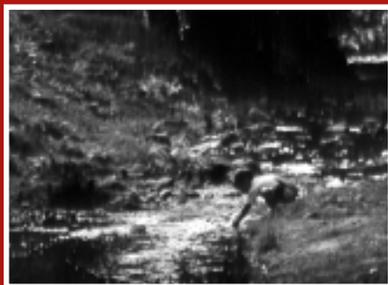


Baltic Sea



A FROG, A WOODEN HOUSE, A STREAM AND A TRAIL

Ten Years of Community Revitalization
in Central Europe

A REPORT FOR THE ROCKEFELLER BROTHERS FUND
IN COOPERATION WITH THE CONSERVATION FUND

POLAND

CZECH REPUBLIC

SLOVAKIA

By Roberta Brandes Gratz

HUNGARY



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in Central Europe

(Poland, Slovakia, Hungary & Czech Republic)

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*By Roberta Brandes Gratz,
based on site visits with David Sampson*

March 2001

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New York City
March 2001*

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Autumn, 1989. In a sudden and momentous expression of political change, the Berlin Wall falls and with it the iron grip of Communism in Central Eastern Europe. Freedom-hungry citizens take to the streets, cheering, dancing, celebrating. Church bells peal with a ring of new possibilities. Families and friends cross borders to reunite. Censorship becomes a thing of the past, and Central Europeans absorb news from beyond the region like a wet sponge. Cafés with tables and chairs on the street open for unencumbered social meetings. People talk politics openly on the streets, at cafés, in their living room. Citizens around the globe cheer them on.

Ten years later, political leaders, press commentators and ordinary citizens in the region and around the globe look back to understand the decade of change. Many trumpet Central Eastern Europe's political successes. The challenge of re-shaping economies after decades of command-style central planning is more daunting than ever, but a few signs of progress emerge. The establishment of open societies with free and fair elections, a free press and free assembly, and at least the beginning of a market economy are obvious achievements. The peaceful gains in this relatively short time are remarkable.

The soul-searching after 10 years spotlighted failures and disappointments too, most commonly involving disenchantment with national leaders and widespread corruption and cronyism evident in the privatization process. Clearly, the monopolistic, gargantuan industrial practices inherited from the former regime would fail in a suddenly competitive environment. Such industry was the first to fall apart and had to be distinguished from other problems of privatization. But the road to privatization had many ruts. Poorly regulated banks, weighed down with crippling bad debt accumulated by inexperienced or corrupt bankers or inherited from past regimes, collapsed. The former financial system caused much of this. But no adequate new banking framework was set up to prevent further financial instability.

Integration into the global market has advanced considerably in the 10-year period. Many unanticipated consequences have followed. Global corporations and

international institutions now shape the future of the newly free societies of Central Eastern Europe more than observers and the local populace anticipated. Unless current trends are dramatically changed, Central Eastern Europe will undoubtedly be even more constrained, if not more controlled, by such international behemoths.

In the recent retrospective, a significant phenomenon was overlooked. Thousands of small, grass-roots efforts succeeded step by step to rejuvenate their communities, upgrade the environment, stimulate small businesses, strengthen a local economy, preserve historic buildings and revive stifled traditions. This vast assortment of varied successes gives the true measure of the region's gains and reflects genuine regeneration. Cumulatively, these efforts have forged the foundation for a future of progress that was once expected from the national leaders of reform. That foundation, like any foundation, could only rise from the bottom up.

These achievements are, however, not only unrecognized and undervalued, they are endangered by the growth of global forces beyond their control. The danger is double-edged. Global priorities threaten the survival of local and regional culture, commerce and community. At the same time, new alliances between old-style Project Planners and new-style big business interests have been forged. A strong civic structure does not exist yet either locally or nationally to either balance or control them. These alliances, in fact, work against the emergence of a strong civil society.¹

The issue is not that international capital is going into Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Bratislava but that it is going in a way that minimizes the power of local communities to shape their own society and economy. Fledgling civic organizations and new and emerging democratic institutions are not given the opportunity to shape plans or help decide matters in a meaningful way.

¹ Civil society encompasses the citizen-based organizations and associations that function outside formal government structures and that play an important role in advancing democracy and true public process. Without the non-governmental sector playing a pivotal role in shaping society, democracy is not complete.

Thus, world leaders from Václav Havel to Margaret Thatcher could extol the virtues of rebuilding civil society and even occasionally celebrate a specific example of it, but none of the leaders in either Western or Central Eastern Europe thought carefully or investigated fully the question of *how* to meaningfully stimulate the rebirth of civil society and *how* to nurture it further. If they did, the evidence is hidden.

In the first years after the historic changes of 1989, policy-makers and environmentalists publicly emphasized the importance of protecting an abused cultural heritage and restoring a damaged ecology. Then, in the rush to become Western-style consumer societies, consumer values superceded environmental goals in priority. Emphasis shifted to market solutions. People accepted the erroneous assumption that economic and environmental goals cannot be advanced together. The short-term goal of privatization supplanted the long-term vision of what kind of society and economy people wanted. The potential of short-term profits was irresistible. People embraced immediate, often deceptive, solutions. Investors came in at the top, overwhelming the energy emerging from the bottom. The pressures of consumerism and the influence of distant corporations gradually took over the shaping of development. Commercialization advanced with overwhelming speed.

Now, more than 10 years later, loud voices of dissatisfaction have risen again. This time, the complaints focus not on authoritarian rule but on a democratic system controlled too much at the top, influenced too much by global commercial interests and international funding sources and unresponsive to a public vision that does not want to see its traditions and cultures erased in a rush to make up for past decades. Crony capitalism and an anything-goes free market have disillusioned many people. Václav Havel calls the dissatisfaction a “national foul mood” in the Czech Republic, but that does not acknowledge the depth of feeling that exists throughout the region.

Significantly, in all the reviews of the first decade, the weaknesses and disappointments cited in varying degrees pertain to issues, leaders and institutions at the top. The great successes percolating from the ground up exhibit few of the same weaknesses, disappointments or even failures. **Any look at grass-roots successes around the region is quite revealing. While top-down policies and institutions have not met expectations, genuine democratic success and economic potential at the bottom are exceeding expectations.** Democratic success and economic potential at the bottom, though not without problems and pitfalls, are more significant than

recognized and need to be strengthened. It was an untold story. We want to tell it.

This report includes a sampling of those successes. Many more can be found than are covered here. The achievements reflect substantive accomplishments. They have not and probably cannot yet be quantified. Their innovative, grass-roots nature resists reduction to formulas. These qualitative achievements demonstrate, however, alternative strategies to top-down policies. While the individual projects are unique and reflect the individuals and places involved, they share qualities of public participation, cost effectiveness, multiple environmental and economic benefits and future potential for more improvements. Each project is relatively modest, but that modesty is deceptive. The impact goes beyond any conventional statistical measurement.

Most significantly, some of the innovative projects described in this report demonstrate that the choice is not between economic growth or environmental quality, new development or historic preservation, regional malls or local stores, highways or rail, cars or public transit. One can achieve qualitative development rather than mere quantitative growth. The issue is finding balance and adopting strategies that achieve multiple values.

- Environmental improvements can bring economic gain.
- Modern consumer goods can be sold in existing historical centers, not just in distant hypermarkets.
- Sewage treatment can be low-tech, inexpensive and affordable by a financially-strapped community.
- Cultural assets, heritage preservation and environmentally friendly tourism can stimulate economic growth as an alternative to the massive industrial giants of the past.
- New residential opportunities can be created without destruction of small farms and historic landscapes.
- Car ownership and car usage do not have to lead to car-dependency.
- Mobility of people and goods by public transport is cheaper and more efficient than cars and trucks traveling over a network of superhighways that hurts the environment, economy and culture.
- New housing needs can be met in traditional but modern forms whether in new construction or reconstruction.

In other words, modern life with all its advantages is attainable without destroying heritage, environment, local economy and character of place. In fact, qualitative

growth can not be achieved without the critical roles played by history, culture, local identity and local economy.

If the goal is truly to encourage civil society, democratizing formerly authoritarian regimes, cleaning up the environment after years of degradation, and economic empowerment of a formerly deprived populace, then the stories in this report offer many lessons. If, instead, the priorities are globalizing the region, opening new markets to international and national corporations and fueling consumer capitalism without regard to protection of local and national character, economy or resources, then this report is even more important and should prompt reconsideration of those priorities. This analysis of the solid

progress of thousands of individuals and small groups calls into question current directions and emphases of national policies.

The challenge of the next 10 years is daunting because of the forces at work and the speed of change. This report addresses fundamental issues of economic development, ecological improvement, social concerns and cultural protection on a micro or small-scale basis. Local achievements can only be understood and appreciated closeup; they get lost in the quagmire of national statistics. Macro or large-scale measurements can't adequately highlight how small successes contribute to big positive change. National governments and global institutions can no longer afford to overlook these achievements.

BACKGROUND

In 1990, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the German Marshall Fund established a three-country network called the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (EPCE), three independent and self-governing foundations. Three became four in 1993 when Czechoslovakia split, and a fourth Partnership was established in Slovakia. Through small grants, technical assistance and training, the mission of the EPCE was meant to respond to the needs of a growing number of grass-roots, self-help environmental groups in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. A dozen other funders from three continents later joined the Partnership.²

The purpose of each Partnership was and continues to be fostering the rebuilding of civil society through financial and professional support of local environmental efforts. The fundamental mission of the Partnerships is to animate and mobilize local non-governmental organizations (NGOS) and communities to take action on environmental issues, broadly defined. This innovative initiative was and still is unusual in its willingness to offer fast, flexible and non-bureaucratic assistance to NGOs and municipal agencies. The initiative has proven that:

- (1) investment in committed people with vision is key to achieving enduring positive change;
- (2) investment in a bottom-up process of change is infinitely more beneficial over the long term than investment in top-down, large-scale projects;
- (3) a diverse assortment of incremental locally and regionally based efforts, each modest in size, together leads to big, significant change;
- (4) place-based community initiatives involve local people in the process of change, a necessary feature for rebuilding civil society;

² Pew Charitable Trusts, Trust for Mutual Understanding, Conanima Foundation, Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Moriah Fund, Sacharuna, Jennifer Altman Foundation, Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation, Winslow Foundation, Barbara Gauntlett Foundation, Jurzykowski Foundation, Charities Aid Foundation, Environmental Training Project for Central Europe (USAID Grant).

- (5) no program or project can become a formula if the initiative is local and shaping it engages the people affected.

A report on the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe commissioned by the Partnership in 2000, noted that:

“Over the years, each of the foundations has developed distinctive areas of concentration and expertise from which other members of the consortium can profit. The Hungarian Environmental Partnership is particularly strong on energy issues and working with Roma. In Poland the foundation has been leading the way in developing productive relationships with the corporate sector as well as reforming water and flood management. EPCE Slovakia has developed an expertise in rural development as well as the creation of community foundations, which the Czech Environmental Partnership is now tapping for some of its own community development initiatives. The Czech foundation has, in turn, led the way in promoting citizens’ right to information and participation in decision-making processes.”

The Environmental Partnership of Central Europe each year has grown gradually, gotten steadily stronger and achieved a broader impact. The Partnership program illustrates how big, positive change (short of revolution) occurs in small, gradual steps.

The four Partnerships covered in this report—in Poland, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics—are governed by national committees. Together they have made approximately 1,000 grants and organized or co-sponsored over 500 workshops, training events, fellowships and exchanges. Each operation has grown in sophistication, stature and success. In less than 10 years, the Partnership, individually and as a group, has gained attention, admiration and respect from all over the globe.

GOAL OF MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

In the Spring of 1999, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Conservation Foundation asked urban affairs writer and author Roberta Brandes Gratz³ and former Hudson River Greenway Director David Sampson to

³ Roberta Brandes Gratz is author of *The Living City: Thinking Small in a Big Way* and *Cities Back From the Edge: New Life for Downtown* (both John Wiley & Sons).

visit and comment on a selection of community-based planning and action projects. Most but not all of the projects are supported in some way by the four Partnerships.

The first goal was to observe first-hand the results of almost a decade of investment in small, place-based, community initiatives intended to involve local people in the process of change within their communities, to help them shape that change in their own image and, as a result, assist the emergence of a civil society. Has it worked? If so, to what degree? Where did it not succeed and why? What are the lessons?

A second goal of the report was to place the local experiences in the larger perspective of national, regional and global change and development. Sampson's 30 years of environmental work in both the public and private sectors of New York State and Gratz's 30 years' experience writing, commenting and advising on urban development were critical to shaping this assessment.

Following the collapse of Communism in 1989, the focus fell on macro issues: the establishment of democratic institutions, freely elected parliaments, an independent judiciary, pluralist political parties, a free press, as well as the institutions of free market economies like central banks, commercial banks, stock markets. **Yet what happens on the most local, micro-level remains the essence of democracy. Democracy can't exist, let alone thrive, without a foundation of strong local communities and a vibrant, knowledgeable and committed civil society.**

After a decade of efforts to rebuild local communities through economic and environmental action, it is a good time to look back.

The people interviewed for this report are most inspiring. Many were directly or indirectly involved in the revolution in their country and are now tirelessly dedicated to pursuing the principles for which they fought. Some follow profoundly alternative life paths, regardless of what regime is in place. They are knowledgeable, practicing environmentalists and naturalists, and some were considered radical by their compatriots before and after 1989. They range from the staunch advocate to the very pragmatic. At both ends of the spectrum, they share a stability of vision, a fundamental understanding of the issues and dilemmas of positive change, and a sensible approach to determining solutions. One can only hope that they have the stamina, resources and capacity to continue to deal with current and new issues as they arise.

These community and NGO leaders have been incredibly productive catalysts for change. Investing in people is a profoundly difficult task. Knowing how to invest in people is the biggest challenge for funders.

But from the successes represented in this report, the funders clearly chose well. Now the challenge is for the respective governments, the European Union and international funders to learn the lessons of this collective experience.

BASIS FOR MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

As an organizing principle for the mid-term assessment trip, Gratz and Sampson followed the general routes of both the Amber Trail and Czech Greenway and visited many programs supported by the EPCE, although not exclusively.

In 1991–92, The Czech Greenway was established with foundation funding to foster grass-roots economic growth and environmentally friendly tourism along a route going generally from Prague to Vienna. This program was intended to focus on rebuilding local communities, encouraging eco-tourism, stimulating of new local businesses and linking communities in common activities along the route. The model for the Czech Greenway was the Hudson River Valley Greenway in New York State which, created and led by Sampson, encouraged and supported local and regional planning efforts using cultural and environmental resource protection as an organizing principle. Unlike its Hudson River counterpart, the Czech Greenway does not have a single geographic feature like the Hudson River to tie it all together. Nevertheless, the Greenway was intended to bring Czech communities together to shape a common purpose and stimulate public participation in each community. Connecting neighboring communities through a shared vision is meant to encourage people to see solutions close to home instead of a national or more distant benefactor, to overcome narrow disciplinary thinking and to recognize the long-term benefit of small-step change. After a few years and a shift in leadership, these broader goals fell firmly in place. In 1998, The Czech Greenway became a project of the Czech Environmental Partnership.

In 1997, The Amber Trail Greenway (ATG), a complex and ambitious program also learning from the Hudson River Valley Greenway and drawing on the Czech Greenway experience, was launched as a joint project of the Polish, Slovak and Hungarian Environmental Partnerships. The Amber Trail seeks to revitalize local economies and build linkages across borders by fostering rediscovery of a variety of historic trade routes between Budapest and Cracow through Slovakia. The current ATG wanders a bit from older established routes but is meant more as a symbol and unifying principle and has the potential to become a significant connector of peoples and places between northern and southern Europe.

The Amber Trail Greenway could become a significant model for cross-border collaboration. The vision and impetus for ATG came from Slovak Partnership director Juraj Mesík⁴ who was already familiar with the Hudson River Greenway and the growing success of the Czech Greenway. But the origins of the two programs are significantly different. The impetus for the Czech Greenway came from outside. Its evolution into a truly grass-roots, locally-based effort took a few years. The ATG came from within, making for a somewhat smoother development.

Two Partnership directors met in Banská Štiavnica in 1997 with David Sampson to discuss Amber Trail Greenway possibilities. Mesík recognized the greenway concept as an innovative mechanism through which environmental programming, participatory planning and economic development could be achieved in a productive and organic structure. The bulk of the route, of course, from Cracow to Budapest is in Slovakia. The potential impact of the Trail is extensive.

Fortuitously, Mesík found Ján Roháč, a geologist who was equally energetic and enthusiastic about the ATG concept. Having participated in the study program organized by the Atlantic Center for Environment in New England⁵ in the summer of 1998, Roháč was already familiar with the Hudson River Greenway. He lives in Banská Štiavnica where he has seen the benefits and potential of tourism and actively involved citizens. He is well known nationally and is considered one of the most knowledgeable NGO experts in the field of regional development.

Developing tourism and nurturing new local businesses are common goals of both Amber Trail/Greenway programs. The ATG ties together most of the projects spotlighted here. In each case, the Amber Trail, like the Czech Greenway, concept is an extremely useful

tool to get localities to take stock of their strengths, to develop pride of place and motivate people of all ages to engage in their community's future. The ATG emphasizes building on existing resources (human, built and natural) and adding to them, instead of replacing them with projects that erase history, tradition and local character. This approach to revitalization called Urban Husbandry, is a problem-solving strategy that strengthens what exists before building anything new.⁶

Managing Change Innovatively

Fundamentally, both the Czech Greenway and Amber Trail Greenway are innovative strategies for managing change and for insuring that change is shaped by local people and emerges from a democratic public process that reflects a local vision. A greenway strategy can tackle both local and regional issues with a unifying and equitable vision rarely achieved in nationally conceived, top-down policies. Cross-border cooperation and sustainable development⁷ have the greatest chance for success.

Most of the projects visited and described are along the routes of either the Amber Trail or Czech Greenway. Additional material and observations resulted from numerous trips taken by Gratz for research, lecturing and consulting in Central Europe over a period of eight years.

One can best understand and fully appreciate the impact of this decade-long activity through on-site observation, interviews with participants and group discussions focused on their collective experience. The study team looked at the full spectrum of these efforts. Standard or specific measurements were not applied. **Value-based, not project-based change is the measure here. Significant change takes years to have an impact on macro-statistics. The most important goals are establishing the democratic, public participation process, demonstrating the potential of local initiatives to overcome dependency on a central government. The achievement of these goals is difficult to measure. The construction of one big project can be captured in one photograph. The involvement of a community in the shaping of its own future is difficult to capture in a single image. The least tangible and least easily observable might be the most valuable.**

⁴ Juraj Mesík is a medical doctor with a degree from the Comenius University School of Medicine and was long active in the Slovak environmental movement before the establishment of the Partnership. He served as a vice president of SZOPK (Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protectors) between 1990 and 1993, co-founded the Green Party in 1989/90 and served as its first president in Slovakia from 1990–1991. In addition, he was a member of Parliament and an advisor to the minister of the Federal Committee for the Environment in Prague.

⁵ The Atlantic Center for the Environment is part of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation (QLF), founded in 1961 to improve conditions in rural communities of Quebec and Labrador. The Center, with considerable experience in encouraging land conservation and sustainable development policies and practices in the U.S. and Canada, directed its attention to Central Eastern Europe after 1989. While not officially covered in this report, the Center's impact and influence is everywhere. Through its programs of fellowships, regional workshops, study tours to other countries and technical assistance, the Center has helped train many leaders now active in the region.

⁶ Urban Husbandry is a term devised by Roberta Brandes Gratz to describe the process of rejuvenation referred to here. Gratz focuses on this process in both of her books, *The Living City* and *Cities Back from the Edge*.

⁷ Sustainable development is development that does not contain the seeds of its own decay in its conception or the seeds of decay of existing places. Intelligent, farseeing and longterm, sustainable development combines as one value both economic development and environmental progress. Non-sustainable development, in contrast, is like a virus infection that may thrive but infect the body politic around it.

HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE: THE TOTAL LANDSCAPE

Central European towns and city centers in pre-Communist times evolved naturally according to long-held traditions. But few escaped the ravages of World War II and reconstruction under Communist rule, marked by willful neglect of historic heritage. The historic fabric of many cities survived the Communists' massive rebuilding schemes because, for the most part,⁸ central planners chose to build massive housing projects and factories at the edge or outside of existing towns and shifted the population and local economy to these new communities. Thus, many depopulated centers remain, deteriorated from neglect but fundamentally intact and encumbered by local regulations that make difficult upgrading existing property or building new infill.⁹ In bigger cities, however, some whole neighborhoods were replaced by clusters of high rise housing. This shift of residential and commercial life should not be confused with the U.S. experience of urban abandonment or the Western European experience of high rise growth outside central cities. While the visual result may sometimes appear the same, the cause and, therefore, the solution, may be different.

In the early 1990s, repair, restoration and new construction were visible in every community throughout the region. In many cases, it was tradition, however, that shaped scale, style and material. People restuccoed their houses and retiled their red roofs, in keeping with longstanding practice. In many rural areas, new houses were similar to old ones, somewhat bigger perhaps and sporting new flourishes. Few thought about doing things differently because what they were doing emerged out of indigenous conditions and had worked well. Why change for the sake of change? One could observe new ornamental touches, perhaps metal frame windows instead of wood, glazed tile for ornament around windows or doors and maybe some other new materials here and there. But the essential style, scale and form were dictated by an accepted norm. Houses were kept close together and within walking, biking, streetcar or bus distance from the center.¹⁰

⁸ Rumania, especially Bucharest, is an obvious exception because of Ceacescue's slash-and-burn approach to building new communities.

⁹ Local regulatory impediments vary but one that is common is requiring excessive parking in any new development or reconstruction. Permit approvals and cultural heritage opinions for remodelling or new construction in many centers are so difficult, some potential development is gravitating to greenfield sites.

¹⁰ The attachment to traditional styles sometimes takes on interesting dimensions. The Communists built primarily flat roof buildings. In the village of Modra in the Czech Republic, local officials proudly pointed out the number of houses with peaked roofs that had replaced Communist-built flat roofs. Upgraded buildings all had peaked roofs. This was one of many things meant to undo Communist handiwork.

The landscape of rich farmland and tree-lined roads linking well-defined community boundaries had been similarly shaped by tradition. The landscape remains the most compelling characteristic of the region but is seriously threatened by suburbanization. **Where and as long as it lasts, the landscape, with its extraordinary vistas, compact historic towns and sprawl-free countryside is Central Eastern Europe's greatest asset. The sprawl-less landscape differentiates the region and holds great appeal for visitors.** The potential for environmentally friendly economic development is great. But the unique landscape and its opportunities are eroding fast. Car-dependent development of every scale is already transforming large areas, eliminating vistas, covering foothills, invading pristine mountains and wiping out allees of old growth trees. Compact communities are dispersing. This does not have to happen. **Growth, change and even suburban development can occur in ways that don't undermine existing localities and wipe out local economies.** This goes to the heart of community survival, tradition continuity and societal structure, the framework essential for a civil society to exist and endure.

Understanding Impacts of Sprawl

Worldwide, it has taken several years for the adverse impacts of sprawl and misguided transportation policies to be understood as critical to community rebirth, natural environment protection and genuine economic development. This understanding is growing but remains limited. Each of the Partnerships and most NGOs herein are somewhat or totally unfamiliar with these issues. Some issues are relatively new to the region. A sense of urgency has not yet arisen. Yet an increased and urgent focus is the only hope that the whole region won't go the way of international building formulas and the Look of Anywhere.

Strong ties to old traditions are not enough to stem the onslaught of contemporary sprawl. Since no public discussion was possible until after 1989, sprawl and inappropriate development had not reached the public consciousness. Many people are still totally oblivious to these issues. Others resist the negative news. Many are tired of hearing Americans and Western Europeans tell them not to do what Westerners have done. Many hear it as "you shouldn't want a car" or "you shouldn't want a television" and, understandably, they want both. Anything that appears to threaten new consumer opportunities is not heard. **Many have no sense whatsoever that progress, economic development and consumer gains can come in environmentally-friendly forms that don't erase the culture, traditions and the architecture. In other words, the economic, cultural and social landscape need not be**

destroyed in order to own a car or a television or to have a McDonald's or Ikea nearby.

For that matter, many Americans don't know this either, but in America, this has rapidly become one of the biggest public issues. The erroneous development path followed since World War II in the Western world is finally getting serious attention in some quarters simply because it has caused so many overarching new problems. It would be a tragedy if Central Eastern Europe, having missed some of the worst of that highway, sprawl-creating strategy, embraces it just as the West recognizes the damage and seeks to repair it.

Sprawl, large-scale shopping malls that are even larger than most in the U.S., highway planning and auto-based development is happening in Central Eastern Europe faster and on a bigger scale than even happened in the U.S. or Western Europe. Its destructive impact could wipe out or overwhelm much of the positive, community-based change achieved by the successful projects described in this report.

A NEW APPROACH TO PLANNING

Greenways, Heritage Corridors, Nature Protection, Rails-to-Trails, Open Space Conservation, Historic Preservation, Public/Mass Transit Advocacy and Community-based Development are recent, increasingly popular phenomena both in the U.S. and abroad. They are emerging in the form of NGOs in Central Eastern Europe as well. Their significance has much broader implications than the specifics of their causes. Each initiative is:

- (1) a natural, logical and manageable framework for encouraging positive change;
- (2) a tangible idea which any member of a community can understand without being intimidated by a perceived lack of expertise;
- (3) an integrative approach to problem solving; and
- (4) a focused area around which a public process with genuine public participation can form.

They reflect the principles of Urban Husbandry.

The resultant public process is inevitably democratic and grass roots because it is place oriented and local by definition. This is not a guarantee of positive and enduring change but the chances for it are infinitely better than any alternative.

The impact of these growing movements is more profound than usually realized. They are growing as an alternative to old-style planning, allowing the public to genuinely shape its own destiny. Citizens participate in a public process of "visioning" or "planning" for the future of their communities. A democratic process

evolves in a way that never would have if the typical, top-down city planning process had prevailed.

The common thread of these new strategies is their interdisciplinary and integrative nature. Environmentalists, historic preservationists, transit advocates, private sector businesses and farmland protectors come together in a collaborative way that fosters an understanding among them that their issues are inextricably bound together.

CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE AT A TURNING POINT

One of the overarching issues is funding from the European Union. Most community groups are only now beginning to understand the full scope of harmful impacts that the tidal wave of EU money will bring. This report does not evaluate the different EU funding programs. While some EU funds support the modest community-based efforts described here, the overwhelming share goes to big top-down, large-scale expensive projects. **It is not melodramatic to worry about how many recent gains described in this report will get swept away by ill-conceived policies and inappropriate, well-financed, big projects. It is not melodramatic to worry about how much incremental change won't have a chance.**

Proponents of EU membership cite the higher environmental and other standards the national governments must meet to join. A built-in contradiction exists, however, in the environmental standards established by the European Union. The standards will surely help in the workplace and industry. Industrial effluents will decrease. The workplace air will get cleaner, and so on. But the EU standards appear primarily to be consistent both with high-tech solutions and with Western high-tech businesses. EU proponents also argue that some things would never change without the pressure of joining the EU. That may be true. But the question is, at what price those benefits come.

A similar contradiction can be found in EU planning and development policies. On the one hand, EU documents present spatial development policy and urban redevelopment guidelines very much in line with sustainable development, compact cities and against urban sprawl.¹¹ On the other hand, policies and financing encouraging mostly big, highway-based development makes this goal unrealistic. Again, EU proponents argue that without EU influence, local policies would be even more destructive. That too may be true, especially when one recognizes the degree of local corruption and

¹¹ "EUROCITIES: Eurocities for an Urban Policy," Brussels, October 23, 1998. Also, EU position paper: "Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: a Framework for Action," Vienna, November 1998.

zoning for sale throughout the region. But the questions remain, at what price are the outside influences coming and is this the appropriate strategy for reform.

Negative impacts are already painfully evident:

- Farmers have been besieged with competition from the West. This goes far beyond introducing basic competition which encouraged indigenous farmers to improve the quality of produce and delivery, terrible under the former regime.
- Trucks bringing in goods from the West clog the roads and pollute the air.
- Most farms and local businesses are too small to compete in world markets and will probably get bought up by bigger companies, likely international ones. The lack of a recent entrepreneurial tradition makes survival of the modest-scale businesses even more difficult.
- Big, top-down development—i.e. car-based suburban developments, shopping malls and office parks fueled by big Western and multinational banks pose a real danger to the stability of historic centers in both big cities and small towns.
- Communism's brand of centrally planned top-down development simply may have been replaced by another form of centrally planned, overscaled, top-down development.

These negative impacts are particularly significant, given the impending flow of European Union infrastructure money. People are making choices and planning projects based on the expectation of money from Brussels, not necessarily on what is best long-term for the country or specific communities. Many good, successful, locally based programs benefitted from earlier European Union funding under the PHARE Program—the EU's funding program for Central Eastern Europe initiated in 1990. But most new funding programs for EU accession countries initiated in 2000 emphasize big infrastructure projects instead of the modest ones that till now have been directed at genuine regeneration projects. Big money historically attracts big corporate players. Their interests and control, however, are a great distance from the locality affected.

How much of the new money can be secured for modest, community-based, economically productive and environmentally sensible initiatives is a challenge all groups face. They must now compete with large-scale, expensive projects promoted by big, well-connected interests with strong lobbies. The citizen-based not-for-profit sector does not enjoy equal access to decision-makers. Nor do they enjoy equal media exposure. **Worldwide, small projects making a big difference never get the media attention given big projects of sometimes dubious significance.** This lack of attention

definitely does not diminish the significance of the cumulative impact of small projects. Innovative new things start small. Hopefully this report will help draw fresh attention to these local-based efforts and the lessons they offer.

Positive results of innovative approaches to community change are illustrated clearly in this report and offer a viable strategy for meaningful regeneration. People and groups throughout the region—and beyond—can both learn from and be inspired by every experience included herein. Policymakers can understand the broad potential represented and be encouraged to shape government policy according to the lessons. The lessons can serve a broad use beyond the four countries—i.e. the U.S., other Central and Eastern Europe countries, Latin America.

Thirdly, and most of all, we hope this report inspires citizen activists to continue their work, to build on their success and broaden their impact. New efforts are bound to grow out of the current ones.

The velocity of change in Central Europe is so dramatic that building on the successes represented in this report is urgent.

AS MUCH AS THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

“The first lesson I learned was that many countries are not dealing with the past, because the past is still with them. In most of the former Soviet republics, the old bosses are now the new bosses, now calling themselves nationalists instead of Communists.”

Tina Rosenberg made this observation in the introduction to *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism* (Random House, 1995). In so many ways, the comment appears still true, especially in the middle echelons of government bureaucracy. Rosenberg was focused on the moral dilemma of interpreting and judging behavior under the former regime. These same questions and challenges arise in the area of community redevelopment.

Peter Zlonicky, a landscape architect and urban planning professor emeritus at Technical University in Dortmund, Germany, for example, noted in an article about 20th century planning:

“The *Bund Deutscher Architekten* (Federation of German Architects) managed to survive National Socialism by being ‘brought into line.’ The frame of mind of those architects who remained in Germany has been articulated pointedly by Helmut Hentrich in conversation with Werner Durth: ‘We heard the roaring of the guns coming from the approaching English battalions as they reached the Lower Rhine; we put down our pencils, only to pick them up again a fort-

night later without any way altering the project we were working on.”

Plans created under the authoritarian regime for roads, sewers and flood control projects, for example, were simply dusted off, updated and are now being implemented by today's bureaucrats, often the same people as in the former regime. Many of these plans and policies reflect old thinking and out-of-date strategies. Some plans are even holdovers from the Nazi occupation during WWII when highways were planned to facilitate military occupation, for moving troops not civilians and commerce. Old plans were not reevaluated with new democratic goals or subjected to economic and environmental analysis. The mission of the highway engineer to move vehicles without regard to impact on communities prevails over the goal of moving people and goods so central to livable, economically viable places.

Current highway routes included in the Prague Master Plan, for example, are a synthesis of schemes from the 1930s, 1950s and 1970s when ill-conceived pave-over planning was at its worst worldwide. Much of the transportation thinking of those periods has been discredited. Wherever such policies prevailed, especially in the U.S. and Great Britain, monumental traffic, pollution and development problems exist today at great economic cost. Paradoxically in Prague, Czech activist Petr Štěpánek points out, “the highway plan faced bigger public opposition during Communism when it was seen as yet another destructive step by the Communists.” The distinction between old Communist and new Democrat, in this case, is blurred! Everywhere, development plans are being approved with total disregard for environmental and economic consequences and, quite frequently, with total disregard for the law and democratic participation.

Rafał Serafin,¹² director of the Environmental Partnership of Poland, noted about Poland's failed attempt to win the site of the 2006 Olympics for Zakopane, the ski resort in the High Tatras: “Nature preservation is the law yet the Polish government is promoting a plan for the Olympics in a protected nature preserve that is against the national law. Some things are still dealt with in the old way with a new label.”

Another Pole noted: “The young are being taught in state planning schools by old tenured professors with old ideas.” **Top-down, autocratic and bureaucratic**

governance is still a very strong pattern in Central Europe. The dominant centralized bureaucracy has yet to be fundamentally reformed, opened up and made accountable for its actions.

