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Climate Change- How can Czech NGOs make a real difference?

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I. INTRODUCTION

We are running out of time. These are probably one of the most use words when it comes to the discussion about climate change. Many political players from all over the world are trying to tackle the CO2 problem, however, some few countries are still not sustainable enough and rely heavily on nuclear and thermal power. The Czech Republic might be one of those. Whereas their neighbour Austria who never had any nuclear power plants and even stopped import of nuclear power from Germany and Czech Republic in 2013¹. Czech Republic other neighbour, Germany, is planning a nuclear phase-out by 2022.

Thus, we want to explore the possibility of how Czech NGOs could make a real difference when it comes to the climate change debate. It is a very hypothetical question itself, however, there are strategies with which it might be possible that certain Czech NGOs have more influence when it comes to policy making nationally and international. Change does not occur over night and the road will be long. Nevertheless, many already integrated and well known NGOs in Czech Republic like NaZem, Hnutí, and Greenpeace.

The essay is structured into three main parts. We deem political intervention, the education of the next and this generation, and symbolic and direct actions as the main pillars of this endeavour to change the public's view on climate change and to activate them.

II. MAIN PART

The most important argument when it comes to “green” decision making might lie in the hands of the political system and the way NGOs can use and benefit from it.

It would be interesting to organize a new political party that acts locally and nation-wide with individual citizens that are based on taking action on the streets and also lobbying both at the legislative level in the government and at an educational level. We should not discard the idea that Czech citizens and environmental associations could form a political party whose organization could look like this: Raising the figure of online militants as a basis for decisions to be adopted by a non-contact manner in most cases. The highest representative

¹ Hecking (2013) <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/energiewende-oesterreichs-totaler-atomausstieg-a-909206.html>

body of the party will be the citizens' assembly: any militant may attend every meetings which are held every three years (or any given time). It could be equivalent to the conferences of the parties. The highest body between each town meeting will be another member who have each the power to take decisions on setting decisions. This will be called the city council. It shall meet at least once every six months and shall be elected every three years, each town's assembly, by opening lists among all members through an electronic vote.

For the day to day politics, we could design an assembly of 10 to 15 people who will correspond to adapt the policy of the association to the circumstances. This small group will be led by a spokesman and answer to the name "coordinating council". The coordinating council is elected by the city council which is proposed by the spokesman of the association, to be submitted to a closed list voting. Party spokesman – in practice leader of the organization – will also be chosen by electronic voting. Like all organs of the association, its mandate will last three years.

The town meeting will discuss the political, organizational, and ethical principles that developers will draft documents on. Town assemblies and neighbourhood associations, for each neighbourhood in each city, may present alternatives to those raised by the promoters to decide how training is organized among those proposals. The final model assembly is the one who makes the decisions. Finally, the city council is the body that will decide on the most important decisions of the organization.

Territorial organization

Training should alter from traditional models where the power is distributed on the basis of territorial quotas. Thus, the territories have no specific weight when participating in the management bodies. As an example, the city council will be distributed by thematic areas rather than territories. It is intended, note sources of training, the policy objective of the training are citizens, regardless of their origin, contributing to this new way of organizing the association. Territorially organized our association will continue from the circles. Making key decisions will be left to the bodies at the state level.

Lobbying

The lobby is a growing discipline in today's societies and has become a widespread action for businesses, employers, trade unions, and social associations with the purpose of getting a favourable ruling from government decisions. We get access to the public authorities, public negotiating proposals, and participate in legislative and administrative processes.

With the growing involvement of public bodies in societies, through legislative and administrative regulations, it is inexcusable to know and practice lobbying actions that allow us to know: who we should talk to, how to formulate our proposals, participate in the most appropriate time, and knowing specific communication techniques likely to use in our negotiations with the executive, legislative, and judicial fields.

The process of lobbying is a communicative act that must be performed by specialists in political communication. Actors may be members of public bodies, experts in communication companies, non-governmental organizations, social associations, trade unions or employers.

This would be a great way for Czech citizens to be directly involved in decision-making. However, the first step to implement such a new political association. Enough support and participation is needed. Further, the green party *Strana zelených* in Czech Republic could be valuable partner in this matter but also in the next one: education.

The involvement of politics appears to be the main tool when it comes decisions surrounding environmental and especially climate related laws and decisions. Nevertheless, education is the key and another puzzle piece, for education is what could change and save the future of the next generations by opening the public eyes to environmental problems.

“Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today,” Malcolm X.

We were taught this during our whole life and it is also a most important step, when it comes to solving environmental and social issues. In Czech Republic, the majority of public society either do not know or basically do not want to know about environmental and social negative externalities that are based on everyday activities and the economic sector. People overall, not just in Czech Republic, want to keep the status quo, and they do not face real problems in their lives. Reason for this ignorance is that most of the dangerous production activities are off shored to other countries. Therefore, pollution over there does not have straight impact on them but it does show a slowly visible effect over time.

