. An ornithologist is a man from the Soviet order, and he does the job that he has to do. A birdwatcher has another job and goes birdwatching just during his leisure time. If you are a birdwatcher, you can do

whatever you want and specialize just in birdwatching and bird identification, without paying attention to biological questions.”

Another member framed the problems of the organisation, and particularly the problem of relations between scientists and nonscientists, in even more general terms: “Somehow everyone is afraid to communicate, and it is really a pity, but this is our Soviet heritage ... The point is that everyone who has achieved ‘more’ looks at others from above, and this is the greatest enemy of warm, honest communication.”

In this scenario, hierarchic and ‘formal’ relations between scientists and amateurs reflected the survival of particular social patterns that had structured participation in collective activities under communist rule, and which thus represented continuity with this period. In general, our findings with LOD do seem to problematise more optimistic general accounts of postindependence professionalisation in the Lithuanian environmental sector (eg Rinkevičius, 2000, pages 191 – 193). Considered in the light of the situation in LOD, the self-consciously ‘flat’ organisational structures of DOPPS and the two Polish organisations—defined primarily by informal, egalitarian relationships and fluid boundaries between experts and amateurs, staff, and volunteers (EuMon, 2007)—were not only particularly suited to operating conditions after communism; they also represented a dramatic symbolic and cultural break with patterns of power, authority, and privilege associated with that era.

7 Internationalisation

In all our case studies the nation-state remained an important focus for organisational activities. In the case of DOPPS, for example, its founders advocated from the very beginning the importance of ornithological monitoring as a national concern, central to the establishment of a robust Slovenian national identity. In the introduction to a bird atlas published a few years after independence, one of the founding ‘czars’ of DOPPS argued that monitoring was “a cultural act of every nation”:

“for small countries like ours such projects are even more important, because they place us alongside larger, more important nations that consider them to be inevitable and necessary” (Geister, 1995, page 25).

Considered as a national-level strategy, this seems to have been quite successful. Today, long after the initial euphoria of independence, birdwatching and environmental activities enjoy a privileged position in the Slovenian public sphere, and remain popular particularly with the younger generation (Bell et al, 2010; EuMon, 2007).

At the same time, across all the case studies it was also clear that forms of allegiance and political belonging beyond the nation-state had played an important role for the environmental volunteering sector in the postcommunist period: both insofar as the problems and challenges confronting the sector exceeded or ignored the frame of the national, and insofar as the sector itself was, increasingly, connected and organised transversally, in ways that criss-crossed state lines and ignored established national structures. With the transition from communist rule, a new transnational field of operations opened up for NGOs, defined by open borders, an influx of foreign volunteers, and significantly increased access to foreign research, data, expertise, and funding sources. A key marker of difference between our case studies was the degree to which the organisations in question had been able to operate effectively within this new and expanded transnational field, taking advantage of new conditions and opportunities.

This differential was conditioned, at least in part, by factors linked to the legacy of communist rule: in the case of the Lithuanian organisation, for example, by the tension between inherited organisational cultures and the requirements of effective volunteer management after independence. The attempts of LOD at international collaboration in the transition period were, generally speaking, less than successful. Our informants

were reluctant to discuss in any detail the attempted collaboration with the Danish Ornithological Federation (DOF), or why it floundered. From DOF interviews on the Danish side, however, it became clear that the management of DOF at least believed that factors internal to LOD—particularly its managerial and organisational culture—played a part in this.

In Poland both the organisations were drawing efficiently on extranational funding sources, liaising with international organisations and mobilising volunteers both domestically and abroad. Both organisations were also founded in the period following communist rule, and had therefore not passed through a regime change. Nevertheless, as we suggested earlier, the structure of the postsocialist domestic NGO sector in Poland—as a fragmented, decentralised, and dispersed field, populated by numerous small and independent actors—was determined in important ways during the final years of communist rule, by the emergence of Solidarity and the resulting polarisation of the civic sphere. Consequently, the domestic field within which both organisations operated was, in a sense, an indirect legacy of communism—perhaps best understood as “an unexpected ‘positive’ effect of the Communist regime” (Chimiak, 2006, page 317). With both organisations, the loose network structure of the field encouraged key aspects of organisational character and social structure—small-scale, informal relations, flexible structures of authority—that enabled them to operate with relative efficiency at the transnational level. The leadership of both our Polish organisations were conscious of this, and determined to retain the small-scale and independent status of their organisations—to the point where the leadership of one of the organisations even refused to apply for NGO status (EuMon, 2007).

