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**Navigating Institutional Pressure in State-Socialist and Democratic Regimes:
The Case of Movement Brontosaurus**

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Abstract

Using the case of Movement Brontosaurus, a Czech organization founded in state-socialist times, this paper investigates how civic associations and nongovernmental organizations seeking to promote alternatives to the status quo respond to institutional pressures in different political and social contexts. The case shows that under state-socialism, Brontosaurus appeared to conform to state mandates and societal expectations. However, its formal structure was decoupled from many activities to obscure its oppositional intent. After the transition to democracy, the organization was only able to maintain its place in society by aligning its structure and practices with each other and when the alternative agenda of the organization was openly expressed. The findings demonstrate how social change and alternative lifestyle organizations vary their responses to institutional pressure in ways that enable them to realize their values and pursue their missions while accounting for the political and social contexts in which they are embedded.

Navigating Institutional Pressure in State-Socialist and Democratic Regimes: The Case of Movement Brontosaurus

In 1999, a group of local chapters of the Czech environmental association, Movement Brontosaurus, decided to organize a celebration in honor of the organization's 25th anniversary. The event met with an enthusiastic response as hundreds of activists gathered to take part in festivities that included discussions, workshops, an evening dance with country music, and the cutting of a gigantic cake. It was not the nature of the event or the guest list that made it unique. Rather, it was the fact that the celebration took place at all. This was an organization that was founded in the darkest days of state-socialism with the purpose of engaging the nation's youth in activities that would educate them to be good socialist citizens. After the regime fell in 1989, and the organization became independent from the state, it struggled to survive. Not only did Brontosaurus have to contend with public attributions about its former affiliation with the Communist Party, but there were internal conflicts among leaders about what practices were most appropriate given the realities of the new political and economic systems.

According to neoinstitutional theorists, organizations enhance their prospects of survival by adapting their structures, and at times their practices, so that they conform to the rules and norms of the field in which they are situated. Organizational fields are comprised of the array of stakeholders with which an organization interacts and shares a system of meaning (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001). For civic associations and other types of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with social change agendas,[1] fields typically are comprised of the beneficiaries and targets of their activities as well as government agencies, donors, and other organizations addressing similar issues or working toward related goals. Over time, the interactions that take place among these parties result in the creation of explicit rules and tacit behavioral norms, which collectively are referred to as institutions (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Fligstein, 1996; Haveman and Rao, 1997). The widely accepted view is that survival is more likely when organizational structure and visible practices are isomorphic with these institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). However, rather than conform to the new institutions taking root as a consequence of the transition, or mimic successful organizations, Brontosaurus survived by asserting

alternative values and taking action that was not aligned with emerging norms.

Most institutional studies of nonprofit organizations examine social service and development organizations in stable democratic contexts. However, civic associations and NGOs of all kinds and in all regimes not only encounter institutional pressures, but as the case of Brontosaurus suggests, they respond in diverse and unanticipated ways. In this paper, we use the case of Movement Brontosaurus and the transformation from state-socialism to democracy that took place in the former Czechoslovakia to understand how associations and NGOs seeking alternatives to the status quo navigate institutional pressure in diverse social and political environments. The findings from this study extend nonprofit scholarship by demonstrating the ways that organizations vary their relationship between structure and practices to maintain legitimacy with the regime in power and society-at-large while seeking to remain true to their values and mission.

Institutional Pressures and Nonprofit Organizations

The degree of autonomy granted to social, cultural, and political associations is determined by the political system that is in place. In authoritarian regimes, civic associations tend to be subordinated to the state and often are founded as a means for promoting state ideology and goals. For instance, when the Communist Party came into power in Czechoslovakia in 1948, its leading figures not only sought to transform economic policies and public administration, but to dismantle most aspects of civil society that had been created under the Habsburg dynasty (1541-1918) and advanced during the First Republic (1918-1938). Their efforts extended from exerting control over the media to the dissolution of almost all independent associations. One of the ways that these changes were facilitated was through the formation of the National Front, a coalition comprised of all political parties as well as a variety of associations and mass organizations. "Mass" in this context refers to state-sponsored and controlled organizations that encompassed large subpopulations such as women, youth and workers (Anheier and Priller, 1991). Any given mass organization would oversee the activities of a variety of different groups and programs. By situating associations within the National Front, the state was able to influence their formation and activities and, in the process, assert a fundamental level of control over political, social, and cultural life

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(Silhanova, et al., 1994).

In democracies, individuals generally are free to form civic associations and other types of NGOs, including civic and cultural organizations, social movements, advocacy groups, and professional associations, that are separate from the state (Clark, 2003). As in state-controlled systems, associations in democratic systems are viewed as being integral to advancing political ideals. However, rather than being founded to serve state aims or required to foster particular ideologies, their independence enables them to contribute to democratic process by giving voice to excluded segments of the population and by bringing marginalized issues and ideas into public view (Keane, 1988; Cohen and Arato, 1992). While they must still must comply with limits imposed on their activities (Chisholm, 1995; Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Fry, 1995; McCarthy, Britt, and Wolfson, 1991), NGOs in democracies are granted the autonomy to engage in a wide variety of activities, from providing services to challenging the status quo to participating in public decision-making on behalf of their constituents and society-at-large (Cohen and Arato, 1992).