Our proposal is to make people aware and make them realize how those activities are interconnected and how affects us in terms of climate change, soil degradation and water/air pollution, and water waste. Environmental education is an important step here. Because of

their ignorance regarding these topics that are evolving around climate change. Czech people have to be taught, about how the globalized world is functioning, what they can do, what their role in the society is, and how can they participate on making the world place.

The first measure to take would be to educate youngest generation since they are the ones who have to deal with permanent consequences of global warming and pollution. Further, children are when it comes to education and character a tabula rasa. They are still mouldable and do not have prejudices, but with time they act like their parents wants them to. Environmental education should be introduced with the primary education in terms that it gets integrated into existing subjects like Biology, Geology, Social subjects, and Chemistry. In high school and in college there could also be a new subject like “International Development”. This subject would clearly illustrate how the global economy is interconnected and to explain that most of the economic activities have social externalities – a topic that is yet missing in the Czech syllabus. This policy change would require a lot of lobbying work on the sides of NGOs and local political parties and politicians.

As already mentioned, children mimic the behaviour of their surroundings. Since they spend most of the time in school and at home, the next measure would be to tackle the education problem at the parental level. This step is more difficult as this generations already has their habits etched in their minds. There are a few possibilities how Czech NGOs could be at aid and educate. One possibility would be to put pressure on political parties to inform the public about the global issue of climate change and regarding those issues through public information channels of veřejnoprávní televise in forms of more news coverage, special shows, and documentaries. Most adults are probably not aware of the processes of a nuclear power plant, and a thermal power plant. Here, for example already existing documentaries about Chernobyl and Fukushima could be more integrated in programs. However, as mentioned above political decision making is the most crucial part in this puzzle. Because the public could still choose to ignore this topic and without guidance from NGOs and political decision no change would take place.

Furthermore, those NGOs dealing with environmental issues should take a big part; NaZemi has already its programme for global development education, Hnutí Brontosaurus is gathering young volunteers in order to truly protect environment and historical sights. Those are examples of groups which could make a real difference when cooperating together.

Last, but not least, Christian community in Czech Republic could take its place in the cooperation. Head of Catholic church, Pope Francis was recently highlighting the necessity

of changing our way of lives in order to save the planet in his encyclical. This could be the authoritative voice pushing for action our older, believing, generation.

Further educational measures go hand in hand with the next step of symbolic and direct action taking. These actions are not less important than the political step and the education of the public, however, this step should not be taken too early when there is not public who will respond and back those actions. This is why symbolic and direct actions should be implemented after a time when one can tell that those measures show first signs. Then it is those actions who further reinforce those statements via symbolic actions, mind bombs, and demonstrations.

As already mentioned, symbolic as well as direct actions are also key tools when it comes to rising awareness and changing particular practices of individuals, companies, and even states. Therefore, it is amongst other important that NGOs keep on gathering together with the public before and during the important political and environmental procedures.

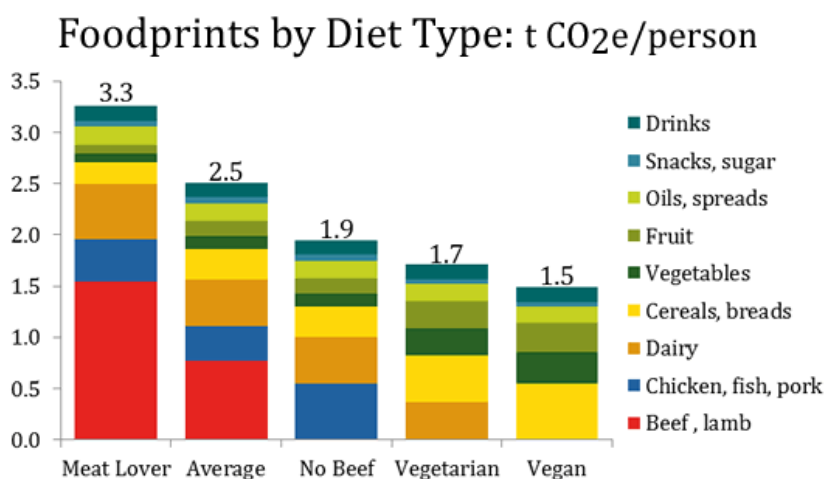
For example with the COP21 in Paris beginning on the 30th of November many symbolic actions are taking place as a part of the global climate march to show politicians and citizens all over the world how important it is to come to a legally binding agreement on a sustainable future. In Hamburg, NGOs are spreading the word of a symbolic action taking place on the 29th of November at the Binnenalster. People should come and bring lanterns, and flash lights to spread the word further and to put more pressure on policy makers. In general, worldwide in 175 countries over 600.000 people demonstrated and called “for a strong deal in Paris that will see a swift transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy”². Paris was unable to march because of orders by authorities after the 13th November attacks. However, a powerful, symbolic installation of 10.000 shoes was displayed which should symbolize the inability to participate directly “Our shoes should march for us”. Even Pope Francis and Ban Ki-moon donated shoes for the Paris installation and a note under Ban Ki-moons donated shoe says: “As the world gathers in Paris to stand up for climate action, let us also stand in the shoes of all victims of terrorism, war and persecution... and respond with compassion.”