In contrast, citizen-activists and NGOs are in the vanguard of innovative, positive change. A new day is decidedly dawning throughout the region in large part due to scattered, modest, grass-roots efforts. On this level, thinking is fresh and creative. In nature conservation, tourism, historic preservation, community organizing, organic farming, landscape renewal, sewer, road and energy infrastructure, general problem solving with great potential for significant change is evident. Astonishing sophistication and technical knowledge is represented in the private, not-for-profit sector. **In fact, in many cases, more stability exists in the leadership of citizen-based organizations than in the upper echelons of most governments and many corporations. NGO ability to build awareness, their capability to make decisions and capacity to implement programs, puts them ahead of many local administrations and government bureaucracies.** They often serve as principal convenors of multi-interest, multi-disciplinary issues, bridging longstanding hostilities.

Yet, formidable hurdles remain.

Capitalism is often confused with democracy. So pleased to finally have access to much-desired consumer goods, many people tend not to recognize the trade-offs and compromises.

Old feelings remain and old habits are hard to break. The Communists, for example, compelled people to attend public meetings and participate in community projects. This was called Ideological Mobilization. Planning was centralized, top-down and totally unresponsive to community wishes. Now, a fierce anti-planning mindset translates into “the market will take care of everything.” What people think “the market” actually is remains somewhat mysterious. Local residents often are skeptical about efforts at genuine public participation and resist opportunities to get involved. Others, however, exhibit a real thirst for it, or at least a willingness to try it out.

Planners limit themselves to the obligatory “consultation” process rather than encouraging “participation.” This reinforces public skepticism about the planning process and gives no encouragement to those willing to participate productively. Democracy can't exist without an active citizenry. Confusion exists over the roles and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. The concept of volunteering carries negative connotations from when volunteering was compulsory and meaningless, a Communist holdover.

¹² Rafał Serafin, Polish director since 1996, has degrees in the environmental sciences and geography from universities in Waterloo and Toronto in Canada and East Anglia in England and a special expertise in urban and rural planning and ecological economics. While born in the UK, he lived most of his life either in Poland or Canada, UK and Austria. He returned to Poland in 1990 to participate in the country's economic, political and environmental reforms.

The idea persists that the state should and will take care of things, leading people to wait instead of acting independently. As one Pole observed: “For 50 years, Poland was divided into us and them. People complained if things didn’t get done or weren’t taken care of. Now they don’t believe they can do something on their own.” Often, people don’t believe they can affect change. In recent elections to the Warsaw municipal government, the most important in Poland, the participation rate was only 10 percent.

Paradoxically, people who fear or resist participatory planning frequently wait for government to do everything. Often, the biggest hurdle to positive change is the mindset of waiting for government to do it.

The above hurdles converge into one of the biggest of all, what one Polish observer calls, “the problems of domestic ignorance and distorted values held by large groups of the population so eagerly embracing consumerism and shying away from civic involvement.” Consumer behavior is shaping civic values and planning policies. Hypermarkets are generally loved by consumers. No understanding is apparent of the complex linkages between hypermarkets and urban sprawl, destruction of the environment or erosion of cultural heritage. Planners either don’t know any better or don’t try to educate the public to a different perspective and available alternatives. No voice is heard educating the public to different options, options that combine economic progress and environmental improvement and bring big consumer choices without destroying existing places.

BIG CHALLENGES

• **A lack of serious concern and activism in regard to the rapid proliferation of malls and hypermarkets guarantees serious problems in years to come.** The public and government on all levels are ill-equipped to handle these inevitable problems. Local governments don’t negotiate or set conditions for these malls, some of which make Wal-Mart seem intimate. Narrow zoning standards, such as road frontage and traffic considerations, are the only conditions these developments must meet. Planning and zoning regulations, however, do little to mitigate the scale, velocity and impact of development. Little understanding is evident that this kind of car-based development leads inevitably to more and more of it. Eventually, sprawl prevails, the center withers and a dysfunctional place results. Furthermore, programs or provisions that help both small businesses and local entrepreneurs compete are meager and bureaucratic, a serious deficiency. The undermining of locally owned businesses, however, is just the beginning of the problems that come with this car-

based mall development. Dominance by distant corporations is the inevitable result.

• **Cars are the big status symbol.** It is easier to convince people of the perils of nuclear energy than the perilous change that comes with a rebuilt landscape designed to accommodate so many cars. Monolithic Chernobyl and disparate car development are equal dangers. This is true in Western Europe as well. The phenomenon of cars results from a large number of small, individual decisions, albeit promoted by very sophisticated corporate propaganda. However, Chernobyl is “real” and large and can be viewed more easily as an “enemy.” Central Eastern Europeans remember Chernobyl and awareness of its danger remains, but they don’t believe Western sprawl will engulf them. There is little understanding of auto-related costs—air pollution, health, public services, runoff and the whole catalogue of external costs. Erosion of towns and cities occurs in small steps—a building here, a new road there, a gas station here, a small shopping center and many, many convenience stores at scattered road intersections here and there—until piece after piece, the cherished landscape that has endured for centuries is gobbled up. This universal process is little understood. Culture, heritage and tradition erode in equally small steps.

Cars represent freedom and status, things for which Central Europeans have waited a long time. They don’t recognize the distinction between owning a car while still having the choice not to have to use it and depending on it for everything.¹³ Few understand that it is in the interest of car drivers that access to cheap, comfortable reliable and safe transit remain available to those who want that alternative. The more people choose a transit alternative, the better it is for those who drive.

The real consequences of auto-based development trends are ignored or minimized, just as they were in the U.S. and Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. Highway decisions are not being made as part of a larger, long term vision in which the public participates. The people are absent from the process. Decisions are being made by a combination of government officials and private businesses, often with shared vested interests that conflict with public benefit. The idea has been successfully promoted that highways are needed to be Western, and whatever it takes to get them seems acceptable. It is nothing short of startling, and surely alarming, that Prague, for example, could seriously be pursuing plans for two highway rings with several

¹³ The good news is that the cars are still small with high mileage and gas is still expensive. Cheaper gas and the Sport Utility Vehicles now choking U.S. roads and air, can’t be far behind.

highways radiating out, crisscrossing the city, guaranteed to choke Prague with traffic and decimate its historically rich cityscape. A map of planned highways around the region looks like a Los Angeles freeway interchange. This is nothing less than the planned destruction of Prague. The city least destroyed by war faces overwhelming destruction by choice.

• **Only a lack of funds may contain serious sprawl.** Polish observers point out that not enough government infrastructure money exists to keep up with the random building on land without roads, sewers, running water or electricity. Thus developers must build their own infrastructure which raises costs. One Cracow suburban development is right off a highway but has only a pitiful road connection dating from the 1970s. The road is hardly more than a dirt path. Some of these homes have environmental toilets (self-contained composting toilets) instead of plumbing, lanterns instead of electricity and no running water. This is, reportedly, typical. Observes one Pole: “As long as we don’t have big infrastructure development, we won’t have big sprawl. The government is not interested in servicing these big developments and hasn’t enough money to do so anyway. Individuals and small developers are building these projects.” Small developers don’t have the political clout to demand government investment. Undoubtedly, if big developers with political clout exhibit interest in developing where infrastructure does not yet exist, the governmental response surely will be different. This may be good news, for now, but how long it lasts is open to question, especially as EU infrastructure money pours in.

• **Sprawl is occurring in guises unrecognizable to most people.** In cities like Cracow and Prague, for example, as private apartments empty and come on the market, rents are rising steeply, becoming out of range for most residential tenants. As apartments become empty, businesses paying the higher rents frequently replace residents. Restrictions should, but don’t, reserve upper floors, for example, to residential use which would keep a lid on some rent increases while permitting commercial occupancy and rent increases on the first and second floors. Limitations like these would temper change without stopping it. Without such appropriate policies, the displaced move out of the center to find affordable rents. Stores downtown serving a local population subsequently close either when the customers disappear or, more commonly so far, when tourist businesses come in paying more rent. Others are put out of business by the new chain stores. The appeal of the Center diminishes when access to necessary goods and services disappears and real estate becomes unaffordable.

• **A built-in contradiction exists in EU environmental standards ostensibly established to improve the environment of the region.** As noted earlier, the standards will surely help in the workplace and in industry. Industrial effluents will be reduced. The workplace air will get cleaner, and so on. But the EU standards appear primarily to be consistent with high-tech, big project solutions for infrastructure problems offered by Western high-tech businesses—dependent often on EU subsidies. Once small, low-tech alternatives are presented as farm, water, development and other solutions, EU standards become a problem and the low-tech alternatives don’t fulfill EU expectations.

• **Excessive highway planning, emerging sprawl, and the erosion of historic centers endanger both the natural environment and the historic and cultural landscape that have evolved over centuries.** These environmental threats are not as easily articulated and visualized as threats to a forest or a frog.

• **Challenges to road plans and demolition/new building proposals are erroneously perceived as a threat to new freedoms and consumer opportunities.** Yet, built environment challenges are as daunting as natural environmental ones, probably even more so. The solutions are more politically challenging and the lobbies resisting those solutions are formidable. **While the EU is demanding improved natural environment conditions, it is inconsistently promoting development and transportation policies that guarantee new environmental problems of enormous scale and, in some ways even more difficult to solve.**

• **Too much is simply taken for granted.** Traditional places, customs and lifestyles are clearly being undermined, mostly in gradual, not obvious ways. Some activists understand this turn of events but haven’t begun seriously to take on these issues or to encourage others to do so. Others understand but pursue other priorities. Top policy-makers avoid the issues almost entirely, an egregious error. Sadly, the only one in a position to force government to confront these issues is the already overburdened NGO community.

The successful NGOs represented herein are uneven in their ability to compete with seasoned, well-financed developers and to make an impact on policy. But to participate in a policy dialogue means partners in government are willing to listen, especially at the highest levels. That has yet to be the experience of most people in this report. The four partners of the EPCE have achieved extraordinary problem-solving successes. Whether national or international policy-makers are willing to absorb the lessons of successes is an open question. Those successes are widespread and can’t be

ignored. Those successes, visible in a large number of modest projects, add up to significant change.

Miroslav Kundera, director of the Czech Environmental Partnership,¹⁴ apologizes “for having less of an impact on policy than we would like,” but adds, “don’t underestimate the impact of the programs that are succeeding.” This is the remarkable truth that will become apparent in this report.

• **The biggest challenge of all is persistent and widespread corruption and cronyism in the privatization process throughout the region.** It is easy to declare a free market and to establish the **form** of a democratic society. But as *New York Times* correspondent Thomas L. Friedman notes in his incisive book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, “What’s difficult is to establish even-handed enforcement of equitable laws and commercial codes, with courts that will protect people from unfettered capitalism.”¹⁵ The prevalence of laws that can be

easily ignored, decisions being made with under-the-table cash transactions and financial systems vulnerable to abuse will become apparent throughout this report. This is a shortcoming undermining all progress in the region.

Friedman sums it up appropriately:

“It is not only critical in this era of globalization to learn how to compete without walls on the outside of your country, it is also critical to learn how to remove the walls inside. The more transparent you are inside, the more your government is grounded in the rule of law, the more you are willing to share how and where decisions are made, the less likely it is that corruption will remain hidden, and the more likely others will be willing to stick with you. An efficient, transparent and honest legal system — where citizens can get an accurate picture of how their government’s policies are performing and investors can be assured that private property and intellectual innovation will be respected and the playing field will be relatively level — is essential for sustainable growth.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Miroslav Kundera, director since 1994, holds a doctorate in physical geography and was a co-founder of the Czech Union of Nature Conservationists and of the environmental quarterly VERONICA.

¹⁵ (Anchor Books, April 2000), p. 153.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Poland is the largest and most populous of the four Central European countries visited for this report. With 38.5 million inhabitants, Poland is also the nation where environmental conditions remain so alarmingly bad that one cannot imagine long-term economic progress without a more serious environmental strategy that draws lessons from the kind of successes described in this report. Closing the monstrous polluting factories of the Soviet era made an early dramatic impact but it was only a start. The problems are so fundamental that even the best centrally developed national policies would be insufficient without effective, widespread locally based efforts.

A published report of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) noted, for example, that no unpolluted ground-water resources remain in Poland. Untreated waste pours into the country's rivers, lakes and sea every year. Poland's waste treatment rate is 13 percent compared to the Western Europe norm of 70–90 percent. Conventional, top-down thinking worldwide is typically dependent on high-tech solutions — capital intensive projects that require big financial investments and are usually implemented by large, often foreign, contractors.

But the Polish water problem is simply too vast and too expensive to be solved in such a manner. The World Bank has estimated that meeting EU environmental requirements will cost 35 billion Euro.¹⁷ Just over half of that alone, 18.1 billion Euro, would go toward improving water quality, since the EU requires that to gain membership every community of more than 2,000 have its own sewage treatment facilities. Powerless to deal with a problem of such scale, the Polish government requested a 10-year moratorium on the requirement, a request resisted so far by the EU.

Poland is not alone in this and other daunting problems. Flood protection is equally pressing, especially since the devastating floods of 1997. Water treatment was a primary concern at most of the sites visited for this report. Communities that had invested in expensive, complete



treatment systems had no money for anything else. Others couldn't imagine where funds would come from if not from the national government, since the local population was already too poor to afford more taxes. Only at some locally initiated, environmentally friendly projects, developed with some extraordinary NGO expertise, did we observe innovative, low-cost solutions that went beyond just solving the technical challenge. Public participation and broader community revitalization were advanced in the process of solving environmental problems.

Serious environmental issues beyond water-related ones will be obvious in the stories of individual projects.

• **Polish farmers have long played a central, if generally unacknowledged, role in maintaining the traditions, culture and environmental health of rural areas.** However, environmentally sustainable practices of farmers are threatened by the influence of the EU. Poland's small band of two million farmers cannot compete with EU imports, for example. Experts predict that two-thirds of those farmers will not be able to earn a living following EU membership. Worse, farmers are too poor to buy expensive western chemicals, fertilizer or equipment. Banks and some government programs offer loans for such products, and the western Europe chemical salesmen

¹⁷ 1998 Report, Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation.

are quite busy luring farmers to new practices that use their product. Chemical marketers are quite effective. Gradually, intensive, highly organized, chemically-oriented agriculture depletes the soil and makes farmers more vulnerable by raising their costs. **As farmers go deeper into debt and are less able to compete with cheap imports, they are more likely to sell out to big agribusiness corporations, further threatening the culture, traditions and physical landscape uniquely Polish.**

On the other hand, non-sustainable practices of small farmers are not being addressed. One Polish economist notes: “Farmers own very fragmented pieces of land. In many places, they spend much energy on constantly moving among these small parcels. A tractor gets used most for making trips between them...Farmers use leaking septic tanks and deplete water from deep wells. Untreated waste ends up in runoff or in smoke.” **Small farm problems are many. The answer to these problems, however, is not to put them out of business but to introduce sustainable practices within the context of their continued existence.**

- **Only 10.9 percent of the forests are classified “healthy.”**

- **Less than one percent of ancient forests are strictly protected.**

- **Wildlife of all kinds is threatened.** This is true elsewhere in Western, Central and Eastern Europe, but it is uniquely more important in Poland than in other countries. Poland is one of the last European countries (Ukraine is another) which still has wildlife that used to be common ALL over Europe. Poland still has, for example, European bison which are exceedingly rare—larger than North American bison, and they don't live on the plains but in forests. They still thrive along the eastern Polish border and, a little bit, in Slovakia. Wolves, severely depleted or entirely gone in the rest of Europe, also roam the region. Bears, golden eagles, cranes and lynxes still live in Poland. The reason this bio-diversity exists is fundamentally tied to development patterns. Especially with relatively large mammals with big ranges (wolves, bears, lynxes), highways and sprawl ring the death knell. Poland's tradition of compact communities and limited highway development with lots of undeveloped, open land has allowed these animals to thrive.

One observer noted: “No one talks about this. Western European (EU) policy-makers are unaware of this issue. Polish decision-makers don't want bio-diversity issues to impinge upon the prospect of future economic development. The same old ‘we can't afford it’ argument gets repeated and repeated. By and large, Polish, like Slovak, Czech and Hungarian nature

protectors are experts and knowledgeable but not great at public relations and politics.”

Except for the small farm question and the importance of Polish wildlife preservation, all the issues listed are germane to all the other countries in this report.

What follows are stories of locally based projects that are achieving both environmental and civil society improvements. While offering great promise, they are insufficient—without broader support—to withstand the pressures of sprawl, car dependency and global corporate control.

Alarming trends include:

- An evolving truck- and car-dependent society with costly, inefficient and environmentally devastating traffic congestion that cannot possibly be mitigated by more and bigger highways.
- A meagerly subsidized national transit system that forces schedule reduction, ticket price increases and closure of intact short lines and local bus services. Local transit systems mirror the condition of the national system. Communities become isolated. Without access to transit some wither away. More people rely on cars. New and bigger public investment is required to solve newly created environmental problems. The connectedness so crucial to a democratic society is undermined.
- Demolition, abandonment and diverted investment will surely undermine and atomize the once naturally-evolved, physical landscape where compact communities functioned for centuries.

CRACOW

Cracow, the ancient royal capital, has traditionally been one of the major centers of Polish culture and education. The Old Town, designated a UNESCO site in 1978, grew gradually over the centuries starting in the 13th century. Two defensive walls with 47 towers and seven entrance gates that encircled the town were demolished in the 19th century except for a small but distinctive section. A filled-in moat-turned-park encircles the city center giving it a clear and pleasant definition. Much of Poland, particularly the cities, was destroyed during World War II. Cracow alone emerged unscathed. Until now.

Justifiably known as the jewel in Poland's crown, Cracow is the first place to suffer early impacts of new residential and commercial development outside the city. The old town is considered one of the world's great cities. The Rynek Główny, the medieval market square, is always filled with people—young and old, students with books, parents with baby carriages, old folks with canes, business people with briefcases, the whole

spectrum of human activity that defines a living center. Outdoor cafés surround the square. Historic architecture and varied cultural activities distinguish the city. Because of its vibrant center and animated market square with its huge enclosed market building, one can be deceived into thinking all is well. Unemployment ranks lowest in the country. Thirteen universities draw 102,000 students. The intellectual and cultural life is rich.

The nibbling that erodes a city, however, has begun to nibble at Cracow.

Unbridled suburban development is pulling people out of the center, as skyrocketing rents for small, unrenovated apartments are pushing residents out... slowly, for now. Hypermarkets, mostly out of the center, are undermining downtown retail, and little or no attention is paid to policies that could direct the new stores into the traditional center. As the people and businesses move out, cultural and intellectual institutions will eventually feel compelled to follow. Neither the suburban sprawl nor urban deterioration draw sufficient concern and policy-making attention. Real estate remains poorly regulated and development restrictions and legal rulings have no strength. One Carrefour Mall Development (French chain) at the outskirts of Cracow was held up by the municipal government when a traffic study showed that enormous congestion would occur. The government official responsible for denying the permit was subsequently fired and the building permit approved. The anticipated traffic congestion occurred and now the mall is lobbying the city to widen the roads. Predictably, other malls are rising along the same route, a circumstance easily anticipated.

Undermining the Center

To make matters worse, planning, building and zoning laws undermine official city goals to achieve future compact development. Excessive parking requirements for new and remodelled development, low-density zoning near transit stops and other districts and complex permitting procedures are serious discouragements to compact development.

Ironically, Cracow is one of the better managed cities in Central Eastern Europe.

Eventually, possibly inevitably, Cracow will become a glorious ancient city stage set, visited by millions of tourists and enjoyed by students but missing the urban richness of a fully-functioning vibrant community. Cracow is not alone and, in fact, is emblematic of the future of Central European cities. This pattern is visible in Prague and Budapest, as will be described later. On a lesser scale, one can observe this already in small towns like Telč in the Czech Republic where little activity

other than tourist services is apparent in its extraordinary square and surrounding arcaded stores. And, of course, many farm communities and small villages throughout the region already stand almost empty for many reasons, including the ending of low-cost, accessible inter-city mass transit. In many historic towns, such as Banská Štiavnica in Slovakia, the challenge is to repopulate and reanimate a center vacuumed out by policies of the former regime. But in cities and towns like Cracow that still have what so many cities around the world have lost and are trying to recover, no policy is more important than strengthening existing life and averting its erosion. All over Cracow, residential apartments are being converted to office space. No policies assist local residents to afford to stay and no programs assist the small businesses from being forced out. This contrasts with national development policies designed to encourage outside corporations and developers to come in a big way. Restoring the infrastructure and buildings without stabilizing the residential and business population is a questionable accomplishment.

Ironically, Cracow was one of the first of the historic Central European cities to successfully confront the McDonald's dilemma. In 1994, city leaders would not give McDonald's a permit to open a restaurant in a faded but elegant 15th-century building reasonably intact despite many incidental alterations. The targeted building was located right on Rynek Główny, the heart and soul of the city. The food chain already occupied—quite unobtrusively—a 14th-century building on Floriańska Street, the old Royal Way to the city's main gate. The red and yellow logos occupy a modest-size sign protruding from the building, similar in scale to other store signs on the street. Reporting on the conflict in *The New York Times*, Jane Perlez wrote: "The fight is not so much about a particular building, although that is part of it, but about fending off what many here see as the cult of prosperity." This conflict, however, preceded the multiple chain-style developments that have met little official resistance. The McDonald's issue, confined as it was to Rynek Główny, was considered a fight for the "architectural soul" of the city.¹⁸ The proliferation of chains and malls all over Poland since that conflict, however, has not provoked the same kind of resistance but assuredly goes to the "community soul" of the nation.

Years later, McDonald's has prevailed and is scheduled to open on the main square having overcome technical and sanitary problems that stood in the way.

¹⁸ In 1999, McDonald's stood as the symbol of American-led globalization threatening traditions of all Western and Central European countries. When French sheep farmer Jose Bove trashed a McDonald's that was under construction, he became an instant national and international hero.

This McDonald's is supposed to be low key¹⁹ like the one on Floriańska Street. The entrance will be on the side street, not on the square. This is considered a sufficient compromise.

A large-scale planned development—now stalled—in Cracow raises a different, less obvious, set of issues. Nowe Miasto, marketed as a “cultural shopping district,” is an American-style retail, entertainment, hotel, office and residential complex with 2,500 parking spaces covering 15 hectares just outside the once-walled center. A “most exciting opportunity in a rapidly expanding retail market,” a brochure boasts, fully implying this is the perfect destination for global retailers. Developed by the prominent New York-based firm of Tishman-Speyer, Nowe Miasto is reportedly the largest urban development investment in Central Europe. Yet, no anchor tenant has been secured. As one mall expert familiar with the larger the Central Europe region observed: “Only low-end mass retailers used to building tin sheds on the highways are attracted to malls. High-end anchors don't want them.” Mall retailers don't understand urban retailing and always demand parking. The city government had to pass a special variance permitting the 2,500 parking spaces, a far greater number than allowed in any one district up to this time, appropriately so. Until now, Cracow has wisely kept a tight lid on city center parking, critical to moderating traffic congestion.

The design of Nowe Miasto (literally New Town) appears from its marketing material to be reasonably amenable to foot traffic and somewhat transit oriented and not disconnected from the historic core. How well connected it turns out to be will depend on how many street-front entrances will be open upon completion, whether retail access will be from the inside like a mall and whether perceived security needs will dictate gate-like fronts. **Malls are designed to lure shoppers inside and to keep them there. Real urban districts encourage the easy passage of people in, out and around so all businesses in the district benefit. Thus, how many entrances in any new development that are open and unlocked indicates how truly mall-like or urban it is.**

Large-Scale Won't Work

No matter how aesthetically pleasing and how functionally urban the result actually is, the scale and impact will be big. The first phase alone calls for 65,000 square meters of retail, an 8,500 square meter multiplex cinema, 30,000 square meters of offices and a 250-room

hotel. Eventually, approximately 20,000 square meters of retail space is planned for this site, more than now exists in the whole historic center. This ratio courts disaster. People, activity and retail will obviously be drawn out of historic core already experiencing destabilizing trends. Scale can sometimes be more significant than any other feature of a development. Some observers mistake this as an advantage, assuming that by drawing commercial uses out of the core, more space is available for cultural uses. But nothing can guarantee that those cultural uses won't follow the larger shift or remain isolated and less visible.

The development's location offers advantages easily negated by its scale. Multiple transit options could exist here, a significant positive feature that could reduce the impact of growing car traffic. (The on-again-off-again fast tram system planned for Cracow will stop here too.) Close proximity to the main square assures an important pedestrian link. In fact, this is probably the ideal location for this kind of development on a smaller scale.

Nowe Miasto raises another set of concerns. Adjacent to the city's rail yards, Nowe Miasto replaces an area of low rise warehouses, factories and assorted buildings that together once represented critical economic uses but have fallen into disuse. Officials report the existence of falling-down underutilized buildings. *Often, this empty, run-down appearance is deceptive. If one actually goes building by building, more economic activity is usually going on inside than even officials recognize. The smallness and, often, messiness of the operations fools people into thinking the businesses are not important. This is precisely the kind of assortment of buildings with cheap space that gives rise to new businesses. Underused small spaces offer great opportunities for new innovative uses.*²⁰ Nowe Miasto replaces this district and is conveniently located adjacent to the railyards but leaves little room for future manufacturing or other businesses that require proximity to rail freight. Serious concern is always called for whenever such low-level buildings and local businesses—existing or potential—are replaced. Improved, upscale development is always primarily for big international chains. Local vendors are displaced. Local ownership is exchanged for distant ownership and control. Entrepreneurial opportunities are exchanged for low-wage jobs. Local character is replaced with well-designed homogenization. How much of this kind of development a city of such richness as Cracow can sustain is an open question.

Development of this scale is always problematic, anywhere in the world. It is simply too large to occur

¹⁹Actually, McDonald's is to be commended for some of its facilities in European historic buildings, such as the train station in Budapest and the historic shopping street of Salzburg. No garish golden arches protrude from or obstruct the historic facade and only modest signage heralds its presence.

²⁰ These kinds of districts in other ancient cities are now giving rise to new or small high-tech and dot.com companies.

without taking years of local struggle and large sums of wasted money. The scale is devastating for a city of this size. The process of approval totally omits public participation, denying the perfect opportunity to create a long term vision for the city that does not undermine hundreds of years of unique development. Elements of this development plan have positive potential. But the only way this could work to the city's benefit is if it happened in modest increments, was adjusted as conditions changed and filled unmet needs instead of generating an alien market. Popular support would have a chance under this scenario, but Tishman-Speyer has indicated that that kind of development is too small for them. That is precisely the problem with mega-developers seeking opportunities in modest-sized cities, a problem already apparent in other cities, like Budapest. There, also adjacent to one of the primary train stations, is an outrageously overscaled development causing all sorts of problems.

In Cracow, Nowe Miasto has run into political problems because one administration approved it but the next one is not continuing the approval. The project totally depends on the construction of an unrealistic, problem-filled road connection between the city and the ring road outside the city center to be paid for by the city. This would cost billions of dollars, disrupt all kinds of districts and be fiercely resisted by the public, guaranteeing endless delays. The city can't afford it and Tishman-Speyer has said they can't build without it. Surely, a no-win situation.

What may turn out to be the most important value of Nowe Miasto, built or unbuilt, is that it will have forced the city of Cracow to confront the issue of mega-scale development, to examine conditions effected by such development and to debate its value to a city rich in attractions that needs modest, not overwhelming, new development.

REVITALIZING CRACOW'S KAZIMIERZ

For a long time, Kazimierz was an independent town with its own Town Hall and market square. A defensive wall surrounded the town, and by the end of the 14th century it rivaled Cracow in wealth and importance. A trickle of Jews had migrated to Cracow by the 12th century. In the 1330s, persecution of Jews escalated throughout Europe, and King Kazimierz offered them shelter in Poland. Their numbers grew immeasurably at that point. Threatened by the size of the growing community, King Ján Olbracht expelled them from Cracow. They settled in a small section of Kasimierz, separated from the Christian Quarter by a wall. That lasted until the end of the 18th century when Cracow and Kazimierz were administratively combined. The wall was demolished in the 1820s. The Jewish popula-

tion continued to grow and eventually filled most of the town. That lasted until the Holocaust.

Once the heart of Cracow's Jewish community, Kazimierz is the only substantial visual and architectural remains of Cracow's Jewish life. There remain seven synagogues, two cemeteries and several commercial and residential buildings—an astonishing number. The first Jews who arrived primarily from Germany over 500 years ago as tradesmen and merchants established what became a significant center of Jewish culture and worship. Before the Holocaust, the district was home to an estimated 70,000 Jews. Today, fewer than 200, mostly elderly, Jews remain. Poland had the largest Jewish population in Central Europe, and the Jewish impact and imprint on the nation has not yet been fully understood. As part of Cracow and Polish history, this neighborhood is critical.

The former regime ignored Kazimierz, apparently in order not to raise the Jewish issue. Reportedly, little interest was shown in the district after World War II. A small trickle of Jewish tourists wandered through it. The movie, *Schindler's List*, brought new attention to Cracow's Jewish heritage. "Schindler Tourism" (Polish and foreign) and investment interest mushroomed.

Authenticity Threatened

The biggest dilemma is that Kazimierz is an authentic Cracow neighborhood in which 20,000 ordinary residents and business people lead their everyday lives. The district contains an appealing assortment of run-down but structurally sound buildings, less expensive than more upscale Cracow neighborhoods. Upgrading a neighborhood without having it go out of control because of its appeal to outsiders is the most difficult challenge for cities around the world. In this case, the outside interest is twofold: Polish artists and middle-class folk with rising incomes are moving into both unrehabilitated and upgraded buildings, raising real estate values. At the same time, tourist-related businesses are moving in, pushing up commercial values as well. Already, the pressures of gentrification are being felt.

The Kazimierz Local Office operated jointly by the city and a local group, the Cracow Development Forum, definitely has the right ideas about revitalizing this area as a community. They organized a public forum for local residents to express opinions about what should happen. They've advanced "green projects" for some courtyard spaces. They advocate improving living conditions for the benefit of residents and support initiatives to safeguard and restore historic sites. They issue a monthly newspaper covering current topics and past history. They write about Jewish holidays, unfamiliar to many current residents, and about the people after

whom the streets are named. They promote the Christian sites of the district, since most visitors don't know this was first its own town and the site of centuries of interweaving of Christian and Jewish heritage. "We're trying to preserve a small town but don't want what happened to the Main Square, where no one can live any more, to happen here," said Małgorzata Walczak of the Cracow Development Forum.

The good news is that Kazimierz was designated a priority area in the city's 1993 development strategy. While not all district buildings are of heritage quality, new ones are expected to conform in design and scale to the existing neighborhood. That is where the good news ends. A Kazimierz Action Plan was prepared by a team from Cracow, Edinburgh and Berlin under the auspices of the European Union's ECOS Ouverture program, which is devoted to improving urban and regional planning by helping cities exchange experiences. The plan calls for the district to be revived, restored and kept residential for "the benefit of its residents." But as yet it is only a paper plan meant to promote the area and not yet formally integrated into municipal development procedures. By the time it is, however, if it is, the local population will be dramatically reduced.

No policies or programs, in fact, are in place to facilitate the continuation of Kazimierz as an authentic neighborhood. The city officially favors letting the market dictate everything that happens. This guarantees the gradual but eventual displacement of the current population.

Kazimierz' destiny is clear. Without publicly-funded initiatives to dampen the displacement trend, it will erode gradually. This is not like wholesale removal and demolition. Instead, this is subtle—slow but sure. This pattern of gentrification is visible in all of the architecturally intact and culturally unique ancient cities of Central Eastern Europe and will continue unabated under anything-goes market economies. Few traditional historic cities in Western Europe and North America have escaped this trend. In fact, about the only ones that have are those, especially in North America, that have been so bulldozed by urban renewal that little urban fabric remains to appeal to an existing or new population of residents or entrepreneurs.

NOWA HUTA

Nowa Huta is world famous for the enormous polluting steel mill built by the Soviet regime that spewed black clouds of soot south to Cracow, endangering the health of residents and scarring priceless architecture in the entire historic city. In the West, Nowa Huta was depicted in the media as the Communists' revenge on the incomparable beauty of Cracow. Nowa Huta, as it turns out, is considerably more than a steel mill and is an

extraordinarily historic, fascinating and functioning city for which a locally-based preservation effort has been mounted for logical reasons.

Fifty years ago, prompted by Joseph Stalin and assisted by Soviet engineers, Poland's Communist authorities decided a whole new city would be built to the east of Cracow around a giant steel mill complex—the Lenin Steel Works. The decision to build Nowa Huta—literally 'new foundry' was not only economic, but also political. Economically, it was part of a six-year plan to industrialize the Polish economy. Politically, it was intended to create a second city to dilute Cracow's independent tradition. Nowa Huta's Central Plaza was intended to compete with Cracow's historic Rynek Główny, less than 7 kilometers away.

By the 1970s, over 100,000 people lived in Nowa Huta. The Lenin Steel Works produced over six million tons of steel annually and employed as many as 35,000 workers. But little attention was paid to environmental protection. The air was black with sulphur and smoke and water was contaminated. It was here that Poland's first independent environmental groups were organized, including the Polish Ecological Club, which campaigned in the 1980s to close the steel works.

More Than a Steel Mill

In the 1990s, the Lenin Steel Works was renamed the Sendzimir Steel Works to commemorate one of Poland's inventors, and a restructuring program was initiated. The most polluting parts of the plant were closed and environmental controls were introduced. What was once a monolithic state-controlled plant and site of workers' strikes, is today a modern industrial operation made up of several companies. The early strikes and protests here helped lead to the collapse of Communism.