The history of DOPPS in Slovenia presents a similar case, characterised by rapid and efficient international networking strategies that mirrored, interestingly, strategies pursued by the new-born Slovenian state at the national level. Immediately after secession, Slovenia began to forge connections and alliances internationally: with the EU, NATO, and individual European states, particularly Germany. Analogously, throughout the decade prior to independence, DOPPS sought to forge connections with other organisations at the Yugoslavian level. In 1987 it was included in the recently established Association of Yugoslav Ornithological Societies which became the Yugoslavian section of the International Council for Bird Preservation—now BirdLife International—the following year. When Yugoslavia disintegrated in 1991, DOPPS quickly moved to form direct links with international organisations, particularly BirdLife International. After a “lingering period of gradually establishing direct contacts” (Jančar, 2004, page 41), this labour bore fruit: DOPPS achieved national representative status within BirdLife in 1994, partner-designate status in 1996, and, finally, authorised partnership in 2001. International collaborations in this period have been productive, resulting in a series of successful conservation campaigns and high-profile publications: strengthening, in turn, the domestic profile of DOPPS. Again, as in the case of Poland, our material and interviews suggest that the ability of DOPPS to network efficiently with volunteer organisations abroad, particularly in Western Europe, was determined, at least in part, by its flexible and egalitarian organisational culture—a culture whose roots can, at the national level, be traced back to the ‘self-management’ ideals of the Tito era.

In political terms, environmental volunteering within both the Slovenian and Polish organisations was robustly oriented beyond the domestic sphere of the nation-state—through processes such as international networking and resource sharing, overseas travel, collaboration around transboundary problems, or issues and participation in the international arenas of policy, research, and advocacy. These organisations also evidenced the skills and human resources required to effectively manage volunteers in

the new postcommunist context and to foster participatory organisational cultures. In the case of LOD, interviews with both Lithuanian and Danish informants suggested that the limited success of international collaborations was linked—again, at least in part—to aspects of organisational culture inherited from the Soviet era, such as command hierarchies and the character of institutional relations within the organisation.

8 Conclusion

During the period leading up to independence, environmental movements in all three countries we studied served an oppositional role, relative to a repressive communist state apparatus—while at the same time also depending on that apparatus for political coherence and direction, as well as (to some degree) for maintaining levels of volunteer labour power. As communities of political protest, environmental movements were thus simultaneously oppositional to and dependent on the state apparatus—and in the aftermath of its collapse, this often led to loss of direction and dissolution. One vector of adaptation to the new postcommunist parameters has been professionalisation, as the role of the environmental movement in general “shifted from being a mobilising agent for populist protest ... [to] pragmatic, goal-oriented professional organisations” (Jancaar-Webster, 1998, page 69). Another way of describing these strategic and political reorientations would be as an effort to formulate, develop, activate, and mobilise alternative vocabularies of belonging: in other words, as a matter of associating volunteering, in general, and environmental volunteering in particular, with new (and attractive) political identities and relations, constituted through participation in communities that, while distinct from the state apparatus and traditional models of citizenship (Lawrence, 2005), may well still intersect with these in novel ways. As we discussed in the previous section, the international scope of both ecological problems and organisational networks in the environmental sector have helped establish one such alternative register of citizenship as belonging, namely transnational citizenship (Rohrschneider and Dalton, 2002)—understood here as participation in the community of European environmental activism. Another such alternative register, again not oriented primarily towards the state apparatus, is ecological or environmental citizenship (Dobson, 2003).