Those actions are extremely important as they make people who witness those actions by coincidence, curious about what is going on, so general public awareness. Even though there was no climate march taking place in Czech Republic, those pictures and emotions

² Philips, Vaughan and Milman (2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/live/2015/nov/29/global-peoples-climate-change-march-2015-day-of-action-live>

from all over the world could still have spread there and could have had a small impact. Also, those actions are important for solidarity, and pictures, and videos taken there will spread rapidly via news broadcast and social media like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Hopefully, in a couple of years those symbolic actions could be imaginable in Czech Republic. Since they are an important part for making the public more aware of the problems and consequences of climate change itself. The nature of these future symbolic actions really depend on the circumstances. However, since no Czech NGO is doing no actions against nuclear power plants yet because of the endorsement of nuclear power by the public, it would be smart to tackle a smaller problem which is also related to climate change first and then to proceed to bigger issues. One possibility would be the Czech meat consumption. It is long known that the meat and dairy industry has a huge impact on climate change.



Note: All estimates based on average food production emissions for the US. Footprints include emissions from supply chain losses, consumer waste and consumption. Each of the four example diets is based on 2,600 kcal of food consumed per day, which in the US equates to around 3,900 kcal of supplied food.

Sources: ERS/USDA, various LCA and EIO-LCA data



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Only 2%, 153.000 in total, of the Czech population is vegetarian (as of 2013)⁴. Compared to the direct neighbours Austria 9%⁵, 765.000, or Germany 9%⁶, 7.371.000, the Czech Republic does seem to consume more meat than their neighbours. Other studies on meat

consumption per capita support this further.

The idea here would be to promote a more versatile and more healthy attitude towards meat (and dairy) consumption and their negative effects of meat production on climate change. The traditional Czech cuisine is mainly based on meat which is in turn a cultural habit. Still, it is not about abandoning it completely, more about cutting back and consuming meat more

3 Wilson (2013) <http://shrinkthatfootprint.com/food-carbon-footprint-diet>
 4 Bio-Info.cz (2013) <http://www.bio-info.cz/zpravy/veganu-a-vegetarianu-pribyva>
 Raw Food Health <http://www.raw-food-health.net/NumberOfVegetarians.html>
 5 Vegan.at (2014) <http://www.vegan.at/inhalt/9-leben-vegetarisch-oder-vegan>
 6 vebu.de <https://vebu.de/themen/lifestyle/anzahl-der-vegetarierinnen>

consciously. A tax on meat⁷ in whole Europe could be one answer and one measure to force people to consume less. Still, since EU governments are still subsidizing (livestock, feed, free pollution permits) meat production and thus making it cheaper for consumers, a tax on meat could only be effective if subsidies stopped. Regardless, the health risks that too much meat consumption poses and the repercussion on the environment in terms of water and feed waste, and CO2 emissions should be further elucidated. Here, Czech NGOs that are in Zelený Kruh could for example organize nation wide action days with the World Vegetarian Day on October the 1st, the World Vegan Day on November the 1st, or find other suitable opportunities to raise awareness through symbolic actions. Further, student canteens offer not many vegetarian or even vegan options. It could be possible that with the variety that especially exchange students and other students would choose a meatless more healthy option. Right now the vegetarian and not quite healthy option is mostly fried cheese with fries – even the salads contain meat, it is very hard to find a proper vegetarian salad in Brno.

Direct actions are the obstruction of the praxis and could yet be to premature in Czech Republic when it comes to nuclear and thermal power plants. Nevertheless, occupations, blockades and strikes concerning smaller issues could show an effect and could even mobilize the public.

Conclusion

If everything that we have proposed is somewhat feasible, it is not something that will happen over night. We know it is a tedious, tiresome, and long process. Luck also has to be on our side. It is difficult to convince people of something if there is no free will from the individual, if there is no policy or wish to volunteer.

It is impossible that just over night a society that does not care about the environment suddenly speaks up for it. In the end, the political result is nothing more than a reflection of today's society, and Czech society is not at all involved in environmental defesa. If we repair the political results, we can see that the Green Party is residual in the political spectrum.

Also, the media impact is crucial to reach people, but it has to back an interest that hardly exists. You can also get there through money, something which we or presumably Czech NGOs simply do not have abundantly.

⁷ Rousseau (2015) <http://www.globalmeatnews.com/Industry-Markets/Meat-tax-favoured-by-public-report-finds?nocount>

Finally, almost as consolation we can only raise awareness that it will be an arduous task, long, in which we could support associations from more green and conscious countries like Germany and Austria who have more experience in the field in question and where the public supports environmental NGOs.