Today, Nowa Huta is considerably more than a steel mill as the district is becoming an attractive location for both small and large businesses. For example, Chicago-based R.R. Donnelly is building a \$10 million printing works in what used to be the Steel Works' buffer zone, creating jobs and diversifying the local economy. Nowa Huta has become Cracow's industrial and residential district. Local community groups are nurturing a sense of history and initiating projects to improve community appeal. The Association for Nature Conservation, for example, is working with residents to humanize their surroundings by tearing up the concrete around high-rise buildings and planting gardens with ivy to cover bleak facades.

A green business park with small companies committed to operating in line with European Union environmental standards is being developed under the Environmental Partnership's Czysty Biznes ("Clean

Business”) Program. The program helps small and medium-sized companies to reduce operating costs by upgrading environmental procedures, improving management skills, sharpening competitiveness and to become suppliers to large companies committed to environmental responsibility. The program also encourages them to become involved in community action.²¹

Another initiative is the Association for Nowa Huta Museum, which has brought together steel workers, environmentalists, teachers, trade unionists, business people and local government officials to preserve local heritage. The history of the area—including the construction—is being documented and heritage trails developed to bring the past to life. Maciej Mieziań, a local community leader involved in the Museum initiative, says “Nowa Huta is really Cracow’s older sister.” The new town was built in one of Poland’s largest prehistoric settlements and on the site of 30 villages, some dating from the 13th century. Relics of village architecture, old manor houses and even palaces enrich its landscape. Visitors are surprised that amid the high-rise residential areas, you can encounter 100-year-old peasant houses, wooden rural churches from the 15th and 17th centuries, and the residences of landowners from the 18th and 19th centuries with extensive parklands. Nowa Huta’s oldest relic is a prehistoric burial mound with the remains of Princess Wanda—Cracow’s legendary ruler. Other architectural monuments include the Gothic Cistercian abbey in Mogiła (13th–16th centuries) and numerous structures built in the style of Socialist Realism, now accorded heritage protection status.

A Real Place

Local initiatives focused on environment and heritage are building a new sense of identity and pride in Nowa Huta as a community—a place to live and work. Yet the most difficult challenges still lie ahead. With production down to less than two million tons annually, the Steel Works still employs 18,000 but continues to cut back to stay competitive. As many as 10,000 workers are to lose their jobs over the next five years to help the steel mill reduce costs and to give it a chance to survive as Poland enters the European Union, where there is over-capacity in steel production. Job losses are already dampening the local sense of identity and caring. Unfortunately, the city authorities appear to be doing little to ease the social and economic impacts of the downsizing. No retraining programs are available or policies to help develop small

and medium-sized enterprises, the best hope for job creation and longterm growth. Consequently, funds for retraining steel workers available from the national government and the European Union are being directed to the nearby Silesian coal mines and not to Nowa Huta.

Local NGOs, church groups, and business people are taking the initiative themselves to develop links with other European cities in Germany, UK and France which have experienced steel plant restructuring and unemployment problems. Once employed at the Steel Works, Krzysztof Kwatara now works for the Environmental Partnership. “Ten years ago, environmental arguments were used to close down heavy industry,” he says. “Today, we’re seeing a concern for environment as an opportunity to generate jobs in Nowa Huta and to rally support to attract new investment ideas, which can help bring new life to Nowa Huta. What’s needed is partnership between NGO and business leaders to identify local needs and opportunities, and only then will we be able to mobilize government action.”

SOUTH FROM CRACOW ALONG THE AMBER TRAIL GREENWAY

The following projects reflect the Polish Amber Trail Greenway (ATG) focus on the creation of projects and activities which solve environmental problems while encouraging local economic development and protecting the natural and cultural heritage. Ongoing overall efforts seek to connect sites for tourists, to encourage cross-border cooperation among the three ATG countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary) to identify and mark a bike route, to stimulate more local entrepreneurial opportunities and to market the trail for tourists.

THE JURA PROGRAM

(developed with Ojcowski National Park, the Jura Landscape Parks and local governments)

“The project seeks to identify and promote community-based sustainable development projects along a Jura Ring that surrounds the Jura Landscape Parks with the twin objectives of reducing tourist pressure on Ojcowski National Park and providing economic development opportunities for communities in the Jura Upland.”

One of the most significant characteristics of the diversified community-based projects throughout Central Europe, immediately apparent in Poland, is the nature-conservation-outdoor activity focus of so many citizen initiatives. Invariably, the most interesting, diversified and effective efforts start with small, often spontaneous initiatives. In this case, as will be seen in the next project, a citizen-organized program to protect frogs crossing roads was an early catalyst for a larger effort.

²¹ The Clean Business Program is actually one of the Polish Environmental Partnership’s most innovative and covers 60 towns in southern Poland. By demonstrating how good environmental practices can improve profits, the Clean Business Program advances the fundamental premise of all projects included in this report that profit and an improved environment can go together.

The Jura Program is a multi-faceted nature and open-space program with a modest sprawl containment and economic development subtext. This program brings together National Park managers, local officials and residents, a remarkable achievement considering the less than warm feelings among those groups. The resentment of local residents toward park administrators is similar to that of the people who live in New York State's Adirondack State Park,²² even though the contexts are so obviously different. In this case, the former regime actually confiscated privately owned land—mostly non-arable forests—to expand parks. Some Adirondack property owners feel like their land has been confiscated even though they still own it, because of unfairly stringent park regulations.

The Jura Program aims to spread out park visitation and take pressure off the most popular, heavy-traffic Ojcowski National Park, located just 20 kilometers from Cracow's historic square. Efforts to market alternative park options seem to be working. At New York's Mohonk Mountain House,²³ an extraordinary national historic landmark in the Hudson Valley, a similar effort was undertaken to ease visitor overload in the most popular areas and encourage visitation elsewhere. It worked. Any effort to bring new attention to underused appealing sites is bound to draw people.

"Our greatest success so far," notes Andrzej Biderman, PEPF Jura Program coordinator, has been "the change in attitude of local people. People living in the parks thought institutions dealing with landscape conservation were the enemy. Now local officials want to talk to us when they have meetings about real estate development. Park people knew they should work with local people but they didn't know how and had no tools." **The role of the Partnership in bringing together groups that were either hostile or just unfamiliar with one another is repeated in many projects and may be one of the most useful functions each Partnership performs.**

²² The Adirondack Park is a six-million acre region composed of public and private lands. An Adirondack Park Agency, created in the 1970s and with state, local and private sectors, manages growth in the park. It can dictate kinds and color of signage, density and other types of zoning issues. Historically, it has been very unpopular with people who live year-round in the Adirondacks and popular with tourists or owners of second homes in the park. It is a favorite place for summer activities, such as hiking, biking, camping, canoe trips, mountain climbing and the like.

²³ Mohonk Mountain House is the only true "resort" in the Hudson Valley and is located in a 26,000 acre natural area that includes state park land, private preserves and the resort property. It is a sprawling, rustic-style Victorian hotel with many different sections totaling an eighth of a mile in length. It sits atop a ridge next to a lake in the Shawangunk Mountains in the middle of the Mohonk Forest Preserve. Once strictly a summer resort, Mohonk now accommodates vacationers and conferences year round.

Under the Jura Program, efforts are made to encourage local people to open small tourism-related businesses. Tourists, in this case, are mostly Poles from the Jura region coming to bike, hike, walk trails or rock climb. In one small town, Bolechowice, (population 2,000), a small grocery store opened, more parking was created at the church, and public benches were installed. These small actions resulted from the local group efforts, but were the first civic activities in this community in decades.

Traditionally, most Poles define economic development, Biderman notes, as steelworks and petrol stations so "they never thought they had the resource to profit from tourism-related businesses." **The Partnership is helping redefine economic development as something within the reach of local people on their own initiative.** Most people, Biderman adds, in or near the parks are farmers and "a two-hectare farm is not a business." (When land was confiscated under the former regime and farmers were sent to work in factories, the farmers were often left with small pieces to farm for their own purposes, not big enough for any kind of real production.)

With pride, Biderman showed us the small parking lot created in Bolechowice, which nicely incorporated part of an old ruin. Parking anarchy is clearly an increasing problem everywhere, and this small parking lot was meant to address the issue. To some extent it does ... for now. Creating parking space is like building highways. The more you provide parking, the more cars seek to take advantage. The need for increased parking never diminishes. There is never enough. In this case, the small parking area is not intrusive and, mercifully, was not paved, just gravel. Every tourist and park-focused project, however, should direct serious attention to gaining or improving mass transit service to parks, in this case buses that accommodate bicycles.

The Partnership efforts in the region are now well accepted and their input seems to be solicited as well. Bolechowice cooperated when all neighboring towns said no. Since then, however, other towns are cooperating, bringing citizens together and looking for small economic development opportunities. Out of eight municipalities in the area, only two remain apart, and that probably won't last. **Over and over, this kind of modest success spreads. Nothing is more persuasive than actually seeing something change. When one community sees something working in the next community, competitive juices flow.**

GREENWORKS

(Society for Active Nature Conservation)—Rytro

"The project in Rytro seeks to develop capacity for volunteer-based nature conservation of amphibian habitats along the

Poprad River valley and to work with Slovak NGO groups to promote practical nature conservation as a cost-effective method of flood control and education. The cooperation of the local people, Greenworks, local government and Poprad Landscape Park authorities led them to develop an ecological park. The activities organized in the park are concerned not only on environmental education but also on the development of ecologically-friendly tourism.”

This project is a classic example of how one person starting a small project can lead to the involvement of many people and bring different communities together for a common goal. This is a rebuilding of civil society at its best.

In the early 1990s, every spring, frogs were getting crushed to death by cars along the Poprad Park road in southern Poland as they crossed mostly at night to reach their breeding ground. The Poprad Park was established in 1987 to protect the Beskid Sądecki range which is part of the Carpathian Mountains, areas of undrained valleys and rare pure streams, mountains and wild forests, and rare species.

This particular site, a pond and wetland, is at the Park forest entrance in Rytro. A local school science teacher, biologist and president of Greenworks, Grzegorz Tabasz, organized a campaign to save the frogs. He had heard about a similar effort in the Jura region and felt it should be done here. Tabasz started by getting young people including school children to be road guards, to stop traffic when frogs were crossing and to bring attention to the threat to the frogs and the larger environment. School children made field trips, studied nature in new ways and began to appreciate the environment from a new perspective. With funding from the Polish Partnership, the Park, the local government and the Global Environmental Facility (as part of a project called “Plan Poprad 21”), he conducted workshops on the environment. The pond and wetland were cleaned and enlarged to facilitate frog breeding. A bridge over the pond was constructed. Paths along the stream were created. An attractive entranceway was built. Signs were put up and benches were installed. More than 500 volunteers worked on different aspects of the project.

Tourists began to hear about the site and came to visit. Local residents and their children repeatedly visit to see what is happening. Many came and went during our visit and seemed to do no more than stare down at the pond. Some people come, sit on benches and just listen to the frogs. Reportedly, with the area cleaned and functioning well environmentally, an increase in birds has been observed.

Multiple Lessons

The frogs would have disappeared without this project. But beyond that the schools now have a more concen-

trated environmental awareness program with students feeling very connected and appreciative of their local place. Local elected officials gained new respect for citizen involvement and are quite responsive to new citizen initiatives. The mayor of Rytro, Władysław Wnetrzak, in fact, now relies on the environmental expertise of Greenworks and Greenworks-affiliated teachers are often hired in the local schools. People who never believed one person could make a difference learned an important lesson. As evidence grew of tourist potential, two bike rental businesses and a riding stable opened nearby. A tourist guide was written and published. Ideas for new community-based projects are percolating.

The success of this project has actually reached regional proportions. The mayors of two adjacent towns, Nowy Sącz and Stary Sącz are now working with the Rytro mayor to connect the towns with trails in the park and to work together on environmental and tourist development programs. This project made them realize the need to work together in various ways. At the time of the site visit, Slovak children from schools in the Poprad Valley just south of the Polish/Slovak border were scheduled to visit, and it was quite likely that a plan would emerge whereby Polish students reciprocated. The impact was nationwide.

All of this occurred in less than 10 years in incremental steps and with modest financial investments.

1990—Greenworks, founded by Tabasz, a local leader, activist and teacher, along with a group of 50 citizens, started in schools with field trips and biology lessons;

1993—Frog problem in the mountains of the Beskid Sądecki region recognized, public attention focused and action began;

1994—Local officials made a field trip and recognized problems;

1995—Wetland protection project underway. Local authorities joined in and helped expand; awarded first place by the Ministry of Environmental Protection as best regional program of active protection of a species and its habitat.²⁴

KICZNIA VILLAGE COMMUNITY-BASED FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT

“The project seeks to implement environmentally-sensitive engineering methods to protect Kicznia Village from floods and simultaneously restore and conserve natural habitats. The project wins a joint PEPF/Wyborcza Newspaper ‘Stop the

²⁴ In 1996 a similar project was implemented in Stargad Szczecinski and in Łódź with the support of other ecological organizations. In 1998, this project received second honors from the Henry Ford Conservation Awards for outstanding contribution to the conservation of the natural environment.

Wave' competition for community-based flood protection projects. The local government is strongly involved in the project."

Kicznia (population 500) lies in the Lacko district at the crossroads of two Western Carpathian ranges: Beskid Sa decki and Beskid Wyspowy. The region is characterized by communities along mountain rivers with no dams and river banks in a natural state. A dam is being built for the next 10 years that will create a reservoir near Kicznia and help flood prevention. The 1997 floods that gained world attention devastated Kicznia.

Kicznia is quite near the Slovak border. Small, mostly poor farmers dominate the area. If one has a five hectare farm, he is considered rich. More than 50 percent of the farmers in this region were assigned to factories under the former regime. They were "land-owning factory workers," an unusual identity. This led to what was identified as a "strange mentality" because they were neither attached to the land nor to their work in industry.

Nature protection in Poland is widely viewed as a "luxury." The concept of economic development combined with nature protection is completely new, as is true in most parts of the world. Environmental protection is achieved by prohibitions and obligations and is not at all a part of local everyday life. Flood prevention with natural methods as Kicznia illustrates is cheaper and more efficient than the prevailing technological methods. This, however, is not reflected in public policy. Most communities assume no alternative to high-tech solutions, like big dams and concrete stream banks, exists.

Low-Tech Solutions

The flood issue clearly juxtaposes the expensive high-tech solution that requires capital-intensive construction against the more cost-effective natural systems that are easier and cheaper to implement. The former emerges from narrow, linear thinking and the latter from integrative, interdisciplinary thinking reflecting the kind of innovative solutions that exhibit multiple beneficial spinoffs. The former gets only one job done. The latter accomplishes that same task but has multiple additional benefits. The one is a narrowly defined project. The other is both a project and a catalyst for the process of building civil society. The former feeds the global market strategy of the EU. The latter responds to the democratic agenda articulated but not implemented by the EU. After the 1997 floods, environmental groups were logically concerned that only the high-tech methods to flood prevention would be applied.

The Kicznia Village effort was the first of three successful environmentally-sensitive flood control projects visited for this report (Hungary, Czech Republic projects to be described later). Clearly, the flood issue has engaged environmentalists who have displayed

several innovative ways to address naturally the flood danger that avoids the intrusive use of cement, saves a lot of money and involves a substantial number of community members.

Throughout the trip, we heard repeated laments from local people about the lack of funding for such infrastructure projects as sewage treatment and flood control. (The EU requires that candidate countries ensure waste water treatment for all communities over 2,000 people before the admission.) Illustrated in just the limited assortment of projects we visited are environmentally-sensitive, cost-saving methods in practice that could be repeated throughout the region. Yet, we also heard of strong pressure on central governments from big infrastructure builders to fund such projects in a big way. The modest efforts don't require the services of the big global corporations that influence national policy. Sadly, a number of the communities we visited who had invested in big projects, especially the sewage projects, had no money for anything else and had acquired bond debt in the process. Many communities which have a big debt are beginning to default because it is not clear how they will repay it. Tax receipts are generally insufficient.

In 1997, the small tributaries caused the worst flooding and flood damage in many years. In Kicznia, the whole first floor of the school was flooded along with many homes and great expanses of land. The school flooding made a big impact on the children, causing them to examine the environmental pluses and minuses of their own school building and make recommendations for change. The school director sought help from many groups but Marek Styczynski, president of a local NGO, the Workshop of All Beings, was the only one to respond. Marek visited and decided Kicznia was a good site for a demonstration project.

Before the flood, local environmental efforts had been initiated. Local people, including children, cleaned local streams and started a recycling project. In the environmental awareness program in the school, children participated in art projects focused on both environmental issues and folk heritage. The kids, in fact, identified the school building's coal-fired heating system as the biggest polluter in the village. It was because of the environmental initiatives already implemented by local people, namely the woman school director and teachers, coupled with the heavy flood damage that caused Workshop of All Beings to choose Kicznia.

Marek offered help to the village and recruited children in the project. Standard flood control projects pave stream banks with concrete. The mayor understood that concrete doesn't solve flood problems. National

government funding after the flood was available for rebuilding roads, homes and dams. Very little was eligible in Kicznia. After the flood, the national government gave each person who had suffered damage a small “symbolic” payment as compensation. In addition, some relief money from abroad was distributed through the national government down to villages and towns. At best, the funds covered about 50 percent of the damage. Many received nothing.

Children Play a Role

Under the community-based flood control project, each child was given seeds to plant trees around the house and was told to inform parents that money was available to buy small trees for them to plant on non-arable land. The students learned how planting trees was critical to flood prevention. In this village of 130 houses, each family participated. Ten varieties of trees were planted. The community was educated about the importance of tree variety to avoid monocultures. The mayor was impressed by the extent of public involvement, became quite enthusiastic about it and, in fact, now invites people from other communities to view the regraded stream banks and tree planting areas. Other stream communities are buying seedlings on their own. This mayor is one of the three who wants to connect the trails mentioned in the Rytro project.

Radosław Tendera, Program Director of the Partnership, notes that after the 1997 floods, PEPF did not know what its response should be. “We had no water-related programs,” he says. The Partnership developed the Stop the Wave contest to encourage flood-damaged communities to seek help. The Partnership expected an outpouring of applicants. Only four communities, including Kicznia, participated. “We were shocked,” Tendera says. The Kicznia Village project emerged, bringing together in one communal effort a school, the children, village officials and residents. No project better illustrates the multiple benefits of such a low-cost, low-tech effort in contrast to big, expensive flood control projects. Interest in low-tech and community-based flood protection projects is increasing across southern Poland.

Under the Communists, environmental and ecological organizations were a refuge for dissidents. These organizations were well positioned after the revolution to lead innovative, civic rebuilding efforts. The Jura and Rytro frog protection projects in Poland, as was shown, grew out of groups that functioned before the revolution. Hiking and biking had been great pastimes, an alternative to Communist-controlled entertainment and television. Forest trails were popular and well used because, besides obvious reasons, they were among the few places people could walk and talk,

confident they were not being listened in on or watched by government operatives.²⁵ “Trees don’t talk,” people say by way of explanation.

Historically, of course, going back centuries, an elaborate system of hiking trails was established throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The culture of Central Europe has long ties to nature. Thus, nature-based initiatives and environmental concerns were a natural focus for civic efforts after the revolution. Nature conservation and environmental preservation are comfortable stimuli for community action.

ZAWOJA PROJECT OF THE POLISH ECOLOGICAL CLUB

Jerzy Sawicki, Chair of National Parks Unit of the Polish Ecological Club,²⁶ leader of “Coalition to Save the Carpathian from Olympic Games.”

“Zawoja is a famous tourist village located at the foot of the Babia Góra range—the highest in the Beskidy Mountains known as a ‘Queen of Beskidy.’ But Zawoja is famous also for a longstanding conflict between the Babia Góra National Park authorities and local people. In February 1998 an international workshop in Zawoja was organized on people-park conflicts and local people for the first time discussed their problems with the National Park authorities. Something changed in the minds of both sides of the conflict. A main mediating body between people and the Park is the National Parks Unit of the Polish Ecological Club.”

Three interesting things are going on here:

- When the Communist regime expanded the national parks by taking forest and non-arable land from private owners, they compensated people with token sums of money. People considered themselves well paid and no attempts at reclaiming that land have been made. Now, however, the parks propose to expand again by annexing some valuable land that apparently should have been included originally. No buffer zone would be created.

Old Assumptions Die Hard

A buffer zone is a special strip of land surrounding the core of the national park for added protection, a transition zone between the park, where nature conservation is a priority, and surrounding commercially-used land, where development is the priority. In a buffer zone, landscape regulations are not as strict as in the national park. Environmentally-friendly tourism and

²⁵ Ironically, in the Hudson River Valley, there was early opposition to the network of Greenway trails because it was “a Communist plot.” Greenway leaders took great delight in pointing out that the Czech trail system actually helped to overthrow Communism.

²⁶ PKE was founded in 1980 in Cracow during the first Solidarity Movement by scientists, physicians, journalists and others aware of the country’s environmental crisis.

economic activities are permitted. The Babia Góra buffer zone was created in 1997.

In the face of stiff local opposition, the buffer zone covered a very small, almost symbolic area, not enough to properly protect the core of the Babia Góra National Park. People subsequently opposed enlargement because they interpreted it as an enlargement of the whole park which they saw as additional restrictions and obstacles to their business activities.

“In fact,” observes Dominika Zareba of the Polish Environmental Partnership, “the buffer zone is not a big obstacle for everyday life of local people. They can develop tourism and other businesses but only in an environmentally-friendly way. The problem is that people are not well informed about environmental law and don’t understand the role of the buffer zone or what sustainable tourism can mean. The Polish Ecological Club, supported by the Partnership, is helping to raise awareness among the local population of Zawoja about the wide range of possibilities offered by ‘soft economic activities’ within a national park and its buffer zone.”

The region has high unemployment with many closed factories. Under Communism, Zawoja region residents lived in part from agriculture and in part from working in factories located in nearby towns. As mentioned earlier, a special social group was created called Farmer-Worker. This duality, Dominika observes, undermined the dependence on and deep respect for the land. When the factories closed, agriculture, forestry (in many cases illegal) and tourism were the only known alternatives.

In Zawoja the conflict between local people and the national park agency is probably the greatest in Poland. In a referendum in 1997,²⁷ 60 percent of the people opposed the proposed enlargement of the park and its buffer zone. Instead, many local leaders advocate building more small private ski lifts and roads cutting into beautiful hills and primeval forests in the unfounded hope that this will bring more tourists. Yet, snow in this area is not conducive to good skiing as the winter is generally short, making this high-impact development concept even more misguided.

The National Park Unit of the Polish Ecological Club Partnership initiated a proposal for compensation to land owners who would give up their development rights in favor of nature conservation. Other NGOs have since gotten involved. In northern Poland, the concept of trading forest land for a discounted energy rate on gas and electricity already is advocated.

²⁷ This was the only referendum in Poland concerned with **enlargement** of a national park. A referendum in North-East Poland concerned **establishment** of a new national park, Mazury National Park. Local people voted it down and it still does not exist.

The Club sought EPCE financial assistance and experience in stimulating local action. Since then, 1997, the Polish Ecological Club with Partnership support has begun implementing a series of projects bringing in experts—sociologists, economists, lawyers—to help define the problem, advocate lower taxes as compensation and stimulate public discussion.

Bringing People Together

The Polish Ecological Club is more widely known than any environmental NGO. The workshop with visiting experts was the first time local people and representatives of the national parks talked together. This was a major breakthrough. In Kicznia, people were brought together around flood problems, and they gained something in the process. Here, nothing positive exists to bring local people together because things can only be taken away from them under the proposal. The land proposed for park enlargement is heavily used by local people for hunting and tree cutting.

“Our role,” Dominika Zareba explains, “is to demonstrate alternative kinds of development that will keep the natural image of the region that will not destroy Babia Góra by heavy investments.”

- The second interesting trend here in Zawoja is small economic development efforts emerging in eco-tourism.

Having a national park located here should be an advantage. There are 22 national parks, three of which get the most traffic, the Tatra National Park, the Ojcowski National Park in the Jura Region and Kampinoski National Park near Warsaw. The Zawoja area gets 60,000 visitors a year. The Tatras get that number in a day.

The mayor of the village of Zawoja has developed a proposal, the Strategy of Tourism Development in Zawoja. The strategy includes promotion of tourism and local handicrafts, improving the tourist infrastructure, i.e. new bus stops, cycle paths, trails and other things. Most local people are quite passive. The mayor is trying to activate them. Workshops are conducted to offer ideas profiting people, and anyone who responds gets official help. So far, 10 new bed-and-breakfasts and an eco-farm have opened. An annual Babia Góra Autumn Festival, including folk music concerts and handicraft fairs, is an important cultural event for the region, drawing people from all over Poland.

The strategy also articulates a need for saving old wooden houses in Zawoja, but local governments have no idea how to do this other than to offer them as tourist attractions. So far, few preservation ideas have taken root other than removing threatened houses to the open-air museum in Zawoja Markowe which preserves

the building but not the place. Incentives for local or outside owners to upgrade and rebuild such traditional buildings are occasionally mentioned, but no enabling program has been proposed.

Farm Tourism

The one eco-farm in Zawoja Barancowa exemplifies both the preservation and re-use of traditional domestic farm buildings and the feasibility of organic farming. Its success is gaining attention. **With more cheap food coming from the European Union, the realization is growing that organic farming is the only way to develop a different and competitive product.** This farmer became sick and quit the cooperative where heavy use of chemicals prevails. Since he ceased using chemicals, he has gotten better. Furthermore, his cows are living longer than those of the cooperative where cows are still fed in conventional ways. “The hardest thing is to be a prophet in your own country,” he says.

About 80 guests a year stay at the farmhouse. There is no tax for facilities of up to five rooms. Apparently, in order not to exceed five rooms but to be able to accommodate many guests, rooms accommodate four and five people. This eco-farm was developed with the direct assistance of a national organization, ECEAT Poland (European Center for Ecological Agriculture and Tourism in Poland).²⁸ ECEAT seeks to counter the trends toward agribusiness in Western Europe and the U.S. that depend on large-scale investments, chemicals and big machinery. Wherever agribusiness increasingly dominates, environmental damage follows, small family farms are lost, incomparable landscapes are altered and local culture and traditions undermined or lost. ECEAT has shown that combining modern organic farming and eco-tourism can avert this trend. Most significantly, as in the example of this farm, the small farm can be economically sustainable and agriculturally productive. At the same time, it brings new economic activity and entrepreneurial opportunity to the locality. The goals and work of ECEAT combine logically with the Polish Partnership. The two organizations have begun to find ways to coordinate, certainly a means to advance the development of the Amber Trail Greenway. A very useful publication exists that lists organic farms that accommodate guests and gives interesting background on the role of farming in Polish history and culture.

²⁸ ECEAT is a Europe-wide organization based in the Netherlands which has made huge inroads all over Central and Eastern Europe in promoting Agritourism. Each participating country has a national office. The Polish chapter of ECEAT was established in 1992 to preserve rural cultural and natural resources and promote sustainable farming. Launched with just 17 farmers and 500 visitors in 1993, the program included 87 farmers as of 1999 who offer bed-and-breakfast or camping accommodations on their farms.

Marketing What Already Exists

Promoting agri-tourism and other types of non-agricultural economic activities and producing publications for its purpose are now PEPF priorities. Under the Communists, workers were given special holiday packages. Several hotels were built in Zawoja, similar to the reasonably sized one in Rytro. There was no need to entice visitors; they were fully occupied. But now promotion is critical. Somehow the view prevails among many local people that they could develop ski lifts in environmentally positive ways and avoid the mistakes of Zakopane. Zakopane has been a downhill ski resort since the 1920s and the site of European competitions but, many Poles feel, has been overdeveloped. Polish officials perceive ski lifts as profitable whereas agri-tourism is not as tangible.

- The third interesting trend apparent is the growing role of NGOs, such as the Polish Ecological Club as an important mediator and facilitator.

The mayor recognizes the value of the Club. The first public organizing session organized by the Club in Zawoja was a breakthrough because local people's ideas and feelings were actually taken into account. The paradox was that officials thought people were ignorant of community problems and gave them no credit for understanding environmental issues. They discovered the opposite. People were actually clamoring for a clean environment but needed the means and motivation to pursue action. The Polish Ecological Club with support from the Partnership researched and published a report, “Ecological Compensations, Motivations and Recommendations,” with examples of nature conservation compensation methods, such as low interest bank credit for heating and sewage projects. The report was sent as a proposal for a new policy and legislative initiative to the Ministry for the Environment in Warsaw. Efforts are now focused on creating a coalition of nearby communities to tackle these issues and proposals.

Rabka, a famous Polish spa town, is one of many such towns in the region with considerable assets to work for genuine revitalization and little vision of how to make the most of it. The town is architecturally rich, filled with high-style 19th century buildings and communal facilities in the center. Towns like this could use help “visioning” their future in a step by step manner, including instruction in marketing. Rabka gets 15,000 visitors a year without any promotion, which illustrates the potential with promotion.

The feature that distinguishes Rabka from other spa towns is its apparent usefulness for children, especially those suffering from allergies and lung disease. It was the first spa to open for children in 1964.

Discussion with local leaders has the familiar echo of “we need money” when, in fact, the issue is more how should money be spent. Here many believe they need a lot of money for infrastructure, particularly a sewage system which is already partially done. A new plant has been built but the drainage is apparently not complete. Clearly a complete sewer system is needed. Sewage is still going into the Rabka River which feeds drinking water for Cracow. No central garbage collection system exists. Solid waste has to travel 150 kilometers for disposal to Silesia.

Spa Town Challenge Is Regional

The spa town issue is huge throughout the whole four-country region. They are quite plentiful. The waste water/sewage treatment issue is, of course, the same for all of them. This is particularly acute in spa towns since they exist based on the quality of their water. Most officials and citizens are unaware of the lower-cost, environmentally better, low-tech alternatives available, assuming that only high-tech solutions exist.

Town officials, like so many local officials throughout the region, are looking to the EU for the money. But there is little vision beyond a sewer system, little thinking about long term visions for the town and an apparent assumption that once the sewer system is completed, everything else will take care of itself. The Partnership is encouraging Rabka and neighboring communities to join forces to create shared waste, water or other systems. This is certainly appropriate, but one gets the feeling that it will not be easy.

A recycling effort is apparently getting started with some awareness in the schools, but it does not seem to

have the mayor’s enthusiastic support. This effort may wind up energizing the public even without the enthusiasm of the political leadership. Local people being ahead of their elected leaders would not be uncommon. In the long run, mayors come and go, but the public interest needs to be continually building.

Soon after our field visit, however, the Partnership received a project proposal from Rabka to develop bicycle trails on the Amber Trail which would help integrate the town into a region-wide tourism development program. The City Councilwoman established a citizens committee for Amber Trail development in Rabka. The Partnership is using this as an opportunity to connect Rabka and neighboring districts an effort to build partnerships between local governments and maybe address their common water problems. **As with the other Partnerships, the Polish Partnership is always on the lookout for opportunities to bring small communities together in regional cooperative efforts. This is fundamental to the work of the Partnership and to the success of developing the Amber Trail from the grassroots as a long-term and enduring citizen-based initiative.**²⁹

²⁹ Skomielna Biała, a neighboring town of 2,000 residents and 150 businesses, reportedly follows a different course, focusing on revival of crafts suppressed under the former regime. Products such as slippers, sheepskin coats, iron handles and ornamental woodwork are made there. Skomielna Biała reportedly has the lowest unemployment rate in the region. “Here the focus is on the spas, there the focus is on crafts,” a Rabka resident says enviously. That is as it should be. Not all towns should focus on crafts. Rabka should focus on being a spa—build on its assets and history to find a niche and complement that with other initiatives.

Slovakia became an independent country on January 1, 1993, after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Slovakia has confronted the dual challenge of transition from a system of authoritarian, centralized governance to a market-oriented democracy, establishing a new, independent nation of five million. It seems always to have been part of something else, the agricultural outlands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then part of Czechoslovakia. Finding its own place in the region and the world has been a formidable challenge.

Until recently, former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar was the primary political force, autocratic and authoritarian and surrounded by a tight circle of cronies. Mečiar seemed to develop to a fine art the privatizing of state enterprises to friends.

The good news in all of this was that grass-roots, democratic forces were energized in unified opposition to him. In 1998, NGOs and all segments of civil society worked feverishly to defeat Mečiar in the national elections, achieving the extraordinary voter turnout of 83 percent, an enviable achievement in the West.

Slovakia clearly stagnated under Mečiar. At the same time, his tenure provided a little more time for citizens to think about and envision their future. There was little opportunity to take more than modest steps. Where possible, innovative activists did just that, enough to lay the groundwork for more opportunities under democratic circumstances. The election galvanized those activists.

Slovaks live mostly in small towns and villages. Bratislava is the capital and biggest city but it does not overwhelm the country. One-fifth of the population lives in Bratislava whereas in Hungary, one-third lives in Budapest.

NATIONAL TRUST OF SLOVAKIA FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Heritage preservation holds a peculiar position in Central Eastern Europe. On the one hand, historic sites and properties are much revered. On the other hand, what is defined as worthy of preservation is often limited to ancient monuments, prominent individual buildings, churches and a few extraordinary towns listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This overlooks a lot of worthy buildings around landmark sites along with



important sections of big cities and small towns and leaves them up for grabs, especially with the great appeal of new types of developer-built housing, shopping malls and modern office buildings. As highway projects move forward and demand for cars increases, the historic fabric of the region from the smallest village to the largest city is gravely threatened. The present owners often are unaware of the economic potential and social significance of their properties. Most buildings are capable of modernization and upgrading. Furthermore, the level of restoration skills in the region could not be higher.