Institutional Pressure in Authoritarian and Democratic Systems

Whether they are situated in an authoritarian or democratic system, institutional rules, norms, and expectations are established that, in turn, exert pressure on organizations. These pressures tend to fall within one of three general categories. The first form of pressure, coercion, relies on the threat of sanctions to persuade organizations to conform to particular rules or engage in specified practices (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001). For associations, coercive pressure stems from expectations associated with laws and government policies. For instance, under state-socialism in the former Czechoslovakia, the restriction on being able to legally form independent associations, in combination with state control of some facets of organizational administration, resulted in constraints on the activities and agendas that could be openly pursued (Frič, Deverová, Pajas and Silhánová, 1998). While the enactment of liberal nonprofit legislation in 1990 established provisions for forming new organizations and granted existing associations autonomy from the state, NGOs were still required to meet basic stipulations regarding their activities and submit financial and activity reports to the government at

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specified intervals in order to retain their legal status.

Legislation is not the only source of coercive pressure that organizations encounter. Most donors, for instance, require that recipients submit reports and limit the use of funds to stipulated activities with the threat that noncompliance will result in withdrawal of support. Once again, this form of pressure is present in different regimes. In state-socialist systems, ministries and government agencies usually are the primary source of funds for associations. To maintain access to state financial support, these organizations must meet the expectations and requirements of the state. Alternatively, in democratic societies, NGOs have access to a wider range of domestic and transnational funders. However, most require that recipients submit reports and limit the use of funds to stipulated activities with the threat that noncompliance will result in withdrawal of support.

Normative and mimetic are the two other types of institutional pressure that associations encounter though the transmission of best practices, standards, conventional wisdom, and assumptions. Normative pressures affect organizations by shaping their views of what types of practices are most appropriate while mimetic pressure have an impact when organizations identify with and imitate practices they believe will promote success (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001). Participation in networks and attendance at conferences are two means through which professional ideas, techniques, and information are diffused. Alternatively, governments and foundations inculcate norms related to report and grant writing, influence perceptions of high priority agenda issues, and promote views about how best to manage and administer organizations. While access to information and participation in international events and networks is more controlled in state-socialist systems, associations in all regimes tend to be staffed by professionals who read journals, participate in topical conferences, and interact with their peers in a variety of forums and who encounter societal expectations related to administration and accountability. The norms that are transmitted through these and other modes of information dissemination and interaction shape views of what behaviors and practices are most appropriate and likely to be most effective (McMahon, 2001; Reimann, 2001; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 2002; Andrews and Biggs, 2006).

Nonprofit Organization Responses to Institutional Pressure

No matter what regime is in power, the prevailing view is that in order to cope with coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures, civic associations and NGOs will conform to the rules and norms associated with their field of activity. For instance, the adoption of particular technologies or the presence of bureaucratization and professionalization often are viewed as indicators of conformity. When looking across an organizational field, it may appear that associations respond to pressures by altering their practices to be aligned with dominant institutions. However, scholars also have observed that in many instances, these behaviors are symbolic. In some instances, conformity with requirements and norms of a field can promote efficiency and effectiveness while in others they do not advance goal achievement (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Consequently, in response to pressures, some organizations design their formal structure to give the impression that they are conforming when, in fact, their structure is decoupled from practices that are oriented toward facilitating the realization of their mission and goals (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

The view that organizations will manage pressures through alignment with dominant institutions neglects several critical external and internal factors. First, it ignores that organizations are situated in diverse political and social contexts. Since the rules and norms associated with organizational formation and activities vary in accord with the regime and social environment, it is likely that so too will the ways organizations contend with the associated institutional pressures. Second, the suggestion that organizations will pursue alignment and decoupling fails to account for how the distinctive mandate of civic associations and NGOs shapes their decisions and actions (Moore, 2000; Zald, 2000; Jasper, 2004). In keeping with their mission, most associations and nonprofit organizations are characterized by the centrality of their values and strength of their ideals (Zald and Ash, 1966). These traits not only tend to endure over time, but provide organizations with moral guidance as they make decisions and seek to accomplish their missions (Schein, 1985; Carmin and Balser, 2002). Third, organizational response to institutional pressure will be affected by the presence of routines, or habituated practices that are used to accomplish tasks. These activities form standard operating procedures that help organizations cope with

complexity while establishing expectations of what activities are possible, appropriate, and likely to be effective (Gersick and Hackman, 1990; Minkoff, 1999; Ramanath, 2008).

Studying Organizational Response to Institutional Pressure

A diverse array of civic associations and nonprofit organizations are present in all types of political and social systems. While they must contend with the impacts of coercive, normative, and mimetic pressure, given the centrality of values and routines, we also would expect them to respond to the rules and norms they encounter in light of their ideals and capabilities (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Voss and Sherman, 2000; Carmin and Balser, 2002). In other words, while some organizations may elect to align their structures and practices with dominant institutions and with each other, others may pursue alternative approaches and trajectories (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Rothschild and Leach, 2006). Although nonprofit organizations and the contexts in which they are embedded are varied, most studies of institutional pressure and response either examine macro-level processes or the internal dynamics of a small subset of organizations situated in democratic systems.

