The importance of recognizing difference: Rethinking Central and East European environmentalism

This talk addresses the literature interrogating existing hierarchies in global knowledge production by examining the dominant research on post-1989 Central and East European (CEE) environmentalism. Analyses of CEE environmentalism have predominantly relied on concepts and organizational models generated by research on environmental activism and politics conducted in Western contexts, resulting in negative assessments of CEE as lacking environmental engagement. This talk proposes to re-think CEE environmentalism, arguing for a more positive perspective that takes into account the various traditional practices and informal outdoor and nature-based educational activities that have a long history in CEE. These originated to promote everyday pro-environmental behaviours that are motivated by a desire for authenticity, ethical living and personal integrity. While often overlooked by both Western and CEE observers alike, these forms of CEE environmentalism are strikingly compatible with the everyday material and ‘post-postmaterial’ environmentalism recently promoted by Western-based political theorists. This presentation draws on a paper accepted for publication in Political Geography and co-authored with Kerstin Jacobsson (Göteborg University).

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