The field of historic preservation throughout the four-country region seems to be quite removed from the general public. Advocates and practitioners are not known to be interested in recruiting local people for important projects. For the most part, preservation suffers from an elitist and separatist image. Jobs in converted buildings or free tickets to events held in them are not the same as involving local people in the process of restoration and re-use. Unfortunately, the significant opportunity is missed for fully integrative revitalization efforts in some communities with heritage conservation as a catalyst.

Thus, two projects—Františkova Huta (Iron Works) and the intact wooden village of Podbiel 1.5 km away, both in the Orava Region of Central Slovakia—take on great importance for both the Amber Trail and the future of historic preservation in Slovakia. These two efforts exemplify local involvement in the preservation and local use of historic sites. These two sites are living

places, not just historic sites. Local use is balanced with tourism development. They are excellent models.

In 1996, the National Trust of Slovakia for Historic Places and Landscapes was formed, founded by Martin Kováč and five other young enthusiasts based in Bratislava. The National Trust in Great Britain seems to have been the model and considerable guidance has come from it. Kováč, the director, is a construction engineer who got involved in preservation through working with student volunteers on the restoration of the Františkova Huta 10 years ago. As a membership organization, the Trust includes individuals and groups, professionals and volunteers. Interdisciplinary cooperation is important. The Trust looks to long-term partnerships with individuals and other organizations to pursue preservation and to increase the credibility of NGOs.

The Trust cooperates on the local level with city councils and on the national level with government ministries, as well as the State Institute for Monuments and Ministries. In fact, it was asked by the Ministry of Culture to prepare a strategy for revitalization of historic sites that the Ministry will try to enforce. Officials seem to understand the potential contribution of heritage conservation to regional development. And, significantly, officials seem to value both industrial and domestic heritage and the involvement of local citizens. The Trust already has 65 members, including 15 from Podbiel, and one organizational member, the Tree of Life, a civic association working with youth at heritage sites all over Slovakia, since 1983. Governed by a 12-member volunteer Board, the Trust has a professional staff of five full-time people, four long-term volunteers and more than 15 short-term volunteers. Those volunteers, Kováč believes, have joined because people in Podbiel recognize the benefits to be gained from improvements in the community.

FRANTIŠEK IRON WORKS

František Iron Works is a foundry built in 1836 that ceased operation in 1862 and is the first real estate property purchased and owned by the Trust.³⁰ This abandoned site is what inspired “six young enthusiasts” to initiate the Trust. The ruin consists of a combination of hauntingly beautiful sandstone and fired brick walls enclosing the remains of the furnace. Remnants of the lime works and water channel system are nearby. The iron works sit in a vast open field set back considerably from the road and with foothills of the Tatras as a backdrop.

³⁰ The Trust also owns the Ladislav Noel Photographic collection of 70,000 slides and pictures of Slovakia made from the 1940s to 1990s, recording the significant changes of the society, landscape and urban structures of Slovakia.

This is the only project we visited or are aware of that has the potential to celebrate the region’s 19th century industrial heritage. The mining heritage exhibited at various Slovak sites celebrates an even older, more widely recognized history. According to Kováč, the local community was unaware of its industrial past but has gotten quite involved in the effort to preserve it, focusing attention on František Iron Works. The site is quite large with much room for multiple uses, such as festivals, horseback riding and other activities appealing to both residents and tourists. The combination of programs developed primarily for local people along with activities to attract tourists bodes well for its future success.

PODBIEL VILLAGE

Podbiel Village (1.5 km from the foundry) is one of 10 Slovak villages with the special heritage status conferred on villages with preserved folk architecture. The village has 64 registered folk wooden buildings which create the historic center of the village and date as far back as 250 years. This is the highest number in a living village in the whole country. Significantly, while these 64 represent the historic core, Podbiel still is an evolving town with recently built new houses. It is a particularly good example of a Slovak village with all its layers of development visible and the newest layer emerging. In fact, the newest layer is quite bold and colorful—stucco houses of purple, blue, yellow, pink—a far cry from the dark wood of the timber houses. But what is most significant is that the new development is similar in pattern to the old, building on a tradition rather than replacing it. New houses are slightly more separated from each other but are still located on streets well connected to the center. Gravel and grass paths are found in the old section and asphalt sidewalks in the new.

In 1998, the Trust restored one of the historic wooden buildings in the center and rented it from the local owner to promote the František Iron Works property and NTS programs. Programs include promotion of local heritage for visitors, support for community-based development projects such as the restoration of an original balance well, local school programs, and training for owners of historic buildings. Classes for the public are also offered in heritage laws, preservation practice, financing and tourism potential.

Podbiel is reportedly a very traditional community, quite resistant to change. The restoration of an ancient well and the preservation of historic buildings have engaged the interest of residents beyond expectations. Some local owners have been inspired to restore their properties at their own expense, an original goal of the Trust.

Trust representatives around the country are finding considerable interest in similar revitalization projects. “The challenge,” Kováč said, “is establishing NGOs to do this or to work with ones who already want to pursue heritage development. We find they already have good ideas or are open to new ideas.” Thus, Trust programs focus on working with local heritage groups, property owners and citizen activists, educating and training them and acting as facilitator between local property owners and government agencies.

The Trust’s number of activity sites is growing. The head office of the trust is in Bratislava’s Petržalka neighborhood where they have restored an original tool house on the bridge over the Danube. It incorporates an office, gallery and cafe. The upper part of the building will become the Center for Technical Protection of Historic Buildings and the cafe and gallery will be at street level. Thousands walk by daily. The gallery is well used to promote heritage.³¹

Many prosperous areas all over the country are under huge development pressure for which the Trust may be the only resource for technical help. According to Kováč, heritage preservation projects are occurring with great difficulty all over the country. For a long time, the connection and communication among the different efforts was meager or non-existent. A Trust internet forum is forming and should begin to address this difficulty. This of course will only be useful to organizations and individuals who have access to computers, so far, only six percent of people in the region. Chances are great that the role for the Trust will expand dramatically in the next decade, and it could serve as a model which the Partnership could help to promote in other countries.

ZUBEREC OPEN-AIR MUSEUM OF TRADITIONAL VILLAGE (SKANSEN)

The Zuberec museum is a Colonial Williamsburg-like Village, a collection of 43 historic wooden houses brought to one site from various places. The Village museum contains examples of buildings used for work

³¹ In 1997, a woman read about the work of the Trust and called for help with a 200-year-old property in Trnava, 40 km from Bratislava. Because of its deteriorated condition, the owner had been under pressure to do something since 1994. The Trust helped clean it up, stabilize and market it, assisting the owner to find a new owner who will use it respectfully. In this case, the Trust will help secure the long term preservation with conservation easements, the first in the country done by a non-profit NGO. The Trust will offer technical assistance to the new owner in restoring and maintaining the historic quality of the property. This would be an important national precedent and serve as a new tool for historic preservation of private property.

The Association of Banská Štiavnica sought analytical help with the 14th century building they own and are trying to authentically restore using original craft methods for use as NGO offices, flats and workshops for traditional crafts.

and living with appropriate furniture and farm and production implements. It is open in summer (50,000 visitors) and during ski season (15,000 visitors) and has a working pub and small gift shop. Buildings are all fully furnished but demonstrations (weaving, pottery, blacksmithing, basket weaving) occur only irregularly during special folklore festivals. Handmade craft products are sold in the store.

Not surprisingly, craft demonstrations are an important component of Slovak folk museums. The crafts revival is significant throughout the whole former Iron Curtain region because of their suppression under the former regime. This revival is interesting to observe in each country. What changes—new designs, new objects—emerge over time will be interesting. As the skills are honed, something new and innovative is bound to show itself. This is already visible with Czech glass. Contemporary design has been introduced and new forms seem to be increasingly available. Something similar is happening with pottery.

Paradoxically, many of the ways of living and working exhibited in the Zuberec Museum are still current in many parts of the country. Many weavers, potters and blacksmiths, for example, do their work the same way, as is demonstrated. Museum in that context takes on a different meaning. Some Slovaks have “both a horse and a machine and still work with a horse by choice,” we were told. So some people may think it premature to exhibit such elements of “life,” although the historic wooden architecture is clearly disappearing rapidly.

This museum is a total contrast to Podbiel Village which is both a living place and a living museum. Zuberec Museum is not a living community and is one of many “historic” “tourist” sites that embody a longstanding museum style that recreates the artifacts and the historic place but sustains no daily life. Clearly, many such sites in the region could benefit from either a visiting “living museum” consultant or, perhaps instead, a site visit to a “living museum” in the U.S. as part of larger visit for ATG directors. American institutions like Colonial Williamsburg, Plimoth Plantation, Sturbridge Village (each a living history museum of colonial America) and others have a life and vitality missing here. The potential is there. It needs to be cultivated.

THE ORAVA CASTLE

The Orava Castle, not far from Podbiel, attracts 120,000 visitors and is the third most visited site in Slovakia. The castle, perched high on a rocky hilltop, is quite a challenge to climb (112 m/380 ft). The original fortress dates from the 13th century. The castle overlooks the Orava river in the village of Oravský Podzámok. Somebody could have fun with the fact that it was used

for Tod Browning's 1931 movie, *Dracula*, starring Béla Lugosi. An assortment of things could bring fresh interest.

Management and content of historic sites are subjects worth exploring for future development throughout the region.

VLKOLINEC – HISTORIC WOODEN VILLAGE

Serendipitously, we visited an extraordinary historic wooden house village, Vlkolinec, in the mountains near Donovaly. This is a UNESCO World Heritage Site³² and one of the most spectacular places imaginable. The first written mention of Vlkolinec as a farming village dates from 1376. Two rows of wooden houses, all with long courtyards, line a crooked dirt road. This wooden village, reportedly the only one in the country without any modern development, is a challenge of a third kind—a living village, no “curator,” destined to be transformed over time into a vacation and tourist destination when the current population grows old or leaves. Of its 32 permanent residents, only two families are young. As residents move out or die, second home buyers move in to use the community as a vacation site. Ruins also remain from some homes burned during the national uprising in World War II. Basic modern conveniences are missing. Property owners resist modernization, such as a new water system or sewage facilities. A water well stands in the middle of the village. One house is preserved as a museum. This is a rare place where time stands still. Yet, property values have risen. How to manage its survival as a real place is a difficult question.

A-PROJEKT: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES TO THE OLYMPICS

If most people in the High Tatras region of northern Slovakia ever conclude that their future lies with an interesting variety of modest-scale development projects instead of the elusive big promise of the Winter Olympics, the lion's share of the credit should go to Vlasta Körnerová, a Slovak physicist who abandoned her profession to fight for an alternative to the Olympics. Körnerová, with a small, energetic and passionate band of staff and volunteers, has already changed attitudes throughout the Kvačany Valley and the larger Liptovský Region.

The post-World War II Communist era was hard on the Tatras. Almost overnight the area became a mass resort for the mountain-starved, fenced-in peoples of the Eastern Bloc, prompting much development and commercialization. “We already had the cross-country ski and world ski jump competition in the 1950s and

they brought only damage,” Körnerová says. “Hotels and ski jumps were built but used rarely. The Olympics would ruin a pristine landscape. The appeal of Slovakia is wilderness and small-scale attractions.” With open borders, Körnerová notes, people prefer the Austrian Alps for skiing and this region already has some large hotels that are only half-full most of the time. From a pragmatic point of view, she adds, “The Olympics could take years to come here. We wanted to start an improvement process immediately.”

And that she did in 1993, founding an organization called the A-Projekt to represent an alternative development path. Throughout the region, closed and downsized industry caused high-unemployment. Now, small projects are already adding up to big change. Positive environmental, economic, political and social improvements have occurred. A variety of separate efforts focus on unique aspects of the flora, fauna and environmentally-friendly tourist potential of the High Tatras, a mountain range of particular beauty in northern Slovakia and southern Poland.

Property owners are saving and restoring timber cottages, and opening bed-and-breakfasts. Traditional wooden fences are replacing chain link fences. Playgrounds and public spaces are rebuilt. Trails are refurbished. Crafts are revived for local production of both household necessities and tourist goods. New environmental educational programs address everything from animal protection to forest management to waste and recycling issues. School children are rescuing rare birds and returning them to the wild. They are being introduced to the natural landscape that they have taken for granted and are learning how to get involved in improving communal life. Local history is celebrated. Local character is recognized and appreciated anew. Local pride grows daily, and civil society is being restored in ways that could not be predicted or planned.

Körnerová, a Comenius University graduate in experimental physics, comes by her independent instincts naturally. Her father is a scientist who quit the Communist Party in protest in 1969 and was excluded from meaningful jobs thereafter. Her mother, a teacher, lost her job for introducing ideas into her classroom that did not follow the Party line. Körnerová herself was denied access to her first choice university and program studies. Later, in 1991 she was fired by the Meciar regime from her job in the District Office for Environment for opposing the Olympics.

A Timber House Starts Process

The A-Projekt started in 1993 with the restoration of a deteriorated wooden house destined for demolition in the Village of Kvačany. She considered this an experi-

³² Slovakia has four World Heritage sites: the others are Spišsky Castle and surrounding villages, Banská Štiavnica and Slovak Kras which includes Domica caves.

ment, as part of a “pilot project” of sustainable development of the Tatra region, but it has been non-stop success ever since. Architectural students from the Faculty of Architecture in Bratislava together with volunteers from the village rebuilt this two-room traditional timber dwelling. A new roof was installed. The straw and mud walls were rebuilt. Even the traditional exterior beam was restored with the inscription of the name of the family who built it and the year, 1864.

Immediately, people in the village started restoring their own timber cottages instead of demolishing and building new. They modernized, added additions, made modifications. Some converted houses fully to bed-and-breakfasts. Others just used extra bedrooms to accommodate guests. A rural improvement program with small-scale tourism as a foundation was launched.

The significance of this project goes beyond the immediate and visible economic, social and communal gains. As noted earlier, open-air folk village museums, modeled on the Scandinavian Skansens, have been a popular form of cultural and architectural preservation in Slovakia since the 1920s. Nine museums throughout the country exhibit traditional architecture, and one concentrates on technical objects. As appealing as these sites may be, their existence reinforces the notion that the old belongs only in museums and the new is what one aspires to live in. The new, of course, becomes the latest universal building form with minimal, if any, regional distinctions. Character, culture and living history disappear. This is happening the world over. The A-Projekt provides an alternative model.

Kvačany Regenerates

Kvačany is a village of 567 souls with 70 wooden dwellings out of 200. The Liptov Region in which Kvačany is located is as rural as you can get with the full variety of topography that comes in the foothills of the High Tatras. With the one wooden house restoration, the A-Projekt demonstrated that tradition and modernity can be compatible and economically productive. Local carpenters have been re-employed and are teaching a new generation carpentry skills that might have disappeared. The one house restoration has led to the revival of locally-crafted timber by new entrepreneurs. Bus shelters, signage, public benches, and playground equipment are elements of a community beautification project all being produced by local businesses.

The first timber house was the beginning of the exemplary community revitalization process that followed. In 1993, the A-Projekt sought out public opinion to develop a vision for Kvačany’s future. With local

people, a development plan was designed. A-Projekt sought professional assistance from the Dutch European Center for Agrotourism (ECEAT) (mentioned in the Polish eco-tourist farm model) to educate villagers about accommodating tourists. Subsequently, as word of Kvačany successes spread, similar projects were started in 10 villages—timber house restoration, local research projects of biodiversity and pollution, seminars, conferences, publications, mini-grant programs, community meetings and educational programs. This evolved into the first rural community foundation in Slovakia, established with the assistance of A-Projekt.

Kvačany now has tourist accommodations in 10 family-run houses. An eleventh is owned cooperatively. Before A-Projekt, none existed. Historic mills in surrounding valleys have become hiking destinations. With guests coming, everyone wants the village to look tidy. The public improvements to village life, residents recognize, benefit them first but clearly add appeal for the tourist. A visitor information center that also functions as a community facility was created in a traditional house next door to the village church. Local crafts, especially woven products, are sold. Photographs of good and bad examples of change are exhibited. A garden competition was conducted. People from around the region stop here to learn about what is going on. The spin-off momentum does not stop there. The Kvačany school serves 10 villages. People in each of those villages are watching Kvačany and initiating similar upgrading projects.

Perhaps school curriculum and activity changes reflect the biggest impact. Small children clean and plant within the vicinity of the school. Older students clean the lush green valleys of accumulated garbage, watch and study raptors (of which there are more than a dozen species), climb the mountains, clean the trails and study the environment in new ways. A living environmental classroom was created around the school with trees and plants labeled, and some lost varieties have been reintroduced. Each of the 10 villages has a specific set of problems that kids learn how to deal with.

One class confronted the question of why fish no longer lived in a local stream. They analyzed the water, studied local history and discovered that the pollution from manure and chemicals used by the local farm cooperative killed the stream and the local crayfish it once contained. Environmental workshops for teachers from other schools are conducted and an environmental awareness booklet was produced and distributed throughout the region. Students proposed starting a school newspaper which was accomplished with A-Projekt help. The reputation of the school itself has soared throughout the region.

Many of these projects came about as a result of A-Projekt's "listening" program³³ whereby volunteers are trained to canvass their neighbors to learn what they would like to see happen in their village in the future.³⁴

This is a novel approach to stimulating public involvement. The "listening" process creates community profiles, determines priorities and spurs programs. Encouraging citizen activity, however, is very difficult. This method at least works and, as will be shown, is being applied elsewhere in Slovakia.

Nonetheless, real faith in the public process continues to lag. About 15 percent of the community shows up for public meetings. Yet, improvements are occurring and villagers increasingly recognize it. In reality, the "listening" method is a form of public participation. It is just not called that. And it will probably take a while to reduce skepticism.

Small Changes Work Best

The Amber Trail concept is still somewhat unfamiliar in this Slovak region. Even with the assorted small accomplishments, appreciation for the gains seems somewhat limited. Expectations, as often occurs, were too high. Some people focus on inaction or failures instead of improvements and successes. Two new profitable businesses—a construction company and planning firm—have emerged, but many thought there would be more. Some local shops have opened, including a grocery, but no restaurant. A horseback riding business is not doing well.

The varieties of small changes that strengthen existing character and the local life without undermining or destabilizing a community are very hard to either measure or recognize in one picture. In contrast, big projects like hotels, malls, highways unavoidably change the character and quality of localities but give the illusion of progress in one easy photograph.

Even with the steady growth of small projects, the region-wide Olympics aspiration persists, especially in the cities of Tatra region (population 300,000) that includes Orava, Liptov and Spiš Regions. (The Liptov Region alone is 150,000.) In a 1998 survey, 93 percent of the respondents favored the Olympics because it would

"promote Slovakia, create jobs and show we can do it," Vladislav Huml, the vice-mayor of Liptovský Hrádok, said. Yet, the brand of change forged by the A-Projekt under Körnerová's leadership is also making inroads way beyond its small beginnings in the village of Kvačany.

Over lunch, vice-mayor Huml showed respect and admiration for both Körnerová and the A-Projekt. He was an unequivocal advocate for the Olympics, clearly believing that the Olympics was the only thing that could motivate the national government to invest in a much needed sewage treatment system for the city of Liptovský Hrádok. He may be correct on that score. **National governments too commonly are only too eager to invest in infrastructure when a big project is in the offing. Yet, community after community throughout the region reported not being able to get attention and support for the infrastructure for everyday living.** That is unfortunate and misguided. Local improvements make places appealing to residents and visitors on a continuing, economically sustaining basis instead of for a onetime event. City officials also clearly hope for other "big" infrastructure projects, such as highways. This, of course, is a point of view common among local officials throughout the region.

Interestingly, however, vice-mayor Huml was enthusiastic about the kind of change already identified with A-Projekt. The officials of Liptovský Hrádok had reached out to Körnerová for assistance. Liptovský Hrádok is not as old as some of the villages, he pointed out, and "it only has a partially-restored castle" where work was stopped because after 1989 government priorities changed, and Liptovský Hrádok didn't receive money to finish the restoration. Now "the town does not know what to do with the castle."

In 1950, the population of Liptovský Hrádok was 2,000, but under the Communists in 1950 the forest and wood industry expanded, building on a 203-year-old Forestry School. The Tesla Telephone Exchange Company was founded, creating more jobs, and the population increased to 10,000. Three villages were merged into the town. Five state-owned wood products companies were established and have all been privatized. But, since privatization, they have been having serious economic difficulties.

The Regeneration Process Spreads

The vice-mayor, however, was aware of local assets to build on in the A-Projekt model. He cited the unfinished castle and the Váh River which runs through the region, offering canoeing, kayaking and fishing. Historically, salt from Poland was carried down the river to Budapest on rafts. Those are the obvious assets but with the assistance of the A-Projekt, many more resources are being identified.

³³ One of the most interesting listening projects we witnessed was in Prencov, a small village near Banská Štiavnica. At an evening meeting, volunteers were training eight local residents to listen. The trainees were men and women of all ages who were quite engrossed in the process. This is quite an innovative and sophisticated public process device. In the U.S., we train people to envision a future for their community, to participate in planning and the like, but we don't train people just to listen to each other.

³⁴ Körnerová learned about the "listening" strategy in 1996 from Chris Weiss, an American from West Virginia who was working with a USAID-financed rural communities assistance program. This same program introduced Körnerová and others to the concept of mini-grants, now being carried out by VOKA, an organization that encourages new modest initiatives with small grants.

The vice-mayor also pointed out that young people are trying to revive a local railroad “put out of business in the 1970s by cheap gas.” This could bring low-impact tourism to the rich natural environment of the region, the antithesis of Olympic visitation. And, he proudly pointed out, volunteer efforts to rebuild playgrounds and public spaces are already underway, “similar to Kvačany and the volunteers are being educated to save old values.” Despite his enthusiasm for the Olympics, the vice-mayor recognized the business and job creation potential exhibited in Kvačany and cited innkeeping and tourist services as holding great promise. Liptovský Hrádok, he pointed out, is at the crossroads of two national parks, the Low and High Tatras National Parks.

A few years ago, Körnerová and the A-Projekt applied the Kvačany experience to Liptovský Hrádok and first organized a “visioning” conference at which local people could express their hopes for the city. A Liptov Regional Development Fund was formed, as a program of the A-Projekt, to push the process and facilitate the Kvačany model. A mini-grant program was started for local initiative groups. A rural tourism program was developed for 16 villages. With Liptovský Hrádok, the Low Tatras National Park Service and the 16 villages, the A-Projekt established a community information center in Liptovský Hrádok on the main street which is a vehicle for disseminating information to the public. An A-Projekt office in Liptovský Hrádok manages and coordinates the regional efforts.

The new programs initiated by the A-Projekt and serving the region are impressive.³⁵ They are models of civil society development. Local companies, like Alcatel, Tesla and others, are funding the Liptovský Region Sustainable Development Fund. All the programs are focused on developing skills of local people, to enable people to participate in the decision-making process and to give them the ability to participate in projects that improve the community.

As Körnerová describes the future: “We believe in decentralization so our vision is this: After 10 years, we will have a network of local community foundations or community information centers which will lead sustainable development efforts in the Tatras region. It will be a

network of collaborating micro-regions with the power to advocate and to lobby on the national level.” With Körnerová’s leadership, one does not doubt this will happen.

Government Learns

It is difficult to convey the full impact of the A-Projekt and the Kvačany model of sustainable village development. Clearly, the original goal of demonstrating an alternative development path for the Tatras Region in the face of Olympic pressures has been met. The dream of the Olympics, however, still lives for many people. Yet, an alternative path is taking hold. Big, questionable projects take years to happen. Modest ones can begin quickly, advance steadily and grow with accelerating momentum.

The A-Projekt is known throughout the country now as an expert on rural development. Governmental agencies, such as the Ministry of Environment and Slovak Environmental Agency, seek advice and cooperation. Non-profit organizations turn to it for guidance and training. Local people recognize the social, economic and environmental improvements that come with A-Projekt efforts. Training and mini-grant programs have increased the capacity of rural communities to solve their own problems. New jobs, small lending programs, new cooperative efforts involving citizens and government and improved sources of communication and information are apparent. The layers of impact are immeasurable.

RUZOMBEROK CITIZEN GROUP FIGHTING AIR POLLUTION FROM PAPER MILL

This is a highly sophisticated group of citizens whose fight against the biggest employer of Ružomberok is courageous, necessary, well-researched and intricately strategized. The smell and foul air of the SCP, Severoslovenské celulóžky a papierne (Northern Slovakia Pulp and Paper), a paper mill, are a longstanding condition here. SCP is among the 10 largest exporters in the Slovak Republic, employs around 4,000 people and produces paper and pulp. More than 5,000 people live in the factory’s immediate vicinity. In 1993, a decree of the Ministry of Environment (no. 112/1993) declared that the Ružomberok area is one of the 12 most devastated regions in Slovakia with a terrible health and environmental record, mostly due to SCP activity.

For 10 years, citizens had protested in different ways with no improvement. Hospital records reflect high-level toxic illnesses and chromosome abnormalities. Information has been gathered yearly to no avail. Now with privatization, data are kept secret. The civic group relies on company employees to leak them information. The company apparently would rather pay penalties than invest in upgraded equipment. Apparently, this is

³⁵ A project to interpret the uniqueness of the Tatras from nature trails to mineral springs; workshops in which people learn about solving problems; a local artist creating children’s books; school projects to get children to care about trails; teachers around the region now using a brochure about crayfish created by children of Kvačany to increase environmental awareness; publication of platforms of elected officials to remind people of what promises they made as candidates; getting people to think and write about “What we care about” their community; and a mini-grant program for projects involving children that funded 22 children’s groups.

not an uncommon condition throughout the region and, in fact, the world.

Conditions are particularly problematic in Ružomberok because of its geography. In the western part of the Liptov Valley, Ružomberok is surrounded on three sides by mountains. Low winds, frequent inversions and fog create poor air dispersion.

Only in recent years have citizens determined to do something more about it. In 1993, the company claims, it changed its bleaching and production process to improve conditions. Citizens say nothing changed. In fact, they say, conditions deteriorated even further. In 1997, Olga Homoláyová, a retired teacher and local resident, met Juraj Mesík at a civic conference and sought Partnership help. Homoláyová organized the group and circulated a petition protesting longstanding and well-documented health problems and the foul smell. They gathered 3,300 signatures. More people reportedly would have signed but were afraid since they work for the company. The petition called for a radical change in the factory's technical procedures and the regulatory standards of local authorities to achieve improved air quality. The group has worked mostly without financial support. Assistance, including some legal aid, is coming from the Center for Environmental Public Advocacy, for which Pavol Žilinčík is staff attorney, and from Ekopolis/EPCE which provides contacts to health authorities and organizational support.

Notes Žilinčík: "Research of medical scientists described high level of genotoxic risks. Other medical experts claim genotoxic risks have not been proven. People are not sure whether their living environment might create conditions for chromosome abnormalities. The new private owner of the factory claimed the factory invests millions of crowns into improvements. However, the situation with odorous substances did not change. The real improvement of the air quality is still only a promise."

The petition effort led to the first meeting of seven government agencies, company reps and citizen groups but was not open to the public. This group demanded information and answers to questions but holds little hope of either honest company response or meaningful government pressure. Expectations were that nothing would change and a lawsuit would be filed.

A lawsuit would establish a precedent. No law exists permitting citizens to sue a factory. An old law permitting neighbor to sue neighbor for causing a nuisance could be used. One goal of a lawsuit would be establishment of stricter national pollution standards for such factories and better enforcement. There are ambient standards for several pollution categories. However, odor is hard to measure and, therefore, the ambient standard is that "odorous substances must not create a nuisance."

This is impossible to prove and enforce, and people hope numerical standards will be introduced as one of the results of a lawsuit.

In early 1999, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) proposed a US \$41 million loan to SCP for its planned modernization and financial restructuring. Local residents learned about this in a small story in a local newspaper indicating the loan was in preparation and information was available. Plans for a citizen lawsuit against the company were postponed while all civic energy was directed at stopping the loan. Citizens apparently had a difficult time securing information regarding the loan's environmental review process which excluded the public. The loan information revealed that SCP had already exceeded its maximum pulp production capacity and would have increased it even more with the loan, guaranteeing worse air conditions. Pulp is the largest source of odor-emitting substances. The citizen group devoted itself to challenging the information supplied to the IFC by SCP, cited the company's history of environmental regulation violation and demonstrated how the modernization loan would worsen conditions. They also pointed out the difficult geographic conditions that require extraordinary measures to improve the impact of polluting emissions.

Eventually, the IFC canceled the loan. The energetic and successful citizen effort illustrates several significant issues.

- The need is great for a full public process for any international finance plans. The IFC has different categories of review. This loan plan was not subjected to the highest level of scrutiny. The public should always be part of these processes FROM THE BEGINNING, NOT AFTER A PRELIMINARY DECISION IS MADE. No reason exists for the public to be left out. This holds true for policy, finance and every other kind of planning.
- The expertise of special interest NGOs is a valuable resource that is too often ignored or resisted.
- The energy and capacity of citizen activists to advocate the most appropriate strategy is highly undervalued.
- Access to information that should be public is very poor, despite procedures that give the appearance of access without the reality.

DONOVALLY TOURIST VILLAGE

Donovaly is a jarring departure from the expected assortment of castles, landscapes and cultural sites. A rich expanse of greenery, hills and open space vistas have great appeal for hikers, bikers and campers. Historically, around 1900, Donovaly had a population of 700. Charcoal production was its main economic activity. Copper, gold and silver mining in the area brought

primarily German immigrants who formed the core population. After World War II, many young residents started leaving, a typical story. Old people stayed. The population shrank. But now, a trickle of new people are moving in from Banská Bystrica where, reportedly, they feel anonymous among the population of 85,000.

If there is any doubt that northern Slovakia can attract plenty of tourist business without hosting the Olympics, Donovaly's recent experience should put them to rest. This village of 170 year-round residents is located atop a hill only 25 km from Banská Bystrica and is now the site of the world's biggest annual dog sled race. This is the fulfillment of Mayor Miroslav Daňo's dream. In the 1980s, a Jack London movie was filmed here. Dog sled races were important in the stories of London, a writer of adventures in the American wild. In 1992, the mayor bought a Malamute and conceived of the dog sled race. Only a mountain rescue service existed, especially trained for avalanches. Today, 80,000 people come for four days to watch a race of 168 teams with 850 dogs.

The dog sled race is not the only thing happening here. Downhill and cross country skiing plus corporate vacation facilities also take place. Four schools for paragliding. Mountain bike trails. Thirteen hotels and assorted bed-and-breakfasts adding up to 5,000 beds. A lot of Polish, Dutch and Scandinavian visitors and Russians come for curative visits.

What is remarkable is how many people already come, a built-in potential visitor stream for Amber Trail Greenway sites within the region. Donovaly is so close to Banská Bystrica. The World Heritage Village of Vlkolinec is just outside, probably already visited too much. Kvačany and assorted other attractions are a day trip or overnight stay away. The challenge is to interest those visitors in other ATG sites to spread the visitors around or get them to stay longer. Donovaly is already an extraordinary anchor for ATG tourism but as with some other communities on the Amber Trail Greenway route, awareness of the ATG momentum is new.

As one Donovaly official said, "We are ahead of many other places for Amber Trail development without knowing it. The challenge is to have a constant flow of tourists, not just for events." For Donovaly, the development of the Amber Trail offers hope of that.

Interestingly, Donovaly may have a self-destructive dream. It does not have to rely solely on tourism and, in fact, no place should. Most significantly, Donovaly could evolve into a year-round community with a partial weekend population, a much more stable condition than simply a tourist attraction. The year-round appeal could be undermined by too much tourism. This is an all-too-familiar condition in more developed places.

ŠPANIA DOLINA

This charming hill town, a former mining village, is only 12 km from Banská Bystrica. An unusual flight of several hundred steps connects its entrance to the hilltop where a church sits. Until recently, Špania dolina was only losing population. Now this village of 140 residents is seeing increased sports (biking, hunting, hiking) and conference activity, boasts a delightful restaurant and has a school for handicrafts. A property appraiser, an advertising executive and other professionals have moved here. A young entrepreneur bought and restored an old miners' pub, an indication of new economic activity. Community plans call for creation of a trail connecting Špania dolina to Donovaly which makes a lot of sense. A trail from Banská Bystrica to Špania dolina already exists, a good start. This is a modest beginning but the larger promise seems to lie in the moving in of young full-time residents leaving Banská Bystrica.

The biggest problem here is one we heard over and over: the lingering expectation by people that something will be done for them, an expectation fostered during the Communist era of Central Planning when no one could really do anything independently. This is both the greatest challenge and, perhaps, the area of greatest achievement throughout the region for all four Partnerships. Clearly, the Partnerships have moved some people away from this view. If the Partnerships do nothing more than get people to be self-motivated, to not wait for government action and to have confidence that their own efforts can bear fruit, they will have forged a second, equally important, revolution.

BANSKÁ BYSTRICA

Banská Bystrica (85,000 population) is located in a valley at the intersection of three mountain ranges in the center of the country. Banská Bystrica is probably the most architecturally interesting and attractive city in Central Slovakia. Its central pedestrian square is extraordinarily active and vibrant, an exemplary model of how town centers should function. Like so many Central European towns and cities, Banská Bystrica grew up around this medieval square that was for centuries the center of civic life. For most of this century, however, this square became merely a crossroads for the city's extensive bus system and a through street for automobiles. The bus station sat in the middle, a dismal legacy of the former regime. A few years ago, all traffic was removed and the square was restored, with wonderful stonework and under-the-pavement lights. Looking at historic photos, only minor differences are detectable. Benches, though not enough of them, were installed, and most of the buildings around the square were restored.