To enhance our understanding of how nonprofits respond to different types of political and social environments, we studied how Movement Brontosaurus navigated institutional pressure in state-socialist and democratic regimes. Although our study is limited to one organization, we elected breadth over depth so that we could identify nuanced responses, internal logics, and subtle changes in organizational structure and activities in two distinct contexts. To elicit the organizational perspective on institutional pressure and response, we conducted depth interviews with ten key informants, including a founder, former and current Chairs, event organizers, and Council members. These individuals were selected since they were familiar with characteristics, activities, and aims of the organization at different points in its history. Individuals were asked a series of open-ended and probing follow-up questions about organizational structure, administration, values, mission, goals, and activities as well as about the rationale behind various practices and decisions in light of institutional pressures. This research also is informed by an intensive review of documents and archival materials obtained from public and private collections, participation in organizational events, and background interviews we conducted with an

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additional twenty Czech historians, environmental scholars, and representatives from a variety of national and local environmental organizations.

The case study that follows is presented as an historical and analytic narrative. The preliminary analysis relied on the methodology developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) for ordering and arraying data. Initially, we developed a detailed organizational chronology. We then developed time-ordered matrices to systematically trace the consistency between organizational practices and institutional pressures present in four time periods that have been identified as being distinct eras: state-socialism, the period leading up to the fall of the regime, the years immediately following regime change, and from the mid-1990s onward (Carmin and Hicks, 2002). To understand the values, strategy, and the rationale behind actions, we analyzed the text using grounded theory coding techniques (see Corbin and Strauss, 1998). Using the matrices and grounded theory analyses, we developed the analytic narrative to illustrate how activists within the organization assessed and responded to institutional pressures across regimes. We verified factual data by triangulating across interviews and documentary materials and validated our analysis by having the case reviewed by organizational members.

Movement Brontosaurus Across Regimes

In 1973, several student-researchers from the Czechoslovak Institute of Landscape Ecology (ÚKE) proposed that the Institute initiate a program of environmental protection and education aimed at young adults. After lengthy discussion and planning, the Czech Central Committee of the Socialist Union of Youth (SSM), the mass youth group affiliated with the National Front, elected to pursue this idea and declared 1974 the Year of Protection and Production of the Environment. The researchers from ÚKE developed the central campaign of the Year under the name Action Brontosaurus. Each month was dedicated to a particular environmental problem, such as air pollution, waste management, and water pollution. To disseminate information, the instigators from ÚKE arranged for articles and schedules of Brontosaurus activities to be written about in the popular weekly youth magazine, *Mladý svět*. The slogan "Brontosaurus has not survived because it outgrew its possibilities" was adopted to make the point that the dinosaur became extinct when its natural habitat no longer supported its existence. The intended

inference was that it was essential to manage the environment in order to sustain all forms of life

(Bouzková, 1989; Petříček, 2005).

Founding Principles and Activities of Brontosaurus

Leading figures within SSM quickly realized that they could capitalize on the popularity of

Action Brontosaurus by turning it into one of its permanent programs. Its status became official in June

1974 and, in 1975, they renamed it Movement Brontosaurus (hnutí Brontosaurus).[2] Although Brontosaurs

was a formal organization, being referred to as a movement reflected the mass character of the activity

and the state vision of the nation's youth working to change the attitude of society toward the

environment (Nováková, 2005). Accordingly, participants were called activists. Seeking to keep its

activities under tight control, SSM initially made Brontosaurus part of an existing entity called

Searchlight of Youth (Reflektor mladých) (Velek and Petříček, 1981). Searchlight was an SSM program

charged with the task of identifying "hidden reserves" in the economy by, for instance, locating and

preventing the generation of unnecessary waste or inefficient uses of raw materials in factories and

agricultural cooperatives. Although the vision was never fully realized, regional SSM committees were

given the task of establishing a Brontosaurus affiliate within each local Searchlight body (Činčera and

Fraňková, 2004).

From the perspective of SSM, the organization was seen as a way to indoctrinate youth into

socialist ideology while furthering the state's prevailing technocratic approach to economic development

and environmental protection. As stated in the program declaration of hnuti Brontosaurus, the

organization was founded:

> …..in close co-operation with other components of the National Front and research institutions and
>
> in coordination with commissions for the environment of national committees at all levels (i.e.
>
> local, district and regional governments) to create space for local branches of SSM for active
>
> participation in protection and production of the environment (quoted in Velek and Petříček, 1981:
>
> 7).

The idea behind the notion of "protection and production of the environment" (ochrana a tvorba životního

prostředí) was that the potential exists to master and harness nature. In other words, if there is a problem to be resolved, this can be achieved through technological advancement and control of natural resources. Although not explicitly stated, environmental education in the form of scientific and technological knowledge was a central feature of this official perspective since it contributed to mastering nature and therefore, was an inherent attribute of Brontosaurus from the start.

In June 1978, the Czech Central Committee of SSM decided to make Brontosaurus independent from Searchlight. The now autonomous organization had its own infrastructure with district, regional, and nationwide Brontosaurus commissions. The Czech Central Committee of SSM established the Central Commission of Brontosaurus to coordinate organizational activities. The commission was staffed by a number of environmental professionals, many from the State Institute for the Protection of Historical Monuments and Nature (Státní ústav památkové péče a ochrany přírody - SÚPPOP), as well as a few SSM apparatchiks who were known to everyone and who did not interfere with the activities of the organization (Petříček, 2005). Operationally, each Brontosaurus group was part of a local organization of SSM. Individual groups were not connected to each other and, at least until the mid-1980s, the Central Commission of Brontosaurus did not have direct connections to the groups (Bouzková, 2005: 15). Further, because of its loose structure and approach to organizing, the organization had no official members and no membership fees (Bouzková, 1989: 4). In essence, Brontosaurus was a network of people who were interested in learning about nature and protecting the environment. While most Brontosaurus activists were members of SSM, this was not a prerequisite or condition for participation.