One of the continuities we found highlighted by our informants was the persistence of reductive, exploitative conceptions of ‘nature’ encoded in communist practice and ideology. Generally speaking, the communist central planning apparatus treated nature in a highly instrumental manner, tending to maximise industrial productivity at the cost of serious and long-term environmental degradation (Mirovitskaya and Soroos, 1995; Staddon and Turnock, 2001). Many of our informants reported that such values continued to inform public perceptions of and engagements with the environment (Turnock, 2001)—generating widespread apathy, even hostility towards environmental issues. Under socialism, individual habits and values were also formed in a social environment where public goods (including ‘nature’) were controlled, governed, regulated, and administered by the state apparatus—nominally and, to an extensive degree, also in practice. Localising most or all responsibility for collective and public goods at the level of the state or state bodies, these regimes tended to minimise agency and ‘ownership’ at the individual level (Grzelak, 2004; Vanek, 2004). Against a backdrop of instrumental disregard and centralised responsibility, combined with economic scarcity, privatisation contributed to an environmental ‘tragedy of the commons’ situation (Hardin, 1968; Mirovitskaya and Soroos, 1995), which affected even the scientific usefulness of volunteers; one former member of LOD, citing Western ornithologists, described the situation in post-Soviet countries in this way:

“because of the low standard of living ... people rob nests, sell the eggs to Western collectors. That is one of the reasons why the rare species disappear. When there is a lack of money, people know that if you rob five nests and sell the eggs ... you will have a car.”

This is perhaps where environmental volunteer monitoring articulates most powerfully with emergent forms of citizenship as practice: both practices of belonging in networks and communities of intent, such as environmental organisations (Lawrence, 2005), and practices through which members of the public acquire and develop forms of engagement with, investment in, and attunement to a shared environment: in other words, through which they become ecological or environmental citizens (Dobson and Bell, 2006). As we documented in the final report for the project (EuMon, 2007), in all our case studies (postcommunist and otherwise) we found that the experiences, relationships, and knowledge volunteers acquired through participation in environmental monitoring fostered new and productive forms of responsibility, identity, and affective engagement with the environmental commons. The vital role of volunteer amateurs as ‘citizen scientists’ in the scientific monitoring of wildlife (Greenwood, 2007) makes environmental monitoring organisations a potentially vital locus for enhancing participatory civic and community involvement—counteracting, for example, problems such as the existence of a professionalised NGO sector entirely dependent on foreign aid sources and alienated from local communities (Fagan, 2005).

In our case studies, forms of engagement and civic responsibility through environmental monitoring—along with the social, economic, and organisational conditions that enabled these—have emerged in direct conversation with the perceived material, ideological, and environmental legacies of communism. Across all three countries, our informants were developing and assembling their practices of volunteering in an ongoing processes of negotiation with a past defined, in no small part, by a period of communist rule. In a study of UK environmental volunteering, Ellis and Waterton (2004) state that “[the] ‘opening up’ of professional knowledge systems” may expand citizenship in “unanticipated and transformative ways” (pages 95–96). On the basis of our discussion here, we suggest that, symmetrically reversed, this may hold equally true: at least in the three countries we studied, the ‘opening up’ of citizenship—and perhaps more importantly, of volunteer *expectations* regarding citizenship and participation—has entailed radical and necessary transformations of scientific and professional knowledge systems. In the friction or ease of these shifts are contained equally the dwindling memberships and failed international collaborations of LOD, and the more successful adaptations of DOPPS and the Polish organisations.

A significant difference between these organisations—and this is perhaps the most generally applicable finding from our study—lay with the manner in which they were able to attune to and accommodate the complex, rapidly changing expectations of their own volunteer members. In social environments where the very concept of belonging was up for grabs, one key to the success of DOPPS and the Polish organisations seems to have been their ability, and willingness, to engage volunteers on the terms they brought to the table, adapting to their expectations—and, thereby, actively fostering investment and a longitudinal sense of belonging, associated with citizenship.

Such belonging is of course a complex concept—certainly no less so in the post-communist states where we conducted our research. In a linked study by a member of our team, the leader of a Polish organisation argued for a system of rewards and distinctions based on the civic decorations of the communist era. As he said, evoking a nostalgic past:

“I am from a time when people were decorated, when favour was shown to those who actively joined the Socialist Party ... [T]here is a very precise system of rewarding people and that is why people are so attracted to our organisation.” As an alternative system of reward, a young Polish volunteer in our study suggested: “Just say I am glad you came. You are welcome here in the future”. The space between these two statements—which is also the space between two generations, two cultures of participation, two models of belonging—is precisely the space within which the future of postcommunist environmental volunteering is taking shape.

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