But what makes this square unique is the way it functions as a true crossroads of city life. Pedestrians of every kind pass through all day long because the life of the city is centered around the square. City life unfolds through this square at all hours. Classes of small schoolchildren and clusters of flirting teenagers. Mothers with baby carriages, men and women with briefcases, shoppers with full food baskets, elderly people strolling with canes and occasional bikers defying the rules. Chance meetings, serious conversations, romantic snuggling and the whole assortment of pedestrians keep passing through. The stream of humanity never stops from morning until night. Exactly this kind of vitality is what dies when car-oriented development rises on the outskirts of town. Cars, malls and suburban housing pull the life right out of the center.

Historically, this medieval town was the capital of seven mining towns colonized in the 13th century by German miners who extracted copper from nearby hills until the seams ran dry in the 18th century. Economic stagnation lasted until industrialization in the 20th century. The Communists made much of the town's central role in the 1944 uprising against the Nazis. Monuments and a museum celebrate this event but that chapter of history causes some discomfort to residents in the post-Communist era.

Geographically, Banská Bystrica is a major crossroad between Cracow and Budapest, and between Bratislava and Košice. A tradition of tolerance for different opinions and different peoples reportedly emerged from being both the crossroads between different cultures and a key trading site for different nations.

After the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation in 1993, Banská Bystrica held the first joint Czech/Slovak cultural event. The local cemetery apparently has Czechs, Hungarians, Poles and Slovaks, reflecting the international mix of the population. This was a Mečiar stronghold, and he even tried shifting the national capital here from Bratislava which he felt was too aligned with or influenced by neighboring Austria. Bratislava is only 45 kilometers from the Vienna airport. In Mečiar's exit speech, Banská Bystrica was singled out as the region of his biggest disappointment. Mečiar had served to mobilize the citizenry. He was both a perceived threat and useful opportunity. Because of its history of civic action that predates 1989, Banská Bystrica is an appropriate site for the headquarters of the Slovak Environmental Partnership (Nadácia Ekopolis).

Slovak civic participation in the Banská Bystrica region, both NGO and citizen involvement, is one of the strongest in the country. Candidates in Banská Bystrica, who do well communicating and connecting to the public, are winning elections. This is apparently a direct result of

Partnership funded community programs. "Our people were not used to going door to door with petitions," one activist said, "but they are now." City counselors fear civic initiatives. The new mayor understands he must communicate with civic groups or lose.

The emphasis of Partnership programs is directed at stimulating local civic activity and developing self-sufficiency, a traditional emphasis of the Slovak environmental movement. Its two-year-old small grants program, for example, is focused on overcoming the experience of the state promising things and never delivering. The Partnership announced it was looking for modest, realistic efforts, such as public space improvements, bus stop creation and small environmental programs. The grants of up to \$800 did not have to be matched, although matching was considered better. The idea was very simple. Small things were encouraged just to show that some things could be achieved, and that one need not wait for the state and that people themselves could create change. The Partnership targeted 122 villages in three regions of Central Slovakia—Trenčín, Žilina, Banská Bystrica—where state-dependency was strong. Funds were sufficient only for 170 grants out of 460 applications. The Partnership would have entertained more applications, if funds were available. As hoped, informal groups organized around projects and then evolved into civic associations. Some have followed up with additional grant applications for new projects that evolved out of the initial effort. Civic engagement is truly occurring.

HEALTHY CITY PROJECT

A **Healthy City** project, connected to the international Healthy City movement, focuses on the development of healthy communities in an integrated community-based approach. This creative strategy forces attention from both the bottom and the top on critical issues that might otherwise be treated lightly, such as air quality, noise, garbage separation and recycling. Norika Fabianova, a former member of the Partnership Board, runs the program, primarily studying and evaluating health conditions in the city. The program reports to City Hall but, in effect, collects data needed to mount various environmental campaigns. Once the importance of physical well-being is brought into mainstream thinking, it is not difficult to recognize the larger issues that affect the physical and mental well-being of people.

BANSKÁ ŠTIAVNICA—LIVING IN THE CENTER CITIZEN INITIATIVE

Banská Štiavnica (population 11,000), a community nestled among rolling hills, dates from the 11th century as an important mining town. Its winding cobblestone streets snake along a steep hillside providing wonderful

vistas. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Banská Štiavnica, the oldest mining town in Slovakia, once boasted of some of Europe's richest gold and silver mines. It gained particular prominence as the most important center of precious metal mining in the Hapsburg monarchy. But the mines dried up and the 19th century boom that transformed Banská Bystrica (as described) into a city passed it by. A rich variety of Gothic and Renaissance buildings still dominate. Two castles overlook the town, the Old Castle, renovated in the 13th century, and the New Castle, a Renaissance stronghold built as a fortification in the mid-16th century. Banská Štiavnica is amazingly intact but, unfortunately, is one of the few places that, at best, has not improved in recent years, and rather seems to be declining.

A very positive thing is happening here, however, of national consequence. It is a modest but important beginning whose significance may be difficult to recognize at this time. Young people from both Banská Štiavnica and other places are seeking to move into the historic center, restore old buildings, start new businesses and revive life in the center. While clearly Banská Štiavnica's appeal is obvious, the trend of young people moving into the historic core is bound to occur in many traditional towns and cities around Slovakia beyond just the most obvious places. This is already happening in small ways and without much notice throughout Central Eastern Europe. News reports and commentary focus instead on people leaving cities for new suburbs or farmers leaving villages for cities. This is definitely happening as well. But this return to the center should be watched, nurtured and not underestimated for its potential.

Reviving the Center

Banská Štiavnica is already an active tourist destination and an important anchor for Amber Trail. The challenge here is probably somewhat comparable to Donovaly, getting Banská Štiavnica visitors to go to nearby lesser and unknown sites. The bigger challenge, however, is getting a revitalization momentum going in Banská Štiavnica that is not tourist-directed and to overcome the apparent division between the government and the resident and preservation group. Several citizen organizations are already active.

In 1978, the state moved the population from the center to housing estates not unlike the forced population shift that took place in many communities in all four countries. Ironically, this preserved the historic core by just leaving it alone. At first, the new housing was quite appealing, with heat, running water, toilets and other modern conveniences. Yet, many residents were not satisfied with this lifestyle.

In 1996, a group circulated a questionnaire to determine how much interest existed for living in the center. To everyone's surprise, 600 people replied that they wanted to do so. The Town Hall administration responded by deciding to renovate three buildings for residential use. Earlier plans called for renovating buildings into hotels to appeal to tourists.

A Living in the Centre Initiative was organized as a partnership of future residents trying to restore and reuse an historic building in the center. They are in the vanguard of future residents of the historic center and are valiantly restoring a seriously deteriorated building.

Conversations with members of the "Living in the Center," reveal the kind of reasons for their choice. They want a traditional center. They want to renovate buildings for their own use in a hands-on way. They want to open businesses. They want to be part of the rebirth. They want to reconnect the town to its history. They want to preserve and restore historic buildings. Granted, Banská Štiavnica's mountain setting with its curving cobblestone streets, incomparable views and historic architecture creates a unique appeal. But sooner or later, the appeal of other historic traditional communities will draw settlers to them in the same way, especially since it is a key alternative to remaining in the "panelaks," the huge housing estates built by the former regime. So the lessons here should be a model for future developments bound to unfold.

"Living in the Center" emerged from another group, Association for Banská Štiavnica '91. The Association was organized to do a number of things, including: revive the historic core and local cultural heritage; start a summer camp for youth to raise awareness about preservation; teach restoration skills; and work on the restoration of an unique interior mural in the building under restoration. It is also restoring a seriously deteriorated building down the hill from the center square. This will eventually be the center for all their heritage preservation activities and programs and, probably, a model for the region.

Citizens Persist

Now it is clear. Plenty of people would like to live in the center and many are willing to put considerable time, energy and skill to make this happen. Why this does not bring a positive response from the local government is nothing short of a mystery. In effect, citizens are ready to make happen what government can't do without them anyway. In fact, grass-roots efforts are already making things happen despite official resistance. How such efforts are received by local politicians around the region varies, but here is probably the most discouraging possible.

Even under such discouraging circumstances, civic groups will not be stopped. The energy and commitment exhibited here prompts expectation that civic groups will prevail.

Theoretically, the advancement of civil society and sustainable development issues were delayed in Slovakia

because of the Mečiar regime. Based on the strength and accomplishments of the groups and efforts observed, however, one would hardly know it. The level of achievement under extraordinarily limiting circumstances is impressive.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Several contradictory things are happening in the Czech Republic (population 10.2 million). Similar things are happening in other Central European countries. In the Czech Republic, however, these positive and negative development trends are either more advanced or more obvious.

On the positive side are the increasing success and growing impact of environmentally friendly, locally based and modestly scaled projects. These efforts are economically rewarding and genuinely contributing to the rebuilding of a civil society.

Some of these projects will be described herein.

They are models of appropriate change and are proving the viability of sustainable development concepts promoted by such NGOs as the Environmental Partnership and Veronica, an extraordinarily innovative environmental group concerned with the stability and strengthening of ecosystems. Renewable energy resource projects, in fact, are already changing the face of villages in some regions, such as the White Carpathians and Southern Moravia. Cultural programs and local economic development projects are strengthening and reviving communities and regions. Also on the positive side is the growing popularity of eco-tourism under the auspices of the Czech Greenway, a program designed to nurture local economies, stimulate citizen involvement and promote locally-based sustainable development projects along the historic trade route between Prague and Vienna.

Remarkable change is evident in the site visits to be described. **The projects are small and dispersed but the change they represent is large and significant. The potential for low-cost, fiscally prudent, democracy-strengthening policies illustrated here is clear. The fundamental challenge for policy-makers, governmental agencies and private funders alike is a need for a genuine openness to the innovative programs these successes represent.**

On the negative side is the proliferation of malls and highway plans. As will be evident, the scale of these negative trends is horrendous and could both overwhelm the notable successes described in this report and wipe out the unique social, economic and cultural



fabric. Both the democratization and economic and social rejuvenation of the country are at stake.

The former Czechoslovakia escaped unscathed by World War II bombing campaigns and is blessed with the most intact physical environment with a natural and man-made landscape unsurpassed in beauty anywhere in Europe. All that is now clearly threatened. **What the bombs spared may be destroyed by development. It is already occurring with such lightning speed that few people, environmentalists and sustainable development advocates included, realize how quickly the country will reach a point of no return.**

The “mall” of the Czech Republic, for one thing, is happening so fast and on a scale so overwhelming that it is now possible that the cherished historic towns and urban centers of which Czechs are so rightfully proud will, within the decade, be nothing more than stage sets visited only by tourists and removed from Czech daily life. The daily life and social institutions that have grown up around and within these traditional centers now function so effectively because of them. But all that could be dramatically undermined as the physical landscape gets rearranged by massive development.

In 1998 alone, a reported 22 shopping centers and hypermarkets have been built around Prague. The highway from Prague to Brno is rapidly turning into a strip development typical of many U.S. cities. Some of the hypermarkets, in fact, are larger than almost anything currently in the United States. Many of these

malls are approved with inadequate, if any, real assessment of the environmental, economic, social or physical consequences. The approval process is at best poorly informed, at worst a charade.

The proliferation of these malls does not seem to generate sufficient public concern. Instead, most people seem to celebrate their arrival, assuming incorrectly that the consumer goods they offer would never be available without the malls. Few, if any, transportation, planning or urban specialists, let alone policy-makers and the general public, have begun to consider the long-term implications of this kind of development either for the natural and built environment or for society and the economy. More significantly, perhaps, few people are demonstrating to the general public or elected officials that the choice need not be either/or.

Too many Czechs—and all Central Europeans for that matter—deceive themselves into thinking that the sprawl, traffic congestion and erosion of historic centers that they see in Western Europe and the U.S. won't happen to them. They seem to think they are different because their country is small and Czechs care deeply about their historic towns and natural landscape. They are in for a rude shock. Much of the development is speculative. No doubt the bubble will burst. The only question is when. The market can't sustain all the new malls. Consumer buying power does not match the proliferation. Competition, experts note, will weed out the weaker ones. This is probably true. But **more devastation follows mall closings than after they open in the first place. It is called killing a place twice, first when they open and then when they close.**

Killing the Local Economy

The pattern is the same all over the world and has been well demonstrated throughout Western Europe and North America. When a mall opens, considerable local economic activity in nearby town centers dies. Some businesses disappear quickly. Others take a while to fall apart and close. As they close, the local economy diminishes and then disappears. A local economy can only be defined by local ownership. Local merchants and entrepreneurs are close to their customers or a short transit trip away. When they disappear, the remaining businesses are a long distance away, usually a car-dependent trip. Ownership as well is distant. In Central Europe today, this means foreign ownership. Profits therefore leave both the town and the country.

Plans for a complex network of highways crisscrossing the country north and south are moving ahead as the country's enviable network of long distance trains and local streetcar systems continues to suffer from inadequate investment, diminishing service and increas-

ing ticket prices. **Erroneously, highways are regarded as a valued investment but mass transit as a burdensome subsidy. Highway funding comes from national and international sources; local transit depends mostly on overburdened local budgets. This kind of thinking leads to a continued, gradual erosion of public transit and equally gradual but inevitable dependency on costly car ownership.** Eventually, the Czech Republic—and the other Central European countries—will be transformed into car-dependent societies in which enormous financial resources must be used to maintain this environmentally devastating condition and in which a substantial portion³⁶ of household incomes will be absorbed by exorbitant transportation costs, leaving diminished resources available for food, shelter, education, health or leisure.

The proliferation of malls and highways coupled with the diminishment and increasing price of long distance rail and local transit service adds up to a heavy dose of urban sprawl (a term that has yet to enter the Czech vocabulary) which neither the Czechs nor any other Central European country are at all equipped to manage.

PARADOXICALLY, MOST OF THE CURRENT HIGHWAY SCHEMES WERE PLANNED UNDER THE COMMUNIST REGIME AND WERE FIERCELY OPPOSED BY CIVIC ACTIVISTS AT THE TIME AS YET ANOTHER STATE-IMPOSED MEGAPROJECT. SOME HIGHWAY PLANS WERE EVEN FIRST DEVELOPED BY THE NAZI REGIME IN THE 1940s, PROBABLY FOR TROOP MOVEMENT. IN SUBSTANCE, THOSE PLANS ARE NO DIFFERENT TODAY. WORSE, THESE PLANS REPRESENT AN APPROACH TO TRANSPORTATION THAT IS HIGHLY OUTDATED AND UNDER HEAVY CHALLENGE IN MORE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES. THE CZECH REPUBLIC FACES THE POSSIBILITY OF BUILDING HIGHWAYS THAT WILL BE RECOGNIZED AS MISTAKES UPON COMPLETION. ENORMOUS PUBLIC INVESTMENT WILL BE REQUIRED TO CORRECT THOSE MISTAKES.

Federal and international money pours into highway planning and construction. At least as much investment and serious attention should be paid to mass transit if a balanced transportation system is to be achieved. The Czech rail network and local streetcar inventory, regardless of condition, is the envy of every car-dependent Western nation struggling to come out from 50 years of automobile-focused development. It is a system that, at least, does

³⁶ Studies indicate that 30 percent of the average car-dependent American family budget is currently required for transportation.

not have to be created from scratch. Yet, localities struggle to support with local funds their streetcar systems that are in desperate need of investment and that still are the most efficient, cost-effective alternative to car dependency. Not surprisingly, financially strapped localities are cutting back streetcar services and seeking federally funded highway projects. This is a guaranteed formula for disastrous transportation decisions.

The national government, however, has put lots of money into the railway system, even if not as much as in highway construction. The problem is that the state-owned and fully controlled Czech Railways (CD) missed the decade after the revolution to reform itself. It is still an inefficient, inflexible, giant bureaucratic system which is unable to initiate some of the simplest things, such as coordination of train connections, flexible pricing, friendly customer relations and other system upgrades. Stations are dirty, hangouts for the homeless, disorganized. Many of them are architectural gems left in terrible disrepair. The feeling conveyed is that the government doesn't care if it is not car related.

The specific sites, programs and projects reported herein should be considered within this complicated context. If meaningful progress is the national agenda, the lessons that follow are invaluable.

PRAGUE

Prague, the city of a thousand spires, is probably the best preserved large city in Central and Eastern Europe. Dating from the 6th century, Prague overflows with an extraordinary legacy of culture, architecture and history. Pulsating street life. Serendipitously entertaining public spaces. Exquisite Baroque and Renaissance buildings interspersed with some of the finest Medieval and Art Nouveau structures found anywhere. Czech Cubist buildings, an architectural variety unique to this country. A varied topography highlighted by an incomparable hilltop castle. Historically important Charles University founded in 1348, making Prague an intellectual center. A riverfront site marked by one of the world's most famous bridges. And, significantly, a variety of residential neighborhoods necessary to complete a requisite menu of thriving urbanism.

With a population of approximately 1.3 million, more than 10 percent of the country's inhabitants, Prague is as good an example as one can find of the intact historic city fully capable of modernization without destruction of the qualities of its greatness. So far, that is. Prague's inner core is a designated UNESCO World Heritage site. Its striking beauty can easily blind an observer to the problems festering below the surface and away from the treasured core. The affordable

housing supply is diminishing rapidly for the same reasons cited for Cracow. Homelessness is rising. The infrastructure is old and in need of upgrading. Transit has not kept pace with demand and, in fact, has increased in price and diminished in service. The full range of urban dilemmas found in other Central Eastern European cities exists in Prague.

Prague, however, seems to embody the best and the worst features found in the other highly visible urban centers of the region. A confident sense of great possibilities and a growing feeling of disappointment and hopelessness exist side by side. New, trendy restaurants, fashion-based business, art galleries, internet companies proliferate among both young Czechs and foreign investors. Yet, many well-educated, caring Czechs wonder what happened to the values embodied in the Velvet Revolution and talk about leaving. Inflation, corruption, a struggling economy, diminishing safety nets, increasingly concentrated wealth and destructive, top-down planning are disillusioning enough of the city's best and the brightest to make one wonder where the next generation of civic leaders will come from. Illusions have turned into disillusion, Roger Thurow wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* story, "For Many Czechs, 'Velvet Revolution' Has a Coarse Edge," (November 30, 1999).

One activist told Thurow: "It's been only a decade, but we need to remind people about the basic things they take for granted, like a free press, freedom to travel, freedom to run for political office. Now they look at things through the prism of what they can buy. People don't see many role models in our country, [such as] people who have gotten rich honestly... Here, success is a source of suspicion and envy."

Yet, the splendors of Prague still have the power to inspire. The dilemmas and possibilities are daunting but not so daunting to frighten away a growing band of caring, civic-spirited Prague citizens mobilizing on different fronts to keep alive the vision and values of the Velvet Revolution. Community and issue-based groups are proliferating. Increasingly, various groups are coming together on certain issues, a sign of civic maturity with a great potential impact.

SOS PRAGUE

SOS Prague is an important model for citizen coalitions. Some 38 groups came together primarily over the issue of a new Prague Master Plan, prepared by the city without meaningful citizen involvement and without any opportunity for expression by citizens of a vision for the city's future. The master plan was prepared in a classic top-down process. It was developed within government and presented to the public and put on

view after its development. Public comment followed this process, instead of preceding it. Civic groups were invited to meetings where they had no possibility to change anything. Public comment and public input are two very different things. Arrogantly, city planners and elected officials argued that the plan's critics have no understanding of planning and that only professionals have the requisite expertise.

The plan allows cherished public spaces to be sold for private development with no citizen participation in such decisions, encouraging the erosion of the public realm for private benefit. The Plan also provides for a large network of highways crisscrossing Prague as decimating as the most destructive schemes dating from the heyday of American urban renewal/highway building. Massive public infrastructure projects, such as highways, are to be paid for with public money but without public input.

Prague citizens are understandably threatened by many elements of the Plan. SOS Prague provides an opportunity for Prague NGOs representing a broad cross-section of citizens to meet, discuss common issues, coordinate activities and increase their potential impact on both City Hall and Borough Halls.

Overcoming Disillusionment

The significance of SOS can not be exaggerated. The very fact that a coalition exists is a major achievement in this atomized society. SOS has made a breakthrough with the press, gaining coverage of urban issues unnoticed before and raising public awareness. Through SOS efforts, several new civic services have been gained. A media center was established to continue bringing press attention to development issues. Legal consultation services are now available to NGOs and community activists. An Expert Center connects civic activists with needed experts according to the specific cause. Most interesting is the establishment of a Conflict of Interest Center. One SOS organizational member, Oživení, had researched the background on Master Plan proposals that seemed to be irrational. Virtually every City Commissioner, according to Oživení director Petr Štěpánek, was found to have a private interest conflicting with the public interest. A database of potential conflict of interest was established and is now available to the public.

The common attitude about Prague city government among these groups reflects some of the disillusion spreading among city residents. Petr Štěpánek, a SOS founder and one of its leaders, has written explaining the group's formation:

“After some positive changes in the post-Communist society of the early Nineties, City of Prague has been plagued by a lack of democratic institutions, a

non-existent platform of communication with its citizens and an absence of a right-to-know and right-to-participate process. Those few who pointed at corruption and a need for discussion about the future of the City of Prague had been labeled as enemies or green extremists or complainers at best. Town Hall did not talk to anybody. At the same time, thousands of citizens organized themselves around problems of their neighborhoods having tried to communicate with the town hall. Some of them, like Prague Mothers or Ecological Society, had experience from pre-revolution times, others like Optim-EKO or STUŽ formed around new pressing problems. These groups started to build a common platform when they recognized the need for a more coordinated approach to city problems.”

The newly-formed group gained Town Hall's attention and met with the mayor in 1999. So far, the major accomplishment has been to get the city's attention and obtain at least a theoretical commitment to future citizen participation. Hopes have been raised enough for SOS Prague to move ahead to professionalize itself and seek appropriate expertise for organizational development.

A balanced city master plan was the overarching goal of SOS Prague. Yet, the very existence of the 38-member SOS Prague has gone a long way in overcoming the historic lack of civic culture, the confusion over which level of government is responsible for what and the Communist-era experience of civic associations as extensions of the central government. The disastrous Master Plan that was approved in September 1999 served to deepen the commitment of the SOS coalition to pursue genuine reform.

TRANSPORTATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A number of experienced civic organizations have recently come together around the issue of a balanced national transportation policy. Organized primarily by the Czech Environmental Partnership and Nadace Via (to be described below), this is the first coordinated effort to work to preserve and strengthen the country's extraordinary public transit system. This coalition of groups ranges from the most activist and protest-oriented, like the Czech-Slovak Transportation Club, Hnutí Duha and Prague Mothers, to the Institute for Environmental Policy, the Center for Community Work and the Environmental Law Service. The spectrum is broad and growing. A balanced national transportation system is the shared goal.

The common thread of the coalition is recognition of an ironic reality: the superb public transportation system built by the former regime, with its seamless network of

buses, trams, railroads and metros, is considered one of the best in the world. That valuable national resource is dramatically threatened by a national transportation policy that encourages the accommodation of automobiles and underinvests in the efficient movement of people and goods. The coalition views the upcoming massive European Union investments in highway building as the biggest challenge. The erosion of the public transportation system is already dramatic with self-defeating ticket price increases, service cutbacks and insufficient investment in upgrading. Traffic congestion and air and noise pollution are already serious problems and rapidly getting worse. Prague, in fact, has more cars per square kilometer than Vienna and other major European cities. And while other European countries and the U.S. seek ways to recreate the kind of seamless transportation system the Czech Republic still has, Czech leadership resists recognition of the inevitably destructive direction in which it is heading. Recognition of the impact of transportation policy on such diverse interests as land-use planning, environmental protection and social policy has brought civic groups focused on these issues together in this new coalition.

NADACE VIA

Nadace Via (The Via Foundation) grew out of the Czech branch office of The Foundation for a Civil Society (FCS), a New York City-based foundation set up in the early 1990s to help rebuild democracy and civil society in then Czechoslovakia. The Foundation is led by Wendy Luers, whose husband, William Luers, served as U.S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia in the early 1980s. Luers, active since 1990 in the region, recognized that Czech and Slovak offices were ready and able to become indigenous organizations.

Nadace Via is now totally Czech-based and since its inception in 1997 has distributed more than \$600,000 in small grants to support NGOs of all kinds around the country. The organization is effectively led by Jiří Barta, Czech-born with a degree from Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Nadace Via is a critical intermediary organization that serves as a grant-maker, convenor, facilitator and overall supporter of NGO development and community-based efforts of all varieties around the country. Its overall mission is to increase civic engagement and public participation in democratic decision-making in the Czech Republic—at the local, regional and national levels.

Most significantly, Nadace Via has increasingly recognized the inextricable connection of transportation policy to all the issues of its concern and has increased its focus on transportation and sustainable development

efforts. Transportation decisions, program officers realize, can make or break a community's revitalization effort and are of eminent importance to members of the public.

CZECH GREENWAY/ZELENÉ STEZKY

Following the fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, a dialogue began between a group of Czech citizens and American individuals and organizations with strong interests in the newly liberated country.

They saw tremendous challenges as well as opportunities facing Czech and Slovak citizens in balancing the forces of Western capitalism and the need to build an economy based upon the magnificent cultural and natural resources of the country. Eco-tourism was gaining considerable attention in North America and Western Europe. Small, environmentally sensitive developments could restore historic towns and preserve natural landscapes without overwhelming local communities. Improvements would serve local residents and visitors alike. Local economies would benefit. Sustainable development, gradual change and modest growth were the overarching goals. To some extent, this idea, at least conceptually, was at the heart of the Greenway's beginning. Lu and Tereza Chmelar, residents of upstate New York, were the initiators with funding from the World Monuments Fund. Lu Chmelar is a Czech-born engineer who was inspired by the Velvet Revolution to do something for the country of his birth. In 1991, they read in a local paper about an effort by New York State to create a Greenway in New York's Hudson River Valley. The idea of the Hudson River Valley Greenway (HRVG) was that the environment and economic development could be brought into balance through a voluntary, participatory process that involved government, business, not-for-profit organizations and, above all, local citizens. The Chmelars contacted the HRVG and an exchange program began that resulted in a formal acknowledgment of a Czech-Hudson Greenway project by then Governor Mario Cuomo and Czech President Václav Havel.

The Greenway idea is to bring people together inspired by a vision for their own community's future and by the advantages of connecting with their neighbors along the Greenway route, in effect reactivating and reenergizing the body politic in new ways. This synthesis of support for nature conservation and cultural preservation and promotion of local and regional development through environmentally-friendly tourism is the mission of the Hudson River Greenway. As an approach to advancing positive change and strengthening local economies and democratic societies, it can be an effective methodology.

The Czech Greenway goes between Prague and Vienna and passes through areas particularly rich in cultural and natural beauty. But the population is relatively poor and economically struggling. This can be a deadly combination. **Economically depressed people in a culturally and aesthetically beautiful landscape can be vulnerable to seemingly generous financial offers from fast-talking investors. Without knowing alternatives, financial offers of any kind can be too tempting to resist.**

The natural and built landscape of the Czech Greenway corridor is extraordinary. Compact walkable towns with government offices, cultural activities and educational resources centrally located and readily accessible by tram or by foot to most of the residents and business people. A verdant, sprawl-free landscape of farms, valleys and forests falls between communities connected by train, bike and walking trails and low-capacity roads bordered by a network of historic allees of incomparable majesty. The relatively poor population is unsophisticated in the ways of global development patterns and is oblivious to the real nature of the threat to their physical surroundings and traditional way of life. Out of desperation for “economic development,” communities are often unable to distinguish between beneficial, productive, appropriate change that builds on the existing assets without destroying them and harmful, short-term inappropriate change that either undermines or destroys the appealing legacies of the past that took decades, if not centuries, to evolve. The Greenway strategy for balancing development, environmental protection and cultural preservation is one potential model that can engender appropriate development and change.

The Czech Greenway is still evolving. Physically, it links Mikulov, Valtice, Vranov nad Dyjí, Telč, Třebon', Jindřichův Hradec, Český Krumlov, Bechyně and Sedlec-Prčice by hiking/biking trails and tourism promotion. The Greenway communities are also linked by a common vision that provides the framework for regional cooperation. The Hudson River Greenway offers a model for implementing such a vision. The Greenway strategy, when fully embraced and developed, offers a participatory public process that reintroduces principles of democracy back into a citizenry that has been under dictatorships for more than 50 years.

Of great significance already has been Greenway's work with local communities and their mayors. Under the program established by former Greenway director Petr Štěpánek, cooperation with the different villages is increasing the public involvement within the villages, as well as the communication between the villages and sharing experiences among them, all of which adds up to an increased level of democratic activity. The difficulty here is that a connection was made only with the

mayors of the 11 villages, and Czech mayors come and go with regularity. This undermines any kind of stability in the program. Thus, more connections with civic groups seem appropriate.

In theory, the Czech Greenway was a major innovation for the Czech Republic and, not unexpectedly, went through some rough ups and downs. It emphasized too early the tourist potential, raising local expectations beyond realistic goals.

Originally established as a separate NGO within the Czech Republic, with a counterpart support organization in the United States, the Czech Greenways program has evolved into a multi-faceted effort to help guide growth and development under the umbrella of the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe.

It has overcome leadership, staffing and communication difficulties and now appears on a stable productive course. With its learning phase substantially past and with its control transferred into local hands, the Greenway's institutional house is stabilizing. Surviving these often inevitable phases is a sign of a successful organization with great future potential. Under the current leadership of Juraj Flamík, the Czech Greenway has gained a broader national and Central European focus. Its growing success has gained attention throughout Europe and the Czech Greenway is now the model for the Amber Trail Greenway from Cracow to Budapest.

Most importantly, the Czech Greenway could become a replicable model of a regional sustainable development process that embraces meaningful public participation and creates needed local economic investment.

Greenway director Flamík is appropriately trying to broaden its activities beyond tourism to working with local partners, such as the communities and businesses along the route, on broader issues of concern. Developing a genuine, local participatory process is the biggest challenge.³⁷

EDUCATIONAL BIKING TRAIL FROM BŘECLAV TO LEDNICE THROUGH RESTORED FLOOD PLAIN FOREST (HORNÍ LES)

This flood plain forest, Horní Les, is a remarkable place and should be a highlight of any Greenway tour. Massive land reclamation schemes implemented under the Communists involved extensive drainage measures and diversion of small waterways. Such a series of public

³⁷ Flamík is helping to develop a new 90 kilometer Greenway from the German border near Most to Doksy in Central Bohemia. This could lead to more Greenways and, eventually, a Coalition of Greenways. The idea for the Northern Bohemia Greenway, close to the borders of Germany and Poland, grew out of a meeting between Greenways and a group of men from the region who know the region well and wanted to create a cycling trail. Out of that meeting grew the larger idea of a Greenway with connections to a small wine region and to fruit growers in the White Carpathians.

works projects diverted water from the River Dyje that flows through this area. Following the building of the Nové Mlýny reservoirs, the river rarely overflowed. Flooding stopped in 1971. The groundwater level dropped as more than 10 million gallons of water a year were retained in the reservoirs. Temporary pools and the fish and amphibians living in them disappeared. The forest dried up. Poplars and oak were especially damaged.

Forest enterprise Židlochovice, a state forest company responsible for managing the forest (including logging), recognized the damage and sought help in restoration. With state financial support and under the direction of the forest service, an artificial flooding scheme was developed. The temporary pools, flooded by surface water or by the increases in groundwater level, have been restored. A network of weirs was built to manipulate the water level and the duration of the flooding.

Through artificial irrigation, 633 hectares (almost two and a half square miles) of the forest between Lednice and Břeclav have been reclaimed. The last restoration work occurred in 1995. It is apparently too soon to evaluate the effect on the stands of trees. The variety of flora and fauna, however, and amazing variety of bird songs make it clear a transformation miracle has occurred. Direct evidence is visible in the herb layer, increased soil moisture, the flowering of some plants, such as summer snowflake which had not flowered in years.

The bike ride through the Horní Les is easy and the Czech-made bikes from the rental place are wonderful. The potential for a full day's excursion is quite apparent.

This forest can be enjoyed on two levels.

- The first is the simple, do-it-yourself way of just a simple pleasurable bike ride. At some point, development of a possible picnic area might be considered.
- The second experience is under the guidance of a knowledgeable leader who can give the history of the degradation and explain what went into the restoration. It is hard to find a more exemplary case of extraordinary forest reclamation but it is difficult to appreciate the transformation without some before-and-after background. It is like seeing a restored architectural landmark without seeing photos of its near collapse. This, of course, could be provided in written form but there was something extra special hearing a member of the forest service give the background and answer questions.

The cleaning and restoration of this flood plain forest, Czech Partnership Director Mirek Kundra points out, is an unusual break in tradition for the forest service. The service is a rigidly-structured hierarchy so if and when policy changes and this approach is accepted as normal, Kundra points out, the new thinking will permeate quickly the forest service bureaucracy.

Along the Horní Les bike route is an interesting site to visit, a hunting castle built as a folly. The Janův Hrad Castle was built as a hunting lodge in 1801–1807 with four towers, an inner courtyard and a residential wing. Built by the Liechtensteins, this fortress-like stone castle exhibits a collection of mounted game animals that is a step back in time to a classic 19th century natural history museum, a strictly non-interpretive display.

Janův Hrad Castle reflects a challenging problem. The Czech people—like the Poles, as noted earlier in this report—feel disconnected from historic preservation. An incident concerning the Janův Hrad points out the absurdity of some preservation attitudes and rules. Some years ago, this castle was used as a movie set. A small, wooden bridge was constructed to provide access over the narrow stream of the River Dyje that flows a few hundred feet from the castle. This prop was built to resemble a period bridge. It remains the only access over the stream but, reportedly, the official preservation authority will not allow it to remain as a permanent fixture. No record exists of what was there, no record of a bridge or what it looked like. Therefore, no permanent bridge is allowed to be built because no one knows what would be historically accurate. In the meantime, the temporary bridge remains in place with no permanent resolution in sight.