Brontosaurus was best known for its portfolio of environmental education and management-related activities. The two most popular were vacation work camps and weekend brigades, both of which embodied the long-standing Czech belief that direct contact with nature was an effective way to promote environmental education. Participants engaged in practical work such as replanting trees, looking after seedlings, managing nature reserves, and renovating castles and other historical monuments (Růžička, 1993; Vaněk, 1996). Camps usually lasted for one or two weeks in the summer months while weekend brigades took place throughout the year and were the most important means of maintaining the long-term

continuity of local chapters of the organization (Bouzková, 1989). From the state's point of view, camps and brigades were a critical means of developing young people's commitment to socialist society.

The emphasis on ecological education, which was present in one way or another in all activities of the organization, was a prominent feature of study camps. A variant on work camps, the first study camp took place in 1975 in the Central Bohemian castle Zvířetice where it was subsequently held on an annual basis until 1987. Every year, the Central House of Pioneers and Youth in Prague selected between twenty and thirty young people to take part in the camp who they thought had prospects of becoming chairs and functionaries of Brontosaurus commissions at all levels of the SSM organization (Velek, 1978; Němcová-Bouzková, 2006). Participants did basic maintenance work on the castle and in nearby nature reserves, but the main focus was education and training. Experts from SÚPPOP and other state institutes gave lectures on subjects such as the Czechoslovak system of nature protection and the protection of folk architecture. Each student participant carried out independent research and submitted a report on a particular aspect of nature and historical monument protection related to the area (Velek, 1978). In return, they received a certificate that authorized them to lead brigades and camps. The annual Zvířetice study camp reflected both the educational orientation of Brontosaurus (Bouzková, 2005) and the state's intent of using the organization to disseminate socialist values and cultivate the next generation of Brontosaurus leadership.

Institutional Pressure and Conformity under State-Socialism

As a means to maintain control of the organization, the Party held its financial and material resources close, doling them out at its discretion and using them to facilitate activities and projects that it deemed important. Having ties to SSM guaranteed that Brontosaurus had administrative and financial support for its publications as well as its work and study camps. Some camps, such as Zvířetice, were fully funded by the SSM Central Committee. However, the majority relied on a mixed funding model, where core money was provided by SSM and the rest by the body that commissioned the work, such as SÚPPOP and the Landscape Protected Areas. Government agencies often gave supplementary support such as releasing employees from work so they could give lectures or by providing tools and materials.

Just as the SSM was the primary source of support, it also was one of the major sources of

coercive pressure. Rather than use funding and resources as form of persuasion, or rely on other types of explicit sanctions to insure conformity, SSM used subtle means to keep organization activists and their activities under control. In some cases, coercive pressure came from routine monitoring. For instance, prior to convening brigades, organizers had to submit detailed planning documents to SSM for approval. SSM held the authority to approve these activities, which they would not do if they appeared to be pushing the limits of the regime beyond acceptable boundaries. This was the case on one occasion when activists gave their weekend activities the title, "In good old England." SSM banned the brigade on the basis that "England was neither good nor old" (Němcová-Bouzková, 2006). In other instances, control was exercised in reaction to organizational activities. Activists understood that if their activities deviated too far from acceptable norms, they could be subjected to punishments. Although they did not fear imprisonment, they knew that they could be dismissed from university or school or be transferred from a relatively prestigious job, such as those in SÚPPOP, to one involving manual labor (Petříček, 2005).

State-sponsored institutes were one of the main sources of normative pressure in the early years of Brontosaurus. While ÚKE was influential early on, SÚPPOP had an enduring impact due to the large number of young scientists and environmental professionals who worked in the agency and were active members of Brontosaurus. Their training in natural sciences, and their commitment to offering seminars and lectures, served as an intellectual engine for the organization. As the primary communication vehicle, *Mladý svět* also was central to the diffusion of ideas and norms across the organization. Most articles were written by members of the magazine staff, often in collaboration with SÚPPOP employees, and illustrated best practices in environmental management and preservation techniques or highlighted innovative programs that groups could integrate into their repertoires. For instance, in 1978, Josef Velek wrote an article titled, "Brontosaurus has a Castle" about the Zvířetice camp. The entire article, which contained subheadings such as "How to get a castle," "What do to at a castle" and "How to make full success out of it," essentially was a manual that groups could use to develop this type of camp. Following on the heels of Velek's article, similar camps started to emerge (Petříček, 2005).

Independent Action and the Realization of Oppositional Goals

On the surface, Brontosaurus was a legitimate affiliate of SSM. The brigades, camps, and weekly magazine all were vehicles to communicate official ideology and values. Through service to socialist society, the organization was designed to build a cadre of youth who were educated in science and who were knowledgeable of the state-supported approach to environmental management and protection of national monuments. To casual observers, Brontosaurus was deeply tied to SSM, conforming to state mandates and enacting the regime's priorities. However, few activists were involved in the organization because they wanted to become better socialist citizens, let alone become active in the Communist Party. Rather, most participated because of their interest in working with nature, meeting other like-minded youth, making new friends, and spending their free time in a meaningful way (Bouzková, 2005; Haken, 2005).