Valtice/Lednice

The Liechtensteins³⁸ were for many centuries one of the most powerful families in the Czech Lands and built the chateaux in Valtice (winter palace) and Lednice (summer palace) with a connecting six kilometer allee, created the unique man-made landscape around the Lednice-Valtice Palaces (zámek) and built the series of quasi-historical follies (a triumphal arch, a temple to Apollo, a Turkish-inspired minaret, a semi-circular classical temple surrounding a group of sculptures of the Three Graces, a Colonnade,³⁹ among others) along the trails of their lands that today hold great appeal to local resident and tourist alike. The 19th century Valtice palace is just off the main square which keeps it very central to village life. The 13th century Lednice palace was lavishly redone in the 1840s into a neo-Gothic extravaganza.

The Lednice-Valtice area of Southern Moravia lies at the heart of one of Europe's most pristine cultural landscapes. It is a cultural legacy of international importance and a spectacular environmental, architec-

³⁸ The Austrian House of Liechtenstein had gained a foothold in Moravia in 1249 when the family received the town of Mikulov as a reward for backing the winner in a contest for the Austrian throne.

³⁹ The Colonnade overlooks the region on the Czech/Austrian border and during the 19th century was considered the Liechtenstein gateway into Moravia. More recently, it was part of the Iron Curtain border and inaccessible to the Czech people.

tural and economic asset for this Moravian region but had escaped world notice and full local appreciation until a major preservation effort initiated by the World Monuments Fund in the early 1990s. Located approximately 55 kilometers south of Brno, 10 kilometers east of Mikulov and only 65 kilometers north of Vienna, this extraordinary 200-square kilometer natural and man-made landscape is now a World Heritage Site, is under conservation and preservation according to a plan developed by both professionals and local representatives and has gained full appreciation and significant funding from the national government.

The World Monuments Fund effort to plan for the conservation of the Valtice-Lednice cultural landscape was developed incrementally, notes John Stubbs, Program Director of the World Monuments Fund, “because we didn’t really understand at first what the full picture was.” WMF focused first on the Valtice Palace and then looked closely at the Lednice Palace. In the process the dimensions of the landscape began to emerge with the ancient network of hiking trails, fish ponds, follies, natural and built landscape with each architectural element placed to command extraordinary vistas. “It turned out to be the biggest coherently planned landscape in Europe and represents an ecological marvel biosphere,” Stubbs explains in wondrous tones. Research determined that the Lednice Park is one of the best examples of English landscape design in all of Central Europe. “The whole area was envisioned by the Liechtensteins to be a new country,” Stubbs notes, and probably escaped notice because it was on the Austrian border and part of the Iron Curtain, “terra incognita even to locals.”

WMF initiated a process which brought in diverse experts in landscape design, horticulture, architectural restoration, management, programming, interpretation, law, finance, education, economic development and tourism. In an unusual process, experts, local officials and civic leaders gathered for period of three days to one week, learning the full dimension of the resource and developing a master plan for the future. “The mayors and local constituency came to life,” says Stubbs, “because it was such an open and exciting process. No one had ever asked the gardener his opinion before. Local people were fascinated by the open, transparent process and everyone had a chance to speak.”

Stubbs notes several remarkable accomplishments. A consensus emerged. Everyone was an author of the solution. “Many places had existed without consensus on use or much public participation for decades,” he said. A political and professional breakthrough was accomplished bringing together foresters, planners, botanists, architects, naturalists and other specialists. The final document set priorities and strategy and

turned into a great fundraising tool. Natural leaders emerged during the process. Local people understood environmental pollution in new ways and saw the economic wisdom of protecting this unique assemblage. “We reconnected what should never have been separated in the first place,” says Stubbs.

Today, work continues, private and government support is increasing yearly. Cultural events and tourism feed the local economy. In fact, one wonders if another gathering will be called for in a few years to deal with the dilemmas of success.

SOUTHERN MORAVIAN WINE TRAIL AS PART OF GREENWAY

A priority new program of Czech Greenway under Flamík’s direction is development of a Southern Moravian wine trail. This is clearly needed for the survival of this extraordinarily beautiful wine district that offers great tourist and economic potential. Rolling hills with small private vineyards and gardens among large agricultural fields have long defined the landscape.⁴⁰ Rows of wine cellars mark the backyards of villages. Interestingly, the same landscape features mark the Austrian wine district across the border. Ninety-five percent of Czech vineyards are located in the 400 villages of this region. The culture and landscape of the region depend on the continuation of the wine-making tradition. In each village grapes are grown and wine is made, most often on the smallest possible scale. Almost 10,000 vintners operate here, but few can live on their effort and unemployment in the area is high.

Wise and successful GEF-funded (Global Environmental Facility, administered by the World Bank, initiated in the early 1990s) projects helped initiate a momentum of change built on environmental improvements, wine industry upgrading and bicycle trail creation. One project funded the development of tourist services in the region which boasts two natural cultural treasures—the Pálava Biosphere Reserve and the Lednice-Valtice Area, mentioned earlier—both UNESCO-protected sites. The cross-border characteristic that Phare encouraged emerged from close proximity to Austria and Slovakia.

Another project supported both grapevine production and advanced tourism in the adjacent Břeclav-Znojmo Districts and the replacement of pesticides in vineyards with non-toxic biological plant protection and

⁴⁰ Essentially, this region runs among what was the boundary of the metaphoric Iron Curtain and there is talk of putting some bunkers under monumental protection. We raised the idea, in fact, of an Iron Curtain bike trail. Seeing the many bunkers and occasional remaining watch towers set in this romantic rural landscape places the fact of the Iron Curtain into a more realistic perspective.

with the improved marketing of quality wines. The “regreening” of vineyards led to an observable increase of bio-diversity and even the return of endangered animal and plant species. Chemical penetration of the water supply, a significant area-wide problem, was significantly reduced. The success of the early Phare-Cross Border Cooperation programs favorably impressed local people and provided a good foundation for expanding programs.

One of the larger vintners, and a highly successful one, is the Znovín Wine Company, run by Pavol Vajcner, whose vast historic vineyards are surrounded by the Podyjí National Park and by part of the bike trail system maintained by the Czech Tourist Club. The Greenway Trail goes through a portion of the vineyards. Znovín’s winery was destroyed during the war and revived in the 1960s. Over the years, additional vineyards have been acquired. Vajcner is pleased to work with the Czech Greenway and to have the tourist trail go through the property and has created a charming, small café-like structure at which hikers and bikers can stop for a glass of wine. A delightful restaurant is also part of the vineyard operation.

Znovín’s vineyards lie in the village of Satov, under which is a medieval labyrinth of underground tunnels built in the 14th century for defense and now used for storing wine. Satov is quite near Znojmo, a hillside town overlooking the Dyje River Valley as it blends into the Austrian countryside. This is the heart of the Moravian wine industry.

Preserving a Wine Culture

This vineyard covers an exquisite landscape of hills and trails and has great appeal to local hiking residents as well as tourists. However, the most remarkable feature is the “Malovaný Sklep,” the painted wine cellar, a portion of the underground tunnel where wine is stored. The whole village, in fact, sits atop the wine cellar. A Satov resident, who had only one hand, painted a fascinating series of wall murals over a 20-year period, starting in the 1940s during weekends and holidays. Scenes depict village life and people, including wine-making and the introduction of heavy farm machinery by the Communists. With a headband to hold a candle for illumination, this man in effect captured the history of the village, the region and to a large extent the country, scene by scene in a simple style.

The Znovín Wine Company is not yet on the Greenway Trail but soon will be. Vajcner already cooperates well with National Park Service. The Park Service representative in charge of the park similarly expressed gratitude for being able to work with a company “making money in a reasonable way, respecting nature and helping

to preserve the landscape.” He also pointed out, interestingly, that the park service has to work hard to persuade the public that parks are not a new form of Iron Curtain, an area in which they cannot go.

The Znovín Wine Company buys grapes from small growers, very important for the survival of some. This is somewhat similar to Vermont, where Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream Company buys milk and cream from regional dairy farmers. Without Ben & Jerry’s patronage, many of these small farmers would go bankrupt. Small Moravian vintners, however, are endangered, even if they can sell some of their crop to larger ones. Preserving the culture behind wine-making and the historic and appealing way of life that grew up around it depends on the survival of these grape growers.

The first step initiated by Greenways under Juraj Flamík was bringing together local groups to encourage the establishment of the Association of Wine Growing Villages of South Moravia, SVOJM, with the shared goal of developing sustainable wine tourism. Twenty villages had joined by Spring of 1999. A year later, 70 villages had joined. With Flamík’s help, almost 400 kilometers of wine trails have been marked in Southern Moravia. Another 300 kilometers will be marked in 2001. Wine tourism is viewed as the great hope. Under development is an interactive web page for villages, a tourist map of the wine region, a marketing plan and a program to assist area pension and hotel owners to improve their services and environmental performance. There is talk of a wine academy promoting wine and agritourism, educating wine growers and producers, marketing local wine and doing what it can to maintain and revive the wine culture of the region.

Vintners confront special problems that can only be addressed by the national government. Stringent legal barriers, taxes, expensive license requirements and hygienic regulations create high costs. And as one local mayor noted: “The big focus after the revolution was privatizing the big companies but no loans were available for small businesses. Now the big companies are going bankrupt and the state is trying to tax small companies to make up the difference.”

The obstacles here are not so simple and, in fact, are similar to many economic challenges throughout the country. For example, as pointed out by one very entrepreneurial and successful vintner, “People here resist getting a business license. They don’t want to enter the official world. They always sold wine on the side, have their own clientele and have gotten used to doing business on the side.” “Doing business on the side,” of course, was an entrepreneurial way of having a small private business officially prohibited by the Communists

and now a difficult habit to break. A residual distrust of government is apparent.

In addition, this vintner pointed out, “Managerial skills are missing in this country. They can grow the grapes but they can’t market or don’t want to. One shouldn’t complain if you’re not willing to change. The biggest problem is changing the mentality.” When asked, however, if this might change with the next generation, one vintner replied: “Older people at least are used to taking orders. Younger people are worse. They have no wine-making or farming tradition to start with.”

Actually, both a formal and informal wine economy would probably be more beneficial than if all vintners of every size and inclination were brought into a formal structure. Informally produced local products work very well in many parts of the world and, in fact, add to an area’s appeal and character. Travelers, especially, love buying local products—food or craft—that can’t be purchased everywhere else. In Portugal and Italy, some families just make wine for family and local consumption and not for “market” purposes. North American maple syrup growers in Quebec, Ontario, Maine and Vermont operate similarly. Sometimes, the more these kinds of products stay in the hands of families and outside the market, the better chance they have of staying local. This is invariably better for the environment and local economy. The point for the Moravian wine district is that local growers should be able to do either. This requires more sophisticated and creative government policies than have yet been in evidence.

European Union versus Local Economy

Competition from EU farm products makes everything even worse. Cheaper fruit and wine—pears and wine from Spain, apples from Holland—are totally undercutting local growers. Farmers’ markets can help small farmers, backyard growers and retired people. They provide the only outlet for growers to sell directly to consumers without the added cost of a middleman. Many small growers are dependent on the income this can bring. One solution, one local farmer pointed out, was the establishment of a joint effort among small farmers for marketing farm products, to avoid having to sell to big companies. Big companies don’t pay enough to make selling to them worthwhile.⁴¹ Tax breaks for local supermarkets selling local wines is one of many suggestions local people have made that make sense.

⁴¹ In 20 years, American farmers’ markets have increased from approximately 200 to close to 3,000. Markets serve more than one million consumers. More than 21,000 small growers depend on the markets. Markets have successfully rejuvenated most of the commercial districts in which they’ve opened. See Chapter Nine, *Cities Back From the Edge: New Life for Downtown*, Roberta Brandes Gratz with Norman Mintz (John Wiley & Sons).

Making the bureaucracy more responsive to small farmers is another important suggestion, since farmers are often overwhelmed by government bureaucracy. The larger issue here is that if the Czechs want both the traditional wine and beer industries and small farmers to succeed, they will have to find creative ways to provide subsidies and incentives to small producers. This is especially true if they want young people to continue, or renew, the farming tradition that is so much a part of the Czech history and culture. In many instances, Czech families could take their confiscated land back if they want but many claimants are dead, elderly or not interested in farming. Incentives are non-existent and many children of farmers are not interested in farming.

This South Moravian region reflects dilemmas common elsewhere. Here is a great countryside, historic landmarks, appealing villages and towns and local products. The people and communities have much to offer. The most appropriate guidance in helping them develop is coming from the NGO sector, not from either the national government or the European Union. Early EU money under the Phare program encouraged small projects and, in fact, funded the early work of many small, positive efforts. For approving the Phare projects in the wine district, the government deserves credit. But newer money is reportedly going to bigger projects, leaving the earlier, emerging efforts to struggle.

In this South Moravian region, the goal is to bring the small vintners together in the larger wine villages association for many reasons, including applying for EU funds, an application process Juraj Flamík pledged to help with. The common purpose helps create a cooperative process among the villages that could be beneficial in many ways. Wine tourism becomes the motivation and the priority for securing money from Brussels but, as one vintner pointed out, “It should not be just that. It should include all the issues of the region and larger issues.”⁴²

Finding Common Cause

Interestingly, with the help of the Greenway, a significant local conversation is taking place among elected officials and the public that both recognizes the interde-

⁴² An interesting sidelight here was revealed in a discussion with three village mayors from Valtice, Lednice and Hlohovec. The EU and other funders, they said, require local matching funds, as already noted. The match is reportedly substantial. Most villages are already in debt because of the expensive infrastructure projects they have built, i.e. water and sewer treatment systems. Thus, little money is available for the matching challenges. Hlohovec is an exception. It has no debt and no water treatment plant. Instead of building its own, Hlohovec has connected to Valtice at considerably less expense. This kind of joint project, along with other inexpensive, environmentally friendly, alternative infrastructure strategies is being successfully demonstrated and promoted by the Environmental Partnerships in all four Central European countries. A model Moravian project appears later in this section.

pendency of the different groups and villages, and the need to come together to tackle common priorities of agriculture, vineyards, rural water and sewer infrastructure, cultural preservation and tourism. This is the kind of regional planning that could probably never be achieved if any planning agency were to attempt to initiate a conventional “planning process.”

Instead, a process is emerging in which many stakeholders and the public at large are shaping their community’s future, instead of planners shaping it for them. Several NGOs serve as catalysts and ombudsmen with whom local people are comfortable. The loosely coordinated effort has several very different but interrelated and interdependent components and is appropriately interdisciplinary, something most planning agencies are ill-prepared to embrace.

In any community-based revitalization success, it never matters what initiates the civic process and begins to galvanize local people to solve a particular problem. This underscores a most significant point: the process, not the product or project, is critical. That process is the true test of community revitalization. The strength of the participatory process determines the strength of the revitalization.

This is why the varied NGO groups are so important and already so effective in raising awareness, activating the public and initiating projects crucial to the economic, social and democratic rebuilding of the country. The NGO sector, primarily funded by private foundations, appears to be supplying most of the guidance and leadership.

Fundamentally, what is important is that genuine public involvement needs to happen IN communities and communication and cooperation must also exist AMONG communities which helps create regional cooperation. A stable process for civic participation needs to exist that maintains itself even with frequent changes in electoral officials.

OŽIVENÍ-BOHEMIAN GREENWAYS

Oživení-Bohemian Greenways is another organization using the Greenway concept as a community revitalization tool. Started and headed by Petr Štěpánek,⁴³ a former director of Czech Greenway/Zelené Stezky, Oživení-Bohemian Greenways focuses on heritage trails development. Bohemian Greenways works with communities, mayors, local environmentalists and other active citizens or groups of citizens, such as soccer

players—a soccer team exists in every Central European village—firemen, women associations, and hunters. Bohemian Greenways helps convert local ideas into an administratively acceptable form and helps to fundraise. The most advanced program is the Litavka Greenway southwest from Prague. It has a bike route for road bikes, bike trail for mountain bikes and foot path for pedestrians and horses and a mining heritage trail. Fifteen villages and municipalities are involved in the project. Greenway Elbe is a half-finished project which will carry cyclists from Prague to Dresden on the Prague-Dresden Bike Path. Bohemian Greenways is also working on a bike path system in Prague.

PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SPACES (PVP)

The reactivation of public spaces is an interesting challenge that is not unique to the Czech Republic. It is not an accident that every village, town and city in Central Europe has a medieval square that was for centuries the center of civic life. Historically, these public squares were where public life occurred, where activities of commerce, communication and leisure took place and where the character and soul of a community were defined. **Pride of place, a necessary ingredient for a caring committed local population, is difficult, if not impossible, without an active, well-maintained public space that cradles tradition and culture and assures continuity.**

Democratic discourse is a natural occurrence in active public squares. Thus, under both the Nazis and the Communists, most public squares were purposely undermined. Some were transformed into parking lots, bus depots or filled in with the construction of a large building, such as the state-run department store. Some public squares were left untouched. However, places for people to gather—the venues for social discourse such as cafes, multiple benches and farmers’ markets—were discouraged.

The Communists encouraged—in some cases forcibly required—the emptying out of historic centers. Many were not demolished or built upon. Such historic places were viewed as either decadent or bourgeois. Public events, schools and residential life shifted into new, high-rise housing blocks outside of the center. In some urban centers, there is an unexpected benefit to that Communist-era policy of de-population of centers. The rich concentration of architecturally significant buildings and public spaces survived substantially intact. They stand ready for renewal.

In 1994, Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a New York City-based NGO, launched a demonstration project in the Czech Republic focused primarily on the reactivation of public squares as a means of rebuilding communities. PPS specializes in assisting communities in the U.S. to enliven public spaces as a critical step in

⁴³ Petr Štěpánek, born and raised in the Czech Republic, earned a Masters degree in molecular biology from The Charles University, 1990, was a member of the City of Prague Assembly, during the mid-nineties (’91–’96), a teaching assistant at SUNY HSC Brooklyn, 1998, spokesperson for the Ministry of the Environment, 1997.

any revitalization effort. The PPS strategy can be a catalyst for rebirth with great long-term potential. It involves the public in creating a vision for its community's future. It promotes grass-roots initiatives that emerge from the vision and are implemented by the community. By keeping those initial efforts modest in scale, visible short-term results are possible.

Through PPS efforts in five communities in the Czech Republic, a public process was reintroduced and residents and businessmen got involved in civic life. Small, practical projects were initiated. Modest successes were achieved. Long term potential was demonstrated. However, limitations of local management minimized the program's lasting impact. The effort was restructured under the auspices of the Environmental Partnership and renamed the Partnership for Public Spaces (PVP). Jitka Ficová, a landscape architect, was hired as director.

Now, as a Czech-based initiative, PVP offers a variety of services. It has worked for a one- to three-year period with 15 communities to improve public spaces. Each community gets a small grant, technical assistance, training, participation in workshops, fundraising assistance, and so forth. PVP also provides communities around the country with technical materials for the regeneration of public spaces. Workshops and seminars are organized to share success stories among communities. Materials on techniques for public participation are published.

The planning weekends are probably one of PVP's most significant accomplishments. These special event weekends bring people in the community together to envision and plan public spaces. Attendance has been far greater than anticipated, and during 10 such weekends up to 150 attended each one. The significance of these gatherings reaches many levels, but two are of particular consequence. Public spaces serve as important gathering places in democratic societies, where people come together informally, exchange ideas, sometimes argue about and sometimes resolve differences. Whatever the activity, they come together as equals and not as strangers, critical to an integrated society. Such places were either drastically undermined or totally eliminated under prior regimes and are important communal elements to be revived. Secondly, giving people a voice in the shaping of their own community is a new experience in this region and another critical element of a genuinely democratic society. A "how-to" video was produced by PVP from these weekends. The video and technical assistance material help other communities initiate the process.

New Life in Village of Zahrádky

PVP, of course, also works directly with individual communities. In the case of the small village of Zahrádky, Mayor Eliška Novotná, an energetic and innovative

sociologist, contacted PVP for assistance. A public space in the village of Zahrádky was upgraded and given new life. The success of that project was made possible by a dynamic mayor with vision and energy. An active leader, whether an elected official or NGO activist, makes small, positive change more likely to occur. Choosing to target assistance to such places is wise PVP policy.

Zahrádky is a village with a rich cultural and social life. Through meetings involving the town council and the public, two projects were initiated. One, creation of a parklike public space near the village pond appropriate for outdoor meetings and cultural events. Two, creation of a public square across from the town hall. PVP helped facilitate the public process, gave technical assistance, and financed design work. During the public process in which residents were meaningfully involved, the projects were modified. An old dairy production building was demolished across from the town hall, to create the public square. Trees were planted. A fountain was installed. Wisely, necessary underground infrastructure work, not related to the fountain, was done at the same time, doubling the efficiency of the effort.

The town hall bustles with community activity, enthusiastically sponsored by the mayor with PVP assistance. Art workshops teach the traditional crafts of woodcarving, basketweaving, fabric weaving, lacing, flower arranging and sculpting salt-dough figures. One-week courses are offered in crafts for teachers from outside the community so the teaching of those crafts is possible in other communities. Relearning traditional crafts is a popular idea, especially since such traditions were either discouraged or destroyed under Communism. A weekly newsletter is produced in the town hall informing the public of different activities.

The Zahrádky project illustrates several levels of PVP success, which can also be found in other PVP-sponsored communities: The interdisciplinary nature of PVP projects; the bringing together of the general public, organizations and elected officials; the reactivating of communal places; the value of modest, short-term projects; and, the educational value of each success.

Philanthropist Supports Activists

In a totally different case, PVP was enlisted by the town of Slavičín. Here, Jan Pivečka, a wealthy shoe manufacturer, became a major local philanthropist after a group of young nature conservationists came to his house seeking help to save migrating frogs that were getting killed by cars while crossing the roads. Pivečka supported the frog rescue and then donated forest land at the edge of town for a volunteer-created park. The town and the Nature Conservationists maintain it. For the park, students from the Art Academy in Prague were

invited in summer to come and create animal sculptures for children to play on. The sculptures are quite charming. Combined with carved log benches and some basic play equipment, like seesaws, the park has become quite a communal gathering place for young and old, relieving some of the crowd pressure felt in a forest park on another side of town.

Pivecka and the Nature Conservationists have worked on several projects since 1993, including the creation of a headquarters for the nature group. A stork with a frog in its mouth became the logo for the Jan Pivecka Foundation with the slogan, “Never Give Up.”

PVP has evolved in a somewhat different direction from that originally intended. While highly appreciated playgrounds and neighborhood parks fill a long neglected need, the focus emphasized by Project for Public Spaces was on the broader issues of community revitalization. For that broader vision, the public spaces of town and city centers represent multiple opportunities to confront larger communal challenges of community visioning, traffic calming and fostering local businesses. That remains the challenge which PVP still has the opportunity to pursue.

RESTORATION OF THE JEWISH CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SOUTH BOHEMIA

A Project of the Rožmberk Society in Cooperation with the Jewish Community of Prague—Visit To Cemetery of Jindřichův Hradec

The issue of Czech Jewish culture presents an interesting and significant challenge. Before the Holocaust, Czechoslovakia had the smallest Jewish population of Central Europe. Poland had the largest. Despite its small numbers, the Jewish population had a large impact on Czech culture. This becomes apparent in many ways, particularly in discovering that almost every community seems to have had a Jewish segment whose members often played a significant role in the larger community. In many towns, for example, Jews were important merchants and shopkeepers, operating in the town center. When Jews were shipped off en masse to concentration camps, some business centers were decimated. Sometimes the heart of the business district was wiped out. Many have barely recovered since. Reportedly, the majority of shopkeepers occupying the stores facing the square in Telč, for example, were Jewish. After the war, the businesses never really recovered and Telč, as magical a place as it is, seems like a stage set with little viable business occurring in the center.

Czech Jewish history dates back to the 9th century and is just beginning to be explored in a few places around the country, and any program that advances that effort is significant on many levels. First, it is important

for Czechs to understand the role all groups have played in their history, whether German, Roma, Jewish or other. Secondly, as the Rožmberk Society⁴⁴ notes, uncovering this history, giving it the respect it is due and celebrating its contribution to the country helps stem anti-Semitism, something that is unfortunately cropping up in different places in Central Europe.

As a result of the Holocaust and later Communist policies, the Jewish communities virtually disappeared, and now fewer than 6,000 or five percent of the pre-war numbers remain. Many Jewish buildings were destroyed or converted to uses that erased any semblance of Jewish use. Cemeteries, where they remain, are often the last local evidence of a Jewish presence. Approximately 350 cemeteries have been identified. They are all in various states of decay and none are in active use. Most are now owned by the Jewish community of Prague that can not possibly raise enough money to solve the countrywide problems.

The restoration of one such cemetery in the town of Jindřichův Hradec has become a priority project of the Rožmberk Society, a historic preservation organization dedicated to uncovering local history and incorporating it into the popular landscape and visitor sites. They established an educational walking and biking trail around a pond in Jindřichův Hradec and are establishing a village historical museum for the nearby village of Kojakovice. Working with the Jewish Community of Prague, cemetery owner, the Rožmberk Society wants to restore the cemetery and develop it as a historic and educational site.

Broad Interest in Jewish History

This project was initiated and is spearheaded by a local woman, Olga Černá, and her Dutch boyfriend, Robert Durfler, neither of whom is Jewish. Both are dedicated, energetic and strongly committed to the undertaking. The mayor of Jindřichův Hradec is very supportive of the cemetery restoration effort and just the initiation of the effort itself has inspired useful public discussion and exploration of local history. The mayor's wife, it turns out, has a Jewish grandparent, a discovery she made only recently. This kind of discovery—the presence of a Jewish relative on the family tree—is not uncommon throughout Central Europe. The case of the mayor's wife is interesting because with the mayor speaking of it so openly and proudly, the effort to combat anti-Semitism is advanced in subtle ways.

Among the goals of the Rožmberk Society's effort are the fighting of anti-Semitism and the raising of public awareness about the history of the rural Jewish communities in the Czech Republic. The restoration of

⁴⁴ The Rožmberk Society started with a focus on heritage preservation and expanded to sustainable development issues.

the cemetery and associated buildings in Jindřichův Hradec along with the burial records⁴⁵ is one of six such sites in Southern Bohemia. This site includes the cemetery, a burial preparation building (quite holy according to Jewish tradition) and a caretaker's house. All are in poor condition. Restoration plans call for establishment of public education programs in an information and documentation center.

Because the synagogue and former Jewish school buildings are currently occupied by the Hussite Brethren, the cemetery and its constituent buildings are the last remaining evidence of Jewish tradition in Jindřichův Hradec that dates as far back as the 12th century. The cemetery is on a hilltop but slopes down to the bank of the Nezárka River. The oldest section is on the lowest portion of the hillside. Dirt washing down the slope has buried ancient tombstones. Part of the project goal is to uncover those gravestones, undoubtedly revealing new information, possibly dating back to the 9th century.

VILLAGE OF HOŠTETÍN

Some, if not the most, significant environmental programs supported by the Czech Environmental Partnership can be seen in this southeast Moravian region, particularly in the village of Hoštetín (population 320) and surrounding communities, where many of the critical issues and themes of this whole report come together. These issues include: holistic thinking about community; sustainable, low-cost and environmentally friendly development; building on the talents, energy and accumulated wisdom of a resident population; involving local residents in creating and implementing the solutions to local problems. The programs illustrated here are low-tech, modest in cost, job and entrepreneur-producing and sustainable without ongoing, expensive outside support. Significantly, these projects also demonstrate to the local populace how much can be done without waiting for outside help.

The White Carpathians is an often breathtaking patchwork landscape straddling the Moravian-Slovak border that, like many rural areas of Central Eastern Europe, had been buffeted by high unemployment and crises in agriculture and industry. This area of the White Carpathians was declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve in 1996. Here, old valued concepts, traditions and land practices have been revived without resorting to the expensive, high-tech answers to which so many post-Iron Curtain communities turned. This was not easy.

Until 1945, animals, such as sheep and cows, grazed in the lush green meadows. The Communists transformed

this agriculturally rich and productive region into factory farms, eliminating the diversity of Moravian farming. In some democratic, capitalist economies, a form of this “modernization” happened as well. The “scientific rationalization” of food production has occurred globally in all kinds of societies. Things don't automatically go back to the way they were, even where memory is strong. Cows, for example, are still kept in barns, as they have been for 50 years since the Communists halted the cows grazing in the field. Fruit farms, as well, were plentiful and once supported many villagers until destroyed by the Communists, but orchards are now only slowly being reintroduced. All this restoration work seems to depend on the leadership of environmental NGOs.

Except for the fortunate absence of the blight of heavy industry, this area suffered from most of the destructive impacts of the Communists beyond just agricultural damage. Existing conditions even before the former regime reflected traditional development dilemmas of most rural “underdeveloped” regions. Hoštetín was dependent on coal for fuel, had no sewage treatment facility, no infrastructure to accommodate growth, and no access to the nearby train station. Conditions could not be much worse but were typical of Czech villages for decades.

Bad as things appeared, essential assets were still in place on which to develop a renewal momentum — the assets of a traditional community built up over time with the character and personality of its residents. By having avoided in many ways the global trend of techno-centro developments of the post-World War II years and by retaining the elements of a traditional community — despite some negative development of the Communist era, especially in agriculture — these communities have the opportunity now to “get it right,” in other words to develop in a manner that reflects an authentic place and is economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable.

The Mayor Leads the Way

In Hoštetín, most importantly, a receptive mayor, Drahomír Orsák, a professional mason, and a dynamic young deputy mayor, Radim Machů, were looking to upgrade the village in every environmental way possible while still retaining the character. They were determined to do it without large financial investments in big projects. They have been instrumental in convincing local residents to try out new approaches and technologies. In developing its innovative programs, Hoštetín was aided by the Veronica Ecological Institute, the extraordinary environmental organization based in Brno, and by funding from the Partnership.

⁴⁵ Burial records are the most, and sometimes only, record for Jews to research the fate of relatives who might have perished in the Holocaust.

One big project is not transforming Hořetín. Several modest projects are — the key to small steps and long, enduring impact that is at the heart of so many of the stories in this report. An Atlas of Renewable Energy has been published illustrating on a map the several hundred installations of alternative energy sources in Southern Bohemia. This includes solar, wind, water, geothermal and biomass projects. To view the many dots on a map is to understand how many small things add up to big impacts.

Numerous Hořetín homes and public buildings have been converted from coal to solar. A low-cost, low-tech, natural reed-based sewage treatment plant that did not put the village into long-term debt was built. A stream running through the village has been cleaned up. A traditional fruit drying shed has been restored and put back into use. New crops of fruit trees have been planted. An old traditional farm has been preserved in a Land Trust. And a pedestrian path through the farm to the train station was created to make access easy to mass transit.

Solar Panels

A Veronica project called “Sun for the White Carpathians” starting in 1997 installed solar panels on 35 homes and public buildings in the region, seven of which are in Hořetín. The seven solar homes demonstrated a low-cost alternative to coal at 30,000 Kč (\$860) per house, half of which was paid for by the Partnership. Local people were trained to install the panels so future projects will continue to create local jobs. Other residents either have already followed or are considering installing solar panels in their own homes. Employees in five area businesses have been trained to assemble and install collectors. Yvonna Gaillyová, the creative and tireless Veronica director, is a physicist who developed the Veronica Ecological Institute as a widely respected think tank for sustainable development and energy saving projects. Gaillyová points out that these solar panels do the work of conventional technology that would produce about 1,500 kilograms (3,300 pounds) of carbon dioxide annually, one of the critical causes of the greenhouse effect. Gas lines don't come near Hořetín and won't in the near future, so gas was never an alternative to coal.

In 1997, technician Jaroslav Boleček was the first Hořetín resident to install the panels on his home. In a March, 1999, article in the Prague Post, Boleček told reporter Rene Jaki: “When some of my neighbors saw that [the system] works, and makes warm water even in winter, they installed them too. Now when I get together with guys in the pub, we show off whose system works better.” Boleček's family now saves more than 3,000 Kč per year on electricity. At this rate and assum-

ing the unlikely circumstance that there is no increase in the cost of electricity, the unsubsidized price will be repaid in 10 years. Each panel produces the equivalent of 2,000 kilowatt hours per year.

Sewage Treatment Plant

Hořetín is the first village in the White Carpathians to use a Kořenovka, a natural water filtration system, for sewage treatment. The system consists of two drain fields that process the water through beds filled with a special mixture of sand and gravel and planted with reeds. At the end is a collector pond for the clean water. Plants consume the nutrients from the sewage and transport oxygen to the bed which helps the aerobic bacteria decompose the sewage. Clear water flows out of the third field or basin. This system is suitable for small towns up to 1,000 people, for individual farms, single buildings and similar structures and even neighborhoods within larger communities. The maintenance costs are minimal. The mayor is the proud operator of the treatment plant and on a site visit captured and proudly displayed a light green frog, a bio-indicator of the cleanliness of the constructed wetland. The site had been polluted by raw sewage which killed just about everything in the nearby stream. The frogs had all but disappeared but have now returned.

The treatment plant capital costs were minimal and operation costs are similarly low. This contrasts with the common lament in the region that there is no money for such projects. When localities do raise the money for big, expensive high-tech projects through bonds, they place themselves deep in debt and limit opportunities to invest in other projects.