The rationale for why the student researchers at ÚKE initiated Brontosaurus illustrates this perspective. By 1973, just a few years after its founding, Party functionaries accused staff at the Institute of having unacceptably low political engagement.[3] In an effort to improve the image of the Institute, the Director met with the younger employees, many of whom were graduate students, one at a time and tried to persuade them to become active in the Party. Recognizing that the students were opposed to the Director's ideas, a senior researcher suggested that they develop an affiliation to SSM by creating an environmental education campaign. Drawing inspiration from the recent UN conference in Stockholm, instead of joining or forming a chapter of SSM outright, the students decided that they would take the senior researcher's suggestion and start an SSM initiative along the lines she suggested so that they could appease the Director while engaging in work that was meaningful and close to their profession. This evolved into the Action Brontosaurus initiative and ultimately, Movement Brontosaurus. As one participant recalls, "the famous Movement Brontosaurus originated in our Institute due to the fact that nobody wanted to join the Communist Party" (Stoklasa, 2006: 23).

Although SSM maintained its hold on resources and established the basic structure of the organization, it did not wield complete control over the activities that took place or the sentiments that prevailed among activists. From the time it was founded, Brontosaurus operated more as a network than

as a formal and hierarchical organization. As one of the organization's co-founders, Václav Petříček notes (2005), "You can't say that there was a clear conception laid out from the beginning, a structure, but rather, it was a system of actions and reactions, and from that certain specialized programs arose." Aware of the loose structure, activists would test a new activity or publish new information and ideas and then wait for the reaction. If their activities did not elicit sanctions, they would push forward. They also understood how to draw on this structure and maintain their autonomy while continuing to function within the existing political climate. For instance, westerners they met would often suggest that they form an independent association. However, the activists understood that this was not allowed. Instead, they formed local groups, each of which created its own program. Activities, and even information published in *Mladý svět*, were done precisely and cautiously, testing the boundaries and assessing how far they could be stretched (Petříček, 2005).

While mindful of the system in which they operated, activists were willing to challenge it at times. For instance, soon after the launch of the organization, some SSM committees at the district and city levels decided that they would use Brontosaurus groups as patrols of Searchlight (Velek, 1978). As the remit of Searchlight did not mesh with their idea of nature protection and environmental education, activists developed a strategy to resist SSM and defend their version of the organization's founding goals and values. In essence, what they did was to over-comply with the Searchlight mandate. As required, Brontosaurus-Searchlight patrols visited factories to assess their waste and energy efficiency and distribute flyers urging employees to switch off lights and save energy and materials. Although it was not part of their charge, when they discovered large-scale malpractices, they decided to publish their findings in *Mladý svět*. In keeping with the activists' intent, the negative publicity led managers to oppose having Searchlight on their premises (Petříček, 2007). It took about a year-and-a-half, but ultimately the activists were able to refocus on nature conservation and education (Petříček, 2005).

Domestic brigades offered Brontosaurus activists opportunities to cultivate ties to each other and to openly exchange ideas. In addition, they often would organize trips to other countries in the region so that they could develop international contacts, communicate with like-minded colleagues about

environmental topics, learn what sorts of environmental activities were taking place, and build networks that extended beyond the Czech borders. They also would use these excursions to gain distance from the regime. For instance, in summer 1984, Brontosaurus activists from Charles University in Prague used their Western contacts to identify other groups in the region that were actively working on environmental issues. They then organized a hike in a mountain range in Romania where these groups convened. Apart from spending time in the outdoors, the purpose of the trip was to hold strategic discussions beyond the reach of the Czechoslovak secret police (Němcová-Bouzková, 2006). In addition to adventure, visiting other countries in the East provided a means for people to openly communicate without the threat of being monitored and gave them the opportunity to strengthen their bonds to each other.

Most of the time, Brontosaurus operated in a relatively routine manner, with activists participating in brigades and camps. While many activists knew that they could rely on their youth to get away with things that others could not (Petříček, 2005), more often than not, they used their scientific and technological training to publish non-controversial ideas in *Mladý svět* and to organize mundane activities that, in turn, allowed them to promote particular perspectives about environmental management and sustainable lifestyles. For instance, throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, *Mladý svět* ran a regular section on tramping that discussed the ideals and techniques associated with this approach to outdoor living.[4] Following on this perspective, camps and brigades were run as very modest events with participants taking shifts cooking for the collective. Participants also found inexpensive and locally grown food, slept in sleeping bags that they brought with them, and made efforts to have minimal impacts on the natural environment. By relying on articles, as well as informal discussions and spillover as participants moved from one camp to the next**,** organizational activists found ways to disseminate their ideas and values.

Coercion and institutional control were realities that organizational activists could neither ignore nor alter. Rather than engage in contentious action or launch explicit attacks or critiques of the regime, activists found ways to use the structure and resources of the organization to pursue environmental activities of personal interest, to travel, and to have open conversations. Hradil (2005) sums up the importance and the ordinary way in which this worked:

[Brontosaurus] was an alternative vis-à-vis the spirit of the time, vis-à-vis the contemporary

mainstream. People took part in Brontosaurus events that were largely outside the control of the

authorities and where they could freely make new friends, cooperate, express themselves,

discuss issues of interest, and work for nature protection.

Despite the outward appearance of conformity to the mission advanced by SSM, activists did not regard

Brontosaurus as a way to become closer to the Party or develop their connection to socialist society.

Instead, they used the structure and typical activities of the organization to gain psychological, and at

times physical, distance from state control, to freely exchange ideas, and to engage in a decidedly Czech

and highly stylized version of sustainable living.

Democratic Transition and Organizational Instability

In the wake of a popular uprising in 1989, a democratic state was established and freedom of

association was restored in Czechoslovakia. *Hnutí* Brontosaurus held its founding Congress in January

1990, where those present voted to continue on as an environmental organization. A week after the

Congress, Brontosaurus' application for nonprofit status was approved by the Ministry of Interior

(Bouzková 1990). The vision was that Brontosaurus would be self-governing organization that would not

have connections to politicians or political bodies and would continue doing the same types of work as in

the past (Haken, 2005). From the perspective of the activists, the true organization always had been

oriented to freedom and democracy and therefore, many believed that there was no need to make

significant changes in their practices (Haken, 2005; Němcová-Bouzková, 2006). This included sponsoring

the same types of outdoor activities as well as maintaining a loose network of local groups. As in the past,

a central office in Prague served as an information center for the organization and as a secretariat for the

Council. The Council was now comprised of an elected body that included local representatives. Their

charge was to set the overall strategy for the organization and to make major administrative and

programmatic decisions (Bouzková, 1990).

The leadership of Brontosaurus believed the organization would be lauded for having quietly

thwarted the regime and providing alternative venues for youth over the years. They were surprised to

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find that instead, they were viewed by many as an unwanted hold-over from the previous era (Nováková, 2005). The impact of this perception was that demand for ongoing activities almost immediately decreased as did the number of activists (Haken, 2005). While 58 local groups were still registered affiliates, the number of active participants fell from an estimated 10,000 in the 1980s to about 1,000 in 1990 (Dusík, 2006). Some activists severed their ties with the organization because of its former relationship to SSM. Others left because they wanted to establish their own environmental groups or found that they could now pursue their environmental interests in different venues and readily accepted positions in government or the private sector. This decline in membership was most notable in Prague were professional opportunities abounded. Just months after the fall of the regime, few Brontosaurus groups and activists remained in the capital city (Tomek, 2005; Činčera, 2006).

The organization not only had to contend with negative attributions and declining membership, but also with an unfamiliar and rapidly changing institutional context. Brontosaurus no longer had the privilege of preferred access to financial resources or an externally funded administrative staff. While they could enter the fray and compete for support from international donors, the activists knew that grants from national Ministries, particularly the Ministry of Education, were their best option. However, even here they were at a disadvantage as educational support was based on the number of dues-paying members in an organization and charging a significant amount for dues meant that the organization would have to alter its structure and inclusive approach. They scanned the domestic field of NGOs for ideas on how to secure funding as well as on how to improve their popularity. Even though norms related to best practices had quickly taken root as a result of training sessions and information provided by international foundations and organizations (Carmin and Hicks, 2002), there were unable to find role models or practices that they thought would be suitable for the organization. Brontosaurus was one of only two environmental organizations seeking to survive the transition and the other was dealing with similar issues. Many environmental NGOs founded in the period right before or immediately after the fall of the regime were relatively successful, but had values, agendas, tactics, and management styles that the Brontosaurus leadership did not want to emulate. They even looked for examples in other countries, but

quickly came to the conclusion that the experiences of NGOs elsewhere could not be applied because, "Czech society is different, people's reactions are different" (Nováková, 2005).

As the organization sought to make its way, a series of rifts emerged between the Council and some administrators and activists. The main disagreement was over whether or not to conform to economic institutions by reorienting the structure of the organization to embrace free-market principles. The Council did not want to alter the types of activities sponsored by the organization while dissenters thought they should use the skills and expertise they developed over the years to generate income by consulting, offering environmental services, and selling informational publications (Rada, 1993; Honzas, 1992). To test their proposed alternatives, a group of activists who specialized in renewable energy and energy conservation set up a consultancy centre under the name Ekowatt. A second group founded Brontosaurus Praha 7 as a global environmental education center that offered fee-based courses while a third created an organization called BEZK (Brontosauří ekocentrum Zelený kruh) to produce environmental publications. Although these initiatives were successful in isolation, they did not sufficiently resonate with the traditional values of the organization or attract interest.

The leadership continued to explore its options and considered different approaches to revitalize the organization. Time and again, they concluded that proposed activities were not in-keeping with deeply held values and the programmatic approach that they sought to retain. In assessing the field of environmental NGOs, they knew that many of the successful organizations were professionalized along Western lines or were becoming affiliates of international environmental NGOs. Some of the approaches being proposed were aligned with these trends. However, the Council did not want to alter the loose structure of the organization or shift from a voluntary to a professional orientation, despite the presence of pressures pushing them in this direction. Other successful environmental NGOs were engaged in advocacy or openly contentious political action. While Brontosaurus had a history of serving as a countercultural organization, the Council wanted to retain the organization's focus on sponsoring romantic and educational outdoor activities rather than emulate the openly political, and at times contentious, tactics many of these newer organizations employed. At the same time, it was not readily

apparent to them how their traditional approach of quiet opposition was relevant in the current socio-political reality.

Goals, Values, and Traditions

The challenge of wanting to stay true to their deeply rooted values and style of activism, without having a clear position or issue to which they could provide an alternative, gave rise to what Hradil (2005) refers to as a "period of identity crisis" in which, "[Brontosaurus] was no longer the site of positive, non-violent resistance to the communist regime, but it was not an authentic, radical, clearly green organization either." In the socialist era, the formal structure of the organization and requirements of SSM were transparent. Activists were familiar with the expectations of officials and understood how to operate within the constraints of the regime. While the SSM-created structure established a coherent set of boundaries, state oppression gave Brontosaurus a sense of purpose. Rather than being overwhelmed, activists found that the rigid adherence to rules and level of predictability of SSM functionaries made it possible for them to tap into resources and use the system, at times against itself, to achieve their goals. After the fall of the regime, the organization languished as its unstated, but central purpose of providing a "free space" (Evans and Boyte, 1992) was no longer viewed as essential and as the leadership wrestled with how to navigate unfamiliar institutional terrain.