Significantly, the treatment system has had a major impact on the village. Hořetín had been prohibited from expanding because the district office feared that new home construction and additional inhabitants would spoil the village's water quality. Downstream is the reservoir for the region. Once the natural system was operational in 1997, the ban was lifted, permitting young families to build homes and not have to move away. Residents leaving villages and moving to cities is a problem throughout the region. Anything that improves life and encourages people to remain is beneficial all the way around.

The efficacy of this environmentally-friendly, cost effective treatment system is in evidence in various sites around the world but is still being discovered by the most advanced, industrialized societies, where disbelief and resistance to low technology is so strong. The resistance has nothing to do with the operational validity but is primarily due to the expensive and effective marketing campaigns and the vested interests of high-technology corporations.

An interesting article in *The New York Times* (July 18, 1999) illustrates just this point. The operator of a sewage treatment plant in Lloyd, New York, (population 9,000) about two hours north of New York City, heard about a system operating in Ecuador, just like the one in Hoštetín. Simple beds of marsh grass clean waste water as effectively as expensive, large-scale treatment plants with concrete tanks, steel pipes and electricity-hungry oxygen pumps.

John L. Jankiewicz, as Andrew C. Revkin reported in *The New York Times*, is the 49-year-old water and sewer administrator for Lloyd, on the job 28 years. When he heard a presentation about this “reed bed” treatment system in a Ecuadorian rain forest village that used no electricity and required hardly any maintenance, he traveled 3,300 miles to observe it, returning home fully convinced. He created a similar 30-by-50-foot patch of eye-level phragmites. The root systems of the phragmite weeds break down contaminants in waste water and purify it naturally. The marsh does what the capital-intensive mechanized system does at half the operation cost and works in all seasons, just as in Hoštetín and could also in so many Central European communities that have never had any treatment system.

There is an interesting added significance to the Lloyd story. A local business with 300 jobs was on the verge of leaving town because of a failed septic system too expensive to fix. A wetland was created instead, keeping the business and jobs in place. In addition, two local cider mills are building artificial wetlands to treat their annual autumn flood of unusable juice and other waste. These are very localized solutions, an approach not often thought about anywhere these days. Project planners usually talk only of big, capital-intensive systems to handle the needs of a whole community instead of smaller, localized solutions addressing smaller parts of the problem. Thus, experts would likely dismiss the Hoštetín success because the village is so small. Yet, no reason exists that this kind of system can not be used on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis in a community of any size. This technology, like any, needs to be operated properly.

Fruit Tree Restoration

Another innovative Veronica project is the reintroduction of organic fruit orchards. Veronica, together with other local ecological agencies, established the association, Traditions of the White Carpathians (TBK), that has a special logo guaranteeing the quality, origin and history of the fruit. At one time, pears, plums and apples were plentiful. The old varieties of apples, however, that are used to the tough climate of the White Carpathians, if grown conventionally with chemicals and other expensive processes, cannot compete with foreign imports that are

bigger and more attractive in appearance. If grown organically, however, and used for juice or as dried fruit, local apples can compete with international produce if labeled as a pure, natural product.

Local growers already cannot fill the demand. TBK has built the first juice-extraction plant in Hoštetín to buy apples from local growers and to produce a natural, unfiltered apple juice, carrying the TBK logo. Clearly this fruit orchard project is already a commercial success with great growth potential. Equally important is the preservation of unique fruit varieties and the traditional culture of the region. The TBK brand will include high quality natural products from the region, including dried fruit, juices, jams and handicrafts. “The idea is to develop a clear association with the White Carpathians region and its special qualities,” explains Partnership director Mirek Kundraťa.

KOSENKA ECOLOGICAL CENTER IN VALAŠSKÉ KLOBOUKY

Not far from Hoštetín, the Kosenka Ecological Center in Valašské Klobouky pursues similar programs to restore the environment, to develop environmentally positive commercial ventures and to preserve its traditions, culture and architectural landmarks of the region. This is the kind of combination most skeptics dismiss as unrealistic but this region shows it is all possible.

Kosenka is a 25-year-old local civic organization with a solid tradition of active volunteers. Headquarters are housed in a wonderful historic timber-framed farmstead maintained with all the traditional features. A variety of interesting educational programs are conducted here. A horse riding rental business is conducted out of the barn and in an adjacent apartment. Kosenka has gotten involved in local elections, established working relationships with local officials and is exploring other partnership arrangements.

One extraordinary Kosenka project is the placement of sheep back in the meadows they once filled. This serves a multitude of purposes. For one, the sheep naturally maintain the meadows. In one orchard field, for example, sheep now do what used to be done with heavy equipment. In effect, they mow the grass. At the same time, notes Kosenka director Miroslav Janík, sheep replace costly and time consuming equipment and provide meat and wool for sale.

Kosenka is working with one farmer-turned-sheep herder to establish a cooperative venture and helped purchase 30 sheep, placed on his 300 hectare farmstead. Kosenka also gets local residents to purchase a sheep (more if they want), and they share in proceeds. If the sheep has offspring, they are divided between the sheep

investor and herder. In this way, the herd will grow to everyone's benefit. A particular breed of sheep is chosen for this purpose, one that does not cluster on the land. These sheep spread out over the whole expanse and feed evenly across the landscape. This breed, however, does not offer a high quality wool. They are experimenting with using the sheep wool for insulation. If this experiment fails, Kosenka and the sheep herder will probably try something else until they succeed. The natural insulating material has the added benefit of supporting small wool producers whose sheep are now helping maintain the flowering meadow ecosystems, an important enough goal in itself.

In a lunch meeting with Kosenka members and mayors from nearby villages, the same refrain was heard about the need for water, sewer and gas facilities. But communities in this region actually do a lot for themselves despite scarce financial resources.

NGO Leadership Brings Results

Clearly, throughout the Czech Republic, as with the other three countries, many communities have important self-help initiatives underway because of the critical assistance of the NGO community. The Czech Partnership staff points out, however, that the EU SAPARD program should be an appropriate tool for upgrading projects around the country. Yet, they note that in the Czech Republic the decision-making is completely top-down. The project selection process is fully controlled by the government. For this program, NGOs were not involved in setting priorities and planning implementation and not even designated as potential recipients of assistance. Along with assistance to private enterprises and local governments, community-based not-for-profit organizations can also play an important role in stimulating communities in micro-regions to formulate their own vision and plan for their region. Not enough support exists to increase local capacity to absorb change or to advance micro-infrastructure projects instead of macro-infrastructure projects.

This kind of essential leadership comes from the NGO community. Their participation must occur in partnership with elected officials and local entrepreneurs. The Greenway takes the lead in South Moravia introducing new ways to develop without looking to big outside investment. Veronica and Kosenka and other NGO partners take the lead in the White Carpathians demonstrating that environmental and sustainable development projects make good economic sense and that environmental and economic issues should not be looked at separately. The Slavonice Renaissance Society, in the small town noted for its many buildings embellished with sgraffito, is developing a leadership position in South Bohemia demonstrating the value of cultural heritage in the revitalization process. SOS Prague has taken on the monumental task of introducing genuine public involvement in the Prague city planning process. Transportation For the 21st Century has assumed the formidable task of coordinating the various public transit advocacy issues and adding strength to the overarching importance of rebuilding the mass transit infrastructure. Nadace Via is working throughout the country stimulating community-based efforts and organizations. The Partnership for Public Space (PVP) is refocusing attention on the value and importance of public spaces to civic and economic health. These NGOs are only a drop in the bucket of the many that exist throughout the country.

The accomplishments of all these organizations are extraordinary and illustrate the enormous potential for future productive change. But their capacity and financial resources are extremely limited. In fact, their accomplishments far exceed what should be expected with limited funds. The Czech Partnership feels the lack of capacity and recognizes the need for more professional assistance, analyses of local potential, interpretation of local heritage, community visioning and implementation skills. How that challenge is addressed will reflect the genuine progress of the Czech Republic toward a truly civil society on a path of productive and sustainable growth.

HUNGARY

“Hungary—with a population of 10 million—has attracted more foreign direct investment than any other East European country, due mainly to an early start on economic reforms, investor-friendly policies and a privatization program under which Budapest sold the bulk of its leading companies and banks to foreign concerns.

“But a decade after the collapse of Communism, some formerly sanguine economists and policy makers are beginning to take a more sober view of the downside of foreign investment: the economic distortions and welfare-sapping effects that Western-style business can create.”⁴⁶

Clearly, multinational companies have gained dominant market positions throughout Central Eastern Europe but with the early generous tax breaks available “not available at the same time to local players,” complaints can be heard about the lack of a level playing field on which local players can have an equal chance. What seems to make many people unhappy is that the Western-style business growth and prosperity is not trickling down as promised and that a two-tiered society is growing. Pockets of prosperity do not make for a prosperous country.

In Hungary and in particular in Budapest, the large malls and real estate development problems described so far in this report exist in their most dramatic form. For this reason, these issues gained the attention of community development activists earlier than in the other three countries. The total square footage of shopping mall space in Budapest, for example, is already approaching Western European levels. According to the international real estate firm of Jones, Lange & LaSalle,⁴⁷ 276,000 square meters of shopping space has been built nationwide of which 190,000 square meters is in Budapest. Only 29 percent of the new mall space has secured tenants.

Every reason exists to expect similar circumstances to occur in other Central Eastern European countries. “Czech banks have long created headaches for their government,” *The Economist* noted.⁴⁸ “In 1995, the



government forked out more than 8 percent of GDP to clean up banks, and the taxpayer had already taken a big chunk of the bad loans of the two largest Czech banks.” Walter Hook of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) wrote in a report in the Spring of 2000 about the direct connection to troubling real estate and banking developments: “The Czech banking system, far less successfully privatized, remains the most vulnerable to a sudden deterioration in the quality of their real estate loans and direct holdings. Poland is farther behind in its commercial real estate development cycle, and its banking system is thought to be more stable, but there is much more suburban housing being built, and many industry experts believe the industry is already overheated and profit margins are already failing.”

The trends are clear. They happen faster in Hungary because the post-1989 property restitution process is easiest. Pre-Communist property claims can only be made for compensation from the government of the monetary value of the land, not for an actual property. Thus, the considerable number of properties tied up in long, legally complicated claim processes in the other three countries is not true in Hungary. Unencumbered property is more easily available for development. An earlier legal infrastructure for investors and a higher

⁴⁶ *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 1999.

⁴⁷ Much of the banking and real estate research for this section was provided by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, NYC.

⁴⁸ “Czech Banking: The Last Crisis?” June 24, 2000, p. 88.

GNP put Hungary ahead of the other three countries in these development trends.

The overconstruction that has resulted makes the real estate field highly unstable and with it the banking system. These conditions, coupled with weak regulatory practices, parallel circumstances that preceded the disastrous collapse and subsequent bailout of American banks in the 1980s. Banks hold real estate as loan collateral. When the value of that real estate collapses, which it always does in an overbuilt market, the banks go with it. Observers cite additional factors that make matters even worse.

Current rents in shopping malls, for example, are so high that even banks can't afford them. If banks can't afford to occupy space, observers wonder how shopkeepers can make a profit at these rents. The malls are being condominiumized by developers. The developer's profit is secure when the mall is converted to a condominium, but control of the mix of stores—critical to the success of any shopping mall—is thus abandoned. The retailers own their own space, often in both a downtown street site and a mall. Established retailers, in effect, are hedging their bets, keeping the downtown street site and opening a mall store. Once they see which direction better sales are going, many retailers will seek to sell off the less active site. As retailers do this, values will fall and the mortgage burden could overwhelm retailers left holding less profitable property.

Add to this a number of other factors, and the situation looks worse and worse.

- Banks reportedly are well aware of these precarious circumstances but are motivated to act because they are confident they will be bailed out by the government, i.e. the taxpayer. This has happened in Hungary before.
- Considerable mall construction is reportedly being carried out by the Ukrainian "Mafia," using this construction to launder money. If the market collapses, whatever they get out of it gives them more legal funds than they had before. (Money laundering of this kind, as well as of local ill-gotten gains is known to be going on all over Central and Eastern Europe.)
- In addition, some Hungarian banks are reportedly still holding defaulted loans from before 1989.

Now add to this the grim circumstances of the residential construction market. Housing subsidies before 1989 were only available for new construction. Available cleared land was only outside of cities. Most new housing was built by individuals without bank loans. Their location outside Budapest and other cities was inevitable without comparable help available for upgrading existing dwellings concentrated in cities. It is extremely difficult to secure loans for city dwellings since so many apartment houses have been condominiumized, and all the owners

in a building must want to borrow or no one can. This bizarre requirement makes the upgrading of urban dwellings almost impossible. Also, it is politically difficult to evict tenants or foreclose on mortgages. Thus, apartment owners buy apartments (sometimes multiple units), collect rents, let the property deteriorate and default on their mortgage. Regulations are minimal. Enforcement is meager. Official interference is rare. This is exactly what happened in American cities in the 1950s under the slum clearance programs that allowed property owners to let their buildings deteriorate while they collected rent and neglected loan payments, a fundamental cause of the decline of American cities. Without a dramatic change in these housing policies, the same process of gradual but guaranteed decline will occur here.

Until recently, the construction of new housing on the outskirts has been kept modest because bank loans were unavailable. All the banks are now gearing up to make mortgages available to lower income people for new homes. Again, money for new construction but not for rehabilitation is a policy guaranteed to undermine existing cities and towns. A new housing construction boom is expected in the next five years.

BUDAPEST

As might be expected from these factors, Budapest exhibits many problems described earlier for Cracow and Prague. The future does not bode well for Budapest on several levels. The official priority seems to be accommodating the car and the suburban commuter. No policy to encourage center-city living is apparent; on the contrary, many policies are clearly discouraging. Open space, small neighborhood parks, potential park spaces and appealing public buildings, like schools, are apparently being sold or available for sale to the highest bidder despite energetic resistance of various citizen activist groups.

Shopping malls are proliferating within the city with big garages attached. The longterm viability of so many malls—some of which are quite near one another—is questionable, as indicated earlier. The malls are almost entirely filled with chains, predominantly foreign-owned. They are clearly undermining the local economy. Four thousand small businesses have reportedly closed in Budapest.

This is an interesting dilemma. Surely, it is better for the city that this development occur within the city instead of outside in the countryside. And, in fact, these malls are not anti-urban in their design, despite big garages. Pedestrian access is as good as for most traditional department stores. These malls, for the most part, connect well to the street, rather than stand isolated from the street and adjacent buildings. Yet, little understanding

of their impact seems to be reflected in an apparent hands-off policy by the city. A limitation on mall size could go a long way to minimizing the negative impact on local businesses and traffic, but the possibility of imposing any kind of restrictions seems remote.

Predictable problems are exacerbated. Incentives seem to be available to mall developers without comparable resources available to local businesses. Tax benefits for new investment, such as malls, are reportedly available, for example, ONLY for expensive, large projects. Small and mid-size businesses are disqualified because they don't require large investments. An environmental impact review (EIS) apparently is of little or no consequence. One small Budapest development was stopped in an area of strong community opposition in 1994. On another site, however, a court reportedly ruled against a mall citing both construction permit and environmental impact problems but construction continued.

Simply put, land use regulations are minimal and poorly enforced. This is economically self-destructive for the city. Owners of healthy local businesses spend and live locally; distantly-owned businesses extract profits from the local economy and spend it elsewhere.

Incentives Favor Demolition

Regulations permit construction of new buildings as high as surrounding or nearby buildings, a clear incentive to demolish older buildings. For such an historic and architecturally rich city as Budapest, this is deadly. This nibbles away, building by building, at the overall appeal and livability of a city. Appreciation of the value of existing buildings, unless a special landmark, seems limited. Citizens are easily persuaded that some old buildings are "too far gone." Universally, that is frequently what the official assessment is because municipal engineers rarely want to take responsibility for suggesting that something old can be fixed, whether it is a building or a segment of infrastructure.

Sometimes it appears to be cheaper to build new. Often this is questionable. Demolition costs are usually not included in the calculations. The new construction is cheap in both quality and cost. And, the new will fall apart quicker than a well-renovated 100-year-old building. This is almost universally true.

This is strikingly apparent in the U.S. where shopping malls and office buildings built after World War II are falling apart faster and more dramatically than 100-year-old buildings that have never been renovated. Clearly today, nothing is built to endure beyond the life of a 20-year mortgage. Existing buildings anywhere, especially in Europe, that predate 1945 are of a better structural quality than anything built today. Only creative architectural and engineering expertise are required to make them

functionally modern. This does not mean new construction isn't called for under appropriate circumstances. If, however, existing buildings are not upgraded first, they continue to deteriorate and lose value. Eventually, only new construction occurs. Existing buildings deteriorate further and eventually are demolished. This happens slowly but surely, building by building, block by block. The historic character is inevitably diminished, if not lost entirely. The replacement is never as rich as the original.

CLEAN AIR ACTION GROUP, ACTIVE IN BUDAPEST ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

The Clean Air Action Group (CAAG), the leading coalition in Central Eastern Europe devoted to transportation and sprawl-related issues, started 12 years ago out of concern for air pollution levels. After a survey had demonstrated that 90 percent of kindergarten kids had a high concentration of lead, CAAG concentrated mainly on transportation issues. The high level of lead in the air is due to vehicular traffic. The number of cars keeps growing, but occasional victories do occur. A big victory was keeping a planned road out of an important Budapest park, Hamzsabégyi, a mecca for families with children. CAAG gained a lot of press attention from the fight.

Considerable understanding and concern is evident among CAAG members about the interconnections of the urban issues on which they are focused. Vehicular traffic increase, public transit decrease, public space diminishment, urban housing deterioration, mall proliferation were all part of a discussion relating to the most obvious challenges they are confronting in Budapest.

With a membership of more than 90 environmental and community organizations, CAAG has orchestrated a number of achievements in recent years, through its policy analysis, public education, grassroots organizing and advocacy work. CAAG has played a constructive and persistent role in efforts to increase government support for mass transit and railroads. This work is leading to the reconstruction of the old railway link between Hungary and Slovenia that will improve freight rail connections between Russia, Ukraine and Slovenia's Adriatic ports. CAAG's public education and advocacy efforts in the transportation arena has had a big impact, including helping to halt several costly and environmentally damaging highway projects.

CAAG is also a model NGO focused on urban development and is well positioned as a leading voice in the region to spotlight the destructive impact of urban sprawl on communities of all sizes.

The number of people leaving Budapest for suburbs is accelerating. Not surprising. Urban life is being

nibbled away. No official policies grapple with the causes. In fact, official policies make things worse. According to CAAG representatives, the current population is 1.8 million, a loss reportedly⁴⁹ of 200,000, since 1989. Sixty per cent of the car pollution is from out-of-town vehicles. Although there are 15 railway lines, parallel to almost all of the main roads leading to the city, only a few of them are used for local or suburban transit. Transit costs are rising at a much higher rate than inflation. Service is down. The city transit budget is about one third the 1989 level. The streetcar system has old Soviet tracks and equipment that is energy consuming, inefficient and uncomfortable. In recent years, several lines were cut and only one new short extension built on one line. Only a few of the tracks have been upgraded. Some traffic lanes are designated “bus only,” but enforcement is meager. New Hungarian buses are cleaner but official policies do not encourage mass transit use over cars. The national and city governments each contribute 30 percent of the local transit budget. Forty percent comes from fares.

Parking Anarchy

Sixteen percent of Budapest residents use a car daily. Unofficial, free parking is everywhere, wherever someone can fit a car without using a parking facility that costs money. CAAG has been fighting for parking fees for years, but the idea of paying for parking generates universal outrage among car owners. (Parking lots that charge 5000–7000 forints a month are just about empty. People just refuse to spend money on parking.) However, parking anarchy continues to be evident almost everywhere, with cars parked on sidewalks, sideways, backwards and at angles.

Eighty percent of the population in central city use mass transit, 60 percent overall when suburbanites are counted. As more people move out of the city, this ratio will change. This creates a momentum that feeds on itself. Officials predictably will cite a diminishing population to justify all sorts of harmful policies which then abet the forces driving more people out. That is the pattern elsewhere. No reason exists for it not to be true here. “The car still represents freedom” remains the bottom line in most people’s minds. The consequences are ignored.

SELLING OFF OR TEARING DOWN THE CITY

To illustrate how Budapest’s livability is being officially undermined, Erzsebet Beliczay, a CAAG vice president and an architect with considerable experience in transportation and land-use planning, took me to see a public school—considered one of the best in the city—

being sold by the city to a bank. CAAG is working with the parents to prevent the sale. “Not everything which is valuable should be privatized just for economical reasons,” she notes. “If the community has something of value, it should remain in the community.”

The city’s rationale is that Budapest’s population is diminishing. Therefore, five schools could be consolidated into four. This accelerates a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more school quality is diminished, the more city life is undermined, the more young families leave. The more they leave, the more justification for shortsighted selloffs.

The school building is a grand 19th century mansion, comfortably set back from the sidewalk in the centrally-located 6th district. The school has a pleasant front yard and rear play area and extraordinary interior decorative details. Every teacher and student must feel privileged to be in such a building, a subtle but important advantage if you want children to feel valued. The Russian occupying forces used this building for the secret service but in 1956, it became a school. The location is quite central, with a trolley stop at the corner. This is considered one of the best schools in the city, a motive of many of the families whose kids attend, for not moving to the suburbs. Twenty percent of the students come from other districts, including Roma. The school holds events, including one with a modern Roma band, to call attention to the school sale fight.

Demolishing a Farmers’ Market

Another site being sold for development is a wonderful old, three-story active and vibrant market building whose activity spills out onto the adjacent sidewalk. A couple of dozen farmers sell from street stalls. At the end of the 19th century, when the population of Budapest tripled and the city had its biggest building boom, the government built a network of public markets to enable consumers to buy directly from farmers and to keep prices low. A few functioning ones remain. This phenomenon occurred in both European and American cities. Few market buildings or public markets are left anywhere. But in the U.S. and some western European cities, vestigial markets, now highly valued, are being restored and enjoying new success. Consumer hunger for fresh produce is universal, especially in areas where it has been lacking. This Budapest market building, however, will be demolished to make way for a supermarket. And while a few seasonal stalls, the city promises, will be retained on the street, no fresh vegetable shops will be left in the district. One can be sure that the supermarket produce will not be similarly fresh.

Understandably but unfortunately, so many Central Europeans are overjoyed just to have supermarkets. What a privilege after so many years of little choice and meager

⁴⁹ Most of this information is based on CAAG figures.

quality. Regional farmers, however, offer a product of higher quality than supermarkets that often import the goods from a great distance. The high-quality produce that only comes direct from farmers might disappear before the consumers realize what they're missing.

E-MISSION ASSOCIATION

E-Mission is an organization started by students and focused on environmental decline and sprawl. It is based in Nyiregyháza, a city of 120,000 persons, 240 km from Budapest, three hours by car or train. Tamás Cselöszki, director of E-Mission, works with CAAG.

In 1987, a teacher established a summer camp for students to study nature, energy conservation, bird watching, and to spur environmental awareness. E-Mission is an outgrowth of the camp which sponsors an environmental education program to train teachers, as well as students. Efforts include advocacy of sustainable development and citizen participation in the local governmental process.

E-Mission fights the proliferation of shopping centers since they cause economic decline in this northeast region of Hungary (Szabolcs-Szatmár) which has one of the highest rates of unemployment and lowest rates of income. Many foreigners, especially Romanians, come to the region from the east to shop. Four foreign-owned centers of 15–20,000 square meters filled with low-priced chain stores targeting different groups already exist. The centers are not big but cumulatively have vacuumed out a lot of economic life from local centers. One additional shopping center, and apparently only one, has local businesses. All reportedly are below profit expectations.

After 1989, many people without the money or expertise started mostly selling food and beverages in their garages. Some sell second-hand clothes. Many survive though government support for local businesses does not exist. A 1988 study suggests the need of help for locals to enable them to compete. Some toy and food businesses seem strong enough to survive. E-Mission is working to start a cooperative purchasing program to help small businesses buy at discounts comparable to high-volume chains.

The shopping center conflict was the first to set E-Mission at loggerheads with the municipality, according to Tamás Cselöszki. The organization was criticizing the regional investment policy, primarily selling municipally-owned land to foreign shopping-center developers, and demanded participation in decision-making. At first, the municipality refused to budge, saying that only such regulations that pertained to construction laws and zoning would be respected. This seems to be the attitude in much of Central Europe. Throughout Central Europe,

zoning laws seem to focus only on such limited matters as setbacks, height, safety and, maybe, traffic. The more significant issues, like environmental and economic impact that relate to the long-term erosion of existing communities and economies, don't hold much weight.

In spring 1998, E-Mission representatives were finally permitted to attend Council meetings. Active protests occurred in the summer of 1999. That fall, serious negotiations between the organization and the municipality occurred resulting in a promise by the government in December of 1999 that no new sales would be consummated. Also, E-Mission succeeded in gaining minor modifications in the design of one center to diminish negative impacts on adjacent residential areas. This was an important victory. Yet, a better designed harmful project is just that, a better designed harmful project. The municipality has acknowledged the right of citizen involvement in local decisions, a big step, but only time will tell if the commitment is fulfilled.

E-Mission hopes to raise these issues in the next local elections in 2002.

It is interesting to note that the broad efforts of both CAAG and E-Mission are actively supported by the Hungarian Environmental Partnership. This group, more than the other three Partnership Offices, seems more aware of and focused on sprawl, the exodus to the suburbs from Budapest, and deteriorating conditions in Budapest that exacerbate this trend. What happens in Budapest will have enormous economic, social and political impact on the future of Hungary. The conditions in Budapest parallel other cities and should be an important alert to citizens and officials elsewhere.

THE AMBER TRAIL/HUNGARY

The Amber Trail, the cross-border program linking Cracow to Budapest through Slovakia, is so far least developed in Hungary. In the region where local trail connections should be made, few appropriate community-based partners have been identified. The conditions stalling Amber Trail development are quite fascinating.

Hungarian Partnership Director Zsuzsa Foltányi says of Partnership activities in the region north of Budapest to the Hungarian border, "We're seen not as outside catalysts" of positive change but "just outsiders from Budapest and not of the community." These parochial communities are close to the capital, but their social development has been very different. There is a tradition of "very radical environmentalism and Communist community developers. Community Centers in villages were run to keep people quiet. We are seen as Budapest-based and arrogant. We're unable to bring together different wings to understand common problems."

Furthermore, Hungarian tourists gravitate to western Hungary around Lake Balaton, the largest lake in Central Eastern Europe, or northern Slovakia in the mountains, two especially beautiful areas. It does not yet occur to many tourists to venture east instead. The undeveloped nature of the region should be of great appeal to tourists, but promoting tourism here is a new idea. Techniques to stimulate local economic development are unfamiliar. “The Amber Trail is the best marketing tool,” Foltányi says, but asks, “Are we best as movement developer? This marketing activity is not within our scope.”

None of the four Partnerships, in fact, have marketing skills but have finally begun to realize they need them.

The entire Amber Trail Greenway development emerged slowly due to the lack of face-to-face exchanges among staffers of the three Partnerships. Eventually, some foreign trips of staff members to the Czech Greenway and Ireland, were real eye-openers. “We began to understand the vision,” says Foltányi.

Foltányi adds: “Ours are not written cultures. People believe something when they see it. We need to find coordinators among opinion leaders, whoever they are, i.e. priests, mayors, anybody, and we need more cooperation among them. We’re not willing to exaggerate or overemphasize democracy in order to create local need. First we need an organizational infrastructure. We’re now thinking to start with teachers working with local curriculum.” This comment is particularly interesting in light of the Szentendre example to be described and the Greenworks frog program in Rytro, Poland, started by a teacher and described earlier. Both projects were started and led by teachers.

ESZTERGOM

The Amber Trail should go through both Esztergom and Szentendre. These two old, intact communities are extremely appealing as tourist attractions and already have citizen-based activity underway. There is a natural fit between Amber Trail objectives and the work of the community organizations.

Esztergom grew up around a cathedral, the third largest classical cathedral in Europe. The cathedral was built in the mid-19th century on ground devastated by Turkish invasions. Communism made few inroads here because of the strength of the church. Thus, Esztergom remained a small city, and no large-scale Socialist housing or heavy industry was built here. Winds, however, bring heavy pollution from industrial areas. Old thermal baths exist, but there does not seem to be any investment to upgrade or renovate the accommodations. The water levels diminished due to heavy draining for mining and will take years to revive.

Under the previous regime, one large complex of residential, office and retail units was built on the main square, but a smaller square remains across the road with a post office, town hall, banks and other businesses. This traditional square is charming and with appropriate attention could function as an important gathering place, a real center.

Many qualities attractive to visitors exist in Esztergom, including the town center and three campsites in the hills just outside of town. But Jakab, who seems to be the city’s chief tourism thinker, was not inclined to take visitors anywhere but to the church. He recited every last detail, the conventional litany of statistics, such as pounds and origin of marble, height of spaces, size of dome, organ, and so forth. It took the comment, “I hear you have a beautiful city here that visitors should be interested in seeing too,” before we descended from the hill to the center, walked along the charming little tributary of the Danube that snakes through town and on which a few home-made house boats are docked, walked some of the quaint streets and ended up in the town center with its assortment of upgraded and not-yet-upgraded buildings. Renovation of a theater on the square was underway, a potential site for interesting and lively future events.

The challenge is for the community to combine its appreciation of the history and architectural value of the place with a vision of how to incorporate it into strategies for positive change and economic growth within the historical context. Amber Trail coordinators could help community activists broaden the local vision to use the tourism appeal to advance sustainable development.

SZENTENDRE AND THE SALAMANDER ASSOCIATION ⁵⁰

The extraordinary leadership of Edit Kosztolányi at the Forest School Foundation in Szentendre is as innovative and effective as can be. It parallels the dynamic work in Slovakia of Vlasta Körnerová described earlier.

Szentendre is a gem-like Baroque town, with its quaint buildings and cobblestone streets. Unfortunately, it is overrun by tourists. Local businesses in the center have been almost totally displaced by touristy kitsch. The Forest School and the Salamander Association’s citizen-based activity is responsible for what local life and character is left.

The school, in the town center, provides after-school environmental activities for local children. A walk through the building reveals a great spirit, energy and level of creativity even after the building is empty of

⁵⁰ Interestingly, a young man from the city government who acts as liaison with community groups joined the interview. His job was created after the fall 1998 election, a response of the local government as a “gesture to show it appreciates civic involvement.”

students and study. Children's art is everywhere. All the artwork seems to be made of recycled material. The subjects are nature or conservation. Posters and activity information are plentiful.

Teachers Start the Process

The school is a culmination of an interesting process that started quite modestly. In 1987–88, 18 public school teachers came together (they had 210 students among them) to discuss environmental issues. They persuaded the school canteen to stop selling chocolate and to only sell healthy food, like sandwiches. They persuaded each school to separate garbage, bought the necessary containers and organized pick-ups. As volunteers, they created an environmental curriculum for the public schools. One thing led to another, and eventually, a major environmental effort emerged focused on removing solid waste such as batteries and medical refuse. The town now has a full waste collection system. In achieving all this, the teachers convinced the local government to accept the idea of public participation in planning and implementing government programs. A civic coalition, the Salamander Association, was soon organized and is increasingly involved in city planning and environmental control.

In 1992, the school was founded to fill a demand from students and parents, says Edit Kosztolányi. The school requirement that students participate in civic improvement projects ends at age 14. Students wanted to continue beyond this but with an environmental focus. They enjoyed joint activities, collecting scrap, cleaning the forest and town, walking in the hills to plant trees, learning about nature conservation, collecting dead batteries, monitoring city services.

Solid waste seems to be the environmental issue on which the Salamander Association is most focused. They advocate garbage removal fees and tax relief for shops selling deposit bottles. Edit points out that Hungary lags behind western Europe in waste collection standards. They are a founding member of a 25-member national lobbying group, the Waste Working Group, one of the strongest national lobby networks. Since 1990, a national waste management law has been in preparation. The local government resisted requiring garbage separation and establishing a designated waste yard. These concepts are slow to emerge, even with money in the budget. No landfill is allowed in or around the city because it is a natural biosphere.

"I love going back to successes," says Edit. She doesn't let failures defeat her. "If something doesn't work, we move on."

In the 1980s, some of the early teacher participants, including Kosztolányi, had tried to stop a major road

coming through town. They lost, and the road unfortunately divides the town. But when McDonald's tried to come, the story was different. Edit enjoys telling this story:

"I was a teacher in a local school and by chance I saw on the principal's desk a letter from the city government to get kids to sign a petition saying they wanted McDonald's. The letter had gone to all the schools. We called a public meeting. We expected 10–30 and 40 showed up. We wrote the local government opposing this and contacted national organizations for support.

"We already had 54 eateries in town. We already had a waste crisis and didn't want one more waste producer. And McDonald's is modern and alien for a baroque city. We circulated our own petitions but we gave people a true choice. The children carried the petitions to restaurant owners and to the market place where McDonald's wanted to locate. While children were doing this, we convinced the city council to vote against it. That land is owned by the city and could be sold."

At the time, there were no privately owned restaurants. Other communities are facing the same problem and are learning from the experience in Szentendre. "Times have changed," Edit notes. "Now, we're on the internet and city representatives can read citizen opinions in this new way."