In the newly democratic context, it was still important for the organization to heed government policies and regulations. However, survival now was contingent on being accepted by at least some portion of the public. Despite divergent opinions among activists about how to attract participants, members of the Council maintained that they should stay true to the traditional values, mission, and activities of the organization. Rather than altering their activities to be more like successful environmental NGOs, or pursue fee-based services, they decided to develop a campaign that would demonstrate their place in Czech society by emphasizing a "return to their roots." To initiate the campaign, members put up several posters at the 1999 Stage Coach and Country Music Festival, an event held annually in the town of Mohelnice (Mohelnický dostavník), inviting people to two weekend brigades. Some activists did not believe that the campaign would be effective as weekend brigades were deemed by many as desperately

old fashioned. Not recognizing how they could still be used as an alternative or countercultural space, skeptics also believed that people would not want to serve as volunteers for demanding conservation and historic preservation activities. However, the response was so much greater than anticipated that they had to convene four, instead of two, brigades (Hradil, 2005).

Invigorated by the interest, the leadership of the organization decided to sponsor routine weekend brigades that were open to the public (Hnutí Brontosaurus, 2003). Given the impact of the posters at the Mohelnice festival, they revived an outreach approach commonly used in socialist times in which they regularly set-up information booths at large music festivals as a means to promote their activities (Nováková, 2005). The promotion of traditional types of outings resonated with the vision many people still held of the appropriate way to engage in nature conservation and historic preservation. Brontosaurus was unique among Czech environmental NGOs as it was one of the few in existence that embodied time-honored values about the romance of nature and the freedom that comes from being in the outdoors and living in harmony with the natural environment. As Brontosaurus came to be viewed by the broader public as a truly Czech environmental organization that was performing an essential role, and was doing so in an appropriate fashion, the organization started to see its membership grow.

In the process of gaining traction, the activists came to recognize that the core values and routine practices they had fought so hard to retain were salient in a way that harkened back to their experience in the previous regime. After 1989, Czech society quickly became oriented to consumerism and consumption. Over the next decade, people came to recognize that the market orientation had displaced the sense of solidarity that was present in socialist times. Just as alternative activities and bonds of friendship provided a refuge from central planning, they offered a means of escape from a society now dominated by market forces (Scribner, 2005). In keeping with this trend, Brontosaurus found that brigades and camps filled a void. As in socialist times, young adults realized that they could use these activities to distance themselves from what they perceived as an oppressive system. However, rather than opposition to the political regime, in the present institutional context, outdoor activities offered a means "to support those forces that strive to divert society from the consumerist lifestyle" (Hnutí Brontosaurus,

2003). By sponsoring its traditional activities, Brontosaurus provided a refuge from market forces and a space in which people could enact values related to a sustainable lifestyle:

> Hnutí Brontosaurus is striving to create an alternative and, as it represented an alternative
>
> to the communist regime, today it is the alternative to the passive consumerist society
>
> (Hradil, 2005).

Drawing on its traditional values and routine practices, Brontosaurus continued its ongoing outdoor programs for the general population that, at the same time, served as a venue for young adults seeking to participate in a quiet, countercultural organization that stands in opposition to prevailing norms.

Differentiating Organizational Responses to Institutional Pressures

The case of Brontosaurus demonstrates how civic associations and NGOs strategically vary their responses to institutional pressures in ways that enable them to enact their core values and mission. Under state socialism, activists occasionally were overtly oppositional, but generally focused on using the state-sponsored approach to conservation and historic preservation as a means to achieve their alternative activities. To all outward appearances, these activities met with SSM expectations and were accepted by society as an appropriate way to engage in conservation, preservation, and environmental education. While upper-level administration and the program structure were controlled by SSM, the activists were able to use *Mladý svět* to disseminate information about countercultural lifestyles and their brigades and outings to create psychological as well as physical distance from official ideology and control. In other words, by signaling conformity, activists were able to "hide in plain sight" and use a sanctioned structure to pursue their countercultural and anti-regime mission.

When the regime collapsed, the traditional approach to conservation that relied on brigades and camps not only was viewed by the public as unnecessary, but generally was regarded as out of step with emerging institutions. In addition, many Brontosaurus activists believed that their goal of a free society had been realized and the organization no longer needed to serve as an alternative to the state. Rather than continue with their traditional activities, some leaders and local groups believed that they should embrace the new institutions, particularly the free market, and engage in fee-based activities. During the transition,

individuals and groups tested out ideas they thought were more contemporary and would attract participants. For those who interpreted the situation as one of disinterest in the old style of brigades, and therefore attempted to engage in new types of activities, they found that their efforts not only met with limited public interest, but led to dissention within the organization.

Internal struggles and the inability to attract members were indicative of a systemic problem within the organization. In the past, activist values were enacted through their ongoing programs. As they sought to align their activities with what they perceived as the reality of the new era, and attempted to adopt behaviors that were in-keeping with the free-market, a mismatch between values and practices emerged. Focusing on consultancies and fee-based services did not reflect the significance that activists placed on the romantic aspects of nature or the sense of freedom from constraints that was central to their experience of being in the outdoors. These activities also failed to alter public perceptions and attributions about the organization's past or mesh with widely held views of appropriate forms of nature protection. The result was that attempts to adopt activities that mimicked economic institutions led to the subjugation of traditional values and had limited resonance with current activists and potential participants.

The core group of activists who remained over the years was committed to the traditional values and programmatic activities of the organization. While they explored strategies they could use to improve their resource and membership base, they were unwilling to mimic the practices of successful organizations and adopt norms of professionalization, bureaucratization, and political advocacy that were emerging at the expense of these traditions. Leaders of Brontosaurus scanned the field of environmental NGOs and made concerted choices that they should not emulate the practices of successful organizations or conform to emerging norms. The rationale behind these decisions was that they did not want to engage in activities that would divert them from enacting their values or achieving their mission. Although the organization no longer was opposed to the prevailing political ideology, activists came to recognize that their traditional camps and brigades still filled an important void by offering an alternative to the consumptive and environmentally destructive practices fostered by the economic system.

The transformation that took place within Brontosaurus illustrates how organizations can remain

true to their founding principles while adapting to the realities of their institutional contexts. Under state-socialism, founding and leading members of the organization shrouded their true values and mission from the watchful gaze of public officials by signaling conformity with institutional pressures. Beneath this veil, they pursued activities that were aligned with their alternative intent. After the regime changed, Brontosaurus found a place for its routine activities in a radically changed institutional environment by reframing its goals from being in opposition to the political regime, to opposing consumptive practices fostered by the market economy. At the same time, the desire to maintain continuity in values and mission meant that Brontosaurus had to openly exhibit fidelity between its structure and the actions it previously hid from view. Consequently, the organization had to shift from a loosely coupled relationship between formal structure and practices to one in which these two organizational elements were tightly aligned.

The patterns revealed by Brontosaurus extend our understanding of how nonprofit organizations manage institutional pressure along four critical dimensions. First, neoinstitutional theorists suggest that organizations enhance their prospects of survival by altering their formal structure to conform to institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). They further maintain that this structure often is decoupled from goal-oriented activities and, as such, performs a symbolic function (Meyer and Rowen, 1977). While most nonprofit studies confirm these findings, the case of Brontosaurus provides evidence that there is greater complexity than is often reported. In particular, the patterns suggest that civic associations and NGOs strategically alter the relationship between formal structure and practices in response to the regime in power and the social context in which they are embedded. The second pattern revealed by the case is that in all contexts, the relationship that organizations adopt between structure and practices not only promotes goal achievement, but continuity in values and mission. Third, the findings suggest that organizations can serve as a hedge against institutional pressure. By establishing expectations of what practices are most effective and appropriate for the organization, they reinforce values and mission and, in the process, delimit potential responses to external pressure. Finally, similar to findings about grassroots movements (Van Til, Hegyesi, and Eschweiler, 2006), it appears that oppositional and alternative organizations frame and reframe their goals in ways that enable them to maintain legitimacy with the state

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while mobilizing societal participation.

This study suggests that associations and NGOs not only adapt their relationship between structure and practices in response to different types and sources of institutional pressure, but vary the signals they give and ways they frame their goals to facilitate the realization of values and mission. Although this paper examines one organization, the findings offer insight into how other organizations make the transition from one regime to the next, not only in Central and Eastern Europe, but in countries around the world that have moved toward as well as away from democratic systems and free market economies. The results also are applicable beyond transition states. Many nonprofit organizations seek to establish operations in multiple locales and, in the process, find that their existing approaches are not effective or appropriate. These findings provide insight into how the relationship between structure and practices can affect their ability to operate in diverse social and political environments and offers clues into some of the steps organizations can take to adapt. While further exploration is required to understand how additional types of organizations respond to other political and social contexts the case of Brontosaurus demonstrates how social change and alternative lifestyle organizations strategically navigate institutional pressures in state-socialist and democratic systems.

Endnotes

1. Throughout this paper, we use the term civic association to denote associations under state-socialism and the term NGO to refer to organizations in democratic systems that are not administered by the state and that do not have commercial or economic missions. This distinction is necessary since most associations in authoritarian systems are sponsored by the state. In addition, even though we are looking at oppositional groups, we use the term NGO rather than social movement organization since we do not explore the ties of organizations to broader movements and since this is how organizations across Europe with political, social, and cultural change missions typically refer to themselves.

2. It is common in the Czech literature on Movement Brontosaurus to use lower case "h" in the phrase hnuti Brontosaurus when referring to the pre-1989 Brontosaurus to indicate that it was not an autonomous organization, but an SSM program. In contrast, capital "H" is used when referring to the fully independent post-1989 civil association Hnutí Brontosaurus (Činčera, 2004).

3. Only three of ÚKE's 70 employees were members of the Party. These three were the Director, a member of the cleaning crew, and an employee who is only identified as being responsible for "special tasks" (Stoklasa, 2006).

4. Initially referred to as "wild scouts" due to their loose form of organization and alternative subculture, Czech tramps were a clandestine subculture that engaged in outdoor activities based on their stylized view of the American West (Vágner and Procházka, 2004). Most groups of tramps would dress in cowboy and Indian costumes and gather at designed "campsites" where they would play guitars and sing songs around bonfires, participate in canoeing and archery competitions, carve totem poles, and sleep in teepees and log cabins that they constructed (Jehlička and Smith, 2007).

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