Cleaning the Stream

Another very impressive long-term project is the clean-up of Bükkös, a stream that runs through the city which in the late 1970s paved the banks and effectively killed everything along one stretch where fishing used to take place. By the 1980s, the fish had vanished. Waste water poured in. One kind of bird that feeds on small fish disappeared. Over time, the vegetation overgrew much of the cement. The Forest School Foundation used it as an educational site for children to learn about both the environmental conditions and how to affect change. The students took photographs in front of houses of the trash that was ending up in the stream. They tested water quality. They published the photographs and test results in the newspaper. This brought public attention to the situation. They advocated allowing the cemented stream banks to disintegrate and cleaning up and leaving natural the untouched stretch. They succeeded on all fronts and beyond. Public clean-up days are now scheduled with government supplying the tools and bags. Collection days are established. Only one discharge point remains, and that building has been identified and required to connect to the sewer system. A bio-indicator crab has returned to the stream. A delightful small park has been created at the bridge equipped with bike racks and children's play equipment. A pub has opened across the street.

The students who worked on this project have gone on to become a research biologist, a school official, a civic activist involved in health protection, a community historian and oral history recorder. All, Edit says, have realized how important the built environment is, along with the natural. “I never realized Szentendre was so beautiful,” one of them told her.

The Salamander Association, The Forest School Foundation and all the citizen initiatives evident in Szentendre add up to an appropriate final example in this report of bottom-up, grass-roots activity.

Szentendre, as has been illustrated by projects throughout this report, is the site of a rich assortment of local citizen energy so necessary for the regeneration of local places, development of civil society and strengthening of a newly democratic nation.

What is most remarkable about all the communities and civic organizations presented here is that so many more like them exist in all four countries. We hope this report will accelerate the recognition of their individual and combined strengths and make clear how important continued support is.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Contradictions and Paradoxes of the Legacy of Communism

Poland, more independent under the Communist regime and alone among the former Soviet bloc, never collectivized its agriculture, leaving most of its six million farms smaller than 50 acres. Without the cooperative ownership tangle, Poland was quicker to remove restrictions about private business and development and is now witnessing unbridled suburban development. Individually and in groups, houses are appearing all over the landscape. In the middle of their land, for example, some Poles are building houses without requisite infrastructure—a road, plumbing, electricity, running water. Extra-deep wells, leaky septic tanks, coal or wood-burning heating systems have negative environmental impacts. Providing the infrastructure to avoid these impacts would only legitimize the sprawl. Instead, land use regulations should provide for compact development and preclude sprawl.⁵¹

Regulations are minimal. The laissez-faire attitude—“the free market will take care of things”—disguises the intractable and inevitable problems that lie ahead. As the hillsides, open spaces and incomparable vistas disappear, so will the reason that people want to locate in these places in the first place.

Czech and Slovak cooperative farms greatly altered the landscape by eliminating small fields, taking out allees of trees and sometimes ruining the soil. But they did not build in the landscape, and great vistas remain. Czech and Slovak co-ops are so difficult now to disassemble, chop up and return to private ownership that the random suburban development with houses in the middle of fields witnessed in Poland does not appear in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Instead, as has been shown, some Czechs and Slovaks are now trying to save the fields and meadows created by the co-oping of the land, while restoring the diversified agriculture of pre-Communist times.

Czech and Slovak intellectuals and traditions were highly valued before 1989 because intellectuals were driven underground and traditions suppressed.

Forbidden fruit. Following the revolution they were celebrated and openly revered. Kafka, Dvořák, Kundera, and Klíma were the national heroes. Sports heroes, like Martina Navrátilová, Dominik Hašek and Ivan Lendl were on as high a pedestal as authors and poets, not an overarching one. After 10 years, however, this is changing. With capitalism and consumerism, western television, film and music are now in the ascendancy. National literary heroes, theater and film have lost audience share.⁵²

Unwittingly, the former regime preserved traditional towns and villages by drawing people out of those centers and moving them into high-rise housing blocs considered quite modern at the time of their construction. The towns, villages and cities ignored or overlooked in this process were not thus “modernized” or “renewed” out of existence. They exist intact now, ripe for renewal of the most productive kind. These places are probably the region’s greatest undervalued asset on which to rebuild. The West lost so many of these appealing and livable communities during the pave-over planning years. The West is now trying to recreate just these kinds of places.

This is about preservation of living, functional places in which historic buildings happen to predominate. Thinking about preservation in this manner is not common in Central Europe. For that matter, it is not common in the West either, but in the West it is rapidly becoming more so. Historic preservation in much of Central Europe is considered elitist, appropriate for castles but not understood for its potential for vernacular buildings and whole towns as organic communities.

⁵¹ Two erroneous notions have an impact here. One is the belief in the absolute right to do what one wants with his land. The other is a belief that a property owner building in the middle of his land today is in the tradition of the landed gentry. The parallel between the pre-modern, 18th century tradition of the landed gentry living on estates the size of villages and the suburban housing today in the era of the automobile is ludicrous. A useful rationalization at best.

⁵² In some quarters, this seems to be changing again. Peter S. Green, Eastern European correspondent for the *International Herald Tribune*, wrote an article entitled “Politics and Czech Art: The Party Isn’t Over” in *The New York Times* (Sunday, May 21, 2000). Noting a number of exhibits, Green wrote: “...political art seems to be making a comeback in the Czech Republic, largely because the new government has failed to deliver on promises of creating a prosperous country on the cinders of Communism.”

In Poland, building big new homes was a rare expression of individual success and status permitted under Communism. One of the first things people did when they could afford to was to tear down their wooden houses and rebuild in stucco. This is still true. Building as big a house as possible has long been a primary status symbol—even if one did not need the space. An empty third floor of a house is, apparently, not uncommon. Before the revolution, it was politically okay to have what would seem to be a capitalist luxury, the big house. This was also a way to hide money from the tax assessor who raised your taxes if you bought a car but not if you built a bigger house. One only needed enough money to buy building supplies, since everyone built his own house. This point gains importance for the various historic preservation projects that have emerged throughout the region focused on wooden houses. Additionally, we were told in Slovakia that you are considered poor if you still live in the house you built, even if it is stucco and reasonably modern. Thus, new suburban developments have the appeal of being developer-built. Buying a new development house is considered a step up.

Some traditions that predate the Soviet era were taken over for new authoritarian purposes but survived to return to former civic uses. Loudspeaker systems, for example, visible in so many Slovak and some Czech towns are an old tradition, were co-opted under the former regime and are once again well-used by democratic mayors for weekly announcements of local happenings. Announcements were always part of village communication in the region. As Mirek Kundrata points out, “We used to have the special function of the ‘drummer’ and ‘night watcher’ whose role was announcing news for centuries. Modern age brought radio and loudspeakers to most villages and towns in the 1960s. Of course they were used for the Communist agenda but also for congratulations to citizens for birthdays and for announcing important and practical news.” Today, the loudspeakers keep people connected and informed and serve as a local newspaper. Information includes when

the visiting doctor is coming, what new opportunities exist, who is selling a tractor and who’s celebrating a birthday—all important community stuff!!! The significance of this seemingly inconsequential pattern cannot be overestimated. Broad communication is a fundamental ingredient of a democracy. With the historic absence or recent demise of newspapers in communities around the globe, communication is sometimes quite rare. The Internet has the potential to broaden the possibilities, but it is a distant opportunity in many places. Ironically, in the New York State village of Castleton, volunteers serve as runners—one of the oldest vehicles of communication but only recently introduced here—to place public notices under the doorways of all residents. Many old fashioned mechanisms can serve modern needs.

Throughout the region, longstanding tensions seem to exist between populations living adjacent to or near national parks. Several reasons help explain this. First, citizens living near parks still do not appreciate the importance and benefit to their local economy of ecotourism. The potential is misunderstood. Economic benefits and jobs are primarily, if not solely, still associated only with the factory or the farm. Second, a misunderstanding prevails about buffer zones, the designated land surrounding national parks. While buffer zones allow property owners to do most, if not all, of the things they want to do, a lack of trust persists. Park officials are still government regulators. Sometimes they can be as dictatorial now as they were under the former regime. In fact, some of them hold the same job now that they did under the Communists. Third, the dependency syndrome interferes with the emergence and growth of entrepreneurship. Not many property owners recognize the entrepreneurial opportunities offered by owning seven hectares of land. Many economic uses are compatible even with buffer zones that are not thought about. This challenge is being addressed by many of the programs included herein. As successful examples gain attention, new ideas should catch on.

CONCLUSION

Change is inevitable. Positive change is not. Change can be shaped. The real question and primary challenge is who will shape that change? Will it be foreign retail chains, whose narrow corporate interests have little to do with building healthy communities? Will it be suburban developers or home builders whose sole interest is building and selling new homes, not in preserving or rebuilding community? Will it be the traffic engineers who are more concerned with speedily moving cars and trucks than efficiently, environmentally and cost effectively moving people and goods? Will it be the banks and suppliers primarily interested in big deals? Will it be real estate investors whose primary interest is to build what is easiest, cheapest and most efficient for them? The harshest question is, perhaps, whether Communist Central Planning will be replaced by another form of Central Planning, this one shaped by international corporations and institutional forces. Or, in fact, will the task primarily rest with the people in cities and towns of all sizes whose lives will feel the greatest impact and on whom the future of each country depends? A fundamental question, however, is critical to the answer to all these questions: Can a genuine rule of law take hold to insure that governmental decisions are not made on the basis of cronyism and corruption?

One concludes from the evidence presented in this report that appropriately sized, participatory development is occurring with significant impacts throughout the four countries. This can not be captured in big photographs and macro-statistics. Impressive citizen involvement exists throughout the four-country region with significant cumulative impact. *The civic initiatives detailed in this report blaze a hopeful trail for the future of the region, if they are really heeded and nurtured. How well the civic initiatives detailed in this report are heeded and nurtured will make the difference.* This is probably the most hopeful conclusion of this report and the best news coming out of the region.

Another conclusion is that the region's well-publicized progress and growing prosperity mask fundamental problems either not being seriously addressed or being given deceptive lip service. Top-down planning,

central bureaucratic control, unenforced rules of law, weak banking laws that facilitate money laundering and questionable real estate development, overwhelming influence of big, mostly foreign money, absence of adequate conflict-of-interest rules for government and banking officials, and international control persist. Equally damaging is the willingness of municipal and district governments to sell land and give zoning variances without proper assessment of economic, social, financial and environmental consequences and mortgage policies that favor new construction in suburban areas over rehabilitation of existing buildings. Meaningful access to public information, full disclosure laws, government policy-making with genuine public participation, uncorrupted development approval and building permit processes, environmentally sound transportation polices and sustainable development policies, in large measure, are not in place. *If fundamental change does not occur, the future is bleak.*

Given these realities, the fundamental values of democratic society are endangered.

The long-term impact of current trends is grim. Accelerating car dependency, diminished public transit and increased highway capacity guarantee worsening air pollution, destruction of cherished landscapes and cultural heritage, community dispersal and inescapable Western-style sprawl. Under the former regime, a thick smog, hung over the region's cities created by the ubiquitous coal furnaces and industry smokestacks. Today vehicular exhaust is rapidly replacing the industrial smog and traffic is clogging city streets. Proliferating malls and overcapacity of retail stores guarantee more severe destabilization of small and large downtowns, increased foreign ownership and control and crippling of local economies. The tyranny of sprawl is quickly taking over. Dependency on high-tech, capital-intensive infrastructure solutions guarantees unwarranted financial burdens on local public budgets and environmentally unsound public projects. The profit will be distant but the cost will remain local.

Progress does not have to come at such costs. The future is filled with choices. It is an insidious but

persistent myth that all this is part of progress and change. The successes presented herein demonstrate the untruth of the myth.

A democratic nation and civil society depend first and foremost on public process, civic engagement through which citizens are genuinely involved in government decision-making. The first and probably most important thing that can be said about the projects and organizations included in this report is that they have produced an enormous amount of that essential public participation.

Most significantly, all of these activities represent a multi-disciplinary approach which overcomes the destructive limitations of conventional planning. Nature protection, environmental cleanup, historic restoration, cultural preservation, economic innovation, sensitive tourism, sustainable development, all or most of these values are combined in almost every project.

Small Steps, Big Impact

From the Greenworks Project in Rytro, Poland, to the Zawoja Project of the Polish Ecological Club. From the A-Projekt questionnaire to the Listening Project in Slovakia. From SOS Prague to Nadace Via's multiple involvements throughout the Czech Republic to the Greenway's Southern Moravian Wine Trail. From the Clean Air Action Group in Budapest to the Salamander Association in Szentendre. From the cross-border lesson learning and lesson sharing of the four Partnerships to the forging of productive connections among small communities along the nascent Amber Trail. All represent the high degree of public participation that *only* emerges from grass-roots efforts. The enormous impact of connections and of collaboration among people, communities and the Partnerships themselves—is most clear.

The amount of public participation generated by the NGO sector covered by this report contrasts sharply with lack of the same among the four national governments. Citizens are excluded from formulation of policies and plans. Meaningful disclosure regulations and public information process are still not in place. Citizens do not have access to the basic information needed to make informed decisions.

In addition to the public process initiated by the diverse community-based efforts is a broader democratic involvement in specific issues. For example, a forum on flood control—following the devastating floods of 1997—organized by the Czech Partnership in conjunction with the USIS was the first time that flood control was discussed among a broad section of Czech society. The forum provided the opportunity as well to touch on broader water management problems. To examine

such issues, as well as many similarly significant ones, outside of the narrow circles of the specialists is a great achievement, a genuinely democratizing force.

Workshops and public forums organized by the Polish Ecological Club for the Zawoja Project, another example, brought together for the first time local people and National Park representatives, longtime combatants, to discuss the historic problems and conflicts between them. To openly discuss long-term festering conflicts is the first step to accommodation and resolution, a milestone for democratic participation.

Confronting Difficult Challenges

Of cross-border significance are the varied Polish and Slovak communities forcing debate of the proposal for a future winter Olympics in the High Tatra Mountains. The Olympics is the highest impact development issue in that two-country region. Educating the public and initiating debate at an early stage gives hope that some kind of public involvement in the decision will happen.

In considering the specifics of the individual efforts presented here, one cannot help but marvel at the richness, the endless innovation, and the enormous potential of each effort no matter how small.

The citizen effort, for example, to minimize displacement of existing residents in Cracow's rejuvenating Kazimierz District is significant. The real estate market everywhere can be ruthless in its impact on longtime residents. The issues apparent in Kazimierz have parallels in each country and, in fact, in cities around the globe. Rarely, if ever, is displacement addressed at all or successfully minimized without an aggressive grass-roots effort.

Nowa Huta also offers a generic lesson in urban challenges. Factory towns with an oversized, polluting facility either closed down or diminished in scale and workforce dot the region. Quite a few places in Central Europe were built from scratch or fundamentally transformed in the 1950s by big industrial projects. Now, they have large populations, collapsing, partially-privatized, obsolete industrial assets and—as is the fate of one-company towns—very high unemployment. Many of these plants are inherently inefficient and have been or are being downsized or privatized. But solid communities have grown up around them and need help finding a future based on a community-generated vision. The array of measures occurring in Nowa Huta have more of a chance of achieving broad improvements than any single large-scale policy and can serve as one useful model.

The flood control, sewage treatment schemes and landscape reclamation efforts are all innovative strategies for region-wide problems. The several Slovak community revitalization schemes developed for historic

preservation are significant new models for Central Europe. The National Trust of Slovakia plan for the František Iron Works and its work in the wooden house village of Podbiel are particularly important as more communities are motivated to preserve their own history in a structural way. As more communities recognize the threat to their cultural heritage and historic landscapes caused by out-of-control sprawl, citizen-led preservation efforts will become more urgent.

The A-Projekt's evolution from restoration of one wooden house to a regional strategy for sustainable development shows clearly how small local initiatives can have sizable impacts. The various efforts to revitalize Banská Štiavnica highlight the new young, energetic people ready to commit themselves to meaningful rejuvenation efforts even in the face of government and bureaucratic resistance. "Center Pioneers" are evident in many localities in all four countries. The Slavonice Renaissance Association's rebuilding of community through the arts introduces a strategy successfully applied in many Western communities and uniquely suited for historic towns throughout the four-country region, even though the appeal of each town will be different from the rich assortment of sgraffito-embellished buildings of this small Czech town. The Rožmberk Society reflects a growing interest in Jewish Heritage by non-Jews increasingly aware that a significant thread of national history was destroyed in the holocaust. Kosenka's effort to restore the southern Moravian working landscape and Veronica's reintroduction of fruit orchards and dried fruit tradition in the same Moravian region are both high impact models applicable all over Central and Eastern Europe. These are all innovative programs with significant economic implications. The Clean Air Action Group's advocacy work in Budapest, the City Preservation Association in Esztergom and the Salamander Association's programs in Szentendre are Hungarian efforts that illustrate strategies for strengthening centers necessary for containing sprawl.

The people portrayed in this report are a remarkable group of civic leaders of the highest quality and strongest commitment. Undeniably, they have initiated democratic involvement in many ways. They are the catalysts for the public process that is building a civil society. On every level, the public is involved in new ways, and formerly hostile interests have been brought together. This group of individuals must be both nurtured and expanded. One question is: Will their message and missions be overwhelmed by the events occurring around them? Have they created organizations and relationships strong enough to withstand the global pressures of the EU and international institutions? Another question is: Can they continue to attract necessary financial support critical to

their continued success? And, most significantly, can governments and international institutions learn from the lessons of these successes?

The civic activists introduced here represent a stability not customary among public officials. Mayors and bureaucrats come and go. Elections shape that cast of characters. Civic leaders endure, if their activities and missions do. They cannot survive, however, without outside support and broader recognition. More importantly, domestic support is necessary. And while, to be sustainable in the long term, that support must be based in the local community, current realities dictate that financial assistance must come from outside if these groups are to survive.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEW CHALLENGES

These recommendations and challenges are generally, but not exclusively, directed at past and future foundation supporters, organizations covered in this report and others that are similar but not mentioned, and to international financial institutions.

Economically effective, environmentally sound national policy and international finance strategies are reflected in these recommendations, building on the strengths already exhibited in the success stories. Entrenched politics and private interests resist them. The effectiveness of the NGO sector can make the difference.

Promoting Low-Tech Solutions for Public Infrastructure: Many of the communities seeking high-tech solutions do so because they don't know that cost-effective, environmentally sound alternatives exist and think generous financing from the national government is the only course to follow. The challenge is to bring more attention and more access to financing for the low-tech, lower-cost solutions. Such alternatives have the additional advantage of using local labor and services and can be implemented more quickly. Several projects illustrate beautifully the wisdom of low-tech alternatives—the community-based flood control project in the Carpathian village of Kicznia, Poland, the natural water filtration system in the Moravian village of Hoštetín, Czech Republic, the stream cleanup project of the Forest School Foundation in Szentendre, Hungary.

Such projects demonstrate clearly how much better these projects are environmentally, financially and civically than any of the more common big, high-tech projects. But the multiple values represented by these alternatives are not adequately publicized. If they are to be recognized as a logical alternative to conventional practices, publicizing their success is urgent. It is not clear if

minimum media attention is due to the media missing “a good story” or a minimum public relations effort by the organizations on their own behalf. It is also not clear if a real depth of understanding about the interconnections of the varied issues and the significance of small successes exists among many members of the press.

Promoting Low-Tech Solutions for the Transport Sector: Governments want to spend millions on new highways and new metros when much cheaper improvements in the surface public transit systems exist and could have an immediate, low-cost impact. Make bus, tram and trolley lanes exclusive. Upgrade trams for improved passenger comfort and higher speed. Increase, rather than decrease, transit schedules. Decrease, rather than increase, passenger fares. Limit downtown parking and make it expensive. Improve bicycle lanes and pedestrian access. Dramatically upgrade freight train service to compete better with rapidly growing truck usage. Each of these measures can improve transit service, give transit a competitive edge over automobile usage and avoid capital intensive expenditures that burden public budgets.

Some observers speculate that public transit is not considered as urgent an issue as highway building because Central Europe retains such an elaborate transit network. That is a dangerous view. The intricate web of public transit can erode rapidly and is already doing so. Without major attention to management and capital investment, the velocity of its deterioration will overwhelm all half-measures.

Public transit passengers and pedestrians need to have a stronger voice in the transportation planning and decision-making process. They are a majority, but their needs are seldom heeded. City planners promote the idea that planning, whether land use or transportation, is too technical for ordinary citizens. This entrenched notion is nothing short of ridiculous. **If common sense is not the basis of any kind of planning, it is invariably wrong and harmful. Users, not planners, are the best experts. Planners’ technical knowhow should be used to implement the vision and choices of citizens, not their own.** The Clean Air Action Group (CAAG) performs this function to a great extent in Hungary, and Transportation For The 21st Century may evolve to perform this function in the Czech Republic. But more NGOS need to champion these reforms. They need to understand the inextricable link between transit and farming, center city strength and suburban sprawl, between highways and their indirect costs. The citizen advocacy on these issues needs to be broadened and strengthened.

Marketing: Global corporations, mall developers, highway promoters, car manufacturers and international retailers succeed through many means. Political influ-

ence and financial chicanery are common assumptions, but much of their success is directly due to mass marketing, advertising and public relations. Public relations has been developed to the high art of selling an idea, a company or a person. Multinational and transnational financial corporations are creating a universal culture, making national and regional identities less distinctive. This consortium of big-scale interests has persuaded much of the public that their products represent progress, status, democracy, that the negative tradeoffs are a necessary price and that life is better this way.

The strategies and programs represented in this report contradict all such assumptions and offer a completely viable alternative. In reality, these alternatives are most often cheaper, quicker, more innovative, more sustainable and more effective at enhancing civic life. But the marketing, advertising and promotion of these alternatives is inadequate or non-existent in the face of the expensive marketing campaigns of conventional projects and programs. Too often, in fact, these efforts are left to sell themselves on the basis of substance and logic, a strategy that is no match for the competition. New thinking, new energy and new resources need to be directed at an aggressive marketing campaign that enlists the skills of the same promotional industry that has worked so well for big development and big corporations.

Education of the Media: Journalists have no more reason to understand the full complexity of urban development than citizen activists. Activists, however, often learn, because whatever issue involves them is inextricably related to all others. Journalists, on the other hand, may not have the background or understanding necessary to critique and scrutinize the government and business policies they write about. Workshops, forums, study tours and other mechanisms need to focus on members of the press, if the public is ever going to read or hear about alternative choices.

Small Business and Entrepreneurial Training: Big so-called economic development projects are always promoted as creating jobs. Less importance seems to be placed on promoting and encouraging innovative entrepreneurs. Merchants in all four countries face double jeopardy. They don’t have years of business experience to help them survive either outside the mall or as a tenant in the mall. Experienced American and European merchants have trouble with this, and they are not novices in the business.

In countries where malls have been emerging and growing for decades, like the U.S., they are by now a struggling institution. Their dominance is diminishing and many are economically failing as traditional downtowns regain appeal. In Central Europe, however, malls

have just begun their long cycle. The second generation of malls which get built even further from centers than the first, for the most part, are yet to come. But come they will, more and more, unless Central European policy-makers choose to follow the example of some Western European countries, like Great Britain and Denmark. Those countries protect both city centers and ex-urban greenfields, instead of following the land-wasting and community-destroying policies of the U.S. Without serious policy interventions, new and bigger malls will continue the pattern of drawing from both existing malls and established centers, attracting the usual assortment of smaller car-dependent businesses on the roads between them, the inevitable ingredients of roadside sprawl. Many consumers, merchants and public officials mistakenly believe this is merely about fair competition, the free market. Survival, they often believe, of the small, localized businesses is possible. This is a dangerous misconception.

Many local businesses will not find a place in the new economy under any circumstances. But many could survive and compete in new ways. This is unlikely unless specific programs are introduced to educate merchants. The programs and technical assistance needed by merchants to compete and implement innovative strategies are not apparent. Advisers and/or trainers can be brought into communities to work with merchant groups and individual merchants where appropriate. Resistance to advice or assistance is common among local merchants worldwide. Often, this leads to their eventual demise. But many are open to new ideas and changing strategies. The opportunity to learn new ways must be made available to them. They could be the reinventors of independent businesses and the initiators of significant new ones. Programs to nurture this process are strongly recommended.

Parallel to this is the need for **entrepreneurial access to small amounts of capital**, the kind necessary for new businesses to start or existing businesses to grow. Some of this exists. The research for this report did not scrutinize the adequacy or efficacy of existing programs. A survey and/or study of existing efforts is needed to reveal future needs. The availability of big capital for big, often irresponsible, retail and development projects is clear. But the availability of the kind of modest capital that nurtures innovation and modest efforts is not apparent. Big financial institutions, both national and international, pay minimal attention to this area and in fact are not the right ones to manage the needed programs. Such institutions should consider establishing loan funds for this purpose to be administered by not-for-profit organizations experienced in this work whose understanding of the issues, communities and people cannot be replicated by

conventional lenders. This resource should be developed as close to the locality as possible.

In general, small business interests are weakly organized. Organizing them politically to prevent further unfair tax privileges being granted to large shopping malls is overdue.

Advocacy Capacity Building: Many NGOs have a proven ability to raise awareness, bring in experts, organize lectures and produce educational publications. The kind of grass-roots action that achieves fundamental change, however, requires campaign strategizing and vigorous civic activism. Grassroots and policy-oriented organizations throughout Central Eastern Europe need to improve, coordinate and expand their efforts to address the complicated mix of sprawl-related issues.

A new initiative launched by the New York-based Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) has the potential to go a long way in this direction. Working mainly behind the scenes for more than five years in Central Europe, ITDP has helped local groups improve their economic and financial analyses, open dialogues with national government officials and business people and build local advocacy. It has produced excellent research on how inadequate conflict-of-interest rules, banking regulations and real estate codes have facilitated sprawl and encouraged inappropriate investments in transportation and land-use.

In the next three years, ITDP will assist in developing sprawl-related campaigns in Budapest, Warsaw, Lodz, Cracow and Prague, help develop and publicize case studies on the impacts of sprawl, hold region-wide workshops and continue technical assistance to local groups promoting transportation reform. This effort should go a long way in assisting NGOs to take these issues to the next step.

Review and Revise Local Zoning Codes: An urgent need is apparent to review local zoning provisions, to understand how they encourage sprawl and to spotlight how they are administered. Considering the kind of development possible under many zoning codes and considering how easy it is to overcome sensible restrictions, zoning codes are at best ill-considered and weak and at worst an obvious joke. This should be done by people experienced in traditional town planning that is not car-based.

Develop a Farmers' Markets Movement: Farmers' markets historically the world over have served as great economic and civic rejuvenators. Central and Eastern Europe used to be filled with agriculturally rich and productive areas. Reestablishing farmers' markets in many of the town squares in which they once functioned could go a long way to stimulate productive local

economic activity and sustainable development. Experienced farmers' markets experts are available.

Farmers' markets are the best mechanism to encourage organic farming and preserve small farms. Markets offer farmers an opportunity to sell directly to consumers and eliminate mark-up by the middle-man, increasing the farmer's profit. In addition to fruits and vegetables, other local products, including wine, specialty foods like honey and jellies and crafts can be sold at such markets. Where traditional farmers' markets exist, they should be modernized and vigorously promoted.

All four countries could benefit greatly from a major proliferation of farmers' markets. This would have particular significance for Poland where under the former regime agriculture was about 80 percent private, and those small farmers are particularly endangered by imports.

Establish an Organizational Equivalent to the U.S. Natural Resource Defense Council: Impressive nature and environment protection laws exist but need to be strengthened and enforced. Protection laws—for nature, environment and heritage—need to be promoted for their positive values instead of spotlighted for their negative limitations. An organization similar to the Natural Resources Defense Council in the U.S., focused on air and water pollution with the ability to sue, is needed in each country. Some efforts along these lines exist. Coordination among them is needed. Some efforts should be expanded and new ones started where appropriate. This was obvious in the Ružomberok, Slovakia, story where an appropriate legal challenge could create an important new precedent nationally for factory emission standards. A survey of existing environmental organizations with the capacity to sue is a needed first step.

Land Trusts are still a recent concept for Central Eastern Europe. The Quebec-Labrador Foundation has done a good job educating people from the region about their value and their application. This work needs to be expanded. And while other legal mechanisms exist to conserve and preserve land, encouraging increased use of land trusts seems the prudent thing to do rather than introduce new strategies. Land Trusts are not intended to be a substitute for solid, long-term, smart-growth strategies, but should be part of them. It must be noted, however, that these countries have some very impressive National Parks administrations and conservation and protection laws which Western countries would also do well to pay attention to.

Smart Growth is a term recently introduced into the U.S. to encompass the array of positive policies that strengthen existing communities before permitting development of new ones, invest in existing housing

stock before encouraging construction of replacements, reinforce pedestrian and transit-based localities and avoid car-dependent ones and minimize the dramatic erosion of open space that has been occurring for decades. Preserving open space, however, is only part of a smart growth strategy. Strengthening existing centers, maintaining the traditional mix of residential, commercial, institutional and entertainment uses, protecting the density of uses and avoiding suburbanization of the core are all crucial to smart growth policies. This is not widely understood. In the U.S., for example, as well as in CEE, suburban housing developments are replacing traditional density in urban neighborhoods. Without density, local retail, viable transit, neighborhood schools and pedestrian activity are impossible. Attention needs to be paid to understanding these issues on the part of NGOs, government officials and the media.

Endowments for NGOS is an idea whose time has come. All types of grant-giving organizations should consider initiating such funds to help establish a level playing field for the array of diverse but modest scale efforts. A real danger exists that they could receive and become dependent on funding from the corporate interests they should be watch-dogging. Without financial security, this could undermine the validity of their work.

A lot of the work reported here was informed and enriched by people in Ireland, Denmark, Great Britain, The Netherlands and the U.S. **Regular travel and expert exchanges** with foreign counterparts has already occurred but should expand as much as possible. These are valuable educational and eye-opening experiences. Investing in people is the foundation of all these successes. Study tours, especially to Western Europe, are very useful. Tours to the U.S. can be problematic unless the right assortment of non-mainstream, genuinely grass-roots organizations are involved. Seeing first hand the good and bad experiences outside the community is the best form of education.

The **Czech Greenway and Amber Trail** should be as much about a trail of ideas circulating among its communities as it is about a physical trail. More attention should be paid to the larger context of appropriate development and change. Activities within or among the communities need to emphasize long-term community values and goals and not just the short-term gain of increased tourism. The Czech Greenway and Amber Trail are potentially great opportunities to stimulate sustainable development policies.

Multiple levels of value can be found in the Czech Greenway and Amber Trail efforts. They are just beginning to emerge. Thousands of kilometers of trails, for example, exist throughout the region. They connect

large areas and, to some extent, whole countries and, in former regimes, provided a place to go where “the trees don’t have ears.” The Greenway concept, while attractive as a tourism stimulant, is growing in appeal as a mechanism to unite communities and bring together various public and private groups. The community regeneration aspect of the Greenway concept needs to be more developed.

New Focus on Historic Sites: Before 1989, heritage sites, such as castles, village museums and other landmarks, were not heavily visited by international travelers. In recent years, the world has become aware that tourism can be the economy of the future for many communities. But, too many are struggling with how to manage historic sites and develop interpretive programming that does justice to both the physical site and architecture and the human stories. Introducing some of the innovative interpretation techniques developed in various places in recent years to the Central European countries would be quite useful.

The restoration and reuse of historic buildings in many areas of the world provide a creative impetus for community revitalization that reflects local character rather than replacing it. This is a broader view of historic preservation than is often held. Such projects most often start modestly, require small capital investment, potentially involve many citizens and help broaden the focus of public issues. More information outlining successful redevelopment strategies with historic preservation as the centerpiece needs to be gathered and disseminated.

A final recommendation comes in the form of a plea, a plea for continued and expanded support by private foundations, governments and international agencies, particularly the European Union. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, German Marshall Fund, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and all the other foundations supporting the initiatives represented here over the past 10 years showed enormous wisdom in investing in an extraordinary but untested assortment of people and ideas. It was bold, risky and innovative. This is no time, however, to cease the effort. A new and in some ways more difficult set of challenges awaits the civil society of all four countries. Expanded support is necessary to build on the first 10 years and succeed in the next decade. The potential value of increased success

goes beyond the four-country borders. The lessons here are transferable to the beleaguered countries to the east and west where many mature democracies are looking for rejuvenation. This new challenge is unthinkable without additional support.

No trend in history lasts forever. Actions bring reaction. The expansion of the global economy into virtually every phase of human life is bound to repeat historic patterns and generate a powerful reaction: ordinary citizens will turn to leaders close to home to mediate against the global colossus. The governments and civic organizations they will turn to for this purpose will probably be accessible and modest in scale instead of national in scope. Many of the people and groups covered in this report fit the requirements of this reactive trend. The transcendent question is to what extent they will be in a position to respond to that inevitable occurrence. Some indications already exist that a reaction to globalization is underway, that recognition of the threats to tradition and cultural legacies is growing and that disillusionment with global consumerism is spreading. The people and efforts represented in this report offer the best alternatives.

The more governments and markets function globally, the more people are thinking and acting locally. In Western Europe and North America, neighborhood ties have become more important in recent years. Community-based activity has increased enormously. Local economic and social resources and existing physical assets are valued in new ways. Traditional urbanism has been partially incorporated in the New Urbanism, and historic preservationists are demonstrating worldwide that the inherent value of organically evolved communities endures. Regional connections more than international ties are gaining in importance in many areas. The balance to the globalization of control, whether on the government or corporate level, rests with the kind of people and civic organizations represented here.

The projects represented are small and dispersed, but the change they represent is large and significant. The potential for low-cost, fiscally prudent, democracy-strengthening policies illustrated here is clear. The fundamental challenge for policy-makers, governmental agencies, international institutions and private funders is to be open and responsive to the innovative choices these successes represent.